



Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council
Annual Joint Meeting of the Policy Board and the Transportation Advisory Committee

MEETING SUMMARY

Wednesday, September 3, 2008, 7:00 PM

Meeting Location	Proctor Community Center, 100 Pionk Drive, Proctor, MN
Meeting Chair	Andy Peterson
Note Taker	Rondi Watson

MIC Members Present	Ed Anderson	City of Superior
	Nick Baker	Douglas County
	Warren Bender	City of Superior
	David Brenna	City of Proctor
	Earl Elde	St. Louis County Townships
	Jay Fosle	City of Duluth
	Garry Krause	City of Duluth
	Keith MacDonald	City of Hermantown
	Kay McKenzie	Douglas County
	Cindy Moe	St. Louis County Townships
	Kevin Norbie	City of Superior Citizen Rep
	Steve O'Neil	St. Louis County
	Andy Peterson	City of Duluth Citizen Rep
MIC Members Absent	Broc Allen	Douglas County Suburban Townships
	Steve Baker*	Douglas County
	Mike Coyle	Douglas County
	Dan Olson*	City of Superior
Others Present	Steve Anderson	City of Proctor
	Dan Belden	WLSSD
	Holly Butcher	ARDC / MIC Senior Planner
	Ron Chicka	ARDC / MIC Director
	Jack Ezell	WLSSD
	James Gittemeier	ARDC / MIC Planner
	Jim Heilig	TAC Member / Duluth Transit Authority
	Robert Herling	ARDC / MIC Associate Planner
	Pat Henderson	ARDC Executive Director
	Denny Johnson	TAC Chair / MnDOT
	Sheldon Johnson	NWRPC / MIC Deputy Director
	Jay Mitchell	Superior School District
	Mayor Don Ness	City of Duluth
Heather Rand	TAC Member / MN DEED	
Jim Rohweder	TAC Member / City of Proctor	

Dena Ryan	TAC Vice-Chair / WisDOT
Brian Ryks	TAC Member / Duluth Airport
Cindy Voigt	TAC Member / City of Duluth
Rondi Watson	ARDC / MIC Secretary
* Excused	

1. Introductions and Agenda Review

MIC Co-Chair Andy Peterson called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. and meeting attendees introduced themselves. ARDC's new executive Director, Pat Henderson, introduced herself. No changes to the agenda were put forward.

2. Guest Speakers

Duluth Mayor Don Ness prefaced his remarks by noting that while working for Congressman Jim Oberstar, he was exposed to and became interested in transportation issues such as Safe Routes to School activities, promoting biking and other alternative modes of transportation, generally lessening our oil dependence, and clustering development around existing transportation systems. He added that the trend of disinvestment in transportation and other systems is seen most acutely in core cities (like Duluth), for too many years it has not been dealt with, result is crumbling infrastructure.

He noted that Mayor Doty some years ago created the street improvement fund from the interest generated by the Community Development trust fund (casino revenue) and new property tax revenue. Since 1994, all new revenue, plus assessments (20%), has been captured to pay off debt for the street improvement program. He described this as a good model that has allowed a great deal of improvements, especially in the 1990's; the problem is that the financial assumptions have not panned out and we now have a major deficit. Duluth was only able to fund less than one mile of local street improvements this year, which he described as certainly inadequate. He stated that he is challenging city staff to use a new way to think about city streets, with less emphasis on new construction and more on continual maintenance to preserve the assets we already have.

Another significant policy shift has been in regard to the use of MSA funds, up until now they were used mainly for special projects. The total for next three years had already been committed to skywalks. He told DEDA that MSA dollars were no longer available; in short order they made a shift to using DEDA funds instead. Result: instead of waiting until 2010 to address Woodland Avenue, it can begin next year. Will also move forward with reconditioning West Superior Street, important because it is one of Duluth's central corridors and because we will see a major investment in I-35 in the coming years. He added that CBDG dollars are becoming scarce and the part of the city that hasn't received a lot of investment is the core city. He is a believer in improving and investing in roads that are the most traveled and also with a view to the infrastructure below.

He stated that he also sees an opportunity in commuter rail for the City of Duluth; there will be an interest and a need to move people from one side of the city to the other, in particular as the school district's Red Plan is implemented.

He also stated he wants to see us thinking big in this area, to take advantage of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that exists for us, now that Congressman Oberstar is chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Congressman Dave Obey as chair of the Appropriations committee. He noted, however, that these legislators can help with funding, but can't develop the actual plans. He emphasized that we need to be prepared in the months to come to present a future vision along with specific plans to Oberstar in the next congress.

In response to a question about the likelihood of Joshua Avenue being constructed, he replied that it is clear that if it were built it would take pressure off the neighborhood, but it's a very expensive project, and in the context of many competing priorities, he characterized it as one that the city cannot take on by itself, that it would have a better chance if there were a broader partnership with the county and the state.

