

Highway 252/I-94 Environmental Impact Statement PAC Meeting 11

Meeting Summary

October 25, 2023: 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Attending Members and Staff

MnDOT: Deputy Commissioner Kim Collins, Mark Linderberg, Amber Blachard, Ryan Wilson, Sheila Kauppi, April Crockett, Scott Pedersen, Brigid Gombold, Ricardo Lopez, Andrew Lutaya, Melissa Barnes, Erik Rudeen

State of Minnesota: Senator John Hoffman, Alexis Varner (Aid to Senator Bobby Joe Champion), Katherine Perry (Aid to Senator Pha), Representative Samantha Vang, Alex Will (Aid to Senator Dibble)

Brooklyn Park: Mayor Hollies Winston, Jesse Struve, Jeff Holstein

Brooklyn Center: Mayor April Graves, Liz Heyman, Reggie Edwards, Barb Suciu, Armando Oster

City of Minneapolis: Julieann Swanson, Bethany Turnwall (Policy Aid to Council Member Jeremiah Ellison),

Hennepin County: Bill Emory

Metropolitan Council: Council Member Reva Chamblis, Tony Fischer

Metro Transit: Adam Harrington

Federal Highway Administration: Wendall Meyer, William Lohr, Anna Varney

National Park Service: Forest Eidbo

HDR: John Griffith, Scott Reed, Katie Caskey

SRF Consulting: Brett Danner, Justin Sebens, Don Demers

Bolton & Menk: Marcell Walker, Mikaela Isaacson, Breyonne Jeter, Chloe Williams

Bellwether Consulting: Allsion Bell, Rebecca Lieser

General Public

David Mulla, Indred Alexander, Nahid Khan, Tara McCarthy, Tom Kouri, Adam Muilenburg, Alan Robbins-Fenger, Ben F, Chereen Norstrud, Jiahong Pan, Joshua McGovern, Katy Thompson, Seth T, Daniel Saunders, Jay Alexander, Rebecca Lieser, Bill Emory, Jane Voss, Alexis Alexander, Terri Kasbohm, Jane Voss, Michael Svard

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

Presentation

1. Housekeeping (Marcell Walker, Bolton & Menk)
2. Welcome, Purpose of Meeting, and PAC roll call (Kim Collins, MnDOT)
 - a. PAC meeting in attendance:
 - Deputy Commissioner Kim Collins, MnDOT
 - Sheila Kauppi, MnDOT (Acting) Metro District Engineer
 - Wendell Meyer, FHWA
 - Mayor April Graves, Brooklyn Center
 - Mayor Hollies Winston, Brooklyn Park
 - Representative Fue Lee
 - Senator John Hoffman
 - Councilmember Reva Chamblis, Met Council
 - Katherine Perry (Aid to Senator Susan Pha)
 - Bethany Turnwall (Policy Aid to Council Member Jeremiah Ellison)
 - Alexis Varner (Aid to Senator Bobby Joe Champion)
 - Councilmember XP Lee, Brooklyn Park

3. MnDOT Organizational Changes, Overview of the Purpose and Need and Project Objectives

(Ryan Wilson, MnDOT)

Ryan presented the organizational changes with the project team. Ryan is the West Area Manager and will become the new project sponsor for the project replacing Mark Lindeberg in this role. Amber Blanchard is the Major Projects Manager and will be the new Project Manager for the project. The transition from Scoping Decision Document to the Environmental Impact Statement phase will have a new consultant team assisting MnDOT with this work. HDR Engineering with major support from Bolten & Menk will be leading this effort.

The Project Purpose and Need and Project Objectives were presented. A key point was made that the Project Purpose and Need had been developed over several years with multiple agencies supporting this effort. The document did receive initial concurrence from all Cooperating Agencies on the project. Key points in the Purpose and Need are accessibility, connectivity and comfort for walkability and bikeability crossing Hwy 252 along with vehicle safety. Vehicle mobility supporting local and regional trips was also identified as a need. Hwy 252 is a principal arterial and is identified in both local and regional planning transportation plans at this designation. Project Objectives were developed through the work of the PAC and reflect input received from past community engagement. Project Objectives provide the context to alternative analysis as the project progresses through the EIS process.

