

# Highway 252/I-94 Environmental Impact Statement

## PAC Meeting 8

### Meeting Summary

**June 27, 2022 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.**

Opening Remarks and Roll Call – 10 minutes (MnDOT)

Attending Members and Staff

**Representative Michael Nelson (D40A)**

**MnDOT – Deputy Commissioner Kim Collins, Jerome Adams, April Crockett, Aaron Tag, Kent Barnard, Christina Perfetti, Brad Larsen, Jay Hietpas**

**Brooklyn Park – Council Member Terry Parks, Council Member Tonja West-Hafner, Jesse Struve, Jeff Holstein**

**Brooklyn Center – Elizabeth Heyman, Mike Albers**

**City of Minneapolis –Bethany Turnwall (staff to Council Member Ellison), Betsy Brock (staff to Council Member Vetaw), Katie White, Julieann Swanson**

**Hennepin County – Commissioner Jeff Lunde (District 1), Carla Stueve, Jason Staebell**

**Metropolitan Council – Chair Charlie Zelle, Council Member Reva Chamblis, Council Member Robert Lilligren, Hannah Pallmeyer**

**Metro Transit – Erin Mitchell, Victoria Dan, Arman Rajaeian, Adam Harrington**

**Federal Highway Administration –Anna Varney, William Lohr**

**Isthmus Engineering – Mary Karlsson**

**SRF Consulting – Jono Cowgill, Justin Sebens, Leif Garnass, Marie Cote, Khani Sahebjam, Brian McLafferty, Brett Danner, Don Demers**

**General public – Darryl Sannes, Denyse Tarduno, Jackie Douglas, Joe W, Nahid Khan, Swanson Dena, Tara McCarthy, Tom Kouri**

The Highway 252/I-94 project team conducted a presentation to the Policy Advisory Committee which included the information below. For additional details on the topics below, please see the presentation posted on the project website.

### Opening Remarks

Welcome, Housekeeping, and Introductions (Kim Collins, MnDOT)

## Roll call

### Housekeeping Reminders

- 1) Project Schedule (Justin Sebens, Consultant Team)
  - a) Current project schedule. Scoping document period is through spring of 2023.
- 2) Project and Purpose/Need (April Crockett, MnDOT)
  - a) Project objectives
    - i) Discussion
      - (1) PAC – No questions or comments from the group
- 3) Public Engagement Summary (Jono Cowgill, Consultant Team)
  - a) Directly connected with more than 400 people in Spring 2022
  - b) Connected broadly with diverse audiences
  - c) Top themes include:
    - i) Freeway Conversion
    - ii) Safety
    - iii) Traffic Volume
    - iv) Environment
    - v) Biking and Walking
  - d) PAC Reflection:
    - i) Commissioner Lunde – Heard from members of Latine community that feeling left out in decision-making and from MnDOT Project Team that we are having a difficult time in getting landlords let engagement happen within apartment / rental buildings; Please feel free to connect with Commissioner Lunde who can help connect MnDOT project team to community organizations that can facilitate this meaningful connection
    - ii) Deputy Comm. Collins – MnDOT requests help in connecting meaningfully with communities
- 4) Equity and Health Assessment Update (C Terrance Anderson)
  - a) Equity and health assessment recent activity and findings presented
    - i) Assessment process

- ii) Pop Up Events
- iii) Canvassing
- iv) Who was heard from
- v) Focus area ranking results
- vi) Key takeaways from BIPOC community members
- vii) Safety should be thought of in terms of CROSSING the facilities, GETTING to the facilities, USING the facilities
- viii) Job access can be considered by TRAVEL TIME in transit (not just cars)
- ix) Food options – access to existing and options for them to be sited / attracted into the corridor
- x) Green space – including improving access to Mississippi River corridor
- xi) Unfair burden – consider people who LIVE in the corridor and people primarily USING the corridor
- xii) Think about how to IMPROVE conditions, not just avoiding inflicting additional harm

b) Discussion

- i) PAC Reflection
  - (1) Council Member Parks – Went and talked with 16 businesses surrounding 85th and Noble Parkway. None of them were concerned about breaking the 610 / 252 connection; concerned about employees accessing the businesses and also worried about impacts along Noble and 85<sup>th</sup>.
  - (2) Commissioner Lunde – Welcome input on how to prioritize health objectives; Strongly opposes breaking the 610 / 252 connection – if considered, need to engage residents on West River Road and Noble Parkway; worried that increasing property values could result in displacing more people; felt that reducing traffic on Hwy 252 would require reducing I94 as it is the draw
  - (3) Council Member Chamblis – Please provide more disaggregated data on engagement results to explore if engagement is reflective of community demographics

