

2019
Public Engagement Awards

March 7, 2019
University of Minnesota
Saint Paul Campus



MnDOT Public Engagement Awards

MnDOT is recognizing agency-wide efforts to engage the public in transportation decision making. This awards program aligns with the department's Strategic Operating Plan and our Diversity and Inclusion Unified Strategic Work Plan (which states that MnDOT will demonstrate and share best public engagement practices). To be eligible for consideration, the project or process must have included MnDOT staff and had at least a portion of the work completed in calendar year 2017 or 2018.



Award Categories

Creativity and Innovation

Innovation is key for advancing public engagement and moving the agency forward. This award will be given to the project that best demonstrates innovative, creative use of planning, techniques and tools to effectively and meaningfully engage participants in a project or process.

Respect for Diversity, Inclusion and Culture

This award will be given to the plan, project or process that best demonstrates effective engagement of marginalized, underserved, vulnerable and “hard to reach” populations or a multicultural, linguistically diverse and/or bilingual process that reflect a depth and diversity of participants.

Best Engagement for a Small/Medium Project

Quality engagement is critical to successful outcomes. This award will be given to the project that best reflects excellence in planning, tools, techniques and efforts in public engagement.

Best Engagement for a Major Project

This award will be given to the major project (\$30 million or more in the metropolitan highway construction district, \$10 million in nonmetropolitan highway construction districts) that best reflects excellence in planning, tools, techniques and efforts in public engagement.

Ongoing Engagement

This award will be given to the best overall ongoing (not project specific) public engagement effort demonstrated by an office or district.

Creativity and Innovation

Metro District: 35@94: Downtown to Crosstown

CHALLENGE:

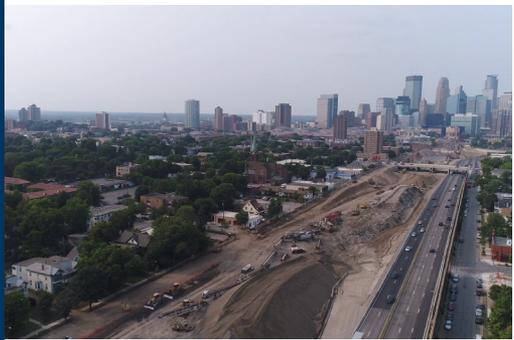
Long-term closures of key access points; dense, urban setting.

APPROACH:

Implement a stand-alone engagement plan separate from construction communications to be carried out during construction.

Contact:

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35@94: Downtown to Crosstown is a four-year construction project (2017 – 2021) through south Minneapolis. It involves long-term closures of ramps including key access points into/out of downtown. The project is in a dense, urban setting and has noise, access and disruption impacts to residents and business near the corridor.

The first unique aspect of this project is that public engagement is being carried out during construction. Additionally, there is a stand-alone engagement plan, separate from construction communications, such as road closures and impacts. This strategic engagement plan engages the community around transportation and the overall work of MnDOT.

Another feature is the work to build trust and connections in the community that lasts beyond the project. The strategic engagement effort provides an opportunity to hear from the community outside of the standard public involvement process. Conversations as a part of various engagement activities often focused on construction and the project, but also involved honest and open dialogue on other issues, which built agency integrity and trust.

The effort highlights the ability of MnDOT to be a more intimate partner in helping communities improve their quality of life, which extend beyond projects and construction impacts. Collaborating with community organizations and Minneapolis Councilmember Andrea Jenkins on the 38th Street Bridge Dinner is a prime example of this extension. The community vision for this bridge opening was to create an event that symbolized the reconnection of the neighborhood that has been divided by a freeway for generations. Additionally, working with the local schools on STEM activities and curriculum showed MnDOT as a part of the community they serve and not just a transportation organization.

Some might think these activities stray too far from the mission of MnDOT, but this engagement speaks to the agency's core values, which include service, and diversity and inclusion.

Respect for Diversity, Inclusion and Culture

District 8: Willmar Wye Project

CHALLENGE:

Engage and involve community where English is not the first language.

APPROACH:

Work through trusted community leaders and the faith community.

Contact:

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The Willmar Wye project is a public private partnership that involves MnDOT, the city of Willmar, Kandiyohi County and BNSF Railroad. The project area does not directly impact any residential community, but it indirectly impacts all residents within the city of Willmar since the railroad divides the city. Not having a specific community or population to target made it challenging to do meaningful engagement.

The goal was to engage with and involve the entire community, which includes many newcomers and populations where English is not the first language spoken.

