



1. Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the Duluth-Superior area.

Duluth-Superior Long-Range Transportation Plan



Sustainable Choices 2050

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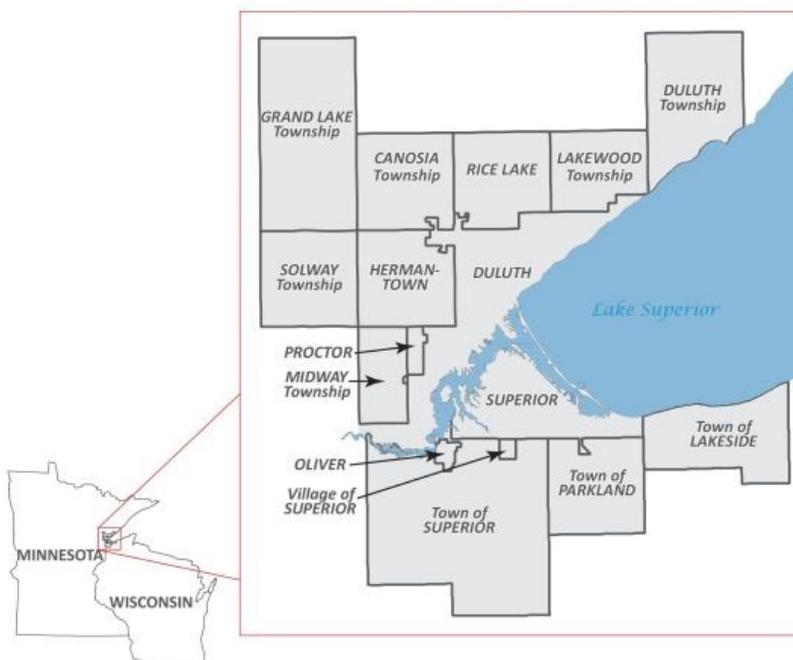
About Sustainable Choices 2050

Sustainable Choices 2050 is the MIC's long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the Duluth, MN—Superior, WI planning area. It identifies a community-supported vision for how our transportation network will look, feel, and function in the future. It covers a twenty-five-year planning horizon and to keep pace with changing priorities, opportunities, and challenges is updated every five years.

Developing a transportation system that meets the changing needs of Duluth-Superior area residents, businesses, and visitors supports the region's development and provides a range of safe, efficient multimodal options for everyone. The plan is also an important element in supporting local and regional economic development and contributes to the region's quality of life. The purpose of the 2050 MTP is to evaluate potential existing and future conditions that affect regional access and mobility and to evaluate potential transportation improvements to address existing and emerging issues.

Sustainable Choices 2050 addresses all modes of transportation within the Duluth-Superior metropolitan planning area (Map 1.1), encompassing multiple state, county, and city jurisdictions.

Map 1.1: MIC Planning Area



The Vision of Sustainable Choices 2050

Develop a transportation system that:

- Is community-supported
- Multimodal
- Supports the needs of both people and commerce
- Is fiscally, socially, and environmentally sustainable over time

Three aspects of Sustainable Choices

To achieve the overall concept of *Sustainable Choices*, we should ask if any new policy, project, or decision related to our regional transportation network:

- Promotes *fiscal* sustainability
- Promotes *social* sustainability
- Promotes *environmental* sustainability

A key goal of *Sustainable Choices 2050* is to encourage infrastructure investments and policy decisions that will contribute to the attainment of an integrated, multi-modal transportation system that provides a high level of access and mobility for all people and goods, improves safety, preserves infrastructure, and provides economic activity consistent with available environmental and fiscal resources.

All of the MIC's planning activities embody the [cooperative, continuous, and comprehensive \("3-C"\) framework](#) for making transportation investment decisions in metropolitan areas as reaffirmed in the federal legislation, the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act \(IIJA\)](#) aka the [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law \(BIL\)](#).

What's New for the 2050 MTP

Sustainable Choices 2050 builds upon the holistic approach of the 2045 plan, to consider and plan for all users of the transportation system, which includes commercial and freight entities as well as the people who live here, of all ages, incomes, and abilities.

In the 2050 plan, new and notable elements of the plan and our planning process include:

Performance-Based Planning

The development of *Sustainable Choices 2050* involved the MIC's first true use of a performance-based planning approach to identify priority projects within our MTP.

The purpose of applying this framework was to better align the short-, mid-, and long-range projects included in Chapter 6 with the MTP's vision, goals, and objectives.

Project Prioritization

The performance-based process included a structured evaluation of the approximately 250 non-transit proposed projects listed in the MTP, resulting in a shorter list of 40 priority projects that are expected to best carry out the vision of *Sustainable Choices 2050* and implement its goals and objectives.

