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Executive summary

As part of its 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) sought to better understand how transportation affects and is affected by equity. MnDOT developed a pilot project to conduct community conversations with various groups, agencies, and organizations (hereforward “organizations”) working with and representing underserved communities in Minnesota.

Beginning in 2017, MnDOT launched district-specific efforts to engage communities through conversations to inform equitable transportation planning and practice. MnDOT coordinated in-person conversations between staff and officials with community organizations, first in District 2 in 2017 and then in District 8 in 2018. These community conversations help MnDOT develop a deeper understanding of the people who live in the different districts, determine which key communities MnDOT needs to learn more about, and identify organizations that work with and represent those key communities. This initiative to advance equity continues with conversations in 2019 in Districts 1, 4, and 6.

The conversations in District 8—and the other districts—included a wide range of topics selected to enhance MnDOT’s understanding of the role transportation plays in people’s lives and the opportunities or consequences people face based on available transportation modes. In addition to its continued work internally and with districts to implement changes based on the findings, MnDOT intends to share its District 8 findings with partners from this initiative to help inform their work.

Methods for the study

For the District 8 community conversations, MnDOT engaged in interviews with representatives from 30 organizations with strong ties to key communities identified in a regional demographic analysis. MnDOT engaged with the following types of communities:

- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes
- Facing unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches

Teams of two interviewers visited the 30 organizations in person and asked questions using a semi-structured interview guide, where interviewers followed a common conversational structure but could pursue other relevant topics as they arose.

Themes and findings

Several themes emerged from the community conversations in District 8, including that transportation does not exist in a vacuum—it affects community life and at the same time is affected by communities in District 8 and their life situations. Further, while transportation provides access to jobs, school, medical appointments, social services, shopping, and social events, inadequate transportation can simultaneously be a roadblock to access and opportunity.
These themes are summarized below and discussed further in later sections of this report.

- **Transportation in District 8** is deeply connected with other aspects of life in the region. Several characteristics of the region shape District 8’s transportation needs and systems. **Population density**: District 8 has relatively low population density, with 10 percent of the state’s land area and only 5 percent of its population. This level of density fundamentally shapes transportation needs and the options available. Participants cited privately owned vehicles as the most used and preferred mode of transportation. Existing public transit is limited.

- **Housing affordability**: Housing that is affordable for residents with a low income is often found in more-remote areas of District 8, where residents without cars cannot easily get to work sites, schools, stores, social services, and health care facilities. In central locations, housing is close to priority destinations and perhaps in areas served by transit, but residents with a low income are often priced out of these neighborhoods.

- **Aging population**: Mirroring statewide trends, one-fifth of District 8’s population is now over age 65. As driving habits change with age, people face more difficulties in getting to medical appointments and running errands and find themselves more dependent on others to complete these tasks. Health care access stands out as an important challenge in particular for older adults.

- **Accessibility**: More than 1 in 10 people in the district have one or more disabilities, which can affect transportation needs and available modes. These Minnesotans may have difficulties operating standard vehicles, getting to transit stops, and using sidewalks and paths not adequately designed or maintained for easy access by those with physical limitations.

- **Poverty**: District 8 residents with low incomes may find the costs of owning and maintaining a vehicle beyond their reach, but they face very limited transportation options and restricted access to destinations if they do not have private vehicles.

- **Increasing diversity**: The district is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse, with people of color and American Indians increasing as a share of the population to more than 10 percent in recent years. District 8 has a growing immigrant population, including residents from Latin America, Somalia and other African countries, and Southeast Asia. Newcomers to the area can experience language and other barriers that limit their access to transit and ability to obtain a driver’s license or own a car. These barriers may stem from wary attitudes toward government that constrain effective engagement and representation, and, for immigrants in particular, challenges with the English language and a lack of familiarity with local transportation systems and modes.
Accessible transportation can be an economic catalyst for both individual residents of District 8 and local institutions. Conversely, the absence of affordable or accessible transportation options can constrain both individual opportunity and regional growth.

- **Individual access:** Transportation can define the health systems, community institutions, and economic opportunities residents can access. In this way, transportation enables—or hinders—individual mobility as residents consider which jobs, services, and institutions they will be able to reach based on their transportation options.

- **Institutional reach:** In parallel, transportation influences the ability of local health providers, community institutions, and companies to reach potential patients, constituents, and employees. As a result, transportation expands—or limits—the reach of institutions and the populations they can serve, and affects both individual institutions and the region’s broader health system, economy, and civic life.

The District 8 community conversations also identified several specific ways in which government and personal decisions about transportation can create roadblocks to equity and access for individuals and communities in District 8.

- **Transit mismatches:** Various transit agencies offer bus transportation, dial-a-ride service, and pickups along set routes. However, participants often commented on limitations of public transit including inadequate hours of operation, infrequent service, long wait and travel times, and scheduled routes that miss some key destinations.

- **Perceptions of bicycling and walking:** Walking and bicycling for transportation is limited due to real and perceived barriers including winter weather and lack of maintenance, use of bike and trail infrastructure for recreational purposes only, location of infrastructure that is available, and stigma that walking and bicycling for transportation is a “last resort” for those who cannot drive.

- **Land use planning:** The places people need to go most for employment, daily errands, and community and cultural activities are not always centrally located or near existing transit routes.
Recommendations

Managers and staff from District 8 and MnDOT’s Central Office reviewed these findings from the equity conversations and developed potential strategies to address challenges and advance equity.

Results from this meeting and observations from MAD consultants resulted in the following recommendations for MnDOT to deepen engagement, expand transportation services, and partner to build relationships in District 8:

**Deepen**

1. Create a District 8 public engagement strategy.
2. Create a marketing and outreach campaign to reach communities of non-native English speakers.

**Expand**

3. Collaborate with local government partners to develop and, where necessary, update bicycle and pedestrian plans.
4. Work with partners to expand access to and availability of transit options in District 8.

**Partner**

5. Establish and build relationships with groups, agencies, and organizations not traditionally engaged in transportation conversations.

These recommendations are discussed further in later sections of this report.
Origins of the equity effort

In January 2017, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) released its updated, 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP).\(^1\) During the process of updating the plan, MnDOT sought input from stakeholders and the public about what to include in the plan. Participants in those conversations said MnDOT needs to advance equity, citing a range of disparities related to race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and physical abilities. In response, MnDOT listed two activities to advance equity in its SMTP 2017–2020 Work Plan:

- Study how transportation affects equity, and identify transportation strategies and approaches that will meaningfully reduce disparities.
- Pilot tools and strategies to better incorporate equity into project-level decision-making.

To help advance equity in work planning, MnDOT chose to conduct community conversations designed to provide a qualitative, experienced-based perspective of how transportation affects equity. These community conversations about transportation gathered information about equity concerns from a variety of groups and organizations, built relationships for MnDOT, and provided a pathway for continued engagement and initiatives to address equity issues.

MnDOT contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD)\(^2\) for assistance with these community conversations, specifically to:

- Build MnDOT’s capacity to conduct interviews
- Coordinate in-person interviews with organizations that serve communities in MnDOT’s District 8
- Analyze the data
- Report interview findings and recommendations

Methodology

The project primarily consisted of in-depth interviews with groups, agencies, organizations, and a business—all collectively referred to in this report as “organizations”—that work with and represent key communities of interest for the District 8 Equity Project.

The main purposes of the interviews were to:

- Better understand the organizations’ perspectives about how the transportation system, services, and decision-making processes help or hinder the lives of people in Southwest Minnesota
- Build relationships with organizations whose work aligns, directly or indirectly, with equity and transportation
- Identify actions to address transportation inequities

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\(^2\) MAD is the State of Minnesota’s in-house consultants that provide neutral, third-party management consultant services to public sector agencies. For more information, please visit [http://www.mn.gov/mmb/mad](http://www.mn.gov/mmb/mad).
Key communities selection method

MnDOT conducted an analysis of the 12 counties in District 8, examining the current demographics and trends in the district and focusing on populations with known inequities. MnDOT used the analysis to further identify and prioritize which key communities to include in the equity project. They include communities:

- Underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes
- Facing unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches

MnDOT District 8 staff, Central Office staff, and other partners identified potential organizations to serve as interviewees. The groups, agencies, and organizations MnDOT selected all work with and represent the project’s key communities. MnDOT identified additional organizations by asking interviewees for suggestions on others to interview.

MAD contacted the organizations by phone and email, asked them to participate in the project, and scheduled interviews. Interviews were conducted from November 2018 through May 2019.

Interview teams

All MnDOT interview teams included at least two people. The teams visited the organizations in person and asked questions using the semi-structured interview guide described in the section below on data collection and analysis. Depending upon the specific interviews, the interview teams included combinations of MnDOT District 8 staff, MnDOT Central Office staff who work on statewide planning and public engagement, and consultants from MAD. Most involved two interviewers from District 8.

In October 2018, MAD conducted an interview training session for participating MnDOT staff. The majority of staff participated in person, with a Skype option available. The training goals included:

- Explaining purpose and process for the interviews
- Providing qualitative research instructions, including note-taking guidelines
- Distributing project and interview materials
- Practicing interviewing
- Explaining interview scheduling process

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3 Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
4 Refer to Appendix D: Key communities for interviews on page 57.
5 Refer to Appendix B: Project team and interviewers on page 47.
Data collection and analysis

MnDOT and MAD developed a semi-structured interview guide, meaning that interviewers followed the guide but could pursue other relevant topics as they arose.

Interview topics included:

- The experience of key communities in traveling for day-to-day activities, such as work, school, medical appointments, social and recreational activities, shopping for goods and services, and accessing social services
- Transportation barriers community members experience and opportunities to meet their needs
- Safety concerns for the communities
- Opportunities and challenges for the communities when engaging with government
- The perspectives of the organizations on both equity and how transportation can advance equity

MAD collected interview notes and conducted preliminary analysis to identify potential themes. When categorizing the notes, MAD used a first stage of coding to test the themes from its preliminary analysis and then added new codes as additional themes arose from the full set of interview notes. MAD confirmed the accuracy of both preliminary and additional themes by monitoring how many times an interviewee made comments that fit in a theme and in how many interviews the topic came up. MAD then reviewed and recoded the data as necessary to ensure consistency in coding for the main themes and additional subcodes. MAD used these themes and their subcodes to develop findings.

Implementation meetings

District 8 managers, District 8 staff who served on the interview teams, and MnDOT Central Office staff met on May 28, 2019, to consider possible improvements and actions based on the conversations. Specifically, participants:

- Reviewed findings from the District 8 community conversations
- Determined what level of influence MnDOT has over the issues behind those different findings
- Rated the findings by MnDOT’s ability to influence action
- Brainstormed actions District 8 and Central Office staff can undertake to address findings

At the end of the meeting, participants voted on which solutions they thought MnDOT should prioritize. Recommendations found in this report are informed by the high-priority solutions.

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6 Refer to Appendix E: Transportation equity interview guide on page 60.
7 MAD analysts coded data according to theme. If data could not reasonably fit a theme, they were coded as Miscellaneous or analysts created a new code to fit the new theme.
8 Refer to the recommendations section on page 42. For the full list of ideas suggested by participants from MnDOT’s District 8 and its Central Office, refer to Appendix F: Findings and potential solutions from Implementation Planning Meeting 1.
Participants from the May 28 session met again to validate recommendations from this report, align the recommendations with ongoing MnDOT plans and initiatives, and further assess the opportunity for realistic action. In September 2019, the group reconvened to develop action items that advance the recommendations, identifying who at MnDOT should take what steps and when to advance the recommendations.

**Organizations interviewed**

**Response rate**

MnDOT invited 41 organizations to participate in an interview and completed interviews with 30 organizations, for a response rate of 73 percent. Of the 11 organizations that were not interviewed, only two declined and the rest did not respond to interview requests during the data collection period. No organization that declined an interview invitation reported doing so based on lack of interest or support for the project.

**Types of organizations**

Table 1 lists the types of organizations interviewed. Most organizations interviewed were nonprofit organizations or local government entities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization type</th>
<th>Number interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit agency</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tribal government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Counties represented**

Figure 1 counts how many of the 30 organizations interviewed have a presence in each of the 12 counties in District 6. Most organizations interviewed worked with or represented key communities in several counties, so the counts by county in Figure 1 exceed the total of 30 for organizations interviewed. The counties served by the most organizations were Lyon (15) and Kandiyohi (12), followed by Chippewa (10) and Yellow Medicine (10).
Figure 1. Number of organizations interviewed based on the District 6 counties where they are active

Note: Counts by county exceed the total of 30 organizations interviewed because the counts are for the number of those 30 organizations active in each county and many of the organizations are active in more than one county.

