

Introduction

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) have initiated the planning for improvements to the Blatnik Bridge. In January of 2021, two documents were prepared early in the project’s environmental process for public input: a Draft Purpose and Need Statement (PNS) and an Evaluation Criteria document.

The purpose of this summary document is to summarize the methods used to facilitate comments on the PNS and evaluation criteria, the types of comments received, and specifies the methods in which the comments were considered in the final draft of the PNS and evaluation criteria.

Outreach Methodology

The following events and platforms were used to advertise the availability of the PNS and evaluation criteria to the public and to facilitate comment on the needs identified:

- Public Advisory Committee (PAC) #3, January 5, 2021
- Public Open House #2, January 12, 2021
- Project website, including project contact information and a comment box to provide input
- Agency Meeting #2, January 27, 2021

The Public Open House was advertised through social media platforms belonging to both MnDOT and WisDOT, including some paid promotion advertisements to increase reach. Press releases were provided in advance to relevant news outlets to garner interest in the project. The PAC and agency meetings are regularly standing project meetings which received specific presentations related to the PNS and Evaluation Criteria. These events directed attendees to provide comments on the project website (<https://www.dot.state.mn.us/d1/projects/blatnik-bridge/index.html>) by utilizing a comment form, or by contacting the project contacts by mail, email, or phone. Public comments were accepted through January 19, 2021, and agency comments through February 22, 2021.

Summary of Comments Received

During the PAC #3 meeting on January 5th, seven comments were received. During the public comment period (January 12 to 19, 2021), 56 comments were received. During the agency comment period (January 22 to February 22, 2021), one comment letter was received and several minor comments were provided at the Agency Meeting #2 on January 27th. The comments received have been separated into groups by topic and include:

- Walkability / bikeability
- Future design, including service life, mode shift, and transit
- Alignment
- Traffic volume
- Cost
- Environmental justice populations
- Outreach
- Aesthetics
- Geometrics, divided by general region (Wisconsin, Minnesota, bridge, and navigation channel)

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- Traffic control
- Railroad crossings
- Weather
- Redundancy
- Environmental
- Freight, including maritime freight, trucking, and oversized overweight freight
- Tribal Interests

The following sections explain how these comments were considered in the PNS and evaluation criteria. A matrix of all comments received is included in Table 1.

Walkability/Bikeability

There were numerous comments regarding the importance of improving/adding bikeability/walkability within the project corridor. The PNS identifies bikeability/walkability as a Secondary Need in Section 3.1 “Walkability/Bikeability” and therefore consideration for the inclusion of multimodal facilities will be completed as alternatives are proposed and developed. Evaluation for this criterion is outlined in Section 3.2.3.1 “Walkability Bikeability” of the Evaluation Criteria. The bridge is identified in multiple regional plans as a system gap for multimodal transportation, therefore, alternatives that contribute to improving multimodal connectivity may partially or fully meet this need. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Future Design

Multiple comments recommended alternatives for consideration. The public recognized the opportunity in designing a structure with a 100+ year design life. Many included a call to ensure that the alternatives leave open the potential for future changes in transportation such as mode shift, emerging technologies, and possible transit corridors. The needs identified in the PNS do not preclude the possibility of any of these proposed alternatives, and the project will be evaluated for the viability of accommodating different modes and methods of transportation. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Transit

A few comments recommended that the project potentially provide space for future transit lines, including the planned Northern Lights Express and the potential for implementing light rail facilities between Duluth and Superior. MnDOT and WisDOT checked with their respective transit offices, and local transportation plans have been reviewed, for other transit needs that have been identified in the Duluth-Superior area. No plans for light rail or other transit improvements are mentioned in the Metropolitan Interstate Council’s long range plan or by the Regional Transit Coordinating Council. Other than the proposed Northern Lights Express (NLX) passenger rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth (via Superior, Wisconsin crossing over the Gassy Point railroad bridge), no other transit needs have been identified between Duluth and Superior. However, the PNS does not preclude the possibility of designing for potential changes in the current transit system. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Alignment

Comments about potential alignments for the project were provided, including alignments and alternatives that should be considered as part of the project. The PNS must focus on the project needs,

not the solutions, and therefore cannot specify alignments. These suggestions will be considered as alternatives are developed and then evaluated using the Evaluation Criteria.

In order to not preclude any of the alignment proposals that were made, one change was made to the PNS. The original Purpose Statement was, “Provide an Interstate highway connection **over** the St. Louis Bay that does not restrict the movements for freight and provides local, regional, and international movement in a reliable and efficient manner.” The statement was modified to instead state, “Provide an Interstate highway connection **across** the St. Louis Bay that does not restrict the movements for freight and provides local, regional, and international movement in a reliable and efficient manner.” This will allow for potential alternatives that may cross the St. Louis Bay by means other than bridging over.

Traffic Volume

Comments were provided regarding the traffic volume on or around the existing bridge, as well as asking about changes in mode shift and how it would impact existing and future traffic volumes. Traffic volume data was used to support the Vehicle Mobility need, as outlined in section 2.3.1 “Traffic Operations” of the PNS. Traffic forecast analysis was used to determine future traffic volumes through 2045, the design year. As there are no existing multimodal facilities on the Blatnik Bridge, no data was available for bike/ped volumes in order to do a similar analysis. These factors were considered in the development of the PNS. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Cost

Comments about the cost of the project and sources of funding were received. Project costs are not part of the PNS or initial evaluation criteria. Cost will be assessed alongside the alternatives as they are evaluated. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Environmental Justice Populations

One comment pertained to the consideration for environmental justice populations which currently and historically have lived in or near the project area. Environmental justice populations are addressed in Section 3.3.3 “Environmental Justice” of the Evaluation Criteria. MnDOT Highway Project Development Process methodology will be used to identify low income and minority populations in the project area.

