

REGIONAL SAFETY ACTION PLAN

Engagement Summary

September 2024



METROPOLITAN
COUNCIL

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Introduction

The Met Council is developing a Regional Safety Action Plan to address transportation safety issues in the Twin Cities region. The Regional Safety Action Plan builds on the previous safety action planning efforts of cities and counties throughout the seven-county metro area to prioritize regional infrastructure projects, strategies, and policies for implementation.



Figure 1: Staff interacting with participants during community tabling event

To ensure the success of the Regional Safety Action Plan, the project team gathered feedback from residents who represent identities that were inadequately represented in recent transportation safety engagement, with a focus on historically underrepresented people, including Black, Indigenous, people of color, people who have lower incomes, and people living with disabilities. The engagement goals and strategies are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Engagement goals and strategies for the Regional Safety Action Plan

1 Recent Engagement Review	2 Identify Communities	3 Engage with People	4 Summarize Findings
Summarize recent engagement from other Met Council projects and from partner agencies' transportation projects across the region.	Identify communities that have been insufficiently engaged in recent transportation projects.	Engage with people from communities that have been identified as missing or underrepresented in recent transportation conversations through community-based organizations.	Summarize findings and prioritize input from residents who are most impacted by traffic crashes.

This document summarizes the engagement results for the Regional Safety Action Plan and is organized into sections corresponding to the overall engagement goals.

1. Summarize Recent Engagement Efforts

The USDOT awards Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) grants to projects that incorporate equity and engagement, identify underserved communities, and collaborate with appropriate partner locations. Based on this engagement focus, the project team reviewed projects for equitable engagement practices: who participated in conversations, how they were engaged, and what level of engagement the target audiences had. The review includes transportation projects led by the Met Council and represents some engagement efforts – it is not a comprehensive list of recent transportation discussions conducted by local agencies (Table 2).

Table 2: Projects reviewed for this summary

Year Complete	Project	Agency Lead	Description	Participants
2023	Equity WikiMap Survey	Met Council	The Met Council surveyed transportation agencies about recent safety studies or documented engagement efforts related to traffic safety from the past five years.	7 government agencies
2023	Transportation Needs in Daily Life Study	Met Council	The Met Council hosted small group discussions / focus groups across the metro region to understand how people’s values and needs influence their daily travel decisions and incorporate people’s lived experiences into regional policy documents and planning initiatives.	182 individuals
2023	Young Leaders in Transportation Collaboration	Met Council	The Met Council enlisted young leaders to conduct interviews with diverse youth groups exploring transportation issues affecting young people and their communities.	120 individuals

For a full list of results from each project, see the Summary of Recent Engagement Efforts report.

2. Identify Communities

Based on recent engagement, the project team identified groups of people who have not been adequately involved in recent transportation projects. Table 3 provides information about these identities and explains why they may have been underrepresented in recent transportation engagement. The staff aimed to engage as many as possible for this project. Due to the broad range of groups identified and the project’s limited timeline, project staff were not be able to engage every identity. The team made efforts to reach as many of the identities as possible but also drew in feedback gathered from other recent engagement projects to supplement due to the wide range of underrepresented people and scope of the project. The team will document any areas that need improvement for future projects to build upon.

Table 3: Identities underrepresented in recent transportation projects

Identities	Why They May Be Underrepresented
People living with disabilities	Although there was some targeted engagement to people living with disabilities for the Transportation Needs project, the amount of engagement is low considering 10% of the people in the region identify as living with a disability.
Queer, non-binary and transgender people	Besides a handful of female and male focus groups conducted by the Transportation Needs project, recent transportation engagement efforts have not focused specifically on gender identity. Transgender and non-binary experiences have not been reflected at all in recent transportation safety projects in the metro area.
Higher-population cultural communities	The higher population cultural communities in the metro region, including African American, Latinx, Hmong, Somali, and Oromo communities, have had some targeted outreach in recent transportation projects. However, the level of engagement from these communities has been relatively low compared to their population size in the metro area.
Lower-population cultural communities	There are many cultural communities represented in the metro area that have not received any targeted outreach on recent transportation projects including Indian, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Ukrainian communities, among many others.
People living in suburban and rural cities and towns	Many areas in Suburban Edge, Emerging Suburban Edge, and Rural Service Areas were not represented in recent transportation engagement. Cities and townships such as Lino Lakes, Hugo, Rosemount, Credit River, Victoria, and Dayton did not show up at all in the review of transportation projects.
Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and immigrants in suburban and rural cities and towns	Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and immigrant communities who live in suburban or rural cities and towns were not represented nearly as regularly as those who live in urban areas during recent transportation engagement.

