

Focus Group Meeting Summary – June 6, 7, and 12, 2006

Background

As part of the I-35W/I-94 Downtown Minneapolis Freeway Study, three Focus Group meetings were held in June 2006 in order to obtain stakeholder input about existing conditions, including the role of the freeway system, and to help share visions for the future. The study area was divided into three subareas – east, central, and west – although each area received the same background presentation. Focus Group members were identified based on the Mn/DOT study team’s research to identify appropriate nearby neighborhoods, major businesses, institutions, freeway users, and neighboring jurisdictions. Mn/DOT also received assistance and input directly from the City of Minneapolis. The City identified and solicited input from community members for the meetings, including neighborhood spokespersons, who represented the opinions of residential communities adjacent to the freeway.

Focus Group meeting participants were asked first to introduce themselves and to quickly propose a positive vision of the future. Later, in small sub-groups, participants discussed existing conditions and expected trends, including future scenarios for land use, development, neighborhoods, businesses, and transportation. A graphic was used (attached following this summary) to identify catalysts for consideration in developing freeway improvement scenarios and to display the neighborhoods within the Downtown Freeway Study Area.

This overall summary captures the key input and issues discussed at the three meetings—first addressing existing conditions, and then a summary of potential visions or solutions. More detailed lists of the input received at each meeting are also attached.

Facilitation and Issue Summary for All Three Focus Group Meetings

All three Focus Group meetings were led by Mn/DOT staff—Tom O’Keefe (Area Manager) and Jerome Adams (Project Manager). Consultant staff also attended to assist Mn/DOT, with Doug Abere of CH2M HILL and Scott McBride of SEH facilitating the discussion. Staff representing City of Minneapolis Transportation Services also attended all three meetings.

At all three meetings, participants compiled a list of existing conditions, future conditions/solutions, and potential positive changes within the study area. The attendance groups’ individual lists are provided in the attached spreadsheets (after the graphic).

Several common issues and concerns arose throughout the meeting discussions and the majority of the future solutions discussed by the Focus Groups addressed the same issues. These issues can be grouped into three main categories, each of which are described and summarized below.

1. Neighborhood Issues

The majority of the focus groups mentioned various issues associated with the neighborhoods within the study area. Significant issues included the following:

- *Aesthetics*: Included discussion of bridge, highway, and noise barrier design, inclusion of green space, and maintenance of all facilities (highway, pedestrian, bicycle, etc.).
- *Noise*: Reduce highway noise through construction of barriers and highway design measures such as not using concrete for the roadway surface, less braking through improved traffic flow, and burying the freeway.
- *Cut-through traffic*: Safety, noise, and operational concerns on local streets resulting from traffic using adjacent neighborhoods in order to avoid congestion on the freeways.
- *Neighborhood connections*: Provide connections between neighborhoods, specifically using land bridges accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists.

2. Alternative Modes of Transportation

There was significant discussion within the focus groups regarding alternative modes of transportation. The majority of the comments centered around providing transit and other modal options, such as better bicycle/pedestrian facilities, LRT, bus routes, and personal rapid transit, both within the study area and to surrounding suburbs. Encouraging employers to provide incentives for ridesharing and transit use was also mentioned.

3. Safety/Freeway Operations and Need for Improvements

Several safety/operational issues were mentioned by the Focus Groups. The main concerns included weaving issues, poor traffic flow, and management of crashes. As a general rule, the Focus Groups stated support for future transportation improvement actions, including both freeway and transit improvements. Little or no discussion proposed a lack of such needs, although alternative levels or methods were often proposed.

Focus Group Potential Solution Summary

Focus group participants were asked to provide potential solutions to the existing issues and concerns they discussed. The following solutions were suggested by more than one group (they are presented in no particular order, but were):

- Bury the freeway(s) to reduce noise
- Construct noise barriers in residential areas
- Implement 'car sharing' program to reduce traffic
- Construct LRT line along I-94
- Consider aesthetic design of auto and pedestrian bridges, noise barriers, etc.
- Improve maintenance (mowing, garbage, etc.)
- Construct land bridges over highways to connect neighborhoods
- Provide dedicated funding source for transportation/highway needs
- Expand transit options, including LRT, bus routes, pedestrian/bicycle facilities
- Use existing right-of-way for improvements to minimize impacts on neighborhoods
- Improve signage related to freeways through neighborhoods

Individual Focus Group Meeting Details

As previously noted, more detail on each Focus Group meeting is provided in the attachments that follow the graphic on the next page.

