

Plan Summary and Public Comments

Plan Summary

Access and Mobility for People and Freight 2030 establishes future land use and transportation goals and objectives, proposes transportation improvements for a 25-year timeframe, and highlights future planning and policy directions for the Duluth-Superior metropolitan area. Additionally, this plan calls out current and projected capacity deficiencies, extends the planning horizon, updates demographic and travel demand modeling information, discusses future intermodal freight opportunities, contains a fiscal analysis and an air quality conformity determination. *Access and Mobility for People and Freight 2030* addresses multimodal issues that influence maritime, airport, freight, roadway, transit, bicycle and pedestrian movements aligned with the intent of SAFETEA-LU.

The MIC recognizes the need for in-depth study and evaluation of metropolitan transportation issues. All MIC corridor and mode specific plans should be considered a subset of *Access and Mobility for People and Freight 2030*, and are therefore equally important planning elements of the multimodal transportation system. MIC staff will continue to conduct studies using the projects defined in this document to guide planning efforts. The travel demand modeling completed for this plan will be updated periodically to provide information on area roadways in relation to area land use changes. To summarize key aspects of the plan:

- **Chapter 1 / Introduction:** Plan goals and objectives, new elements of the plan.
- **Chapter 2 / Planning and Policy Framework:** Transportation policy framework, plan's public involvement process, land use and demographic trends.
- **Chapter 3 / Multimodal Transportation Network:** Current and future planning initiatives by transportation mode in moving people and freight.
- **Chapter 4 / Transportation Management and Operation:** Management and operations information including ITS initiatives across the metropolitan area.
- **Chapter 5 / Travel Demand Model:** (TP+/Cube) results illustrating current and projected capacity deficiencies for the Duluth-Superior planning area.
- **Chapter 6 / Network Recommendations:** Describes project programming process, financial resources and projections, jurisdiction's project lists in short, mid, and long range timeframes, air quality impacts, and community impact assessment/environmental justice analysis.
- **Chapter 7 / Plan Summary and Public Comment:** Summarizes plan content, public input received and MIC responses.

Public Comments

The draft version of this plan was available for 45-day public comment from June 16—July 30, 2005. The draft plan was available online www.ardc.org/mic, on MIC area jurisdiction web sites, and at public libraries. Two public meetings were held on the draft Long Range Transportation Plan in June (21st and 23rd). On July 7, the Duluth News Tribune ran an article giving an overview of the draft Plan as well as an editorial commenting on the lack of a discussion of passenger rail (see Appendix), which in turn generated public interest and internal plan review. Additionally there was a follow-up Duluth News Tribune Editorial on Light Rail on the August 3, 2005 in response to the Congressional approval of a federal highway bill—SAFETEA-LU (see Appendix). That editorial stated that high priority funds received in the Duluth Metropolitan area could also be diverted to studying and working towards implementing light rail as there is strong interest on the part of the North Shore Scenic Railroad in the Duluth Depot to restore passenger rail linkage to the Twin Cities and within the Duluth Metropolitan area.

Passenger Rail

Six letters were received by MIC staff, responses sparked from the July 7th Duluth News Tribune Editorial titled “*Our View: Long-range plan headed down the wrong route.*” Each letter noted the benefits of light rail for Duluth and concerns that the plan lacked inclusion of the topic within Duluth or from Duluth to the Twin Cities.

Response:

- Formal MIC response letter to Ken Buehler, Executive Director of the Lake Superior Railroad Museum on August 3, 2005 (main points of this response are summarized in Chapter 3, Movement of People by Rail section).
- Final Plan will include discussion of Midwest Regional Rail Initiative as it relates to Minnesota and Wisconsin (service to Duluth shown as bus feeder service from the Twin Cities), state DOT planning initiatives in Wisconsin and Minnesota, DTA and North Shore Scenic Railroad’s B-BOP week (bus, bike or carpool) commuter rail demonstration (May 2005) promoting intercity passenger rail service.

