

6. Participation

This section of DIRECTIONS 2035 outlines the MIC’s process for ensuring participation from area stakeholders and the general public. It describes the various actions that were undertaken to distribute information and gather input during the development of the 2035 long range transportation plan.

PAGE 6-2

ENGAGING OTHERS IN DULUTH-SUPERIOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- Working to Ensure Involvement in the Planning Process* 6-2
- Efforts to Involve Traditionally Underserved Populations* 6-3
- Updating the MIC’s Public Participation Objectives and Strategies* . 6-4

PAGE 6-4

OUTREACH & INVOLVEMENT IN DEVELOPING DIRECTIONS 2035

- Using the MIC Website as a Principal Outreach Tool* 6-6
- Establishing a Steering Committee* 6-7
- Directing Outreach to Stakeholders* 6-7
- Seeking Input from Traditionally Underserved Populations* 6-8
- Engaging Stakeholders in Updating the MIC Area’s Transportation Goals and Objectives* 6-9
- Seeking Input on the LRTP List of Transportation Improvement Projects* 6-10
- Targeted Outreach to Outside Organizations During Project Assessments* 6-10
- Outreach During the Drafting of DIRECTIONS 2035* 6-11
- Soliciting Comment Throughout the Process* 6-12

PAGE 6-12

CONCLUSION

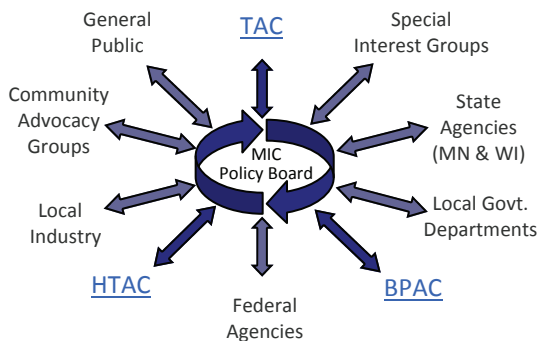
ENGAGING OTHERS IN DULUTH-SUPERIOR TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Involving others in the process of planning for their communities is important, as professional planners and engineers are not always aware of certain issues encountered by some members of the community, nor can they account for every potential effect that might result from a specific policy or action. That is why the Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC) is not only federally obligated to be transparent and inclusive in its transportation planning activities, but is committed to engaging community members in the process of planning for their community and to facilitating the active exchange of information on a continual basis.

Ensuring involvement in the planning process

Starting with its official advisory committees (BPAC, HTAC, TAC), the MIC's staff and Policy Board works with a diverse group of officials and public representatives with different interests in local transportation issues. But the MIC also reaches out to engage the involvement of various perspectives and expertise from a broad range of groups, organizations, government agencies and members of the wider public (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: MIC Stakeholder Involvement



A main outreach tool of the MIC is its website (www.dsmic.org) which is there to provide a forum for connecting with those in the community who may have an interest in local transportation planning issues but who has not yet been identified by the MIC. The MIC uses its website to provide people easy access to all its planning documents, studies and other resources, as well as to information about current and ongoing MIC activities and related information. The website also provides contact information and opportunities for users to request information and provide comments.



Audience at a MIC public outreach meeting

The MIC's outreach responsibility:

"The MPO is responsible for actively involving all affected parties in an open, cooperative, and collaborative process that provides meaningful opportunities to influence transportation decisions."

Source: *The Transportation Planning Process: Key Issues - USDOT (2009)*

All of the MIC’s planning activities embody the [3-C planning process](#) (comprehensive, continuing, and cooperative) and follow the general steps outlined in its [Public Involvement Plan \(PIP\)](#). By disseminating information and soliciting comments regarding ideas, issues, scope, and alternatives early and often in the planning process, the MIC aims to ensure that all stakeholders, including the general public are given ample opportunity to have a real influence throughout the planning and decision-making processes and thus help to shape the local policies, programs and projects of their own communities.

Although the scope and necessary activities will vary from one planning effort to the next, the MIC starts off every new initiative by establishing a stakeholder involvement strategy that is tailored specific to that effort and then proceeds with a process similar to the one outlined in figure 6.2, and generally includes two primary outreach phases in which the MIC actively solicits input from stakeholders: after an initial information gathering and analysis phase, and then again as it is drafting specific actions or policies that it will recommend to area jurisdictions or organizations.