- a. Mayor Graves: Why can't we include the first bullet in Project Objectives within the Purpose and Need statement? Equity and safety are not adequately addressed in the current Purpose and Need statement. How will MnDOT measure equity? Equity isn't being wrapped into the Purpose and Need enough—for example: Safety should be much more than mobility safety. Current evaluation criteria doesn't reflect all the considerations in the first Project Objectives bullet accurately.

Project team response: Equity is forefront for MnDOT and the Project Team but the Purpose and Need statement isn't the appropriate vehicle to communicate that. The Purpose and Need statement for

highway projects needs to be in the context of the transportation problems. Consistency for NEPA purposes and following FHWA guidance on the development of the Purpose and Need is very important. MnDOT is working on how to measure equitable outcomes, however, the current evaluation criteria developed and shared with the PAC does include Social, Environmental and Economic criteria that will help in evaluating alternatives.

4. Summary of Engagement During Scoping Decision Document, Overview of How Scoping Informs the Environmental Process, Summary of Comment Themes

(Mark Lindeberg, MnDOT)

Mark shared background information on the engagement that was performed leading up to the public comment period for the Draft Scoping Decision Document that was released for public comment in May 2023.

- a. Councilmember Chamblis: Can project team provide attendee information at the six Stair Step events? Would also appreciate the number of attendees and/or a list of people that attended each of the events identified in the slides.

Project team response: Project team will follow-up with information from events.

Mark discussed how the scoping process informs the EIS process which is the next phase that the project will be entering. The scoping process considered numerous technical evaluations of a wide variety of project elements, including: vehicle safety, accessibility, connectivity and comfort for walkability and bikeability, property impacts, mobility and traffic needs, traffic diversion, local street impacts, among other things. The scoping process was performed to screen alternatives and conclude with a reasonable number of alternatives to advance into the EIS phase.

Theme: Alternatives. The alternative theme focused on those alternatives that did not either address the Purpose and Need or performed poorly when compared to alternatives that were identified to advance.

- a. Mayor Graves: What are the differences between a six-lane expressway and the no-build?

Project team response: The No-Build includes four lanes on the northern part of Hwy 252; Hwy 610 to Brookdale Drive southbound and a short segment from Brookdale Drive to 83rd in the northbound direction. The six-lane expressway would be six lanes throughout. The No Build could be selected as the preferred alternative through the EIS process. If selected a new project could be initiated that could analyze a 6 lane expressway. We recognize the No Build compared to the 6 lane expressway are not an apples to apples comparison between the two, but they are very similar in a lot of respects.

Additional Context: In the existing condition, all of Brooklyn Center currently has 6 lanes in each direction. This would be evaluated as the “No Build” Condition in Brooklyn Center.

- b. Mayor Graves: This part of the process is lacking equity. There should be another column in the analysis of what alternatives moved forward. If there is more analysis, that should all be included in how information about the project is communicated.

Project team response: There is more analysis in the scoping document than what is shown in the slide deck. The slides were capturing the key criteria not being met with the alternatives.

- c. Councilmember Chamblis: Can the SDD have the full matrix available up front so it can be found easily?

Project team response: The full matrix is available. We have included it as part of the PAC summary.

- d. Mayor Graves: The 6 lane expressway with alternative intersections and pedestrian bridges should be an alternative that is carried forward into the EIS phase.

