



Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council
Transportation Advisory Committee
MEETING SUMMARY
Tuesday, September 14, 2010, 1:30 PM

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| Meeting Location | WITC Conference Center, Superior, WI | |
| Meeting Chair | Jim Foldesi | |
| Note Taker(s) | Rondi Watson | |
| Members Present | Jim Foldesi | St. Louis County Engineering |
| | Chuck Froseth | City of Duluth Community Development Dept |
| | Denny Johnson | Mn/DOT District 1 |
| | Cindy Petkac | City of Duluth Planning Dept |
| | Brian Ryks | Duluth Airport Authority |
| | David Salo | City of Hermantown |
| | Cindy Voigt | City of Duluth Engineering |
| | Dena Young | WisDOT NW Region |
| Members Absent | Jeff Goetzman | City of Superior |
| | Paul Halverson | Douglas County |
| | Bryn Jacobson | Bike/Pedestrian Rep |
| | Dennis Jensen | Duluth Transit Authority |
| | Walter Leu | Mn/DOT District 1 |
| | Cari Pedersen | City of Duluth Engineering |
| | Heather Rand | Mn DEED |
| | Jim Rohweder | City of Proctor |
| | Jason Serck | City of Superior |
| | Jim Sharrow | Duluth Seaway Port Authority |
| Others Present | James Gittemeier | ARDC / MIC Planner |
| | Robert Herling | ARDC / MIC Planner |
| | Alison Johnson | Duluth Airport Authority |
| | Allyz Kramer | SEH Inc |
| | Andy McDonald | ARDC / MIC Principal Planner |
| | Jamie Mehle | SEH Inc |
| | Kody Thurnau | ARDC / MIC GIS Specialist |
| | Rondi Watson | ARDC / MIC Planning Assistant |

1. Introductions and Agenda Review

TAC Chair Jim Foldesi called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. All meeting attendees introduced themselves. He asked if there were any proposed changes to the agenda. None were requested.

2. Committee Business

Meeting Summary of August 17, 2010

Chair Foldesi asked for any changes or corrections to the previous month's meeting summary. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve.

Motion Dave Salo/Brian Ryks moved to approve the 8/17/10 meeting summary as
Discussion presented. There was no discussion and the motion was approved unanimously.
and Vote

3. Sky Harbor Airport

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.

Cindy Petkac asked if data exists about topping trees and survival rates. Answer: they are working with arborists to determine the amount of crown of the old growth trees that could be reduced without harming the trees.

Denny Johnson asked if funding will become available to pay for these improvements. Brian replied that their chances of getting funding are pretty good, considering the amount of study funding (about \$800,000 to date) that has been spent.

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).

Jim Foldesi commented that this is a wise approach, to do the legwork up front, before the FHWA makes something a requirement.

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 proposed performance measures – that have sources of data – for each:

- Number of vehicle crashes
- Number of crashes resulting in injury
- Number of crashes involving bikes or pedestrians

Discussion: Jim Foldesi commented that severity (e.g., incapacitating or fatal) is the measure typically used. Also crashes involving bikes and those involving pedestrians should be separated.

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 then proposed a number of performance measures for discussion:

- Pavement Quality Ratings (PQR)
- Bridge Structure Ratings
- Sidewalk Quality Ratings
- Average Age of Transit Fleet
- % of investment spent on preservation

Discussion: Dave Salo commented that Pavement Quality measure is a good one – but what needs to be determined is finding a common definition. Hermantown does not use PQI – ratings depend on the funding source and how they define it. For state aid roads they use “adequate” or “inadequate.” Jim Foldesi noted that the County’s ratings are consistent with MnDOT; in fact, they hire MnDOT to do the ratings. Denny Johnson stated that MnDOT has a very sophisticated system in place to measure Pavement Quality Index (PQI).

Jim noted that the measure of bridge structure ratings is a relatively easy one, because the same measure (PONTIS rating) is used by all jurisdictions.

Cindy Voigt commented that sidewalks will soon need to be ADA-compliant, and that an important element of a rating system would be to determine who owns the ped ramps and whether they meet current standards.

