

Rethinking I-94 Phase 2 Community Leaders Meeting (Meeting 1)

Date: 06/25/2020 (4:00 pm – 5:00 pm)

Location: Zoom Meeting

Participants:

MnDOT: Nicole Peterson, Sheila Kauppi, Gloria Jeff, Cyrus Knutson, Hannah Rank, Melissa Barnes, Torri Hampton,

FHWA: Anna Varney

WSB: Jack Corkle, Dan Pfeiffer, Joanne Cho

Community Leaders: Keith Baker (ReConnect Rondo), David Wilson (Green Minneapolis), Amy Gundermann (LexHam Community Council), Andy Singer (St. Paul Bicycle Coalition), Ashwat Narayanan (Our Streets Minneapolis), David Jullif (Be Civil, ReConnect Rondo), Debbie Meister (Neighborhoods First), Julia Tabbut (Prospect Park Neighborhood Association), Lindsay Schwantes (Hamline-Midway Transportation Committee), , Shannon Watson (St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce), Theresa Nelson (Move Minnesota), Tiffany Scott Knox (Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood) , Mohamed Liban (Somali American Partnership), Marquitta M (Summit University), Scott Berger (Union Park District Council)

Project Partners: Joan Vanhalla (Hennepin County), Kelly Agosto (Hennepin County), John Mazzitello (Ramsey County), Randy Newton (City of St. Paul), Russ Stark (City of St. Paul), Brian Issacson (Ramsey County), Jenifer Hager (City of Minneapolis),

Meeting Summary

1. Introduction and Welcome Remarks

- Sheila Kaupp, Metro District Deputy District Engineer welcomed the group and provided an overview of the purpose of the Community Leaders Group and meetings. Moving forward, MnDOT will continue to:
 - Keep communities well-informed and engaged throughout the project process
 - Learn and create an environment where people can share information –not just for this project– that would help MnDOT better connect with communities

2. Phase 1 Recap

- A recap of the work and products of Rethinking I-94 Phase 1 was provided to the group. Phase 1 occurred from 2016-2018 and a partial list included 2,200 surveys, 250 meetings, and 50 listening sessions. Findings from Phase 1 were:
 - Community members are interested in issues beyond the freeway
 - Community members value involvement early and continuously, and want accurate, timely information
 - Community members want their values and visions to be reflected in project designs
- MnDOT developed five guiding commitments for project planning based on what people expect from MnDOT: vision, co-power, authentic respect, transparency, and inclusivity
- MnDOT also developed the livability framework based on what people expect from MnDOT, serving as a guide for all current and future MnDOT projects: health & environment, economics, sense of place, safety, connections, equity, and trust.