Efforts to engage Traditionally Underserved populations

Nationwide, low-income individuals and groups of racial and ethnic minority have historically been underserved in urban planning processes, and subsequent legislation and policy, such as the Executive Order on [Environmental Justice](#), have been developed to ensure that these groups receive more consideration and have more input in planning decisions that affect their communities.

It is estimated that approximately 6% of the MIC area’s population is of a racial or ethnic minority, and that 20,000 individuals (13%) of the population are living in poverty. In addition 5% of the population are estimated to speak a language other than English as their primary language, and potentially could have limited proficiency in reading or understanding public information. Together, these groups represent the MIC area’s *traditionally underserved* population (Figure 6.3 on the following page).

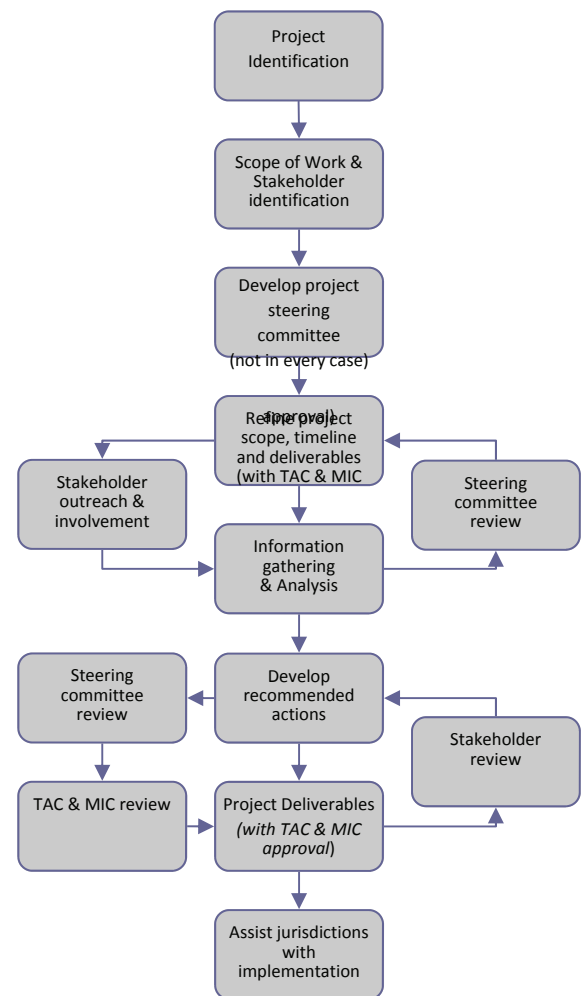
The MIC works regularly with a number of local agencies and organizations such as Community Action and United Way on transportation issues as they relate to low-income and minority groups in the MIC area. The MIC works to consider the impacts that planning decisions may have on access and mobility for individuals of these groups, which includes consideration of public transit and non-motorized modes of transportation.

In an effort to ensure the consideration and participation of these groups, the MIC will continue to do the following::

The MIC’s general involvement efforts:

- Works with a diverse policy board & advisory committees.
- Follows a public involvement plan (PIP).
- Maintains a website for disseminating information and receiving comments.
- Regularly reviews and updates specific objectives and strategies for public participation.

Figure 6.2: The MIC’s General Planning Process (individual project level)



- Utilize geographic information systems (GIS) applications to collect and analyze current demographic data in relation to local transportation issues or proposed transportation improvements.
- Work closely with local organizations that advocate for low-income, racial minority and non-English speaking members of the community to remain aware of specific transportation issues being encountered by these populations and ensure early and continuing engagement with members of these communities.
- Ensure EJ considerations are included in the [TIP](#) criteria so that potential impacts of planned projects are identified and addressed early in the planning and programming process.
- Perform community impact assessments on all transportation improvement projects that are programmed to receive federal funding.
- Explore ways the MIC website can be improved to at least notify the MIC if and when someone with limited English proficiency is requesting assistance with accessing information.

