

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PHASE 1 SUMMARY

Introduction

The Metropolitan Council is evaluating the Regional Solicitation program and process for selecting projects for federal funding in the seven-county metro area. The purpose of the Regional Solicitation Evaluation project is to tie federally funded project selection closely to the vision, goals, and objectives of the Imagine 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, which was adopted in 2025.

For public engagement on the Regional Solicitation Evaluation, the Met Council gathered feedback from residents on which types of transportation projects they would like to see in their community in the future and how they would like to provide feedback on those projects to local government agencies. Engagement reached residents from all seven counties, with a particular focus on hearing from historically underserved and underrepresented communities such as Indigenous people, Black people, people of color, people with lower incomes, people living with disabilities, and people living in suburban edge and rural cities and townships.

Across communities, participants consistently expressed interest in more transit options and roadways that separate different transportation modes. Safety was a universal concern, with residents prioritizing improvements such as better lighting, snow removal, and road maintenance. Throughout our public engagement, we heard that people desire transportation spaces with good lighting, cleanliness, and visual elements like murals. For those walking or biking, safe intersections and dedicated infrastructure were identified as critical needs.



MIGIZI staff look through photos of transportation facilities and pick ones that evoke a reactions.

Engagement Goals

The following were public engagement goals for the project:

- **Educate** people on the Regional Solicitation process.
- **Seek out input from residents from historically underrepresented communities**, especially Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, people with lower incomes, and people living with disabilities.
- **Get feedback** from people on the types of transportation projects they would prefer to see in their communities in the future.
- **Gather input** from people on their preferred ways of providing feedback on transportation projects in their communities

Target Audiences

The project aimed to reach residents who live in the region with a focus on residents who have historically been underrepresented in transportation planning.

- Indigenous people.
- Black people and people of color.
- People living with disabilities.
- People with lower incomes.
- People living in suburban edge and rural cities and townships within the metro.



A resident shares what infrastructure she would like to see in her community with project staff.

Engagement Events

To hear from residents and visitors about which types of transportation projects they would like to see in the future and how they would like to provide feedback on these projects, the Met Council organized nine focus groups and five interview-style events with partner organizations from around the metro. Through these events, the Met Council was able to hear from 134 people who live in all seven counties and largely represent the target audiences.

Table 1: Engagement event summary

Date	Community Organization	County	Target Communities	Strategy	Participants
Nov. 6, 2024	Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington counties	Washington	Black people and people of color, lower income, suburban	1-on-1 interviews	18
Nov. 15, 2024	Christians Reaching Out in Social Service (CROSS)	Hennepin	Lower income	Online focus group	2
Nov. 18, 2024	YouthLink	Hennepin	Black people and people of color, lower income, youth	In-person focus group	7
Nov. 21, 2024	Avenues for Youth	Hennepin	Black people and people of color, lower income, suburban, youth	In-person focus group	6
Nov. 23, 2024	Residents of Color Collective (ROCC)	Dakota	People of color	1-on-1 interviews	19
Dec. 11, 2024	Dakota County Disability Advisory Council	Dakota	Disability	In-person focus group	6
Dec. 20, 2024	MIGIZI Staff	Hennepin	Indigenous	In-person focus group	12
Jan. 17, 2025	MIGIZI Youth	Hennepin	Indigenous, black people and people of color, youth	In-person focus group	28
Jan. 23, 2025	Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington counties	Washington	Disability, lower income, suburban	1-on-1 interviews	18

Date	Community Organization	County	Target Communities	Strategy	Participants
Feb. 10, 2025	Hope 4 Youth	Anoka	Disability, youth, lower income, suburban	In-person focus group	4
Feb. 24, 2025	SmartLink Bus	Scott	Disability, lower income, suburban	1-on-1 interviews	4
Feb. 24, 2025	Scott County	Scott	Suburban	In-person focus group	5
Feb. 28, 2025	SmartLink Bus	Carver	Lower income, suburban	1-on-1 interviews	1
Feb. 28, 2025	Carver County, Gather and Grow Food Shelf, Better Society, Love, Inc.	Carver	Suburban	In-person focus group	14

During these events, community members were asked to participate in a discussion facilitated by Met Council staff, before filling out a short follow-up survey. The facilitators asked participants to introduce themselves before asking them to review a set of 20-25 photos, each depicting a transportation project that has been or could be funded by the Regional Solicitation.

