

Rethinking I-94 Phase 2 Community Conversations

Date: 11/17/2021 (6:00pm-7:00pm)

Location: Zoom Meeting

Presentation Summary

Presenters:

Brad Hamilton (WSB)

Sheila Kauppi (MnDOT)

Gloria Jeff (MnDOT)

1. Introduction and welcome

2. Agenda

- a. Welcome
- b. Project overview and schedule
- c. Study process
- d. Livability
- e. Project limits
- f. Draft statement of goals
- g. Draft project needs
- h. Draft project purpose
- i. Conversation

3. Project Schedule

- a. Sheila Kauppi emphasized that MnDOT wants to hear from all voices of people who use the corridor
- b. The virtual open house started mid-summer
 - i. People can view and comment on the draft documents
- c. The project schedule is long - it is a journey, and we are early. We are currently in phase 2. We started in 2016. We are not thinking of construction projects until 2026 or later.
- d. Phase 1: Community engagement was from 2016-2018
 - i. There was a healing ceremony 2016
 1. MnDOT committed to be better
 - ii. We asked people what is important to communities through surveys, community conversations, meetings etc.
 - iii. Communities were interested in issues beyond the freeway
 - iv. MnDOT asked how do communities learn and make decisions?
 1. MnDOT is still learning the answers to these questions and this framework is the basis for phase 2
 - v. Communities wanted to be consulted early and often

- vi. Community members want their values and visions to be reflected and designs
- vii. On our website we have a tab called 'Phase 1' where people can read more about it
- viii. We committed in 2016 to work differently and that we would listen

4. MnDOT's roles

- a. Leader – issues related to the I-94 itself
 - i. Our primary mission is to oversee the highway system
 - 1. Includes pavement and bridges
- b. Partner – issues or situations that cross over agency disciplines or missions
 - i. Local roads that might connect to a MnDOT roadway or a bridge that goes over the highway
- c. Facilitator – Issues not under MnDOT control but can assist for the broader health of communities
 - i. This is important because people are interested in things beyond the freeway

5. Study process

- a. We have not made any decisions yet
 - i. We are very early in the project
 - 1. The earliest projects may start in 2026
- b. Transparency takes a lot of time
- c. Information and feedback from phase 1 helps inform phase 2
- d. We are committed being transparent and incorporating feedback
 - i. There are several pathways that this project will take
 - 1. Pathway 1
 - a. Transportation improvements
 - b. Set forth a vision for the I-94 corridor
 - i. Transportation purpose and need
 - ii. Evaluation criteria
 - iii. Alternatives
 - 2. Pathway 2
 - a. Livability framework
 - i. Sense of place
 - ii. Equity
 - iii. Economics
 - iv. Connections
 - v. Health and Environment
 - ii. Scoping Document
 - 1. MEPA
 - a. Very high level look at I-94
 - b. What are access interchange alternatives?
 - c. Where are entrances and exits?
 - iii. Tier 1
 - 1. Livability
 - iv. Tier 2
 - 1. This is where we will have a program of projects

6. Livability

- a. Livability is very important to the project
 - i. We created this division to help guide the project
- b. Livability is not a singular concept
 - i. Livability is utilizing transportation services and facilities to achieve goals
 - ii. Looks at neighborhoods and communities as a whole
- c. 7 elements that were identified in phase 1
 - i. Health and Environment
 - ii. Economics
 - iii. Sense of Place
 - iv. Safety
 - v. Equity
 - vi. Connections
 - vii. Trust
 - viii. These guide what the metro district does with transportation projects
- d. MnDOT hosts Livability Workshops and writes papers on those workshops
 - i. Community members and their designated leaders are constantly in consult through monthly workshops focused on individual pillars
 - 1. Host conversations, surveys about the pillar what it means to them etc
 - 2. This will help us create balanced solutions

7. Project limits

- a. Between highway 55 (Hiawatha) and Marion Street in Saint Paul
 - i. 35K residents
 - ii. 24k employers
 - iii. 1300 businesses

8. Draft statement of goals

- a. MnDOT wants to do things differently
 - i. We are prioritizing the wellbeing of those who live work and play along the corridor
 - ii. Enhancing mobility and safety on and along the corridor
- b. Livability framework is incorporated into draft statement of goals
 - i. Health and Environment
 - ii. Economics
 - iii. Sense of Place
 - iv. Safety
 - v. Equity
 - vi. Connections
 - vii. Trust

9. Draft project needs

- i. Safety
- ii. Bridge condition
- iii. Retaining wall condition
- iv. Pavement condition
- v. Mobility

- vi. Drainage condition
- vii. Noise wall condition
- viii. Safety on intersecting streets
- ix. Walkability/Bikeability
- x. Drainage Capacity

10. Draft project purpose

- i. Improve asset conditions of I-94 bridges, pavements and supporting infrastructure
- ii. Enhance safety for people and goods on, along, and across the I-94 corridor
- iii. Improve the mobility of people and goods on, along and across the I-94 corridor.

