

ADVANCING TRANSPORTATION EQUITY



District 3
June 2023



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Executive summary

As part of its 20-year 2017 Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) sought to better understand how transportation affects and is affected by equity. MnDOT developed a pilot project to conduct community conversations with various groups, agencies, and organizations (hereafter referred to as “organizations”) working with and representing underserved communities in Minnesota.

Starting with District 2 in 2017, MnDOT launched district-specific efforts to engage communities through conversations to inform equitable transportation planning and practice. MnDOT continued to coordinate in-person conversations between its staff and representatives from community organizations in District 8 in 2018, and then in District 1, District 4, and District 6 in 2019. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MnDOT conducted community conversations in District 7 through remote meeting technology. MnDOT continued to use remote meeting technology in 2022 in District 3, concluding the Greater Minnesota regions for the community conversations project. These conversations help MnDOT develop a deeper understanding of the people who live in the different districts and their transportation needs, determine which key communities MnDOT needs to learn more about, and identify organizations that work with and represent those key communities.

Similar to previous districts, the conversations in District 3 included a wide range of topics that has contributed to improving MnDOT’s understanding of the role transportation plays in people’s lives and the opportunities or consequences people face based on available transportation modes. In addition to its continued work internally and with districts to implement changes based on the findings, MnDOT intends to share its District 3 findings with partners from this initiative to help inform their work.

Methods for the study

In District 3, MnDOT engaged with representatives of 24 organizations with strong ties to key communities identified through a demographic analysis of the region. These organizations represented communities:

- Currently **underrepresented** in transportation decision-making processes.
- Experiencing **known inequities** in transportation access or outcomes.
- Facing **unique transportation needs** not well served by current approaches.

Teams of two interviewers met with the organizations via Microsoft Teams 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

People and community connections

In District 3, participants emphasized that access to services and other needs are often affected by factors such as income, race and ethnicity, age, and ability.

- **People with low incomes:** Personal vehicle ownership and maintenance is often expensive for many people with low incomes. Given the distances needed to travel and inability to rely on transit due to limited hours and service areas, accessing employment, shopping, medical and health needs, and social and recreational activities is challenging for people with low incomes.
- **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and immigrants:** Community members may often face multiple barriers due to income, citizenship status, and ability to speak English. These community members have experienced historical discriminatory practices and treatment leading to distrust of government, and language barriers may prevent effective engagement at the local level. In parts of the district, such as Saint Cloud, immigrants and refugees may make up a significant proportion of the population; however, limited or lacking access to transportation creates barriers to access opportunities and needed services.
- **Older adults:** Older adults, especially those aging in place, require adequate transportation access for a broad array of services, including health and medical services and social and recreational needs, often relying on friends and family for transportation needs.
- **People with disabilities:** People with disabilities in the region rely on public transit, volunteer drivers programs, and other transportation services. For people with disabilities, transportation barriers often include limited availability of transportation services and ADA compliance issues such as lack of accessibility ramps, audible signals, and curb cuts. Where transit and transportation services are available, inability to access vehicles independently is also a challenge.
- **Zero-vehicle households:** Community members without a vehicle include older adults, people with low incomes, students, people experiencing homelessness, and BIPOC community members. For zero-vehicle households, barriers include limited hours and service areas of transit and lack of rapid transportation between the region and the Twin Cities.
- **Veterans:** Veterans in the district face multiple barriers, including low incomes and limited access to affordable housing and health and medical services, especially lack of easy access to mental health services.
- **Women and girls:** Specifically for vulnerable women and girls, such as those experiencing homelessness or domestic violence and those who have been formerly incarcerated or victims of sex trafficking, there are limited trusted sources of transportation available. When in a crisis situation, women and girls often cannot rely on public transit due to limited hours of operation and service areas.
- **Access to basic needs and services in rural areas:** Most participants discussed how access to critical needs and services are affected by the rural nature of the district, specifically highlighting how the concentration of health and medical services, employment, and affordable housing in specific parts of the region (such as larger cities) limit people's ability to access these services and needs without a personal vehicle.

Transportation and infrastructure barriers

Participants discussed how the modes of transportation available create and limit opportunities for key communities in District 3. A common theme in the conversations is that often destinations with critical services and needs are inaccessible without a personal vehicle.

- **Personal vehicles:** Personal vehicles are the necessary mode of transportation in the district due to the distances needed to travel and limited hours and service area of transit. People with low incomes or immigrants and refugees may not own a car or have a driver's license or be familiar with driving, leading to reliance on friends and family for transportation.
- **Public transit:** Public transit, while important for many key communities including older adults, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes, have limited hours of operation in parts of the district, including infrequent service, and can be expensive and inefficient due to long travel and wait times.
- **Walking and bicycling:** There are barriers to walking and bicycling due to limited infrastructure, including missing, incomplete, and poorly maintained sidewalks, and safe and accessible pathways to popular destinations.
- **Other transportation modes:** Volunteer driver's program, formal and informal ridesharing, and medical transportation fill gaps but are limited and more so due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Public engagement limitations

While participants in conversations identified successful engagement efforts in the district, they also emphasized that frequently used engagement efforts may not be as effective with certain communities, such as BIPOC, immigrants and refugees, veterans, and people with disabilities. Historical experiences of discrimination and unfair treatment coupled with a perception that their input is not valued are barriers particularly significant to communities of color.

Equity impacts

When asked what equity means to their organization, participants offered a variety of perspectives, most commonly defining equity as equal access and opportunity or ensuring people have what they need to be successful regardless of abilities and background. Several also discussed equity in terms of targeting or focusing efforts on those who have been historically excluded and have disproportionate needs.

For many participants in the District 3 community conversations, an equitable transportation system is critical for community members to access jobs, health and medical needs, housing, and social and recreational activities.

Participants identified specific opportunities for MnDOT and its partners to advance equity in transportation, including:

- Improve access and funding for public transit.
- Increase connections within the district, between the region and the Twin Cities metro area, and continuity of transit services within the district.
- Improve city planning and zoning to increase multimodal connection to popular destinations.

Recommendations

Management and staff from MnDOT Central Office (CO) and District 3 participated in a series of working meetings to review the findings from the community conversations and developed potential strategies to advance transportation equity. Results from the series of meetings led to the following recommendations for MnDOT:

- 1. Integrate equity across MnDOT and D3 policies, programs, and processes to reduce inequities across the transportation systems.**
- 2. Expand and broaden public engagement strategies for deeper, connected engagement with key communities identified in the equity community conversations.**
- 3. Improve transit access in District 3 in partnership with transit providers and the Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCC).**
- 4. MnDOT and D3 staff should continue to work with local partners to improve safety and accessibility for people who walk, bike, or roll to their destinations.**

These recommendations are discussed in more detail beginning on page 38 of the full report.

Origins of the equity effort

In January 2017, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) released its updated, 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP).¹ During the process of updating the plan, MnDOT sought input from stakeholders and the public about what to include in the plan. Participants in those conversations said MnDOT needs to advance equity, citing a range of disparities related to race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and physical abilities. In response, MnDOT listed two activities to advance equity in its SMTP 2017–2020 Work Plan:

- Study how transportation affects equity and identify transportation strategies and approaches that will meaningfully reduce disparities.
- Pilot tools and strategies to better incorporate equity into project-level decision-making.

To help advance equity in work planning, MnDOT chose to conduct community conversations designed to provide a qualitative, experience-based perspective of how transportation affects equity. MnDOT coordinated in-person conversations between its staff and representatives with community organizations, first in District 2 in 2017 and then in District 8 in 2018. In 2019, the conversations continued in District 1, District 4, and District 6. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, MnDOT conducted the conversations in District 7 through remote meetings. MnDOT continued to use remote meeting technology in 2022 in District 3, concluding the Greater Minnesota regions for the community conversations project. These community conversations have gathered information about equity concerns from a variety of groups and organizations, built relationships for MnDOT, and provided a pathway for continued engagement and initiatives to address equity issues.

MnDOT contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD)² for assistance with these community conversations, specifically to:

- Build MnDOT’s capacity to conduct conversations.
- Coordinate conversations with organizations that serve communities in MnDOT’s District 3.
- Analyze the data gathered from conversations.
- Report interview findings and recommendations.

Methodology

The project primarily consisted of in-depth interviews with groups, state and local government agencies, organizations, and community leaders—all generally referred to collectively in this report as “organizations”—that work with and represent key communities of interest for the District 3 transportation equity community conversations.

¹ Minnesota Department of Transportation, “Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan,” January 2017, <http://www.minnesotago.org/final-plans/smtf-final-plan>.

² MAD is the State of Minnesota’s in-house consulting group that provides neutral, third-party management consultant services to public sector agencies. For more information, please visit <http://www.mn.gov/mmb/mad>.

The main purposes of the interviews were to:

- Better understand the organizations' perspectives about how the transportation system, services, and decision-making processes help or hinder the lives of people in south central Minnesota.
- Build relationships with organizations whose work aligns, directly or indirectly, with equity and transportation.
- Identify actions to address transportation inequities.

Key communities selection method

MnDOT conducted an analysis of the 13 counties in District 3, examining the current demographics and trends in the district, and focusing on populations with known inequities.³ MnDOT used the analysis to further identify and prioritize which key communities to include in the conversations.⁴ They include:

- Communities currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes.
- Communities experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes.
- Communities with unique transportation needs not well served by current and usual approaches.

MnDOT District 3, CO staff, and other partners identified potential organizations to serve as interviewees. The groups, agencies, and organizations selected work with and represent the project's key communities. MnDOT identified additional organizations by asking interviewees for suggestions on others to interview.

MAD contacted the organizations by phone and email, asked them to participate in the project, and scheduled interviews. Interviews were conducted from June 2022 through September 2022.

Interview teams

All MnDOT interview teams included at least two people. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency, all interviews were conducted via videoconference or remote meeting technology. The interview teams⁵ met with representatives via Microsoft Teams and asked questions using the semi-structured interview guide described in the section below on data collection and analysis. Most interviews were attended by interviewers from MnDOT District 3, and some teams included a combination of MnDOT District 3 staff, CO staff who work on statewide planning and public engagement, and consultants from MAD.

In May 2022, MAD conducted an interview training session for participating MnDOT staff. The training was conducted via Microsoft Teams. The training goals included:

- Explaining the purpose and process for the interviews.
- Providing qualitative research instructions, including note-taking guidelines.
- Distributing project and interview materials.

³ Refer to Appendix C: District 3 demographic profile on page 44.

⁴ Refer to Appendix D: Key communities for interviews on page 55.

⁵ Refer to Appendix B: Project team and interviewers on page 43.

- Practicing interviewing.
- Explaining the interview scheduling process.

Data collection and analysis

MnDOT and MAD developed a semi-structured interview guide,⁶ meaning interviewers followed the guide but could pursue other relevant topics as they arose.

Interview topics included:

- The experience of key communities in traveling for day-to-day activities, such as work, school, medical appointments, social and recreational activities, shopping for goods and services, and accessing human services.
- Transportation barriers community members experience and opportunities to meet their needs.
- Safety concerns for the communities.
- Opportunities and challenges for the communities when engaging with government.
- The perspectives of the organizations on both equity and how transportation can advance equity.

MAD collected interview notes and conducted preliminary analysis to identify potential themes. When categorizing the notes, MAD used a first stage of coding to test the themes from its preliminary analysis and then added new codes as additional themes arose organically from the full set of interview notes.⁷ MAD confirmed the accuracy of both preliminary and organic themes by monitoring how many times an interviewee made comments that fit in a theme and in how many interviews the topic came up. MAD then reviewed and recoded the data as necessary to ensure consistency in coding for the main themes and additional subcodes. MAD used these themes and their subcodes to develop findings.

Implementation planning workshops

MnDOT Central Office staff, District 3 managers, and members of the interview teams met in November 2022 to hear about the findings and consider possible improvements and actions. Specifically, participants did the following:

- Reviewed findings from the District 3 community conversations.
- Determined what level of influence MnDOT has over the issues behind those different findings.
- Rated the findings based on MnDOT's level of influence.
- Brainstormed about what District 3 and CO staff might do going forward with regard to the findings that MnDOT can influence.

⁶ Refer to Appendix E: Transportation equity interview guide on page 58.

⁷ MAD analysts coded data according to theme. If data could not reasonably fit a theme, they were coded as Miscellaneous, or analysts created a new code to fit the new theme.

At the end of the meeting, participants voted on which of their brainstormed solutions they thought MnDOT should prioritize. Their high-priority solutions informed the recommendations found in this report.⁸

Participants met again in January 2023 to validate recommendations from this report, align them with ongoing MnDOT plans and initiatives, and further assess the opportunity for realistic action. In February 2023 the group reconvened to develop specific action items around the recommendations, identifying who at MnDOT should take what steps and when, to advance the recommendations. MAD consultants helped the district create an action plan document summarizing the information for District 3.

Organizations interviewed

Response rate

MnDOT invited 38 organizations to participate in a conversation and 24 agreed, for a response rate of 63%. Of the 14 organizations that were not interviewed, 13 did not respond to interview requests during the data collection period and one declined the invitation due to staffing shortages.

Types of organizations

Table 1 lists the types of organizations interviewed. Most organizations interviewed were nonprofit organizations.