Participants were asked to choose an image or images that evoked a strong reaction and share why they chose that image. The facilitator prompted participants to share what they liked or disliked about these images and if there was anything in them that they would like to see in their community. From there, participants were asked what improvements they would like to see to reach their destinations more safely. Finally, participants were asked why these improvements would be important to their community and how they would like to provide feedback on transportation projects in the future.

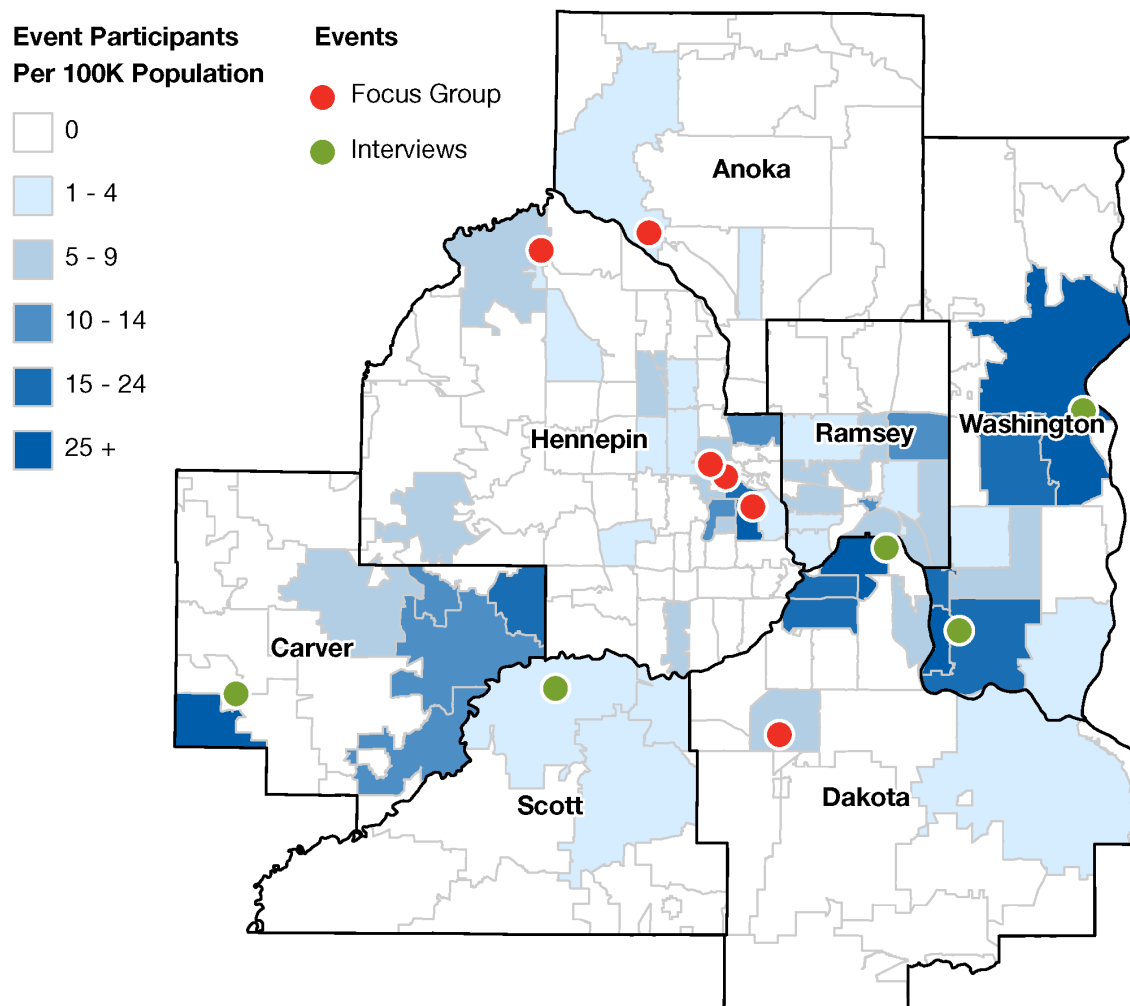
Community members provided feedback through 60-minute focus group discussions, or in 20-minute 1-on-1 interviews. 1-on-1 interviews offered at existing community events allowed participants to sign-up for a timeslot during the event when they could talk with a staff person one-on-one. All community members were incentivized to participate with gift cards.

