



Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council
MEETING SUMMARY
Wednesday, September 15, 2010, 7:00 PM

Meeting Location	WITC Conference Center, Superior, WI	
Meeting Chair(s)	Nick Baker, WI Co-chair	
Note Taker	Rondi Watson	
Members Present	Broc Allen	Douglas County Suburban Townships
	Ed Anderson	City of Superior – Citizen Rep
	Keith Allen	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	Nick Baker	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	Tony Cuneo	Duluth City Council
	Earl Elde	St. Louis County Suburban Townships
	Melanie Hendrickson	Duluth Transit Authority
	Cindy Moe	St. Louis County Suburban Townships
	David Montgomery	City of Duluth – Citizen Rep
	Dan Olson	Superior Common Council
	Steve O’Neil	St. Louis County Board
Members Absent	Warren Bender*	Superior Common Council
	Wayne Boucher	City of Hermantown
	Kerry Gauthier*	Duluth City Council
	Denise McDonald*	Superior Common Council
	Troy Foucault	City of Proctor
	Kay McKenzie*	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	Jim Paine*	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	* Excused	
Others Present	Ron Chicka	ARDC / MIC Director
	James Gittemeier	ARDC / MIC Planner
	Robert Herling	ARDC / MIC Planner
	Allyz Kramer	SEH Inc / Biologist
	Andy McDonald	ARDC / MIC Principal Planner
	Jamie Mehle	SEH Inc / Project Engineer
	Brian Ryks	Duluth Airport Authority
	Rondi Watson	ARDC / MIC Planning Assistant

1. Introductions and Agenda Review

Wisconsin Co-chair Nick Baker called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. All meeting attendees introduced themselves. He then asked if there were any changes to the agenda. None were put forward.

2. Committee Business

8/18/10 Meeting Summary

Chair Baker asked if there were any changes to the summary from the last meeting of the MIC Policy Board. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve.

Motion Earl Elde/Dan Olson moved to approve the 8/18/10 meeting summary as
Discussion presented. There was no discussion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.
& Vote

3. Sky Harbor Airport Environmental Assessment Process

Guest Speaker Brian Ryks, Executive Director at the Duluth Airport Authority, reported that Sky Harbor Airport on Park Point is not in compliance with federal and state regulations because a number of trees, including old-growth red and white pines, have grown tall enough to create airspace obstructions in the approach and transitional zones of the runway. The Federal Aviation Administration and MnDOT Aeronautics have directed that Sky Harbor Airport must return to regulatory compliance, but because of the many concerns expressed by community members about the importance of the old growth forest area, the FAA recommended that an Environmental Assessment be conducted. A process to develop the Scoping Document has been underway, with extensive agency and public involvement, for about two years. The final Scoping Document, which lays the groundwork for the joint federal EA/state EAW process, was released in February 2010, examining a number of alternatives and proposing a preferred alternative.

He added that about 3 weeks ago he had received an email dated June 2010, forwarded from the City Council, from the Chair of the Duluth tree commission, asking the Council to take action to supersede the EA/EAW process. The information today was also recently presented to the City Council.

He began by noting the Sky Harbor airport is a key component of airport service in this region. It has been in operation since 1939 and serves private, corporate and cargo operations. It is a significant asset to our community - unique in that it has both hard surface runway and a seaplane base and serves as an international port of entry (400 travelers cleared customs there last year). Its operation is not reliant on city tax dollars; the facility breaks even or makes money every year.

He noted that interim solutions have already been implemented to allow for the joint federal/state EA process, while ensuring safety for airport users. In February 2007, it was closed for night operations; in November 2007, GPS approach landings were disallowed; in summer 2008, the useable length of the runway was shortened and obstruction lighting installed.

Allyz Kramer and Jamie Mehle, consultants from SEH, gave an overview of the process to date, and described the methodology of the tree survey (a supplement to the EA). The goal of the tree survey was to develop a model to estimate change in tree height annually, estimating

potential growth over the next 5 decades out to 100 years. Additionally, a site index of the dominant tree species has been developed, specific to this forest stand at the airport site. They have been able to identify up to 600 potential tree impacts. In the completed Scoping Study, 14 different alternatives have been narrowed down to 3, which will be evaluated in depth in the final Environmental Assessment:

- Alternative 1: do nothing/no action
- Alternative 12: shortening and shifting the runway, reduces impacts to about 204 trees
- Alternative 13: shortening and re-aligning the runway, reduces impacts to about 50 trees

Alternative 12, shifting the runway 30 feet and reducing the runway length to 2600 feet, was selected as the Preferred Alternative because it minimizes impacts to trees in the area for the least cost.