Table 1. Types of organizations participating in interviews

Organization type	Number interviewed
Nonprofit	13
Transit agency	7
Local government	4
Total	24

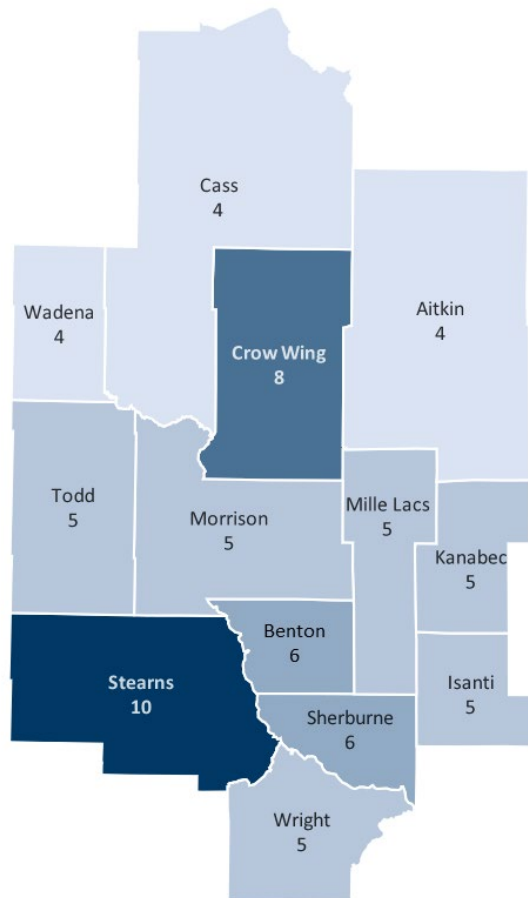
Counties represented

Figure 1 counts how many of the 24 organizations interviewed have a presence in each of the 13 counties in District 3. Most organizations interviewed worked with or represented key communities in several counties, so the counts by county in Figure 1 exceed the total of

⁸Refer to the recommendations section on page 44. For the full list of ideas suggested by participants from MnDOT’s District 7 and its Central Office, refer to Appendix F: Findings and potential solutions from the implementation planning meeting on page 61.

24 for organizations interviewed. The counties served by the most organizations were Stearns (10), Crow Wing (8), and Benton and Sherburne (each at 6).

Figure 1. Number of organizations interviewed based on the District 3 counties where they are active



Key communities represented

Figure 2 illustrates the key communities and the number of the interviewed organizations that represent or served them. Key communities are groups that are:

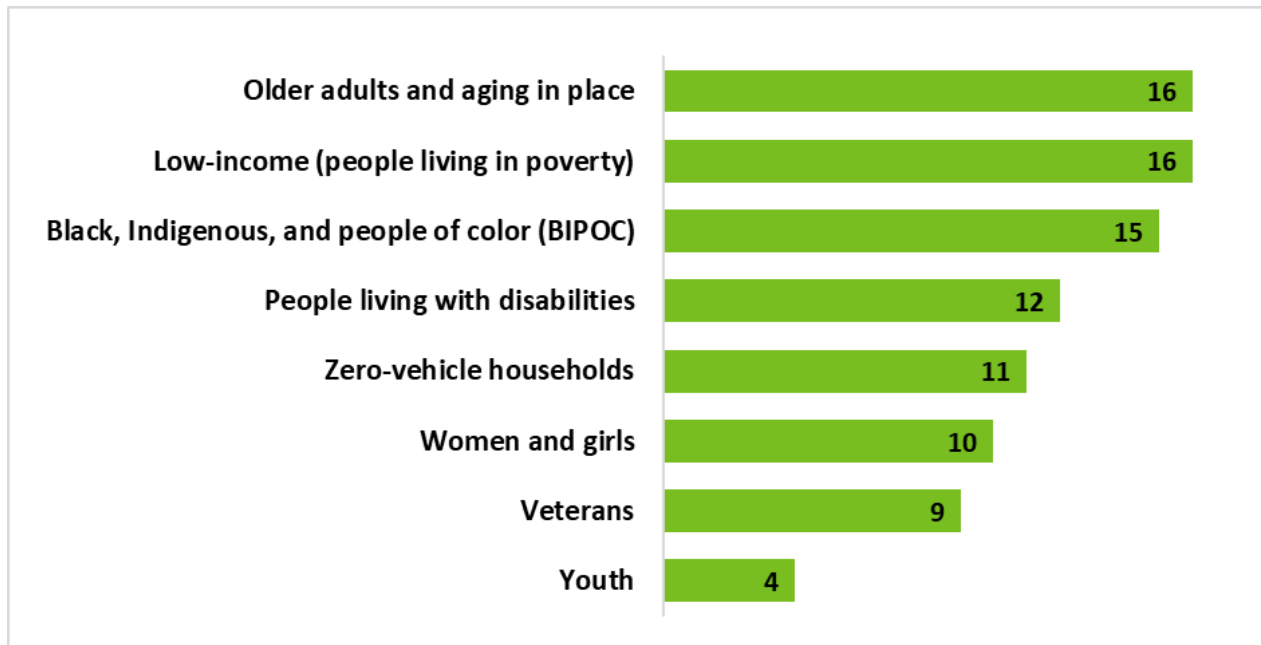
- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes.
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes.
- Facing unique transportation needs not well served by current and usual approaches.

Key communities are not mutually exclusive. A person can belong to one or many of the key communities identified.

All of the key communities identified at the onset of the initiative were represented by at least one of the interviewed organizations. Many of the organizations worked with more than one key community, so the number of organizations in Figure 2 exceeds the number of organizations interviewed. Organizations serving and

made up of people with low incomes, BIPOC, people living with disabilities, older adults, and women and girls were highly represented, followed by organizations serving veterans, zero-vehicle households, and youth.

Figure 2. Number of organizations interviewed based on the key communities they serve



Note: Counts by key communities exceed the total of 24 organizations interviewed because many of the organizations serve more than one community.

Findings

Several themes emerged from the community conversations in District 3, with participants often highlighting that transportation is deeply connected with other aspects of life such as employment, healthcare, childcare, affordable housing, and recreation. Further, while transportation provides access to jobs, school, medical appointments, social services, shopping, and social events, the available modes within the transportation system create and limit opportunities for communities in District 3.

This section summarizes the findings from the community conversations in District 3, organized into the following four categories:

- **People and communities** examines how transportation interacts with many other factors of life, including where people live and work, and their income, race, ethnicity, age, and abilities.
- **Transportation and infrastructure** looks at the modes available within the transportation system and how those modes create or limit opportunities.
- **Public engagement** focuses on how government and transportation partners can interact with Minnesotans to create a more equitable transportation system.
- **Equity** provides perspectives on equity from conversations—how to define equity, how it relates to transportation, and strategies interviewees suggested to improve equity.

Because many topics from the community conversations are interrelated, they may appear in more than one category.

How to interpret the findings

Some discussions were with one individual associated with one organization, while other discussions included multiple people from one organization but serving different roles. In order to be clear and accurate, MAD consultants used the following terms:

- **Participant** refers to an individual.
- **Organization** refers to a specific organization.
- **Conversation** is a general term used to describe the interviews.

In addition to using proportions such as one-fourth or two-thirds, this report uses the terms below to describe how many participants, organizations, or conversations talked about a topic:

- **A few** is generally two or three.
- **Several** is generally more than a few, but less than one-fourth.
- **Most** is more than half, but less than two-thirds.
- **Nearly all** is greater than 90%.

People and communities

“Poverty, people don’t have access to a vehicle, and they don’t own a vehicle and we are so rural. We don’t even have a hospital. We have to go to Bemidji, Park Rapids or Brainerd for hospital or specialty care.”

District 3, located in the central region of the state, made up of 13 counties: Aitkin, Benton, Cass, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright. Nearly 13% of Minnesota’s total population, or 716,269 people, live in this district, with nearly a quarter of the district’s population located in Stearns County (158,947 people) and Wright County (144, 845 people). More than half of the district’s population (56%) lives in Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright Counties. Twelve cities have more than 9,000 residents each, with Saint Cloud (located in Stearns County) being the largest city by population with 68,462 people.⁹ The Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) serves the entire Saint Cloud Metropolitan Area, as well as portions of Benton, Stearns, and Sherburne Counties.¹⁰

Participants in the conversations often discussed how access to services and amenities affects communities they represent, such as people with low incomes, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), people with disabilities, and older adults. According to participants, because the district is largely rural, traveling to access critical needs and services, as well as for recreational purposes, is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive.

⁹ For more information about key demographic factors in the district refer to Appendix C: Demographic profile on page 45.

¹⁰ For more information about Saint Cloud APO refer to <https://stcloudapo.org/about-us/history-of-mpos/>.

Another common theme across the conversations was that transportation in District 3 is deeply connected with other aspects of life such as employment, healthcare, affordable housing, education, childcare, and recreation. The following sections highlight the topics most often discussed in the community conversations. Unless otherwise noted, all data discussed below are from the 2020 US Census five-year estimates.

COVID-19 pandemic

The District 3 transportation equity community conversations occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic public health emergency. The pandemic created many disruptions and challenges in the district and across the state, including:

- Shift to remote work for some workers
- Closure of in-person learning and shift to remote learning
- Strict social distancing requirements, including limiting number of passengers on transit services
- Loss of employment, hiring freezes, and closure of some childcare settings
- Pause on planned expansion of services such as transit services
- Loss of opportunities to engage in social and recreational activities, and an increase in social isolation

Several participants also discussed ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic that impact and are impacted by transportation.

- While many people continue to work from home or participate in education remotely, those who needed to attend shift jobs at manufacturing facilities, or people in low-wage jobs, had to report to a job site and limited transit availability was challenging to many.
- High cost of housing and development pressures due to population growth in part driven by the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., people moving to the district to telecommute).
- Limited availability of reliable internet in parts of the district preventing people from accessing online services.
- Increase in mental health needs at the same time services were curtailed or stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Closure of childcare centers during the pandemic and that did not reopen. Many jobs that have been created since 2020 are in the service sector and pay wages too low for parents to be able to afford the increased costs for remaining childcare slots.
- Wages have not kept up with the high cost of living making owning and maintaining a private vehicle cost-prohibitive.

Specific transportation issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic discussed include:

- Transit systems and services that connect people to jobs and places for critical services continue to be limited in parts of the district due to driver or staffing shortage.
- Availability of informal and formal ridesharing options, including Volunteer Driver Programs, continues to be limited.
- Availability of transit services connecting affordable housing to critical services and needs is limited.

People with low incomes

“Lot of folks live further out in the rural area, don’t have cars, no transportation, and no funds to buy a car, nor maintain it. This causes issues and barriers in getting and keeping jobs, getting education, getting medical service, buying food, etc.”

According to the 2020 US Census estimate, in District 3, the median household income is \$62,655 (in 2020 inflation-adjusted dollars) which is lower than the statewide median household income of \$73,382. Sherburne County has the highest median household income (\$88,671), while Wadena County has the lowest (\$46,178). About 9% of people in the district live below the federal poverty line,¹¹ which is higher than the statewide percentage of 8%. The highest proportion of people in poverty live in Cass County (13%).

More than three-quarters of participants in conversations discussed challenges for people with low incomes in the district, frequently highlighting that people with low incomes may be older adults, people living with disabilities, people with mental health needs, BIPOC, or refugees or immigrants. Given the distances needed to travel outside of the Saint Cloud metropolitan area, accessing food, healthcare, employment, and social and recreational activities is challenging without a private vehicle. As one participant described, “If you’re low income or if you are off of public transportation routes meaning you live anywhere but the City of Saint Cloud it’s probably a real challenge.” Participants said that for people with low incomes the cost of owning and maintaining a personal vehicle is a barrier for accessing their day-to-day needs.

People with low incomes often rely on public transit where available, and rides from family and friends, medical, health, and social and human service providers. Several participants said that existing options such as public transit, rideshares (i.e., Uber and Lyft), and taxis are often limited and costly for people with low incomes. As one participant described, “We just need affordable services for people living in extreme poverty and limited resources. Whatever you do it would have to be cost effective.” Participants said available public transit is limited in hours and areas of service, making it unreliable for people to access critical needs and services.

Black, Indigenous, and people of color including immigrants

“There is a large Somali population in Waite Park that we should try to better understand their needs. Maybe they find a different job that helps increase quality of life but are limited by transportation. Even if they get hired at a higher paying job, if they cannot commute there using public transportation, they cannot accept the new job.”

According to the 2020 US Census estimates, about 7% of District 3 identifies with racial groups that are not white. Those who identify as Black or African American are the largest group, consisting of 3% of the residents, followed by American Indians and Asians (1% each). Since 2010 the share of the District 3 population that identified as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) increased from 1% to 7%. Those who identified as

¹¹According to the Census Bureau, a family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty if the family’s total income is less than the dollar value of the appropriate dollar value threshold. The set of dollar value thresholds vary by family size and composition.

Hispanic or Latinx¹² make up 3% of the whole District 3 population and is the group that increased the most. District 3 has two Anishinaabe Tribal nations within its borders. The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is located partially within Cass County and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe is located in Mille Lacs County. Just more than 1% of all District 3 residents identified as American Indian or Alaska Native.

Participants in nearly three-quarters of conversations discussed challenges for Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, including immigrants, refugees, and those who may not speak English as their primary language. In some parts of the district, immigrants and refugees may make up a significant proportion of the population. For example, according to the US 2020 Census, about 27% of Saint Cloud's residents are BIPOC. The two largest BIPOC groups are Black or African American (17%) and Hispanic or Latino (4%). Additionally, about 12% of residents of Saint Cloud were born in a foreign country.

Participants said that Black and Indigenous community members and community members of color may have limited understanding of services available to them. Language barriers can prevent people who do not speak English as their primary language from accessing services, being able to navigate systems easily, and providing input to solve local problems. People from these communities often face discriminatory and unfair treatment, adding to distrust of government and service providers. Safety concerns, driven by immigration and citizenship status, can prevent undocumented members of the community from engaging with local governments or accessing services. As one participant described, "It is not fair or equitable that someone going to work end up going to jail while waiting for a bus because someone thinks they look suspicious. This is specially a problem for people who don't speak English well."