5) Special Topic – Travel Patterns and Roadway Classification, including PAC Reflection (Leif Garnass)

- i) Travel patterns and roadway classification
- ii) Pandemic traffic impacts
- iii) Roadway classification and access-mobility relationship
- iv) Hwy 252 scenarios
  - (1) Change to local road

- (2) Change to freeway
- v) Access and Mobility takeaways
- b) Project Next Steps
- c) PAC Reflection
  - i) Commissioner Lunde written comment in meeting Chat: “Please note Noble Ave runs adjacent to 1 Elementary School, Brooklyn Middle School and Park Center High School”
  - ii) Commissioner Jeff Lunde written comment in meeting Chat - Can we get a copy of the presentation somewhere, awesome info so far today?
  - iii) MnDOT written response in meeting Chat - Yes, it will be posted to the website within days.

### Open Comment Period – 15 minutes

- Jackie Douglas – Posted a list of comments in the Q&A and hope those will go into public record. Are the pop-up meeting location dates and times published somewhere so people can attend (Brooklyn Park City Website, Next Door, etc.)? Too much information at the Open Houses.
- Nahid Khan – Met Council 2040 Transportation Policy Plan has clearly expressed support for converting Highway 252 into a freeway including EZ Pass and interchanges at 66<sup>th</sup> and elsewhere. No assessment of environmental impact was conducted by Met Council before it was codified into the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan. The Met Council already has full funding for the Highway 252 freeway conversion. Concern this compromises the integrity of current alternatives evaluation and engagement work. Remainder of comments posted to chat.
- Tara McCarthy – Put question in the Q&A and wondering if Leif can provide an answer. Curious about the figure about traffic increasing 15% if closing 252. Doesn’t match other figures provided previously, what was the data source? Question clarified with verbal response to say “increasing at least 15%”

### Written Comments

Provided via the Q&A feature during the meeting.

- Nahid Khan - The original draft SDD was going to be released in Spring 2022; it has been delayed one year to Spring 2023. Please explain reason(s).
- Nahid Khan - Please clarify what was meant by public comment "may or may not" influence, impact, change, etc. SDD and subsequent stages.
- Jackie Douglas - Several comments and requests, Can this group provide more and quicker transparency to the community, such as publishing this presentation and minutes within 2 weeks not 2+ months? Also when can the community expect a more finalized set of options being considered? Answered I believe, 2023. I have attended the open houses as have my neighbors and they are very confusing. Too much information and confusingly presented. Are there more engagement options being considered and when will the public be notified? I must

say I am disappointed that more of our elected officials were not here or didn't send representatives. Perhaps scheduling this the week before a major vacation period might not have been the best option. Can this be considered when scheduling in the future? Can there also be published - pulled out of the whole presentation an updated timeline? Rumors are starting that the city of Brooklyn Park or State is starting to buy up businesses at 282 and 85th. Can you address this? With regards to popups where were these published? Not everyone gets out and many of my neighbors and myself would have been to these if we knew about them.

- Nahid Khan - I encourage all Hwy 252 and I-94 Project PAC members and attendees at this meeting to attend the exhibition entitled "Human Toll: A Public History of I-35W" through South Minneapolis. Hennepin History Museum through Oct. 1, 2022. Then I encourage PAC members and attendees think about the human toll of building Hwy 55 / Olson Memorial Highway, I-94 through North Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center, I-694 through Brooklyn Center, Hwy 100 through Brooklyn Center, and Hwy 252 through Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park. Brooklyn Center is overburdened by freeways; most residents live within one mile of a freeway and are exposed to high levels of air pollution.
- Nahid Khan - How will public comment period in early 2023 inform, impact, influence design refinements and other decision making (if at all) on project alternatives to move forward to draft SDD? Please explain how the enhanced community engagement through the Equity and Health Assessment and the work of the Equity and Health Neighborhood Advisors will inform, impact, influence design refinements and other decision making (if at all) on project alternatives to move forward to draft SDD? The Mississippi River is our major natural amenity along North Minneapolis and Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park. But I-94 tremendously separates N Mpls and BC from the River, including the North Mississippi Regional Park and Nature Center. There is a horrific freeway wall that further separates this beautiful natural amenity from the people of N Mpls and BC. Please develop project alternatives that restore the connections between the people and the river, and be able to benefit directly from this amazing work of nature.
- Nahid Khan - At the January 2022 Policy Advisory Committee, I pointed out that the long-preferred (especially by the Met Council) project alternative of the Hwy 252 6-lane freeway conversion, and the various alternatives briefly considered during 2021 of this "Environmental Review" are all expansionistic projects. This expansionistic attitude toward Hwy 252 through Brooklyn Center and Brooklyn Park precludes a full, open-ended consideration of the future of Hwy 252 (and indeed I-94 through Brooklyn Center and North Minneapolis).
- I said I would like to see a full spectrum of project alternatives with (a) No Build at the center (b) the development of reductionist alternatives down to local roadway along one side of the spectrum, and (c) expansionistic alternatives placed along the other side of the spectrum, with the 6-lane freeway at the extreme end.
- The range of project alternatives that were "returned" (after previously being eliminated) or newly developed for the March 2022 PAC meeting do not come across to me as a member of the public following this project since its inception in around 2014 – as sincere. Rather, the "interpretation" of my request to see the spectrum of project alternatives be broadened to include reductionist project alternatives goes against the very spirit of my request to give the