He added that in order to reach a long term solution, there has to be compromise all around. The airport's compromise has been to reduce the length of the runway to 2600 feet and the FAA's compromise is to allow the 204 trees in the transitional zone to remain, without cutting or trimming. He added that if the DNR is serious about protecting its Scientific and Natural Area which includes the affected trees, they should contribute to the costs as well.

He noted that all of the affected trees will not have to be cut, but the tree commission is concerned that even topping them off will kill the trees – additional info is needed.

During the discussion, Ed Anderson suggested that the density of the numerous trees in that area might potentially present a fire hazard and might also have value, if logged, as timber.

Nick Baker commented that it also has a lot of value to a lot of people as a natural recreation area. He added that hopefully, potentially, the dredge materials management plan would provide the materials needed to fill in land to be able to realign the runway. Brian responded that the soils analysis showed that they can't build out very far into the bay.

He added that they are seeking a fair and reasonable compromise solution that would have minimal disruption to the forest at a fair and reasonable cost. But the fact is, some trees will have to go, while others will have to be topped off.

Ed asked if there wasn't a federal abrogation agreement that allows an easement. Brian responded that it is not clear on that point.

Broc Allen asked if the shortened runway is even shorter than the runway in Superior. Brian responded that the Sky Harbor facility is designed for a specific type of aircraft. They are not planning to try to accommodate additional larger planes. If you can keep light aircraft separate, that's a good thing.

Ed asked what the costs are to make these changes to come into compliance. Brian responded it could cost from \$3 to \$20 million, depending on the option selected. He added that those costs would be largely borne by a user-supported federal fund. He added that the DNR should also participate in the cost-sharing if the goal is to preserve it as a natural area.

Tony Cuneo asked about instrument/non-instrument approaches and their impact on design

features. Brian responded that yes, there is a difference and that's why GPS approaches are disallowed (20:1 approach ratio).

Ed asked for more details about the findings of the tree study, in relation to natural growth cycles. Allyz Kramer reiterated that the tree study was designed as a supplement to the Scoping Document, pertaining to a very limited area and therefore its scope did not address his specific questions. The potential effects to the project area and to the entire Park Point forest area is part of what has yet to be addressed in the pending EA/EAW.

4. Transportation Performance Measures for the Duluth-Superior Area

Robert Herling reported that MIC staff, in response to the increasing attention being given to performance measures in transportation planning, will be working with the TAC and MIC over the next year to develop one or two performance measures related to each of the objectives identified in the MIC's recently adopted Long Range Transportation Plan "Directions 2035."

He noted that even though it will be four years until next LRTP update is due, by starting now there is time for research and development by potentially collecting 3 years of data.

He added that at last month's meeting, it was agreed that the proposed approach would be to utilize existing data and begin by addressing the most concrete objectives first (e.g., preservation and safety), moving to the most abstract (e.g., security and economic vitality will be more difficult to measure).

Robert began by listing the objectives pertaining to Safety from the 2035 LRTP:

Obj. 1 – Reduce automobile crashes

Obj. 2 – Reduce bike and pedestrian accidents

Obj. 3 – Reduce conflicts at rail crossings

Then he presented the performance measures that emerged out of yesterday's discussion at the TAC meeting, noting **that the TAC had agreed on the following measures:**

- **Number of crashes (by severity).**
- **Number of crashes involving pedestrians.**
- **Number of crashes involving bikes.**

Robert also presented the objectives relating to Performance in the 2035 LRTP:

Obj. 1 – Ensure longevity of infrastructure

Obj. 2 – Optimize investments

Obj. 3 – Constrain network expansion

He noted that the TAC had agreed on the following measures:

- **Pavement Quality Ratings (PQI).**

- **Bridge Ratings (PONTIS).**
- **Sidewalk Quality Ratings.**

Rob closed by saying that he would be working the measures into the “SMART” format advised by the FHWA – specific, measurable, agreed-upon among partners, realistic and time-bound. A sample SMART objective might read as follows:

“By 2020, the MIC area will have 30% fewer annual number of crashes that result in incapacating or fatal injuries than in 2010.”