Updating the MIC’s Public Involvement objectives & strategies

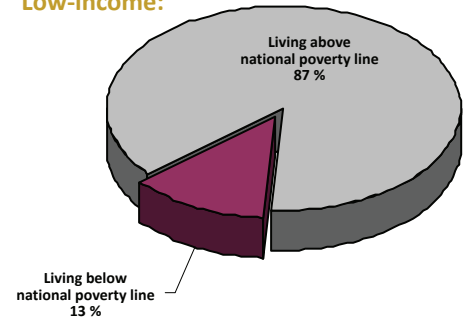
Because the participation of stakeholders is so important to the planning process, the MIC includes “Public Involvement” as one of its nine planning goals ([Chapter 1](#)) under which it establishes a series of objectives. These objectives are reviewed every four years as part of the MIC’s process of regularly updating the Duluth-Superior long range transportation plan (LRTP) and the objectives are modified or added to if determined necessary.

During the development of *Directions 2035*, the MIC moved to strengthen its public participation objectives by calling out specific strategies that it will employ to help it accomplish them. Members of the public were invited to help update these goals and objectives (as described in more detail on pages 6-9 and 6.10).

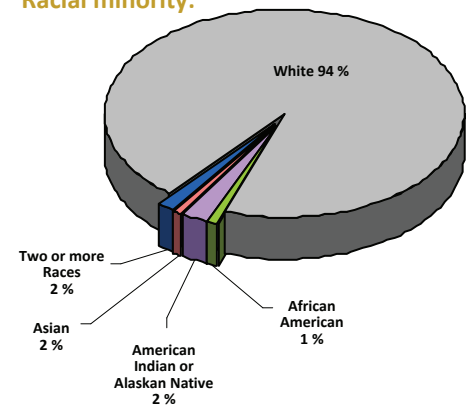
The MIC’s updated public involvement objectives are listed on the following page. Although they were revised as part of the process of updating LRTP, which involved its own specific public outreach strategy, to the best of its ability, the MIC moved to incorporate the updated objectives and strategies back into the process as it was ongoing.

Figure 6.3: “Traditionally Underserved” Populations in Duluth-Superior

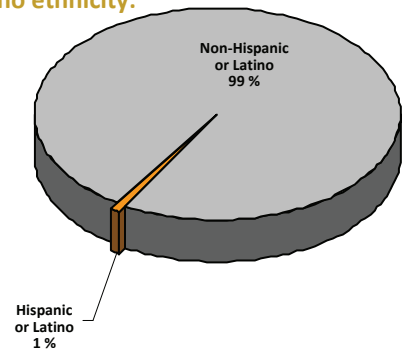
Low-income:



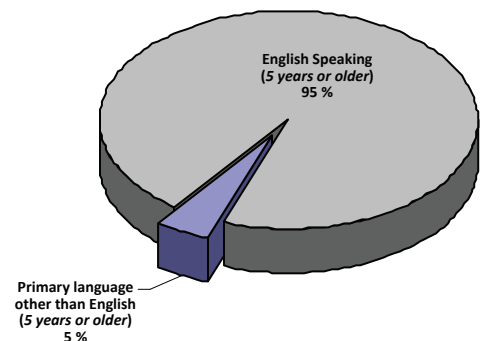
Racial minority:



Latino ethnicity:



Non-English speaking:



MIC's Goal 9: Public Participation

Maintain a planning process that is committed to coordination and public involvement, and is responsive to the needs and interests of all residents, stakeholder groups and public agencies.

Objective 1: Successful coordination

Ensure successful coordination among jurisdictions and other local entities.

Strategies to accomplish objective 1

- Identify all stakeholder groups relevant to any MIC study or plan.
- Form diverse steering committees to provide additional expertise for planning activities.
- Stay abreast of jurisdictional plans and planning activities; communicate to other jurisdictions.

Objective 2: Ensure environmental justice

Ensure that MIC activities remain consistent with federal Environmental Justice requirements.

Strategies to accomplish objective 2

- Identify areas of minority and low-income populations in the MIC area.
- Proactively engage all stakeholder groups to identify potential issues early in planning activities.
- Provide outreach to communities potentially affected by planning activities to insure a significant and timely exchange of information.

Objective 3: Provide opportunities for involvement

Provide ample opportunities for the public to access information, become involved, and provide input on transportation decisions.