Project Team response: The No Build will be carried forward to evaluate the advancing alternatives against. The existing condition is very similar to a 6 lane expressway. The Alternative Intersections were evaluated in the scoping phase. The evaluation showed right of way impacts exceeding freeway interchange alternatives without the benefits of separating pedestrians from high speed traffic. The standalone pedestrian bridges while leaving the intersection in place potentially have a high level of non-compliance with their use. This scenario was discussed in the Draft Scoping Decision Document with observations at 85th Ave on Hwy 252 and 49th Ave and Hwy 65 in Columbia Heights.

Mayor Graves: The No-Build is not comparing apples to apples.

Wendall Meyer (FHWA): The No Build is used as a comparison to the advancing alternatives. The No Build can be an alternative that is selected out of the process if the advancing alternatives are more impactful and provide little benefit compared to leaving the existing conditions as they are. Future projects could be done if the process ends in selecting the No Build Alternative.

- e. Mayor Graves: With huge increases expected with truck traffic, diesel spills would impact all city wells in Brooklyn Center and there will be air quality impacts associated with the increase in trucks. This is why the City wants to see an alternative that is different; all the ones currently being advanced are so similar. The current process does not show any environmental impacts until after you decide what alternatives will move forward. Without having an alternative that is vastly different than the freeways options moving forward it's hard to see what the environmental impacts really are or if there's a better option for the community. These environmental impacts should be part of determining which alternatives move forward, not analyzed after. The PAC is the Community's voice and MnDOT is not listening.

Project Team response: MnDOT is aware of the city wells and will be mindful of them as the project progresses. The NEPA process that we are required to go through isn't always intuitive and may not be generally understood by stakeholders. We continue to provide information to help stakeholders understand the process and to evaluate the alternatives with established criteria. This is something we can continue to discuss as part of this group. We need to do a better job of making the process more understandable and maybe recommend tweaks.

Additional Context: Each city does have a comprehensive emergency action plan as it relates to accidents and spills near city resources (i.e wells). With the selection of the preferred alternative, MnDOT will work with the affected agencies to update these plans. Accident rates and severities were part of the scoping process, and the expected crash rates for freeway type facilities were less than the expressway alternatives.

Deputy Commissioner Collins: Acknowledge Mayor Graves concerns and agreed that the process is not always intuitive to the public. Because of the length of time that the project development has taken, stakeholders have and will continue to change. MnDOT knows this and will continue to provide that lens into the process that this project is following.

Mark continued with the remaining themes that came out of the Public Comments to the Draft Scoping Decision Document. The remaining themes include: Air Quality, Environmental Justice, EHA Recommendations, Property Impacts, Purpose and Need, Traffic Noise, Safety and Transit.

- a. Councilmember Chamblis: In order to do Environmental Justice well, you have to look at equity with a broad lens, it should be regional and not just a specific community. A broader equity lens needs to be considered on this project.

Project Team response: Thanked CM Chamblis for her thoughtful insight.

- b. Mayor Graves: There should be a way to go back and revisit past decisions. Brooklyn Center originally sought to have an interchange at 66th Ave and received funding for a project at this location. But decision makers at the city have changed and opinions about what the community wants have changed since then. We know how to do things better now, and those involved then may not be in leadership now. The process needs to be more iterative, with the ability to change and go back to previous decisions that were made and adjust the direction the project is taking. We need to be able to go back several steps in order to take the current steps forward, communities change over time. This will make it more equitable and fairer to the communities.

Project Team response: We certainly understand the desire to have the process be more iterative. With a project of this size and how long it takes to get through the entire process, an iterative decision making process would be very challenging. If we were to allow iterations to occur whenever in the process, we'll never go forward, so we need to find that balance.

Deputy Commissioner Collins: We are following the NEPA process for this project. Since the beginning of the project we look to the federal guidance to provide the steps that are required to be followed.

Wendell Meyer (FHWA): Corridor planning occurs within each community and a process is followed to identify transportation needs for a 20 year planning horizon. These plans roll up to the regional plan and informs MnDOT on what transportation needs they need to consider on their facilities. Hwy 252 was identified in all of these plans for improvement.