Outreach

Comments were provided related to the outreach approach for the project and how the public can stay up-to-date on changes as the project develops. These questions were addressed directly in the public open house and participants were encouraged to visit the project website and sign up for email updates. Continued outreach and evaluation of outreach techniques is planned throughout the project. The findings from engagement will be further described in the Environmental Assessment/Environmental Assessment Worksheet. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Aesthetics

Comments about the aesthetics of the bridge were broadly supportive of the look of the existing Blatnik Bridge or were related to opportunities for visual improvement. Aesthetics could be added to the additional considerations of the PNS if or when specific visual goals or needs are identified. Regardless, visual quality will be considered during the alternatives evaluation. A visual quality process will be used

to assess the visual impact of the project alternatives and will be summarized in the Environmental Assessment/Environmental Assessment Worksheet. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Geometrics

Comments about challenges related to the geometrics of the existing bridge provided. Comments can be broadly grouped by location along the existing bridge: Wisconsin approach and interchange, Minnesota approach and interchange, the bridge itself (including the main span and approach spans), and the geometrics of the navigation channel. These elements are considered in different sections of the PNS in order to support both the needs of vehicle safety and vehicle mobility:

- Section 2.2.3 “Geometric Influences – Roadway” addresses bridge design and access interchange influence on poor traffic conditions
- Section 2.2.4 “Geometric Influences – Bridge” details the existing bridge dimensions and compares them to geometric standards for median and shoulder width, which is then tied to crash rates on the bridge
- Section 2.3.1 “Traffic Operations” focuses on the design of the interchange in Superior, Wisconsin and how it impacts traffic operations in the touchdown area
- Section 4.1 “Maritime Freight Navigation” specifies the geometrics of the navigational channel and notes that coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard is required if there are any changes to the navigational channel

These comments reinforce existing operational issues related to the geometrics of the bridge, which have already been incorporated into the PNS. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Traffic Control

Comments related to traffic control were specific to traffic operational issues at or near the Wisconsin touchdown of the Blatnik Bridge. These traffic control issues are addressed as part of the “Vehicle Mobility” need in section 2.3.1 “Traffic Operations” of the PNS. Alongside the influence of geometrics on the traffic operations in this area, traffic control issues influence crash rates in the touchdown area. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Railroad Crossings

Some comments emphasized the impact of rail crossings on traffic near the Wisconsin touchdown of the Blatnik Bridge. Rail crossings are considered in the PNS under “Additional Considerations”, section 4.4 “Railroad Crossing”. Considerations for the three crossings in the project area will be completed as concepts are developed. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Weather

Comments were received emphasizing the impacts of wind and weather events on the driving experience on the bridge or its approaches. Weather impacts are considered under Section 2.2.5 “Adverse Weather Influences” of the PNS and are grouped with factors underneath the primary need of Vehicle Safety. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Redundancy

Comments were provided related to the need for redundant crossings between the cities of Duluth and Superior. While some comments expressed the necessity of maintaining the double crossing over the St. Louis Bay, other comments expressed that the second crossing is not necessary and can be removed. Redundancy is included as one of the Additional Considerations in the PNS, in Section 4.2.2, “Redundancy”. Data provided in this section of the PNS support the need for redundant crossings. As alternatives are developed, the impact they will have on redundancy in the regional system will be considered. No changes were needed to the PNS or evaluation criteria to address these comments.

Environmental

Comments were provided that described potential environmental areas of concern for the project, including shoreline erosion, stormwater drainage and treatment, contamination, and the impact of lighting. Drainage is included in the primary need “Bridge Condition” under PNS Section 2.1.2 “Approach Spans”, where it is identified as one of the factors leading to deterioration of the piers from roadway runoff. These topic areas are also included in the Evaluation Criteria, Section 3.3 “Level 3 Evaluation Criteria (Social, Economic, Environmental Considerations)”. This section includes subsections for soil, sediment, and water contamination; and wetland and waterway impacts. Further criteria can be considered under this section as environmental studies are completed for the project which would allow for the modification of the evaluation criteria.

In a comment letter dated February 17, 2021, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requested the addition of the St. Louis River Area of Concern (AOC) under the Great Lakes National Program (GLNP) as evaluation criteria. This has been added to Table 1 of the evaluation criteria document with the measurements described in new Section 3.3.8. The EPA also provided comment regarding discussions at the Agency Meeting #2 on January 27th. These are discussed below.

Several environmental related comments were received at the Agency Meeting #2 on January 27th. Three comments resulted in minor modifications to the PNS and/or evaluation criteria:

- The purpose statement and objectives from the PNS has modified the word “over” to “across” to capture the potential for non-bridge alternatives to be developed and evaluated.
- Contaminated sediment has been added as evaluation criteria.
- Waterway impacts has been added as evaluation criteria.

Freight

Several comments were related to the influence the Blatnik Bridge has on commercial freight routes, not only those travelling by road on the bridge deck, but maritime freight that travels underneath the bridge in the navigational channel, and the loads that travel on local streets underneath the bridge and provide access to the port and other trucking facilities. In Section 2.3.2 of the PNS, the evaluation criteria was expanded to include a criteria for maintaining access to the port and other trucking facilities.

Regarding oversized overweight (OSOW) loads, comments were provided which support the PNS as the bridge is load posted which prevents loads of larger dimensions or weight to be unable to use the connection between the two cities. These topics are addressed in multiple sections of the PNS.

Section 2.3.2 “Oversized Overweight (OSOW) Freight Mobility” identifies a primary need of the project to allow for OSOW loads to travel across the Blatnik Bridge. No changes are proposed to the need

addressing OSOW loads on the bridge deck. However, this section does not address the need for maintaining freight connections on local streets that pass underneath the Blatnik Bridge. As such, the following was added: “The Blatnik bridge is a critical link for freight movement to and from the Twin Ports. As such, access to the port must be maintained, including on Port Terminal Road which crosses underneath the bridge in Minnesota and 1st Street which crosses underneath the bridge in Wisconsin.”

Section 4.1 “Maritime Freight Navigation” is included as an Additional Consideration, identifying that coordination will be required with the U.S. Coast Guard if any changes are proposed to the navigational channel underneath the bridge. No changes are proposed to this section.