Strategies to accomplish objective 3

- Seek public involvement at the start of all planning projects and keep all participants regularly informed throughout, offering them additional ways to continue their involvement.
- Continue to follow procedures established in the MIC Public Participation Plan.
- Notify local media outlets early on in planning activities and follow up with timely press releases.
- Use the MIC website to advertise all ways people can get involved.

Objective 4: Increase public interest

Increase public interest in the MIC's activities and improve the public's understanding of the MIC and how it makes transportation decisions.

Strategies to accomplish objective 4

- Send out press releases to local media outlets to inform them of MIC activities.
- Keep the MIC website current with updated information relevant to public concerns and interests.
- Offer an online "news alert" mailing list for which people can sign-up or opt-out of.
- Showcase past MIC projects that have successfully incorporated extensive public involvement.

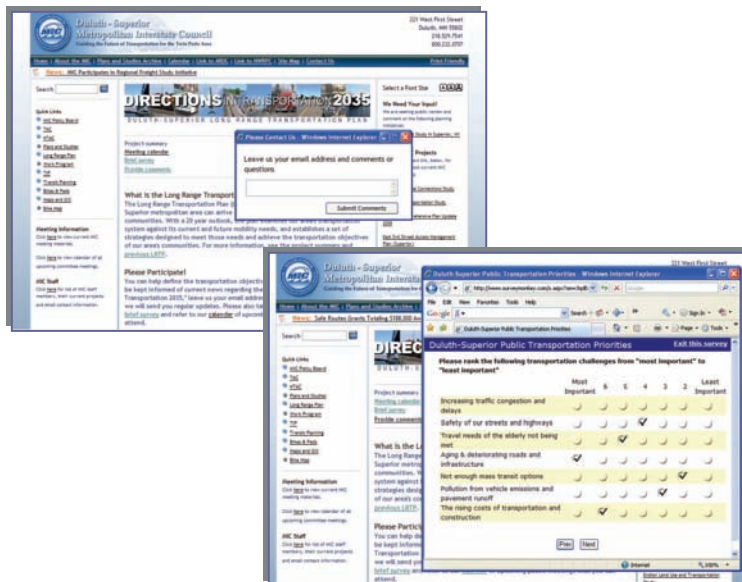
OUTREACH & INVOLVEMENT DURING DEVELOPMENT OF *DIRECTIONS 2035*

The MIC is obligated to meet a number of federal requirements regarding stakeholder outreach, and these are summarized at right. The MIC considered each of requirements as an initial public participation strategy ([Appendix D](#)) was devised for the development of *Directions 2035*. This strategy was used as the MIC’s “road map” for getting good stakeholder participation while updating the Duluth-Superior L RTP. It was designed using protocol established in the MIC’s [PIP](#), and resulted in the process illustrated in Figure 6.5 on the following page, which began with the creation of an L RTP-specific webpage.

Using MIC website as a principal outreach tool

A webpage specific to the L RTP update was created as one of the MIC’s initial steps in ensuring stakeholder involvement in updating the Duluth-Superior L RTP (Figure 6.4). This webpage was used throughout the process to post updated information about the project’s development. It included a calendar of upcoming meetings which people could attend to get additional information and provide direct input. The website also included a link to a brief survey regarding peoples’ opinions about local transportation priorities (survey results, [Appendix D](#)), as well as an active comment box for people to post comments (comments received, [Appendix D](#)), submit questions, and/or leave their email address to be added to the MIC’s *Directions 2035* mailing list to receive regular notifications about the L RTP update process.

Figure 6.4: L RTP Webpage - Comment Box & Public Survey



Specific Federal Outreach Requirements:

- Provide reasonable public access to information.^{1,2,3}
- Incorporate the use of electronic methods and visualization techniques.^{1,2,3}
- Provide early & continuous opportunities for involvement.^{1,2,3}
- Offer timely information to citizens, affected agencies, private entities and other interested parties.^{1,2,3}
- Give adequate notice of public involvement activities and ample time for public review and comment at key decision points.^{1,2,3}
- Hold public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations.^{1,2,3}
- Ensure the inclusion of non-motorized users, the disabled, the elderly, minority, low-income and other traditionally “underserved populations” .^{1,2,5,6,7,8}
- Include the consideration of the potential impacts of decisions on social and natural resources and reach out to relevant agencies and stakeholders.^{1,2,3,4}
- Develop and regularly review a public participation plan.^{1,2,3}

Sources of regulations:

1. *Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)*; Sections 1107 and 6001.
2. *23 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)*; Parts 450.210 and 450.316.
3. *23 United States Codes (USC) 128 and 135*
4. *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*
5. *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act*
6. *28 CFR 36 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*
7. *Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice*
8. *Executive Order 13166 on Limited English Proficiency*

Assessment of website’s effectiveness:

Greatly increased the MIC’s outreach abilities, yet only 71 people completed the survey, only three comments were received from the comment box, and only two visitors asked to be added to the LRTP mailing list.