Key communities represented

Figure 2 illustrates the key communities and the number of the interviewed organizations that represent or served them. Key communities are groups that are:

- Currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes
- Experiencing known inequities in transportation access or outcomes
- Facing unique transportation needs not well served by current approaches

Key communities are not mutually exclusive. A person can belong to one or many of the key communities identified

All of the key communities identified at the onset of the initiative were represented by at least one of the interviewed organizations. Many of the organizations worked with more than one key community, so the number of organizations in Figure 2 exceeds the number of organizations interviewed. Organizations serving and made up of people of color and American Indians were highly represented, followed by organizations serving people with low incomes, veterans, people with disabilities, and older adults.
Figure 2. Number of organizations interviewed based on the key communities they serve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Communities</th>
<th>Count of Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonwhite racial and ethnic groups</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with low income</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with disabilities</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older adults</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero-vehicle households</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Counts by key communities exceed the total of 30 organizations interviewed because the counts are for the number of those 30 organizations that serve each key community and many of the organizations served more than one county.*

Findings

“Transportation is key to access and opportunities.”

This section outlines the findings from community conversations. Information is organized into four categories:

- **People perspective** highlights how transportation interacts with many other factors of life, including where people live, where they work, and their income, race, ethnicity, age, and abilities
- **Modal perspective** looks at the modes available within the transportation system and how those modes create or limit opportunities
- **Public engagement** focuses on how government can interact with Minnesotans to create a more equitable transportation system
- **Equity** provides perspectives on equity from conversations—how to define equity, how it relates to transportation, and strategies interviewees suggested to improve equity

Because many topics of conversation are interrelated, they may appear in more than one area.
How to interpret the findings

Some discussions were with one individual associated with one organization, while other discussions included people from multiple organizations or people from one organization but serving multiple roles. In order to be clear and accurate, analysts used the following terms:

- **Interviewee** refers to an individual
- **Organization** refers to a specific organization
- **Conversation** is a general term to include interviews where more than one organization was represented, and the people in the conversations are participants

In addition to using proportions such as one-fourth, this report uses the terms below to describe how many interviewees, organizations, or conversations talked about a topic:

- **A few** is generally two or three
- **Several** is generally more than a few, but less than one-fourth
- **Some** is more than several, but not near a critical mass
- **Many** is generally more than one-third, but less than a majority
- **Most** is more than half

People Perspective

Transportation and access in rural areas

“Demographics is a huge issue—fewer young people, aging population, fewer areas that have availability of basic services. Lack of general services such as grocery stores, pharmacy, etc., in many communities. Household incomes here are the lowest in the state. Diverse population is increasing and adds to services needed. Labor force availability is a struggle . . . Local match for bus purchases is a struggle. Seventy percent of the communities in this area are less than 500 people.”

Located in Southwest Minnesota, District 8 consists of 8,305 square miles representing 10 percent of Minnesota’s total land area containing under 5 percent of the total population.\(^9\) The district has a low population density, and the largest five cities have populations ranging from about 5,500 (Glencoe) to just over 19,000 (Willmar).\(^10\)

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\(^10\) Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
Most of the transportation equity conversations centered on the rural nature of the district. As one interviewee noted:

“Things in town are easy for people to get to, but if someone needs to go outside their community it can be difficult. Many towns in our region don’t have grocery stores, gas stations, health care options, or other retail. Also a barrier for people who live in the country, especially for people who don’t or can’t drive. If you need to get to work or school or other places and don’t drive, you couldn’t live in the country.”

Participants often discussed that living in a rural community is deeply interconnected with the ability of residents to access basic needs such as employment, health care, affordable housing, child care, and recreation, among others. The following sections highlight the topics most often discussed in the community conversations.

**Employment opportunities**

District 8 has a low unemployment rate—under 4 percent in recent years. According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), one quarter of the state’s food manufacturing workers are employed in Southwest Minnesota, including those in several District 8 counties. During the period from just before the Great Recession until shortly afterward, food manufacturing in the region continued to add jobs and offered annual wages higher than most other industries. While most people employed in Southwest Minnesota are white (94 percent), half of food manufacturing jobs in Southwest Minnesota are held by people of color: 20 percent of food manufacturing workers are non-white (non-Hispanic), and Latinx workers make up another 30 percent of the food manufacturing workforce.

Despite these positive employment trends, discussions regarding employment opportunities in equity conversations were mixed when it came to comments about perceptions of the labor market and job availability. Conversations highlighted how transportation access can be a catalyst of individual and regional

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11 Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
12 DEED defines “Southwest Minnesota” differently than MnDOT District 8. DEED’s Southwest Minnesota planning area includes the MnDOT District 8 counties of Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, and Yellow Medicine. The four counties of Kandiyohi, Meeker, McLeod, and Renville are not included in this planning area.
13 Interviewees often mentioned that community members worked at JBS USA, Jennie-O Turkey Store, Monogram Meat Snacks, Schwan’s Company, and Turkey Valley Farms.
15 According to DEED, while the total economy in Southwest Minnesota lost over 6,800 jobs from 2007 to 2010, food manufacturing there saw a 4.7 percent increase in jobs, “Food Manufacturing Brings Much to the Table,” accessed May 2019, https://mn.gov/deed/assets/Southwest_tcm1045-346098.pdf.
17 The term “Latinx” is used to describe people of Latin American descent except in specific reference to Census data, which uses the term “Hispanic,” which technically describes people of Spanish descent.
economic growth, while a lack of transportation options can be a constraint on economic opportunity. A few interviewees said that businesses in the region are unable to fill positions or expand because there are not enough workers. As one interviewee noted, “Unemployment in the area is very low, and businesses need even more manpower than they have access to. [One business] for example is constantly hiring, but there aren’t people to employ.” Another interviewee indicated that to offset transportation challenges and recruit workers from the area, some employers offer transportation incentives, including reimbursements for transit and even rides to work. Some are said to be considering mileage reimbursements for employees to cover their costs of commuting to work.

Conversely, participants in a few conversations highlighted that employment opportunities in the area are often limited, specifically for people of color or immigrants. One interviewee said there are not enough employment options for the immigrant communities they represented. Another reported that immigrants were moving to the Twin Cities due to lack of employment opportunities in the area.

Regarding employment challenges for the communities they represent, several interviewees discussed how transportation options affect access to employment. Transportation options can promote job mobility when there are accessible transportation options and as a constraint on the jobs individuals can reach (and on the workforce an employer can recruit) when there are limited transportation options. Challenges included the lack of transit, and in places where transit service is available, a misalignment between bus service and work hours for people with evening and weekend shifts. Interviewees also cited the lack of access to private vehicles or ride-sharing options for many in the community, some of whom need to travel long distances. The following comments illustrate these challenges:

- “Many people in our community have to turn down opportunities, whether jobs, extracurricular activities, leisure activities, etc., due to not having reliable transportation.”
- “It’s hard for people who work at night to get to their place of employment if they don’t have a car or work unconventional hours. We need more taxis, public transit, or ride-sharing to give people more options.”
- “One issue that comes up is that people that have to walk or bike to a job usually have lower-paying jobs because they are in town, which doesn’t enable them to get to higher-paying jobs because of transportation.”

A few participants in conversations also suggested that there is a skills mismatch between the community members looking for jobs and the jobs that are available. According to one interviewee:

“A lot of our clients are working those minimum wage jobs—fast food, gas stations, grocery stores, factories, which don’t really pay too well. We rarely get a client who has an advanced degree…. Some are—they can weld, they can operate forklifts—so they can get the employment that can help them sustain a living. We’re usually dealing with clients who have trouble getting into a career, versus just get into a job.”

For some communities, affordable housing and employment opportunities are interconnected with transportation challenges. A lack of affordable housing has resulted in veterans choosing to live in more rural areas even if those locations leave them without reliable and predictable transportation, according to one interviewee. “We advise them to try to move to the city, but they say they can’t afford the rent,” the
interviewee said. “We know. But if you live in the rural areas, how are you going to travel 30 miles to get to your employment?” Another interviewee also highlighted the importance of transportation for accessing employment, saying,

“[Transportation] will give them more options to participate. Maybe they want to work at Schwan’s or other places, but they don’t have a ride. They may work at Turkey Valley because they have a ride there. They may have the ability to do the job, but they don’t have the ability to get a car or a ride, so that limits their opportunities to have a better future.”

**Access to health care**

Nearly half of the conversations highlighted how transportation affects the ability of the key communities\(^\text{19}\) to access health care both within and outside the district, as available transportation options can improve health access or constrain communities’ access to care.

According to a few interviewees, access to health care facilities in cities such as Willmar, Marshall, and Redwood Falls is generally good. However, participants in several conversations said transportation to medical appointments in other cities can be challenging. According to one interviewee, some insurance will not cover transportation costs to facilities outside of a certain mile range, which poses challenges for those who need appointments with specialists in the Twin Cities, St. Cloud, and Sioux Falls. A few interviewees noted that there are some private transportation providers, but they are often costly and may be unreliable. A patient may also face disruption in health care services from providers if transportation challenges repeatedly prevent them from attending appointments.

Community members often rely on friends, family, or social services for transportation to appointments. Indian Health Services can provide transportation as a last resort for American Indians living on tribal lands. Medical van services are available to people with disabilities for nonemergency medical transportation,\(^\text{20}\) but personal care attendants (PCAs) who care for people with disabilities cannot provide transportation to them due to restrictions in state statute.\(^\text{21}\) Participants in several conversations noted volunteer driver programs (VDPs)\(^\text{22}\) are used extensively for medical appointments, but they also noted that VDPs are experiencing challenges in providing the level of transportation requested.

Participants in a few conversations discussed the potential for coordination among organizations that provide medical transportation. Currently only veterans who are traveling to appointments at the Department of Veterans Affairs facilities are able to rely on county veteran services and transportation provided by nonprofits. As one interviewee noted, “We hear that people wish there could be more coordination with veteran services vans. The van goes to the [Twin] Cities twice a month and maybe has two passengers. Could more people use

\(^{19}\) Refer to Appendix D: Key communities for interviewon page 57.

\(^{20}\) The Minnesota Health Care Program (MHCP) provides nonemergency medical transportation (NEMT) for eligible Minnesotans. To learn who is eligible, see https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=dhs16_141021#er.

\(^{21}\) For more on statutes relating to personal care attendants, see section on people with disabilities on page 24.

\(^{22}\) For more on volunteer drivers’ program in the district refer to the section on page 34.
that service?” Another interviewee said that due to lack of transportation to other locations serving basic needs, such as grocery stores or social services, some people have resorted to using the transportation provided for medical purposes to reach those other locations. “Many people take the bus to Willmar for the clinic and then say they need a prescription filled. They say they’ll fill it at Walmart and then they pick up groceries, clothes, etc.”

**Affordable housing**

“When you think about the available resources, it’s too expensive to live in Marshall, so people need to live in rural areas. There is housing available there, and it’s only 8 to 10 miles. But from a transit perspectives, it’s a big deal, and you’re not where the maximum services are.”

About one third of the conversations involved discussions about access to affordable housing. According to the Housing and Transportation Index, the average household in District 8 spends 51 percent of their income on housing and transportation.23

A few conversations involved discussions about how transportation is interconnected with the availability of affordable housing. As one interviewee said, “Where there is housing, there isn’t transportation. When there’s transportation, there is no affordable housing.” Most often these participants were referring to larger cities in the district, such as Marshall, and suggesting it was too expensive to live in those cities. One interviewee explained that rural towns are losing people, which opens up more housing options, but it is difficult to attract people to smaller communities because those communities often lack amenities and transportation options for those without cars. Participants in a few conversations noted a tension between efforts to provide housing that meets the needs of all people and to ensure that people can age in place. Those participants said that limited turnover and aging stock of available housing created additional challenges to meeting the need for entry-level housing.24

One interviewee who works with immigrant communities mentioned that immigrants often face challenges when looking for affordable housing. “Housing is a big problem, especially with larger families and the rules of apartments,” the interviewee said. This person said immigrants may be unfamiliar with apartment rental rules, which can lead to trouble with the landlord over issues such as kids playing in the parking lot. Affordable housing is often located far from other services these community members need. Another interviewee said people who move to low-income housing often do not realize in advance the transportation challenges they will face when they need to travel in order to access services and meet household needs. The interviewee noted, “[W]e don’t have public transportation or services like in the metro. For example, we don’t deliver babies in Benson. Well, they say, ‘What do you mean I have to go to Willmar to have my baby?’ If you grow up rural, you understand, but the newer people moving in don’t understand.” Another interviewee said some immigrants choose to live in

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24 National research shows that current generations of homeowners ages 67 to 85 are staying in their homes longer than previous generations. Researchers attribute this trend to advances in health care and education that has made aging in place easier. For more information, see [http://www.freddiemac.com/fmac-resources/research/pdf/201901-Insight-02.pdf](http://www.freddiemac.com/fmac-resources/research/pdf/201901-Insight-02.pdf).
more central locations, such as downtown areas, because they do not have transportation and can access services more easily from these locations.