Tribal Interest

Representatives of the Fond Du Lac Tribe attended the Agency Meeting #2 on January 27th. The representatives noted that consideration of tribal interests (i.e. treaty rights regarding hunting and fishing) should be included in the evaluation criteria. MnDOT/WisDOT are committed to tribal coordination through the study of cultural resources. As such, tribal interests and coordination have been added to the evaluation criteria.

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Table 1: Comment Matrix

Date	From	Via	Comment	Topic/Theme
1/5/2021	Prescott Morrill, We Walk Duluth	PAC 3	Asked why walkability/bikeability is considered a secondary need and why the purpose statement doesn't specifically mention multimodal transportation	Walkability / bikeability
1/5/2021	Jenny VanSickle, City of Superior City Council	PAC 3	Asked whether reducing vehicle volume and rebalancing it with other modes of transportation would extend the service life of the bridge.	Service life Traffic volume
1/5/2021	Lindsey Jacobson, Superior Business Improvement District	PAC 3	Asked if there were counts of bike/ped use on the Bong Bridge for comparison.	Traffic volume
1/5/2021	Mike Casey, We Walk Duluth	PAC 3	Asked whether modular design (such as including flexible lanes to accommodate OSOW loads, heavy peak hour traffic in one direction, or increased multimodal usage) would be an option for the bridge as it would reduce cost.	Future design Cost
1/5/2021	Prescott Morill, We Walk Duluth	PAC 3	Stated that the evaluation criteria for walkability/bikeability only includes whether the alternative fills a gap in the overall system. He recommended considering other markers for walkability/bikeability such as ADA accommodation, AASHTO, NACTO, or all ages and abilities requirements.	Walkability / bikeability Evaluation criteria
1/5/2021	Chris Belden, Duluth Transit Authority	PAC 3	Asked whether resiliency can be added as a criteria under level 3 to capture criteria such as long-term maintenance, long-term funding, right sizing the project so that it is neither overbuilt nor underbuilt, and future scenarios related to the Bong Bridge.	Evaluation criteria Future design
1/5/2021	Wayne Dupuis, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Indians	PAC 3	I introduced myself as Wayne Dupuis from the Fond du Lac Band of lake superior Indians. The indigenous people that lived on the shores of lake superior. We have been ethnically cleansed from the area that your stakeholders groups are placing their comments on. in terms of environmental justice I think we need to be aware of this.	EJ populations
1/13/2021	Lance Burger, Superior, WI	Email	<p>Good morning. Good presentation last night. I like the web format. It's less time demanding and more convenient. However, I admit it can be a little intimidating at first for newbies to feel they're not going to inadvertently click a setting to interrupt the meeting.</p> <p>Here are some thoughts & concerns I have with the current WI approaches beyond the obvious existing structure deficiencies of shoulder width, approach grades, stopping sight distance, etc. that I hope can be eliminated or mitigated in a new structure reconfiguration. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.</p> <p>1. The main bridge alignment goes from a posted 55 mph Interstate (you'll get run over if you go less than 60+ mph) dumping onto a posted 25 mph city street. Only in Superior.</p>	Outreach Geometrics– WI Traffic control Railroad crossings Weather

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			<p>2. Actual traffic speeds in the general Hammond Avenue & 5th Street area conflict with pedestrian crossings. It's scary to see a pedestrian trying to cross Hammond (especially at 5th) let alone cross a side street (especially 5th) with turning vehicles. Not ALL drivers see or yield to pedestrians. Those drivers who do yield (especially SB on the bridge approach) are in danger of getting rear ended.</p> <p>3. Superior bound traffic making a left turn onto 5th ("shortcut") to go east vs NB traffic making a left turn onto 5th to go west. Currently, It's difficult for both opposing drivers to see oncoming traffic especially if one or both opposing turning vehicles are larger than a car.</p> <p>4. Bridgeview Motel patrons pulling out onto 5th heading east to access Hammond despite it being a one way going away from Hammond.</p> <p>5. Train backups can cause excessive queuing on Hammond and sometimes cause a queue to form up the bridge (rear end crash concern).</p> <p>6. It appears to me the Duluth bound approach past 5th becomes slipperier than other locations due to - tailpipes becoming elevated enough or enough tailpipe pressure with increased speeds to discharge exhaust pipe condensation onto the roadway and driver speeds reaching adequate velocities to blow stacked snow off vehicle roofs and semitruck box trailers.</p> <p>7. USH 2/53 has reduced mobility entering on and off the bridge due to low speed single lane ramps controlled by a signal.</p>	
1/12/2021	Capt. Joseph McGuiness, Western Great Lakes Pilots Association	Email	<p>Good afternoon.</p> <p>Thank you for continuing to invite Western Great Lakes Pilots Association to the Blatnik Bridge project meetings. We are the mariners that navigate the foreign ships in to and out of Duluth and Superior, often transiting underneath the bridge with bulk project cargoes or bulk grain cargoes.</p> <p>As the project moves forward toward consideration of alternatives, we request you ensure the width and height of the navigation span remain as they currently are.</p> <p>We would be pleased to continue consulting with you on any issues that effect the navigational span.</p>	<p>Freight – Maritime</p> <p>Geometrics – Navigation channel</p>
1/11/2021	N/A	Website	<p>I support the need for a new bridge but request it also have a bike/walking path.</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p>
1/8/2021	N/A	Website	<p>I would like to see a pedestrian walkway implemented on a replacement bridge. This area also experiences high wind gusts that can make driving a large commercial vehicle or an SUV hazardous.</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p> <p>Weather</p>