To engage with Willmar's two largest ethnic populations, MnDOT worked through trusted community leaders and the faith community.

In the Somali community, MnDOT worked with Hassan Yusaf, a Willmar Public School liaison. Yusaf worked with elders to set up an open house and meeting at the mosque. Hassan advised MnDOT how to conduct the meeting and open house.

In the Latino population, MnDOT worked with the Assembly of God Church pastor. The church has a Spanish-speaking service and fellowship each Sunday afternoon. The pastor advised MnDOT how to conduct the targeted meeting on an afternoon in December after the Spanish service.

Both meetings were focused on fellowship and food. Since there were no existing relationships between MnDOT and each of these communities prior to this project, it was important and beneficial to find a trusted community member to help build those relationships. The input gathered at these two events was used as part of the project's environmental process. It helped with District 8's recruitment efforts and other public engagement planning and implementation methods.

Best Engagement for a Small/Medium Project

District 7: Mini-Roundabouts – Highway 4 St. James

CHALLENGE:

Convince residents that mini-roundabouts would be the most viable way to keep Hwy 4 running through St. James.

APPROACH:

Build public support through education.

Contact:

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About 45 minutes southwest of Mankato lies the charming city of St. James. With historical railroad ties dating back to 1871 and beloved celebrations such as Railroad Days and the Watonwan County Fair, the community is proud and involved. When it was time to reconstruct approximately 1.6 miles of Highway 4 through the heart of the city in 2017, MnDOT District 7 wanted to work closely with the community early in project planning and development.

District 7 initially considered having Highway 4 bypass St. James. During pre-scoping, MnDOT learned that about 90 percent of the businesses and many residents wanted Highway 4 to stay on its current path through town. The option of mini-roundabouts was discussed between MnDOT, city staff and the general public.

Roundabouts were presented as an alternative for the two signalized intersections on Highway 4 through downtown St. James to address the city's problems with traffic flow. Public pushback was immediate along with a resolution from the city objecting to the idea. In response, District 7 staff used outreach and engagement techniques to gain stakeholder support for roundabouts.

The community's 30 percent Hispanic population added another layer to the challenge of communicating project specifics and getting feedback. District 7 chose interactive engagement techniques to demonstrate how to navigate mini-roundabouts. They partnered with local business to lay out the mini-roundabout design in a parking lot and invited community members to drive through it on golf carts. MnDOT also hosted a "Roundabout Rodeo" event, provided translators and bilingual project flyers and engaged with the public at key community events such as Railroad Days, Hot Dog Days and the Watonwan County Fair.

The process of finding new solutions and gaining community support was a challenge, but it also presented an opportunity that led to the first Minnesota state highway mini-roundabout.

Best Engagement for a Major Project

**Metro District:
35@94:
Downtown to
Crosstown**

CHALLENGE:

Create meaningful engagement with the community throughout the length of the project.

APPROACH:

One-on-one meetings with officials, neighborhood associations and community leaders to learn how they would like to be engaged.

Contact:

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35@94: Downtown to Crosstown is a four-year (2018-2021) construction project through south Minneapolis. It is in a dense urban setting and has significant noise, access and disruption impacts to residents and businesses near the corridor. Additionally, it impacts transit along and near the corridor. One over-riding goal of the strategic engagement effort is to educate the public on the benefits of the project, including new bridges, better mobility and a new transit station at Lake Street.

The 35W@94 engagement strategy is an attempt to more meaningfully engage with the community and the users of the freeway during the long construction phase. Techniques include one-on-one meetings with elected officials, neighborhood associations and community leaders to elicit their ideas on how to best engage with their communities. These initial meetings then informed the engagement activity program, which so far has included:

- Bridge opening celebrations
- Topics-based conversations with the community – casual events where MnDOT experts speak to a specific aspect of the project
- Project tours
- Webcams/drone footage of construction
- Project blog
- STEM projects – science and engineering activities and partnerships with local schools
- A comedy night with the MnDOT Commissioner and the Theater of Public Policy
- Public surveys to gauge the success of engagement efforts

In 2019, Metro District will continue to expand its engagement efforts for 35W@94: Downtown to Crosstown. In addition to the activities mentioned, MnDOT will launch an advertising campaign with project branding, expand collaborations with schools and groups such as WTS, and work with the city of Minneapolis on mitigating impacts to businesses on Lake Street.

Best Engagement for a Major Project

District 6: Red Wing Bridge

CHALLENGE:

Keep the community connected, aware and engaged throughout the length of the project.

APPROACH:

Used multiple channels to connect with the public on their terms.