Organizations that work with veterans reported that some veterans face additional challenges with housing and employment due to criminal records or poor histories with housing in the past. As one interviewee said of clients with criminal records, “That’s a big barrier. We have to find the landlord who’s willing to overlook that.”

**Land use planning**

Participants often discussed how land use can pose challenges for those with limited transportation options, depending on the services needed and how cities or towns are laid out. One interviewee highlighted this challenge by describing services community members often accessed:

> “The Kandiyohi County Health and Human Services Building is difficult to access as it’s on the northeastern edge of town; there are trails to it, though. The Willmar High School is on the northeastern edge of town, but has some trail and sidewalk network issues to it. Ridgewater College is on the northwestern edge of town. However, there are trails and some housing in the area. Jennie-O Turkey Store’s biggest plant is on the southwestern edge of town. And the big-box shopping options such as Walmart, Cub, and Cash Wise, etc., on the southern edge of town.”

Participants said that older downtowns are often easier to access, but newer buildings such as schools and businesses on the outer edges of towns are difficult to access. In other instances, they can be on either side of towns, as described above, making it difficult for those who need to access them, even if there are some trail networks in place. Distance is a barrier.

**People with low incomes**

> “Transportation impacts all areas of life. When it’s this rural, I have 60 miles to go one way just to get to the job or housing. If I am low-income and have one vehicle, and that vehicle breaks down, everything I need to maintain my life, everything is gone.”

Ten percent of District 8’s population lives at or below the federal poverty level. While the percentage of people living in poverty is lower in District 8 than in many other MnDOT districts, participants in half of the conversations discussed challenges that people with low incomes experience. Interviewees highlighted barriers their community members face in purchasing and maintaining reliable vehicles for transportation. These challenges include having enough income to purchase a vehicle, afford repairs, pay for regular maintenance, and buy insurance.

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25 Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
26 Refer to barriers to vehicle ownership and driving on page 26.
Participants in a few conversations said members of the communities they serve who do not have access to private vehicles rely on public transit, where it is available, and share rides with friends and family. They also discussed challenges with relying on these other modes. The challenges discussed include:

- Limited hours and service areas for transit
- Inability to attend family or children’s activities in the evening hours
- Inability to ride-share while traveling with children because they need car seats
- The expense of traveling to commercial hubs such as St. Cloud, Sioux Falls, and the Twin Cities for services

**People of color**

As of 2016, nearly 11 percent of District 8’s residents belong to one of the non-white racial or ethnic groups identified in U.S. Census Bureau data, with the Hispanic population being the largest group at 6 percent. American Indians account for about one percent of the population. In some parts of the district, notably Kandiyohi County, the percentage of people who belong to a non-white racial or ethnic group is nearly the same as the statewide average of 18 percent. Additionally, nearly three percent of people in the district speak English less than very well. Other languages commonly spoken include Spanish, Somali, and Hmong.

Participants in half of the conversations discussed challenges faced by people of color and immigrants in the region, including language barriers and relationships with government that constrain effective engagement and representation. These challenges are interconnected with these communities’ access to feasible transportation options.

Participants in one-third of the conversations discussed language barriers to accessing services, including transportation. One interviewee noted, “Lots of the residents have language barriers, so they may not be aware of the services available. They may not know what’s out there, for transportation or any other service . . . .”

Participants in a few conversations reported that language barriers and lack of familiarity with the public transit process hinder immigrants’ use of that option, so they most often rely on each other for transportation.

> “Immigrant populations are heavily reliant on each other . . . They provide rides for their families and friends.”

Language barriers create challenges for immigrant communities in accessing basic services and meeting needs, such as purchasing goods. An immigrant who does not speak English requires assistance getting to a doctor’s appointment and even checking in because interpreters help during the actual visits with the doctors but not with interactions at the front desk, according to one interviewee.

Other challenges mentioned include familiarity with driving, safety concerns associated with driving, and challenges with acquiring a driver’s license due to immigration status. This experience is similar for the American

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27 Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
28 Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
Indians who live on tribal lands. No public transit options are available to and from the reservations in District 8, and walking and biking poses safety concerns, according to one interviewee. As the interviewee noted, “For anyone who doesn’t have their own vehicle, getting anywhere off the reservation can be difficult, especially on nights or weekends or for things other than appointments.”

Several of the District 8 equity conversations included discussions of the relationship many immigrants and other people of color have with the government. A few participants in these conversations said members of these communities may experience a general fear of government that prevents them from contacting government about their needs. Relevant comments include the following:

- “I can’t say if people have any contact with the city government. Newcomers [immigrants] are scared of the government and the police, which can lead to trouble. Government offices are feared and not necessarily trusted. The community doesn’t see the government as serving them.”
- “In general our people don’t make any complaints, live their own lives, and may be scared to call someone to complain when they don’t speak the language and don’t know what is going to happen.”
- “White people go to city council meetings and write letters to the editor. Immigrants will not express their needs as regularly.”

Regarding this wary attitude toward government among some people of color, one interviewee added that fear is exacerbated for immigrants who are not citizens. Their immigration status affects their ability to move around freely, the interviewee said, noting, “There is a fear of getting pulled over, especially due to racial profiling and other types of stereotyping. After the 2016 elections, non-white people felt increased fear of leaving their homes and were less mobile in general. There is a constant concern that something bad will happen outside of the safety of their home.”

About one-third of conversations covered other challenges faced by people of color, including immigrants. For example, interviewees said it may not be apparent to everyone how to access services, and often there is little or no support for people learning to navigate government processes and policies. Interview participants explained that there is an expectation that immigrant community members will figure out how to access services. As one interviewee noted, “People have to go to the government. The government never goes to the people. The attitude of the government is, ‘You chose to come here, so figure it out on your own!’”

**Older adults**

“Transportation is key for older adults to continue living on their own. Having transit available and knowing it’s there is very helpful for older adults to be able to live on their own.”

Participants in one-third of the conversations highlighted challenges for the older adults in the district connected to transportation. Nearly 20 percent of the population in the district is over age 65—about four percentage points higher than in the state as a whole.29

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29 Refer to Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile on page 48.
Participants in a few conversations mentioned that older adults generally rely on family and friends for transportation. Others said older adults can depend on volunteer driver programs to help them get to where they need to go and meet their needs. A few interviewees said transit offers opportunities for older adults to move around more independently. Yet, participants in a few other conversations reported transit challenges for older residents who may be unfamiliar with the transit systems, may have negative attitudes about taking transit, and may not be willing to use transit where it is available.

A few conversations also included discussion of the need for additional, more accessible sidewalks and trails and safe street crossings to support older adults who choose to walk or use other non-motorized modes of transportation.

Limited transportation can lead to a lack of access to services, social isolation, and mental health challenges for older adults, according to a few conversations. As one interviewee noted:

“Transportation and access to everyday needs does have an impact on mental health. Being homebound and isolated can cause mental health issues. These mental health issues could become very expensive to deal with, so if we could provide services like rides to people now and prevent depression or other mental health issues down the road, we should do that. We need to look at the big picture of how transportation can assist these people.”

People with disabilities

People with disabilities comprise nearly 12 percent of the District 8 population. Participants in a third of the conversations discussed transportation challenges for people with disabilities, including accessibility issues with sidewalks and buildings. These challenges may also adversely affect people’s ability to use transit. One transit provider noted, “[There] can be an issue for a person in a wheelchair or [someone with] another physical disability. Especially in bad weather. There are also issues with people getting into or out of a building that doesn’t have a ramp for wheelchair access.”

One interviewee talked about challenges for people with disabilities, including limited transit service, limited dispatch, and the costs and limitations of same-day rides. Another interviewee said these challenges are influenced by the location where people reside, with more-limited options for those who live farther away from cities. This interviewee noted improvements in access for people with disabilities in District 8’s larger cities and said transportation has greatly expanded in Marshall because the transit service there now stops at several apartment complexes where people with disabilities live. Additionally, bike paths and accessible sidewalks with curb cuts have provided more opportunities for individuals to get around.

Interview participants from a few organizations that work with people who have disabilities highlighted a specific challenge with current state laws pertaining to personal care attendants and transportation that
significantly affects people with disabilities. As outlined in the Minnesota Department of Human Services website\textsuperscript{30}, PCA services:

“Provide assistance and support for persons with disabilities, living independently in the community. This includes the elderly, and others with special health care needs. PCA services are provided in the Minnesota Health Care Programs (MHCP) member’s home or in the community when normal life activities take him or her outside the home.”

Currently the statute does not cover reimbursement for transportation services provided by an individual PCA. Organizations that discussed this issue reported that this is a challenge because people with disabilities who have PCAs are not able to rely on them for transportation and instead have to coordinate other modes. This inability of caregivers to provide transportation for their clients is particularly challenging in rural areas, where there are limited transportation options. One interviewee explained that it means people with disabilities often have to rely on already busy and limited transit options available, which causes long waits. The same interviewee explained further:

“This also means that, for individuals needing rides out of town, often for medical appointments and procedures, instead of simply having their caregiver drive them in their own vehicle, they will often have to use medi-van-type services, which means the state will often be paying not only for a caregiver to travel with the individual, but it will also pay for the driver of the service vehicle, and usually at a pretty steep rate. This is an unfortunate and unnecessary duplication of services.”

Modal perspective

Private vehicles

Participants in almost all conversations talked about the importance of private vehicles for transportation in the communities they serve. Several cited private vehicles as the most used and preferred mode. Others cited them as necessary, especially in areas outside of District 8 cities where distances between destinations tend to be long and transit is unavailable.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that statewide about 80 percent of employed Minnesotans with low incomes drive cars, trucks, or vans to work or carpool with others to get there.\textsuperscript{31} People without cars face difficulties getting to jobs, appointments, shopping destinations, and social events. In addition to private vehicles, interviewees in some conversations cited other transportation options as among the most important modes, including walking, dial-a-ride bus service, regularly scheduled public transit, Volunteer Driver Program, and bikes. As one interviewee noted, “It really depends on the community where people live. In the real rural areas,


\textsuperscript{31} Management Analysis and Development calculations using five-year U.S. Census journey-to-work data from the American Community Survey, 2017, for persons with incomes below 150% of the poverty level.
your options are to have a car or to have a friend or family member with a car drive you. Being able to get to regional centers from the rural area is a real problem. You have to have a reliable vehicle.”

**Barriers to vehicle ownership and driving**

While private vehicles stand out as a common and preferred transportation option in District 8, participants in about half of the conversations discussed challenges and inequities tied to vehicle ownership and use. The roadblocks they cited include the expense of vehicle ownership, costs for upkeep, and problems with obtaining driver’s licenses.

**Ownership costs**

Participants in one-fourth of the District 8 conversations mentioned the high costs of vehicle ownership as a barrier for low-income members of the communities they serve. They commented on the high prices for reliable vehicles—costs that can put a vehicle beyond reach for many people with low incomes. The average 2018 purchase price nationwide for three-year-old used models was $7,500 for subcompact cars and $13,700 for all types of personal vehicles. All of the interviewees who cited the expense of vehicle ownership as a barrier also commented on maintenance or insurance costs. Commenting on the cost of repairs, one interviewee noted, “Many times it’s more expensive to fix a car than the car is worth.”

> “For private vehicles, it can be difficult to save enough money to buy a vehicle and to keep up with the maintenance costs.”

**Other impediments to obtaining and keeping driver’s licenses**

Beyond costs, participants cited the difficulties people sometimes face obtaining and keeping driver’s licenses as another barrier to driving. Participants in one conversation mentioned that there are many young adults without driver’s licenses because they could not afford behind-the-wheel training. Current law does not allow undocumented immigrants to obtain a license, although the state legislature regularly considers bills aimed at changing that. Even for immigrants with legal status, difficulty with the English language can hinder their efforts to secure a license, according to a few of the interviewees. More broadly, participants noted that state government can suspend someone’s driver’s license if that person owes child support as long as they are not receiving cash public assistance and that persons convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol can lose their licenses and face high costs for reinstatement.

Additionally, participants in a few of the conversations noted that older adults and those with disabilities may have physical limitations that prevent them from driving or make it difficult for them to obtain a license.

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32 Edmunds, “Used Vehicle Outlook 2019,” p. 2, [https://c-6rtwjumjzx7877x24x78yfynhx2ejix2ejirzisix78-rjinfx2ehtr.g00.edmunds.com/g00/3_c-6bbb.jirzisix78.htr_/_c-6RTWJUMJZIX77x24myyux78x3ax2fx2fx78yfynh.ji.jirzisix78-rjinf.htrx2fzsajwx78ntsijx2fnrlx2fnsizx78ywd-hjyjwx2fnsx78nlmyx78x2f7564-zx78ji-ajmnhqj-zyqttp-wjutwy-knsfq.uiik_/$/$/$/$?i10c.ua=2&i10c.dyv=4](https://c-6rtwjumjzx7877x24x78yfynhx2ejix2ejirzisix78-rjinfx2ehtr.g00.edmunds.com/g00/3_c-6bbb.jirzisix78.htr_/_c-6RTWJUMJZIX77x24myyux78x3ax2fx2fx78yfynh.ji.jirzisix78-rjinf.htrx2fzsajwx78ntsijx2fnrlx2fnsizx78ywd-hjyjwx2fnsx78nlmyx78x2f7564-zx78ji-ajmnhqj-zyqttp-wjutwy-knsfq.uiik_/$/$/$/$?i10c.ua=2&i10c.dyv=4).
Carpools and rides with friends and family

“People rely on family, friends, [and] church friends. A significant amount of transportation happens this way. People who have a larger social network and more social connections, those people can rotate who they have transport them.”