Participants said that limited or a lack of access to transportation often hinders their ability to access opportunities and critical services. A participant said, "Our community is a community of workers even though they tell us we don't work, and we only draw money from the government. 90% of our community work and have one or two jobs. Going to and from work is the most pressing problem we have. That is a challenge."

Additionally, community members may also face language barriers in using and navigating the transit system to travel from one location to another. Participants also discussed transportation infrastructure such as busy intersections between these locations and popular destinations, that make it unsafe for community members to bike or walk.

Participants said that for immigrants and refugees, lack of familiarity with driving and barriers to getting a driver's license or learning how to drive can create transportation challenges. Participants mentioned the cost of driver's education, unavailability of translated driving instruction materials, discrimination at testing sites, and lack of access to a car to get behind-the-wheel training as specific barriers in getting a driver's license. Immigrants and refugees rely on social connections to access transportation, often ridesharing with other community members to get groceries, take children to school, get to jobs, and attend recreational activities.

¹² The term *Latinx* is widely used as a gender-neutral or nonbinary term inclusive of all genders as an alternative to *Latino* or *Latina*. For the purposes of the MnDOT transportation equity study, *Latinx* will be used throughout the document. For more information, refer to <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>.

Older adults

“Seniors sometimes live a mile out of the bus service zones. This is an issue when, for example, seniors are referred to a medical facility down to the Cities for a treatment, or another location, but they don’t know how to get there since there is no public transportation. Volunteers help but they don’t have all needed capacity to provide services. Seniors are generally home bound, but if they want to get on the bus to do grocery shopping, how does the person carry bags full of groceries while using a walker and trying to get on the bus? Due to insurance issues, bus drivers are not allowed to help these seniors get on the bus. In addition, some seniors who shouldn’t be driving are driving because there is no transportation and they need to get to the medical doctor, grocery store, etc.—transportation is important for survival.”

Twenty percent of the residents in District 3 are 65 and older, which is higher than the statewide share of 16%, according to the 2020 US Census. Older adults (i.e., ages 50 and above) comprise 44% of rural Minnesotans, compared with 32% of urban Minnesotans.^{13 14} Additionally, in 2015, nearly 26% of adults 65 and older in District 3 lived alone and nearly 9% of adults ages 65 and older lived below the poverty threshold.^{15 16}

About two-thirds of the conversations identified challenges for older adults in the community in accessing critical services and needs such as healthcare, purchasing goods and services, and socializing and recreation.

Like the statewide trend, many older adults in the district prefer to age in place and require access to critical services and needs in close proximity to their residence. Limited transportation access can increase social isolation for older adults, cutting off critical access to social and recreational activities, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. As one participant described, “Social isolation is prevalent in rural areas. Even if you live out of town a mile or two, without transportation it is very difficult to maintain social interaction. For example, volunteer program in Onamia, where seniors wanted to get to bingo or to church, but there was no transportation available.”

Several participants described specific transportation challenges for older adults, especially those with limited mobility or those who cannot drive anymore. Participants said available transit is limited in hours and service areas, often with no access to services outside of the region for specialized health and medical appointments. The cost of transportation, including transit, is not feasible for older adults living on fixed incomes. Volunteer Drivers and public transit services are also limited to older adults who can get themselves in and out of a vehicle with assistance.

¹³ For more information, see “Greater Minnesota: Refined and Revisited.” Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2017. https://mn.gov/admin/assets/greater-mn-refined-and-revisited-msdc-jan2017_tcm36-273216.pdf.

¹⁴ To define rural and urban settings, the State Demographic Center report, “Greater Minnesota: Refined and Revisited used an assignment scheme known as Rural Urban Commuting Areas (RUCAs) to classify census tracts based on population size, density, and daily commuting. For more details, see pages 6–12 of the report.

¹⁵ Data from Minnesota Department of Human Services: <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/aging/aging-2030/data-profiles/>

¹⁶ According to the US Census Bureau 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimate, the poverty threshold for one person household age 65 and older in 2015 is \$11,367.

Older adults rely on informal ridesharing but do not always have family or friends nearby who can provide rides. Participants said walking and bicycling are limited for older adults, and infrastructure barriers limit their ability to walk or bike. Participants described highway crossings between congregate housing for older adults (e.g., group or nursing homes) and bike trails and busy intersections during the summer months as some examples of infrastructure barriers in the region.

People living with disabilities

“Our biggest barrier is accessible transportation. So, volunteers aren’t trained in any kind of passenger assistance. So, you start getting mobility devices and heightened mobility needs. Unfortunately, we don’t have accessible vans or any of that kind of stuff to be able to do these types of gaps services. The first mile, last mile is another barrier. We have public transit routes and complementary paratransit, but accessibility is a problem.”

About two-thirds of the participants in conversations discussed barriers for people with disabilities in the district. About 9% of residents in District 3 have a disability, according to the 2020 US Census five-year estimates, which is higher than the statewide proportion of 7%. Most transit providers in the district offer free or reduced fares for people with disabilities and operate buses and provide services for people with limited mobility that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

People with disabilities often rely on public transit, volunteer driver programs, medical transportation, and veterans organizations to access services or tend to recreational and social needs; however, in some parts of the region availability of these services is limited, and there may be limited options available for those who use wheelchairs. Participants said many of the smaller cities in the district often do not have ADA accommodations, including accessibility ramps, automatic doors, audible signals, or curb cuts, limiting independent mobility for people with disabilities.

Transportation challenges identified for people with disabilities include:

- Limited transportation services with wheelchair access (e.g., service providers or volunteer drivers)
- Transit services often cannot assist people with limited mobility in getting on and off the bus, or with carrying items.
- Construction and busy intersections that limit safe access for people who use wheelchairs
- Poor sidewalk or trail maintenance, especially in the winter
- Limited ability of volunteer service providers or veteran service providers to support people with disabilities in addressing critical needs such as shopping and accessing social and recreational activities

Zero-vehicle households

“Lot of folks live further out in the rural area and don’t have cars, no transportation, and no funds to buy a car, nor maintain it. This causes issues and barriers in getting and keeping jobs, getting education, getting medical service, buying food, etc.”

About a third of participants discussed challenges specifically for households with no access to a personal vehicle, including older adults, people with low incomes, students, people experiencing homelessness, BIPOC

communities, and people with disabilities. Approximately 5% of households in District 3 do not have a vehicle, according to the 2020 US Census estimates.

Participants said transportation challenges hinder the ability of older adults to attend social and recreational activities. For students in the school system as well as college-age students, transportation is critical to access employment, education, and school activities.

Transportation challenges for zero-vehicle households include:

- Limited hours and service areas of transit in more rural parts of the district, including limited coordination between transit service providers to cross county borders
- Limited access to rapid transportation between parts of the district and the Twin Cities metro area

Veterans

“Veterans can use public transit for free with their VA ID card. However, many of them need additional assistance getting places (physical or mental limitations), so free public transit isn’t an option. When they do use veterans transportation services, it must be for medical appointments only. While transporting veterans, the drivers cannot stop for anything else such as to run into a grocery store, restaurant, convenient stores, etc. Drivers feel bad that they cannot help as many of them have no way to do these other things.”

A few participants also discussed challenges specifically for veterans in the district. About 6% of the District 3 residents over the age of 18 are military veterans, with the largest proportion of veterans in the district living in Stearns County (20%).

Veterans services organizations in the district offer limited transportation to attend medical appointments. For example, the Minnesota Association of County Veteran Service Officers (MACVSO) provides veterans in District 3 with free transportation to access medical services.¹⁷ According to veterans services organizations that participated in conversations, many veterans rely on personal vehicles due to challenges with relying on the transit system. Veterans who do not have their own personal vehicle often rely on friends and family for transportation.

Women and girls

A few participants discussed transportation challenges for vulnerable women and girls in the district, specifically those who are experiencing homelessness, have been formerly incarcerated, are experiencing domestic violence, and are victims of sex trafficking. A few organizations in the district provide shelter and support toward achieving housing stability specifically for vulnerable women and girls.

According to participants, women and girls often experience multiple barriers, including poverty, lack of affordable housing, lack of childcare, and access to a livable-wage jobs, which affects and is affected by lack of affordable transportation options. Participants said for women and girls, traveling with children without a personal vehicle can be time-consuming and cost-prohibitive, limiting their ability to participate in social and

¹⁷ For more information, refer to <https://www.macvso.org/about.html>.

recreational activities or attend extracurricular activities. Participants also discussed safety concerns for women and girls with biking and walking, including availability of bike seats for children, navigating busy roads for accessing basic needs, and walking and bicycling in the dark or in the evenings. Refugee or immigrant women may also face challenges with acquiring a driver's license.

Access to critical needs and services in rural areas

Health and human services

“Health care is a huge issue. CentraCare is the only health facility in the area. The medical transportation companies are few. We have our own navigators who call patients to help with medical appointments. We have patients who miss medical appointments because they don't have medical transportation. Now the only hospital in the area is not taking patients because of missed medical appointments. They will never take them again if patients miss three appointments.”

Nearly all participants in conversations discussed transportation needs of community members to access health and human services.

Participants described the need to travel out of the district to the Twin Cities metro area or other regional hubs for specialized medical treatments or appointments such as dialysis, cancer treatment, mental health services, and courts. Community members may miss medical appointments or delay care because of transportation challenges. Without a personal vehicle, community members often rely on various service providers, including medical transportation, public transit, volunteer driver programs, and emergency medical transportation services.

A few participants also emphasized the limited availability of mental health service providers in the district, resulting in community members needing to travel farther to access services. A few participants also discussed the inability of vulnerable community members to access needed community resources and services due to a lack of transportation options.

Employment and economic development

“Access to transportation options opens a lot of doors for employment. Being able to choose where you would like to work or being able to find employment you enjoy versus choosing a job just because you can walk there.”

Three-quarters of participants discussed the importance of transportation to access employment and economic development. Sixty-four percent of the working-age population 16 years and older is in the labor force, which is slightly lower than the state's rate (70%). Wright County has the highest participation rate (73%), and Aitkin County has the lowest (49%). Overall the working-age population 16 years and over is projected to decline by 3% over the next ten years.¹⁸ Within District 3, projections show the labor force participation will decrease by just less than 1% by 2030, with the 55 to 64 age group projected to lose the most labor force participants by 2030.

¹⁸ Minnesota State Demographer's Office: <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/labor-force/>

Most participants discussed the lack of transportation options for workers in manufacturing jobs, especially those who need to attend second- or third-shift jobs. Additionally, manufacturing plants may be located in hard-to-reach locations with staggered shifts, which poses significant transportation challenges for workers. A few participants also discussed limited availability of jobs in rural parts of the district, requiring community members to travel farther out to access employment.

As transit services available in the region are limited to Monday to Friday during standard business hours, these workers cannot rely on transit to get to their places of employment. A few participants said some companies provide transportation (e.g., Pilgrim's Pride, Cargill, Jenny-O), or workers may organize transportation between themselves, which can be cost-prohibitive for low-wage workers. However, without a personal vehicle, workers face barriers in accessing other needs and services, such as grocery shopping and attending to healthcare needs. A few participants also said that central commercial hubs and shopping are often located in larger cities in the district, and there are limited transportation options available for community members from more-rural areas to access these locations. A few participants described "food deserts" in the district (i.e., lack of grocery stores or access to fresh produce), requiring community members to travel farther.

A few participants advocated for rapid transit or light rail to connect the district with other metro areas including the Twin Cities metro area or Duluth.

Affordable housing

"The City of Brainerd has both east and west sides, and Highway 210 goes through there. It's hard to cross the highway. I think the type of housing in the northern part of this segment of the community is generally lower income, and access to the kind of shopping, restaurants, and food areas on the south side is difficult because there is not very good crossing."

Nearly half of the participants discussed the limited availability of affordable housing in the district. According to the Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index, residents in 7 out of 13 counties spend at minimum half of their household income on housing and transportation combined, with Cass and Wadena Counties' residents spending the largest proportion (both 57% of income).¹⁹ The district includes some of the counties with the highest number of home owners in the state after the Twin Cities metro area.²⁰ Additionally, compared with other regions of the state, the region also has the highest rate of owner cost burden with 15,582 owners paying more than half their income on housing, partly driven by declining median income in some counties, as

¹⁹ The Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index provides a view of affordability of a geographic location in the United States that includes both the cost of housing and the cost of transportation, which is often the second largest household expenditure. For more information, refer to <https://htaindex.cnt.org/>.

²⁰ For more information about housing affordability in the region, refer to State of the State's Housing 2021 report by the Minnesota House Partnership, accessed at <https://mhponline.org/state-of-the-states-housing-2021/>.

well as high housing costs due to new developments. Thirty percent of the renter households in the region reside in Stearns County.²¹

Nearly half of participants discussed availability of affordable housing in the district, especially in the Saint Cloud metro area. According to participants, there is a housing shortage in the district, pushing people with low incomes into more rural parts of the district where there is less availability of transit and transportation options. Limited transportation options for people experiencing homelessness or in locations with affordable housing hinder the ability of community members to access jobs, education, healthcare, and other critical needs and services. A few participants also discussed infrastructure barriers such as busy highways or unsafe crossings between affordable housing or shelters for people experiencing homelessness (e.g., Highway 10 has unsafe crossing between shelter and grocery store/Target, Highway 210 in Brainerd).

Childcare

“Childcare is affecting labor participation rate. There is a childcare shortage and often parents and grandparents are unavailable to help.”

Over a third of participants discussed a childcare shortage in the district. Participants most often said that the limited availability and cost of childcare impacts the ability of caregivers to find employment.²² The limited hours and service areas of transit in many parts of the district can be challenging for those who want to drop their children off at childcare and go to their place of employment. According to participants, some transit providers have busing services for school-age students for recreational activities, or preschool busing services, which help.