Participants

The Met Council spoke with 134 people and heard from residents in all seven counties in the metro (Figure 1). Following discussions, participants were asked to self-identify using a survey. The following people identities were:

- 62% people of color including
 - 2% Asian
 - 20% Black or African-American
 - 11% Native American
 - 26% Hispanic or Latino
 - 22% two or more races
 - 7% some other race
- 43% living in households with less than \$35,000 income
- 36% individuals living with disabilities
- 23% youth

Figure 1: Event locations and participation by zip code per 100,000 population



Engagement Key Takeaways and Recommendations

The following key takeaways from our public engagement process directly inform the proposed new Regional Solicitation categories. Each finding includes corresponding page references to the detailed analysis in the sections that follow. To support the connection between the engagement findings and Regional Solicitation, key takeaways are accompanied by specific recommendations that will inform future Regional Solicitation application development.

Equitable and Inclusive

Key Takeaways

1. Transit options need to extend to suburban and rural areas to allow residents the same access to financial opportunities (page 8).
2. People need educational information and additional wayfinding to feel comfortable using new infrastructure (page 9).
3. Different methods of acquiring feedback are needed to hear from diverse populations (page 10).
4. Transportation services need to exceed minimum standards to fully meet the needs of people living with disabilities (page 11).
5. Clean spaces and placemaking efforts such as murals encourage more residents to use certain spaces (page 11).
6. Poor pavement conditions and minimal transportation options make communities feel overlooked for transportation funding (page 12).

Recommendations

- Prioritize projects that extend public transit to underserved suburban and rural areas.
- Include comprehensive wayfinding and educational materials with infrastructure projects.
- Develop inclusive engagement strategies that reach diverse community groups.
- Fund transportation solutions that go beyond minimum accessibility standards.
- Support placemaking initiatives that improve community infrastructure aesthetics.

Safety

Key Takeaways

7. Safety is the primary concern for most people when using transit facilities, especially youth and people living with disabilities (page 12).
8. Transportation facilities that are separated by travel mode make people feel safer (page 13).
9. More lighting would make pedestrians feel safer traveling in their neighborhood (page 13).
10. Transit is a preferred method of travel by some people for safety and comfortability reasons (page 13).
11. Poor pavement conditions on the road make people nervous (page 13).
12. Gaps in the transit network make young people feel unsafe (page 14).

13. Poor snow removal is one of the biggest concerns for transit users, pedestrians, and cyclists in the winter (page 14).

Recommendations

- Implement multi-modal transportation designs that physically separate different travel modes.
- Prioritize lighting improvements in transportation infrastructure.
- Ensure robust snow removal and winter maintenance capabilities.
- Address transit network gaps to improve safety for all users, especially youth.

Bicycle and Pedestrian

Key Takeaways

14. Busy intersections require crosswalks and other pedestrian-focused safety infrastructure (page 15).
15. Lower-income communities need pedestrian and bicycle-focused infrastructure for travel, as well as health reasons. (page 15).

Recommendations

- Ensure comprehensive pedestrian safety features at high-traffic intersections.
- Encourage applications for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure needs in lower-income communities where people may not own or have access to a vehicle.

Roadways

Key Takeaways

16. Drivers prefer traveling on less congested roadways (page 16).

Recommendations

- Consider road design that minimizes complexity and reduces driver stress.

Transit

Key Takeaways

17. Minimizing gaps in transit would allow more people to use it regularly (page 17).
18. Frequent transit users spend a lot of time at transit stops and require amenities such as heaters and benches to feel comfortable (page 17).
19. Transit users require more frequent buses on their routes for a variety of reasons (page 17).
20. Transit and transportation service delays need to be addressed for people to use it regularly (page 18).
21. Transit users also need accurate and accessible route information at transit stops (page 18).
22. A variety of transit services are needed to address the transportation needs of all metro residents (page 18).

23. Residents of all ages would like to be able to use to access social and recreational destinations (page 19).

Recommendations

- Develop comprehensive transit networks that minimize service gaps.
- Improve transit stop amenities with comfort-focused features.
- Increase bus frequency and reduce service delays.
- Provide clear, accessible route information.
- Create diverse transit services that meet varied community needs.

Engagement Findings

Though participants came to their respective listening sessions with varying backgrounds and experiences, many of the same themes and findings emerged.



A SmartLink customer shares her opinion on EV chargers with project staff on their way to work.

Equitable and Inclusive

Many individuals from historically underrepresented groups expressed that the spaces they frequent are not being prioritized in transportation funding. The findings below indicate some of these concerns.

Transit options need to extend to suburban and rural areas to allow residents the same access to financial opportunities

People living in the suburbs of the metro area feel overlooked because they don't see transportation options or projects in their community. Many of the people living in these cities shared that they allocate a large portion of their income towards paying for a car, which they

need because of the lack of other transportation options. Should their car stop working, these participants stressed that they wouldn't be able to travel.