Short Trip Generator Analysis

Replica, a data mobility model generated from multiple sources, was utilized to identify key zones that could be targeted for future bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and safety improvements. Many short (i.e., one-mile and three-mile)

Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council



www.dsmic.org

The MIC is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Duluth-Superior area and produced this long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

MIC-Area Jurisdictions include:

Minnesota – St. Louis County

- Canosia Township
- City of Duluth
- City of Hermantown
- City of Proctor
- City of Rice Lake
- Duluth Township
- Grand Lake Township
- Lakewood Township
- Midway Township
- Solway Township

Wisconsin – Douglas County

- City of Superior
- Lakeside Township
- Parkland Township
- Town of Oliver
- Village of Superior

automobile trips are currently made in these zones and represent the areas of greatest opportunity for people to bicycle and walk more often. Improved biking and walking facilities in these targeted locations would not only encourage the use of sustainable modes of transportation, but would also support the higher number of people with special transportation considerations who live there. This is discussed in further detail in the Bicycle and Pedestrian sections of Chapter 5, and the original data analysis is shown in Appendix B-2.

Combined Jurisdictional Consultations

As described in Chapter 9 (Public Participation) and Appendix C (Engagement Activities and Stakeholder Input), instead of meeting separately with each jurisdiction, for the first time these consultations were held as group sessions (Minnesota jurisdictions and Wisconsin jurisdictions).

This format served as a productive opportunity for discussion for jurisdictions to share their transportation wants, needs, and short– mid– and long-range projects to be considered for inclusion within the MTP.

Focus Groups with Targeted Stakeholders

As described in Chapter 9 (Public Participation) and Appendix C (Engagement Activities and Stakeholder Input), focus group discussions were held to better understand issues that were highlighted in the survey results, and on because the public survey respondents did not fully represent the diversity of the MIC region’s population in terms of race and ethnicity, income, age, and ability. These stakeholder groups included:

- Pedestrians
- Sustainable transportation
- Equity and environmental justice
- Older adults
- People with disabilities

This was the first time the MIC used a facilitated discussion format to develop a better understanding of issues and opportunities. Much of that input is reflected in the Key Takeaways (Chapter 3).

Planning for All Modes of Transportation

Transportation systems are multi-modal. This plan addresses both motorized and non-motorized (or “active”) modes of travel, including:



Pedestrian



Harbor/Port



Highways



Transit

How This Plan Was Developed

Sustainable Choices 2050 is an update of the 2045 long range plan, a major planning initiative conducted over 18 months in accordance with ‘update’ as it’s defined in 23CFR: *to make current a metropolitan transportation plan through a comprehensive review...with public review and comment and a 20-year horizon.*

As described in the previous section, several new processes were utilized. General start-to-finish process steps included:

- Identifying transportation issues and opportunities in the Duluth-Superior metropolitan area through early engagement efforts that included a public survey, consultations with representatives of area jurisdictions and focus group discussions with targeted stakeholder groups.
- Reviewing and updating the 2050 Goals and Objectives in Chapter 2;
- Analyzing the most recent data available, including traffic volumes, level of service estimates, socioeconomic and demographic trends, and existing transportation assets;
- Working with MIC-area jurisdictions to determine proposed short-, mid-, and long-term projects, and estimating projected revenues to determine fiscal constraint;
- Presenting and discussing the MTP at monthly meetings of the MIC Policy Board and the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC);
- Conducting intensive discussions with TAC members to introduce our performance-based planning process and gain their input into a structured evaluation process to prioritize the projects proposed by the jurisdictions to better align them with the MTP’s vision, goals, and objectives;
- Coordinating with current federal and state policies and building upon the MIC’s recent plans as well as local area plans and policies;
- Making the draft MTP available for public review and comment and holding two open house-style public meetings;
- Incorporating the comments received into the final MTP and demonstrating where in the plan those changes were made. if applicable.
- Presenting the final MTP to the TAC for its recommendation for approval and to the MIC Policy Board for adoption.

Planning for All Modes of Transportation



Roadways



Air



Bicycle



Rail

MIC-Area Transportation Improvements Since Sustainable Choices 2045

Many improvements to the Duluth-Superior area transportation system have been made in the five years since the 2045 update of the MIC's MTP, contributing to the attainment of its long-range vision of *developing a community-supported multimodal transportation system that supports the diverse needs of people and commerce.*

This section highlights key improvements to the Duluth-Superior area transportation system, as shared by local jurisdictions during jurisdictional consultations.