Things that could be improved:

- Add a counter to record the number of visits the website receives.
- Explore ways of better advertising the webpage and its features.

Establishing a DIRECTIONS 2035 steering committee

The MIC used its principal advisory board, the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) and its policy board as a combined steering committee (makeup of Steering Committee, [Appendix D](#)) for updating the Duluth-Superior LRTP. This is because the both bodies are comprised of Duluth-Superior public officials and professionals who represent the area’s various jurisdictions and interests. These bodies have acted as the LRTP steering committee in the past two updates and are familiar with the various requirements of the document. The varied perspectives of these two bodies were relied upon right away to help to further identify an initial list of key stakeholders to contact directly as the updating process began.

The regularly scheduled meetings of the TAC and MIC Policy Board also allowed members from other stakeholder groups and the general public at large two opportunities every month (one midday and one in the evening) to have direct access and provide immediate input about the LRTP update process.

Assessment of steering committee effectiveness:

The TAC & MIC policy boards represent a diverse group of backgrounds and perspectives; staff deemed the regular meeting times, and the bodies’ prior familiarity with the LRTP process was very beneficial.

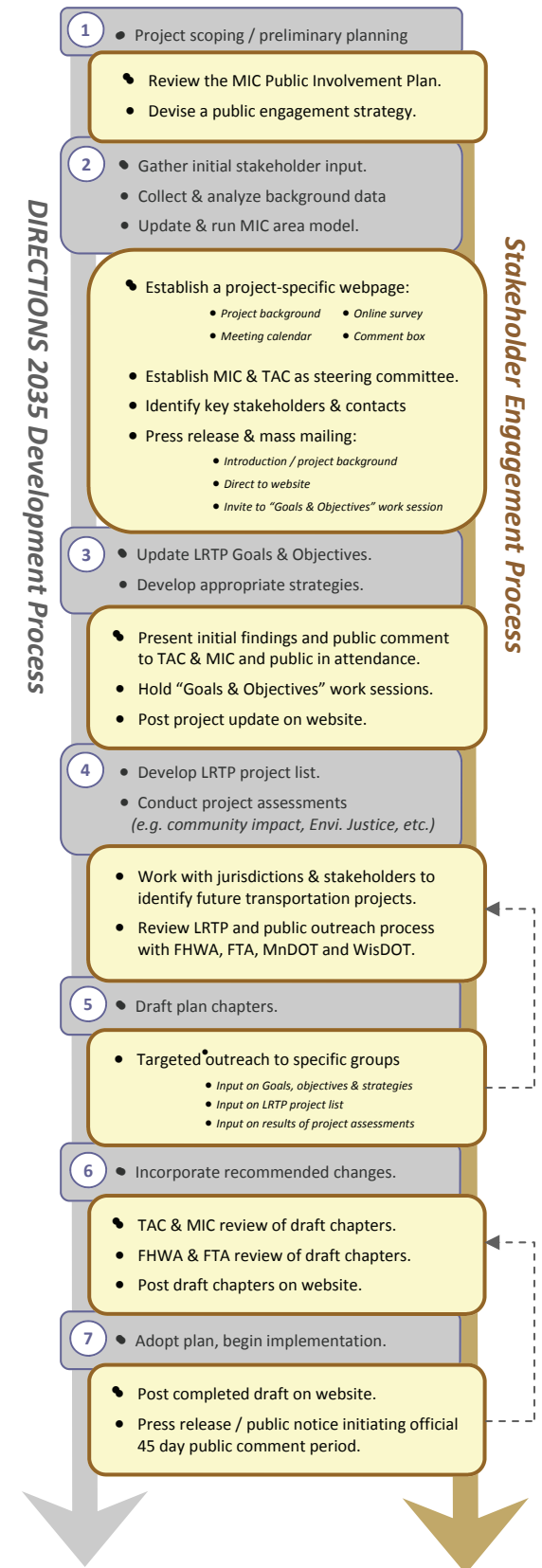
Things that could be improved:

- Have a stronger representation of “traditionally underserved” populations (i.e. low income and minority groups).