cities of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park and ultimately also North Minneapolis a true range of possibilities to consider that would both improve the quality of life of residents and improve their transportation options. The reductionist project alternatives the project team has come up with: (1) conversion of Hwy 252 to local roadway that disconnects the north end in Brooklyn Park from Hwy 610 and the bridge across the Mississippi River to Coon Rapids, and arbitrarily prescribes a very low speed limit (even lower than nearby East River Road in Fridley) and (2) conversion of Hwy 252 into a transitway only, which either reduce or eliminate area residents' ability to use Hwy 252 by car, and (2) conversion of Hwy 252 into a transitway only, which either reduce or eliminate area residents' ability to use Hwy 252 by car, even to cross it, are absurdly extreme. No such extreme project alternatives were ever proposed for roadways such as Hwy 55 / Hiawatha Ave or University Ave when the light rail lines were built; they continue to be fully usable by drivers. Moreover, it seems that at least one of the "returned" project alternatives, the Super 2 freeway design, was eliminated in 2021 because it cannot be built in this area. We have been told by project staff that it has serious engineering issues because of storm water management challenge in close proximity to the Mississippi River that preclude it from further consideration. I ask why taxpayer money is being wasted by spending resources on studying a project alternative that already is known to be unbuildable. As with the reductionist project alternatives, the re-addition of this Super 2 freeway design comes across as insincere.

- Nahid Khan - The history of the Hwy 252 project since its inception in 2014 as a top-down imposition of a 6-lane freeway into an almost residential area only half a mile from our beautiful Mississippi River, has suffered immensely from community trust issues. From the beginning, all community engagement through the end of the Hennepin County-led Environmental Assessment by early 2020 focused on selling the 6-lane freeway to the community and manufacturing consent for it, and prevented public discussion on any other approach to the future of Hwy 252. Shortly before the January 2022 PAC meeting, we discovered and exposed that the federal NEPA EIS was being violated in the development of the current project, including the interim safety measures, two of which were rejected because of the "anticipated freeway conversion". The project team could have taken "feedback" from various quarters as a result, to start a process of respecting community needs and then design project alternatives that take community concerns seriously, The project team could have taken "feedback" from various quarters as a result, to start a process of respecting community needs and then design project alternatives that take community concerns seriously, but it is clear that they did not do so.
- Nahid Khan - I ask that the PAC direct the project team to develop reasonable and viable reductionist project alternatives for Hwy 252. For a start, the reduction to local roadway alternative must connect to both Hwy 610 in the north and I-94 / I-694 in the south, but in ways that force drivers to change their behavior from "freeway" expectations (as they have now) to "local roadway" expectations, in ways similar to what has been done for East River Road in Fridley. For expressway type project alternatives, the project designs must force drivers to change their behavior from "freeway" expectations to those similar to Hwy 47 and Hwy 65 (University and Central Aves in Fridley), which all have far fewer crash rates than Hwy 252 though they also are expressways. A major change in roadway identity needs to be created for Hwy 252, beginning with the establishment of a local road name, such as is the case at the

Fridley interchanges with their north-south roadways, where signage emphasizes the local road name over the highway designation. Yes, we could have a local road name such as West River or North Mississippi Avenue, Boulevard or Parkway that enhances our community and city identities.

