

## Statewide Mowing and Haying

### Project Background

- MnDOT engaged with stakeholders and the public to educate and share different perspectives on how mowing and haying permits and rules impact them or the environment and gain their perspective and suggestions on improvements to the current process of obtaining a permit.
- MnDOT used the input to generate recommendations for the Legislature regarding the establishment of a permit or notification system (or changes to the existing permit process) to mow or hay in trunk highway right-of-way.

### Public Engagement Challenge

- Conflicting views on policy from opposing members of the public and other stakeholders (city, county, etc.).
- Legislative mandate to study and recommend solutions for this issue created a very tight timeframe that made consent difficult to obtain.
- State statute that restricts mowing in the highway right of way to only the month of August affects the willingness to seek a permit by those wishing to mow and hay.

### Public Engagement Tool

- Stakeholder meetings were held monthly (and more frequently at the end of the process) and included members of each of the following areas:
  - Business/Agricultural interests
  - State and local governmental entities
  - Environmental groups
- Nine listening sessions were conducted with the public across the state (October - December, 2017).
- Over 200 persons of the public submitted feedback online.
- Paper feedback forms were distributed at the listening sessions for public to hand in at the end of the meeting and others sent via mail (over 75).

### Key Takeaways

- Using a neutral third-party consultant (MAD) to conduct the sessions added credibility and allowed for a more open and honest discussion.
- Starting out stakeholder sessions with an opportunity for each group to educate others on “why” they hold their perspective (without interruption):
  - Infused a greater understanding and empathy (even if all did not agree).
  - Provided input to create an “Interest Chart” which was used as a guide at other sessions.

- Encouraging stakeholders to listen in on at least one public session, when acted on, facilitated an even greater shared understanding of the complexity of the issues and why compromise would be ideal.
- Having multiple methods to engage the public reaches a broader geographic and brings in a wider variety of perspectives:
  - In-person sessions were skewed somewhat toward agricultural/business interests.
  - Online submissions were skewed somewhat more toward environmental interests.
  - Mailed in and online options were mixed.

### Level of Engagement: Collaborate

- MnDOT was clear up front that the public input could influence recommendations. For example, the “Take some, Leave some” policy recommendation for mowing and haying (versus listing a specific % split) was suggested in the listening sessions and explored by the stakeholder group to meet more needs and encourage wider ranging compliance.

### Caveat

- Identify stakeholders as early as possible and coordinate the schedule to meet the desired outcome (over-book number of meetings and cancel if not needed later).
- Anticipate potential outcomes and if conflict is predictable, take preventable measures (soft skills, negotiate, neutral third party facilitator, on-site police, feedback forms).
- Use rules up front for listening sessions on appropriate participation and time limits.

### Quote

- “Providing multiple ways for the public to provide input, especially by holding listening sessions around the state, proved to be a good method for obtaining a variety of perspectives on this complex issue.” – Nancy Daubenberger, Assistant Commissioner, Engineering Services

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### Keywords

- Public vs. public conflict, short time frame, multiple tools, legislative mandate, collaborate.

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