Transportation and infrastructure

Most critical method of transportation

“Transportation is a huge barrier. For employment, you need three things: housing, transportation, and childcare. If you are missing one of these, it can be huge. If transportation is missing, it may mean an individual may get to work but is not able to get home later when they get off. Cab service is not present in St. Cloud like other larger cities. Uber and Lyft services are not reliable, making good transportation hard to find. If you don’t have a car in St. Cloud, you are out of luck. There is a spot near the Highway 10/23 interchange where people cross Highway 10 so they can get on a different bus route to save 45 minutes on the travel time.”

²¹ The Central region for the State of the State’s Housing report includes Benton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright Counties. The regions are based on the delineations used by the Minnesota Housing Finance Authority.

²² A September 2022 report by the Center for Rural Policy and Development outlines the decline in availability of childcare in Greater Minnesota. For more information, refer to <https://www.ruralmn.org/rural-child-care-solutions-from-the-ground-up/>.

About two-thirds of participants said private vehicles are the preferred or most critical method of transportation. This includes those who drive their own vehicles but also rely on rides from others.

According to participants, people rely on private vehicles due to the rural nature of some parts of the region and the need travel long distances for essential services. Additionally, limited transit options outside of the metro areas, as well as limited hours of operation, and impracticality of relying on bicycling and walking during winter, also increases this reliance.

Less than half of the participants said that for many community members, transit or bus services is the most critical or preferred mode of transportation. Participants highlighted that for community members who do not own a private vehicle or have a driver's license, people with disabilities, and older adults, transit is critical for attending to essential needs and services. A few participants also said older adults rely on transit due to safety concerns related to infrastructure changes (i.e., introduction of unfamiliar interchanges). A few participants said that rapid transit is critical for those who need to travel to the Twin Cities metro area. A few participants discussed that often in more rural parts of the district, the limited hours of operation and service areas, including the lack of continuity or border-to-border transit, limits the ability of community members to use public transit.

About a third of participants said that walking is a critical method of transportation for some community members, such as those in zero-vehicle households. Several participants said that some cities in the district, including Saint Cloud, are pedestrian-friendly, with popular destinations well connected and easy to navigate for pedestrians. Several participants also said that winter weather, or in some cities lack of connections or infrastructure barriers, makes walking less feasible in some parts of the district (e.g., busy intersections, summer traffic, affordable housing disconnected from popular destinations by busy highways).

Less frequently, a few participants said bicycling and formal ridesharing (taxis, Uber/Lyft) are a critical mode of transportation in the region.

Personal vehicles

“Have to make choice between having their vehicle versus pay rent, buy groceries, pay bills.”

Most conversation participants said private vehicles are the most critical or preferred method of transportation for people in District 3, where according to the 2020 US Census about 95% of households have at least one vehicle. Nearly 80% of district residents drive alone to work, and an additional 9% reported carpooling.

One conversation participant said transportation in the district is great for privileged residents, and for those families with two cars, getting around is rarely a barrier. There is at least one organization in the district that has a program to help with vehicle loans. While purchasing a vehicle can be a barrier, many participants pointed to insurance, maintenance, and repairs as barriers more often.

Gas prices have become a significant barrier, with steep increases occurring at the time community conversations took place, making driving more expensive for people with low incomes.

“Car-centric community, car dependent.”

People who do not own a vehicle will often rely on family or friends with a vehicle to get rides. A few participants noted informal ridesharing often happens among immigrant groups and older adults.

Barriers to vehicle ownership and driving

Less than half of conversation participants talked about barriers to driving, but there were a few themes that emerged from their comments. Personal vehicles can be cost-prohibitive, especially to people with low incomes.

Ownership costs

“You don’t get to just jump in a car unless you’ve got a really good job to go with it.”

Conversation participants noted purchasing a private vehicle is a barrier for people. Purchasing a roadworthy vehicle is just the first step, however. Paying for fuel, insurance, repairs, and maintenance is another significant barrier to vehicle ownership.

Driver’s license issues

Immigrant populations face language barriers in trying to get a driver’s license. The Minnesota driver’s manual is available only in English, Spanish, Somali, and Hmong. The knowledge test is available in a few additional languages, but the road test is conducted in English only. A few participants noted some community members do not know how to go about getting a driver’s license.

“...if you’ve ever worked with a mother or a father who is being told we don’t want you driving anymore that is a huge blow to not only their independence, but their self-value.”

Older adults stop driving or can no longer drive due to health or medical issues. One conversation participant said older adults will often go seven to eight years without a driver’s license. Organizations who serve older adults noted that this loss of independence can harm the mental health of people aging in place, in addition to the difficulties they face getting to appointments, the grocery store or pharmacy, and other places.

Public transit

About transit

Nearly all participants said public transit is an important, but limited, transportation option for many communities, including older adults, immigrants, people with disabilities, people with low incomes, and zero-vehicle households. Nearly all organizations who participated in interviews said that while transit exists in the district, there are many limitations and barriers to using public transit.

Eight government entities and nonprofit organizations or private companies offer transit services throughout the 13 counties in the district.²³ The majority of the services operate demand-response services (also known as

²³ Refer to MnDOT’s interactive web tool for transit data in Minnesota:

<http://mndot.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Minimalist/index.html?appid=2e3d00cf13924ce290386f195c0892e1>

Dial-a-Ride), often requiring 24-hour advance scheduling. Transit users schedule pickups and drop-offs in advance by phone or online.

- **Metro Bus by the Saint Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission** operates 17 fixed routes serving the cities of Saint Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park seven days a week with services running from 5:00 a.m. to 10:43 p.m. on weekdays, and reduced hours from morning to evening on the weekend.
- **The Metro Bus also operates a Dial-a-Ride**, paratransit service for individuals who are unable to use fixed-route services. Users must apply for eligibility and receive certification approval to be able to use these services.

Public transit services limitations and barriers

“Community members are challenged and run into barriers mostly due to service times or hours of operation not matching up with their needs. They might need to be to a doctor’s appointment that is too early, or they need to get on the bus hours before their appointment or they’ll not make it. This is also a problem for those who don’t work a regular day shift and they need to get to work.”

When describing public transit limitations and barriers, participants said the limited hours of operation and routes and a lack of coordination between providers makes it challenging to use transit to access critical services and meet the needs of the community. A few also discussed other barriers such as the system being hard to use, limited understanding of the system and how to use transit, and a cumbersome process for coordinating transit.

A few participating organizations said there are areas where the available transit does not meet the needs of the community members. These participants said smaller cities, especially where affordable housing is available, lack transit services that meet the needs of the communities they serve, such as families with low incomes or immigrants and refugee communities.

Limited hours of operation

“You could only get to and from Cambridge and Princeton at a certain time of day. Also, you could not just call and request transportation, you had to schedule around Arrowhead Transit’s schedule. Now you can schedule appointments, but they do not have as much availability. They also require advanced notice as well, which is not possible in crisis situations or any last-minute items.”

All of the transit providers offer services during typical business hours Mondays through Fridays, and several also offer limited services on the weekend.

A majority of participants in conversations discussed the limited availability of transit services to attend to critical services and needs outside of normal business hours (e.g., grocery shopping, attend medical appointments, employment). Several participants discussed the inability of community members who have second- or third-shift work to rely on public transit. Participants also discussed the inability to use transit to attend college, extracurricular activities, or social and recreational activities, especially for students, older adults, and those without a private vehicle.

Transit service area and scheduling

Two-thirds of the participants also discussed challenges with transit service areas and scheduling as a barrier.

Participants said that in the Saint Cloud metro area there are specific locations not served by existing transportation (e.g., industrial park, new high schools, new county facility, new housing developments, access to parks). Outside of the Saint Cloud metro area, the routes are infrequent, and people have to wait long periods for the next available service. Several participants specifically discussed challenges with lack of continuity or border-to-border service when traveling between counties in the region, adding extra coordination and travel time for transit users.

The majority of services available in the district require scheduling a ride ahead of time (for example dial-a-ride may require advance notice of weeks, according to a respondent), which is particularly challenging for last-minute or short-notice needs, such as accessing healthcare or in crisis situations (e.g., for people experiencing mental health needs or women and girls experiencing domestic violence).

A few transit providers also discussed the inability to provide transit services or meet demand due to funding constraints. Other challenges discussed by transit providers include:

- Lack of vehicles to expand transit services
- Lack of ridership in cases where transit was expanded
- Structural barriers (e.g., low canopies, inaccessible parking lots, roundabouts, lack of turnarounds)
- Lack of political support to share funding between counties
- Limited access to technology (e.g., apps, cameras)

In some parts of the district, such as Cass County, there are no transit services available, according to participants.

Other barriers and challenges

Several participants also discussed other barriers and challenges to using transit, including:

- **Accessibility:** Most commonly, participants discussed challenges with accessibility, including coordinating transfers, lack of door-to-door services, or limited availability of accessible vehicles.
- **Cost of transit:** A few participants also discussed cost of ridership, especially for people with low or fixed incomes.
- **Knowledge and perception about transit:** Participants also discussed how limited understanding as well as negative perceptions about transit services create barriers for using public transit.
 - Immigrants and refugees and those who do not speak English as their primary language may be hesitant to use transit services or may not know how to schedule transit or how to navigate the complexity of existing services.
 - Some community members may also hesitate to use transit services due to safety concerns such as harassment at bus shelters, or negative perception about safety on public transit.
- **Other barriers:** Less commonly, participants also discussed lack of bus shelters, winter weather, and stigma associated with taking the bus as barriers for transit use.

Walking

“We need to think about communities with all modes of transportation not just vehicles. Good corridors are safe to get around. People want to be able to cross the major highways. Facilities should be accessible [to] all ages and physical abilities and everyone should have options.”

Most participants in conversations talked about walking in the district, often in conjunction with bicycling. Many communities have fairly good recreational walking trails, but in cities and towns, road crossings can be difficult and dangerous. Several interview participants said community members walk much more for recreational purposes than they do for work, for many of the reasons listed in the barriers section below, including distance to travel.

Barriers to walking

Most conversations discussed barriers to walking in the district, and the bulk of that discussion was about safety concerns related to walking. Larger cities and smaller towns in the district have safety concerns about walking.

“Crosswalks and intersections are a huge safety issue for us. Our intersections are not safe. We have been advocating for years to make our intersections safe to cross. There is a big mall here [St. Cloud] where there is no safe crossing area. People have to watch for cars and sprint and run for their lives to cross the road.”

While a few conversation participants noted construction projects that, once completed, featured wider shoulders or pedestrian paths that made those roadways easier for pedestrians and cyclists to use, many more talked about specific highway and railroad crossings in both larger cities and smaller towns in the district that are unsafe for pedestrians and cyclists to cross.

Safety

“People have to watch for cars and sprint and run for their lives to cross the road.”

For walking and bicycling, busy intersections and unsafe crosswalks are a concern in many communities in the district. Busy highways often separate areas with more affordable housing, for example, from shopping, employment, healthcare, and human services. Interview participants noted too few controlled crossing locations in their communities.

Lack of infrastructure

Several participants said their communities lack paths and trails for walking. Walking trails in the district often do not connect with each other, or with sidewalk networks in communities. Outside of cities and towns, walking on county roads, or the shoulders of those roads, is a safety concern in the district.

“We start a trail but they are not always connected, there are trails that are pieces with a plan to complete a bigger picture, but the work is not complete or the money is not there to complete. We have spots that have trails but need to connect the dots.”

Sidewalks in some communities in the district are broken, do not connect, and can be covered with snow and ice in the winter months. One interview participant said their community featured sidewalks that are part of parking areas and may often have a car in the middle of them.

Winter weather

Winter weather and long distances to travel are barriers pedestrians face in the district, especially older adults and people with disabilities. Several participants described winters in the district as “brutal.” Even when

weather or unsafe conditions are not an issue, walking is often not feasible for people to get to employment in another town.

Lack of familiarity

“We are concerned about walkers especially older Somali men and women using the roundabouts or just crossing in a crosswalk. Sometimes the people walking don’t understand how to use the system.”

Immigrants and refugees in district communities may be unfamiliar with the pedestrian system in their cities. A few interview participants said there were concerns, especially about older Somali community members who are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with navigating cities on foot.

Bicycling

Many participants in conversations said the district has a robust recreational trail system for bicycling, due in part to the large tourist population that visits the area, especially in the summer. That same tourist population, however, can make bicycling less safe in the district’s cities that are not equipped to handle the level of traffic they receive during the high tourist season.

While a few participants said they saw people in their communities bicycling in work uniforms, leading them to believe they were commuting by bike, most bicycling in the district is recreational. As noted above, recreational bike trails are generally not connected to sidewalk infrastructure in the district, which leads to less bicycling to work.

A few participants said they have seen an increase in bicycling and walking, especially in communities in the district associated with addiction recovery centers. These communities tend to have good bike repair and retail shops.

Barriers to bicycling

“Winter gets really difficult for biking. If you have any physical disability, it’s hard to bike or even walk. There are also infrastructure barriers, like trails.”

Nearly all conversation participants discussed barriers to bicycling in their communities. The most significant barriers are safety concerns, which came up in nearly all conversations. Other notable barriers include winter weather, a lack of infrastructure, distances to travel, and physical ability.

Safety

“... there are very few safe, controlled crossing locations.”

Participants noted busy intersections in several communities that were dangerous for bicyclists, pedestrians, and those using wheelchairs or motorized scooters to cross, especially in cities with increased summer cabin and lake traffic. People in these communities have difficulty safely crossing highways to get to and from homes, shopping, appointments, and school.