Directing outreach to stakeholder groups

A stakeholder mailing list ([Appendix D](#)) was put together that included individuals from various agencies and interest groups that the MIC has either communicated with during past planning activities, has been engaging in current and ongoing efforts, or which

Figure 6.5: LRTP Development and Stakeholder Engagement Process



the LRTP steering committee determined should be included. Stakeholders on the mailing list were sent an initial notice informing them of the MIC's LRTP update process and encouraging them to do the following:

- Visit the DIRECTIONS 2035 webpage for additional information and opportunities to comment.
- Participate in the upcoming "Goals & Objectives" work session.
- Attend each month's meetings of the TAC and MIC to get regular project updates and provide direct input into the process.
- Forward the email or notice on to others who they think should be notified.

In addition to those whom the MIC directly contacted, anyone who visited the DIRECTIONS 2035 website were invited to submit their email address or other contact information if they were interested in receiving future notices and updates about the LRTP. In this way, the MIC hoped to be continually expanding the mailing list from those who were not originally identified in the initial mailing list.

Effectiveness of Stakeholder Identification:

Outreach was comprehensive regarding public agencies, private business, special interests, and community advocacy groups, but the stakeholder mailing list contains significantly more contacts on the MN side than the WI side.

Things that could be improved:

- *Better assess the balance of MN and WI contacts earlier in the process.*
- *Actively solicit additional WI contacts if representation among the different stakeholder categories appears disproportionate between the two states.*

Seeking Input from Traditionally Underserved Populations

Community advocacy groups which the MIC works with regularly regarding local transportation issues were identified as the "primary contacts" to traditionally underserved populations during its initial outreach efforts. Various members of these organizations were included on the LRTP stakeholder mailing list and notified directly about the LRTP update and opportunities for involvement.

Staff from the MIC also introduced the *Directions 2035* process at a number of meetings with local community advocacy groups and informed those attending of opportunities to become involved in the process. Likewise, these groups also presented information to the TAC or MIC Policy Board during development of the plan. These

Groups the MIC contacted about the LRTP update process:

LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

Airport, port and transit authorities
Area colleges and universities
Chambers of commerce
Community advocacy groups
Commuter groups
Counties, cities and townships representatives
Economic development organizations
Engineering and architecture firms
Environmental groups
Industry groups
Local business groups
Local planning departments
Local media
Neighborhood groups
Police departments
Public health agencies
School districts
Social services
Trails & recreation organizations
Utility and sanitary service providers

REGIONAL & STATE STAKEHOLDERS

Intercity transit services
Regional economic development organizations
Regional planning organizations
MnDOT and WisDOT
Tribal communities
State DNRs and MN Pollution Control Agency.
Regional rail operators

NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

Army Corps. Of Engineers
Environmental Protection Agency
Federal Highway Administration
Federal Transit Administration
National industry groups
US Coast Guard
US Fish & Wildlife Service

occurrences are documented in the MIC's LRTP outreach log found in [Appendix D](#) of this plan.

During the development of *Directions 2035* the MIC also considered outreach to non-English speaking individuals, but data regarding the number and specific language requirements of such individuals in the Duluth-Superior area is scant, and the MIC was unable to determine a cost-effective approach of targeting communication to non-English speaking peoples.

As development of the plan progressed and future transportation projects were identified, staff also conducted an environmental justice (EJ) assessment of those projects (see [Chapter 5](#)) and undertook a targeted outreach effort to notify representatives of these groups of the potential impacts (or opportunities) that specific projects may have on members of traditionally underserved populations.

Effectiveness of outreach to traditionally underserved communities:

No comments were received by individuals identifying themselves as low-income or of a racial minority. Efforts by the MIC staff to speak at scheduled events of traditionally underserved individuals were either not responded to, or faced scheduling conflicts.