He added that next month he would be presenting these statements for group discussion, as well as introducing potential measures regarding Mobility.

5. Joshua Avenue Design

Andy McDonald reported that the City of Duluth was able to secure funding for the design phase of implementing Joshua Avenue (or “Duluth Heights Connector”) from Maple Grove Road to Arrowhead Road. This design is the next step in implementing the recommendation from the 2006 Duluth Heights Traffic Circulation Study for the new roadway. He added that during the MIC’s planning process for that study, there was a strong degree of neighborhood interest and a high number of participants who attended the public meetings we facilitated. It was promised at that time that there would be a public input process when the design phase came along.

He noted that MIC staff has been contacted about using our travel demand model information for a small area model being developed for the roadway design. We are glad to be at the table during modeling discussions – and would also like to participate in any subsequent public input phases, since we initially were the public face of this effort.

He added that the information developed for this design project will also be useful for work on the Central Entrance Corridor Study, as any predicted changes in traffic flow or volume would be relevant to that study area, as well.

Dave Montgomery commented that it was important to note that neighborhood residents are just one stakeholder in the development of this new roadway – there are many citywide constituents. The City would be taking a pretty aggressive stance in regard to Complete Streets principles to accommodate all users of the roadway. He added that we don’t often get an opportunity to build a road from scratch – it’s a great opportunity to do something innovative. They don’t want to see an “Arrowhead II,” i.e., a large, straight, auto-oriented, 4-lane thoroughfare.

Nick Baker cautioned that the cost of this road: could get expensive.

Ron added that this idea for a Duluth Heights connector has been considered in planning documents since 1981. There is even documentation showing there were plans to do this since 1927. An opportunity was missed to complete this missing link in the transportation network at the point in time when Miller Hill Mall, a major traffic generator, was first being proposed.

6. Central Entrance Corridor Study – Scope of Work Development

Andy McDonald reported on the MIC's upcoming Central Entrance Corridor Study and asked for input into the scope of work. He noted that the City of Duluth has identified a new vision for the Central Entrance corridor and business district, as defined in the Central Entrance-Miller Hill Small Area Plan (www.duluthmn.gov/planning/sap/millerhill.cfm), which was completed in September of 2009. The vision for the Central Entrance area was to become more of a walkable place that also has improved auto access to businesses and have Central Entrance function as a "main street" for the Duluth Heights neighborhood. The MIC was asked to build on this effort with a more detailed look at how the anticipated future land use changes would impact and complement the surrounding transportation network.

The proposed study area would be Central Entrance from Trinity to Mesaba, with a focus on the most heavily commercial district in the mid-section. Possible areas to focus on in this study include:

- Access analysis – compare # of access points per mile to developed standards
- Potential land use changes
- Missing sidewalk connections
- Crash analysis
- Small area traffic modeling
- Environmental Justice impacts
- ADT change over time

At the discussion with the TAC the previous day, it was suggested that the impact of the pending closure of Central High will be a strong factor that will basically go away when the facilities plan is fully implemented. Maybe it would help to determine numbers going up the road to the high school and then subtract those numbers. Andy noted that we will likely be running a couple of likely alternative land use scenarios.

Andy stressed that MIC staff would continue to rely on input from the TAC, to serve as the study committee throughout the development of this project. He added that there would also be opportunities for public input along the way, not necessarily in the form of an advisory committee, but public meetings will be held, as well as outreach via social media to include project blogging, online surveys.

Dave Montgomery commented that he would also like to see a business scenario modeled, in addition to a residential-only scenario. A lot of options for redeveloping the school site would be on the table.

7. 2011 MIC Work Program Development

Ron Chicka presented the projects being proposed for inclusion in the work program and budget for the coming year. He noted that much of the staff's work will need to address required tasks pertaining to the TIP and LRTP. There are a number of policy-based items that need attention, especially in light of the upcoming state and federal requirements (e.g., developing performance measures work and increasing public outreach efforts to name just

two). This means there will not be much room for discretionary of projects such as this year's Central Entrance or Kirkus Street corridor studies.