I-35W / I-94 Downtown Minneapolis Freeway Study (Mn/DOT SP 8825-204)

June 6th Focus Group Meeting

Attendees:

John DeWitt – Camden Neighborhood
Nadja Gale – Cityview COOP
Mary Watson – Ventura Village Neighborhood
Michael Ramolae – U of M Parking & Transportation
Tom Fraser – DPS – Mn State Patrol
Goban Perzad – Perzad Properties
Arvonne Fraser – Marcy Holmes Neighborhood
Robert Hain – Seward Neighborhood
Jo Radzwill – Marcy Holmes Neighborhood
Anna Flintoft – City of Minneapolis
Lisa Goddard – Harrison Neighborhood
Erik Grant – Ventura Village Neighborhood
Duane Schwartz – City of Roseville

Introduction to the Study / Positive changes

Reduce crashes
Signage – Routing trucks thru neighborhoods
35W Southbound to 94 Eastbound – missing connection
Reduce Highway Noise levels
Ability to clear crashes quicker (time and design)
Smoother I-94
Cut-thru Traffic (394)
Reduce Noise
“Mitigate” freeway affects
Pedestrian bridge aesthetics
Better retaining wall
Wider 5th Ave to 94 Eastbound
Not take R/W with solutions
Improve neighborhood connections
Widen bridges for green space – “land bridge” / decking for green space

Existing Conditions / Immediate Thoughts

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<p>Make pleasant for residents of area freeway runs through -- noise, greenspace, arteries across freeway -- auto and pedestrian/ bike</p> <p>Incorporate alternate transportation -- light rail / bus / bike / ped</p> <p>Sufficient barrier between freeway & neighborhood -- neighborhood – prevent crime by decreasing easy areas to gather</p> <p>Sparse access to freeway in certain areas</p> <p>Better connection to East & West Marcy Holmes --35W @ 4th & University</p>	<p>Exceptionally long term / expensive solutions – needs cheap solution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - clearing crashes - would problems be fixed with better enforcement? <p>Alternative Transportation Plan ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - especially looking at future population <p>94 is axle breaker (potholes)</p> <p>Should never have a “Commons” – does not work</p> <p>Fix it!</p>	<p>Noise (no concrete please)</p> <p>Cut off from Downtown</p> <p>Homeless on MnDOT land & under bridges</p> <p>Beggars at exits</p> <p>Drugs & Prostitution at entrances</p> <p>Need security cameras</p> <p>Truck traffic signage needed through neighborhoods</p> <p>Freeways are barriers for pedestrians & bicycle traffic</p> <p>On & Off ramps are dangerous – Washington / University / 4th</p> <p>TOO MUCH TRAFFIC !</p> <p>What happened to trees near 18th ?</p>

Existing Conditions / Problems to Solve Address

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
	<p>Global warming</p> <p>Transit that works going to 'burbs (reverse commute too)</p> <p>Needs of aging population</p> <p>Petroleum Costs / Availability</p>	

Existing Conditions / Transportation and Community Needs

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
	<p>Cut – thru traffic is problem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - safety on City Streets - Don't respect Stop Signs / speeds <p>Transit options (Smart routes – well funded)</p> <p>Don't necessarily widen the freeways</p> <p>Don't just move bottleneck</p> <p>Need improved linkages between neighborhoods</p>	

Future Conditions / Solutions

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<p>Central Corridor light rail long I 94?</p> <p>Move 35W to 280 (possibility) -- double deck at 35W – 94 (280) *Cap (deck over 35W) at 4th and University</p> <p>*Noise barriers in all residential areas</p> <p>*Better signage to and from freeway thru neighborhoods *More artistic / aesthetic design to auto and pedestrian bridges and noise barriers</p> <p>* i.e. Duluth</p>	<p>No additional Right of Way for Highways</p> <p>Safety enhancements</p> <p>Workable, smart, transit program - transit center in 'burbs – multimodal</p> <p>Think about aesthetics --bridges don't have to be ugly Use other metro areas as model More land bridges between neighborhoods</p> <p>Predictable /consistent travel time (slow is ok) Big Picture : roof over Freeway A system that addresses needs of aging, population, global warming and petroleum costs Negative growth of VMT (vehicle miles traveled) every year is possible – that past trend could change in the future...</p>	<p>Freeway planning should NOT negatively impact neighborhoods (widen bridges) Freeways should provide right –of- way for alternative modes of transportation ie..LRT, buses, etc Freeway planning should include better pedestrian, bicycle, and handicapped traffic Freeway planning should include aesthetically pleasing noise mitigation: trees, berms, pavement, walls, etc Traffic enforcement: Ped crossings, speed limits, bikes Maintenance of MnDOT lands – Need better maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Garbage (especially in winter) - Mow grass - Remove homeless from right-of-way areas