I just got a car, thank god, but before, to get to my medical appointments, I would call to get a medical cab, otherwise I would just stay at home because I didn't have another way around where I live. I never see buses or trains around here.

-Cottage Grove resident and mother

Residents without cars shared that they would like to see transit run from downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul to their city for financial opportunities. Specific areas that participants would like to see transit extended to include Inver Grove Heights, Cottage Grove, Stillwater, Mankato, and Woodbury.

They have a new project coming out from the city towards Woodbury and I think that's a great thing because there's not much retail in St. Paul with a lot of stores going out of business—this means a lack of opportunity for intercity residents. I think offering public transportation to suburban areas makes for more opportunities for employment, resource attainment, and low-cost retail and groceries.

-Stillwater resident

Another request by participants from various suburban areas such as Stillwater and Brooklyn Park was the expansion of bike and scooter rentals. Youth would especially enjoy the opportunity to travel using these rentals that are most often found in urban areas.

People need educational information and additional wayfinding to feel comfortable using new infrastructure

A common experience amongst participants was difficulty navigating existing infrastructure systems, causing them to enter unsafe situations or forgo their travel plans altogether. When focus group participants were asked to choose images that they disliked, many chose Image 2. The interchange was described as confusing and overwhelming, with participants explaining that there is too much signage to read and yet not enough effective signage that can help them navigate through with ease.



Participants said they were confused by this interchange design.

Another common source of confusion is bike paths. Metro residents prefer marked lanes and paths that use clear symbols to convey who should be using them and want to see these markings standardized across Minnesota.

Although participants responded positively to modal separation on roads and trails, many said that they see cars struggle to know where to drive when specialized lanes are present. They shared that this puts other drivers and pedestrians and bicyclists attempting to use these lanes at risk and, in some cases, causes road rage. Some participants shared similar experiences witnessing drivers attempt to navigate multi-lane roundabouts.

I'm a biker but I do find that the bike lanes in South Minneapolis are a part of a larger gentrifying scheme of the city to gentrify our community. Because right now our people bike, but we're not using bike lanes. That's because there's no education or resources or commitment to teaching our communities how to utilize those spaces.

-MIGIZI staff focus group participant

To better understand the new infrastructure in their neighborhood and how they can take advantage of systems such as the Gold Line, residents would like to see the Metropolitan Council and other public sector agencies put forth an effort to educate the public, whether it be through additional wayfinding or advertising efforts such as public mailers.

Different methods of acquiring feedback are needed to hear from diverse populations

Throughout engagement, participants shared many of the same ways they would like to give feedback on transportation projects in the future: through text, emails, and QR codes posted at transit stops. Many participants also shared that they like to hear updates and give feedback through the community groups and spaces they frequent. These methods were supported by people who emphasized that certain methods, such as public meetings, can often work to

exclude people from sharing their opinions because attending them requires more time, resources, and labor. Instead, meeting people where they are shows communities that the government agencies are putting forth the effort to reach them.

When you call town halls, no matter what time of day, what I found is the folks that can attend those spaces are not the folks depleted of their personal spaces. The people you want to hear from the most are the ones with the highest barriers.

-MIGIZI staff focus group participant

Additionally, some participants shared that they don't know what the options for giving feedback are, having never been asked to give feedback on projects like this before. Above all, the variety in responses shows that the public sector needs to use different methods of gathering feedback to hear from a variety of demographics.

Transportation services need to exceed minimum standards to fully meet the needs of people living with disabilities

People living with disabilities often require additional accommodations to use transit safely and comfortably. During the Dakota County Disability Advisory Council focus group, participants were eager to share their experiences using Metro Transit and Metro Mobility. Most comments shared were focused on Metro Mobility processes and operations and not relevant to this project but have been recorded and shared with Council staff.

Additionally, participants expressed frustration over bike storage options for larger bikes that are more likely to be used by older people and those living with disabilities.

I know y'all know there are disabled people because you have services for disabled people and you're creating storage lockers for unhoused people with bikes and you don't consider disabled folks and the adult trikes we might have purchased? When you get older, you want a bigger bike. I'm not asking for 30 storage lockers, but can you just get two bigger lockers? I've made many calls and haven't heard back.

-Dakota County Disability Advisory Council member with an ambulatory disability

Clean spaces and placemaking efforts such as murals encourage more residents to use certain spaces

Participants shared that they try to avoid streets with trash, graffiti, and minimal lighting as much as possible and would like to see more of their funding going towards keeping public streets clean. Many participants appreciated the images with murals because they have the power to make communities feel seen and keep out unwanted graffiti.