The next guest presenters, Jack Ezell, Planning and Technical Services Manager and Dan Belden, Senior Planner from the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD), presented information about wastewater facilities management and ensuring capacity for future growth. Jack explained that WLSSD provides solid waste management and wastewater services for an approximately 500 square mile region around Duluth, Minnesota that includes 16 municipalities and 5 major industries. Duluth alone has over 400 miles of local sanitary sewers. WLSSD was created by the Minnesota Legislature in 1971 as a special purpose unit of government charged with cleaning up the serious pollution problems in the lower St. Louis River. He noted that the new main wastewater treatment facility in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Duluth replaced 18 other facilities. Their approach has been to work with local business and industries at the source through industrial pretreatment program; and they have consistently met or exceeded state and federal standards for water quality.

He explained that they have been able to increase the capacity of their sewer system because Duluth and member municipalities have worked hard to eliminate clear water flows (inflow and infiltration or I/I). A primary challenge is dealing with rain-related sewer overflows-- WLSSD and the City of Duluth are under administrative order from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to eliminate sanitary sewer overflows in the region. Another major challenge is in finding ways to control their costs and rates to customers. Energy costs have been the main source of rate increases in recent years. They are looking at ways to control costs in treatment processes (reducing electrical use, optimizing use of digester gas). They will incorporate all these elements into a revised ten year capital improvement plan...

In response to questions about extending the WLSSD service up the north shore and to new development in other outlying areas, he responded that their Master Plan does set limits on how far the system will extend. He added that since 2003, when municipalities that approach WLSSD with extension requests, they may be required to construct small local pre-treatment facilities. He noted that new construction technologies and design standards actually do not place much of a burden on the system, rather the problem is more with aging infrastructure; the main fix is to address I/I issues.

3. Amendment #6 to 2008-2011 Superior Metro Transportation Improvement Program

Sheldon Johnson presented an amendment to the 2008-2011 Superior Urbanized Area TIP to add a project, programmed by the WisDOT Central Office, involving the inspection and replacement of necessary suspender cables along the Wisconsin portion of the Blatnik Bridge. Project to begin in CY 2008.

Motion and Discussion Ed Anderson/Nick Baker moved to approve Amendment #6 to the 2008-2011 Superior TIP as presented. No discussion, motion approved by unanimous vote.

4. Amendment #10 to the 2008-2011 Duluth Metro Transportation Improvement Program

James Gittemeier presented an amendment to the 2008-2011 Duluth Metro Transportation Improvement Program which he described as mainly administrative, moving the project to pave the Perimeter Road at the Duluth International Airport from 2008 to 2009 in the 2008-2011 Duluth Metro TIP. He added that although the project is included in the more recent (2009-2012) TIP approved by the MIC in July, since that version has not yet been officially approved by the FHWA, it is technically not the current TIP, hence the amendment to the 2008-2011 version.

Motion and Discussion Nick Baker / Steve O'Neil moved to approve Amendment #10 to the 2008-2011 Duluth Metro Transportation Improvement Program as presented. There was no discussion and the motion approved by unanimous vote.

5. 2009-2012 Draft Superior Metro Transportation Improvement Program

Sheldon Johnson distributed copies of the draft Superior Urbanized Area Transportation Improvement Program for 2009-2012 and reviewed the projects on a year-by-year basis. Eleven major projects covering multiple modes are being proposed for funding in the upcoming 4-year period. He closed by requesting approval to release the draft plan for the required 30-day public comment period.

Motion and Discussion Ed Anderson/Garry Krause moved to release the draft document for the mandatory 30-day comment period. *Ed commented that he hoped to see inter-jurisdictional coordination on all projects, i.e., between the City, the County and WisDOT. Kay McKenzie commented that she would like to see more park and ride lots and increased emphasis on transit in an outside the City of Superior.* No further discussion, the motion approved by unanimous vote.

6. Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Update

Robert Herling reported on current work to update the travel demand model—which incorporates land use patterns, socioeconomic data and details about the roadway network—to generate accurate traffic forecasts to better assess the area's long range transportation needs and objectives. MIC staff are presently gathering building permit information dating back to 2003, the year that work on the LRTP update began, as well as data including land use, through lanes and turning lanes and speed limits. Staff will be bringing this information to area jurisdictions for verification and input before moving forward to update the model.

7. 2009-2010 MIC Work Program Projects

Ron Chicka presented proposed projects to be programmed for 2009 and 2010. He noted that he would be following up by emailing all TAC and MIC members not present at this month's meetings. He began by noting that mandatory projects include work on the Long Range Transportation Program, the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) for both Duluth and Superior, and transit and bike route planning.

In addition, each year can accommodate a few discretionary planning projects. Some of the projects already programmed for 2009 (determined last year with the approval of the 2008-2009 Work Program) have or will begin by the end of this year, including the regional freight plan, superior bike route planning, and a study of the Blatnik Bridge. He noted that the latter was prompted by WisDOT's request to project traffic volume in advance of planned work in 2014 which may shut the bridge down for the summer and route all traffic across the Bong Bridge instead. Other projects to begin in 2009 include a Superior Urban Area Growth Impact Study, similar to the one conducted for Duluth to determine potential growth patterns into the townships, as well as a Central Entrance study, building off of the existing Miller Hill Study to examine land uses and improve safety and access management along the corridor between MnDOT and Cub Foods.

