
**DULUTH-SUPERIOR
METROPOLITAN INTERSTATE COUNCIL**

MEETING SUMMARY
Wednesday, January 17, 2007

WITC Conference Center
600 N. First Street, Superior, WI

Voting Members Present:

Broc Allen
Ed Anderson
Nick Baker, *Wisconsin Co-Chair*
David Bilden
Esther Dalbec
Earl Elde, *Secretary*
David Brenna
Garry Krause
Keith MacDonald
Kay McKenzie
Cindy Moe
Steve O'Neil

Voting Members Absent:

Mike Coyle
Nick Milroy*
Andy Peterson
Tari Rayala*
Russ Stover, *Minnesota Co-Chair**

* = Excused

Others Present:

Holly Butcher
Ron Chicka
James Gittemeier
Robert Herling
Sheldon Johnson
Andy McDonald
Rondi Watson
Todd Campbell
Scott Sannes
John Larson

Representing:

Douglas County Suburban Townships
City of Superior
Douglas County
City of Superior Citizen Rep
City of Superior
St. Louis County Suburban Townships
Proctor City Council
City of Duluth
City of Hermantown
Douglas County
St. Louis County Suburban Townships
St. Louis County Board

Representing:

Douglas County
City of Superior
City of Duluth
Duluth Transit Authority
City of Duluth

Representing:

ARDC / MIC Staff
ARDC / MIC Director
ARDC / MIC Staff
ARDC / MIC Associate Planner
NWRPC / MIC Deputy Director
ARDC / MIC Staff
ARDC / MIC Staff
MnDOT
SEH
Army Corps of Engineers

1. Introductions/Agenda Review

Wisconsin Co-chair Nick Baker called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and all meeting attendees introduced themselves. Ron announced that there had been some turnover in a

number of board appointments and welcomed new members David Brenna, Proctor City Councilor replacing Dick Kieren, and Steve O'Neil, St. Louis County Commissioner replacing Peg Sweeney. Chair Baker suggested that the voting items on the agenda be moved until after the two guest speakers; committee members concurred.

2. London Road Plan

Scott Sannes, Project Manager from the consulting firm SEH, introduced Todd Campbell, Project Manager from MnDOT, and explained that they both were involved in the London Road Study currently taking place in Duluth. He began by describing the goal of the project, which is to determine what changes should be made to London Road and Superior Street to relieve congestion from 26th Avenue East to 66th Avenue East. He described the 12-month public involvement process as "very active," including monthly advisory committee meetings, three public open houses, three newsletters, a public survey and a study website.

He summarized the feedback from the phone survey and the public meetings as a general feeling that improvements should be made to deal with problems of congestion, safety and speed. He stressed, however, that the main concern expressed was that the character of the road be preserved. In response to neighborhood concerns for the aesthetics of the roadway, they were developing Context-Sensitive Design options which reflect a sense of place, and a balance between all modes of travel.

He noted that one goal of this process is to educate the public. For example, recent analysis revealed that this stretch of London Road has very low crash rates and in fact can be described as very safe by this measure. Traffic is projected to grow by about 1-1/2 percent per year and contrary to popular belief, the great majority of the traffic is serving the local neighborhood, not passing through to the North Shore. He added that the congestion issue was mainly a perception because it's only a problem along this corridor for about 30 minutes each morning and afternoon. Potential solutions include the following options:

Alternative 1--An expressway that would follow the current rail bed. It would need to be raised over 40th Avenue East, resulting in a major 3-dimensional visual impact. He added that to vacate the active rail line (owned by Canadian Pacific) for use as a roadway would literally require an act of Congress.

Alternative 2- A system of one-way pairs, with two one-way lanes outbound on London road beginning at 40th East, and inbound traffic on Superior Street. This configuration was described as the most advantageous to pedestrians and bicyclists, and would not involve much reconstruction.