Poor pavement conditions and minimal transportation options make communities feel overlooked for transportation funding

Participants throughout engagement reported feeling overlooked by government funding due to similar reasons. Seeing potholes and cracks and few or no transit stops on their neighborhood streets were two of the most common reasons participants shared. Often, participants who felt their neighborhood was being ignored for funding lived in the suburbs or a neighborhood in South Minneapolis.

Safety

For the purposes of this summary, safety is categorized here as themes surrounding personal security as well as the elimination of fatalities and serious injuries. Participants across all counties and demographics shared safety as one of the primary reasons they wanted to see certain improvements.

Safety is the primary concern for most people when using transit facilities, especially youth and people living with disabilities

The topic of safety dominated conversations among youth and participants living with disabilities. Nearly every participant in focus groups with these identities shared an experience in which they felt unsafe using public transit or traveling to a public transit facility. In most instances, these situations involved people using illicit substances or engaging in violent interactions on board or near transit stops. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of security on transit, especially when they see the same people repeatedly participating in illegal activities on board.

I'm a non-binary, transfeminine person. My community just had two transgender women attacked on the light rail in Downtown Minneapolis on November 10th, this year [2024]. It is not the first time. Our safety doesn't seem to be a concern to Metro Transit staff. There is lots of fear [within the LGBTQ+ and disabled communities] when it comes to public transit.
- Dakota County Disability Advisory Council focus group participant

Most participants expressed that they would like to see increased security on transit to help eliminate unsafe individuals and behavior. Though many individuals, especially people of color, shared feeling unsafe around police, they also emphasized wanting to see more security on board in some form. Several of these participants shared that they would feel better about increased security on board if these employees were not armed.

Men will try to talk to little girls and follow us home when its dark outside. If there was a security guard, they could tell them that it's not cool...My sister works at the Mall of America, and she has to take the bus home late in the evening. Multiple times my big brother had to go and get her off the bus.
-MIGIZI youth focus group participant

Transportation facilities that are separated by travel mode make people feel safer

One of the most common themes across engagement was the demand for transportation facilities that are separated by modes of travel. Most frequently, participants expressed a desire to see more bike lanes in their community, but participants also shared an appreciation for pedestrian overpasses and walking trails that are distanced from roads. Participants agreed that they would feel safer traveling on streets with separated bike lanes, both as a driver, pedestrian, and bicyclist. While many expressed the desire to see more bike lanes in any capacity, many other participants were more specific, insisting that these paths should be separated from vehicles by more than just paint.

As someone that bikes a lot, having a bike lane completely separate from where the cars are is ideal for me. No one likes to bike right next to cars and buses—it sucks, and drivers hate it too.
-MIGIZI staff focus group participant

Participants also found it important for these lanes to be separated from the sidewalks used by pedestrians because pedestrians and cyclists alike get frustrated when they must veer off a sidewalk or path to pass the other. Some participants shared their appreciation for paint on bike lanes or signage nearby that clearly indicates who should use that path.

More lighting would make pedestrians feel safer traveling in their neighborhood

Residents across the Metro have a strong desire to see additional streetlighting on their neighborhood routes, often citing reasons of personal security. Engagement participants responded poorly to an image of a walking path that was underneath an overpass because it requires pedestrians to pass through a dark space out of view of other people. Though lighting was most often brought into conversation by pedestrians, drivers also noted that the lack of street lighting is a major concern for them, with some older drivers sharing that they avoid driving in the evening altogether.

Transit is a preferred method of travel by some people for safety and comfortability reasons

Some participants shared that they rely on transit because they do not feel comfortable driving for a variety of reasons. Older individuals and individuals living with disabilities were more likely to share that they avoid driving out of fear. Though most of these individuals shared that their own disability is what makes them nervous behind the wheel, some noted that traffic, the unpredictable behavior of other drivers, and other factors outside of their control contribute to this fear as well. Additionally, in the winter, when the streets get covered in ice and snow, some residents who traditionally drive prefer to use transit when traveling to avoid putting themselves in dangerous situations. Residents from across the metro would like to see transit service expanded so that they can rely on transit when they do not feel it is safe for them to drive.

Poor pavement conditions on the road make people nervous

Participants were quick to notice the condition of the street in Image 16 and compare it to other streets in their neighborhood with similar cracks in the pavement. Drivers shared that poor pavement conditions make them feel nervous because of the damage hitting a pothole or crack

could do to their car. Bicyclists and other individuals who travel on wheels, as well as those living with disabilities, also expressed the same concerns for reasons of comfort and access.



