MnDOT Sustainable Transportation Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

Date: 08/06/2020
Time: 9:00 A.M. – 11:00 PM
Location: Zoom
Meeting materials will be available on the MnDOT Sustainability Website

Action Items:

1. STAC members to think about how this group can prioritize racial equity and justice work.
2. MnDOT will send a scheduling poll to host an “About MnDOT” training in September and offer a recording for people who aren’t able to attend.
3. MnDOT will send meeting notes 1 week from today (August 14).
4. MnDOT will send draft Transportation Action Team engagement materials for comment.
5. MnDOT will send survey for next meeting dates, aiming for late September, early October.

Attendees

Council Members Present
1) Margaret Anderson Kelliher (Co-chair)
2) Chris Clark (Co-chair)
3) Katie Bell
4) Sen. Scott Dibble
5) Katie Frye
6) Dorian Grilley
7) Rep. Frank Hornstein
8) Lisa Thurstin
9) Katie Jones
10) Ashwat Narayanan
11) Michael Noble
12) Rolf Nordstrom
13) Daniel Schellhammer
14) LaSheila Sims
15) Russ Stark
16) Emma Struss
17) Vishnu Laalitha Surapaneni
18) Nick Thompson
19) Peter Wagenius
20) Tara Wetzel

Council Members Absent
1) Greg Ilkka
2) Sen. Scott Newman
3) Patrick Seeb

MnDOT and Great Plains Institute Staff Present
Sethey Ben, MnDOT
Connie Volcke, Great Plains Institute (technical support)
Gina Kundan, MnDOT (facilitator)
Ben Lowndes, MnDOT (facilitator)
Tim Sexton, MnDOT
Siri Simons, MnDOT
Nissa Tupper, MnDOT
Jeffrey Meek, MnDOT
Meeting Notes

Co-Chairs’ Welcome

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher and co-chair Chris Clark, President of Xcel Energy, welcomed council members and attendees.

Member Introductions

Council members introduced themselves and the organizations they represent.

Racial Justice, Equity, and Sustainable Transportation

MnDOT Commissioner Margaret Anderson Kelliher introduced the discussion and framed the importance of prioritizing racial justice and equity in transportation. This is not meant to be an exhaustive conversation for the STAC, but a first step to identify where we can have positive influence. Racial injustice is a public health crisis and transportation planning plays a role in this, in particular where the most marginalized communities experience an undue burden from transportation. It’s important to think about where communities have been adversely affected and there’s a need to engage different perspectives from a wider range of folks.

Gina Kundan, with the MnDOT Office of Equity and Diversity facilitated the group conversation. The group started with grounding in conversation guidelines and definitions for racial equity and racial justice. The group’s discussion was framed around prompt questions and a summary of comments from STAC members is included below:

1) What are some of your most pressing concerns related to transportation and racial justice and equity in Minnesota?

Electrification:

- One concern is with the electrification of transportation and that it will only benefit white affluent residents of Minnesota.
- Need to prioritize electrification of buses in communities where air pollution and racial disparities are the greatest. Electric vehicles are currently associated with privilege, but we need to focus on how they’ll be available for everyone. Families that don’t have garages need public charging. Right now many of these investments are on highways, but we’ll also need high speed charging in neighborhoods without garages.
- Electric bicycles should be considered, as they eliminate age, health, and fitness barriers if they’re accessible and affordable. Can MnDOT develop a pilot for a $300 electric bike?

Impact of historical and proposed investments:

- Communities along the highway corridors (e.g., I-94, I-35 South) are exposed to unequal levels of air pollution and experience undue health burdens. This is an artifact of past transportation investments and is reinforced by folks moving away from those areas who have the means.
There’s also a trend of jobs moving out of the metro community, where metropolitan residents have less access.

- Highway 55 becomes a six lane highway when it gets to North Minneapolis. There are already safety impacts for community members needing to cross, which will increase with the Blue Line extension proposal. It seems intuitive to condense this width, as traffic should be slowing down as it approaches the city. This is a high priority concern for North Minneapolis.