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1/8/2021	Garner Moffat	Website	We need to also consider multiple modes of transit. Please add a need for pedestrian, bike, and possibly rail transit in collaboration with a train to the twincities (NLX). This project will be built to last for many decades, bike / pedestrian needs already exist, and train needs could be here before this project is completed. Our country can no longer afford financially or environmentally to use automobile transit exclusively. This could also open the project to additional funding sources.	Walkability / bikeability Future design
1/7/2021	N/A	Website	Pedestrian/bike lane like the Bing Bridge.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	I believe the bridge should be reconstructed as a tunnel under the bay. A tunnel would better take into consideration the sensitivities to height that many in our aging population experience. Additionally, a tunnel could be repurposed to provide shelter to the homeless of Duluth and Superior during the colder months potentially reducing or even eliminating the dead of winter. Lastly, a tunnel would provide novel educational opportunities to our youth by allowing them to see the St. Louis River estuary and its inhabitants closeup from below.	Future design Alignment
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	I'd like to see a path for pedestrian traffic.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	Please provide wide bike / pedestrian lanes over the Blatnik bridge!!	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	I do like the dedicated northbound lane at its start from East 2nd St, which gives as much time as necessary to accelerate uphill. Wouldn't want to lose that unless it were replaced by a far gentler incline and long entrance ramp. Also please ensure that the resultant I-535 does not exceed 2.80 miles in length, so that it does not lose its status as the shortest inter-state interstate to I-670 in Kansas City.	Geometrics– WI Traffic control Other
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	As a graduate of Uw-superior who frequently walked and took the bus, it would be so great to have a walking / biking path included safely in the bridge design. It would be of benefit for folks who can't afford vehicles or drivers licenses but want to partake in events after 7pm (when the last bus runs) on either side of the bridge. Also it would provide another space for folks who like to jog or walk recreationally, promoting health for community members.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	Thank you for including the fact that there is currently no pedestrian or bike access on the existing bridge. This should absolutely be something that is included in a bridge repair or replacement.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	I think there should be a bike path on the bridge. It would be great for local residents and tourists.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	The new bridge should include a pedestrian/bike lane. The geography of this city is such that it's difficult for folks living in downtown & eastern Duluth to get to Superior without a car, especially considering the limited bus runs between the cities.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	Jesse Schomberg, Duluth, MN	Website	I appreciate seeing pedestrian and bicycle access included in the purpose and need statement. This is the greatest priority, in my opinion, and a huge gap in the current service of the bridge. I would also like to see lower speeds considered, which would help with crashes/accidents, and depending on the design reduce dangers to bicyclists and pedestrians.	Walkability / bikeability

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			Jesse Schomberg, Duluth, MN	Traffic control
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	Add bike and walk access to connect to canal area, it'll boost a connection on the two cities and will be beneficial to all parties	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	Please include a way for walkers/bikers to cross the Blatnik Bridge in the redesign. This would be a great asset for residents and tourists alike--the Golden Gate bridge of the Midwest. I'm excited to see how it turns out--this is so exciting!	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	A two lane bike path between the two would be greatly appreciated.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	Although it is included as a design consideration, I would like to stress the importance of adding bike/pedestrian infrastructure to the bridge and making that infrastructure suitable for snow removal / year round use. I use a bike as primary transport year round, but currently it is too many additional miles to bike to Superior. Adding this to the bridge redesign would allow me to consider jobs / housing on the other side of the bay. Currently, I would use a bike lane over the Blatnik once a week if it existed, but that could greatly increase.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	If possible, please include a pedestrian lane. With increased use of bike and pedestrian pathways in Duluth and Superior, it would be amazing to offer a more direct link between the two cities, especially for active commuters and tourists.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	N/A	Website	I support the Blatnik being redesigned to accommodate both bike and pedestrian traffic in protected lanes.	Walkability / bikeability
1/6/2021	Jenny Jensen	Email	<p>Hello Mr. Huston,</p> <p>I'm writing to ask you to add my support to a safe pedestrian/bike lane crossing on the Blatnik Bridge. As biking becomes more popular as a low-carbon alternative to driving in the future, we need to plan for connections that will be around for a long time to come. Thank you so much!</p> <p>Sincerely, Jenny Jensen 2724 E 2nd St Duluth MN 55812 Global Family Adventures</p>	Walkability / bikeability
1/5/2021	Scott Marek, Lincoln Park, Duluth	Email	<p>Hi Pat: Good luck with the project.</p> <p>The look of the blatnik is great. try and keep that look. much better than the Bong, which went with the minimalist look.</p> <p>Bike and pedestrian access would be nice also.</p>	<p>Aesthetics</p> <p>Walkability / bikeability</p>
1/5/2021	Mike Casey & Prescott Morrill, We Walk Duluth	Email	<p>December 31, 2020</p> <p>To: Blatnik Bridge Project Advisory Committee</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p> <p>Future design</p>