- Nahid Khan - Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to immediate action by the Policy Advisory Committee to put this project onto a democratic, ethical and equitable track that is fully in line with, and actually goes well beyond, the requirements of the federal NEPA EIS process, as the first step in transforming it into a community-based project that significantly improves quality of life for the residents of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park and North Minneapolis, and setting an example for other freeway projects in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and possibly, around the nation.
- Nahid Khan - East River Road connects to Hwy 610, so why has a project alternative for Hwy 252 been proposed that disconnects from Hwy 610. Hwy 252 can be a more local roadway with smaller footprint but still be connected; it can be done so that drivers are prepared to shift from freeway driving expectations to local road expectations, and be primed to alter their driving accordingly.
- Nahid Khan - What about the reduction of access points to Hwy 252, from current 6 intersections to 2 or 3 interchanges? Local drivers will have to drive further within neighborhoods and local roads, leading to potential of additional crashes on local roads, with a freeway conversion that limits local residents now entering the Hwy 252 roadway at the 6 intersections to 2 or 3 interchanges.
- Tara McCarthy - I would like some clarification on the 15% increase on 252 if it becomes a freeway. This figure is much less than any of the other increases you have reported on in the past.
- Nahid Khan - The Met Council 2040 Transportation Policy Plan (TPP) <https://metro council.org/Transportation/Planning-2/Key-Transportation-Planning-Documents/Transportation-Policy-Plan.aspx> has clearly expressed support for converting Hwy 252 into a 6-lane freeway, including MnPass (now EZPass) pay lanes and interchanges at 66th Ave, Brookdale Drive and 85th Ave (see pp 5.45, 5.48, 5.50 and 5.51). No assessment of environmental impacts for the Met Council's plan to convert Hwy 252 into a 6-lane freeway was conducted by the Met Council before it was codified in the 2020 TPP report. The Met Council already has full funding for this 6-lane freeway conversion plan, and steps already have been taken to approve a delay its expenditure to 2026, the year of "major" construction. The Met Council TPP's publicly stated preference for a 6-lane freeway conversion project for Hwy 252 adversely affects public perception about the credibility and legitimacy of MnDOT's efforts to (1) evaluate in a balanced, fair and accurate manner the various project alternatives presented at the April and May Open Houses, and (2) engage the public in an unbiased manner during the ongoing federal National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
- Nahid Khan - We have observed MnDOT staff openly and publicly advocate for, and try to sell, the six-lane freeway conversion project alternative in person, online and in news coverage, especially the "need" to remove traffic signals and intersections on Hwy 252, which effectively

means conversion to freeway. The Met Council TPP raises important questions about the undemocratic, unethical and secretive methodology in place that clearly was working to move ONLY this the 6-lane freeway conversion of Hwy 252 – their predetermined outcome – into the draft Scoping Decision Document that was originally scheduled for release this past Spring 2022 (according to the Technical Advisory Committee meeting documents from the inception of the current Environmental Review through Jan. 20, 2022).

It also raises serious questions about whether the Met Council TPP report (which has no consideration of equity, health or environmental impacts) is ultimately the major factor influencing decision-making processes on the PAC and at MnDOT.

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- Nahid Khan - I ask that steps be taken by the Policy Advisory Committee to face this issue honestly, openly, transparently and with public accountability. The Statement of Purpose and Need for this current Hwy 252 / I-94 Environmental Review was written without any public input or community engagement. It clearly is written so as to preclude the ability of any other project alternative from meeting the criteria adopted in it, so that it obviously biases the overall project trajectory to blatantly favor selection of the already preferred and funded Met Council 6-lane freeway project conversion over any of the other project alternatives. I question how seriously the other project alternatives from 2021 were taken in this project development process, and I wonder how seriously the “returned” (previously eliminated) and new project alternatives as of March 2022 are being taken, given that several of them appear to be designed/engineered to fail because of the bias in the current project Purpose and Need statement for a 6-lane freeway conversion and expansion. The project’s Purpose and Need statement needs to be revisited, reviewed and rewritten from a community-based perspective and in partnership with community, based on health, environment, ecology, and livability contexts for an almost entirely residential area half a mile from our beautiful Mississippi River, rather than a top-down hierarchical and undemocratic approach that looks at this project from a narrow basis focused only on achieving maximum expansion of the roadway to accommodate maximum capacity (number of cars and trucks) at the maximum speeds possible. We know that other experienced community organizations presented a list of suggested revisions to the project’s Purpose and Need statement at the August 2021 PAC meeting, but we have seen no evidence that they have been read, let alone had an impact on revising the project’s Purpose and Need statement. We also know that a MnDOT highway project can revise its Purpose and Need statement as we are aware that a coalition of community organizations have forced the “Rethinking I-94” project to have to revise its Purpose and Need statement. Therefore, I urge the PAC to make such a program to revise this project’s Purpose and Need statement an



immediate priority. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I look forward to immediate action by the Policy Advisory Committee to put this project onto a democratic, ethical and equitable track that is fully in line with, and actually goes well beyond, the requirements of the federal NEPA EIS process. This would be a significant step in transforming the Hwy 252 and I-94 project into a community-based project that significantly improves quality of life for the residents of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park and North Minneapolis, and setting an example for other freeway projects in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and possibly, around the nation.

- Nahid Khan - Please post PAC meeting materials and meeting summary in a timely manner; within 2 weeks.

Adjourned at 3:30 pm

### Next PAC Meeting

The next PAC meeting will be held in fall 2022.