3. Engage With People

After determining target identities, the project team worked closely with community organizations to reach people in ways that work best for them. Engagement activities were dependent on recommendations from community organizations and included a combination of in-person, virtual, and hybrid focus groups and one table activity at an existing event. Table 4 describes the engagement events that the project coordinated with community organizations in June and July 2024.

Table 4: Engagement events

Date (2024)	Community Organization	Audience	Strategy	Participants
June 11	ARC Minnesota	People living with intellectual and developmental disabilities	Hybrid focus group	17
June 12	Young Women Christian’s Association (YWCA)	Women who work with girls and non-binary youth	In-person focus group	7
June 17	Autism Society of Minnesota	People living with autism	Virtual focus group	6
June 24	Waite House Neighborhood Center	Latinx people	In-person Focus Group (Spanish)	5
June 29	African Career, Education, and Resources (ACER)	African immigrants	Tabling event	55
July 1	Banyan Community, Minneapolis	Latinx people	In-person Focus Group (Spanish)	10
July 10	Women’s Initiative for Self Empowerment (WISE)	Girls and women	In-person focus group	8

Focus group participants engaged in 60-minute conversations about traffic safety concerns in their communities. The primary method used to gather feedback during the conversations was an activity where participants were asked to review images of transportation facilities from around the region and describe what they like or don’t like about the transportation options in those areas, if there is anything they would like to be improved for the region, and if the images reminded them of anything in the participant’s neighborhood (Figure 2). Participants were specifically told that the project team was most interested in hearing about safety as it relates to things like speeding, crashes, difficult crossings, insufficient lighting, or not enough separation from the roadway and a sidewalk since the project will make recommendations that impact infrastructure.



Figure 2: Images of transportation facilities provided to focus group participants



Figure 3: Comments written by participants from tabling event

The June 29 tabling event used an abbreviated version of the focus group image activity. Participants selected an image that looked like a place they have traveled through before, or that evoked a strong reaction and wrote or drew on the image what they liked or disliked (Figure 3).

In total, the project connected with 108 participants, 53 during focus groups, and 55 during the tabling event. Table 5 describes the degree of success staff had in reaching target identities during outreach for this project based on post-discussion surveys following the focus groups. Some target audiences were not reached due to the limited availability of community organizations representing target audiences within the project timeline. If identities were not represented, staff used feedback from other recent transportation projects to fill in gaps in the feedback. The Met Council's Transportation Needs in Daily Life Study and the Young Leaders in Transportation Collaboration are the two primary engagement efforts used to supplement the Regional Safety Action Plan engagement. These two projects are used because of the discussions that were held related to transportation infrastructure topics and the access to full engagement notes and participant demographics.