Roads

London Road

At the June 21st meeting at First United Methodist in Duluth, a Duluth citizen attended and expressed concerns about congestion on London Road and adverse impacts experienced by the neighborhood. Additionally, an email letter was received stating the area’s economic development would improve if Interstate 35

were extended to Highway 61 and if access along Highway 61 to Two Harbors were further restricted in an effort to improve travel flow (also suggested further restricted highway access on Highways 2 and 53 to create a smooth flow of traffic through the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan area).

Response:

- MnDOT has solicited for a consultant to begin a study of the London Road Corridor from 26th Avenue East to the Highway 61 Expressway, to analyze deficiencies and identify solutions beginning in the fall of 2005.
- MIC staff shared these comments with MnDOT, WisDOT, and City of Duluth officials on June 22, 2005.

Martin Road

Chapter 3 of this plan describes a transportation modeling process used to evaluate the potential benefits of an East Duluth Arterial and connection of Martin Road with Highway 61. A resident of this area visited the ARDC office to discuss the alignments modeled and then after full review of modeling report submitted a formal letter against both alignments. He suggested that a marginally effective route between Two Harbors and north of Duluth currently exists (STH61 – Berquist – Lismore – Zimmerman – Jean Duluth – Martin). This resident suggested if an east/west bypass above Duluth is proven to be needed in the future to consider allocating funds to study extending Lismore east toward Homestead and west toward US 53, rather than the modeled Martin Road Extensions “A” and “B” options noted in Chapter 3.

Response:

- MIC staff shared this formal letter with St. Louis County engineering staff on July 31, 2005.
- St. Louis County applied for high priority demonstration funds to “study” the potential alignment and was not awarded high priority funds in the federal highway bill.
- The project remains listed as a construction project for St. Louis County in the long range timeframe (2016-2030) however no alignment has been selected or actively considered. St. Louis County will continue to thoroughly evaluate this roadway option and other alternatives and will work with area residents to find consensus if this roadway is needed, not needed, and if needed identify the most appropriate alignment.

Transportation Data

A public comment was received that MIC staff should consider using REMI (Regional Economic Models Inc.) Transight data for transportation planning modeling. This data is used locally by large businesses (i.e. Minnesota Power) for long-range load forecasting and has been found to be a flexible and useful planning and forecasting tool. Transight appears to be gaining wider acceptance as a new model platform from REMI in Detroit, Ohio, Wisconsin, Federal government, CA, and other metropolitan areas.

Response:

- Thank you for your suggestion, we'll consider it in future planning and modeling endeavors.

Demographic Trends

Public comment noted that some time back, federal and state governments decided to redefine the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) from Douglas and St. Louis counties to include Douglas, St. Louis, and Carlton counties. The addition of Carlton County was based on the significant increase in commuting from Carlton to Duluth-Superior employers.

Response:

- Perhaps in the future the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Planning area may need to be refined to include areas such as Cloquet and Esko. The next Census is set for 2010 and perhaps this would be an appropriate time to consider planning area modifications.

Agency Input

Significant agency input was received at the June 15th Annual MIC Mid-year Review Meeting. State and federal agency comments were taken that day and in the weeks that followed after their full review of the draft Plan. The bulk of comments came from FHWA, MnDOT Central Office, MnDOT District 1, and MPCA. Suggested improvements for the final Plan included expanding the NEPA and public involvement process discussions, fleshing out the plan fiscal analysis, providing an Environmental Justice mapping explanation, incorporating state modal performance-based plans, mapping out the Level of Service information from the travel demand model, and differentiating between access and mobility concepts.

Plan Implementation

MIC planning and policy initiatives will continue the commitment of improving the Duluth-Superior multimodal transportation system. Recommendations in this plan were derived from planning studies, jurisdictions, or travel demand modeling analysis.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Project programming is the act of committing funds, through a public decision-making process, to priority projects envisioned in the Long Range Transportation Plan. It commits expected revenues over a multi-year period to transportation projects. Project programming is conducted on an annual basis in Duluth and Superior. It is the responsibility of jurisdictions to follow through and implement plan recommendations and address projected deficiencies and MIC staff is available to aid in that process. Project success evolves from planning and programming coordination as well as coordination between jurisdictions and states.