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		<p>As members of the transportation stakeholder group representing pedestrians and cyclists for the Blatnik Bridge project, we wanted to share our desired outcomes for the Purpose and Need Statement ahead of its finalization in the coming weeks. The following is a summary of what we have heard in our communications with the greater community regarding this project, as well as what we believe will help solve our transportation needs.</p> <p>The Purpose and Need Statement will address more than just automobile traffic as we plan a bridge to serve the diverse transportation needs of the future.. The Blatnik Bridge has primarily served automobile and freight traffic since it was built, reflecting the dominance of the automobile in transportation planning throughout previous decades. Today, transportation agencies work to address social equity, technology advancement, and climate change mitigation in addition to solving traditional transportation issues. The Blatnik Bridge’s successor will accomplish local, state, and federal transportation agency goals for more diverse and sustainable transportation options in the Twin Ports, while also providing built-in flexibility (modularity) to accommodate as of yet unforeseen changes in transportation trends. Currently we are seeing a large uptick in the use of Ebikes and electric assisted devices as examples of what is new and upcoming to transportation in America.</p> <p>As the closest connection between the city cores of Duluth and Superior, this location serves as the main point of crossing for local, metrowide, and regional interstate traffic. This strategic location should connect more than just automobiles, and historically, bridges serving streetcar, rail, automobile, and pedestrian uses have been located in this area. Of the three bridges currently connecting Duluth and Superior, the Richard I. Bong Memorial Bridge provides the only pedestrian/bike connection, while rail connections only exist farther up the Saint Louis River. From a geographic standpoint, it makes sense for the Blatnik Bridge to provide these facilities.</p> <p>Historically, traffic growth is addressed by expanding road capacity but by providing non-motorized options, this bridge will reduce system demand while making it possible for people to travel between Duluth and Superior without an automobile. With both cities investing in their bike and pedestrian networks, connecting the two in an inclusive way will only be possible at this key location at this key time.</p> <p>Similarly, including a rail facility on this bridge will reduce expected Northern Lights Express travel times significantly and provide opportunities for other potential freight/passenger rail services. The viability of the NLX project lies in its ability to compete with automobile traffic on Interstate 35. A faster NLX route means fewer automobiles on the road, less vehicle emissions, and more transportation options for those without cars. This is how we can accomplish the sustainable and equitable outcomes our transportation agencies have outlined for the future.</p>	
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			<p>The successor to the Blatnik Bridge will be more than just a highway bridge. It will be a connection between two communities, two states, and the region not only for those who are privileged enough to own vehicles, but for everyone. The Twin Ports has a rich history of using freeway infrastructure projects to accomplish broader connectivity goals, and we are at our best when we engage in these processes. By emphasizing the importance of accommodating multiple modes of transportation between our two cities in this Purpose and Need Statement, not only can we begin to build a better bridge between our communities, but we can also begin to better bridge the gap between us and our ideals.</p>	
1/12/2021	Carl Sack	Open House	<p>Lives in Duluth and is pleased to see bicycle/ped access is a secondary consideration. Used to regularly use the bicycle route across the Bong Bridge to commute. 2-mile difference between the Bong and Blatnik bridges is significant difference. The Bong facilities have a narrow lane and can be scary if you're not used to it.</p> <p>Project is opportunity to improve bike/ped access between the cities with a path that is wider, safer, and possibly more protected compared to the Bong Bridge.</p> <p>Likes the idea of a commuter rail connection on the bridge or to design in a way that allows for the possibility in the future – would have influence on factors including climate change and improved mass transit.</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p> <p>Future design</p>
1/12/2021	Jordan van der Hagen	Open House	<p>[Chat text] "There are a lot of ideas being developed that could bring big changes in transportation (electric cars, autonomous vehicles, changes in funding, etc.) What will the lifespan of the new bridge be and how can it include flexibility for future changes in transportation?"</p> <p>Asked if there's opportunity to look at the spaces under the bridge as part of the project (Rice's Point / Connor's Point). Spaces have a nice view to watch ships but there is no investment in the area to make those spaces nicer and more accessible.</p> <p>Aesthetics are important as a symbol of the Twin Ports and as a main connection. The bridge is a logo of a few businesses in the area. Suggests outreach to artists who could come up with ideas and concepts.</p> <p>[chat log] "How can the form better represent the idea of uniting the Twin Ports? I think seeing some new concepts would be great."</p> <p>[chat log] "It's an awesome view. People would walk up the bridge just for that if they could do so."</p>	<p>Future design</p>
1/12/2021	Brooks Johnson	Open House	<p>Asked if there are cost estimates available and when a figure will be known</p>	<p>Cost</p>

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1/12/2021	Craig Tinsley	Open House	<p>FeraDyne has two facilities, one at 11 Main Street right on the shore of the bay and the other at the end of Main St by Nordic Construction at the foot of the bridge.</p> <p>Asked about the timeline of a feasibility study and when alternatives will be shared</p> <p>Has traffic going between the two facilities and depends on both the Bong and Blatnik bridge, asked how the project will work in the Main St/Exodus area.</p> <p>Asked how they can keep up-to-date on project as it develops.</p> <p>Asked about construction impacts to the shoreline, giving an example of investment in the sea wall because of erosion from November 2019 and April 2020 weather events.</p> <p>Expressed excitement towards any improvement to the bridge but because of the location on Connor’s point there is some concern about impacts.</p> <p>Goes over the bridge every day. Truck drivers that go over Blatnik will complain about wind and weather and choose the Bong over the Blatnik claiming the angle to the wind is better.</p> <p>Agreed with the speed change issue presented regarding coming off the interstate into Wisconsin. Was happy with the list of needs shown, particularly the geometric deficiencies on the Wisconsin side.</p>	<p>Freight – Trucking</p> <p>Outreach</p> <p>Environmental</p> <p>Geometrics – WI</p> <p>Traffic control</p>
1/12/2021	Luke Viscusi	Open House	<p>Asked if MnDOT/WisDOT will continue to use virtual meetings looking past the pandemic.</p> <p>Participated in the TPI meetings and one issue was blind merges. Emphasized that merges in the area are challenging. Ramp getting off of the bridge on to Rice’s Point as an example – it would be great to have an extended buffer to prevent merging into oncoming traffic coming on to the bridge</p>	<p>Outreach</p> <p>Traffic control</p>
1/12/2021	Valerie Brady	Open House	<p>Is an aquatic ecologist and works with MN Sea Grant. Deals a lot with stormwater and expressed interest in making it safe, especially in the winter. Recommended examining how stormwater and all the things that are caught up in the stormwater are going to rinse of the bridge, how it gets handled, where it goes, and if there any way to mitigate it. MN Sea Grant is in the middle of an estuary cleaning project and would be interested in having a cleaner estuary after it is complete.</p> <p>[Chat text] “I lived in Michigan when the little car was lifted off the Big Mac, fell into the water, and the woman driver drowned. The wind on the bridge really frightens me.”</p> <p>[chat log] “There are many people who live on one side and work on the other, plus all the commerce traffic. I think this has to be considered, along with the disruption if the Bong has to be closed for an accident, etc.”</p>	<p>Environmental</p> <p>Weather</p> <p>Redundancy</p> <p>Aesthetics</p> <p>Geometrics- WI</p>