He then presented some proposed project options for 2010, including a Metropolitan Pedestrian Plan (a policy plan to build off the Long Range Plan); a metropolitan rail plan (another policy plan); and a Kirkus Street plan examining land use, zoning, and streetscaping for the City of Proctor before development gets going along that new street. Two transit plans were also proposed, including an update to the 1998 Transit Vision plan for the entire MIC planning area, and a regional transit study on the Wisconsin side (a consultant conducted this type of study a few years ago on the Duluth side).

He noted that the TAC at its meeting the previous day had suggested a rail plan that looks at linking rail, trail, transit connections if and when passenger rail comes to Duluth; as well as a GIS-based pavement management system, to create central database of pavement conditions for all jurisdictions. He also reported that those present at the TAC meeting had ranked their top three projects as follows: (1) a roundabout feasibility study, (2) the Kirkus Street plan, and (3) a pavement quality index (on the MN side).

He then opened it up for discussion, asking for other ideas. Several group members endorsed the idea of a metropolitan rail plan, noting that it would tie in well with the Mayor's remarks about future plans and goals for the City. Kay McKenzie commented that she would like to see more emphasis on transit planning, especially for the City of Superior and outlying areas.

Ron asked the MIC and TAC members in attendance to rank these project options 1st, 2nd and 3rd in terms of their priorities. After tallying the results, he reported that the top three-ranked projects, for this group at least, were (1) a metropolitan rail plan; (2) a roundabout feasibility study, and (3) an area-wide pavement quality index

He concluded by noting that he would be contacting all other TAC and MIC members to get their input and developing a draft work program to put before the committee in October.

8. Downtown Modal Connections Study

Holly Butcher reviewed the goals of this study, describing it as a “transformative vision” to identify deficiencies and opportunities for connectivity between the downtown and Canal Park business districts.

She also presented results of the July traffic and pedestrian counts. She noted that it was quite revealing to note that traffic volumes on each of the four lanes on the Lake Avenue overpass peaked at different days and times on Fridays and Saturdays, reflecting the different uses from in-town and out-of-town traffic. Similarly, pedestrian traffic peaked on Saturday mid-afternoon in Canal Park, and on Wednesday during the noon hour in downtown, again reflecting the differing patterns of the two groups (Canal Park tourists and downtown workers).

She added that a consultant, Zenith Research, had been hired to conduct in-person surveys of tourists and downtown workers to better understand their perceptions, awareness and travel patterns between the two areas.

9. Superior Bike Route Planning

James gave an overview of the process for developing a system of signed bike routes in and around the City Of Superior. He’s in the process of organizing a steering committee to convene in September. Other steps will be to identify potential routes and perform a Bicycle Compatibility Index (BCI) analysis to hone in on the final routes. Described it as a very data-intensive process, many components needed per block of each route; after model is run and reviewed by steering committee, public involvement phase will begin to determine that the final routes make sense.

10. Project Updates

Northern MN/Northeastern WI Freight Study

Ron reported that the MNDOT Central Office, MNDOT District staff and MIC staff continue to meet on aspects of the scope, including development of an exact project budget in preparation for the RFP that should occur in September. They have recently been in touch with Dr. Richard Stewart at UW-Superior to discuss their role in the project, who will be able to use his connections for data acquisition as well as in-kind assistance. An RFP for a study consultant should be out within the next month or so.

East Second Street Study

Ron noted that MIC staff had met with the Superior Daily Telegram and the result was a good article in the paper that will hopefully lead to more public input. A steering committee meeting for was held on August 4th to look at the various pieces of information gathered so far for this study and to help direct future tasks. It was determined that the collection of speed data was the next important task to be carried out, as well as to establish a method for people to provide input to the study via the MIC website.

Proctor Comprehensive Plan Update

James reported that the Proctor Comprehensive Plan Update will roll into full gear this fall, devising sections of the plan by topic for feedback from the Proctor Comprehensive Plan Group. MIC staff will also be facilitating a public meeting that will yield a general land use plan for the land that will be opened to development after the Kirkus Street project is completed. Holly added that the Proctor Safe Routes to School Steering committee had met on August 19th to review school site traffic observations and survey data collected this spring, and to begin to devise recommendations to be the basis of an application for SRTS funding to be submitted this November.

Minnesota State Planning Conference

Holly Butcher announced that the annual state planning conference for the Minnesota Chapter of the American Planning Association (MnAPA) will be held at the DECC/Holiday Inn from Monday September 22 – Wednesday September 24. The theme, Transitions in Planning, represents the changing climate of planning topics: the housing market, transportation, environmental awareness, and design requirements.

1. Adjournment

With no further agenda items or announcements, Chair Peterson adjourned the meeting at 8:27 pm.