

ADVANCING TRANSPORTATION EQUITY



District 6
September 2020



Executive summary

As part of its 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) sought to better understand how transportation systems and policies affect and are affected by equity. MnDOT developed a pilot project to conduct community conversations with various groups, agencies, and organizations (referred to hereafter as “organizations”) working with and representing traditionally underserved communities in Minnesota.

In 2017, MnDOT launched an effort in its districts to engage with communities to inform equitable transportation planning and practice. MnDOT organized in-person conversations between staff and representatives of community organizations, starting with District 2 in 2017, District 8 in 2018, and District 6 in 2019. These conversations in District 6—and other districts—have helped MnDOT develop a deeper understanding of the impact transportation systems and policies have on the communities that live in the districts. These efforts have also helped MnDOT identify organizations and provided pathways to build relationships and continue engagement. This initiative to advance transportation equity has continued with community conversations in 2019 and 2020 in District 4 and District 1.

In addition to its continued work internally and with districts to implement actions based on the findings, MnDOT intends to share its District 6 findings with partners to help inform their work.

Methods of the study

MnDOT engaged with representatives from 27 organizations for the District 6 community conversations. These organizations hold strong ties to key communities, identified through a regional demographic analysis, to be:

- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access and outcome
- Facing unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches



Teams of two interviewers met with representatives of 27 organizations in person and asked questions using a semi-structured interview guide, in which interviewers followed a common conversational structure but could pursue other relevant topics as they arose.

Themes and findings

Distinct themes that emerged from the conversations in District 6 include that transportation affects community life and is affected by the life situation of the communities in the district. While transportation provides access to employment, school, medical and human services, goods, and social life, inadequate transportation can simultaneously restrict access and opportunity. These themes are summarized below and discussed further in later sections of this report.



Community interconnections

The income, age, ability, and racial and ethnic makeup of District 6 communities, along with population density outside of the regional hubs, shape how these communities affect and are affected by transportation options available in District 6.

- Older adults and people with disabilities face difficulties in accessing medical services, purchasing goods, and engaging in social activities. They rely more heavily on volunteer drivers' programs, transit, and friends and family for these transportation needs. Participants said barriers to using transit include existing transit service hours and routes and accessibility challenges with snow and ice removal.
- Economic and employment opportunities in the district often require intercity travel. Community members in more remote parts of District 6 cannot easily get to available jobs and back to their homes. More regular and affordable transportation options are needed to connect communities to opportunities.
- Communities feel there is a one-way flow of information, including from MnDOT, to the public and want improved engagement outside of decision-making periods. Participants wish to see more engagement efforts with communities, and proactive efforts by MnDOT to include communities in decision-making processes.
-



Infrastructure limitations

Existing transit services cannot adequately meet the needs of the communities who rely on them the most, especially people with low incomes and communities of color. Participants noted that these communities often reside in areas of cities that are not served well by existing transit services, which may have less direct routes and add to travel time, or may not operate at hours needed most by the communities.

- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), including immigrant communities face distinct transportation challenges such as lack of familiarity with how to use transit, language barriers, and inability to afford transit. These challenges often hinder their ability to rely on transit to access needs and services.
- Pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure is limited to mostly recreational use, with participants citing winter weather, safety, and lack of trails and paths as barriers.
- Existing transportation limits the reach of health care providers, businesses, and community organizations. As a result, transportation can affect the broader reach of the institutions and the regions' broader health system, economy, and civic life.

Recommendations

Managers and staff from District 6 and MnDOT's Central Office reviewed these findings from the conversations and developed potential strategies to address challenges and advance equity. Results from this review and observations from Management Analysis and Development (MAD) consultants resulted in the following

recommendations for MnDOT to partner to with other stakeholders to improve transportation services and infrastructure, and build relationships and deepen engagement with communities in District 6:



Transit planning

MnDOT should work with transit providers to improve transit planning in District 6.



Walking and bicycling

MnDOT should collaborate with partners to improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.



Public engagement

MnDOT District 6 should create a district public engagement plan

These recommendations are discussed further in later sections of this report.