- We know that our bike and walk paths are not distributed equitably and we face gentrification problems when we do introduce them. It’s important we work with the communities to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in a way that builds community health.

- We have an opportunity to build two bus rapid transit lines, the B line along Lake Street and D line, these could be significant to revitalization of communities that have seen historical disinvestment. It’s also important to consider the emission impacts of Line 3.

**Policy, investment, and decision-making barriers:**

- This workgroup should grapple with the reality that there’s challenges in the legislature to the kind of transportation that communities of color need in their lives. This needs to be front and center to address structures that limit how we can advance walkable, bikable, and transit-oriented communities.

- Recognize the outsized role of transportation. It’s one of the biggest factors for breaking out of poverty. There’s an epidemic of traffic crashes in Minneapolis, our state, and nationally. There are significant racial disparities in terms of who’s more likely to be hit by a car. This reflects decisions about where we’ve chosen to invest transportation infrastructure. We also need to talk about policing. What’s our new paradigm for community and transportation safety? Fundamentally comes down to who has power and decision making, this group has an opportunity to bring in the voices of those who have been left out and build a system that actually works for everyone.

- Cost and access to sustainable transportation are barriers to low income and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.

- Government policies are biased to single family homes over those who rent or live in multi-unit housing. There’s also bias to those who own and operate single occupancy vehicles (SOV) versus those who can’t. This stems from less investment in transit and allocation of space. An extraordinary amount of space is dedicated SOVs, especially when we consider parking. Investment is often channeled based on congestion rather than access. Congestion is a proxy for economic activity, yet economic activity produces congestion. Is it right to say that those who have less economic activity, therefore less congestion, need less investment? We need to shift investment priorities to where access is needed, not where congestion is present.
2) What needs to be shed or let go of in order to change the system to achieve racial justice and equity within the transportation sector?

Existing decision-making paradigm:
- The transportation sector is hierarchical in how decisions are made and what issues are elevated. The doors need to swing open more in terms of who can be at the table to be listened to with authority and make decisions.
- We need to shed the idea that transportation planning is primarily an engineering challenge as opposed to "what is the best mix of modes for meeting people's diversity of needs."
- Our transportation investment decisions are based on models that have existed for decades. To get new outcomes we need to create new decision making and funding eligibility criteria.
- We have to let go of the processes and timelines of how we’re used to making decisions that leave out important voices. For example, the work of STAC workgroups to have draft recommendations by December makes it difficult to equitably engage and meaningfully get more voices at the table.
- In transportation, for those who argue we can’t afford everything we want and need, we must do transit, biking, and walking FIRST because those are the modes available to people who can’t afford cars. For too long, these modes have been considered “nice to do if we can afford it.”
- Need to change the “us vs. them,” particularly the “metro vs. urban” attitude, which includes active opposition to the Metropolitan Council. Discounting voices outside the districts served and choosing to only listen to constituents and favoring their opinion is flawed. Policy makers need to represent all Minnesotans with the decisions they make.
- We may need to shed our roles on the STAC to allow the group to become more representative of our communities and the state. Workgroups should consider including others and using virtual panels or other methods to incorporate perspectives.

Historical Metrics:
- One particular metric that should be re-examined is level of service (LOS). How is that currently being used for project prioritization and should it be changed?
- We need to shed the metrics that prioritize moving more SOVs, while doing so faster.

Myths:
- Biggest thing holding us back is mythology. Four myths that need to be shed: 1) roads pay for themselves; 2) we can build our way out of congestion; 3) transportation decisions are driven by land use decisions and not the other way around; and 4) huge increase in VMT is the result of individual decisions or market forces as opposed to policy decisions by government agencies which encourage people to drive more. All of these myths foster political polarization and racial inequality.
- A widely held impression is that money flows into the Metro area from Greater Minnesota to fund things like transit and light rail, when the opposite is true. Money flows out of the
Metro to Greater Minnesota to pay for community services, roads, and schools, which is also a justice issue.