3. Environmental Process

- The group was given an overview of the current environmental process and MnDOT's decision to proceed with an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), a more robust process compared to an Environmental Assessment (EA).
- Rethinking I-94 Phase 2, Environmental Process will be divided into Tier 1 and Tier 2. Tier 1 establishes a vision focused on transportation system actions, including improvements and mitigation actions. The document will determine:
 - Purpose and need
 - Social, Economic, and Environmental (SEE) impacts
 - Goals and livability
 - Alternatives analysis for the mainline (I-94 roadway) and access or interchange alternatives
 - Select preferred mainline alternative and access locations
 - Program of projects and priorities
- Informational handouts/documents for the public will be available soon. MnDOT is also working on white papers for the Livability Framework topics.
- Several members raised concern that the public was excluded from the drafting of the Purpose and Need document. They also expressed that it felt as if MnDOT always shared items that were predefined with little to no room for change.
 - MnDOT recognized where the concerns were coming from, "MnDOT clarified it is not doing business as usual." The environmental document is not final draft. MnDOT is looking for public input. The current version of the Purpose and Need document was prepared so that there was something for the public to consider, review and react.
- The participant group questioned how MnDOT was able to prepare the Purpose and Need document without a public engagement process for Phase 2.
 - MnDOT reminded the group that Phase 2 is a continuation of Rethinking I-94 Phase 1. Phase 1, which was highly focused on connecting and starting conversations with communities, provided the insights, data and information for the Project Team to prepare the environmental document. Phase 2 uses data and information from Phase 1 to help proceed with the environmental process and eventually select a preferred group of projects and actions.
 - MnDOT acknowledged that communities may have new needs since Phase 1. The review of the Purpose and Need document is an opportunity for communities to share new information.
- Local agencies are a part of the environmental process. Their participation provides a sense of what their respective communities would want/need.
- Phase 2 does cover pedestrian and bicycle. The bike/ped division from MnDOT and local agencies have been involved throughout the environmental process.
 - Questions were raised why bike/ped is not a "primary" need. MnDOT clarified that the difference between "primary" and "secondary" does not reflect the importance of those needs. "Primary needs" are what initially prompted the project. "Secondary needs" are other additional needs that have been identified after the initiation of the project.
- Phase 2 is a large-scaled initiative in many aspects: cost, complexity, impacts and project area. While the logical termini recommendation excludes the two downtowns, this does not mean that areas beyond the logical termini will be entirely excluded or dismissed. MnDOT has agreed to complete independent studies in areas of concern that are further east and west of the current logical termini.
- The participants emphasized the need to recognize the enormous harm the highway created during its initial construction. It's important that increasing recognition does not mean only addresses the impacts related to the environment, access, and/or connectivity. MnDOT should push to "Do no harm" in addition to the recognition of past harm the highway has created.
 - MnDOT recognizes the communities' concerns. These Community Leaders meetings will serve as a platform in which MnDOT and community leaders can connect and communicate to help preserve communities while continuing to help meet community needs. This work will include collaborating on potential approaches and solutions to addressing the transportation needs.
 - Other recommendations on what to consider for the project included:
 - Investing in infrastructure that requires less maintenance and environmentally attentive
 - Reducing the number of lanes

- Help decrease VMT
- Crossing improvements
- Improve transit speed and access
- Rondo land bridge
- While MnDOT is leading Rethinking I-94 Phase 2, ensuring that needs surrounding the corridor are met will be a joint effort between all agencies –cities and counties.

4. Community Leaders Group roles and Responsibilities

- The Project Team went over the roles and responsibilities of the Community Leaders Group.
- There was some confusion on whether the roles and responsibilities of the Community Advisors Group differed from the Community Leaders Group.
 - The membership between these two entities is an expansion of what was known as the Community Advisors Committee.
- Additional members/entities were invited to the Community Leaders Group based on MnDOT's relationships along the corridor. The Project Team clarified that the purpose of this group is not to have all members of the community be present but rather find key community members who can help sort through on how to effectively communicate with the communities. It's about having an outlet to the communities.
 - The Project Team recognizes that new entities/communities may have emerged since Phase 1. Community leaders who are not currently part of the group and would help communicate with the public are welcomed and invited to these meetings. Current members should reach out to Dan Pfeiffer (WSB) if there are potential new members to this group.

5. Phase 2 Schedule

- The Project Team shared the schedule for Phase 2. Before a group of potential projects and actions to be undertaken in Tier 2 is selected, there will be a lot of alternative analyses completed. Public engagement will occur to help select the Preferred Alternative.
- Again, the Project Team emphasized that the version of Purpose and Need document is not final. The draft Purpose and Need document has been prepared based on public inputs from Rethinking I-94 Phase 1. The document is a starting point, something the public can react to and be revised as needed moving forward.

6. Upcoming Public Engagement

- Moving forward, the purpose of this group is to ensure that many community leaders are able to participate. The Project Team recognizes that won't be easy to find a time that works for everyone every meeting. An online poll will be sent out to the group to help identify availabilities.
- There was consensus that small group discussions among Community Leader Group participants could be helpful rather than facilitating a virtual discussion with 30+ participants.