Participants reacted strongly to the condition of this road.

Gaps in the transit network make young people feel unsafe

Areas without transit are not only inconvenient, but can often be unsafe, especially for young people travelling alone. Given the size of the metro, residents must frequently take several different transit lines to reach their destination—though not all connections are without gaps. Many youth group participants expressed their concern for specific streets that they must travel through to get from one bus stop to another. Streets and areas such as Lake Street, W Broadway Avenue, and downtown Minneapolis were mentioned as particularly concerning areas.

W Broadway Avenue is scary. There's a lot that goes on. I would love a train through there. I'm tired of walking down the street and hearing people on drugs talking to themselves.

-Avenues for Youth focus group participant

Some participants noted that the presence of violence and crime at these locations discourages them from traveling altogether. To decrease the likelihood that they must walk through these areas by themselves, young people would like to see the transit providers work to minimize these gaps in transit.

Poor snow removal is one of the biggest concerns for transit users, pedestrians, and cyclists in the winter

People who take transit, walk, bike, or roll in the winter often find themselves in dangerous situations because of insufficient snow removal. Metro residents noted that snow from the streets often gets pushed onto pedestrian and bike spaces, making these spaces smaller or

entirely unusable. Participants emphasized that poor snow and ice removal can be especially dangerous around transit stops.

I think the first funeral I ever went to as a little girl was my auntie's best friend who slipped under a bus in the winter and died because back then the snow in Minnesota winters used to be crazy. I know the snow at the bus stops piles up in a way that made it impossible for the driver to see that she slipped under the bus... I know that so many of our people in this neighborhood commute by walking or biking and I know there's a lot of disparities by people dying in the streets by vehicles.

-MIGIZI staff focus group participant

Bicycle and Pedestrian

Most of the discussions surrounding bicycle and pedestrian-related spaces related to safety and personal security, with several groups also suggesting the importance of these spaces in lower-income communities for individuals' health and well-being.

Busy intersections require crosswalks and other pedestrian-focused safety infrastructure

Engagement participants expressed the desire to see additional crosswalks in their neighborhood, with many adding that they would like to see more stop signs or Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at these intersections. Since pedestrians prefer infrastructure that forces drivers to stop for them, many shared that they do not feel safe crossing at intersections with stop lights that allow for cars to turn right on red. Participants from across the metro shared stories of near misses by drivers who were turning right on red and not paying attention to the pedestrians who have right of way. Participants were also frustrated by intersections that only have crosswalks on one or two sides because they often increase the distance a pedestrian has to travel or can encourage them to cross unsafely.

Just having those [flashing lights] makes you feel a lot safer for crossing the road. Walking is the most natural form of transportation, and it can feel hostile.

-MIGIZI staff focus group participant

Several participants would also like to see funding go towards repainting existing crosswalks in their neighborhood that are fading and adding lines that indicate where cars should stop. In addition, pedestrians appreciate roads that have sidewalks on either side of the street, for the same reasons that they want crosswalks on all sides of an intersection.

Lower-income communities need pedestrian and bicycle-focused infrastructure for travel, as well as health reasons

Lower-income individuals, regardless of age, ability, race, and gender, primarily travel on foot because they lack the means to afford other options. To get to where they need to go, these individuals must often walk where there is no infrastructure to support them, because they have no other options. Something as simple as a sidewalk could mean keeping these individuals off busy roads with other traffic.

While sidewalks and bike paths are essential for travel, our participants also suggested that they are essential for the social, physical, emotional, and mental well-being of lower-income individuals.

It's not just about getting our clients from point A to point B, it's about community—having a place where lower-income families can go for a walk. These people need safe spaces where they can walk their children and de-escalate. I don't think it is a privilege thing. Giving out bikes? That's like child abuse prevention right there. A mom can get out and go biking instead of snapping at her kid. Parents need sidewalks so they can push a stroller without getting hit.