Things that could be improved:

- *Work to identify, early on, opportunities throughout the year to present directly to audiences of traditionally underserved peoples.*
- *Work with counties and local community groups to better identify non-English speaking needs within the Duluth-Superior metro area.*

Engaging Stakeholders in Updating the MIC's Goals & Objectives

Data collection occurred early on in the update process to determine socioeconomic trends occurring throughout the MIC area, and this information, in addition to the results of the online survey and comments received (as of March 2008) was used as the foundational information for two "working sessions" that the MIC staff conducted to update its goals, objectives, and strategies ([Chapter 1](#)).

These work sessions were hosted during the March and February TAC and MIC meetings of 2008, of which stakeholders were notified of via the MIC website and notification in the Duluth News Tribune and Superior Telegraph ([Appendix D](#)), were encouraged to attend, and invited to participate. Participants at the sessions were asked to

rank the priority of various objectives, and to assist in identifying strategies the MIC could employ to address them. The results from these work sessions are summarized in Figure 6.6, and the more detailed results (as well as the work session materials used) are included in [Appendix D](#).

Effectiveness of engaging others in updating the goals, objectives and strategies:

Two people representing the community of Proctor, MN who were not members of either the TAC or MIC boards participated in the March work session; one person representing Community Action Duluth participated in the February work session.

Things that could be improved:

- Include handing out “Goals & Objectives” worksheets after L RTP presentations at other outreach meetings; allow people to respond to them at their leisure.

Seeking Input on the L RTP’s List of Identified Improvement Projects

Once area trends were determined and the goals, objectives and strategies were updated, the MIC met with members of the various jurisdictions to identify future transportation improvement projects to be identified in the *Directions 2035*.

The list of projects that resulted was presented at the July 2009 MIC and TAC meetings, which were open for public comment. Notices were sent out to stakeholders that the list could be reviewed and commented on via the *Directions 2035* webpage.

The project list was also presented at the July DTA Operations meeting and again in September 2009 to the Harbor Technical Advisory Committee (HTAC), as well to the Superior City Council’s Meeting of the Whole. Comments on projects were also sought from targeted groups identified in the discussion below.

Effectiveness of stakeholder notification of projects:

No comments were received after the initial release of the project list.

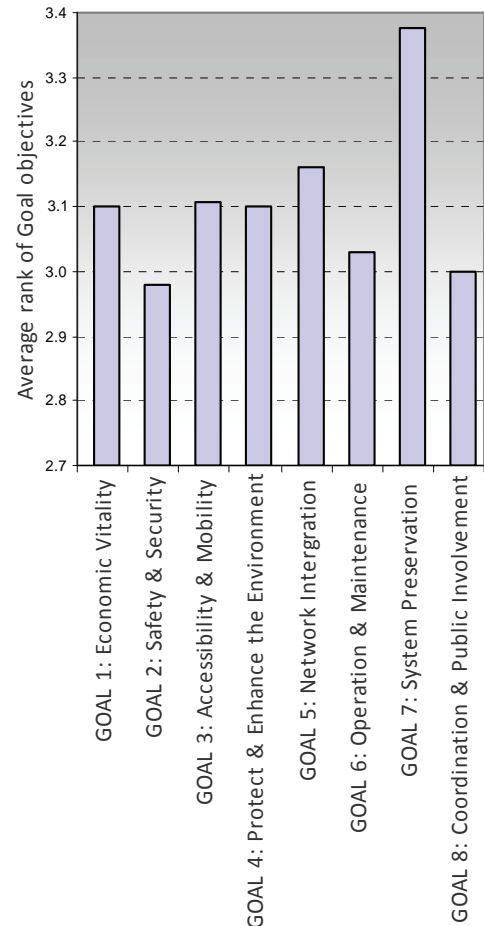
Things that could be improved:

- Make use of local newspaper’s and blog site’s online forums to post notices about opportunity to review the draft project list.

Targeted Outreach to Outside Organizations During Project Assessments

After the list of transportation projects was compiled, staff at the MIC performed a series assessments to determine which projects, if

Figure 6.6: Prioritization of Goals from Work Sessions



any, posed potentially negative impacts to the area’s environmental, cultural, or financial resources in the area, or whether they posed disproportionately negative impacts for low-income or minority populations. This process is discussed in further detail in [Chapter 5](#).