In addition to the importance of owning private vehicles, some interviewees also cited carpools and rides from friends as important and useful transportation modes for members of the communities they serve. Participants in half of the conversations talked about community members using informal ride arrangements with family and friends to meet some of their transportation needs such as going to the grocery store, church, medical facilities, and schools for student activities.

One interviewee said these informal ride arrangements are particularly important in rural areas where options are often limited for those who do not own cars. Another said people without cars sometimes barter informally with family and friends who have cars, offering to babysit or help with cleaning in exchange for rides. While community members may be able to easily arrange for rides to churches and other destinations where many other people go, they often face challenges when seeking rides to certain specific locations such as medical appointments, said another participant.

Several interviewees mentioned carpools as a strategy for people without their own private vehicles. One interviewee cited instances where children “don’t qualify for transportation from the school.” People arrange carpools for which the vehicle owners charge others for rides, including one case in which the driver transports school-bound children without the necessary safety restraints and charges their parents more than the parents would pay to use bus service.

Public transit

A large majority of participants commented on public transit, often as an important but limited transportation option. Several government entities and nonprofit organizations offer transit service throughout the 12 counties in the district. Public transit users most often schedule pickups and drop-offs in advance by phone or online, either from their chosen locations to their desired destinations or from and to a transit services’ regular stops. This approach—often called “dial-a-ride”—is common in Minnesota and nationally for regions that lack dense concentrations of both riders and popular destinations. Regularly scheduled, fixed-route bus service is offered in Marshall, Willmar, and Litchfield. Some transit agencies in the district also coordinate VDP.

The following organizations and entities provide public transit in District 8:33, 34


34 See Appendix I: Map of Greater Minnesota transit systems for a map of public transit by county on page 69.
Central Community Transit (CCT) for Kandiyohi, Meeker, and Renville Counties—regularly scheduled service in Willmar, Spicer, and New London; regularly scheduled route service in Willmar and Litchfield; and dial-a-ride service within the three-county region

Granite Falls Heartland Express for the City of Granite Falls—dial-a-ride transportation

Prairie Five Rides for Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine Counties—service, if scheduled in advance, in the cities of Appleton, Benson, Canby, Dawson, Madison, Montevideo, and Ortonville and dial-a-ride service for the region, including bus service to the Twin Cities, Marshall, Willmar, and St. Cloud

Trailblazer Transit for McLeod, Sibley, and Wright Counties—dial-a-ride transportation in its planned service region and during its planned hours of operation and SMART-RIDE\(^35\) service for scheduled transportation including for locations outside its planned service areas and outside the hours of operation for its regular dial-a-ride service

United Community Action Partnership (UCAP) Community Transit for Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, and Rock\(^36\) Counties—regularly scheduled route service in Marshall; route service in Redwood Falls for transit users who schedule in advance; and dial-a-ride service in the region

Participants in a few conversations noted the importance of public transit specifically for serving the needs of District 8 communities that face transportation challenges and inequities including older adults, low-income residents, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people without vehicles in general. While these interviewees cited public transit as important, most also said existing transit service falls short of what community members need.

**Transit service limitations and barriers**

Most conversations included comments on transit service limitations, such as limited hours of operation, infrequent service, long wait and travel times, and scheduled routes that miss some key destinations. Representatives from a few of the District 8 transit agencies talked about some of these shortcomings, noting the challenges as inherent for transit operations in regions with low population densities and limited public funding.

*Operating hours and routes*

Participants in several conversations said limited transit service and hours of operation adversely affect travel for those who use transit. For example, people with work hours in the evening or on weekends might not be able to use transit to reach their job site. While most transit agencies operate during daytime hours on weekdays, transit services on nights and weekends is limited.

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\(^{35}\) Sibley McLeod Auxiliary Regional Transit (SMART)-RIDE is a locally funded volunteer driver service.

\(^{36}\) Rock County is located outside District 8, in MnDOT’s District 7.
In addition, several of those interviewed raised concerns that routes for regularly scheduled service miss important destinations in some cases and in some locations, especially very rural areas, reservations, and large employers of people in the key communities. A few noted this can be an issue for riding transit to work. In addition, transit riders often face long travel times to get to destinations in District 8’s regional centers for “access to the goods, services, and employment available there,” said one interviewee.

Challenges with transit scheduling, travel times, and trip coordination

A few interviewees expressed concerns about the difficulties in arranging rides on transit and the long travel times sometimes required. Flexibility is one clear advantage of dial-a-ride transit that operates outside of regular routes. Riders can call and arrange for dial-a-ride transit to pick them up and drop them off at the locations within the area served. However, riders need to call ahead—at least 24 hours in advance, for example—to arrange for rides and then stick with that planned schedule. The closer someone calls to the time they need a ride, the more likely they might find out the buses are all booked up.

While they strive for efficiency in scheduling, dial-a-ride transit services coordinate pickup and drop-off schedules based on rider requests, which can lead to long rides on the bus for any one rider as the bus picks up and drops off other passengers. As one interviewee with dial-a-ride experience said, “You’re subject to whoever else has already called in, and that adds to the length of the ride.” Regularly scheduled transit, on the other hand, may run infrequently. Regular routes may also require long travel times, particularly for inter-city transportation that loops through several local jurisdictions on its way to any given rider’s destination.

A few people said travel to and from locations served by District 8’s different transit service providers should be simplified or made seamless. Coordination among the different transit providers is currently limited and fare structures differ, according to one representative from one of the transit organizations. That interviewee suggested MnDOT could play a role in improving coordination among the different transit providers, all of which depend on federal funds provided through the state agency.

Cost

Despite high subsidies for public transit in District 8 and throughout the state, several interviewees said rider fares can be a barrier for some in the communities they serve. One commented that the costs, combined with the inconvenience of long wait and travel times, makes transit impractical for potential users.
Transit agencies acknowledge service limitations, barriers

The officials at District 8 transit agencies who participated in equity conversations are aware of transit service limitations and shortcomings. They commented on the challenges of serving the wide range of needs across large geographical areas with limited funding. As with other interviewees, the transit officials talked about the problems detailed earlier in this section—restricted hours of service, long travel times, infrequent pickup and drop-off times along regular routes, and costs to riders. They noted, too, the difficulties of providing service in sparsely populated, rural areas where low demand makes it hard to sustain transit services at reasonable costs.

A few of the transit officials said that funding from both the Federal Transit Administration through MnDOT and from passenger fares falls far short of what is needed to fully meet transit service demand in the area. This funding gap is common for rural and urban transit systems both in Minnesota and nationwide, and MnDOT noted it in the 2017 plan for transit in Greater Minnesota in the coming decades. The District 8 transit officials expressed regret that the variations and challenges involved in dial-a-ride transit service prevent people with jobs from using transit for trips to work. Nonetheless, transit officials said they strive to provide critical transit options in District 8 with the resources available. One transit service reported that it had recently expanded routes and increased service for children living less than a mile from their schools—far enough to make the walk difficult but not far enough to have school buses to take them there.

Knowledge of, and familiarity with, public transit options and procedures

In almost half the conversations, participants reported that potential riders are either unaware of transit or are unfamiliar with how the transit systems work. A few said community members do not know what transit options are available. Immigrants often rely on their immigrant neighbors and friends to inform them of useful resources, said an interviewee who works with immigrant communities. But consequently, immigrants may know little or nothing about transit because very few people in their social circles use transit.

37 In its Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan 2017–2037, MnDOT showed a gap of tens of millions of dollars for operating costs alone between calendar year 2015 funding levels and the costs to operate greater Minnesota transit to meet 100 percent of the need for service hours for 2020. See more in the plan’s chapter on financial outlook, available at http://www.minnesotago.org/final-plans/gmtip-draft-plan/chapter-9.
“There are still people who don’t know about the transit service . . . . People don’t know how it works, how much it costs. Who do I even ask? What do I ask if I do call them? [There’s a] lack of information about what’s available. It takes proactive action to use service, which is a barrier.”

In addition, many of those who cited knowledge of transit as an issue said community members do not understand how the transit systems work, even if they are aware of them. The process, some said, is complicated. As noted previously, riders need to call to schedule service in advance of their trips for most public transit in District 8. Some services require callers to go to designated transit stops at their appointed times, while others in different locations pick riders up at their chosen locations. For regularly scheduled, fixed-route service, potential riders do not know the routes and times. They also may not know what transit services charge for rides or how they are expected to pay that charge.

“The bus schedule, the process, the cost is very confusing for immigrants and seniors alike.”

Several interviewees noted that language is a significant barrier for immigrant communities across a range of issues. Another person cited a new bus service that stops at more than a dozen key locations around town and costs very little to ride, saying it gets very little use perhaps in part because English was the only language used for all of its promotional materials. To address the language issue, one interviewee suggested that the transit agencies hire drivers who speak Spanish and Somali. Others said the transit agencies and MnDOT should produce more information in the languages common to immigrant communities in the district. Agencies and organizations that receive federal funding for transit operations through MnDOT are required to produce a Language Assistance Plan, describing measures to address the needs of persons with limited English proficiency. A number of the District 8 transit services offer some information in multiple languages.38

Biking and walking

Several District 8 communities have recently invested in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. However, participants in most of the conversations noted that biking and walking remain principally recreational for most residents and said substantial barriers limit their use as primary modes for transportation.

38 For example, the Prairie Five Rides brochure is available in Spanish (http://www.prairiefive.com/transportation.html), and Community Transit offers a Spanish brochure and an audio file on its website using one of the most common Somali dialects (https://unitedcapmn.org/services/community-transit/).
Perceptions of biking and walking

“There’s a] mindset that roads are for vehicles—everyone else needs to get out of the way.”

Interviewees said walking and biking serve as the transportation of last resort. Participants in several of the conversations mentioned that members of the communities they serve walk or bike because they are ineligible to drive or cannot afford to drive, which in turn limits their ability to conduct errands or reach jobs farther away from their residence. Several other interviewees said people make negative assumptions that individuals who bike or walk do so out of necessity, not out of choice. One interviewee noted, “People make fun of kids if they’re biking instead of driving. That is a cultural shift that we need to make . . . . It’s not just a transportation issue.”

Barriers to biking

More than half the interviewees discussed winter weather, including cold temperatures and snowstorms, as the most common barrier to biking. They also said that when snow is not cleared off sidewalks and trails, it can present a significant roadblock to biking in winter months even on days with relatively warm weather and no precipitation.

Participants in several of the conversations mentioned recent investments in bike infrastructure. Hutchinson, Marshall, and Willmar have added bike lanes in recent years. Glencoe, Willmar, and McLeod County have also all added bike trails, although interviewees said people generally use them for recreation and not as a means of transportation from place to place.

One interviewee commented, “The sidewalks and curb cuts have been greatly improved in recent years [in Marshall], so this makes access for bicyclists, wheelchairs, strollers, etc., very friendly. And they recently added bike lanes on some of the more heavily traveled side streets.” Despite these recent infrastructure improvements, participants in most of the conversations discussed a lack of bike infrastructure as a barrier, with the lack of bike lanes and related safety concerns ranking as the second most commonly mentioned barrier to biking in the region. In addition to formal infrastructure, several interviewees cited the need for better driver education about sharing the road with non-motorized users.

Several District 8 communities also recently invested in bike-related programming, with mixed success. A few interviewees cited work on Safe Routes to Schools as particularly effective. For example, from 2016 to 2017 Safe Routes to Schools program, a planning grant provided by MnDOT, supported eight Marshall public schools to identify barriers and opportunities to improve access to biking and walking to schools.

Many conversations highlighted the lack of bikes available to rent or share as another roadblock. Willmar’s now-discontinued Yellow Bike program attempted to address this barrier by placing donated and repaired bikes in

racks for people to use for free. Representatives from several community organizations who worked with users of these yellow bikes reported that the program was popular and spurred increased biking, but several interviewees noted that many bikes were severely damaged or never returned, and the program has ceased operations.

Distance was the third most cited barrier to biking. Interviewees noted that while biking can be practical for recreational use or for short trips within a downtown area, it is less practical for long-distance travel. A few interviewees also noted the difficulty of biking while traveling with children or while carrying groceries.