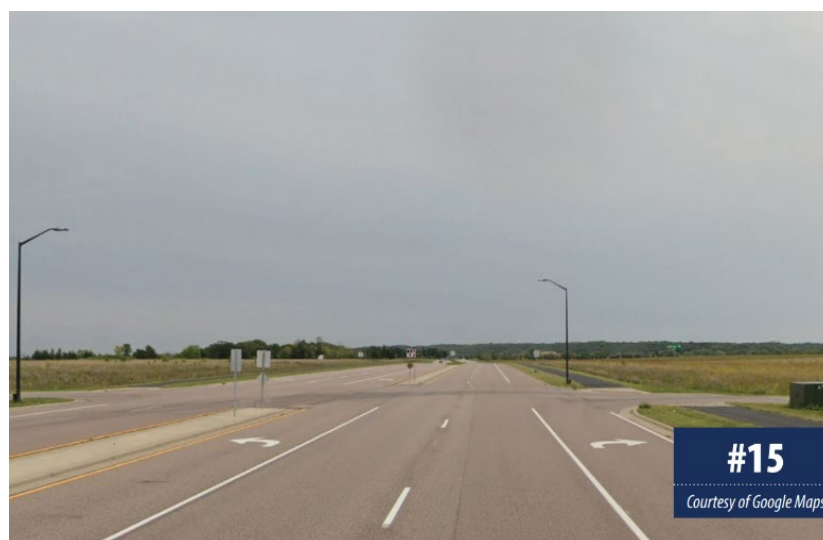
-Carver County social worker

Roadways

While many participants shared that they or someone they know avoids driving because it makes them feel overstimulated or anxious, no participant explicitly listed traffic delays as something they want to see improved.

Drivers prefer traveling on less congested roadways

Though pedestrians responded negatively to image #15 of County Highway (CH) 16 included in the activity because it lacked any visible pedestrian infrastructure and transit options, most drivers reacted positively to this roadway. Drivers agree that efficiency is important when traveling and most feel that less congested roads such as CH 16 allow for more efficient vehicle travel. Additionally, many participants living with invisible disabilities such as anxiety and ADHD shared that they feel overwhelmed when traveling on busy roadways because of the stress brought on by the loud noise and constant decision-making needed to safely travel these spaces. Several of these participants shared that they do not drive anymore because of these negative experiences.



Drivers responded positively to this image of County Highway 16 near Shakopee.

Transit

Transit was one of the most popular topics of discussion across engagement, with suggestions for improvements varying from individual to individual. From transit stops to transit amenities to transit locations, nearly every aspect of transit in the metro area was discussed as an area of improvement.

Minimizing gaps in transit would allow more people to use it regularly

Many participants shared that they would use transit more often if there were longer routes that could take them where they need to go without having to transfer between services. Many participants travel across the metro to get to work and do so by car because traveling by transit would take longer. In addition to unreliable travel times, participants find that they need to make upwards of three connections to get to where they need to go.

Another issue that was highlighted amongst suburban participants was that not all transit and ridesharing services extend across cities and counties. Carver County focus group participants emphasized that their region has very fractured transit networks, which makes it difficult for residents to travel far.

Frequent transit users spend a lot of time at transit stops and require amenities such as heaters and benches to feel comfortable

Aside from safety onboard transit, frequent transit users were most concerned with the lack of amenities at transit stops and shelters. Since frequent transit users often have no other options for transportation, they require reliable amenities such as shelters, heaters, and benches during the cold winter months. More streetlights near stops were also requested by users who report that bus drivers are more likely to accidentally drive past them in unlit or poorly lit areas.

At 6 p.m. in the dark, the bus will drive past people because there's snow and darkness—no light for the bus stop to indicate there's a person there. There should be streetlights near the bus stops.
-Hope4Youth focus group participant

Transit users also suggested adding more buses and bigger buses to popular routes in the winter to minimize the time users must spend waiting.

I would like to see more buses running in the winter. Sometimes you will just be sitting out there [at a bus stop] in the cold for two hours. Maybe at the end of the school day, the longer buses could show up more often. With the short buses, when people get on all at once, it gets crowded, and people get pushed around trying to get in and out of the bus.
-MIGIZI youth focus group participant

Transit users require more frequent buses on their routes for a variety of reasons

While transit users share the desire to see more transit in the metro for reasons of convenience, many people require increased services for reasons of safety and access. For people living with both visible and invisible disabilities, an increase in transit capacity means they will be more

likely to get a comfortable place to sit on transit. Just as people with ambulatory disabilities need available seating, people with developmental disabilities such as ADHD need space to move their body comfortably and people with sensory disabilities need quiet spaces to avoid feeling overwhelmed. An increase in buses and the addition of bigger buses to popular routes are improvements that some passengers need in order to be able to use transit at all.

I'm not sure that every bus will have bench space and cushions on the seats and against the walls. I have ADHD which means I have to bounce a leg or move constantly...so I want to be comfortable. A little more room on buses would be cool.

