

Public Involvement Strategy: Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan

Introduction

An effective Public Involvement Strategy is critical to ensure that stakeholder input is integrated into the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan process. It is important that all stakeholders have an opportunity to become informed about the plan and provide feedback on investment priorities.

This Strategy outlines Mn/DOT's approach to stakeholder involvement in the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan. The public involvement strategy is intended to be open and able to evolve as new issues and concerns are known or additional stakeholders are identified. Mn/DOT will make every effort to consider stakeholders' concerns and incorporate their issues into the final plan.

Project Background

Transit service need, measured in vehicle hours of service, is rising and demographic trends in Greater Minnesota indicate transit service need will continue to increase over the next 20 years. Public transit need around the state is growing with Minnesota's overall population and its population of transit-dependent riders. Minnesota's various public transportation systems are growing to meet these needs. In 1990, 40 counties out of 80 total Greater Minnesota counties had some form of public transportation system; by 2009, this number had increased to 76. Transit provides an invaluable service to seniors, persons with disabilities, people without cars, and others.

Public Involvement in Previous Planning Processes

Greater Minnesota Transit Plan

In 2009, Mn/DOT completed the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan 2010-2030. This plan identified the vision, policies, and strategies for transit in Greater Minnesota. The purpose of the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan is to set investment priorities at the county level based on findings from the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan. Public involvement efforts during the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan were extensive. The Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan builds on previous stakeholder input and seeks additional, focused input on specific funding priorities.

Public involvement during the Greater Minnesota Transit Plan included 35 structured interviews with leaders from state and regional agencies to identify service gaps, groups benefiting from additional transit, priorities for expanding service, and emerging transit issues; 7 facilitated workshops to gather input from key stakeholder groups and invite the general public to provide feedback on the plan; and 35 electronic surveys completed by transit providers throughout Greater Minnesota in October 2008 as a complementary data collection method to the structured interviews. The Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan follows up on this public involvement strategy by engaging stakeholders at a more detailed level in determining investment priorities for future transit investment.

Transportation Dialogues Survey

In fall 2009, Mn/DOT surveyed participants of the Minnesota Council on Disability's Transportation Dialogues, a series of 4 public meetings held around the state. These surveys were targeted to transit stakeholders present at the meetings, including employers, transit providers, and service providers to people with disabilities. This was an opportunity to inform these stakeholders of the planning process. In addition, Mn/DOT used findings from these surveys to develop market research components of the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan.

Objectives for Public Involvement

The primary objectives of public involvement during the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan are to:

- Maintain regular contact with stakeholders to inform them of plan development and findings
- Provide opportunities for stakeholders to participate in the planning process and influence the determination of investment priorities
- Understand and respond to stakeholder concerns and incorporate them in evaluating investment priorities
- Build support for investment priorities

Schedule for Planning

The workplan for the Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan includes the following tasks:

- 1) Market Research/Existing Conditions Analysis
 - a. On-board surveys
 - b. Regional focus groups among non-users of transit
 - c. Demographic profile and transit service mapping
 - d. Structured interviews
- 2) Investment Priorities
 - a. Calculate public transit need by county
 - b. Determine service hours to meet future transit need
 - c. Project costs and revenues by county
 - d. Set investment priorities
- 3) Public Outreach
 - a. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Plan Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings
 - b. Legislative updates
 - c. Stakeholder presentations
 - d. Public open houses
 - e. Public Hearing
 - f. Website with comment section
- 4) Plan Preparation and Writing

Identify Stakeholders and Issues

Per Title VI legislation, special attention will be paid to solicit input from under-represented groups:

- Low income populations
- Elderly populations
- Disabled populations
- Minority populations
- Limited English Proficiency populations

These groups will be targeted for participation in focus groups and identified in on-board surveys. The concentration of these groups within regions and connectivity of existing transit service will be discussed as part of the demographic profile and transit service mapping.