Finally, participants in several conversations mentioned bike loss and theft as barriers, as well as a lack of places to easily store or lock a bike.

**Barriers to walking**

While some barriers to walking mirrored those to biking—with winter weather and distance presenting major obstacles—participants in conversations also highlighted several different issues for pedestrians.

Safety was a commonly cited barrier for pedestrians. Several interviewees noted that upgrading lighting and signage would improve pedestrian safety. Even in areas with generally safe conditions, the perception that pedestrian travel is unsafe can prevent parents from allowing their children to walk to school, a few interviewees said.

The conditions of sidewalks were another commonly mentioned obstacle to pedestrian mobility. Many interviewees noted a lack of sidewalks, particularly in more recently built neighborhoods. Even where sidewalks exist, they may not be up to standard, several interviewees said. They cited partial sidewalks or paths and crossings not well designed for wheelchairs or strollers—some missing curb cuts, for example.

Participants in several conversations also highlighted the difficulty of crossing roads and highways as a barrier to walking. In particular, several interviewees mentioned infrequent highway crossings and a lack of pedestrian signals at major roads. People’s physical limitations were also cited as a barrier to walking, particularly for long distances and among older adults. As a result, a majority of interviewees described walking as only feasible within confined areas of a city and not practical for conducting errands or commuting.

**Additional transportation options**

Participants in more than two-thirds of the conversations mentioned transportation available from, ride-hailing services including taxis, Lyft, and Uber, formal volunteer driver programs, medical transportation providers, and other modes of transportation aside from personal vehicles and public transit. Several commented on the limited availability of these other modes, particularly in the case of ride-hailing options.
Taxis and other ride-hailing services

“It’s hard for people who work . . . to get to their place of employment if they don’t have a car or work unconventional hours. We need more taxis, public transit, or ride-sharing to give people more options.”

Taxis, Uber, and Lyft came up in about half of the conversations. Most of those who commented cited taxis, which are available in a few of District 8’s larger cities. However, interviewees said taxi operations are small and run for very limited hours. Taxis are also expensive for low-income community members, a few said. Uber and Lyft received mention during a few of the conversations, but mostly from those who hoped these app-based, ride-hailing services would become more widely available in the region. Currently Uber and Lyft have drivers in Marshall.

Volunteer driver programs

“We make sure marginalized groups have access to transportation, mainly through partnerships with other organizations or volunteer drivers.”

Some nonprofit organizations and local governments operate VDPs to assist community members who have limited transportation options. VDPs were mentioned in about a third of the conversations. For these programs, organizations match volunteer drivers with those in need of rides for a wide range of purposes, including shopping, errands, education, recreation, and nonemergency medical appointments. These programs are particularly important in rural areas that may lack adequate public transit options, according to one interviewee.

A few participants said there is significant need for volunteer drivers, but the number of people volunteering has declined. A few organizations reported losing volunteer drivers because drivers are aging, drivers are worried about insurance issues, and reimbursement rates are low. Volunteer drivers usually receive limited reimbursement from the organizations for their mileage. In Minnesota, the drivers must report as taxable income any reimbursement amounts greater than the standard charity rate of 14 cents per mile, a rate that falls short of what is needed to cover total vehicle costs. With regard to insurance, Minnesota law requires that ride-share drivers carry insurance that recognizes they use their vehicle to transport passengers for compensation. Lawmakers put the statute in place in response to potential liability challenges for drivers of volunteer driver programs.

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41 For more information about VDP in Minnesota, see “Volunteer Driver Programs in Minnesota: Benefits and Barriers,” Frank Douma, Minnesota Council on Transportation Access, February 2017, http://www.cts.umn.edu/Publications/ResearchReports/pdf/download_pl%3Fid%3D2768&usg=AOvVaw3v8nOxyM0Fq22phHUUETHK.

42 For information from the Minnesota Department of Revenue about volunteer drivers and taxes, see https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/individuals/individ_income/Pages/VolunteerMileageReimbursement.aspx.

app-based ride-hailing services. However, the law has led to concerns because it is not widely understood how to law applies to volunteer drivers.44

**Medical transportation services**

Interviewees also talked about the possibility for Minnesota Health Care Programs (MHCP) to cover transportation services for eligible, low-income community members to nonemergency medical appointments. MHCP includes Medical Assistance, Minnesota’s Medicaid program for people with low incomes, and MinnesotaCare, a state program that provides health care coverage for Minnesotans who lack access to affordable health insurance and have higher incomes than people eligible for Medical Assistance. Transportation service covered under MHCP came up in almost one-third of the conversations. To receive payments for transporting eligible MHCP participants, transportation providers must meet State of Minnesota vehicle and driver requirements. Under the state’s requirements, the providers must train drivers and attendants for protected transportation services, and they must either enroll through MHCP or be county governments or tribal agencies. In addition to MHCP covered services according to one interviewee, veterans traveling to federal Veterans Health Administration facilities often depend upon free transportation from the Disabled Veterans of Minnesota, an organization that operates 34 vehicles in 20 communities throughout the state and uses volunteer drivers.45

**Other modes**

One conversation highlighted bus service that a few employers in the region provide in order to transport workers to their jobs. One person commented on seeing more people using golf carts and all-terrain vehicles for local travel. During another conversation, interviewees said community members who are able to secure transportation expressly intended for one purpose, such as nonemergency medical appointments, may then try to persuade drivers to stop along the way at other destinations.

**Safety concerns**

Several participants expressed safety concerns regarding drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians in the district.

**Motor vehicle safety**

Several interviewees said that some members of the community they serve lack familiarity with driving or are uncomfortable with driving, especially in urban areas. A few participants who worked with immigrant communities noted that some new drivers, including recent immigrants with limited driving experience, may


45 For more on transportation services from the Disabled Veterans of Minnesota, see https://davmn.org/transportation/.
need additional driver education in order to be adequately prepared for Minnesota driving conditions. Winter driving and driving at night were also mentioned as areas in which additional driver education is needed. Participants in a few of the conversations said older residents may not be able to drive safely if they have lost some of their capabilities.

Several interviewees noted a lack of road shoulders as a safety risk, with no shoulders or insufficient shoulder widths preventing drivers from having space for emergency stops.

A few interviewees also raised physical safety concerns about shared transportation, both for passengers seeking informal ride-sharing and for drivers in formal transit and paratransit programs.

**Bike and pedestrian safety**

As discussed earlier, interviewees often discussed safety as a barrier to walking and biking. Winter weather conditions, especially snow, were the most commonly cited bicycle safety risk. In addition, participants in several conversations discussed safety risks involving poor visibility and lighting; a lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, and other pedestrian and bike infrastructure; and hazardous road and rail crossings. Several interviewees also mentioned that perceptions of safety— independent of actual risks—limit parents’ willingness to let children walk or bike.

**Public engagement**

Nearly all conversations included comments about public engagement. Participants in a few conversations reported that recent Highway 23 projects in Marshall and Willmar drew strong public interest and involvement because leaders engaged at the right time, provided options for people to react to, and gave bus tours of newly installed J-turns. One interviewee cited MnDOT’s positive public engagement work to accommodate community requests for the bridge project in Milan. Another interviewee who talked about the perspectives of key racial and ethnic groups suggested engagement was not strong in all communities.

**Engagement strategies**

“The city also included us in the J-turn projects— took bus loads of elderly to drive them around. MnDOT could do that a little bit too, use public transit to bring people around to new construction.”

Participants in two-thirds of the conversations offered input on ways to engage people in the key communities. Nearly half of the District 8 conversations included organizations that have been involved in successful engagement projects. A few participants emphasized that having a local champion can improve engagement efforts. Interviewees mentioned the importance of involving the following for engagement:

- City government
- City and county engineers
• County human service providers
• Law enforcement agencies
• Local chambers of commerce
• Mental health service providers
• Probation officers
• Public health and State Health Improvement Partnerships (SHIP)
• Schools
• Transit providers

Participants in about one quarter of conversations, representing a variety of key communities, also mentioned that people connect with their elected officials and attend meetings or events that include elected officials. Interviewees said that especially in rural areas, people tend to know their elected officials well and go to their elected officials with concerns. One interviewee noted, “Chances are if they don’t know their representative, they know someone who does.”

In many of the conversations, participants mentioned ways MnDOT should engage in the community. They suggested in-person engagements and cited successful strategies used by other organizations, including listening sessions, visits by engineers to businesses and homes to get input, and larger events that cover a wide array of topics and use multiple ways “to try to get people together and get to know each other.” One interviewee cited a MnDOT open house where people were asked to take pictures of things they like and do not like, which was successful, in part, because people did not have to attend a meeting or take off work to participate at a certain time. Interviewees also emphasized the importance of listening to what the community wants, making changes based on that input, and supporting grassroots efforts.

**Ways to communicate**

Participants in most conversations talked about useful ways to communicate information. The communications channels most commonly cited as effective and widely used included social media and other internet-based methods, in-person meetings, newspapers, radio, word-of-mouth, the MnDOT 511 app, and information provided through the schools. Participants in a few conversations also mentioned useful but less common methods for conveying information, such as newsletters and other print publications, discussions at places of worship, emails, signs on benches, comments from elected officials, and videos. A few interviewees said information was not readily available, that they had to intentionally seek it out, and that language barriers prevented people in some communities from accessing information. One representative of an immigrant community organization stated, “[They] receive info by mail but don’t know what it says in English, so [they] dump in trash can.”
Information about MnDOT job opportunities

“[There’s] frustration about the lack of help. There used to be a [veteran representative] at the county career center, but they don’t have that anymore. [Veterans] have said there isn’t much assistance for them. They do get emails from MnDOT on plow drivers needed.”

Based on a question included in the interview guide, about two-thirds of conversations included discussions of whether the participants think people in the communities they serve feel informed about job opportunities at MnDOT. Of those who commented, two-thirds said they do not think the communities are informed about those jobs. Interviewees noted that state agencies do not have a large presence in District 8, so people in general are likely unaware of those opportunities.

However, some said they thought the people in the communities they serve are aware of MnDOT job opportunities. They said job notices are available online and that schools and other organizations that help people search for jobs provide information about job opportunities in state government.

Challenges with outreach and engagement efforts

About two-thirds of conversations involved discussions about why some outreach and engagement efforts are ineffective. In several conversations, participants said people simply have so much going on in their lives that they do not make time to engage. One interviewee noted:

“For the clients we serve, they’re probably not involved at all. We [staff] try to get involved, through the organization. But the clients we serve, this is probably the last thing on their mind. They’re more concerned with [questions like] where am I going to sleep tonight? Where is my next meal coming from?”

Participants in about one-third of conversations said people do not know enough about government or have the right kind of information to participate in public engagement. For example, one interviewee explained that a listening session has a specific meaning for government officials and staff, but most other people do not know what a listening session is. A few interviewees said people in the community do not know when government agencies hold engagement events or are unaware that government is interested in their input. The following quotes illustrate this disconnect for some communities:

- “We use words like ‘listening sessions’ and ‘community conversations.’ What does that really mean? It means things to people who need to be there: This is what we’re trying to make a decision on, please come and talk to us. [Other people] don’t even know they should be there.”
- “People don’t know about most things, most opportunities, what the process is to decide what transportation decisions are made. For example, the counties have a five-year planning process to decide on projects. It’s not secret, but people don’t know it happens or what their role could be in the process. [There’s a] lack of information, in the right way to make it meaningful.”
- “[They] don’t know where to get information or how to influence decisions. People may not even know why they need to get information from the government, what it means for them.”
Participants in about one-fourth of the conversations also discussed inclusion, language issues, and cultural barriers. Unless someone is proficient in English, they may not understand the mailings and other written materials they receive from government entities. A few interviewees said they will translate people’s mail for them and help them decide what is important. Additionally, people from cultures that rely more on oral communication may face challenges sorting through written communication, some interviewees said. Interviewees also noted that some members of communities of color and immigrant communities are afraid to interact with government. The following quotes illustrate how people of color may experience government outreach and engagement differently:

- “The communities—primarily Latino and East African—don’t understand they can provide input, and they are scared and don’t want to create any trouble.”
- “Communities have a fear of government. They don’t generally feel welcome to provide input to the government.”

Participants in a few conversations also discussed timing for public engagement. Communities may not make connections between the input they give and the results if those results come long after their input. It can also be difficult to know when in a project’s timeline is the best time to engage the community. For example, one participant stated, “MnDOT plans five years out. It’s 2019. We finally get going, and the work had been planned in 2012. It’s a huge frustration for people.”

Several interviewees also noted that communication methods may not achieve their intended impact. For example, a few interviewees said meetings are not effective. One reason is that government has a meeting culture that does not align with how the entire general public views or uses meetings. As one interviewee stated, “Meetings are a bad way to engage people, we all go to meetings all the time, so that’s good for us, but for the people who aren’t in the room, it’s not a good way to engage them.” Organizations that receive funding from MnDOT may feel obligated to attend meetings, even if MnDOT says they are optional. Participants also said written communication and radio may have less impact than other outreach methods for the communities they serve.

