

12/6/23 Equity Focus Group (Targeted Stakeholder Consultation)

Description: AECOM staff facilitated a discussion centered on equity issues related to transportation in the MIC area, with a focus on historically-underserved areas and populations.

Key Takeaways:

During the discussion with focus group participants, it became apparent that the region's transportation system has large gaps that contribute to the disenfranchisement of vulnerable populations. For example, participants pointed out that most of the funding and engineering focus goes towards automobile infrastructure even though a large proportion of the population does not own a car. Similarly, during winter months snow is cleared from the roadways by the city and county but sidewalk snow clearance is much less coordinated. As such, participants felt that a more equitable transportation system would be one that treats pedestrians and bicyclists as equal to automobile users by providing an accessible network year-round at a minimum.

What We Heard – Comments:

Transportation Issues

- Downtown transportation infrastructure prioritizes vehicles in an area where a large portion of the population does not have one.
- There needs to be a strong focus on improving transportation in low-income neighborhoods experiencing high health and economic disparities.
- Meyers Wilkins students need safe routes to walk to school.
- Safety and efficiency of transit are major issues facing the community.
- There is a lack of vision and full system planning. For example, there is no non-motorized route through town that is reliably accessible.
- The transportation system is car centric and mostly focused on suburban travelers.
- Snow clearance is not handled well.
- Car centric roadway design and real estate development puts low to moderate income communities in a spiral of disenfranchisement and creates environmental racism.
- Lack of transit in indigenous communities leads to vulnerable people taking unsafe rides.
- Beyond physical needs, there is a need to destigmatize transit users and those without cars.
- Older community members, who are not traditionally considered in transportation planning, need to be considered in future plans without furthering a decline-narrative about aging.
- 95% of the older population live in the community, aging in place. Generally, this group has difficulty accessing transportation.
- In the more rural areas outside of Duluth and Superior, providing transit to the disabled and aging populations is impossible.
- The transportation system needs to be more inclusive. Currently the system has a class bias, prioritizing those who can afford a car.
- There is limited transit access to Hermantown.
- Barkers Island is a major destination, it has a bike trail, but there's a gap across US 2. No transit options will bring you there despite many public events being held there.
- Morgan Park and Spirit Valley are disconnected from transit.
- Lincoln Middle School students do not have any bus options to get to school.
- A tiered transit fare system, specifically lower fares for older people.
- 6th Ave East needs to be reconfigured.
- Electrification is an issue for equity. Electric battery material sourcing exploits native communities.

- Barkers Island is not easily accessible for pedestrians
- Far west neighborhoods feel disconnected and have little access to amenities via transit or other modes of transportation besides cars.

Solutions and Opportunities

- Recognize that everyone is a pedestrian on every trip. (i.e., even when driving, you need to walk to your car, and from your car to your ultimate destination.)
- Car-free areas.
- A Sunday parkway program
- Fix the Duluth-Hermantown connection by extending transit to Hermantown.
- Sidewalk system repair and maintenance.
- A continuous east-west greenway or bike lane.
- Light Rail Transit.
- The city should maintain sidewalks like they maintain roads, and prioritize programs like Safe Routes to School, and transit.
- Prioritize pedestrian infrastructure as an equal member of the transportation system year around.
- Transportation funding allocation should be equity based.
- 6th Ave East needs to be reconfigured.
- The Justice 40 framework should be applied to transportation in the Duluth region.
- Reimagining US 61 is an equity project, to re-connect the downtown and hillside neighborhoods with Canal Park and the lake.
- A bikeshare to provide transportation options for future.
- Northern Lights Express commuters.
- Reliable safe bike parking.
- Attend programs led by community organizations, including:
 - Family freedom center Coffee and Conversations
 - Neighborhood Youth Services
 - YMCA in Superior, Duluth, Proctor
 - Historic St Mark Church – resources for people
 - Interfaith Council – migrant welcome center – Trinity Lutheran
 - Higher education institutions
 - Loaves and Fishes community. Damiano Center. Unhoused.
 - • American Indian Housing Coalition
 - • Youth leadership programs at schools