Contact:

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MnDOT is building a new bridge in Red Wing over the Mississippi River to replace the existing Highway 63 bridge. This project is located in the heart of a historic Mississippi River town with significant community ownership and a strong community partnership with the Prairie Island Indian Community. The community influences river barge, freight and passenger train traffic and is adjacent to historic buildings and a historic land mass (He Mni Can/Barn Bluff).

The project began in May 2017 and will open to traffic in late fall 2019. District 6 needed to find ways to keep the community connected, aware and engaged moving from the pre-construction to construction phase. They chose many channels to reach and connect with the public on their terms and time, including:

- Monthly construction updates on Red Wing Public Access Channel 6 that allow people to attend in person and ask questions or watch at their convenience
- Monthly column in the Red Wing Republican-Eagle, the community newspaper that provides a look ahead in a personal way from the project engineer, Mark Anderson
- A Facebook page dedicated to the project
- Tours for students and community members, coordinating with the Red Wing Area Chamber of Commerce for many tours, but also with Red Wing High School and Dakota County Technical College
- Regular updates with community groups, retirement homes and any group that asks
- Email updates on regular developments that affect traffic or are significant milestones (4,676 subscribers, which is significant for a Greater Minnesota project)

The Red Wing Bridge project was named among the top 10 news stories by the community news paper each year since the project began and is depicted as a positive and impressive activity in the city.

A senior citizen living facility provided lunch for the entire construction crew as a thank you effort for their hard work during the recent winter holidays. District 6 is supporting the community effort to hold a significant celebration of the bridge when it opens in late fall 2019. Strong partnerships with the city of Red Wing and the Red Wing Area Chamber of Commerce have added to the distinct community flavor.

Ongoing Engagement

District 7: Pre-scoping Outreach

CHALLENGE:

Address growing number of scope changes due to issues uncovered late in project development.

APPROACH:

Incorporate early community outreach to build relationships, gain insights and reduce scope changes.

Contact:

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Each year, MnDOT identifies new projects to enter the 10-year Capital Highway Investment Plan. Projects are then typically scoped between years five and six of the CHIP, funded when they enter the State Highway Investment Plan, and designed and developed until the plans are implemented into construction. This is a cycle that has worked well for MnDOT for many years.

Over time, there were a growing number of scope changes on projects due to issues uncovered late in project development. Because of a lack of information from the impacted communities, projects were at risk for having missing components. After seeing how the number of scope changes on projects caused project delays, additional expense and inefficiencies, it became clear that there was room for change in the project development phase.

District 7 planning staff saw an opportunity to incorporate early community outreach in the planning and scoping process to build relationships, gain insight from key stakeholders and reduce scope changes. The intent of this outreach was to improve relationships with communities and key stakeholders and to gain better scoping documents, which in turn provides better executed projects.

Planning staff established key messages to use, explaining that the CHIP projects are not commitments and they are subject to change, but they are on MnDOT's radar. A survey was sent to District 7 cities and counties with planned projects in the CHIP. The survey covered topics from access and bicycle/pedestrian accommodations, to transit, safety and freight accommodations. Once results were analyzed, an outreach plan was formed and customized presentations were given at meetings with community partners.

The feedback from communities regarding these now annual pre-scoping outreach meetings has been exceptional. Because of the early engagement with key community stakeholders in the CHIP, MnDOT District 7 staff improved relationships with these contacts. Through early engagement, projects are more accurately scoped and communities are able to provide input, become involved and collaborate on projects that directly impact them.

Ongoing Engagement

Office of Aeronautics: Airports are Part of MnDOT Too

CHALLENGE:

Increase awareness of what local airports do for city, regional and state economies.

APPROACH:

Meet with communities at local airport fly-ins and airshows to help the public understand their local airport is a gateway to the world.

Contact:

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City governments are pulled in many directions by ever-escalating and competing demands for services and issues such as declining tax bases, unemployment issues, crime and educational needs. Cities face challenges of how to retain a cash-neutral or cash-draining municipal airport when developers are telling them how much money they can make by replacing the airport with condos and strip malls.

The Office of Aeronautics' approach is to connect with communities, using education and outreach to let average citizens know how important their airport is to their community's local economic development.

Many people are simply not aware of what local airports do for the city and state economies. For example, in Austin, Minn., Hormel Foods is a Fortune 500 company that uses the Austin Municipal Airport as their home base. Hormel is an international company with more than 20,000 employees around the globe. The Roseau Municipal Airport is used by Polaris and their well-known brand of snowmobiles. And, when orders are made online from non-metro areas, FedEx, UPS or DHL general aviation aircraft are likely relied upon to bring packages to the local airport.