Within the long range plan element; even though we just finished updating the plan, we will need to use the next three years to build a foundation for performance measures as well as potential new TIP project selection criteria such as PQI and crash data. We also want to take some time to analyze and tweak our traffic model to improve it.

Modal components will also be taking up a good deal of our time—several recent requests have come our way for new bicycle, pedestrian and transit projects. One possible project includes an update to the Duluth sidewalk inventory: at this point, not sure if it would involve a total new condition survey or whether a smaller initiative to incorporate data.

Robert Herling added that from the LRTP standpoint, infrastructure preservation is a high priority, so keeping tabs on these structures is only to our benefit, to better target future improvement dollars.

Rondi Watson noted that a number of groups – Community Action Duluth, Safe and Walkable Hillside, and Fit City Duluth – have all approached us about sidewalk inventories – a number of groups are actively looking at this within the context of their own goals and strategic plans. James Gittemeier added that the MIC wants to be involved with these, especially as to methodology and avoiding duplication of effort.

Ron stated that he is still interested in including some type of engineering study of roundabout feasibility on the MN side of the MIC planning area. Both the city and the county are looking for candidate sites, have been acquiring rights-of-way. Cindy Petkac asked if WisDOT might have information for us, since they've been implementing across the state for many years.

He added that a recent call from the Downtown Council regarding our 2000 Downtown Duluth Parking Study means that we might be called upon to downtown parking study, specifically to update the data in our parking inventory.

He noted that interest had been expressed at last month's MIC meeting to study the traffic volumes on Midway Road—to address the concern that the current high traffic volume, due to the I-35 construction detour, foreshadows problems to come for future growth along that corridor. He noted that St. Louis County Engineer Jim Foldesi had responded that from his perspective, this type of study would not be a priority, adding that the County is already monitoring the intersection at Maple Grove and Midway Road for traffic signal warrants; and Beck's road to be reconstructed as well – all this should be addressed by the end of next year.

Ron also noted that Chuck Froseth from Duluth's City Planning department had expressed an interest in taking a look at Lincoln Park again. With the addition of the new hockey heritage center, and plans to extend the Munger Trail, we have an opportunity to get out ahead of expected growth to get people down their safely.

Ron closed by thanking committee members for their comments and input, adding that he would be presenting a complete draft of the Work Program and Budget in October.

8. Project Updates

I-35 Construction Update – 2011

Ron Chicka reported that although it is likely subject to changes, the website for the projects notes only that bridges will be replaced at the Paper Mill and Ore Docks plus continuing to repair and paint bridges at the “can of worms” interchange. Also, work will continue on pavement replacement from 46th Avenue West to the “can of worms” interchange. Lane closures and various ramp closures will coincide with this work.

For more information and ‘real time’ updates on traffic impacts, go to the project’s website at <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/duluthmegaproject/index.html>.

I-35 Congestion Mitigation Ridership Study

Robert Herling reported that the MIC and the DTA have submitted a proposed scope of work to MnDOT’s Office of Transit as part of an application for special funding dedicated to the study of transit mitigation efforts throughout the state. The scope of work is for a “phase 1” of the study, which would involve on-ride surveys of the riders currently utilizing the DTA’s increased service along Grand Ave. Survey questions will be designed to identify consumers’ motivations; how they are using the service; and what factors would influence whether they’d continue to use related services once construction on I-35 stops and the increased service is dialed back.

Transportation Action Team Update

Robert Herling reported that the “Blueprint to End Poverty’s” Transportation Action Team met in August and identified a series of next steps for its new focus on non-motorized transportation needs in Duluth’s Lincoln Park Neighborhood. These steps include researching and collating all current and recent plans and planned projects for the area; looking for previously identified needs and subsequent recommendations; identifying consistencies and inconsistencies among the plans; and highlighting potential opportunities to coordinate planned activities and projects. In turn, the team will be developing a set of media to present to Lincoln Park residents that summarize all these plans and ask for input. A survey will also be developed to get updated information about current transportation issues or barriers for the Lincoln Park community, as perceived by the low-income residents.

Connecting Duluth-Bike Route Assessment

James Gittemeier reported that the report for the Connecting Duluth project, as reported by Codie Leseman at the August meetings, is completed. In October, the MIC will present this report, including the key findings and the intended use.

9. Adjournment

With no further agenda items or announcements, Chair Baker adjourned the meeting at 8:55 pm.