Table 5: Target identities and representation during project outreach

Audience	Representation During Engagement for the Regional Safety Action Plan	Representation During Engagement on Previous Transportation Projects
People living with disabilities	51% of focus participants identified as living with a disability. A range of disabilities were represented including cognitive, movement, and vision.	33% of Transportation Needs in Daily Life focus group participants identified as living with a disability.
Queer, non-binary and transgender people	10% of focus participants identified as queer, non-binary or transgender even though the project was unable to coordinate with community organizations that solely represented these identities.	Less than 2% of Transportation Needs in Daily Life participants identified as queer or non-binary, and there was no specific focus group that represented these identities.
Higher-population cultural communities	<p>65% of focus group participants identified as people of color including the following races and ethnicities that encompass some of the larger cultural communities in the Twin Cities region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 27% Hispanic or Latinx - 14% Asian - 14% Black or African American <p>In addition to the focus groups, the pop-up table occurred during a community event for African immigrants.</p>	<p>66% of Transportation Needs in Daily Life focus group participants identified as people of color. Ten of the 29 (35%) Transportation Needs in Daily Life study focus groups and one of the three (33%) Young Leaders in Transportation Collaboration were for higher-population cultural communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Native American women - Black/African Americans older adults - Latino caregivers (2) - Latino youth (2) - Hmong youth - Chinese adults - Oromo adults - Somali adults - East African Youth
Lower-population cultural communities	The project was unable to coordinate with community organizations that represent lower-population cultural communities such as Indian, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Ukrainian people within the project timeline.	<p>The Transportation Needs in Daily Life study hosted two focus groups for lower-population cultural communities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Korean older adults - Lao people
People living in suburban and rural cities and towns	9% of focus group participants identified as living in a zip code with mostly suburban or rural land uses. The project was unable to coordinate with community organizations in suburban or rural areas within the project timeline.	Twelve of the 29 (41%) Transportation Needs in Daily Life study focus groups and one of the three (33%) Young Leaders in Transportation Collaboration were for people living in suburban communities.
Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and immigrants in suburban and rural cities and towns	Only a handful of focus group participants identified as a person of color who lived in a suburb or rural area. The project was unable to coordinate with community organizations in suburban or rural areas within the project timeline.	<p>The Transportation Needs in Daily Life study hosted three focus groups for people of color who lived in a suburb or rural area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Latinos in White Bear Lake (2) - Somali people in Chaska

4. Summarize Findings

The following are key findings from this project's focus groups and tabling event, combined with transportation infrastructure findings from previous engagement projects. Findings from the Met Council's Transportation Needs in Daily Life Study and Young Leaders in Transportation Collaboration are used to supplement engagement efforts for this project. Findings are organized by topic as they relate to transportation infrastructure and are presented alongside an example quote or image. Topics are loosely organized based on how frequently they were discussed.

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

Participants strongly preferred the delineation of walking, biking, and driving facilities. This preference was expressed in the engagement activity, where feedback was most positive towards walking and biking paths that were separated from each other and from the roadway.

Both drivers and users of other modes of transit expressed their appreciation of clear signage and separated lanes, referencing safety and clarity of navigation. Boulevards and curbs were the most popular form of separation. Some participants mentioned how delineator posts are easily breakable and do not add a sense of safety. Youth participants have regularly shared that they feel unsafe in bike lanes that do not have separation between vehicle lanes. They said they would prefer to ride on the sidewalk than in bike lanes without separation from vehicles.

I love that there's a separate road, then boulevard, then sidewalk. You won't be hit by a car, and there are trees — I love the trees. We need wider sidewalks -- I always walk with my kids and there's not enough space there.
- WISE focus group participant

Sheltered and accessible transit stops make people more comfortable.

Bus stops and transit stations were described as uncomfortable, inaccessible, and unsafe. Unsheltered bus stops and bus stops close to roads were highlighted as particularly dangerous and inaccessible. Many participants, especially those without access to vehicles, referred to their reliance on the transit system, and expressed how this reliance heightens their need for accommodating bus stops. Many participants asked for more lighting, shade from the sun, heat during the winters, or more separation from vehicle lanes. Some noted how those with disabled or larger bodies could not exist comfortably within existing bus and transit stop infrastructure, emphasizing the need to design these spaces with all bodies in mind.

Hostile infrastructure at bus stops is a challenge. As a larger body person, fitting between the bars they put on seats makes it impossible to sit. The Lake Street and Hiawatha intersection and bus stop doesn't feel safe. Trans[gender] people are often harassed or assaulted there.
- YWCA focus group participant

Better lighting makes people feel safer in areas where they walk.

Improved lighting in areas where people travel is very important for people who walk. Participants suggested specific locations near crosswalks or bus stops that could benefit from better lighting for improved visibility when crossing roads or for a greater sense of personal

security. Some individuals noted that current lighting needed updating, either by replacing bulbs or by maintaining the surrounding vegetation that was blocking the light.

[There is] one very dim light and it's not enough for those people that hang out there. I can't go out after it's dark.

-Banyan Community focus group participant

Greener and cleaner spaces are appreciated.