**Workgroup Updates**

Work group co-chairs provided an update on the status of the groups, goals, and any additional information they wanted to share.

**Fueling and Powering Transportation Workgroup**
The co-chairs, Katie Frye and Rolf Nordstrom, provided an update. The group’s first meeting has been scheduled. The group’s focus areas include: EV charging infrastructure and incentives; biofuels and clean fuels policies; vehicle fuels and efficiency, including emerging fuels like hydrogen; and clean transportation funding pilot program as a sub-workgroup. The group would like to think about infrastructure broadly and explicitly include light, medium, and heavy duty vehicles.

**Reduce VMT and Improve Transportation Options Workgroup**
The co-chairs, Emma Struss and Ash Narayanan, provided an update. The first workgroup meeting was Aug. 4, which focused on grounding in the work. Focus areas include transportation options, including biking, walking and transit; MnDOT project planning and project selection process; and land use and transportation. The group is proposing liaisons to attend other workgroup meetings. The group also discussed who’s not at the table and is looking into other voices to invite into the group. The timeline is tight for deep public engagement, which is a concern.

The next meeting will focus on the goals of the strategies and process for making recommendations. The group is aware of scaling recommendations to match the scale of the problem. The short-term goal for December is to focus on what we can influence now. The long-term goal is to think about recommendations in a more comprehensive way and include more voices to support fundamental changes.

**General Updates**

MnDOT recognized that this timeline is challenging for putting forth meaningful recommendations and conducting engagement. This first year the recommendations and formal work may be different than in subsequent years. Engagement is important and there may be collaboration opportunities with the Governor’s Climate Change Subcabinet efforts.

There are two additional workgroups, one is Climate Resilience, which Tara Wetzel and Greg Ilkka will co-chair. MnDOT staff are working with them to identify the workgroup scope and will re-solicit STAC member participation. The other workgroup is Funding and Finance. This workgroup will likely help respond to other work groups’ recommendations. MnDOT is staggering the start of workgroups due to staff capacity. MnDOT is open to feedback on how these workgroups evolve. If STAC members would like to be on another workgroup, please let MnDOT know. It’s also welcome for STAC members to reach out to people outside the STAC to get involved with the workgroup efforts.

**Governor’s Climate Change Subcabinet**
MnDOT gave an overview of the Governor’s Climate Change Subcabinet and Action Team. Executive Order 19-37 directed the state agencies to work together to identify policies and strategies that will put Minnesota back on track to meet or exceed the Next Generation Energy Act goals. As part of this, a citizen’s Advisory Council is also being created to advise the Subcabinet. The Subcabinet work started in earnest this spring and is organized around sector focus areas. Action Teams include staff-level expertise to generate ideas, which funnel up to the Senior Leaders Coordinating Team to filter the ideas and prepare them for Subcabinet review. The policy ideas shown today are suggestions from Action Teams that can be pursued, these have not been reviewed or formally accepted by agencies or the Governor’s office to move forward yet.

Transportation Action Team
MnDOT gave an overview of the Transportation Action Team. To identify policy ideas, the group started by conducting a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to get a similar understanding of where to start. The group then brainstormed a list of policies that leveraged insights from recent engagement efforts, such as the Pathways to Decarbonizing Project. The group developed a list of about 30 policy ideas and prioritized using GHG reduction and equity impacts to rank them. From there, potential actions were grouped into categories, such as incentives, statutory policy change, state leadership, and grants. Top priorities were then selected from each of these categories.

Current policy suggestions include two “moonshot policies.” The first is to develop a clean fuels standard (low carbon fuel standard) to create a market for different fuel types to incentivize lower carbon fuels and the second is to create a carbon price on transportation fuels. Other policies include: establishing consumer rebates for electric vehicles; directing the existing $75 EV fee toward EV infrastructure; increasing frequency and coverage of transit along high demand corridors; and developing a state-level plan to advance medium/heavy duty electric vehicles.