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			<p>[chat log] "I would like to see it be solar-powered if it is included." (regarding lighting)</p> <p>[chat log] "Safety first, but would be great if we could have that AND a view."</p> <p>[chat log] "Back to the lighting.... Duluth is trying to be more "dark skies" friendly for star gazing. Could we think about a lightening system that shuts off at some point at night to preserve the view of the night sky?"</p> <p>When first moved to Duluth and started going over the bridge to Superior, this location was initially very confusing due to the transition from highway to city street. Agreed with previous comments that it's confusing to figure out which lane to be in as it's the opposite of what you would typically expect (you need to take an exit ramp to remain on the highway rather than taking the exit ramp to get on the city street). For people unfamiliar with the area it can be very confusing.</p>	
1/12/2021	Ann Dahl	Public Open House2	<p>[Chat text] "Please make the shoulder width wider all the way across. Better visibility with entering and exiting. Is a higher guard rail possible?"</p> <p>[chat log] "Would the entire bridge be closed or portions closed at a time most of the time and the entire bridge close for a shorter period of time."</p> <p>[chat log] "I think because it is part if the skyline it is very important and a symbol of the Duluth/Superior community."</p> <p>[chat log] "I think the lights are wonderful to see. Solar would be a great idea!"</p> <p>[chat log] "Vince your idea of a see through rail is a great idea."</p>	<p>Geometrics– Bridge Redundancy</p> <p>Aesthetics</p>
1/12/2021	Shannon Laing	Open House	<p>[Chat text] "Wind is definitely an issue. Add in the narrow shoulders and it gets extra dicey when the wind blows folks out of their lane. I avoid the bridge. Also more robust "this lane only" signage is needed to get folks into the correct lane coming into either side. Lots of close shaves with people realizing almost too late they need to get into a dedicated lane" Stated this is an issue on the MN and WI side. There needs to be better signage because there's a long gap between lanes are identified and when the merge needs to happen.</p> <p>[chat log] "Think about the economic impact of the lift bridge...there's your answer to aesthetics"</p> <p>[chat log] "I think decorative lighting is part of the aesthetic concept - it may or may not be a critical piece but could be dynamic. Agreed with solar"</p>	<p>Weather</p> <p>Traffic control</p> <p>Aesthetics</p>
1/12/2021	Dena Ryan, WisDOT	Open House	<p>Works with the DOT. Bridges last 60-75 years and most of them look alike. Considering the amount of history with Duluth and Superior there is an opportunity for a unique structure and have its history explained through the structure.</p>	<p>Aesthetics</p>

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1/19/2021	N/A	Website	<p>I'm encouraged that the P&N statement identifies bicycle and pedestrian facilities as a significant need. I want to assert that these improvements must be considered a primary need, rather than a secondary need. From the Jan 12 meeting and other publications, it sounds like the existing bridge will not permit the addition of bike lanes or pedestrian walkways. If these facilities are identified as a critical system gap and unbuildable with the current infrastructure, then any plans for a replacement bridge must allow for well-engineered and ample bicycle & pedestrian lanes.</p> <p>The Twin Ports has shaky, disconnected biking/pedestrian infrastructure at best, and while improvements seem to trickle in every now and then, the need for these facilities will continue to grow. I am a year round bike commuter between downtown Duluth and the West End, and so is my partner! We only share one car, so we do rely on cycling and public transit. The lack of cycling/walking facilities on the Blatnik Bridge is limiting for us socially and professionally – many times my partner has looked at better jobs in Superior (she is a welder), but being unable to cross the Blatnik Bridge by bicycle is by far the the most significant barrier to working in Superior. I wonder how many Superior residents withhold business or labor from Duluth's economy because of these transportation limitations?</p> <p>While I can't speak strongly enough about the need for the Blatnik Bridge to be made inclusive of bicycles and pedestrians, I would like to zoom out somewhat and encourage the P&N drafting process to zoom out as well. The Blatnik Bridge is the main connection point between Duluth and Superior, and it is one that currently inspires very little faith! I see this Project is identifying needs and hoping to address them, but it is my hope that the Purpose and Needs Statement will attempt to identify as-yet burgeoning needs for our growing, shifting economy and all the technological advances that are swiftly coming to daily life.</p> <p>I think it is very likely to expect the Twin Ports to keep growing, and with that will come more public transit riders, increased bus service, increased pedestrians, increased bicycle commuters, increased tourists, and it appears autonomous vehicles are soon to be a fact of life. Climate change is real and Duluth has been publicly promoted as a climate refuge destination in recent years... this is a title (and reality) that the Twin Ports can embrace and capitalize off of, and the planning for that should begin now. The Blatnik Bridge is the most important connection point between Duluth and Superior, and if we value that the intertwined nature of our communities and economies, we will invest in this connection point in ways that enrich all levels of society and all modes of transportation, not just automobiles and commercial trucking. It is my recommendation that the Purpose and Needs Statement take a broader look at all the needs this bridge presents us and approach those needs with a forward-thinking mentality to engineer a truly impressive product that all Twin Port residents can be proud of and confident in.</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p> <p>Future design</p>
1/19/2021	N/A	Website	Just tear it down, you only need one	Redundancy

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1/19/2021	N/A	Website	<p>As a citizen of Duluth, and with a background in both Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning (both Master's degrees from U of M), I would submit the following-</p> <p>I would urge the planning and design staff to consider that this bridge will be in-place for well-over 60+ years. With that in-mind, I think that design with the foresight for change and/or modularity would be the most intelligent approach.</p> <p>My thought here starts with this idea (if you will indulge a short thought-experiment) - people designing and building in the 1970's could not, at that time, conceive of the societal impacts of the internet. That was 50 years ago, much shorter than the potential service-life of this bridge.</p> <p>Similarly, we may not be able to foresee the needs that this bridge may have for it's design-life.</p> <p>As such, I believe the design team should be thinking about how the needs of this bridge may change over time. Specifically, I believe the design team should be thinking of a wide variety of potential uses, including but not limited to, automobiles, freight trucking, significant bike and pedestrian uses, electric vehicles, and passenger rail.</p> <p>As we all know, bridges are a bottle-neck in any transportation system, and this bridge should be wideopen to the possibilities of the future.</p>	Future design
1/19/2021, 1/18/2021 (submitted twice)	Skip Williams, We Walk Duluth	Email	<p>January 18, 2021 RE: Public comments to the Blatnik Bridge draft Purpose Statement and Purpose and Needs document:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Purpose statement is too focused, it should be broader and more expansive as per MNDOT's HPDP / Scoping "Purpose and Need Statement" document. • The current Purpose and Needs document as written is replacing a bridge with a bridge and not providing a bigger vision or identifying some failings of the existing bridge. <p>The current draft Purpose and Need statement lists three primary needs (in section 2): Bridge Condition, Vehicle Safety, and Vehicle Mobility. While the current condition and anticipated wear along with vehicle safety and mobility may be key to timing a project they are not the purpose and need for the crossing. The primary need appears from the use data collected displayed in the draft document, to be a crossing providing a capability for all transportation modes and the capacity to meet the present and future service. The fact that the present bridge does not provide for pedestrians or people using a bike for their mobility make this a priority consideration for any replacement. In addition, there is no provision for future public transit other than a bus using vehicle travel lanes. The need for flexibility in meeting periodic oversize or heavy freight in service to either port facility within the Saint Louis bay area is</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p> <p>Evaluation criteria</p> <p>Freight – OSOW</p> <p>Future design</p>