Aeronautics tells these and other stories at a key venue – local airport fly-ins and airshows. An airport fly-in is a pre-arranged social gathering of aircraft, pilots, passengers, businesses and the public. By talking with local community members in person at their airport, Aeronautics staff helps the public understand that their local airport is a gateway to the world.

Most Minnesotans do not associate aeronautics with MnDOT. These fly-in events allow staff to share the big picture of MnDOT with local community members, show support for the local airport authority and provide information on aviation transportation careers. This ongoing engagement, one town at a time, helps communities better understand and appreciate that their airport is a hub of commerce and a front door to the world.

Commissioner's Award for Public Engagement

Charlie Zelle,
MnDOT
Commissioner
2013 – 2018



“We are reaching out to the public regarding projects, processes and policies to find out what the public wants and needs. We take the feedback we gather and use it as part of deciding how we will work and what we will do in the future. And we are striving to reach out, develop relationships and gather input years instead of months or weeks ahead of a project. It is important that we become known as an organization that listens and acts on or responds to what it hears. It’s what the public deserves and should expect. And it is the right thing to do.”

– Former MnDOT Commissioner Charlie Zelle
Twin Cities Business Magazine (4/28/17)

Over the course of his tenure as MnDOT Commissioner, Charlie Zelle made relationship building and engagement with the people of Minnesota an organizational priority. His managerial style directly reflected his personal brand of servant leadership and openness by speaking with communities about the impact transportation projects have on people across the state. Not only did he set the tone for the organization, but he also made sure that MnDOT lived out these ideals in practice.

In the summer of 2015, then-Commissioner Zelle publicly apologized to the Rondo community for the decision made decades ago to split the heart of a once-thriving community of African Americans in St. Paul with the construction of Interstate 94. Subsequently, the agency created the Rethinking I-94 project office as a long-term effort to improve MnDOT's engagement and relationships with the communities in a 15-mile study area between St. Paul and Minneapolis.

When the legislative auditor tasked MnDOT with increasing transparency and asked that the department do a better job of engaging with the public, Zelle created the Office of Public Engagement and Constituent Services devoted to providing data, training and day-to-day support needed to deliver a consistent customer experience.

His commitment to engagement was embedded into MnDOT's organizational DNA through efforts such as focusing on engagement in WIG 2.0, adoption of the Public Engagement Policy, the Diversity and Inclusion Unified Strategic Work Plan and the 2018-2022 Strategic Operating Plan. For all these reasons and more, Zelle's legacy of leadership across the spectrum of engagement will surely stand the test of time.

2019 MnDOT Public Engagement Award Nominations

District 2 – Success through Failure: Highway 2 Road Diet

District 4 – Highway 28 Glenwood Complete Streets

District 4 – Moorhead Area (Highway 10 and I-94)
Snow Fence Project

District 4 – Ongoing Engagement & Public Outreach approach

District 6 – Highway 63 Red Wing Bridge

District 6 – Highway 63 Rochester to Zumbro Falls Whitetopping

District 6 – MnDOT Mike Community Connections radio show

District 7 – Highway 4 St. James Mini-Roundabouts

District 7 – Highway 14/15 New Ulm Gateway

District 7 – Highway 22 Victory Drive Memorial Corridor

District 7 – Pre-scoping Outreach – Early Collaboration with
Communities

District 8 – Area Transportation Partnership Presentation Series

District 8 – Highway 12 Litchfield Reconstruction

District 8 – Willmar Wye Public Private Partnership

Metro District – 35@94: Downtown to Crosstown

Metro District – Highway 47 (University
Avenue) Columbia Heights Resurfacing

Metro District – Highway 316 Hastings Turning Concerns
into Solutions

Metro District – High Bridge Redecking and Highway 149 Mill and Overlay

Metro District – Rethinking I-94 TPT Documentary Series

Office of Aeronautics – Airport Needs Meetings

Office of Aeronautics – Airport Technical Assistance Plan (AirTAP)

Office of Aeronautics – “Yes, Airports are Part of MnDOT Too” ongoing engagement practices

Office of Aeronautics – State Aviation System Plan

Office of Project Management and Technical Support – Tom Styrbicki, Director

2019 Public Engagement Awards Selection Committee

MnDOT Strategic Operating Plan Work Group
Federal Highway Administration Minnesota Division

Notes

**MnDOT Office of Public Engagement
and Constituent Services**

www.mndot.gov/publicengagement