Climate Engagement Team
MnDOT gave an overview of the Climate Engagement Team that was formed to support Action Teams with engagement to inform policy recommendations. The team’s support efforts center on conducting meaningful and inclusive engagement. There are some short-term challenges due to timeline and COVID.

Across agencies, the group is focused on building a team of public engagement professionals to guide coordinated engagement, supporting public engagement implementation across agencies, and developing a public engagement framework to support consistent efforts as the work evolves. Liaison roles have been identified to line-up Climate Engagement Team members with Action Teams to provide dedicated capacity and support continuity.

For the Transportation Action Team engagement, the group is focused on short-term efforts to gather feedback on the potential actions to reduce transportation carbon pollution. These will be a building block for long-term engagement. In the short-term, the group is pushing out an electronic survey to better understand how these potential actions are viewed by Minnesotans, which ideas rise are most important, and hear if any ideas are missing. The survey will help us to better understand how folks
want to be engaged with this effort so we can tailor our activities moving forward. The survey will go live
the week of Aug. 17. The group plans a listening session in early September and will create an open
comment box on the MnDOT website. In terms of targeted engagement, staff are working with the
MnDOT Tribal Affairs Office on tribal consultation efforts. Staff welcome STAC feedback on these
engagement efforts.

Resilience Action Team
Jeff Meek provided an overview of the Resilience Action Team. The group started with
recommendations that the Interagency Climate Adaptation Team (ICAT) had previously identified
through outreach efforts. The group followed a similar process as the Transportation Action Team to
develop ideas. The initial 30 policy suggestions were narrowed down to the top seven to advance.
These include: creating state adaptation funding (grants, bonding, and guidelines/criteria); funding the
University of Minnesota to produce high-resolution, dynamically-downscaled climate projections for
Minnesota; creating a credit system to incentivize ecosystem-based green infrastructure and natural
stormwater management (within NPDES); developing vulnerable populations climate data tools;
authorizing flexible building codes; creating a state inventory for agriculture drainage to support on-
farm and off-farm storage; and launching a Climate Change, Impacts, and Adaptation website.

Discussion
A question was raised about EV infrastructure investment including electric transit infrastructure. This is
something the Transportation Action Team is still exploring.

COVID has shown us that we may need recommendations that help us improve transportation access
(e.g. transit) to have alternative systems that allow people to get to where they need to go, especially if
they don’t have a private vehicle. A policy idea could focus on how to shift from traditionally offered
programs to another set during certain circumstances.

How should the STAC workgroups include policy suggestions within their work, or vice versa? STAC
workgroups and Subcabinet efforts have parallel and somewhat overlapping paths. Although there’s a
slight timing mismatch, the hope is that the workgroups can consider and provide input on these ideas
as time allows. MnDOT will try to keep both groups updated on efforts and welcome ideas on how we
can do that, as well as feedback on the policy suggestions themselves.

At some point the group should look at proportionality of solutions. There’s a need to clean up vehicles
through electrification and reduce VMT, there’s a proportionality we need to consider to achieve our
reduction goals. This is an area where the VMT reduction workgroup can identify levers and changes to
help guide MnDOT’s focus.

Round Robin and Next Steps

MnDOT walked through the next steps, which are reflected in the “Next Steps—Action Items” section.

Public Comment Period
Sean Gosiewski, Alliance for Sustainability: Thoughts on urban resilience needs in addition to rural resilience needs? In the transportation area, additional ways to reduce VMT? He’s also looking forward to helping pull together a virtual conversation with interested NGOs and University of Minnesota experts as resources to provide additional feedback to the Subcabinet focus areas.

**Next Steps – Action Items**

1. STAC members to think about how this group can prioritize racial equity and justice work. Discussion will take place in WGs.
2. MnDOT will send a scheduling poll to host an “About MnDOT” training in September and offer a recording for people who aren’t able to attend.
3. MnDOT will send meeting notes 1 week from today (August 14).
4. MnDOT will send draft Transportation Action Team engagement materials for comment.
5. MnDOT will send survey for next meeting dates, aiming for late September, early October.