I-35W / I-94 Downtown Minneapolis Freeway Study (Mn/DOT SP 8825-204)

June 7th Focus Group Meeting

Attendees:

Ullie Seal – Minneapolis Fire
Lee Bennett – Metro Transit
Lisa Cerney – Minneapolis PW
Dave Erspamer – MN State Patrol
Jeff Karr – U of M Medical Center
Bill Hoffman – Minneapolis Regional Chamber
Piedad Walsh – Phillips West
Greg Walsh – Phillips West
Dustin Maddy - North Loop
Jim McDonough – Phillips West
Bryan Anderson – Stevens Square
Ron Lischeid – University Neighborhood
Dave Laurent – Basilica of St Marys

Introduction to the Study / Positive changes

Access to Fairview Medical Center—for patient and visitors
Parking better (for Basilica)
Better Connection between Loring Park and Stevens Square
Less vehicle traffic on University of MN Neighborhood campus
Less auto-orientated community
Less crashes & quicker clearing of crashes
Better Access and water supply for Minneapolis Fire Dept
Seamless transitions between freeways (ie 35 NB to 94 WB is bad)
Comp Plan for better access for business
Less congestion through this area – better flow
More public transportation
More people per car
Fewer Trips per family
Don't expand MnPass

Existing Conditions / Immediate Thoughts

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<p>Congestion forces cars onto local streets</p> <p>Light Rail in 35W median</p> <p>Very heavy traffic on 5th Ave So (Near 24th Ave)</p> <p>Mental roadblock blocking downtown</p> <p>Pollution – Ref MPCA Study Congestion = Cost Elderly can't drive – transit dependent</p>	<p>Lack of uniform interchanges</p> <p>Transition from NB 35W to WB 94</p> <p>Public Transit connection – Cedar Riverside to U of M</p> <p>Crashes/Stalls need better access to and ability to move/remove</p> <p>Transition NB 35W – EB94 // EB94 – NB 35W “Roof” over 94/35W for Street grades Separate 35W/94 Too much volume feeding into system System designed with less traffic in mind Visual Hazards / hills/ curves / etc. Neighborhood routes / arteries important for neighborhood traffic without using Freeway Driving lanes vs delivery - parking Motorcade Issues at rush hour</p>	<p>Transitional Lane Changes cause shockwave backup</p> <p>Ramp from 6th St to E – I 94 often blocked during snow events</p> <p>I-94 is a barrier separating residential neighborhoods</p>

Future Conditions / Solutions

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
<p>Light Rail in median</p> <p>Go underground –above = Noise congestion</p> <p>Dedicated funding for Transportation</p> <p>Noise barriers in all residential areas Fix broken parts Car sharing</p>	<p>More lanes / keep main lines smooth flowing with uniform interchanges and bus lanes</p> <p>Create system designed to move between regions not within regions</p> <p>Control / restrict “semis” and commercial vehicle traffic – times / lanes etc..</p> <p>Commercial vehicle lanes</p> <p>Use existing “footprints”</p> <p>Comprehensive Transportation Plan & Funding (dedicated)</p> <p>Increase pedestrian / bicycle routes / access</p>	<p>Neighborhood development that encourages pedestrian movement</p> <p>More changeable message boards</p> <p>Expand Bus / LRT</p> <p>Broad overhead lighting Increase directional signage Straighten curves Dedicated roads for each possible transition Establish routes that circumvent commons</p>

I-35W / I-94 Downtown Minneapolis Freeway Study (Mn/DOT SP 8825-204)

June 12th Focus Group Meeting

Attendees:

Rolland Glessing – Downtown TMO
Anthony Dew – Seward Neighborhood
Robert Cook – CLPC (Loring Park)
Bob Tennesen – The I-35W Solution Alliance
Kathy Low – KIAA
Vida Ditter – Bryn Mawr Neighborhood
Jeannine Clancy – City of Golden Valley
Clarence Shallbetter – Basilica of St Mary
Rob Harris – Bryn Mawr Neighborhood
Robert Ball – HCMC EMS
Anna Flintoft – Minneapolis Public Works
Bob Elliot – City of Richfield
Craig Wilson – Lowry Hill Neighborhood
Adam Fulton – City of St Louis Park
Ron Beining – Lowry Hill / Kenwood Neighborhoods
John VanHeel – Loring Park Neighborhood