**Ways to improve outreach and engagement**

“If you talk to different people, you get different answers, so don’t talk to the usual suspects. Think outside the box and outside the system.”

Participants in most of the conversations suggested ways MnDOT could improve outreach and engagement. Several interviewees said MnDOT should partner with local organizations—those that are closer to the community and have more regional knowledge. A few participants also said MnDOT could build relationships by spending time in the communities and, to the extent possible, being part of the communities.

Other interviewees provided specific suggestions for improving written communication and in-person interaction. When it comes to written communication, participants suggested multi-format communication strategies that provide concise information but also direct those who are interested to places where they can find more information. Interviewees recommended strong multimedia platforms. A few mentioned more
advance notification and maps of alternate routes for construction, which one participant said would be helpful for migrant workers who need access to farms. Another said MnDOT should capitalize on lesser-used communications methods, such as mail. Several people recommended that MnDOT print materials in languages other than English.

Participants in a few conversations called for in-person engagement. One interviewee said MnDOT should be more proactive in its engagement and have general, in-person conversations with the public every two or three years. Another encouraged MnDOT to engage people it does not reach through its usual channels. One suggested those seeking input could provide people with options and ask them to weigh in. Another interviewee said it works well to meet people and seek their input at locations where people are already going, such as the grocery store or the social services center. A few interviewees recommended having interpreters at in-person meetings and working to ensure everyone understands how government works and how their input is used. An interviewee also suggested MnDOT take action based on findings from the various studies it conducts.

**Equity**

**Definitions of equity**

Interviewees provided a variety of definitions and explanations for how they interpret the meaning of equity and how it applies to their work. Most discussed equity in terms of equal access to services and opportunities and in terms of ensuring that roadblocks are removed for all communities. A few interviewees added that equal access does not necessarily mean exactly the same type of access. According to them, access can look different based on a community’s needs. A few interviewees also said that equity is about fairness and access to services and opportunities regardless of socioeconomic status, race, or geographic location. Less often, participants in the conversations used words or phrases such as “ownership,” “level playing field,” “impartial,” and “not disproportionately burdensome” to describe equity.

**Equity and transportation**

“If [people] had equal opportunities to transportation . . . the situations we talked about wouldn’t be an issue. You could live in Ghent and go to work in Marshall.”

In two-thirds of conversations, participants discussed the impacts transportation has on equity. According to many, access to reliable and affordable transportation is a critical component in people’s lives. One interviewee commented, “If people have access to transportation options, they are able to live in their homes longer, live the life they want to live, and keep our rural communities vibrant.”

Interviewees also said a lack of transportation options adversely affects self-sufficiency. Without reliable and affordable private or public transportation, people cannot get to work, school, grocery stores, medical appointments, and support services and groups. As one interviewee said, “Public transit is the circulatory system of a community.”
In a few conversations, participants discussed additional challenges that people experience in physically accessing available transportation. Specifically, they shared examples of older adults and people with physical disabilities having difficulties using available public transportation services. One interviewee described a situation where “it took forever for a mother to get her special needs child to the bus stop and then forever to get him on the bus. The ramp had trouble lowering because of snow.” Participants in another conversation said “there are buildings with awnings that aren’t tall enough for the buses to get under, which forces riders to do more to get to the bus.”

**Strategies for advancing equity**

Participants in half the conversations discussed strategies for advancing equity. The interviewees offered a variety of suggestions and ideas for ways to increase the equity of the transportation system for underserved communities, including the following:

- **Improve transportation options:** Participants in several conversations said rural areas need more transportation options. Suggestions included additional buses that operate for longer periods of time, improved connections to larger cities, and access to more medical transportation services. When discussing the need for more-diverse public transit options, one interviewee noted that because their city “is far from the Twin Cities, people don’t currently have access to all of their [medical] needs.” Another interviewee said that social interactions do not happen in the communities “if you lack access to transportation.”

- **Increase transportation funding:** Several interviewees discussed the need for increased transportation funding from state and federal governments. According to one interviewee, “[T]here’s no way the communities and counties could pay for it on their own.” To try to cover costs, local governments and transportation providers have collaborated on methods to fund service, but those methods are not necessarily sustainable over the long term, some said. Another interviewee advocated for increased funding for transportation infrastructure because “any revenue source that can fix and make our roads as safe as possible is a good thing.”

- **Collaborate more:** Participants in a few conversations shared ideas for how to increase collaboration among various groups to advance equity. One suggested that the state and county social services agencies “do co-enrollment or co-donations to facilitate transportation services to low-income families until they can get on their feet.” Another interviewee shared an idea for a common network of local support services through nonprofit organizations.

- **Use more languages for transportation services:** A few interviewees said language barriers prevent certain communities from using available transportation services and suggested communication materials be translated into languages other than English. A few interviewees also said transit providers should employ more staff who can speak languages such as Spanish and Somali to work as drivers and in dispatch and coordination. Another interviewee who discussed transportation issues in Hmong communities said a local transit provider sent a survey out to gather input but “not a lot of people can take it [because] it is in English.”
Recommendations

Five recommendations emerged from the District 8 community conversations and are presented here in two groups: key recommendations and an additional recommendation. The four key recommendations stand out as high priorities specific to District 8, and they emerged from discussions among staff and managers from both District 8 and the agency’s Central Office. MAD suggested an additional recommendation about establishing and strengthening relationships with organizations in a way that builds on initial community conversations and sustains engagement for the equity conversations and District 8 and elsewhere.

Key recommendations

MnDOT Central Office and District 8 management team and staff attended an implementation meeting in Willmar on May 28, 2019, to review the study’s findings. For findings where MnDOT staff indicated that the agency has a relatively high level of influence, meeting attendees generated potential solutions in small groups. The group as a whole then voted on which of these solutions should be the highest priorities for the agency.46

Results from this meeting and observations from MAD consultants yielded the following recommendations:

1. District 8 should create a district public engagement strategy.

   Staff at the implementation meeting noted that while District 8 prepares public engagement plans for specific projects, the district does not have an overall public engagement strategy. Developing such a strategy could help address issues raised by the participants in this study’s equity conversations and advance options for improving public engagement for key communities.

   MnDOT staff suggested several tactics for this engagement strategy, including the following:

   • Continuing to gather input on the types of communications channels that specific communities prefer and using those channels first. The communication channels most commonly cited by equity conversation participants as effective and widely used included social media and other web-based methods, in-person meetings, newspapers, radio, word-of-mouth, the MnDOT 511 app, and information sharing through the schools.
     o Consider gathering additional information on various communities—be they geographic, racial, or ethnic—in order to better understand the context and perspectives of community members.
     o Consider using interpreters or community liaisons to engage with specific racial and ethnic groups, including perhaps the Latinx community. These liaisons could help members of key communities in District 8 more easily convey their thoughts and input to MnDOT. The liaisons could also help ensure MnDOT communicates in effective and culturally sensitive

46 For full results from the Implementation Meeting, refer to Appendix F: Findings and potential solutions from the Implementation Planning Meeting 1 on page 61.
ways and help identify what transportation information MnDOT needs to communicate and how best to do so.

- Sharing information in places that community members already frequent, such as festivals and community gatherings, and that community members use, such as bulletin boards at social service centers and grocery stores. With community members acting as liaisons, MnDOT staff could visit locations in person to provide information and gather people’s input.
- Hosting open houses—whether virtual or in-person—and interactive events, such as “coffee and conversations” events or listening sessions. These forums provide MnDOT with opportunities to communicate how government processes work and listen to stakeholders. The events would also allow MnDOT to share important information, such as advance notification of service changes for transit, project funding levels, and maps of alternate routes during construction projects.
- Exploring partnerships with local government offices, regional organizations, and service providers that are closer to the community and have regional experience. Where possible, MnDOT staff should also attend events held by these groups in order to build stronger relationships with the organizations and the communities.

Implementation of this recommendation is primarily a District 8 responsibility, one of interest to the district public engagement team. However, MnDOT’s Central Office—in particular, the Public Engagement and Constituent Services (PECS) Office—may be able to offer District 8 guidance on developing the strategy, as needed.

2. **MnDOT should partner with transit agencies to create a marketing and outreach campaign in District 8 to reach communities for whom English is not a first language.**

Transit agencies currently translate transit information and communication materials into other languages, but more might be done to reach communities for whom English is not a first language. MnDOT should consider additional communications tactics specifically tailored to these groups, including individuals who may not be able to read or write in their native language or whose language is substantially oral, as is the case for members of various Somali and Karen communities. For example, MnDOT could work with local partners to create a booklet with photos of notable destinations that passengers can point to in order to communicate where they want to go. MnDOT staff suggested using special funds from MnDOT’s Office of Transit and Active Transportation (OTAT) to issue a contract to create consistent marketing materials across transit providers.

Implementation of this recommendation is primarily a District 8 responsibility, but MnDOT’s OTAT could help District 8 obtain funding, and MnDOT’s Central Office could identify District 8 as a pilot to explore the applicability of this approach to other districts.

3. **MnDOT should collaborate with local government partners to develop and, where necessary, update bicycle and pedestrian plans.**

District 8 has a bicycle plan, and several District 8 communities have recently invested in bike and pedestrian infrastructure. However, participants in most of the conversations noted that biking and walking remain principally recreational for most residents and said substantial barriers limit their use as primary modes for transportation. Reasons for the limited use include negative perceptions of walking
and biking as a last resort, snow and other winter weather conditions, and inadequate safety infrastructure such as sidewalks and bicycle lanes. For biking specifically, participants cited distance as a barrier. A few interviewees also noted the difficulty of biking while traveling with children or while carrying groceries.

Staff brainstormed ways that MnDOT can continue to work with local partners and suggested the following:

- Assisting county and city governments in developing bike and pedestrian plans through State Aid and other collaborative efforts.
- Revisiting, revising, and enforcing local maintenance agreements.
- Continuing to enhance the District 8 Bicycle Plan.
- Using the MnDOT Bicycle Facility Design Manual as an opportunity to discuss options and new designs with local units of government and other potential partners.
- Developing implementation guidelines for projects in which bike lanes are being added or upgraded.
- Identifying ways to coordinate transit-to-bike routes with local providers to increase options for people traveling by bicycle.
- Improving the perceptions of biking and walking as attractive transportation options by hosting events such as bike- or walk-to-work days and by educating the public on the benefits of these modes.

Implementation of this recommendation is primarily a District 8 responsibility. However, there may be options and opportunities more appropriately addressed by other areas within MnDOT.

4. **MnDOT should work with transit partners to expand access to and availability of on-demand transit service options in District 8.**

Specifically, MnDOT staff identified the expansion of app-based ride-hailing services as a priority. OTAT recently convened conversations with transit systems in Greater Minnesota to discuss technology options for on-demand transit services. MnDOT should seek additional funding for on-demand services and continue to explore application options in coordination with transit providers. Opportunities might include coordinating connections among transit services, developing an investment plan for transit services seven days a week, and prioritizing unmet transit needs in requests for funding.

A number of government entities and nonprofit organizations that participated in the MnDOT conversations said the public transit services fall short of what community members need. Those commenting on transit service limitations mentioned inadequate hours of operation, infrequent service, long wait and travel times, and scheduled routes that do not stop at key destinations.

Implementation of this recommendation is primarily an OTAT responsibility.

**Other recommendation**

MAD also recommends the following action, which is related to overall findings from the study:
5. **MnDOT should continue to establish and build relationships with groups, agencies, and organizations not traditionally engaged in transportation conversations.**

It is important that MnDOT continue to build on the relationships initiated during this equity project. When MnDOT takes action based on findings from its public engagement efforts and planning studies, it should, at minimum, share the information with the groups that district staff have met with.

Additionally, there is opportunity for MnDOT to connect with even more stakeholders. Participants were asked to provide information on other organizations and contacts that District 8 should talk to regarding transportation equity. Those who were not interviewed for this project were included in a list of potential contacts for District 8 staff. Using this list and leads that District 8 staff find through their engagement efforts, MnDOT could advance potential solutions and improve the agency’s understanding of the needs among specific groups.

MnDOT is also committed to continued development of approaches that connect the agency with American Indian communities in District 8 for dialogue and input.

Implementation of this recommendation is primarily a District 8 responsibility. However, there may be some work that is more appropriately addressed at the statewide level or with the support of the Public Engagement and Constituent Services office or other areas within MnDOT.

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47 Refer to Appendix G: Additional suggested interviewees on page 6.
Appendix A: List of organizations interviewed

Individuals from the following 30 organizations participated in interviews. A number of the District 8 interviews included representatives from more than one organization.