There was a widespread desire for more shade, tree coverage, and green space around transportation facilities. In some groups, there was frustration at the perceived lack of clean and safe public gathering places in and around local streets and bus stops. The development of more public space was posed as a solution to the loitering that happens at corners and bus stops, which made many participants feel unsafe. Participants in some groups agreed that functioning and clean trash cans would make the most difference in the cleanliness of space. Many participants made comments about the dirtiness of urban space, especially on sidewalks and in bus stops.

More garbage cans would really help and be really nice—that's a good idea.

- Banyan Community focus group participant

Interconnected walking and biking systems are essential for safer travel.

The lack of walking and biking facilities that connect to each other and to destinations was mentioned as a deterrent to travel for people who rely on walking and biking to get places. Many people talked about needing to walk in the road or bike with vehicle traffic in places where walking or biking infrastructure doesn't connect. This was especially true for people who walk in suburban or rural areas and either rely on walking or transit as primary modes of transportation. Young participants and people living with disabilities feel particularly uneasy when they are walking and biking and around vehicles.

"In Prior Lake, you are driving to most of your places. But I do think it is important to have sidewalks in neighborhoods; especially where children are using them."

-Young Leaders Collaboration interviewee on transportation

Pedestrians and bicyclists need safe and accessible crossings.

Several focus groups discussed the need for better infrastructure that helps facilitate safer crossing for walkers and bikers. Often comments were made regarding crossing on busy or fast-moving roads and related to crossing in urban and suburban areas. Some people wish there were traffic control devices in places where they currently don't exist. Others talk about the need to improve existing traffic control devices, either by improving the existing control device's visibility or by using a different traffic control strategy. Several people discussed insufficient curb ramps that make it difficult for walkers with mobility impairments or for people who are rolling to cross the street.



Figure 5: Participant notes at ACER Pop-Up event

Clear signage is necessary for safe travel.

Participants repeated their appreciation for clear signage on streets, bike lanes, bus lanes, walking paths, and at bus stops. Signage included references to stop signs, stop lights, street and lane markings, and transit directions. Many participants who were non-drivers expressed how clear signage improved or deterred their ability to navigate spaces as pedestrians and bikers, and feel safe as they did so. In the WISE focus group, signage was mentioned in almost every conversation about the engagement activity.

As an avid bicyclist, I am greatly concerned for the lack of good signage that informs folks on bikes to announce themselves when passing, to bike at a safe speed, to pass on the right, etc.
- ARC Minnesota focus group participant

Slower streets are preferred in residential areas and in areas with community destinations.

Speeding was emphasized as a problem throughout the metro region, both in city neighborhoods and surrounding communities where people also walk, bike or roll. Many participants were concerned about their personal safety and that of children in their community. Speed bumps and flashing pedestrian signals at crossings were the most popular infrastructural solutions suggested by participants, especially near destinations such as schools. For example, during the Banyan Community neighborhood focus group, 13th Avenue South was specifically cited as a street where cars navigate at high speeds, posing direct danger to the children and youth that live on the street and frequently cross it.

The same thing happens on this street—people move really fast, and speed bumps could really help that. The kids are in danger because of the speed.
- Banyan Community neighborhood focus group participant

Poor pavement conditions make travelling more uncomfortable.

Poor pavement conditions were referenced in each focus group and was the top discussion item during the tabling event. Poor pavement has also been discussed at length in previous engagement with target audiences. People have pointed out that the roads, from highways to smaller local roads, need attention. Many cited concerns that potholes could damage their car, as well as put them at risk of a crash. People reported potholes and cracks of all sizes in their own neighborhoods and on busy streets. People have also discussed the need for smooth sidewalks, especially people who have limited mobility and people who rely on walking to travel. People living with disabilities and older adults have especially talked about the dangers of walking on uneven surfaces in the winter when ice is also a limiting factor to movement.

