

Focus Groups Summary

Overview and Purpose

As part of the Regional Bicycle Barriers Study, the project team held two small focus groups to discuss the study: one on February 8, 2017 for general bicyclists, and one on February 16, 2017 with representatives from diverse and underrepresented communities. The purpose was to convene a meeting of bicycling “experts” who offered different perspectives. Participants were given opportunities to talk about the physical barriers they encounter and to help develop and prioritize evaluation values (i.e., factors) for the analysis phase of the project. These focus groups directly influenced the study results through the participants’ shared ideas about values and factors relating to route choice and available barrier crossings, and their priority rankings of these evaluation factors.

Focus Group Participants

Seven people representing “general cycling” participated in the February 8th focus group. They represented a variety of geographic locations and had experience riding in several different areas within the Study area, including northern, northwestern, northeastern, and southern suburbs in addition to St. Paul and Minneapolis. This focus group was roughly half female and half male. Similarly, the February 16th focus group also had seven participants and was roughly half female and half male. One important difference between the groups was that the February 16th group was more focused on bicycling within the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul and had less experience bicycling in the suburbs.

Physical Barriers

The following physical regional barriers and barrier attributes were discussed during the focus group meetings:

- Minnesota River
- Freeways & expressways (I-494, Trunk Highway 62, I-35W, Trunk Highway 55, I-94)
- Distance to next crossing
- Major arterials
- Quality of the facility (including “bike shoulders”)
- Consistency of bridges and facilities on the bridges
- Railroad tracks and large rail yards
- Trains blocking rail crossings on streets vary in the length of delays created. Long delays at some at-grade crossings can be a barrier for all users, not just bicyclists.
- Debris from trains (e.g., coal dust, taconite, and sand)
- Unstriped crosswalks
- Seasonally impacted crossings (e.g., spring flood at Shakopee bridge)
- Areas with new density (not considered bike destination until recently)
- Lack of signed detours on bicycle routes during roadway
- Signage can be used to alert motorists to expect bicycles in the roadway where bike lanes or other facilities are absent)
- Wayfinding

Appendix A: Focus Groups Summary

- Distances between bike crossings less than .25 miles were considered negligible. Slightly longer distances between crossings were considered to be acceptable in dense urban areas.
- One half to one mile between barrier crossings was considered by some to be the maximum distance they would ride to get to a more preferred crossing. Others thought that up to 2 miles would be acceptable as the maximum distance between crossings.
- Higher traffic volumes and higher traffic speeds will deter some bicyclists from choosing a route.
- Existing crash data can help identify which crossings are more unsafe.
- Bicycle route choice can be very different during winter due to ice and snow conditions.
- Elevation changes (steep slopes) approaching or on the barrier crossing itself

Other Topics

Some discussion included issues that are not related to physical barriers to bicycling. These included:

- The importance of having a bicycle network for all ages and abilities
- Needs of pedestrians during construction projects
- Interagency cooperation/coordination is needed
- Greater need of route directness for low-income workers due to lower likelihood of flexible start times (e.g. warehouse workers commuting to QBP)
- Bicycle safety training being offered more at workplaces such as hotels (e.g. in Richfield)
- Importance of schools, health care clinics, residential housing (especially lower income housing), bus/train connection points, employment, and commercial areas
- Consider difficulty for old and young people and others who ride slowly
- Neighborhoods with high bicycle use due to low-income/limited transportation options, but that lack bike infrastructure of other neighborhoods (e.g. near Little Earth in Minneapolis)
- Traditionally lower investment (in bicycle facilities) in communities of color and communities with indigenous populations

Focus Group Results

Toward the end of each focus group discussion, a list of factors was developed from value statements expressed earlier. Participants were then asked to vote for their top three values based on their perceived relative level of importance in selecting potential locations for barrier crossing improvements. The results are summarized in the table below.

TABLE: NUMBER OF VOTES FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS FOR EACH OF NINE BARRIER CROSSING IMPROVEMENT LOCATION FACTORS

	Stakeholder Input	Constraints (Cost and Legal)	Opportunities (Upcoming Projects)	Safety	Existing Conditions	Demand	Connectivity	Equity	Compliance
General Cycling Focus Group February 8	0	1	1	3	3	13	5	8	0
Focus Group February 16	1	0	0	8	10	1	4	4	0
TOTAL	1	1	1	11	13	14	9	12	0