To identify other stakeholders likely affected by planning outcomes, Regional Development Commission (RDC) planners and Mn/DOT District Transit Project Managers (DTPMs) will create a “power vs. interest grid” of stakeholders in their region. This activity facilitates brainstorming to identify stakeholders and helps planners assess stakeholders’ relative power to affect plan outcomes and interest level in doing so. Stakeholders identified through this process will be targeted for structured interviews and stakeholder presentations and asked to make website comments and participate at open houses. The following groups of stakeholders are examples of those identified during this process:

State and Local Agencies and Officials

- Mn/DOT
- State legislators
- Congressional representatives
- County and City elected officials
- RDCs
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)

Private Industry/Civic Organizations

- Transit providers
- Veterans’ groups
- Destination owners and business owners (e.g. shopping centers)
- Chambers of commerce
- Higher learning institutions
- Employment Centers (e.g. shipping and distribution centers, shopping centers, downtowns)

Public Involvement Strategies: Market Research

On-board Surveys

Mn/DOT will survey transit passengers to better gauge their usage trends and desired levels of service. These will be self-administered on buses on each route of every transit system in Greater Minnesota.

Focus Groups

Focus groups will target non-users of public transit and will be used to gather perceptions of transit and transit need among this group. Each RDC will host one focus group in their region; Mn/DOT staff will not be present in order to encourage participants to freely share opinions. Mn/DOT will provide RDCs with a list of questions to use in a facilitated discussion during focus groups.

To invite participants, RDCs will use their existing networks to identify and invite 10-12 participants. RDCs will screen invitees to ensure they are not regular transit riders and do not work for a stakeholder agency, e.g. transit provider, RDC, local politician, etc. RDCs will invite and include one member from each of the following groups: seniors, persons with low-income, minorities, and persons with disabilities. Focus groups will take place during March and April 2010 and will meet in a conference room in the RDC office or other easily accessible location. RDCs will provide dinner to focus group attendees and/or a small stipend

Structured Interviews

Mn/DOT and its consultant team will develop structured interviews that will be administered to individuals from groups such as transit providers, human service providers, and citizens to assess acceptable investment priorities in cases of both increased and decreased funding scenarios.

Public Involvement Strategies: Meetings and Outreach

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The TAC will meet 4-5 times throughout the planning process and help make key decisions to determine project methodologies and set investment priorities. The TAC will provide the first external review of project decisions and will play a key role in shaping the project methodology. Members of the TAC will include Mn/DOT District Transit Project Managers and a transit provider representing each district.

Plan Advisory Committee (PAC)

The primary role of the PAC is to serve as advocates and champions for the plan. They will provide high-level analysis and guide the overall development of the plan. The PAC will meet 3-5 times and provide a second review to confirm the direction of the TAC. Members of the PAC include representatives from key stakeholders and partners, including the Met Council, University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies, Department of Human Services, local transit providers, and others.

Legislative Updates

Mn/DOT will inform key legislative stakeholders of plan development throughout the process. These include representatives from the Senate Transportation Budget and Policy Division, the House Transportation Finance and Policy Division, the House Transportation and Transit Policy and Oversight Division, and other legislators who have expressed an interest in transit. Mn/DOT will present information to these groups at key milestones of the planning process.

Stakeholder Presentations

In June, RDCs will present to 4-6 stakeholder groups identified in the power vs. interest grids to inform them of the planning process and ways each group can provide input on the plan.

Mn/DOT will approve all stakeholder audience groups in advance to ensure RDCs address a diversity of groups statewide and avoid duplication. RDCs are encouraged to attend groups' regular meetings to present, rather than holding a separate meeting. Mn/DOT will produce a single presentation to be used at each meeting, fact sheets, and comment cards for RDCs to distribute at the meetings. Comment cards will be returned to Mn/DOT for further review and responses regarding preferred investment priorities will be tabulated.