- African Development Center Minnesota
- Central Community Transit
- Community Transit of United Community Action Partnership
- Countryside Public Health
- Healthy Together Willmar (Blue Cross Blue Shield)
- Kandiyohi County Veterans Services
- Marshall Area Chamber of Commerce
- Marshall Public Schools Community Education
- Marshall Public Schools Parent/Student Connectors
- McLeod County Social Services
- Mid-Minnesota Development Commission
- Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
- Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers Program, Willmar Workforce Development Center (Department of Employment and Economic Development)
- Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans
- Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging
- Prairie Five Community Action
- Prairie Five Rides
- Rural Immigration Project of the Immigration Law Center of Minnesota
- Safe Avenues Shelter
- Southwest Center for Independent Living
- Southwest Health and Human Services
- Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership
- Southwest Minnesota Private Industry Council
- Southwest Regional Development Commission
- Trailblazer Transit
- Turkey Valley Farms
- United Community Action Partnership
- Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission
- Upper Sioux Community
- Willmar Community Education
Appendix B: Project team and interviewers

The following people were involved in planning, design, data collection, analysis, and/or implementation of the District 8 equity initiative:

MnDOT District 8 Staff:
- Ryan Barney, Project Management Administrator
- Kelly Brunkhorst, Assistant District Engineer for Construction, Traffic, Materials and Special Projects
- Lindsey Bruer, Planning Director
- Megan DeSchepper, Senior Planner
- Craig Gertsema, Maintenance Superintendent
- Jon Huseby, District Engineer
- Susan Karnowski, Assistant District Engineer for Program Delivery
- Sandra Schlagel, Public Affairs Coordinator
- Mandi Lighthizer-Schmidt, Public Engagement Coordinator

MnDOT Central Office Staff:
- Katie Caskey, Policy Planning Director
- Olivia Dorow Hovland, Senior Planner
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- Matt Kane
- Mariyam Naadha
- Abra Pollock
- Charlie Sellew
Appendix C: District 8 demographic profile

Located in Southwest and West Central Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s District 8 includes 12 counties: Chippewa, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, McLeod, Meeker, Murray, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, and Yellow Medicine. Combined, these counties represent 10 percent of Minnesota’s total land area and just under 5 percent of the total population. This report summarizes key demographic characteristics of District 8. Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this document are derived from the U.S. Census’ five-year estimates for 2016.

Overview

- **210,394**—total population in District 8 (Figure 3).
- **1.8 percent decrease**—change in the District 8 population (down 3,797) since 2010, during which time the statewide population increased by 2.8 percent. Compared with other districts\(^{48}\) in Greater Minnesota, District 8’s population decreased the most.

Figure 3. Map of District 8 counties and population

\(^{48}\) Population analysis conducted by each MnDOT District.
• **38.2 percent**—proportion of the District 8 population that lives in a defined geographic area with a population of 2,500 or more, which compares with 73.3 percent in Minnesota. District 8 has a population density of 26.6 persons per square mile.

• **85,630**—total households in District 8, with an average of 2.5 persons per household, similar to the statewide average household size. District 8 represents 4 percent of the state’s total households.

• **Kandiyohi County**—the largest county in the district with 42,510 people, a 0.6 percent increase from the 2010 Census.

• **Willmar**—the largest city in the district with a population of 19,641 (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willmar</td>
<td>19,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hutchinson</td>
<td>13,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall</td>
<td>13,616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litchfield</td>
<td>6,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glencoe</td>
<td>5,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montevideo</td>
<td>5,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redwood Falls</td>
<td>5,086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Race/ethnicity/national origin

• **10.7 percent of people in District 8 belong to a minority racial or ethnic group.** In Kandiyohi County, 17.3 percent of people belong to a minority racial or ethnic group—the highest in District 8 and close to the statewide average of 18.7 percent. The largest racial or ethnic minority in the district is the Hispanic population, which accounts for 6.2 percent of population. The second highest is the African American population, accounting for 1.4 percent of people in District 8. Figure 4 illustrates the geographic distribution of people who are Hispanic or non-white.

• **1 percent of people in District 8 are American Indians.** The two federally recognized Indian tribes in Southwest and West Central Minnesota are the Lower Sioux Indian Community in Redwood County and the Upper Sioux Community in Yellow Medicine County (Figure 5).

• **96 percent of the district’s population was born in the United States,** and 77 percent was born in Minnesota. Latin America was the most common place of origin for those not born in the U.S., followed by Africa.

• **2.9 percent of people in District 8 speak English less than very well.** After English, Spanish is the most common language spoken. Other languages commonly spoken include Somali and Hmong. Languages that are less common include Arabic, Cambodian, Mandarin Chinese, Karen, and Russian.\(^49\)

Figure 4. Percent of population that is Hispanic or non-white (including those who are both Hispanic and non-white) by District 8 census tract.
Age

- **23.7 percent of the district’s population is age 17 and under**, which is slightly higher than the statewide average (23.5 percent). Approximately 25 percent of the populations in Lincoln, McLeod, Pipestone, and Redwood Counties are ages 17 and under.

- **18.7 percent of the population in District 8 is over age 65**, which is four percentage points higher than the state as a whole. Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, and Murray Counties each have populations with a higher percentage of residents ages 65 and older, with each of these three counties estimated at about 25 percent.

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50 This is a map of the two federally recognized tribal nations within District 8 and comes from MnDOT’s MnMaps GIS information site.
Disability

- **11.8 percent of the district’s population are people with disabilities.** Types include disabilities related to hearing, vision, cognitive capabilities, ambulatory capabilities, self-care, and difficulties that restrict independent living. Approximately 14 percent of the people in Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Chippewa, and Murray Counties have a disability.

Veterans

- **6.8 percent of the district’s population are veterans.** Approximately 11 percent of people living in the Murray and Yellow Medicine Counties are veterans. An estimated 32 percent of the veterans in the district have a disability, with a slightly higher percent of veterans who have a disability living in the counties of Redwood (36 percent) and Pipestone (35.7 percent).

Educational attainment

Table 3 below compares the highest educational attainment for the population ages 25 and older in District 8 with Minnesota as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest educational attainment</th>
<th>District 8</th>
<th>Minnesota</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th grade</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th to 12th grade, no diploma</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (includes equivalency)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The number of people for whom high school was the highest level of educational attainment in District 8 is somewhat higher than in the state as a whole.\(^{51}\) An estimated 36 percent of the district’s

\(^{51}\) Population ages 25 and older.
population ages 25 and older have completed high school and did not attend college, compared with the statewide average of 26 percent.

- **The gap between the completion rates for the district and the state is narrower for those who have completed some college (23 percent and 22 percent, respectively) and associate’s degrees (13 percent and 11 percent, respectively).** Kandiyohi County has a slighter higher share of the population who have some college (25 percent) and associate’s degree (14 percent). An estimated 14 percent of the district’s population has a bachelor’s degree, lower than the statewide average of 23 percent. Lyon County has a slightly higher population of those who have a bachelor’s degree, at 19 percent.

### Income

- **The average median household income in District 8 is $52,801,** slightly lower than the statewide average median household income of $55,560. Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Pipestone, and Redwood have median household incomes of approximately $49,000 or under, relatively lower than the district’s average median household income.

- **10.4 percent of people in District 8 have incomes lower than the federal poverty level.**\(^{52}\) Compared with other MnDOT districts in Greater Minnesota, a lower percentage of people in District 8 are living on incomes lower than the federal poverty level.

\(^{52}\) Federal poverty level is defined as $24,250 for a family of four in 2016.
Employment

• The unemployment rate in District 8 is low at 3.6 percent, similar to statewide trends.\(^{53}\) While several counties had unemployment rates similar to those of the state average, Renville and Murray Counties had higher unemployment rates of 4.7 percent and 4.6 percent, respectively.

• Education and health services, trade, transportation, and utilities, and manufacturing are District 8’s three leading industries in terms of employment.

Household composition

• About 8 percent of all District 8 households are single-parent households,\(^{54}\) a share similar to the statewide percentage of 8.4 percent. Compared only with family households,\(^{55}\) rather than all households in the district, single-parent households account for 12 percent of the total. Kandiyohi, McLeod, and Yellow Medicine Counties have the highest percentage of single-parent households, at nearly 9 percent each. Lac qui Parle has the lowest percentage of single-parent households, at 6 percent.

• There are 838 instances in which grandparents are caring for their grandchildren in District 8. Of those 383, about one-third of instances (289) have been occurring for five years or more. In McLeod, Pipestone, and Yellow Medicine Counties, over half of the grandparents who live with their grandchildren under 18 years of age are responsible for raising those grandchildren.


\(^{54}\) Male and female householder (with no spouse present) with own children under 18 years of age.

\(^{55}\) The American Community Survey defines family household maintained by a householder who is in a family related by birth, marriage, or adoption.
Means of travel

Figure 7. Means of travel to work

- **81 percent of District 8 workers ages 16 and older drove alone to work**, higher than the share for the state as a whole (78 percent). District 8 has one of the highest percentages of workers ages 16 and older who drove alone compared with MnDOT’s other Greater Minnesota districts.

- **4.9 percent of District 8 households do not own a vehicle**, compared with 7 percent statewide.

- **Over half (51.3 percent) of workers** spent less than 15 minutes commuting, while another 5.4 percent spent an hour or more commuting. Lyon County had the greatest percentage of workers who commuted less than 15 minutes (63.2 percent). Lyon and McLeod counties had the greatest percentage of workers who commuted for one hour or more (9.6 percent).

Table 4. County-by-county comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Percent racial and ethnic minority</th>
<th>Percent with disabilities</th>
<th>Percent ages 17 and under</th>
<th>Median household income</th>
<th>Percent in poverty</th>
<th>Percent zero-vehicle households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chippewa</td>
<td>12,126</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>54,041</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandiyohi</td>
<td>42,510</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>53,514</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lac qui Parle</td>
<td>6,916</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>49,210</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lincoln</td>
<td>5,793</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>49,438</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon</td>
<td>25,670</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>51,920</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLeod</td>
<td>35,926</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>57,738</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

56 Counts workers ages 16 and older who did not work from home.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Percent racial and ethnic minority</th>
<th>Percent with disabilities</th>
<th>Percent ages 17 and under</th>
<th>Median household income</th>
<th>Percent in poverty</th>
<th>Percent zero-vehicle households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeker</td>
<td>23,094</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>58,574</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murray</td>
<td>8,463</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>51,801</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pipestone</td>
<td>9,285</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>48,944</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redwood</td>
<td>15,578</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>48,891</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renville</td>
<td>14,995</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>54,824</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Medicine</td>
<td>10,038</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>54,717</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Advancing Transportation Equity—key communities for interviews

Management Analysis and Development developed the following in late 2018 to help guide the District 8 interview process for the equity study.

This document summarizes key communities within District 8 for inclusion in the Advancing Transportation Equity project. The goal of this document is to provide a starting point for interviewee identification. Key populations were identified based on the current demographics and trends in the district and include populations with known inequities, including those relevant to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s efforts to achieve Environmental Justice in accordance with Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act.

It is important to recognize that these groups are not discrete. The transportation concerns often overlap, and a potential interviewee may represent multiple groups. Additionally, an individual may belong to more than one of the communities identified and may experience overlapping inequities.

Overview of District 8

Located in Southwest and West Central Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation’s (MnDOT) District 8 consists of 12 counties. Combined, these counties represent 10 percent of Minnesota’s total land area and just under 5 percent of the total population.

Non-white racial and ethnic groups

Racially biased policies and practices of the past have contributed to present-day inequities for people of color living in Minnesota. This includes inequities on a broad scale—for example, employment, wealth, and education—and also specific to transportation, for example, access, safety, and participation in decision-making. As such, it is important to include the concerns of these groups in the Advancing Transportation Equity project.

Over 10 percent of the residents in District 8 belong to a racial or ethnic minority group. The largest racial or ethnic minority in the district is the Hispanic population, which accounts for 6.2 percent of people. The second largest is the African American population, accounting for 1.3 percent of people. In Kandiyohi County, 17.3 percent of people belong to a minority racial or ethnic group, the highest in District 8 and close to the statewide average of 18.7 percent. About 3 percent of people in District 8 speak English less than well. After English, Spanish is the most common language spoken. Other commonly spoken languages include Somali and Hmong. Languages that are less common include Arabic, Cambodian, Mandarin Chinese, Karen, and Russian.

American Indians account for 1 percent of the people in the region. Transportation inequities unique to people of American Indian ancestry, such as pedestrian safety on reservations, should be an important consideration of this project.
Women and girls

Women of all ages make up 50 percent of District 8’s population. This is similar to the state overall. One well-documented transportation concern for women is safety. Safety concerns such as walking to and waiting for public transit, especially at night, should be considered as part of this project.

Elderly and aging in place

About 19 percent of the population in District 8 is over age 65, four percentage points higher than the state as a whole. Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, and Murray Counties each have populations with a higher percentage of residents ages 65 and older, with each of these three counties estimated at about 25 percent. Potential concerns for these groups include transportation for accessing services and care providers, which should be taken into consideration as part of this project.