There was general consensus that they did not like “percent of investment” measure – an artificial percentage, could be skewed by one large project.

Rob closed by thanking committee members for their input, and added 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.”

Jim Foldesi commented that each measure will need to have different measurements and reporting timeframes. We will also need to guess at, or otherwise figure out, what FHWA will require of us.

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.

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

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- Crash analysis
- Small area traffic modeling
- Environmental Justice impacts
- ADT change over time

As part of the discussion, Jim Foldesi suggested that an inventory of traffic controls be included in the data collection. He also noted that if we're doing traffic counts this year, 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. He also asked if future land uses for the Central High site would be considered (Andy – yes – we will likely have to run a couple of likely scenarios).

Denny Johnson commented on the modeling results in regard to Joshua Avenue – important to do scenarios with and without that corridor in place, commented intersections are pretty congested at times of peak flows; but some of the traffic now using Arlington will likely use Joshua (if built). Suggested that they will need to start with a larger area for modeling, to look at the Joshua-Arlington-Rice Lake-Trinity connection – start there, then will narrow it down.

Andy responded that we will want to look at ADT change over time; we have actually reached some of the 2025 projected numbers at this point, but those are likely impacted by construction detours and diversions. He added that in comparing the number of access points, back in 2002 they were already well over the number that MnDOT likes to see. Will be looking to come up with recommendations about reducing the total number, such as identifying multiple businesses that could share entrances.

Cindy Voigt asked if a consultant been selected for the modeling component? Andy: Yes, SEH and LHB.

Denny Johnson asked which, if any, alternatives were “out” based on the SAMP? Andy: One-way pairs option is out, but medians to control access are part of the vision. He added that one big result of SAMP process; Duluth Heights residents see this as their neighborhood “main street” – and are looking for design changes and amenities to create a new look and feel for the corridor.

Denny reminded all that MnDOT has no plans for improvements – he emphasized the greater likelihood of short-term improvements being implemented; suggested that modeling for the long term may not accomplish that goal.

Cindy Petkac commented that it would nevertheless be good to have a plan in place if and when funding becomes available. Ron Chicka commented that there is a significant push coming up for sustainability/livability initiatives within the upcoming federal transportation legislation.

Andy stressed that MIC staff would like to engage the TAC on an ongoing basis to serve as the basic 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.

Chuck Froseth commented that the MIC's survey of the TAC a year or so ago had expressed an interest in moving the TAC from a passive group to an active role. This project presents an opportunity to do just that, and hopes to see a strong degree of involvement by TAC members over the course of the study.

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 concerning the TIP and LRTP as well as our usual modal components (transit, bike/ped, freight and harbor). 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.

James Gittemeier 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. The MIC wants to be involved with these, especially as to methodology and avoiding duplication of effort.

Cindy Voigt cautioned that certain citizen-proposed measures of sidewalk quality, such: vegetation overgrowth and snow removal issues, could be problematic in that these measures do not make them candidates for capital improvement funding; furthermore, these concerns can be addressed by reporting them to the city. From the City Engineering standpoint, they are most interested more in gaps and connectivity issues. She added that they also have separate ADA programs to address curb cuts, etc.

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.

Ron 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. Some members are concerned that the high traffic volumes due to the I-35 construction detour are a preview of problems for future growth along that corridor. Jim Foldesi responded that from his perspective, this type of study would not be a priority, adding that St. Louis County is already monitoring the intersection at Maple Grove and Midway Road for traffic signal warrants; Grand Avenue and Commonwealth to be reconstructed; and Beck's road to be reconstructed as well – all this should be addressed by the county by the end of next year.

Chuck Froseth stated that the City Planning department is interested 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. Robert Herling asked if the city was thinking about a SAMP for Lincoln park (Cindy Petkac – maybe, but it's out several years from now).

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

8. Roundtable Discussion of Local Projects

James noted that big news was that 12th and 14th Avenues in Duluth had been converted (reverted, actually) from one-way to two-way as of today, consistent with recommendations in several MIC plans over the years.

9. 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.

10. Adjournment

With no further agenda items or announcements, Chair Foldesi adjourned the meeting at 2:11 pm.