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		<p>stated but also shows how the need must incorporate future needs within the projected service life.</p> <p>The current Needs portion of the Purpose and Needs draft leaves out bicycle and pedestrians from the primary needs section. The fact that no other present crossing provides a safe capability today with the capacity to meet future needs. (The Bong Bridge does have a bike/pedestrian capability, but this crossing does not have the Blatnik’s geographic presence or directness between the Superior and Duluth downtown areas.) We note that MNDOT’s HPDP / Scoping document under “Most Common Need Types and Their Use” section 6 page 9 states as examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bicyclists or pedestrians have difficulty crossing roadways ● Bicyclists or pedestrians experience low multi-modal level of service (MMLOS; see Highway Capacity Manual) ● Bicyclists or pedestrians do not have reasonable connections between destinations, facilities, or modes <p>All these are present issues on the Blatnik Bridge.</p> <p>The Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council’s Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Bikeways Plan has always pointed to the need for bike and pedestrian infrastructure on the present bridge starting back in the first version in 1994 and the latest in 2019. Listing safety as a primary need and not including the bike/pedestrian mode in the statement of primary need is an oversight.</p> <p>The safety issue with the bridge is listed as a primary need where most all accidents happen on the approaches and exits from the bridge and not on the bridge itself so one could argue that these issues could be reduced with changes to the approaches and exists with little work on the actual bridge.</p> <p>Where the lack of any connection to safely traverse across the bridge via bicycle and as a pedestrian is a primary reason the bridge is not multimodal and should be listed as a primary need. MNDOT’s HPDP / Scoping document under “Most Common Need Types and Their Use” section 6 page 9 supports this.</p> <p>We can all agree that the structural condition of the bridge is the primary reason we are looking at replacing or modifying the bridge at this time.</p> <p>In section 2.3.2 Oversized Overweight (OSOW) Freight Mobility on the Needs section, it points to the structural condition of the bridge that when corrected will then return the bridge to the ability to permit OSOW loads it once did up until 2007. So the OSOW issue is directly tied to the primary need, for freight transportation into the future.</p> <p>Recommend the Primary Needs, Section 2, be amended:</p>	
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			<p>Duluth needs a crossing that provides multi-modal capability to support people, business and government mobility requirements.. At a minimum this must include private and commercial automobile, freight—including periodic oversize and heavy weight vehicles, pedestrians, bike, and consider appropriate public transit. The capability should conform to current safety criteria for each mode and address the region’s potential for high wind and high-latitude climate.</p> <p>A secondary consideration may be a dedicated public transit capability to aid in interstate mobility within and among the two downtowns and regional port facilities. In addition, inclusion with the design of the potential for autonomous vehicles would be prudent given the service life of such a crossing.</p>	
1/19/2021	Andrew L Wensmann	Email	<p>Good morning,</p> <p>As I was evaluating the meeting notes this morning and I had an intriguing thought. In order to determine if the replacement is necessary, could the Blatnik be close for several hours on scheduled days to determine the increase of traffic on the Bong bridge. I don't know the logistics of this kind of study, but I think it would be beneficial in determining if the bridge has a future purpose.</p>	Traffic volume
1/18/2021	Marty Meldahl	Website / email (submitted twice)	<p>Mr. Huston,</p> <p>As you prepare to replace (hopefully) the Blatnik Bridge, please consider a way to move the railroad tracks that run from the East End of Superior crossing many streets including Hammond Avenue which throughout the day backs up traffic onto the bridge not only causing delays but traffic hazards. Perhaps realigning them with the existing tracks that run under the approaches already may be a solution. The abandoned right of way could be repurposed as a pedestrian / bike corridor through Superior.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>	Railroad crossings
1/18/2021	N/A	Website	<p>A walking path on the Lake Superior side would be appreciated. Please keep the same look – it is iconic!</p>	<p>Walkability / bikeability</p> <p>Aesthetics</p>
1/18/2021	N/A	Website	<p>Please consider a suspension or cable-stayed bridge. This would allow for the main span to cross the channel without the need for new abutments in the water. It would also provide the Twin Ports with a pleasant new landmark.</p>	Aesthetics
1/18/2021	BG	Website	<p>How about removing the bridge access from that hwy53 interchange mess there, have the access moved directly to an 'new' interchange northwest of there where I-35 drops into Duluth , and run the pilons or support structure or whatever they are called and align the new bridge along/above Garfield.</p> <p>Thank you</p>	<p>Geometrics– WI</p> <p>Geometrics– MN</p> <p>Alignment</p>
1/18/2021	N/A	Website	<p>Bridges, while the main purpose is to cross something and getting from point A to point B, also has many other purposes. One of those, which I feel gets neglected is aesthetics. The</p>	Aesthetics