Infrastructure

Many participants noted that where bike trails or lanes were available, they often did not connect with other trails, lanes, or sidewalks, nor did they always go where people need them most. Recreational trails are more abundant than trails or bicycle lanes community members might use for commuting to and from work, or for errands. According to participants, trails in some communities are poorly maintained.

“There is a want and need but need to have the infrastructure for safety. We start a trail, but they are not always connected, there are trails that are pieces with a plan to complete a bigger picture but the work is not complete or the money is not there to complete.”

Some highways have added wider shoulders that make bicycling on them safer, but there are more with narrow shoulders that are dangerous, according to several participants.

Winter weather

Many participants said winter weather conditions are a barrier to bicycling in their communities, even where there is adequate bicycling infrastructure. Winter weather is especially difficult for aging populations and people with disabilities.

Bicycling on the county roads and shoulders is a problem in and around communities in the district, according to participants. Some roads have very small or nonexistent shoulders, which can make bicycling dangerous. Participants did point to some roads where the shoulders had been widened, making it safer for cyclists.

Other barriers

Many participants talked about distance to travel as a barrier to bicycling, especially when trying to get from one community to another in the district. Even in cities, older adults and people with disabilities can find the distance to get from their home to work or appointments too far to travel.

“Longer distance trips for example cannot be served by bikes. There are nice trails, but bikes cannot cover everything.”

A few participants talked about immigrants and refugees, in particular, being intimidated about bicycling in their communities.

Bike investments

About half of the community conversations mentioned bike investments in some form. The district is a tourist destination, which has led to investments in recreational trails for bicycling.

“Here is more emphasis on bikes and pedestrians in our region. Good job on it. The nature of our region being a tourist destination with the lakes area and having an abundance of recreation opportunities helps because there is more focus on trails.”

Many communities have bike trails in and around them, but as noted previously, they do not always connect to each other and to other bike infrastructure. In some communities, bike trails can be difficult to access, as many community members would need to cross busy or unsafe intersections to reach the trails.

Participants pointed to the Mesabi Trail as an example of positive bike investment in the district. It connects the larger cities in the area and is used mostly for recreational bicycling. The trail is being expanded to connect more communities.

A few participants talked about communities investing cargo bikes and electric cargo bikes, especially for older adults and people with disabilities. There are also organizations in the district that fix up bikes to give to community members to use for transportation.

“Communities are investing in cargo bikes (a person operates the bike and people ride on the bike, similar to a bike cab). They now have electric cargo bikes. Communities are looking at buying cargo bikes to have people use or provide the rides.”

A few participants said in their communities, bike racks had been installed on their buses, but they were not used. In some instances, the buses have hit other vehicles with the bikes mounted on the racks.

Other transportation modes

Nearly all participants in community conversations talked about other modes of transportation. These other modes can be taxis and ridesharing services, volunteer driver services, medical transportation, veterans services rides, and others. There are barriers to accessing many of these modes, including availability, accessibility, and affordability.

Paid ridesharing services

“Clients oftentimes have to choose whether to eat, pay bills, or pay for transportation to a job interview.”

About half of conversation participants talked about taxis and ridesharing services like Uber and Lyft. This mode of transportation is not available in much of the district, and where one or all are available, they can be costly. A few participants indicated taxi service in their communities had dropped off, either due to lack of demand or lack of drivers.

Cost is one of the more significant barriers to district community members using other modes of transportation, especially taxis or ridesharing services.

Volunteer driver programs

Nearly half of conversation participants discussed volunteer driver programs in the district. According to several participants, organizations with volunteer driver programs or using volunteer drivers are having difficulty finding enough volunteers to meet the need for ride requests. Even organizations with many drivers may not be able to meet demand due to the geographic size of the area they serve. Participants noted limited mileage reimbursement for some programs, while others do not reimburse mileage at all. One participant reported their organization had to return grant funds for a program that would have provided rides to cover transportation gaps for people in underserved areas because there were no drivers willing to participate.

A few participants discussed difficulties in transportation for riders who may need more than one volunteer. Riders may need physical assistance that a driver cannot address while driving or may need a translator to facilitate communication with the driver.

Medical transportation

“There are people who miss their kidney dialysis appointments because of the lack of transportation. Dialysis is very difficult along with chemotherapy to have people get to their appointments especially the frequency.”

About one-third of conversation participants in District 3 talked about medical transportation. They said it can be difficult to navigate; ride availability may not match up with appointment times, leaving users to arrive very early for appointments or requiring them to wait long after they are finished to get their ride home. One interview participant said for-profit medical transportation providers in the district are scaling back services due to productivity issues.

Veterans services

About one-quarter of conversation participants mentioned veterans services rides. This transportation mode is important because while veterans with a Veterans Affairs (VA) identification card can use public transit for free, many need additional assistance getting places due to physical or mental limitations.

Veteran services rides, like those through the VA, can only be used to travel to and from medical appointments. The VA and other organizations that provide veterans services rides are lacking drivers, as are many other transportation providers.

Challenges and barriers to access

More than half of conversation participants talked about challenges and barriers to accessing other modes of transportation. In addition to cost, which was noted above, interview participants said other modes of transportation can be limited, or not available at all. Many volunteer driver programs do not have enough drivers to meet demand; where taxi services exist, they often have limited hours; ridesharing services are not available in many communities; and medical transportation services, both nonprofit and for-profit, have pulled back on services in recent years as well.

“Some elderly persons have a fear of falling, getting in or out of a vehicle they are not familiar with. Members don’t know the vehicle or how to navigate or don’t want to use the bus. This causes fear and apprehension in using a service.”

Accessibility is often a barrier for older adults and people with disabilities when it comes to other modes of transportation. While medical transportation is likely accessible, volunteer drivers, veterans services transportation, and taxis and ridesharing services may not have accessible vehicles readily available, nor are they trained to provide assistance for riders using mobility aids or who have significant mobility needs.

Several participants also talked about limitations around service areas—a driver may have to stop at a county line because they can only operate in one county. Riders needing to get groceries or pick up a prescription cannot combine that trip with a medical ride, for example. So, while it may be less burdensome to get a ride to a medical appointment, community members who need a ride will still be left looking for transportation for the other activities they need to do.

Ways to improve other transportation modes

A few participants talked about possible ways to improve other transportation modes for D3 residents. One participant suggested looking for ways to reinvigorate volunteers and use volunteers across different types of rides needs (medical, errands, etc.) and different modes of transportation. This participant said the volunteer driver base should be expanded, and volunteers should be matched with services needed in the community. They did not, however, suggest who should be doing this work.

Two participants talked about funding for volunteer drivers, with one suggesting the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council work with formula grants for rural areas (5311 funding) for each county and shared vehicles among counties. The other suggested simplifying funding and reimbursement requirements for volunteer drivers.

Another participant said public transportation vehicles need to be ADA accessible and drivers should be trained on how to work with passengers with a disability.

Finally, one participant suggested advocating for rail and improving medical transportation, as well as creating connections between communities in central Minnesota.

Public engagement

“We should look at the St. Cloud area. There is a MnDOT office in St. Cloud, there should be a plan that includes where especially low-income people work and add into decision-making processes. This will make decision-making process equitable by looking at where factories are located and providing transportation access for them.”

All conversation participants discussed public engagement in the district. Participants were split on whether they feel well informed about MnDOT’s transportation projects happening in the district, with slightly more than half saying they did feel well informed.

Several participants who said they do feel well informed often indicated this was due to the nature of their work (e.g., planning, transit provider), and that the people their organization serves may not feel well informed.

“There is a need to use multiple ways to get information out. Don’t put all your eggs in one basket. Use newspaper, social media, utilize local community providers to get information out, go where people gather (church, community centers, figure out where the gathering place is) to start the conversation or get the information out.”

Most conversation participants talked about common methods of communication to share information, including social media, word-of-mouth, community newspapers, local television, radio, direct mail from cities, counties, and other organizations, and community meetings and other events. These participants noted a few more effective communication methods, including sharing information on Somali TV or in a Spanish-language newspaper.

“Over the years it’s recognizing that the messengers are just as important as the message.”

Having trusted community and cultural ambassadors, faith leaders, and others who can connect organizations and government entities with community members is an important component of communication, especially for populations that are mistrustful of the government or have historically had negative interactions with the government.

Outreach and engagement challenges

“[There is] an information and communication void between the people passing the laws and governing and from the common people, that leads to misunderstandings.”

There are engagement efforts that are less successful, according to participants. For example, public events that are held on weekends, when transit is not available, will deter community members who rely on transit. A few conversation participants talked about government officials visiting or engaging community members and organizations only when they are running for office.

“Most are worried about what is for dinner and how do I pay the mortgage.”

There are also populations that are difficult to reach, regardless of the communication or engagement effort employed. People suffering from mental health issues, or individuals with low incomes or families living from crisis to crisis are not usually thinking about getting involved in their communities.

One participant noted communities’ level of involvement depends on whether they perceive their elected officials or other decision-makers are listening to their concerns. If citizens take the time to engage and provide feedback but feel as if their concerns are not addressed, they may be less likely to participate in the future.

Ways to improve outreach and engagement

About one-third of conversation participants offered improvement ideas for public engagement, including providing entry-level information on the transportation system to new immigrants, making decision-makers more available to community members, using social media more, and working more closely with cities and counties.

One transit provider in the district hosts workshops for community members to help them better understand how to use transit and to learn more about their needs. They consider every interaction with the public a survey opportunity to better understand transit users’ needs. Another participant suggested a similar program for community members, particularly new immigrants, to help them understand how they can get involved in decision-making, or how to influence planning and investments in their community.

A few participants said there should be more opportunities for citizens to get involved earlier in MnDOT’s and other entities’ planning processes, especially before planning and project development phases, “before the shovel hits the dirt.”

Equity

Definition of equity

“Equity means that everyone has a fair opportunity. So, as we think of rural Minnesota, they don’t have the opportunity to have a bus come to their area, because they are too far off the path, that’s where we lose our equity. There are still people out there with needs but have to get into town to meet their needs, or plan much further ahead than someone who is in town.”

When asked what equity means to their organization, participants offered a variety of perspectives. Most participants discussed equity in terms of equal access and opportunity, regardless of race, income, geographic region, or abilities. A few participants defined equity in terms of ensuring people have what they need to be successful regardless of abilities and background. A few others discussed equity as focusing on those who have been historically left out or face disparities due to existing systems. A few discussed equity as fairness, impartiality, and being free from bias. A few described equity in terms of breaking down barriers and redistributing power. Other definitions shared by participants include ensuring inclusive access and a seat at the table in decision-making to all members in a community.

Equity and transportation

“Transportation is everything. If one doesn’t have transportation, one cannot get to work; cannot get to the college to advance post-secondary education; cannot get to the doctor; or go to the grocery store; or not being able to visit their families, friends and attend social/community events.”

A majority of participants emphasized that transportation enables access to critical needs and services such as access to employment, mental and physical healthcare, food, housing, childcare, education, and social and recreational activities. Participants said transportation can provide opportunities to community members to provide input and be represented in decision-making. One participant also emphasized that transportation as a sector can provide opportunities for members of the community to access jobs.

Opportunities to advance equity

Nearly half of participants in conversations discussed specific opportunities for MnDOT and its partners to advance equity in transportation. Participants identified the following solutions:

- **Improve access and funding for public transit**, including expansion of service areas, fixed routes, and hours of operation to meet the needs of people with different schedules, increased awareness of available services (e.g., Metro Bus transit training), improved coordination between providers, and a focus on reducing fares for transit services.
- **Increase connections within the district**, including high-speed transportation (e.g., rapid transit or light rail) between the region and the Twin Cities metro area, and continuity of transit services within the district (i.e., border-to-border transit options, creation of transportation hubs) so that people can have more coordinated connection between affordable housing and critical services and opportunities (e.g., specialized healthcare and employment).

- **Improve city planning and zoning to increase multimodal connection to popular destinations**, including more input from communities that have been historically excluded in identifying accessible locations for critical needs and services, addressing infrastructure barriers that prevent transit access (e.g., low canopies, inaccessible parking lots, lack of turnarounds).

Recommendations

Management and staff from MnDOT Central Office and District 3 participated in an online implementation planning workshop on Monday, November 21, 2022, to review findings from the transportation equity community conversations. Prior to the meeting, attendees used an online survey to identify which of those findings fall within the agency's sphere for influence and action.²⁴ At that November 21 session, meeting participants generated possible solutions and recommendations in small groups, and then the larger group voted on which ones should be the highest priorities for the agency. The recommendations were further refined in a follow-up meeting held in January 2023.

1. Integrate equity across MnDOT and D3 policies, programs, and processes to reduce inequities across the transportation systems.

A majority of participants in community conversations emphasized that transportation enables access to critical needs and services such as access to employment, mental and physical healthcare, food, housing, childcare, education, and social and recreational activities. Participants said that transportation also provides opportunities for community members to share input and be represented in decision-making.

Ideas from the District 3 implementation planning workshop to better integrate transportation equity included the following:

- MnDOT should explore opportunities to incorporate equity considerations in project needs assessments, planning, scoping, development, construction, and other areas, including developing clear guidelines, processes, and measures of success. MnDOT should also explore opportunities to evaluate effectiveness of equity efforts, including improving existing evaluation tools.
- Leverage the role of MnDOT as a convener to educate and collaborate with local partners, including cities and counties, on transportation equity. MnDOT should share resources such as education materials and lessons learned to support advancing equity with local partners.
- MnDOT should explore opportunities to build long-term community relationships, to understand barriers and opportunities for key communities, and work closely with communities to provide resources and support.
- MnDOT should leverage State Aid as a tool to identify how to integrate equity in partnership with local agencies. Through the State Aid process with local agencies, MnDOT has the opportunity to influence transportation equity at the local level.
- MnDOT should explore opportunities to integrate transportation equity work into existing staff roles and establish clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations around equity for all staff.
- MAD also recommends that District 3 consider broader efforts to improve agency capacity for equity and inclusion, such as partnering with MnDOT's Office of Diversity and Equity and Office of Transportation System Management to invest in transportation equity training and growth opportunities for D3 staff.