-Cottage Grove resident

Transit and transportation service delays need to be addressed for people to use it regularly

Though many metro residents are interested in or have tried taking transit on a regular basis, many have found that they can't rely on it to get to work or school because of its unreliability. In particular, nearly all the participants who shared that they have used Metro Mobility in the past reported that the service frequently arrives late. Several participants shared experiences in which they or a loved one had lost their job because a delay in transit caused them to show up late for work. A few also noted that arriving too early can have consequences as well, such as being left in the cold outside a locked building. These obstacles prove especially difficult for someone living with a disability and a young person traveling on their own.

Transit users also need accurate and accessible route information at transit stops

Due in part to the number of delays they encounter while trying to use Metro Transit, bus riders shared their frustration with not being able to see pick-up times listed at bus stops anymore. Riders appreciate it when stops have electronic signs that show when the next bus is coming and would like to see them at every stop. Some participants emphasized that not all transit users have access to the internet, so if bus schedules are only posted online, they have no way of seeing updates when they are in the middle of traveling. There is also interest in seeing more bus route maps at stops so that new riders or riders looking to travel somewhere new have this information available.

A variety of transit services are needed to address the transportation needs of all metro residents

One of the biggest themes from engagement concerning transit is that one service does not fit all. Even within demographic groups, every person has unique restrictions and needs that lead them to want something different out of the transit they use. For example, while one individual with an intellectual disability shared that they appreciated being able to take public transit because it improved their confidence and offered them social opportunities, another individual with a similar disability stated that they request shared ride services because public transit is overstimulating for them. In addition, while the SmartLink users appreciated the fixed-route bus they were on because it ensured they would get to their grocery store every week for a smaller fee, another participant from the same region shared that this doesn't work for those who have to make several stops such as dropping a child off at daycare before going to work.

Residents of all ages would like to be able to use to access social and recreational destinations

While many participants emphasized the need for reliable transit to access employment opportunities and basic needs such as grocery stores, other participants suggested that being able to access social and recreational opportunities were also important needs that are not being met. Limited hours on the weekend, short routes, and minimal connections to suburban or rural areas were all listed as barriers for people attempting to use transit for recreational purposes.

For the most part, everybody kind of agrees that the buses are very difficult. Our family home visiting team has community gatherings where they bring all their clients to a community center or a park, but often a family will say it takes too long to get there by public transportation, especially with kids, so they tell us they can't come to these events. It is unfortunate because we have these events so that families who are secluded in their homes can build social and personal networks with people who are in their system of circumstance. That long wait time also makes it very difficult.

-Scott County staff focus group participant

Something that excited many engagement participants was the idea of high-speed rail or Bus-Rapid Transit (BRT) to take them to different regions in Minnesota for recreational purposes. Frequently, these participants shared that they would like to see transit along the north shore, noting that heavy tourism creates traffic on the roads, which are already not designed for high-capacity usage.

I am an elderly disabled person and I would love to use transit to explore more of Minnesota. I am like some disabled elderly people who are isolated and lonely, and getting around to see the state would be a wonderful recreational and mental health activity.

-Dakota County Disability Advisory Council focus group participant

Climate

As was explicitly shared throughout engagement, many metro residents are primarily concerned with transportation funding as it relates to safety and accessibility. As a result, climate and environmental-related topics were largely absent from conversation. Though an image of an electric vehicle charging station included in the set of activity photos used in discussions received a generally positive reaction from participants, many of them were for reasons of demand rather than environmental concern.

Summary

Participants advocated for transportation investments addressing accessibility and safety concerns in their communities. Many participants—especially suburban and rural residents and people living with disabilities—expressed feeling overlooked by existing funding decisions, noting that current transportation services fail to meet their specific needs.

Many expressed that cleaner, well-lit spaces with placemaking elements like murals would encourage greater use of transportation facilities. Participants consistently voiced interest in expanded transit options and modal-separated roadways across diverse communities. Educational resources emerged as a need, with participants requesting better wayfinding and guidance on navigating complex infrastructure.

Safety concerns permeated all discussions. Participants across demographic groups prioritized infrastructure improvements including better streetlighting, snow removal, and pothole repairs. Youth, People of Color, and LGBTQ+ participants specifically highlighted safety concerns in transit spaces, with many noting that transit gaps create significant safety vulnerabilities.

Bicycle and pedestrian discussions centered on intersection safety and the need for dedicated infrastructure, particularly in lower-income communities where these modes serve both transportation and health purposes. While some participants appreciated quieter roadways and electric vehicle investments, traffic congestion and climate/environmental considerations received comparatively little attention compared to requests for frequent, reliable transit services with appropriate amenities and accurate route information.