- c. Mayor Graves: What kind of analysis has been done to show impacts of what doubling/tripling of traffic on 252 would do to existing bottlenecks at I-694.

Project Team response: As part of the traffic operations during the scoping phase, traffic volumes and associated roadway types were compared across alternatives. The signal operations of the No Build currently pulse traffic volumes through the I-694, Hwy 100 interchange southbound. The operations of a freeway is designed to smooth traffic volumes out, although there will be some weaving and merging causing congestion during peak periods. The traffic analysis during the EIS phase will include freeway operations modeling to determine the level of congestion with each alternative. Peak period traffic volumes were calculated and considered during the scoping phase. Network, intersection and segment safety analysis was done with each alternative being considered during scoping. The existing segment safety has a lot of rear end crashes as a result of congestion as drivers transition from freeway to non-freeway environments in the northbound direction. The existing roadway currently is a 6 lane expressway through the City of Brooklyn Center and transitions back to a 4 lane expressway north of Brookdale Drive.

- d. Councilmember Chamblis: What is the impact of alternatives to traffic diversion on other roadways?

Project Team response: Network safety analysis takes into account the shift of traffic to/from Hwy 252 to other roadways. The scoping process has the analysis to show how much traffic is diverted to the local streets for each alternative that was considered. In general, the expressway options have more diverted traffic to the local streets than the alternatives being advanced. The level of impact is shown down to the collector system and not to each individual street within the city. Through streets and those serving larger areas of the city are part of this network.

- e. Mayor Graves: Why is traffic being diverted from 35W or 169 to the 252 corridor, when those corridors are set up to be safer and less impactful to community than 252?

Project Team response: The traffic analysis that was developed for the project uses the Met Council Regional model that takes into account Comprehensive Plans prepared by each city. Traffic growth and transportation uses are formulated with the model and used to predict where trips will be made and how people will get there (i.e transit, carpool, etc). Trips currently using Hwy 169 or I-35W that would be attracted to the Hwy 252 corridor would be doing so because it is a more logical trip for them based on the new conditions. I-35W and Hwy 169 have already been improved in recent years and have seen an increase in traffic. People will choose the routes that are the most convenient for them. Improvements to any roadway tend to increase traffic until it becomes inconvenient again.

5. Summary of the Scoping Decision and Next Steps

(Amber Blanchard, MnDOT)

Amber provided a summary of the alternatives that will be advancing into the EIS phase of work. These alternatives best meet the Purpose and Need of the project. Significant improvements to accessibility, connectivity and comfort for walkability and bikability are achieved by separating them from the mainline traffic traveling at 55 mph. Vehicle safety is significantly improved with the advancing alternatives by eliminating the traffic signals in the corridor. Eliminating the signals reduces rear end and other severe accident types that are associated with stopping traffic. Amber also covered what the next steps were including key milestones and engagement tools that will be used in the next phases of work.

- a. Mayor Graves: Didn't see anything substantially different in today's presentation than what was presented to the PAC prior to the public comment period back in May. So all the hundreds of comments that you received and reviewed didn't really change anything. Thank you for acknowledging the themes but it doesn't feel like the voices of the city partners were heard.

Project team response: All of the comments received were reviewed and discussed internally to determine what impact or changes are needed, if any, based on the comment to the Scoping Decision Document. None of the comments received substantially changed the scoping decision that was presented in May. Many of the comments were about topics, like air quality, that haven't been addressed yet but will be in the next phase of work. All comments were addressed and are in the final Scoping Decision Document. It should be noted that because additional alternatives were not added back in doesn't mean comments were not considered and appreciated by MnDOT.

- b. Mayor Graves: The project estimates for the freeway alternatives are around \$350 million, and the potential benefit is a two minute decrease in travel time savings. Is that little bit of time savings worth the impact to the community and the cost of that level of investment?