Low-income (persons living in poverty)

One transportation equity concern for low-income households is the ability to access jobs, services, and other opportunities. About 10.4 percent of people in District 8 have incomes lower than the federal poverty level. The average median household income in District 8 is $52,801, slightly lower than the statewide average median household income of $55,560. Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Pipestone, and Redwood have a median household income of approximately $49,000 or under, lower than the district’s average median household income.

Zero-vehicle households

About 5 percent of households in District 8 do not have a vehicle. Zero-vehicle households have difficulties accessing jobs and other opportunities. The availability and frequency of transit service, in addition to biking and walking options, are important when considering the transportation needs of zero-vehicle households. For the Advancing Transportation Equity project it will be important to consider overlaps between race, income, and gender with zero-vehicle households.

Disability

About 12 percent of the district’s population are people with disabilities—one of the highest percentages among the MnDOT districts throughout the state. As such, the District 8 equity project should focus on the transportation experience for people with disabilities related to hearing, vision, cognitive capabilities, ambulatory capabilities, self-care, mental illness, and difficulties that restrict independent living. Better understanding the various nuanced experiences will help ensure the individuals experiencing these disabilities are able to travel with the same ease and access as those who do not have a disability.

Veterans

Veterans often experience disabilities at a higher rate than the population as a whole. Veterans account for about 7 percent of the district’s population. An estimated 32 percent of the veterans in the district have a
disability. In addition to mobility concerns, access to veterans’ services in District 8 should also be considered as part of this project.

Other communities for consideration

Information is not readily available for all demographic groups. In some cases data is not regularly collected and reported, or individuals may not feel comfortable providing information. But even if data about transportation is limited, communities may still be experiencing transportation inequities. The list below identifies other potential populations for consideration in the Advancing Transportation Equity project:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual individuals
- Minority religious groups
- Immigrants, refugees, and migrants
- People released from incarceration
- People experiencing homelessness
- People experiencing chemical dependency and other addictions
Appendix E: Advancing Transportation Equity interview guide

Interviewers used the following questions to guide their conversations and were instructed to use probes to further explore topic areas.

1. Broadly speaking, what are some challenges facing the community or communities you serve/represent?
2. Which transportation modes are most often used by the community to carry out day-to-day activities? (Including attending work, school, health care appointments, and social and cultural activities)
3. Which modes are most critical and what challenges do they encounter in accessing these modes? (Including private vehicles, transit, bicycling, walking, etc.) What, if any, locations are particularly difficult to get to?
4. How well are nonmotorized modes and public transportation in this area meeting (or not meeting) the needs of the community?
5. What, if any, safety concern does the community have with regard to transportation?
6. What does equity mean to your organization?
7. Can you describe a transportation project or program that impacted the community your organization serves/represents and how the community was involved in the decision-making?
8. What, if any, examples do you have of when the community has been successful in advocating on issues important to them?
Appendix F: Findings and potential solutions from Implementation Planning Meeting 1

During a May 28, 2019, workshop, MAD consultants presented staff from MnDOT Central Office and District 8 with report findings that lent themselves most to actionable solutions, as distinct from report findings about how transportation interacts with other factors in people’s lives, or about how interview participants defined equity. Workshop participants first chose specific findings and developed the following potential solutions in small groups. They then voted on which solutions they believe MnDOT should prioritize. Proposed solutions that received participant votes appear in bold, with the number of votes listed afterward in parentheses.

Finding: Private vehicles

*Private vehicles are an important transportation mode in District 8, but some community members face challenges related to vehicle ownership and use.*

Challenges include:
- Ownership costs are too high for many low-income people
- Some face barriers to obtaining or keeping a driver’s license (e.g., due to immigration status, language or legal issues)
- Some face limitations, including limitations related to age and disability

Potential solutions:
- MnDOT’s commissioner should describe the challenges when testifying in front of legislators
- District engineers and others share stories with legislators about access to driver’s licenses and reducing the types of offenses that result in a loss of driver’s license

Finding: Public transit

*Public transit services are important to District 8 residents, especially older adults, people with low incomes, immigrants, people with disabilities, and people without vehicles. Nevertheless, access to and use of transit is limited by various factors.*

Factors include:
- Hours of service (generally daytime and weekdays) and the service area of transit providers (limited or nonexistent in some rural areas)
- Challenges with transit scheduling, travel times, and trip coordination
• The price of fares
• Lack of knowledge, and familiarity with, public transit options and procedures. Affected groups include immigrant communities, those for whom English is not a first language, or other members of the community who are aware of transit systems but do not understand how they work

Potential solutions:

• To address knowledge of and familiarity with public transit options and procedures, especially for immigrant communities or those for whom English is not a first language
  o Use OTAT special funding for translation and marketing/outreach campaigns (not just translation, need specific communication tactics) (3 votes)
  o Create a potentially larger contract to create consistent marketing across providers

Finding: Biking and walking

Despite recent investments in bike and pedestrian infrastructure, barriers persist.

Barriers include:

• The stigma that biking carries for some people who consider it a “last resort” for those who cannot drive
• Winter weather—cold, snow, ice
• Limited-distance mode
• Limited infrastructure for biking, such as poor sidewalks
• The perception that biking and walking are unsafe transportation options

Potential solutions:

• Influence local partners to develop bike and pedestrian plans (state aid) (6 votes)
• Local maintenance agreements for snow and ice removal
• Use Regional Development Commissions (RDC) as a platform for working with partners
• Continue to enhance the District 8 Bike Plan (2 votes)
• Develop implementation guidelines along trunk highways for upgrades with projects (1 vote)
• Perception of biking as the mode of “last resort:” Bike or Walk to Work events and/education on benefits (1 vote)
• Make people aware of painted bike lanes
• Identify ways to coordinate transit to bike routes (to address the concern of biking as a “limited distance mode”) (1 vote)
Finding: Additional transportation options

Other transportation options exist, but also have limitations.

Limitations include:

- Taxis are available in larger cities in District 8, but are more expensive (relatively) for people with low incomes
- There is no widely available app-based ride-hailing option (people would like access to this)
- Volunteer driver programs are very important to rural residents, but availability is decreasing and driver reimbursement is limited

Potential solutions:

- Create an app-based (same-day) ride-hailing service (7 votes)
  - Federal Transit Authority (FTA) Pilot Project Grant
  - Hold statewide workshops
- Volunteer Driver Program
- Local Regional Transportation Coordination Councils (RTCCs)
  - Advocate
  - Funding
  - Legislation (protect Volunteer Driver Program)
  - Lobby (RTCC funds)
- Re-assess volunteer driver structure
  - Increase recognition, acknowledgment, and awareness
  - Update District 8 communication materials
  - Job recruitment is being shared with partners
- Recruit more community members to work for transit providers

Finding: Safety concerns for communities in District 8

Equity conversation participants expressed safety concerns about drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

Safety concerns include:

- Some members of the community lack knowledge about driving or are uncomfortable driving, especially in urban areas or on winter roads
- Narrow or absent shoulders are a safety risk for drivers
- Winter weather, especially snow, poses a safety hazard for bicyclists and pedestrians
- Perceptions of safety— independent of actual risks—limit parents’ willingness to let their children walk or bike

Potential solutions:
• Address lack of knowledge
• Provide topic-specific education through MnDOT communications, MnDOT social media
• Partner with the Department of Public Safety, AARP, Agencies on Aging
• Partner with nonprofit organizations that work with immigrants and groups with limited English proficiency
• Address narrow or absent shoulders
• Review Complete Streets guidance and policy
• Coordinate with cities and counties
• Address winter weather
• Assess plowing priorities
• Educate property owners
• Explore/pilot municipalities contracted for maintenance
• Identify priority pathways
• Add living snow fences on bike routes
• Limit winter parking in areas for snow storage
• Address perceptions of safety
• Lower speed limits
• Use traffic calming techniques on more roads
• When coordinating with cities and counties, allow more flexibility
• Pilot placemaking\textsuperscript{57} or tactical urbanism strategies\textsuperscript{58}

**Finding: Public engagement strategies**

Findings include:

• Engagement is not as strong across all communities (e.g., diverse ethnic and racial groups)
• Interviewees emphasized the importance of listening to what the public wants, making changes based on that input, and supporting grassroots efforts
• In-person engagement is key

Potential solutions:

• Go to where people already are, but don’t give up “traditional” methods of public engagement

\textsuperscript{57} “Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.” Project for Public Spaces, “What is placemaking?”, accessed July 2, 2019, \url{https://www.pps.org/category/placemaking}.

\textsuperscript{58} “Tactical urbanism” refers to small-scale, temporary interventions in the built environment to increase human enjoyment of the space, such as “pedestrian plazas,” “parklets,” and “pop-up bike lanes.” Tactical Urbanist’s Guide to Getting It Done, “What is Tactical Urbanism?”, accessed July 2, 2019, \url{http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/about/}. 
• Use a trusted advocate or community liaison
• Make it easy; use multiple communication platforms
• Find ways to be a trusted agency
• Set clear expectations and “close the loop” (communicate our “promise to the public”)
• **Create “fun” events people want to attend (1 vote)**
• **Know a community, do your research (community profile), talk to people to better understand and provide appropriate engagement focused on a specific community (1 vote)**
• Share engagement and communication best practices (MnDOT Central Office)
• Encourage local transit providers to create or grow connections to their communities
• Provide staff with stakeholder engagement training (MnDOT Central Office)
• **Consider hiring or using consultants as interpreters or community liaisons for engaging community members (5 votes)**

**Finding: Ways to improve public engagement**

Ideas from the conversations included:

• Partner with local organizations
• Build relationships by spending time in communities
• Use multiple communication formats/platforms and breaking away from typical channels
• Reach out to the community regularly
• Meet people at places they already frequent
• Take action on the input people provide

Potential solutions:

• **Host open houses (educational gatherings) on current project money (e.g., “Coffee and conversations,” “Explore MnDOT”) (3 votes)**
• Identify people to “open the door” to communities
• **Better understand which communication platforms people use and delivering it [engagement] in different languages (e.g., grocery store bulletin boards) (1 vote)**
• Use community members to translate, transfer trust: we can learn what people need to know (1 vote)
• Follow through on input, connect, and make proper referrals
• **Attend festivals and community gatherings. Meet people where they’re at (1 vote)**
• Assign MnDOT employee as the point of contact for specific groups
## Appendix G: Additional suggested interviewees

The table below lists organizations and people that interviewees suggested for additional conversations. These contacts are an opportunity for District 8 staff to expand on the findings from the District 8 community conversations and explore additional areas of interest that arise from the findings and recommendations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>City</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advance Opportunities</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethesda Nursing Home</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolder Estates–Congregate and Assisted Living In Marshall</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambers of commerce</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Marshall administration</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Integration Center</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County administrators and commissioners</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County engineers</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal courts/justice system</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEED workforce centers</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divine House</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith communities</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food shelf programs</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habilitative Services, Inc.</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong community representatives in Marshall</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major employers</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical facilities</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian community at Southwest MN State University</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Door Health Center</td>
<td>Clarkfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public school administrations</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renville county veterans services</td>
<td>Olivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REM South Central Services</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridgewater College</td>
<td>Willmar/Hutchinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southwest MN State University</td>
<td>Marshall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Affairs</td>
<td>Throughout the district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland Centers</td>
<td>Willmar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: Other opportunities and initiatives

The table below lists other opportunities and initiatives that participants in the conversations identified as possibly relevant to MnDOT’s work in equity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Work or potential work for collaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willmar Bikes</td>
<td>An advocacy group consisting of cross-governmental partnerships, focused on creating a bike culture in Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Family Services regional meetings</td>
<td>A standing meeting of all regional family services during which transportation is often discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Redwood Falls</td>
<td>The city is a Toward Zero Death (TZD) city and would like to address concerns regarding speed and traffic incidents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Graceville</td>
<td>Invited local transit providers to a discussion regarding transit gaps in accessing medical needs (e.g., transportation to drug store)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota River Area Agency on Aging</td>
<td>Coordinate with other state departments and focused conversations regarding aging population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for coordination between veterans services transportation and community members’ medical transportation needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for Volunteer Drivers Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Health Improvement Program</td>
<td>Community-driven efforts for active living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandiyohi County Veterans Services</td>
<td>Provide full-time transportation options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willmar Community Education</td>
<td>Address transportation challenges for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Together Willmar Initiative</td>
<td>A health initiative of Blue Cross Blue Shield in partnership with City of Willmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koloni Share Bike</td>
<td>Smartphone-based bike share program expected to be implemented in Willmar in 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Development Center</td>
<td>Interested in partnering with MnDOT to build trust with the community as well as participate in other initiatives such as job fairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit services</td>
<td>Translation of materials into other languages such as Spanish, Karen, Somali, Amharic, and Tingyi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I: Map of Greater Minnesota transit systems