²⁴ For the survey, MAD listed findings grouped together by type and prompted attendees to "Select the challenges or barriers you think MnDOT (D3 or CO) can reasonably influence."

2. Expand and broaden public engagement strategies for deeper, connected engagement with key communities identified in the equity community conversations.

Slightly more than half of community conversation participants in District 3 said they feel well informed about MnDOT transportation projects. Several participants also said commonly used methods of engagement, such as public meetings on weekends when transit is not available, and traditional media outlets may not always be effective. Community members, including undocumented members of the community or those who do not speak English as their primary language, may be hesitant to engage with government organizations due to safety concerns.

- MnDOT should explore opportunities to improve ongoing engagement, including activities to build on the community conversation engagement efforts that can help organizations connect with each other as well as continue collaboration with MnDOT. Example activities proposed by workshop participants include an annual open house to engage with communities and connect, an activity to reconnect with community conversation participants to share the findings from the study, develop a database of organizations and stakeholders (i.e., CRM system), improve outreach and education on Transportation Alternatives Program, etc.
- MnDOT should diversify distribution channels and explore targeted messaging to improve outreach and engagement with populations whose primary language is not English. Using more culturally specific media (e.g., Spanish or Somali language media to share MnDOT meeting information) can help get information out to community members, as well as address language barriers to information sharing and engagement. MnDOT should also explore partnerships with community organizations, leaders, liaisons, and others to target messaging and identify creative strategies for engaging effectively with community members.
- Adopt a continuous improvement mindset and approach to ensure engagement efforts evolve as communities evolve.

3. Improve transit access in District 3 in partnership with transit providers and the Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs).

Nearly all participants said public transit is an important, but limited, transportation option for many communities, including older adults, immigrants, people with disabilities, people with low incomes, and zero-vehicle households. Most organizations that participated in interviews said that while transit exists in the district, there are many limitations and barriers to using public transit, such as limited operating hours, service area and scheduling, accessibility, cost, and knowledge and perceptions about transit.

Participants in the D3 implementation planning workshop offered the following ideas about improving transit in Central Minnesota:

- MnDOT should also integrate these public transit and other solutions from the district's implementation planning with the Greater Minnesota Transit Mobility/Investment Plan.
- Identify gaps in accessible transit services and vehicles, particularly for people with limited mobility or families traveling with children, to eliminate barriers for both transit users and transit service providers.
- Create incentive programs, such as employer incentive programs, lower transit fares for people enrolled in public assistance, and consider making fares free for bus riders (like a program in Boston).
- MnDOT should use public engagement ambassadors to help educate current and potential transit users, as well as to help reduce the stigma of transit use. These ambassadors could be community members who can offer information and connect with their communities to help them explore public transit

options. Other innovative public engagement tactics can help reach people where they are. For example, using mobile public engagement on public transit, or meeting community members in their places of worship, community centers, and other venues.

4. MnDOT and D3 staff should continue to work with local partners to improve safety and accessibility for people who walk, bike, or roll to their destinations.

Many conversation participants said the district has a robust recreational trail system for walking and bicycling, partly due to the large tourist population that visits the area, especially in the summer. That same tourist population, however, can make bicycling and walking less safe in the district's cities that are not equipped to handle the level of traffic they receive during the high tourist season. In addition to safety concerns, winter weather, distance to travel, lack of infrastructure, and unfamiliarity with bicycle and pedestrian systems are barriers to district residents who walk or bike, or who would like to do so.

- MnDOT should be an advocate for smart development and growth. MnDOT should find a way to get a seat at the table early in the development cycle to ensure parties “put the development where it belongs,” which is not necessarily along busy corridors. D3 implementation planning participants acknowledged the agency could face problems trying to enforce or implement this idea. However, as a first step, MnDOT must figure out how to get a seat at the table in that planning and decision-making process.
- MnDOT should take on the role of convener to help connect funders and grantees. D3 implementation planning participants pointed to a community conversation in which a funding organization talked about having grant funds it was finding difficult to distribute. MnDOT could act as the connection between funding organizations and potential grantees, including cities, counties, and community organizations.
- Currently, development tends to move further out from city centers because land can be more affordable. MnDOT should work to understand where people need to go and how to get them there. These efforts should focus on not just the places people need to go (medical centers, grocery stores), but where they want to go (shopping, social events). Bringing destinations to where the people are may help them rely less on private vehicles.
- MnDOT should lead a review of current systems, especially to ensure adequate crossing times for busy and unsafe intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities. Employing wayfinding could be a cost-effective way of helping those unfamiliar with the area (new immigrants, tourists) get around the district more easily.
- MnDOT should address infrastructure needs. This includes ensuring trails and sidewalks go where users need them to go and do not just end. MnDOT should not only clarify who is responsible for maintenance but should provide funding to make sure the maintenance happens. The agency could even go beyond keeping sidewalks and trails usable in winter months by finding ways to provide appropriate apparel to make walking and bicycling in the winter more comfortable.

Appendix A: List of organizations interviewed

Individuals from the following 24 organizations and groups participated in 24 different conversations.

1. Aitkin County Care, Inc.
2. Arrive Ministries
3. Arrowhead Transit
4. Brainerd Area Public Transit
5. Career Solutions
6. Cass County Senior Transportation Program
7. Central Minnesota Community Empowerment Organization
8. Central Minnesota Council on Aging
9. ConnectAbility of MN
10. East Central Regional Development Commission
11. Friendly Rider
12. Great River Faith in Action
13. Lakes and Pines Community Action Council
14. New Pathways
15. Region Five Development Commission
16. Saint Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission and St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
17. The Initiative Foundation
18. Timber Trails Public Transit
19. Trailblazer Transit
20. Tri-CAP (Tri-County Action Program, Inc.)
21. Tri-County Community Action Partnership
22. Unite Cloud
23. Veterans Health Clinic
24. Whitney Senior Center

Appendix B: Project team and interviewers

The following people were involved in elements of the planning, design, data collection, analysis, and implementation planning for the District 3 community conversations to advance transportation equity:

MnDOT District 3 Staff

- Angie Tomovic
- Jeff Lenz
- Jim Hallgren
- Kelly Hoppe
- LeAnn Goltz
- Mike Ginnaty
- Stephanie Castellanos
- Steve Voss
- Terri Odegaard
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- Jeanne Aamodt
- Joseph Lehman
- Muzamil Ibrahim
- Nissa Tupper

MAD Senior Management Consultants

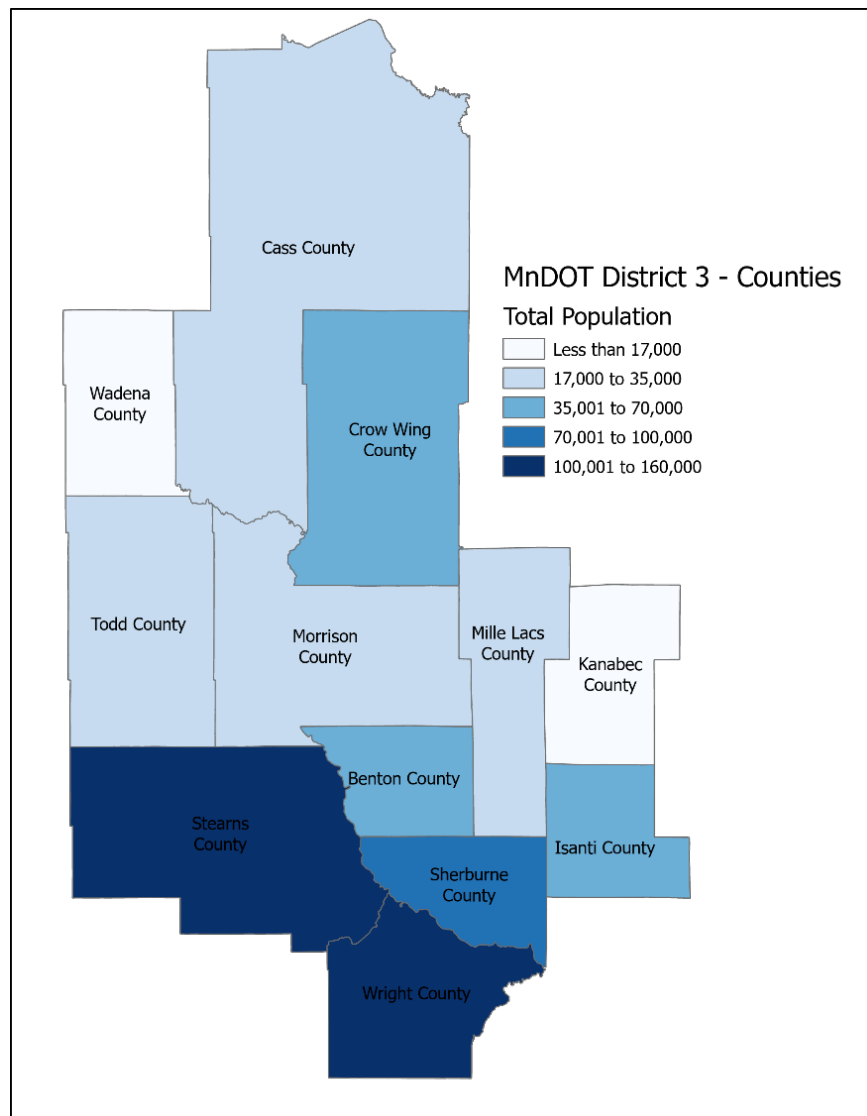
- Jessica Burke
- Mariyam Naadha
- Stephanie Heim

Appendix C: District 3 demographic profile

Overview

Located in the central region of the state, the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) District 3 is made up of 13 counties: Aitkin, Benton, Cass, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright. This report summarizes key demographic characteristics of District 3. Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this document are derived from the 2020 US Census and the American Community Survey Estimates produced by the US Census Bureau.

Figure 3. Map of District 3 counties and populations



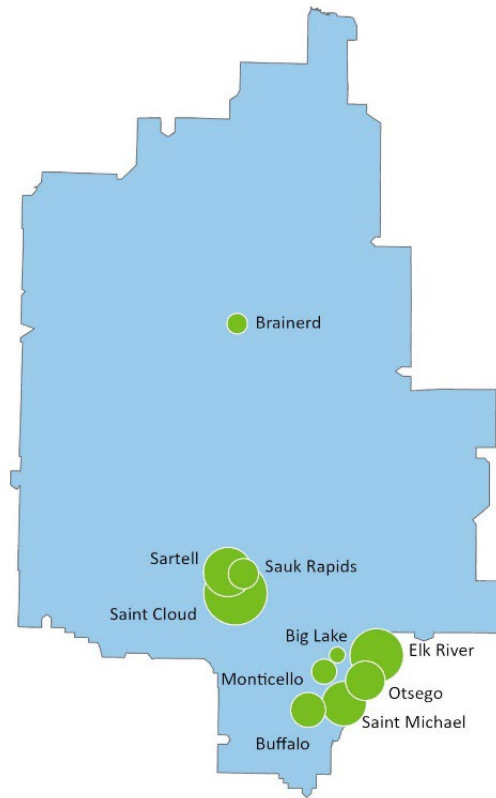
- **Total district population:** 716,269 people (about 13% of Minnesota’s population)
- **Total households:** 267,901, with an average of 2 persons per household, which is slightly lower than the statewide average of 2.5 persons per household.
- **Largest county by population:** Stearns County (158,947 people)
- **Largest city by population:** Saint Cloud (in Stearns County), with 69,305 people. Saint Cloud is part of the larger Saint Cloud metropolitan statistical area, which has a population of nearly 200,000.

Since 2010, District 3’s population has grown steadily, increasing by roughly 8% as of July 2021. Eleven of the 13 counties gained population, with Wright County gaining the most (15% increase). The population decreased in two of the counties, Kanabec and Aitkin. By comparison, the State of Minnesota grew by 8% overall during the same eleven-year period.

Table 2. Population by county

Geography	2010	2021	Percent change since 2010
District 3	661,649	716,269	8%
Aitkin	16,202	15,697	-3%
Benton	38,451	41,459	7%
Cass	28,567	30,639	7%
Crow Wing	62,500	67,270	7%
Isanti	37,816	41,906	10%
Kanabec	16,239	16,159	-0.5%
Mille Lacs	26,097	26,867	3%
Morrison	33,198	33,992	2%
Sherburne	88,499	99,074	11%
Stearns	150,642	158,947	6%
Todd	24,895	25,237	1%
Wright	124,700	144,845	15%
Wadena	13,843	14,177	2%
State of Minnesota	5,303,925	5,707,390	8%

Figure 4. Map of the largest cities in District 3



More than half of the district’s population (56%) lives in Stearns, Sherburne, and Wright Counties. Those counties contain the cities of Saint Cloud, Elk River, Saint Michael, Buffalo, and Sartell, among other high-population municipalities. Saint Cloud alone is nearly three times the size of the next largest city in District 3, Elk River. The table below lists the cities in District 3 with 55,000 or more people.