Alternative 3— A parkway design with travel lanes and a landscaped center median, would yield the greatest capacity benefit, but would have greatest construction and right-of-way costs, with very significant impacts to front yards along entire street

Alternative 4— Converting parking lanes to travel lanes during peak travel periods and making other spot improvements incrementally over 25 years. He described this as the lowest-cost option and would have the least impact overall.

He added that another possible roadway option, building a bypass through the northern townships, would only divert about 400 cars per day, an unacceptably low level of benefit

given the high cost of constructing this option. Furthermore the bypass would not serve the through traffic that needs to access the highway to travel to Wisconsin, etc.

He also described another concern that continues to be expressed by one or two residents in particular is in regard to the risk posed by hazardous materials. The MnDOT office of Commercial Vehicle Enforcement and Hazardous Material Regulation will present information at the February Advisory Committee meeting supporting their belief that there is little to be concerned about, given that the main hazardous material being transported along this route is fuel being delivered to local gas stations.

He closed by stating that the study committee was in the process of evaluating these solutions; noting that the final recommended solution must balance cost with impacts and benefits. Other considerations included roundabouts vs. signals; a possible frontage road connecting the Chateau and Lakeshore. Another public meeting would be held later this winter, with final recommendations to be released in late spring.

Comments by MIC members favored Alternative 2, the one-way pair option, as well as Alternative 4, the parking management option. Scott responded that they as consultants also like Alternative 2, but that the neighborhood does not support it. He added that construction and rights-of-way are the highest costs; and in his opinion this road does not pose a significant traffic or safety problem to warrant an expensive solution. The freeway solution frankly is not proportional to the problem at hand. It does, however, have significant neighborhood support, and he added that they're spending a lot of time having to explain why it won't likely be included in the final recommended solution.

Chair Baker thanked both Scott and Todd for providing this information to the Policy Board and requested that they come back later for an update.

3. Erie Pier Management Plan Update

Andy McDonald introduced John Larson, Chief of Construction at the Army Corps of Engineers office in Duluth, who presented information about a new Management Plan being developed to shift the function of Erie Pier from a disposal facility to a recycling facility for dredged materials. He explained that the harbor needs to be dredged to 21- or 28-foot depths from its natural depth of about 8 feet and that this material is placed in the Erie Pier Confined Disposal Facility (CDF). Currently about 20 percent of these materials are recovered and sold by the Port Authority. This is becoming a time-critical issue because with its current level of functioning, a new CDF will be needed in a decade or so. He noted that a significant amount of taxpayer dollars would be saved by not needing to construct a new Confined Disposal Facility.

He added that the Corps is viewing the Erie Pier Management Plan as a pilot project with significant implications for CDFs across the Great Lakes system. Last year the Corps didn't dredge the Duluth-Superior harbor but rather dedicated the funds to redesigning Erie Pier with staging and washing areas.

One important function of the Management Plan, with its goal of creating a beneficial re-use center, will be to determine and develop markets for the materials, in particular the finer rather than the coarse materials, and preferably large-scale projects. He added that

the finer materials will likely be sold very cheaply--the value is not how much it's sold for but rather in clearing out space. He is hoping that local jurisdictions will consider using these fine materials as unclassified materials—they will be looking closely at specifications, maybe asking them to review their standards as this material does have some structural capabilities that need to be considered. Implementation of the plan will require both public education on this topic as well as outreach to local businesses and municipalities. What they ultimately hope to achieve is a cooperative community solution to the problem of dredge materials storage and re-use.

Other key issues to be addressed will be testing materials for an extensive array of potential contaminants, and water management. Because WLSSD can't handle all the water in extreme rain events, there needs need to be an approved on-site filtration system. Another significant and persistent problem is the transport of the invasive species purple loosestrife. They are hoping to receive some support in addressing this issue from various projects underway at NRRI.

Andy McDonald reported that MIC staff will be presenting the document for approval by HTAC in early March and by the TAC and MIC later that month. We will also be seeking a Resolution of Support for this effort from the Policy Board.