RDC Commission Investment Priority Activity

RDC planners will conduct an investment prioritization activity with the RDC Commissions to help Mn/DOT understand local and rural perspective on how to prioritize transit funding in the future. This activity identifies services that would be valuable to add in the event of increased future funding, and services that are most valuable to maintain in the event of reduced funding. These responses will be presented to the Plan Advisory Committee to take into account as inputs when making its recommendations to Mn/DOT regarding investment priorities.

Public Open House

Each RDC will host a public open house in November to solicit input from the public on proposed investment priorities. Mn/DOT will ensure reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities to attend public open houses and public hearings. Meetings will be held in a transit-accessible location at a time that can be accommodated by local bus schedules. Where appropriate, accommodations such as large print hand-outs and translating service will be made available.

Objective Inform public of plan and consult public opinion regarding preferred investment priorities.

Meeting Content Mn/DOT will produce a PowerPoint presentation and comment card to be used at each meeting. RDCs will present investment priorities and invite public opinion regarding these findings via facilitated discussion and written responses. RDCs will document attendance and comments for consideration by Mn/DOT.

Who will attend Any stakeholder or member of the public is invited to attend outreach meetings. Groups to receive targeted invitations will include:

- Focus group participants
- Groups that received stakeholder presentations
- RDC Commission members
- Structured interviewees
- All local public transit providers
- Representatives of senior, minority, disabled, low-income, or limited English transit consumer groups
- MPO representatives
- MPO contact lists

How groups will be invited RDCs will notify the public of outreach meetings using the following methods:

- Letters of invitation (to local representatives of Title VI advocacy groups and others identified in the power vs. interest grids)

- Coordination with local MPOs to ensure notification is provided to all MPO identified stakeholders through contact lists and MPO websites
- Press releases
- Listservs, e-mail invitations, or other methods

Timing and Location Public Open Houses will be conducted during the first two weeks of November within the 12 RDC regions. RDCs will select and reserve an appropriate meeting space served by public transit and held during hours of transit operation.

Public Hearing

Objective Inform public of preferred investment priorities.

Meeting Content Mn/DOT will produce a PowerPoint presentation to be used at the hearing. Mn/DOT will present plan findings and invite public comment regarding these findings. Mn/DOT will document all public comments made at the hearing and make responses to each comment publically available.

Who will attend Any stakeholder or member of the public is invited to attend outreach meetings.

How groups will be invited Mn/DOT will notify the public of outreach meetings using the following methods:

- Letters of invitation (to local representatives of Title VI advocacy groups and others identified in the power vs. interest grids)
- Coordination with local MPOs to ensure notification is provided to all MPO identified stakeholders through contact lists and MPO websites
- Press releases
- Listservs, e-mail invitations, or other methods
- District Public Affairs Coordinators
- State Register

Timing and location A public hearing will take place via video-conference in each of the Mn/DOT districts in January. A draft plan will be made available for review approximately two weeks prior to the hearing.

Public Comments and Web site

Objective Allow continuous opportunities for stakeholders to comment outside of structured meetings and market research activities. Mn/DOT will accept comments throughout plan development. In addition, Mn/DOT will post all public presentations, technical findings, and the final draft plan for public comment. Any comments received will be considered part of the public record.

Implementation Mn/DOT will include project manager contact information and Mn/DOT's web site address on all presentations and other public involvement materials to encourage comments and questions via the project website, e-mail, phone, US mail, or fax. Public comments will be posted on the project website with Mn/DOT staff responses and updated on a bi-weekly basis. Hard copies of any public notices, presentations, or drafts will be available at Mn/DOT district offices. Accessible formats will be made available upon request.

Mn/DOT will post the draft plan on its web site and make printed copies available to districts approximately ten working days before the public hearing. Notice of the public hearing will also be posted in the State Register. Mn/DOT will post responses to all comments within approximately ten working days of closing the comment period.

Timeline

January 2010	Project Preparation
February	
March	Conduct Focus Groups and On-Board Surveys
April	
May	Stakeholder Identification
June	Stakeholder Presentations
July	
August	
September	
October	
November	Public Open House
December	
January 2011	Public Hearing and Final Plan Submittal