Table 3. Cities in District 3 with a population over 5,000

City (County)	Population	Households
Saint Cloud (Stearns County)	68,462	26,701
Elk River (Sherburne County)	24,522	8,503
Saint Michael (Wright County)	17,586	6,150

City (County)	Population	Households
Sartell (Benton and Stearns Counties)	18,005	6,975
Buffalo (Wright County)	16,210	6,394
Otsego (Wright County)	16,763	5,526
Brainerd (Crow Wing County)	13,373	6,018
Sauk Rapids (Benton County)	13,703	5,666
Monticello (Wright County)	13,583	5,083
Big Lake (Sherburne County)	10,856	3,521
Little Falls (Morrison County)	9,140	3,776
Cambridge (Isanti County)	9,611	3,469
Baxter (Crow Wing County)	8,612	3,367
Waite Park (Stearns County)	8,341	3,515
Albertville (Wright County)	7,896	2,916
Saint Joseph (Stearns County)	7,029	2,256
Delano (Wright County)	6,484	2,153
Isanti (Isanti County)	6,804	2,318
Zimmerman (Sherburne County)	6,189	1,962

Population characteristics

Race and ethnicity

- **Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC):** About 7% of District 3 residents are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.
 - American Indians or Alaska Natives: District 3 has two Anishinaabe Tribal Nations within its borders. The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is located partially within Cass County and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe is located in Mille Lacs County. Roughly 2% of all District 3 residents are American Indian or Alaska Native.
- **Trends for BIPOC communities:** Since 2010, the non-white district population increased from just more than 1% to about 7%. Statewide, the non-white population increased by 24% during the same period. The racial group that increased the most was Hispanic or Latino.
- **Hispanic or Latino ethnicity:** Three percent of all District 3 residents identify as Hispanic or Latino, with the largest proportion in Todd County (at about 7%).
- **Birthplace:** Ninety-four percent of the district's residents were born in the United States and 78% were born in Minnesota. Across the entire state, 92% of residents were born in the United States and 74% were born in Minnesota. For foreign-born, naturalized US citizens in District 3, Africa was the most common region of origin, followed by Asia, Latin America, and Europe. Africa was also the most common region of origin for foreign-born non-US citizens in District 3, followed by Latin America.
- **English proficiency:** Less than one-tenth of 1% of total households in District 3 are classified as speaking English less than very well. Statewide, the estimate is 5%. After English, Spanish is the most common language spoken at home, followed by Asian and Pacific Island languages and Germanic languages. Less common languages include Arabic, Chinese, and Russian.

Age

- **Youth:** Twenty-six percent of the district's residents are under age 18, which is slightly higher than the statewide average. Wright County has the highest proportion at 28%.
- **Seniors:** The percentage of people ages 65 and older in the district is 20%, with Aitkin County having the highest proportion (34%). Statewide, 16% of the population is aged 65 and older.

Disability

- **People with a disability:** About 9% of residents in District 3 have a disability.²⁵ The largest proportion of residents with a disability are in Aitkin and Kanabec Counties (both about 12%), while the smallest proportion is in Wright County (6%). Statewide, 7% of the population has a disability.

²⁵ The American Community Survey asks respondents to answer questions covering six disability types: hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Respondents who report any one of the six disability types are considered to have a disability. See more at <https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance/data-collection-acs.html>.

Veterans

- **Veteran population:** About 6% of District 3 residents over the age of 18 are military veterans. Stearns and Wright Counties have the largest number of veterans, while Wadena County has the fewest. More than 20% of District 3’s veteran population lives in Stearns County.

Educational attainment

Table 4 below compares the highest educational attainment for the population age 25 and older in District 3 to Minnesota as a whole.

Table 4. Highest educational attainment for population age 25 and older

Highest educational attainment	District 3	Minnesota
Less than high school diploma	8%	6%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	34%	24%
Some college, no degree	24%	21%
Associate’s degree	13%	12%
Bachelor’s degree	15%	24%
Graduate or professional degree	6%	13%

- **Highest level of education:** Ninety-two percent of District 3 residents have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, which is slightly lower than the statewide proportion (93%). Additionally, the share of residents with an associate’s degree or higher (34%) is lower than the statewide share (50%).
- **Students:** Currently, 5% of District 3 residents are enrolled in college or graduate school. The largest concentration of college and graduate students is in Stearns County.²⁶

Income and labor force

- **Median household income:** The average median household income in the district is \$62,655, which is lower than the statewide median household income of \$73,382. Sherburne County has the highest median household income (\$88,671), while Wadena County has the lowest (\$46,178).
- **People in poverty:** About 9% of people in District 3 lives below the federal poverty level.²⁷ This is higher than the statewide percentage (8%). Cass County has the largest proportion of people in poverty (13%), and Sherburne County has the smallest (4%).
- **Labor force participation rate:** Sixty-four percent of the working-age population 16 years and older is in the labor force, which is slightly lower than the state’s rate (70%). Wright County has the highest participation rate (73%), and Aitkin County has the lowest (49%).

²⁶ Stearns County is home to Saint Cloud State University.

²⁷ According to the Census Bureau, a family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty if the family’s total income is less than the dollar value of the appropriate dollar value threshold. The set of dollar value thresholds vary by family size and composition.

- **Labor force projections:** Overall the working-age population 16 years and over is projected to decline by 3% over the next 10 years.²⁸ Within District 3, projections show the labor force participation will decrease by just less than 1% by 2030. The 55–64 age group is projected to lose the most labor force participants by 2030, with 21% of workers projected to leave, while the 75+ age group is projected to have a 46% increase.

Table 5. District 3 labor force projections

Age Group	2020	2025	2030	Percent change (2020 to 2030)
District 3 total	364,749	366,110	363,378	-0.40%
16 to 24	54,078	55,540	52,795	-2%
25 to 34	54,881	58,795	63,882	16%
35 to 44	55,780	53,957	52,128	-7%
45 to 54	54,963	51,920	51,971	-5%
55 to 64	51,857	46,948	40,973	-21%
65 to 74	13,727	15,767	16,705	22%
75+	2,897	3,519	4,235	46%

Means of travel

- **Households and vehicles:** Approximately 5% of households have no vehicles, which is close to the statewide average of 7%. For households with vehicles, 13% have one vehicle and 38% have two or more.
- **Traveling to work:** More than three-quarters (80%) of workers aged 16 and older drive alone to work, which is close to the level for the state as a whole (78%). Public transportation riders and bicyclists are among the smallest proportions of workers across the district (less than 1%).
- **Commute times:** About 33% of workers aged 16 and older who do not work from home have a commute time of less than 15 minutes, while 36% have commutes of 30 minutes or more. Seven percent of District 3 residents work from home.

²⁸ Minnesota State Demographer’s Office: <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/labor-force/>

Figure 5. Means of travel to work

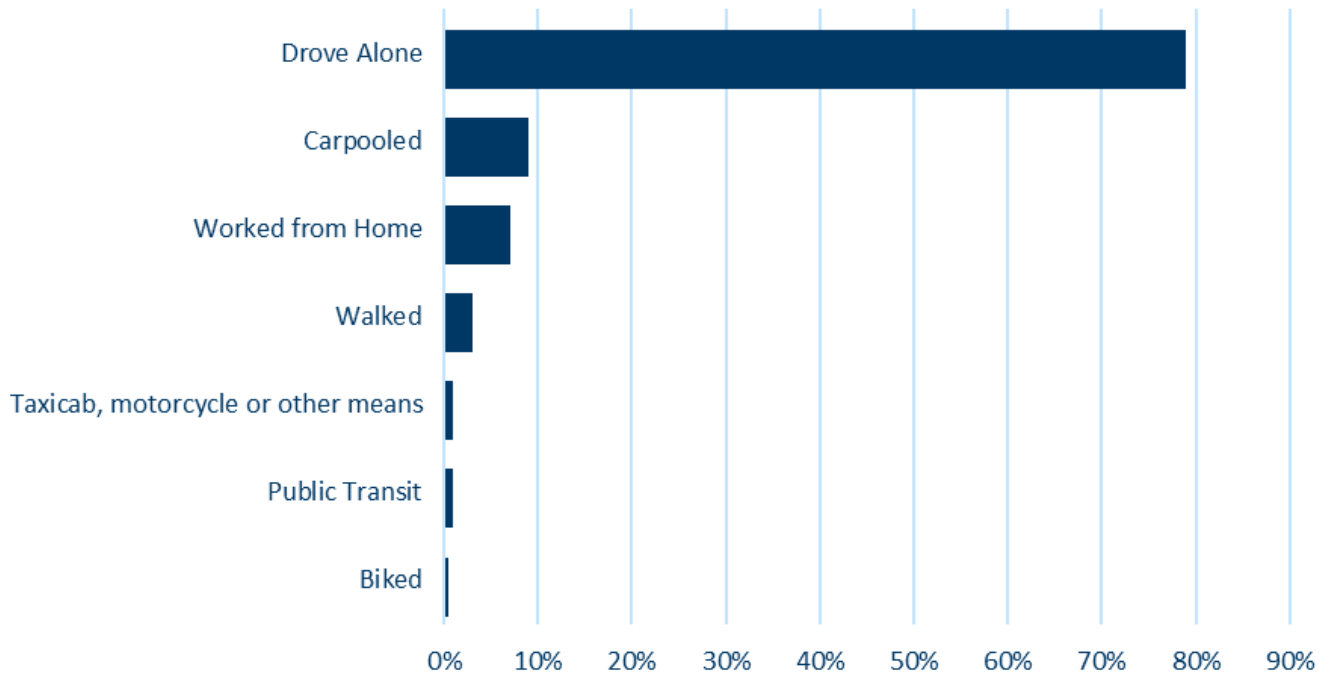


Table 6. Means of Travel to Work in District 3

Age Group	Percentage
Drove alone	79%
Carpooled	9%
Worked from home	7%
Walked	3%
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	1%
Public transit	1%
Biked	0.50%

Table 7. County-by-county comparison for selected demographic data

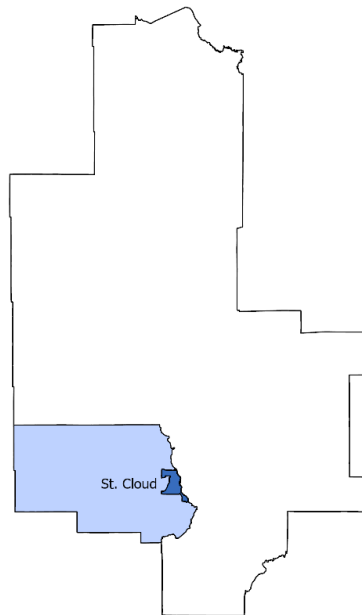
County	Total population	BIPOC population (%)	Percent under 18	Percent 65 and older	Percent disabled	Median household income	Persons in poverty (%)	Zero-vehicle households (%)
Aitkin	15,697	5%	17%	34%	12%	\$49,086	11%	5%
Benton	41,459	9%	25%	14%	7%	\$60,564	7%	6%
Cass	30,639	16%	21%	27%	10%	\$53,845	13%	5%
Crow Wing	67,270	4%	21%	23%	10%	\$57,779	9%	5%
Isanti	41,906	5%	24%	17%	8%	\$76,999	7%	4%

County	Total population	BIPOC population (%)	Percent under 18	Percent 65 and older	Percent disabled	Median household income	Persons in poverty (%)	Zero-vehicle households (%)
Kanabec	16,159	4%	21%	21%	12%	\$57,877	9%	4%
Mille Lacs	26,867	10%	24%	19%	11%	\$57,173	9%	6%
Morrison	33,992	3%	23%	20%	8%	\$58,826	10%	6%
Sherburne	99,074	7%	26%	12%	7%	\$88,671	4%	4%
Stearns	158,947	12%	23%	16%	7%	\$65,244	11%	5%
Todd	25,237	4%	24%	22%	9%	\$54,502	12%	5%
Wright	144,845	6%	28%	13%	6%	\$87,772	5%	3%
Wadena	14,177	4%	26%	21%	11%	\$46,178	11%	9%

City of Saint Cloud demographic characteristics

Nearly 10% of District 3’s population lives in Saint Cloud (Stearns County), making that city of 68,462 the biggest in District 3 by a wide margin. Between 2010 and 2021, Saint Cloud’s population grew by 4%. During that same time, District 3’s population grew by 8% and the state as a whole also grew by 8%.

Figure 6. Map of D3 highlighting the City of Saint Cloud and Stearns County



Race and ethnicity

- **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color:** About 27% of Saint Cloud’s residents are BIPOC. The two largest BIPOC groups are Black or African American (17%) and Hispanic or Latino (4%). Just more than 3% of residents identify as Asian.
- **Birthplace:** Eighty-eight percent of Saint Cloud’s residents were born in the United States, and 68% were born in Minnesota. About 12% of residents were born in a foreign country, and of the foreign-born residents, 40% are naturalized US citizens.
- **Home language:** Most Saint Cloud homes (84%) are English-only-speaking households. Homes speaking Spanish make up 3% of the total, and homes speaking Asian and Pacific Islander languages account for 2%.

Age

- **Age groups:** About 20% of the city’s population is under 18 years old, and about 13% is 65 or older. These figures are slightly lower than the district-wide proportions.

People with disabilities

- About 10% of Saint Cloud’s residents have a disability.

Income and labor force

- **Median household income:** The average median household income in Saint Cloud is \$50,335 (2020 inflation-adjusted dollars), which is lower than the district-wide figure (\$62,655).
- **People in poverty:** About 22% of people in Saint Cloud live below the federal poverty level.
- **Educational attainment:** Ninety-one percent of Saint Cloud’s residents have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, and 31% have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Across District 3, 8% of residents have only a high school diploma or equivalent.
- **Labor force participation rate:** Sixty-nine percent of the Saint Cloud working age population 16 years and older are in the labor force, which is slightly above the District 3 rate (64%) but below the state’s rate (70%).

Means of travel

Traveling to work: More than three-quarters (80%) of Saint Cloud’s workers aged 16 and older drive alone to work, which is the same as the district as a whole. About 2% of commuters in Saint Cloud use public transportation. The average travel time to work is 19 minutes.

Appendix D: Key communities for conversations

Management Analysis and Development (MAD) developed the following in late 2020 to help guide the District 3 community conversations for the transportation equity study.