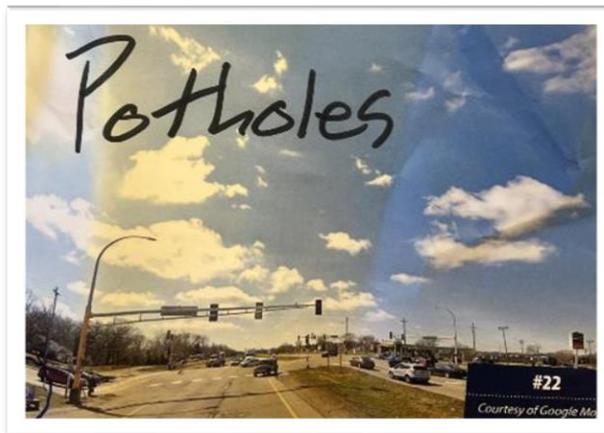


Figure 4: Potholes were the most common comment during the tabling event

Roundabouts slow drivers down but are difficult for pedestrians to navigate.

Participants generally referred to roundabouts as helpful for slowing vehicle speeds but as difficult to navigate on foot. A handful of people who have mobility impairments said they are particularly difficult to cross since drivers fail to yield or do not see people waiting to cross.

*Increase the use of roundabouts to 'slow' traffic down a bit more.
- Autism Society focus group*

*Is there anything that could make the roundabouts safer for pedestrians and people in wheelchairs? You can't see oncoming traffic over the center part which makes it feel unsafe to cross.
- ARC Minnesota focus group participant*

Non-infrastructure Topics

Engagement for this project focused on transportation safety concerns related to infrastructure, but participants also frequently brought up non-infrastructure issues they have with traveling in the region. Here are some of the non-infrastructure topics that were frequently discussed during the Regional Safety Action Plan engagement.

Some transit stops feel unsafe due to a lack of cleanliness or other people's behaviors.

At all the focus groups, participants reported not feeling safe at bus or light rail stops due to people loitering or using drugs in the area. The light rail and bus stops near Lake Street and Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis were brought up at two focus groups as a particularly problematic area due to a history of violence and harassment (especially toward transgender people). Many South High School students take the bus to these stops to get to school, making it a high priority safety concern. The University Avenue and Dale Street intersection in Saint Paul was noted as a particularly problematic area in terms of drug use, loitering, and harassment.

I don't drive, I take the bus. I know how to get to the mall by train—but I can't anymore, because of the people and the trash. That elevator that goes up to the station is so bad—this one on Franklin.

- Banyan Community neighborhood focus group participant

Gun violence, loitering, and drug use make traveling feel unsafe.

Focus group participants broadly shared that violence, drug use, and unsheltered people make them feel unsafe using transportation in their communities, especially walking and at night.

Addressing safety concerns around harassment. DUI, intoxicated adults who pose a serious threat to communities and public.

- ARC Minnesota focus group participant

Some people have anxiety driving and being around cars

Many people are anxious about driving or travelling around vehicles, particularly on wide or fast-moving roads and highways. They often express concerns about high speeds and the poor driving behaviors of others as significant issues. A few participants expressed highway infrastructure as confusing and dangerous, especially the YWCA group (predominantly drivers and commuters) and the Banyan Community neighborhood group (as many were unfamiliar with driving in the United States).

All forms of transportation are stressful to navigate and dangerous. It is rarely enjoyable. It feels this city has more land dedicated to vehicles than it does to the people who live here.

- Autism Society focus group

Next Steps

The Metropolitan Council prioritized engaging populations that have been underrepresented in recent transportation safety projects in the region for the Regional Safety Action Plan. Despite intending to narrow the target audience, the project team discovered a significant number of underrepresented populations compared to the overall percentage of those populations in the Twin Cities region, even with an increased focus on reaching communities that have not historically been engaged in transportation conversations. Staff identified several populations that the Met Council and partner agencies should continue to prioritize in their outreach efforts.

The project team did a relatively good job reaching people living with disabilities, queer, non-binary, and transgender individuals, as well as certain higher-population cultural communities compared to the proportions those identities represent in the region overall. However, they did not succeed in reaching lower-population cultural communities and people living in suburban and rural areas, especially Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, and immigrants residing in those areas. The success in reaching these communities varied during this project, and the shortcomings are described here in the hope that future transportation projects in the region will continue to work toward engaging underrepresented communities.

The findings from this document, along with technical findings, will be considered for the final report of the Regional Safety Action Plan. These findings will help prioritize future safety investments in the regional transportation system. We appreciate the participants for their time and openness and hope that the findings and policy recommendations from this study will have a positive impact on the development of the region's transportation systems in the future.