11. Draft evaluation criteria

- a. Alternative proposals will be measured against the following draft criteria:
 - i. Project needs
 - ii. SEE Impacts
 - iii. Project goals and livability pillars

Conversations

Comment: In the interest of climate change, the only end point of this project that I find acceptable is removing the freeway.

Comment: The I-94 corridor should be an asset, not a liability. MnDOT should explore things like noise reduction and pollution reduction through EVs. We can't only base our analysis of this corridor on car through put – it needs to be considered that people live along the highway.

Comment: Car traffic is not a force of nature. Our city is the way it is because it was built that way. MnDOT has apologized for its racism and made a commitment to the reduction of VMT by 20% and city councils have passed resolutions opposed to adding lanes. We need to take climate change into account. Mobility is too car focused.

MnDOT Response: The advisory council made the recommendation to reduce VMT within the entire state of MN. This has not been formally adopted by MnDOT. We have agreed to take a look at this action to see how we can achieve such a goal. VMT is an excellent way to sloganize around climate, we also need to talk about land use. Where have there been improvements in transit like the light rail lines there has been displacement, transit can be a part of the solution but also can cause problems. We will consider not only the concerns of those looking at climate change but also those wondering where they are going to live. We are looking at both options, it is a balancing act. We consider things like social justice, the economy which provides opportunity etc.

Comment: I've been a resident of Minneapolis for 15 years and I use 35W to get to work but now I take the bus. The noise pollution part of 35 is really bad and there is a lot of air pollution. Some people are forced to live by the highways or send their kids to school around the highways and they suffer from pollution. We need to focus on moving people and not necessarily cars. We can think about a bicycle highway. We need to give people options. We need to reduce infrastructure liability; capping is a bad idea. It does not change the status quo or reduce car dependence.

Comment: We need to optimize public transit and give people other options other than cars.

Comment: Hi, I am with The Trust for Public Land. We are a St Paul nonprofit that works to ensure everyone lives within a 10-minute walk of a high-quality park. We are currently partnering with residents at Central Village Park and exploring a schoolyard improvement project at Maxfield Elementary. After years of collaboration with the community, we recently celebrated the opening of Midway Peace Park. We regularly hear that noise and air pollution, and high traffic and speeds generated by the freeway on local roads decreases people's ability to enjoy outdoor spaces. I'd call on MnDOT to consider ways to invest in these critical community spaces to mitigate the impacts of the freeway. We offer to serve as a partner in implementation of strategies and tactics to improve.

Comment: I have been interested in 94 for a long time, and I have looked at other ways of using this space. Some in the community have suggested that the space could be filled in and reclaimed and the alignment route that George Herald first envisioned. When we bring these roadways into neighborhoods, they should not be motor-only roadways. This is an expense. People cannot use 94 unless they are using a car. Anywhere where there are lots of people need to have through-way for non-motorized transport. I don't think its wrong to have throughways for motorists, but it is a mistake to have motor-only roads.

Comment: I would like people to really think about the possibilities for people who don't have a car or can't drive. I know this is a federal highway system that is used for inter-sate travel and truckers to carry goods all the way across the country, so what is the obligation of MnDOT to provide for interstate travel? Could travel be outside of our cities, so it is not having noise pollution?

MnDOT Response: The way the system was set up, loads on I-94 do travel from state to state, we have ring roads that exist to serve a purpose for freight travel. We do believe that there is a is a function for I-94. Much of the land around I-94 was set up to have I-94.

MnDOT Response: The interstate system was initially intended to provide between places of consumption and places of production.

Comment:. I'd like to see more emphasis on public transit and biking along the corridor. 94 makes it hard to walk or bike or take public transit. Having more connections across the highway would make environmentally conscious choices easier to make.

Comment: Destroying 94 in between the ring road it's a big step we can take to curb climate change – if a large government entity can make that decision it would do a large amount of good. MnDOT should take advantage of the power it has to help reduce climate change.