This document summarizes key communities within MnDOT District 3 for potential inclusion in the Advancing Transportation Equity community conversations. **The goal of this document was to provide a starting point for interviewee identification.** The interview populations were identified based on the current demographics and trends²⁹ in the district and include populations with known inequities. Additional background and analysis about each community is included in the following paragraphs.

It is important to recognize that these groups are not discrete. Transportation concerns often overlap between groups and an interviewee may represent multiple groups. Additionally, an individual may belong to more than one of the communities identified and may experience overlapping inequities.

Overview of District 3

Located in the central region of Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) District 3 is made up of 13 counties: Aitkin, Benton, Cass, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, and Wright. Combined, these counties represent about 13% of the state's total population. Less than a quarter of the district's population lives in Stearns County (158,947 people). In Stearns County, Saint Cloud is the largest city with a population of 69,305. St Cloud is part of the larger Saint Cloud metropolitan statistical area, which has a population of nearly 200,000.

Black, Indigenous, and people of color

Biased policies and practices of the past have contributed to employment, wealth, and education inequities for people of color and American Indians living in Minnesota. Specific to transportation, inequities include issues of access, safety, and participation in decision-making.

Around 7% of District 3 residents are Black, Indigenous, or other people of color. District 3 has two Anishinaabe Tribal Nations within its borders. The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is located partially within Cass County and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe is located in Mille Lacs County. Roughly 2% of all District 3 residents are American Indian or Alaska Native.

Since 2010, District 3's BIPOC population has increased from 1% to 7%, while it increased 24% statewide during the same period.

²⁹ The demographics and trends were derived from the 2020 US Census five-year estimates and the 2020 American Community Survey.

District-wide, 3% of residents identify as Hispanic or Latino with the largest proportion in Todd County (7%).

Women and girls

Women of all ages make up 50% of District 3's population, similar to statewide proportions. A common transportation concern for women is safety, such as walking to and waiting for public transit, especially at night. Other transportation issues include consideration of travel needs and patterns because of women's role in child rearing and household management, women's share in the aging population, and cultural differences that may impact women immigrants. These aspects should be considered as part of this project.

Older adults and those aging in place

About 20% of the population in District 3 is over age 65, which is slightly higher than the statewide percentage of 14%. Aitkin County has the highest percentage of population ages 65 and older in the district, at 34%. Particular concerns for these groups include transportation needs, such as availability of transit services, to access to services and care providers, which should be taken into consideration as part of this project.

People with low incomes (living in poverty)

Top transportation equity concerns for low-income households are the ability to access jobs, services and other opportunities. About 9% of District 3 residents have incomes lower than the federal poverty level, which is higher than the statewide percentage of 8%. The average median household income in the district is \$62,655 which is lower than the statewide median household income of \$73,382. Sherburne County has the highest median household income (\$88,671), while Wadena County has the lowest (\$46,178).

Zero-vehicle households

Around 5% of households in District 3 do not have a vehicle. Equity concerns with zero-vehicle households are related to access to jobs and other opportunities. The availability and frequency of transit service, in addition to bicycling and walking options, are important when considering the transportation needs of zero-vehicle households. It will be important to investigate overlaps between race, income, and gender with zero-vehicle households.

People living with disabilities

People with disabilities account for about 9% of the district's population, which is slightly higher than the statewide percentage. The largest proportion of residents with a disability are in Aitkin and Kanabec counties (both about 12%), while the smallest proportion is in Wright County (6%). This District 3 project should consider the transportation experience of people with disabilities that relate to the following: hearing, vision, cognitive abilities, ambulatory abilities, and self-care or independent living. Better understanding their nuanced

transportation experiences will help ensure that the individuals experiencing these disabilities are able to travel with ease and access on par with those who do not have a disability.

Veterans

Military veterans make up 6% of the population in District 3. Stearns and Wright Counties have the largest number of veterans, while Wadena County has the fewest. More than 20% of District 3's veteran population lives in Stearns County. In addition to mobility concerns, access to veterans services in District 3 should also be considered as part of this project.

Other communities and organizations for consideration

Information is not readily available for all demographic groups. In some cases, data is not regularly collected and reported, or individuals may not feel comfortable providing information. However, this lack of data does not imply that other communities experience no transportation inequities. The list below identifies other potential communities for consideration in the District 3 Advancing Transportation Equity community conversations:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual people
- People released from incarceration
- People experiencing homelessness
- People experiencing chemical dependency and other addictions
- People experiencing mental health issues

Consequently, other types of organization to consider for the District 3 transportation equity community conversations include:

- Colleges and universities: Stearns County is home to Saint Cloud State University.
- Providers of support services for victims of domestic violence.
- Public and nonprofit housing assistance organizations such as public housing agencies and community action partnerships that focus on housing.
- Regional health care providers, including Centracare provider systems.

Appendix E: Advancing Transportation

Equity interview guide

Interviewers used the following questions to guide their conversations and were instructed to use probes to further explore topic areas.

1. First, tell us a little bit about what your organization does and your role?
2. Briefly, what challenges does the community encounter, broadly speaking, including those beyond transportation?
3. Tell me about the ability of community members to carry out some of the day-to-day activities I just mentioned.
4. Which transportation modes [or options] are most often used by the community you serve, for example private vehicles, transit, bicycling, walking, private transportation services?
5. What barriers, if any, does the community encounter in accessing those modes [or options] of transportation?
6. What locations, if any, are particularly difficult for community members to get to and why?
7. Beyond transportation modes [or options], MnDOT is interested in transportation routes and infrastructure. In their neighborhoods or regions, do members of the community face infrastructure challenges that create transportation barriers or hinder travel?
8. How well is public transportation/transit in this area meeting the needs of the community?
9. How well are non-motorized modes [or options] of transportation meeting your community's needs?
10. What safety concerns, if any, does the community have about transportation?
11. Can you share with us what equity means to your organization?
12. How can transportation advance opportunities for members of the community?
13. What ways have members of the community engaged with the government on issues important to them? We're thinking here about all types of government—state, county, local, regional.
14. What examples do you have, if any, of when the government has meaningfully engaged with the community that your organization works with, particularly on transportation issues?
15. Can you recall a recent transportation project or program that impacted the community your work with? If so, what was it?
16. How well informed do you feel about transportation projects that are relevant to the community your organization works with?
17. Who else should we be talking to regarding transportation equity in central Minnesota?
18. Is there anything else you would like to share with us today, anything you wanted to cover that we haven't yet?
19. Is it ok if we follow up with you if we have additional questions or want to clarify something?
20. As MnDOT continues its work on transportation equity, would you be open to us contacting you again if we are looking further into transportation's impacts on the community you work with?
21. And finally, more generally, would you want MnDOT to contact you in the future about transportation projects, events, or information that might be of interest?

Appendix F: Findings and potential solutions from the implementation planning workshop 1

MnDOT Central Office staff, District 3 managers, and members of the interview teams participated in a remote meeting in November 2022 to hear about the findings and consider possible improvements and actions. Prior to the meeting, MAD invited meeting attendees from District 3 and MnDOT's Central Office to complete a survey that asked respondents to select which findings are within the agency's sphere of influence. The meeting participants generated potential solutions in small groups (listed in the next section), and then the larger group voted on which of these solutions should be the highest priorities for the agency. **Proposed solutions that received participant votes appear in bold**, with the number of votes listed afterward in parentheses.

Findings: Equity

A majority of participants in community conversations emphasized that transportation enables access to critical needs and services such as access to employment, mental and physical healthcare, food, housing, childcare, education, social and recreational activities, as well as provide opportunities for community members to provide input and be represented in decision-making.

Potential solutions:

1. **Revisit project needs assessment, planning, scoping, and improve/create evaluation methods to include equity considerations:** Equity is sometimes a part of some of these processes, but we don't have clear guidelines, processes, and measures of success in places to integrate equity in project planning, scoping, and evaluation stages (10 votes)
2. **Convene, partner with, and educate cities and counties on transportation equity:** Many of our local communities lack the necessary resources to consider equity. MnDOT should consider sharing educational resources and lessons learned to advance equity with local partners (9 votes)
3. **Focus on long-term community relationship building:** Communities like refugees face transportation barriers like getting driver's license, think about resources and support that can be offered to communities to create long-lasting relationships (5 votes)
4. **State Aid as a tool to identify how to integrate equity in partnership with local agencies:** MnDOT has an opportunity to influence transportation equity through the partnerships and relationships with local agencies through our State Aid process (2 votes)
5. **Integration of transportation equity efforts to existing staff roles:** Establish clear roles, responsibilities, and expectations around equity for each staff member's position. Can't rely on dedicated equity staff; needs to be a part of everyone's role (1 vote)

Findings: Public transit

- Existing transit services and hours do not meet the needs of many communities in the district.
- Majority of services available require scheduling a ride ahead of time.
- The district lacks border-to-border service when traveling between counties.
- Available services may not be accessible and can be costly for some riders.

Potential solutions:

1. **Collaborate and partner:** Partner with Greater MN transit plan, regional transportation councils, to identify gaps and eliminate barriers for users and service providers (11 votes)
2. **Incentive programs:** Create incentive programs, lower fares for people enrolled in public assistance, and consider making fares free for bus riders (6 votes)
3. **Public engagement ambassadors:** Use public engagement ambassadors to educate current users and potential riders, and to reduce stigma of transit use (3 votes)
4. **Innovative public engagement:** Use mobile public engagement and meet community members where they are such as places of workshop, community centers, etc. (2 votes)
5. **Expand public transit options:** Go beyond existing routes, expand service hours, and prioritize safety and security on public transit, bus shelters, and bust stops (e.g., camera technology, staff, etc.) (1 vote)

Findings: Public engagement

- Slightly more than half of participants feel informed on MnDOT projects. Public meetings, media outlets, and social media may not always be effective.
- Community members may be hesitant to engage with government, or not know if/how to participate in events. Some, including immigrants, refugees, and BIPOC, often do not feel their opinions matter, are fearful of engaging with government, and may face language barriers.

Possible solutions:

1. **Improve ongoing engagement:** Explore opportunities to improve ongoing engagement including activities to build on the community conversations (e.g., Annual open house, meeting to share findings, CRM system to connecting organizations/stakeholders, better education on Transportation Alternative program) (10 votes)
2. **Diversify distribution channels and explore target messaging:** Outreach and engagement with populations whose primary language is not English. Connect with community representatives (churches, community organizations) (7 votes)
3. **Meeting locations:** Offer alternative locations to allow for greater accessibility or alternative online/web options. Have meetings on transit lines whenever possible, or consider providing transportation services to public meetings (4 votes)
4. **Help new immigrants with basic information about transportation system:** Publish websites or meeting information in local Spanish/Somali, etc. newspapers, radio stations (1 vote)
5. **Explore more online engagement:** Provide more hybrid meeting options so people can participate online if they cannot make it to a meeting. Gather feedback online or use online tools (e.g., survey)

Findings: Walking and bicycling

- Many conversation participants said the district has a robust recreational trail system for walking and bicycling. The tourist population can make bicycling and walking less safe in the district's cities not equipped to handle the level of traffic they receive during the high tourist season.
- In addition to safety concerns, winter weather, distance to travel, lack of infrastructure, and unfamiliarity with bicycle and pedestrian systems are barriers to district residents who walk or bike, or who would like to do so.

Possible solutions:

1. **Infrastructure:** Advocate for smart development and smart growth. MnDOT should find a way to get a seat at the table early in the development cycle to ensure parties "put the development where it belongs," which is not necessarily along busy corridors (11 votes)
2. **Help connect funders and grantees:** MnDOT could act as the connection between funding organizations and potential grantees, including cities, counties, and community organizations (9 votes)
3. **Understand where people need to go and how to get them there:** Focus on not just the places people need to go (medical centers, grocery stores), but to where they want to go (shopping, social events). Bringing destinations to where the people are may help them rely less on private vehicles (4 votes)
4. **Review current systems:** Ensure adequate crossing times for busy and unsafe intersections for pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities (2 votes)
5. **Complete connections:** Need to make sure sidewalks and trails that currently just end actually go where people need and want to go. Could better define what "end" means (2 votes)
6. **Winter maintenance:** Clarify maintenance responsibility and ensure funding to actually do maintenance (1 vote)
7. **Wayfinding:** Cost-effective way to support walking and bicycling, especially for those unfamiliar with the area (e.g., new immigrants, tourists).

Appendix G: Additional suggested organizations

The table below lists the organizations and people that participants suggested for additional conversations. The list does not include the organizations MAD contacted for interviews but that did not respond, declined, or were unable to schedule interview times. These contacts are an opportunity for District 3 staff to expand on the findings from the community conversations and explore additional areas of interest that arise from the findings and recommendations.

Table 8. Additional suggested organizations with city

Organization	Location
Beyond the Yellow Ribbon	Cambridge
Big Woods Transit	Nett Lake Indian Reservation
CAIRO-Minnesota	Saint Cloud
Catholic Charities	Minnesota
Central Minnesota Islamic Center	Saint Cloud
Disabled American Veterans	Minnesota
Faith in Action for Cass County	Hackensack
Fe y Justicia (Central Minnesota Faith and Justice Coalition)	Waite Park
Good Samaritans	Minnesota
Higher Works Collaborative	Saint Cloud
Hikmah Education Center	Saint Cloud
HOPE (Healing Opportunity Provided Equally)	Aitkin
Iqra Education Center	Saint Cloud
Islamic Center of Saint Cloud	Saint Cloud
Lutheran Social Services	Minnesota
Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans	Minnesota
Salvation Army	Minnesota
Terebinth Refuge	Waite Park
WACOSA	Waite Park
Wright County Veterans Services	Buffalo