ADVANCING TRANSPORTATION EQUITY

District 2
Winter 2019

Executive Summary

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Executive Summary

As part of its 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Minnesota Department of Transportation sought to better understand how transportation impacts, and is impacted by, equity. MnDOT developed a pilot project to conduct community conversations with various groups, agencies, and organizations (here forward: "organizations") that work with and represent underserved communities in Minnesota.

In 2017, MnDOT launched a pilot in Northwest Minnesota (MnDOT District 2) to understand how community conversations could inform equitable transportation planning and practice. The process of conducting community conversations involved developing a deeper understanding of the people who live in District 2; deciding which key communities MnDOT would most like to learn about; identifying organizations that work with and represent those key communities; and holding in-person conversations between MnDOT staff and those organizations.

Conversations included a wide range of topics that sought to understand the role transportation plays in peoples' lives and what opportunities or consequences they face based on the transportation modes that are available to them. MnDOT intends to share its findings with partners to also inform their work.

Findings

Overall, interviewees said transportation is a key connector that provides people access to the activities they need and want to do. The modes of transportation people choose often depends on characteristics such as distance the person needs to travel, how much time it will take, current weather and road conditions, and convenience. For some people, the choice of mode is limited by further aspects, such affordability, accessibility, and ability to meet requirements (i.e., obtaining a driver's license). In the latter situations transportation can hinder peoples' ability to be healthy and engaged in society.

Transportation interrelates with trends and characteristics of District 2. These characteristics can add to transportation challenges, and challenges associated with some trends and characteristics are worsened by gaps in the transportation system.

Inadequate transportation options not only affect access to basic needs and services—they also affect access to other activities that contribute to wellness, including social and religious activities.

There are several modes of transportation that are available in District 2. Each has its unique contribution to the transportation system and its own limitations.

Conversations yielded ways MnDOT can contribute to advancing transportation equity, including building relationships, engaging the public, and offering input on land use planning.

Organizations provided varied definitions of equity.

Findings

Transportation helps people access activities to carry out their lives.

Employment

Social and human services

Recreation

Medical care

Education

Buying goods

Socializing

Religious activity

Personal care

Transportation interrelates with other trends and characteristics of District 2.

Low-income

Aging population

Child care shortage

Disabilities

Long, snowy winters

Immigration

Housing shortage

Mental health issues

Rural area

These factors, combined with the limitations of different transportation modes in District 2, create transportation inequities.

- Cost
- Getting licensed
- Ability to drive

- Availability
- Convenience

- Infrastructure
- Distance
- Weather
- Safety

Findings included a few ways MnDOT can help advance equity.

Build relationships
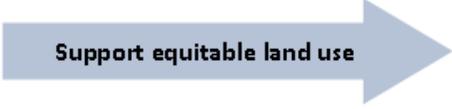
Support equitable land use

Engage communities

Recommendations

MnDOT Central Office and District 2 management team and staff reviewed findings and developed potential solutions, which consultants used to develop recommendations.

Results from this meeting and observations from consultants resulted the following recommendations:

1. **MnDOT should explore opportunities to work with partners to expand transit and other transportation options in District 2.** Opportunities include the development and support of an on-demand transit service and the expansion of the Volunteer Driver Program.

2. **MnDOT should continue to build relationships with new groups, agencies, and organizations.** Building relationships will create direct pathways for equity improvements in transportation and ways for MnDOT to provide input on initiatives that indirectly impact transportation equity.

3. **MnDOT should collaborate with other agencies, local governments, and organizations who do similar work to engage common stakeholders and partner on projects and programs.** Interview findings indicate that MnDOT could accelerate its public engagement efforts by building and strengthening partnerships with other agencies, local governments, and organizations that are engaging the same or similar target populations, depending on the circumstance.

4. **MnDOT should work with other agencies, local governments, and organizations to share information and coordinate processes to leverage existing resources to advance equity.** Potential examples include exploring ways to raise matching funds, coordinating funding and policies with other agencies, being more flexible in funding requirements, and being present, involved, and available to communities making land use decisions.

5. **MnDOT should communicate with interviewees, partners, and the broader public about the Equity Pilot and intended next steps.** This includes reconnecting with interviewees to share findings and discussing ways to work together beyond project-specific work.

6. **MnDOT Central Office should examine the District 2 Equity Pilot findings and identify those that are likely to also impact other districts and would require more systems-level consideration.** As interviews continue throughout the state, Central Office staff should identify potential ways to address broader transportation equity challenges that are likely emerge consistently across Minnesota and develop statewide solutions that would advance equity.

7. **MnDOT District 2 should continue the work accomplished in the implementation planning meeting by identifying and prioritizing which solutions need additional action planning.** First steps include translating high-level priorities into action and identifying solutions that are relatively simple to address.