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			appearance of the bridge along the skyline can be a draw for photographers and potential citizens. Take for instance the Mackinac Bridge, Golden Gate, or Brooklyn Bridge. Personally having a suspension bridge connecting our cities would add the greatest value to our skyline.	
1/18/2021	N/A	Website	The Blatnik Bridge is scary. Rebuild the whole thing.	Other
1/17/2021	N/A	Website	This a once in a more than a lifetime project, so whatever you do, make it beautiful.	Aesthetics
1/17/2021	N/A	Website	I would say that the Blatnik Bridge should either be built adjacent to the new structure or within the existing footprint. If built adjacent to the new structure, it either: (1) should connect to County Highway 36 in Superior and lead straight to Piedmont Avenue with exit and on ramps there to get onto the freeway; or (2) Under the bay. If built in the existing footprint, the bridge should be either: (1) shorter in length and start at Garfield Avenue rather than Piedmont Avenue; or (2) go above Garfield Avenue or close to it.	Alignment
1/17/2021	N/A	Website	I live in Duluth and work in Superior. Blatnik and the future bridge are a keystone to my daily routine. I put my heart and soul into both communities. The new bridge needs to promote as much connectivity between the cities as possible. Bike and Pedestrian transportation needs to be included. The views that Blatnik currently provides remind travelers of the grandeur of this area and inspire investment into the Twin Ports and the Great Lakes.	Walkability / bikeability
1/17/2021	N/A	Website	Please ensure a walking/biking lane that is wide enough for bikes to go by each other without one bike having to stop and tuck hard against a wall for a safe pass. Lane on the Bong is way too narrow. It's important that people who want to walk/bike or who don't own a car to have an comfortable option to cross between Duluth and Superior. The current bridge's industrial look is a great fit for the location and helps make a statement about the Twin Ports history, heritage, and character. Thanks!	Walkability / bikeability Aesthetics
1/16/2021	Becky Plackner	Email	Biker and pedestrian friendly is really important for the future build of the bridge from Superior to Duluth. Thanks	Walkability / bikeability
1/16/2021	N/A	Website	Yes to Pedestrian and bicycle facilities.	Walkability / bikeability
1/14/2021	Taryn Erickson	Email	I think the design should consider a pedestrian/bike path... here are a couple of reasons why: 1. Gives another option to the Bong bridge, taking the Bong can be way out of the way for a ped/biker to utilize to commute between Duluth & Superior. 2. Gives drunk people a different option than walking on the bridge to return back to Duluth 3. The next chance to do something like this wont come along for another half century 4. Bike trail on the Duluth side is already there, Superior is revitalizing the Tower Ave area. This could be a good opportunity to spread Duluth's tourism over the bridge if it were done with class so people wanted to make the longer stroll over the bridge with the great view. The	Walkability / bikeability Future design

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			trail would need to be separated from traffic better than the Bong with more protection from snow plowing, salt, flying debris, traffic noise etc. Suspended below the deck perhaps.	
1/14/2021	N/A	Website	Thanks for all you do!	Other
1/14/2021	N/A	Website	I support and approve of the purpose and need statement for the I-535 Blatnik Bridge project because it defines the scope of the project.	Other
1/14/2021	N/A	Website	I agree that the Blatnik Bridge needs to accommodate walkers and bikers. In order to make our community more sustainable and equitable, increased options for non-vehicle options need to be included in our planning. Please make this a high priority in any bridge modifications.	Walkability / bikeability
1/14/2021	Kate Ferguson	Email	<p>Pat –</p> <p>I'm not sure if these are really relevant to put in this document, but I think it would be helpful to at least mention it somewhere in the document - the freight traffic (volumes are increasing) that goes under the bridge via city streets - both OSOW and normal loads.</p> <p>My thoughts: Section 2.3.2 - can we put something in there about how important it is for OSOW to be moved under the bridge? Section 4? - maybe we can put something in there about freight traffic on the roads below the bridge and how important it is to ensure the Port has viable, unrestricted access for our growing freight volumes that travel by city street underneath the bridge. I see you call out maritime traffic under the bridge, but could we also call out freight/trucking?</p> <p>I'd welcome your feedback on this.</p> <p>Thanks! Kate</p>	<p>Freight – OSOW</p> <p>Freight - Trucking</p>
1/14/2021 (submitted twice)	Steven Boberg	Website	<p>1. Anyway the new bridge can be much lower in height than the existing bridge? This could be accomplished by stopping the traffic and having a lift section to allow ships/tall watercraft to pass.</p> <p>2. Is it possible to have a separate pedestrian/bicycle lane separate or below the main bridge deck similar to the Gooseberry bridge?</p> <p>Thanks, Steven Boberg 218-349-4536 Duluth, MN</p>	<p>Alignment</p> <p>Walkability / bikeability</p>
1/27/2021	Various	Agency Meeting #2	Several environmental related comments were received at the Agency Meeting #2 on January 27th.	<p>Environmental</p> <p>Tribal Interests</p>

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2/19/2021	Environmental Protection Agency	Letter	<p>Draft Purpose and Need document: No comment.</p> <p>Draft Evaluation Criteria Tech Memo: Add additional row to Table 1: Evaluation Criteria (pages 2 and 3), Process Level 3 (page 3), Category – Social, Economic, Environmental Considerations, to identify the St. Louis River Area of Concern (AOC) under the Great Lakes National Program (GLNP) as an Evaluation Criteria, with Measurement identified as ability to avoid impacting past, current and future AOC project areas, with a Methodology of “yes or no” for each AOC project area in or near the Blatnik Bridge project area. Include a discussion/write-up of the AOC Evaluation Criteria in Section 3.3 Level 3 Evaluation Criteria (Social, Economic, Environmental Considerations) (page 6). For information regarding activities in the St. Louis River AOC see St. Louis River Area of Concern 2020 (Remedial Action Plan Reflects amendments to the 2019 RAP) October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020 found at https://widnr.widen.net/content/tsmr1vgmbp/pdf/GW_SLR_RAP2020.pdf</p> <p>Based on discussions during the January 27 Agency Workshop, consider identifying additional Process Level 3, Category – Social, Economic, Environmental Considerations, to cover the following concerns: 1) contaminated sediment in the waters within and near the Blatnik Bridge study area, 2) bridge/roadway drainage/stormwater/hazardous materials spills management, and 3) tribal interests regarding hunting/fishing rights.</p>	<p>Environmental</p> <p>Tribal Interests</p>
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