4. Transportation Investment: Public Opinion & Political Will

Sheldon Johnson reviewed a presentation that had recently been given at the Transportation Development Association (TDA) annual meeting titled "Transportation Investment: Public Opinion & Political Will." He explained that he is an officer of the TDA, which is a Wisconsin-based nonprofit organization working to educate the public and legislature about transportation issues.

The presentation was developed from extensive surveys of the general public to determine their views on the importance of making transportation investments. Polls between 2002 and 2006 showed that Americans overwhelmingly understand the importance of transportation infrastructure, with 97-98 percent stating it is very important for the country and for the economy, 9 of 10 agreeing that we need to start making greater transportation investments immediately, and an overall nationwide increase in satisfaction with roadway system, up to 75 percent today from 50 percent in 1995

The survey then goes on to examine perceptions of the DOT's effectiveness at meeting transportation needs and hits on the growing congestion problem. Roughly 60 percent believe that overcrowding is a problem on most important roads and also agree that transportation capacity is at crisis levels nationwide, but not so much in Wisconsin.

A significant contrast is then brought forward--when the public is asked to prioritize these issues relative to health care and education issues, transportation ranks much lower down the list (holding the line on taxes, health care, and education were the top concerns identified in a recent gubernatorial race). Another related poll indicated that most Wisconsin residents think that the right amount is currently being spent on transportation.

The message for the transportation industry is that all modes of transportation have strong competition from other issues and attempting to get more transportation dollars will be

difficult. The emphasis will need to be on maintaining and improving existing roads, not building new ones.

5. Committee Business

Meeting summary of December 13, 2006

Chair Baker called for amendments or corrections to the previous month's meeting summary. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve.

Earl Elde/Ed Anderson moved to approve the meeting summary from the December 13, 2006 meeting with no corrections or changes. There was no further discussion and the motion was approved unanimously.

6. Functional Classification Update

James Gittemeier reviewed the process for the functional classification update for the MIC area, which included verifying existing data and cleaning up discrepancies. He added that in December, a number of additional changes were made to the system at the request of Mn/DOT District One and St. Louis County. For the most part, the changes to the functional classification system were made in the surrounding townships, focused on county routes, anticipating that some will be changed to CSAHs. Frontage roads along I-35 were also included as local roads. He closed by presenting the updated functional classification map will be presented for approval

Earl Elde/Steve O'Neil moved to adopt the functional classification map as presented and submit to MnDOT Central Office and FHWA for review and approval.

Kay McKenzie asked if the map and system changes had been reviewed by city and county staff—James replied that he and Andrea Diamond, the MIC's GIS Specialist, had worked closely with the engineers to develop the proposed changes. There was no further discussion and the motion was approved unanimously.

7. Endion Neighborhood Transportation & Land Use Plan – Scope of Work

Holly Butcher presented the Scope of Work for the upcoming Endion Transportation and Land Use Plan. The goal of this plan is "to identify solutions to improve safety, traffic flow, multi-modal options and access within [the study area] in an effort to support flexible land use reinvestment within the City of Duluth." She added that MIC staff had met with City of Duluth Planning and Engineering staff in December to discuss key elements to be included in this planning effort.

She noted that the study area is very large, from 6th to 26th Avenues East. She noted that this study is timely given the high level of interest in potential development and redevelopment within the study area: St. Luke's is expanding its facilities and parking facilities; the Lakewalk Surgery Center is also expanding onto former Louis' Café site; and the Plaza retail and Armory area are very high-value properties with great potential for mixed use redevelopment. She noted that the next step would be to convene the first meeting of the study advisory committee, to include MIC staff, City Planning and Engineering staff, and a number of stakeholders from key businesses and ventures in the

area. She closed by requesting approval of the Scope of Work.

Earl Elde/Steve O'Neil moved to approve scope of work as presented. Discussion: Steve O'Neil confirmed that the issue of pedestrian access across London Road is a real issue for the neighborhood and appreciated the multi-modal access component of the study. There was no further discussion and the motion was approved unanimously.