Project team response: Cost estimates that were previously presented are scoping level estimates that need further refinement in the next phase of work. For travel times for the freeway alternatives, the times savings wasn't the only criteria that was analyzed as part of the scoping process. Evaluation criteria like walkability /bikeability accessibility, connectivity and comfort, vehicle safety, and traffic diversion to local streets are also part of the selection process to advance alternatives into the EIS.

Additional Context: The No Build will be evaluated in the next Phase of work. The City of Brooklyn Center currently has a 6 lane expressway through the city. The City of Brooklyn Park has a 6 lane expressway from 73rd Ave to Brookdale Drive and in the northbound direction, 3 lanes from 83rd Ave through the 85th Ave intersection. For the remaining sections a 4 lane expressway exists.

- c. Mayor Graves: The themes don't capture what is really important to the community. You are not measuring the things that are important to them regarding equity. The voices in the community were not heard or captured in your responses.
- d. Mayor Winston: Agree that the equity considerations were not looked at or included. There is a responsibility to do more than just say "we looked at the comments and came to the same conclusion." We don't see what or how our input was measured or used to weigh in on the decision making process. There's not a structure or measurement or criteria that takes this into account. Until people see how their insights interact with the criteria, it's not enough. If it's not being measured it doesn't exist.

Project team response: We understand your statement that "the public doesn't see equity being measured so it doesn't look like it is being considered". Many of the evaluation criteria that are being used do consider many of the equity concerns raised to date. Creating safer environments by evaluating accessibility, connectivity and comfort for walkability and bikeability and vehicle safety are strong considerations in the selection of the advancing alternatives. As we continue into the next phase of work, we will work with our various stakeholders in communicating how their input starts to shape the selection of the preferred alternative. Although equity is not in the project Purpose and Need, the Project Objectives do have many of the equity components we have heard are important to the community.

6. Closing Comments

(Kim Collins, MnDOT)

Deputy Commissioner Collins thanked the PAC members for participating in person and virtual at today's meeting. She made a point to acknowledge both Mayor Graves and Mayor Winston on their insight into what they are hearing from their communities. MnDOT needs to reflect on how Project Objectives are going to be measured. The Project Team will be tasked in creating the link between the Evaluation Criteria established and confirmed by the PAC members to the Project Objectives. As the project advances into the next phase of work, MnDOT will be transparent in the decision making process and appreciate feedback on how well we are doing. Deputy Commissioner Collins ended the formal presentation and thanked the PAC for their continued work on the PAC and appreciates their position regarding community concerns.

- a. Mayor Graves: Are we able to get some data on the environmental considerations for the alternatives that won't move forward? For transparency, we would appreciate having all the information we are currently asking for. Even if the alternative doesn't officially move forward, we'd like to see the analysis for it.

Project team response: The draft scoping decision document does contain all of the evaluation criteria used to compare alternatives and to select alternatives recommended to advance into the next phase of work. The reduction of alternatives is important to narrow down alternatives that continue to meet the Purpose and Need of the project or do a better job of addressing those needs. The No Build will be evaluated through the next phase of work and used as a comparison to determine if the impacts associated with the build alternatives provide a benefit greater than the impacts associated with the proposed alternative. The environmental impacts will be compared to the No Build impacts, air quality and noise are two that have been mentioned. It should be noted that the current No Build configuration in the City of Brooklyn Center is a 6 lane expressway. All the environmental impacts associated with this 6 lane expressway will be evaluated under the No Build. Other expressway alternatives have been determined to perform less than the No Build alternative and have been eliminated from further consideration.

- b. Council Member Lee: Is the 4-lane freeway high speed or low speed?

Project team response: The 4-lane freeway alternative that is moving forward is a standard freeway design, not a low speed alternative.

Open Comment Period – 15 minutes

Open Public Comment Period

(Marcell Walker, Bolton & Menk)

It should be noted that the summaries below are from the notes taken by project staff in an attempt to accurately capture what was said by each participant. While it is not a transcribed accounting of what was stated, it should reflect what the speaker was conveying to the PAC members.