Once projects with potential impacts were identified, MIC staff notified relevant agencies (see list at right) by first identifying appropriate contacts within those agencies, then sending them an email describing the specific projects and maps showing the location and extent of those projects. The MIC requested that comments be returned by April 20, 2010.

The MIC received only one response from this effort: the MPCA reported back that no issues were determined with the list of projects, other than the understanding that all projects resulting in added system capacity undergo the required Air Quality Conformity assessment at the time these projects are programmed in the Duluth-Superior TIP.

Effectiveness of engaging other agencies in project assessments:

Since the vast majority of projects in Directions 2035 are not expansion related projects, MIC staff did not expect many concerns to be raised. Yet, the fact that only one agency returned comment left staff wondering if contacts remained unclear about how to utilize this information.

Things that could be improved:

- *Identify and notify appropriate contacts earlier on; host an informational meeting explaining the LRTP process, its relevance to their organizations, and specific actions the MIC would like them to take.*
- *Request a response by a specified date, but follow up with an inquiry if no comment is returned.*

Outreach During Drafting of the Plan Document

As draft chapters of the plan were completed, they were released to the steering committee members for advance review. Changes that were recommended were incorporated, and then a week and a half before the plan was to be released for official public review, emails were sent out to mailing list recipients and other targeted contacts, inviting them to also review the materials in advance.

Legal notices were submitted to the local papers on May 27th, to notify readers of a month-long official comment period extending

Project assessments performed

As required by FHWA, projects submitted for inclusion in the Duluth-Superior LRTP underwent assessment to determine their potential impact on/ regarding following items:

- Air Quality Conformity
- Historic Preservation Sites
- Environmental Justice analysis
- Environmentally Sensitive areas
- Financial capability of jurisdictions

Groups contacted about the project assessments

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)
- Minnesota DNR & Wisconsin DNR
- Duluth & Superior Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Western Lakes Superior Sanitary District (WLSSD)
- Minnesota & Wisconsin Historical Societies
- Duluth Heritage Preservation Commission
- Duluth Preservation Alliance
- Minnesota Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Bois Fort Band of Chippewa, and Grand Portage Band of Chippewa
- Wisconsin St. Croix Band of Chippewa, La Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwa, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.
- Community Action Duluth

from June 1st to June 30th. This was followed up with requests to the jurisdictions to post a notice of the official public review period on their websites, along with a link to the draft plan. Press releases were sent to local newspapers and television stations to further inform the public of the official review period and of the specific dates and times of two upcoming public meetings in which the public would have an opportunity to provide input and ask questions in person. Staff's contact information was also included in the press releases, and the public was invited to direct their comments and questions to the MIC staff at any time during the official review period.

As comments were received they were reported to various steering committee members, but were then summarized, compiled and distributed to all TAC and MIC members after the close of the official review period (June 30th) and prior to the Policy Board's scheduled action to vote on adoption of the plan (July 21st).

Soliciting Comment Throughout the Process

Stakeholder input was sought throughout the development of *Directions 2035*. In general, much of the input came through various members of the LRTP steering committee, and were in response to the arrangement or presentation of drafted plan materials. A significant number of comments were received during the "Goals & Objectives" workshops, and these can be viewed in [Appendix D](#).

The MIC also solicited comments through the following methods:

- Online comment box.
- Inviting stakeholder's on the LRTP mailing list to email or call the MIC with comments.
- Encouraging comments or questions during outreach meetings; highlighting contact information for others to record and respond to later.

All comments received through these methods (as well as the MIC answers or actions in response to them) can also be found in [Appendix D](#).

CONCLUSION

The MIC is committed to carrying out its duties to ensure an open and transparent planning process, and to engage the participation of a variety of stakeholder groups and the public at large. It carried this commitment forward in the development of its updated LRTP, which began with a stakeholder involvement strategy. This strategy lead

the MIC to carry out a number of efforts, including the development of a project website with interactive features; all of which were aimed at improving the amount of input and involvement received.

The MIC has attempted to assess the effectiveness of its LRTP involvement efforts, and ways that these efforts might be improved upon. The MIC will use this information in subsequent updates of the Duluth-Superior LRTP and continue to find ways of effectively delivering information and encouraging participation.