Introduction to the Study / Positive changes

Smooth transitions with Central Corridor project
Reduce congestion – slow the rate of increase
Niccollet Ave – become high density, mixed use corridor
Facilitate merging traffic
Limit cut-through traffic neighborhoods
Safety of merges
Understand origins / destinations of traffic
Recognize unique institutions
Access to freeways
Adequate funding for transportation / transit
Improvement in freeways in urban environment
Reduce cut-through traffic
Reduce change in car use
Better flow / less braking on freeway – less noise
394 Interaction w/ 94
Better flow
Reduce Crashes

Existing Conditions /

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
<p>394 – commuters jumping off at Dunwoody, going around Lowry Tunnel causes congestion on Hennepin Ave / Lyndale Ave entrance onto 94 / 35</p> <p>Freeway Mitigation – Extend & Widen Lowry tunnel</p> <p>Current freeway divides communities (need to bring neighborhoods together, despite freeway</p> <p>Consider Freeway / Land Use relationship</p> <p>394 – 94 – 35 not conducive to getting across downtown area</p> <p>Interfere with neighborhoods into downtown (pedestrians, bikes, auto etc)</p>	<p>94 W exit to Hennepin Ave S - merging to Hennepin is dangerous</p> <p>35 W exit from 94 E -- merging is dangerous - lots of weaving</p> <p>Dunwoody Blvd entrance to 394 W is dangerous – poor site lines</p> <p>Commuters cutting through any neighborhood – example Golden Valley, Kenwood Bryn Mawr (394 avoidance)</p> <p>Little public transportation from western suburbs to downtown</p> <p>35,000 jobs in Golden Valley vs. 21,000 residents. Is an end destination for commuters</p> <p>85% of jobs , NOT in downtown Minneapolis</p> <p>Land Use vs. Land Values need to be better understood and impact on transportation – who pays for access when high density development occurs above a transit corridor</p> <p>No more acreage to be taken from neighborhoods for buildings / highways</p> <p>Mending the divide - Highways going through neighborhoods</p> <p>Close freeway access where possible</p> <p>Remove / minimize wrecks from highways</p> <p>Make highway design more aesthetically pleasing</p> <p>Improve transitions from 35W to 94 W</p> <p>More driver education – especially on how to merge</p>	<p>Poor design of freeway transition</p> <p>Encourage multi-modal transportation</p> <p>Congestion encourages alternative forms or transportation</p> <p>Congestion encourages urban sprawl</p> <p>Obsolete traffic rules – do not turn on red</p> <p>Dead space divides neighborhoods.</p> <p>Freeways use lots of land</p> <p>Poor transitions into city</p> <p>Neighborhood residents would be more tolerant of a more beautiful infrastructure</p>	<p>Consistent choice or pattern (standardize)</p> <p>Access on and off</p> <p>Integration with city streets (Master planning)</p>

Future Conditions / Solutions

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
<p>Extend and Widen Lowry tunnel</p> <p>Bury 394/94 (E & W) to reduce noise Allow connection of neighborhoods and park land</p> <p>A system healing the divide adjusting, land use and integrating all modes of transportation???</p> <p>Vision that MnDOT give alternatives to auto use high priority – example reduce auto traffic into downtown by encouraging all major downtown employers to provide car share services to its employees. The possible need for a car during the day is major reason people drive to work.</p> <p>Inter Agency – cooperation needed – allow increased housing density to encourage mass transit with city core</p>	<p>Go underground rather than take more acreage for expanded traffic needs (ie Boston / Seattle)</p> <p>Fund maintenance for improved aesthetics</p> <p>Create large green pedestrian land bridges over highways</p> <p>Bridges should have green component</p> <p>Solicit more volunteers to maintain highway green space on bridges etc.</p> <p>Changes in Highway financial ie.. increase gas tax & capital gains tax on development to benefit Highways and transit -- no allocations to cities, counties – only to transportation oversight</p> <p>Air quality issues associated with highways and transportation especially impacts on the very young and very old</p> <p>Strong employee incentive to facilitate employees riding to work together rather than in private cars</p> <p>Make highways more aesthetically pleasing</p>	<p>Personal Rapid transit</p> <p>Convenient access to LRT stations</p> <p>Improved biking & pedestrian</p> <p>Land bridge</p> <p>Greater emphasis on aesthetics</p> <p>Greater emphasis on efficiency</p> <p>More efficient cars</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safer 2. Environmentally friendly 3. Quieter 4. Intelligent 	<p>Education program</p> <p>Consistent pattern</p> <p>Integration MnDOT/ City Government</p> <p>Fair distribution of expense & impact across region</p> <p>Efficient use of existing corridor</p>