1. Brooklyn Center Council Member Dan Jerzak: No one has been able to explain to me in a way that I can explain to my constituents what the upside for Brooklyn Center is given the potential impacts. MnDOT's alternatives will only cost the city money with them sending the city a bill for our share of interchanges. Our community members see this as a mini-Rondo. Our City Council in a 5-0 vote expressed our concerns and asked for other options that seem to be no longer in play. To this day, I've not seen one positive outcome from the public for this project. The most common comment I get is "has this been a predetermined outcome from the beginning." There's been a lot of writing and comment that fall on deaf ears.
2. Tom Kouri : Based on PAC comments and comments from Brooklyn Center and Minneapolis feedback, additional alternatives should be brought back in. The Scoping Decision Document has not been signed yet, so bring back the 6 lane expressway as an advancing alternative. Let's include that alternative option and look at it in a safe way. There are 10 options moving forward and you are only showing nine. (clarification: slide 33 does show 9 subsets, but do not show the full corridor options when considering Hwy 252 with I-94. MnDOT will be evaluating 10 combinations of these). Let's include the 6 lane with alternative intersections and pedestrian and bicycle overpasses and leave the at grade intersections.
3. Alois Belik: Feel like I wasted my time to be here today. I took off work to be here and it's the same meeting we had several months ago. I couldn't ask my question about the interchange impacting a 36" gas main because you don't have enough information.
4. Diana Sanno: Pass.
5. Tara McCarthy: Pass.
6. Nahid Khan: Echo my mayor (Brooklyn Center) and other city council members, that this process has been a scam. I was a EHNA member and that process offered so much but nothing was heard. Listening has not happened on this project. There were hundreds of public comments and it had no impact on the SDD. It was all just to check federal boxes. A town hall was not held. There's only been open houses with no record of what happened. There's also not been transparency in the PAC meetings, no recordings. I believe it was a pre-determined outcome, a 6-lane freeway with managed lanes which MnDOT has always wanted. This project is really all one project from the supposed Re-thinking I-94 to this one. There is also a planned project with I-394 / I-94 and TH 55 that MnDOT is aware of but has not asked the public to participate. If MnDOT did nothing there would only be 4,000 more cars at I-694/94/100 interchange on Hwy 252.
7. David Mulla: Acknowledge and thanked Mayor Graves and Brooklyn Center City Council members for the hard work. This project is proposing irreversible harm and MnDOT's final scoping decision document recommendation for freeway expansion is opposed by the community. Brooklyn Center and Minneapolis opposed and won't give municipal consent. MnDOT failed to give real options in their final decision. MnDOT didn't consider air quality in the alternatives that are moving forward and failed to consider all the deaths that

will occur as a result from air quality from increases in cars and trucks in the corridor. They say they will look at air quality in the next phase of work. Air quality is not being met for Hennepin County goals for health. David mentioned a number of statistics of property takings, (229 homes, 10 businesses and 3 churches) will be taken. 41 BIPOC homes or businesses will be taken with the proposed freeway alternatives. How is MnDOT answering a VMT reduction; they can't say this project helps meet their regional goals. We demand other alternatives, a 6 lane expressway, be brought back into the evaluation process.

8. Michael Svard: I was also part of the EHNA. EJ and Equity objectives aren't part of Purpose and Need and are only talking points. The comments received on the draft Scoping Decision Document only require you to say that you looked at them. The travel time saving metrics don't fairly look at all users in all vehicles. Alternatives have major access impacts to residents causing most of the residents to travel farther because they have less access options with the freeway alternatives. Today's news highlights suggest that congestion delays during rush hour remains lower post-pandemic and calls into question the need for EZ-Pass lanes on future alternatives. A managed lane should not be a preferred option.

9. Terry Kasbohm: Pass.

Adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Next PAC Meeting

TBD