

HIGHWAY 252/I-94 EQUITY AND HEALTH ASSESSMENT

Report #2: Community Priorities – Executive Summary

July 2022

MnDOT is conducting an Equity and Health Assessment (EHA) during the Scoping Decision Document (SDD) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Highway (Hwy) 252/I-94 in Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, and Minneapolis. The purpose of the EHA is to understand equity and health priorities from community members adjacent to the project area so MnDOT can consider them when deciding highway improvements.

The EHA is administered by MnDOT’s Sustainability and Public Health Division, with support from an interagency working group. MnDOT also convened an Equity and Health Neighborhood Advisors (EHNA) group to describe equity and health conditions in their communities and provide input on potential transportation improvements to Hwy 252/I-94.

About this report

This Equity and Health Community Priorities Report (Report #2) is the second of three EHA reports that will be considered as public input to the Hwy 252/I-94 Scoping Decision Document (SDD). The report summarizes the community engagement process and findings from engaging historically underserved and overburdened communities adjacent to Hwy 252/I-94 about their equity and health priorities. Health and equity priorities from community members were identified in the EHA Baseline Conditions Report (“Report #1”) by analyzing existing conditions. The third report will assess Hwy 252/I-94 SDD project alternatives and recommendations to inform potential changes to the SDD to consider before MnDOT finalizes the project alternatives.

Report findings

The EHA engagement process focused on listening to historically underserved and overburdened populations living in Minneapolis, Brooklyn Center, and Brooklyn Park, including Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color (BIPOC); people with low incomes; the elderly; and people with a disability.

Figure 1: Project area map



The project team conducted an online survey and 15 targeted in-person activities between April 15 and May 6, 2022, including pop-ups and canvassing events in the project area. A total of 412 people provided feedback. Eighty percent of participants live in the project area, of which 47 percent (or 153 participants) identify as BIPOC.

Key takeaways

The following key takeaways, listed below in no particular order, summarize overarching themes heard from all participants during this engagement:

- **People said all equity and health focus areas are important and related to each other.** People drew the connections between the EHA topics discussed, and no issue fell to the bottom of the list as unimportant.
- **Health is the top priority because without it, there is nothing.** Many people commented that for the project to prioritize health, it needs to prioritize people rather than maximizing capacity and ease of travel for cars. Some people recommended reframing the focus of Hwy 252/I-94 improvements from investing in highway infrastructure to investing in healthier communities and families.
- **People said sense of community is important for health and equity in their community.** People identified that a key component to a healthy community is a community where people feel secure in the place where they live and connected to one another. An equitable and well-designed Hwy 252/I-94 can help bring people together and increase safety, access, and quality of life for the communities living adjacent to the highway.
- **More transportation options can increase health and equity in communities.** A healthy community has transportation options that provide a safe, affordable, efficient, and environmentally friendly way to travel. Many people said their community needs more viable transportation options and emphasized that highway improvements should not only support cars, but also walking, biking, rolling, and public transit.
- **Nearby jobs, healthy food, and green space helps people live healthier lives.** People said access to jobs, healthy food, and greenspace is a priority. People need easy access to healthy options to be healthy.
- **People expressed concerns for property changes resulting from the Hwy 252/I-94 project.** People are concerned about neighborhoods losing homes, property values decreasing, and communities being destroyed to expand the highway. Some people described how past construction projects on I-94 and I-35W disproportionately affected BIPOC communities in the Twin Cities.

- **People are concerned about air pollution affecting the future and quality of life for communities adjacent to Hwy 252/I-94.** Many people said air pollution from Hwy 252/I-94 traffic affects the health and well-being of people living next to the highway. Some shared concerns that expanding the highway could increase traffic, smog, and air pollution which could increase health issues and asthma levels in nearby communities.
- **Environmental health and the health of the Mississippi River ecosystem is a concern for communities.** Beyond the health of people, commenters also expressed concern for the health of the environment, particularly the nearby Mississippi River and the wildlife that relies on it. Some were concerned that expanding Hwy 252/I-94 would require more pavement and infrastructure and cause more water pollution from highway runoff. Others shared concerns that carbon emissions from increased traffic could increase the severity of climate change.
- **Safety along and crossing Hwy 252/I-94 is a key concern.** A common sentiment from the engagement was the need to make Hwy 252/I-94 safer for all users. Many people said that they are concerned about traffic speeding, car crashes, and reckless drivers. Some people said they intentionally avoid walking, biking, and driving in the project area, even when it is the most direct route, because they are afraid for their safety.
- **Any outcomes from Hwy 252/I-94 improvements should be fair and equitably distributed to highway users.** Many people said that Hwy 252/I-94 improvements should not solely benefit pass-through traffic and commuters at the expense of residents and communities along the highway. Making it more difficult for residents to access their homes, jobs, and public transportation via walking, biking, or driving burdens everyone in the community, but particularly people with low incomes, the elderly, people with a disability, and BIPOC families.
- **A community-centered engagement process on the Hwy 252/I-94 project alternatives will provide community members more say in the highway design.** People said that selecting a preferred alternative fairly and equitably cannot occur without listening to concerns and input from the people most burdened by changes to the highway. Some recommended especially engaging populations historically left out of government decision-making, including BIPOC communities, people with low incomes, the elderly, and people with a disability.

Next steps

This report summarizes public input received as part of the community engagement process for the Hwy 252/I-94 EHA. The community feedback document in this report will support a community-driven health and equity review of the Hwy 252/I-94 project alternatives. The review and recommendations on the project alternatives will be provided in Report #3 – EHA of Hwy 252/I-94 Draft SDD. Visit the EHA website (mndot.gov/metro/projects/hwy252study/eha.html) for the reports and more details on the EHA.