8. FY 2011 Duluth Metro Area TIP Applications

James Gittemeier reported that the process of developing the Duluth Metropolitan 2008-2011 Transportation Improvement Program was underway. A total of 7 project applications were submitted to the MIC requesting federal transportation funding for FY2011.

He distributed copies of each project submittal, along with a list of the evaluation criteria and a point scoring system. He explained that these submittals will be prioritized at the February 20th TAC meeting at 1:30 p.m. at the Proctor Community Center. All voting TAC members, along with any MIC members who choose to participate, will be scoring projects using the evaluation criteria and 100-point scoring system approved by the MIC in May of 2002. The results of this prioritization meeting will then advance to the MIC Policy Board at their meeting on February 21st for discussion and final approval. Projects then move forward in the Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership process (ATP).

He added that he would give a more detailed description of each project at the February prioritization session and requested that TAC members review the project packet and complete a preliminary scoring for each prior to that meeting.

9. Public Involvement Program

James Gittemeier announced that he had conducted the first of two public round-table discussion meetings on Tuesday, January 9th. Residents and elected officials were invited to attend, in order to gain their insight on how to have more meaningful public participation. The feedback he'd received at the first meeting strongly urged the MIC to become more visible—the Metropolitan Interstate Council is not a well-known entity to the general public. They suggested that MIC staff participate as guest speakers at township meetings, business associations, City & County Board meetings, neighborhood associations, and look for ways to be featured in articles in neighborhood papers such as the one for Duluth's East Hillside.

They also made some suggestions for facilitating these meetings: to clearly state the desired outcome, to start and finish on time, to advertise with well-designed flyers, to design slides and visual aids without too much text, and to provide refreshments. We were also advised to capture names and contact info for further outreach and to ask if participants want to be added to a contact list for future events/meetings.

Finally, suggestions were made about how to address the public comments that are received for any given plan—that comments and responses should be clearly summarized in the final version of the plan.

James concluded by announcing that the next round-table discussion would be held on Monday, January 29th at 7:00 p.m. at the WITC Conference Center. He added that significant ideas discussed at these two meetings will be incorporated into the Public Involvement Plan. A final version of the plan will be presented for approval in February.

10. Project Updates

Duluth Safe Routes to School Funding Applications--Holly Butcher reported that the first round of MnDOT's Safe Routes to School applications were due in July 2006 and that funding in the amount of \$30,000 had been awarded to Lincoln Park School in Duluth for their infrastructure and education project. MnDOT has since streamlined its process and the second round of applications are due January 31st. On behalf of Duluth Public Schools, she was now preparing infrastructure applications for Stowe, MacArthur, Congdon, Grant, and Lester Park elementary schools. The Duluth Safe Routes to School Steering Committee convened on December 20th and decided to also prepare a non-infrastructure grant application with the goal of improving bicycle and pedestrian education across all Duluth Public Schools.

Phase 2 On-street Bike Routes --James Gittemeier reported that he, along with St. Louis County staff, continues to work on the finishing touches of the wayfinding signage portion of the project. He added that in the next month he will set up a project jurisdiction meeting to review the final routes, fine-tune the wayfinding signage, and discuss the next steps toward implementation, anticipated to occur this spring or summer.

Northwest Superior Traffic Circulation Study--Robert Herling reported that preliminary data have been gathered regarding current land uses, traffic volumes, crash rates, roadway accesses and rail crossings. MIC staff is awaiting additional data from WisDOT and modeling results from URS. Once this information is received, Phase 1 of the study will be complete. Meanwhile, survey questions are being prepared and will be mailed to area stakeholders, as well as information providing details of the study. Completion of the study is scheduled for the summer of 2007.

11. Adjournment

With no further agenda items or announcements, Chair Baker adjourned the meeting at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rondi Watson
MIC Division Secretary