Minnesota DOT

Key improvements made to MnDOT jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Redesign and reconstruction of the Twin Ports Interchange where I-35, I-535, and US 53 intersect. This large-scale project is regionally significant, especially for freight movement through the Port of Duluth-Superior. Portions of the project have been delayed one year due to an unanticipated discovery, but much of interchange has been completed. The completed project eliminates blind merges and left exits, replaces aging infrastructure and better accommodates freight movements through the interchange.
- US 53 southbound through the Pike Lake area.
- Roundabouts on MN 194 (safety improvement).
- Safety improvements at the MN 194/US 53 intersection.
- Trunk Highway 39 in Oliver.
- Lake Avenue Bridge over Interstate 35 was resurfaced with improvements to sidewalks and crossing signals and the addition of bike lane.

Wisconsin DOT

Key improvements made to WisDOT jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Redesign and reconstruction of Belknap Street (US 2 through the City of Superior). This project incorporated many pedestrian and bicycle improvements.
- Roadway and sidewalk improvements along US 53 within the City of Superior.

St. Louis County

Key improvements made to St. Louis County jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Led a multijurisdictional effort to significantly improve signal timing along several key corridors. Several of the jurisdictions mentioned the value of these improvements.
- Some intersection safety improvements, including installing J-turns.
- Resurface and maintenance of Woodland Avenue north of Anoka Street.
- Resurface, maintenance, and addition of turning lane on Woodland Avenue between Arrowhead Road and Snively Road.
- Redesign and installation of a roundabout at the Snively Road, Glenwood Street, and Jean Duluth Road intersection.
- General sidewalk and bike facility improvements.
- Reconstruction of the French River Bridge.
- Implementing the County Transportation Fund which has directly led to a heavy investment into transportation system improvements within the MIC area. More than \$87 million has been invested by St Louis County, with \$68 million being St Louis County funds, including those directly from the County Transportation Fund.

City of Duluth

Key improvements made to the City of Duluth jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Completed the East Superior Street project downtown. This included pedestrian and handicap accessibility improvements.
- Implementing the local voter-approved levy increase dedicated to street improvements, which has helped reduce the backlog of roadwork needs.
- Improved signal timing has increased performance along the Central Entrance corridor. This was part of the effort led by St. Louis County.
- Segments of the Campus Connector Trail have been completed.
- The City recently received two federal RAISE grants. One is

to support a multimodal redesign of West Superior Street from the M&H gas station to 34th Street, including the section through the Lincoln Park Craft District. The other is to support improvements to the Lakewalk from Lake Avenue to 26th Avenue East.

City of Superior

Key improvements made to City of Superior jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Intelligent lighting has been installed.
- Belknap Street (US 2) redesign and reconstruction (City partnership with WisDOT)
- A traffic signal was installed at the intersection of Tower Avenue (Highway 35) and 61st Street (Highway 105).
- The condition and longevity of East 2nd Street (Highways 53 and 2) have been improved.
- The City's Active Transportation Plan has spearheaded improvements.
- The City continues to implement a policy that all new roadway projects include significant space specifically for bike and pedestrian facilities.

City of Hermantown

Key improvements made to the City of Hermantown jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Improved signal timing has increased performance along several trunk, county, and MSA roadways. This was part of the effort led by St. Louis County.
- Federal aid reconditioning of Ugstad Road and Arrowhead Road that included the following improvements and additions: new sidewalks, crosswalks, multi-use trails, stormwater control, and restriping.

City of Proctor

Key improvements made to the City of Proctor jurisdiction roadways over the past five years include:

- Completed the Proctor Transportation plan, which has been very useful and helped secure some funding.
- Starting a roadway condition plan to better maintain quality roadway conditions.

Duluth Transit Authority

Key improvements made to the DTA over the past five years include:

- Rollout and implementation of Better Bus Blueprint, a bold full-scale reassessment, and prioritization of the entire transit system routing and timing. Significant improvements have been achieved.
- Major facility upgrades, most notably at DTA's operations center.

Duluth Seaway Port Authority

While not a typical transportation jurisdiction, the DSPA does directly support maritime shipping, a significant mode of transportation in the Duluth-Superior area. The Duluth-Superior port is the largest on the Great Lakes and supports both Great Lakes and ocean-going vessels carrying a variety of cargoes. Additionally, DSPA facilitates and houses intermodal freight operations. Key improvements DSPA has made over the past five years to support the Duluth-Superior area transportation system include:

- Rehabilitation of dock walls and slips along Rice's Point to greatly improve the shipping of large cargo, primarily windmill blades and parts to date.
- Redesign and reconstruction of the DSPA property to create an expanded intermodal facility.
- Co-led the revision of the Erie Pier Management Plan (EPMP) in 2021. Erie Pier is the local confined disposal facility (CDF) for placing federal shipping channel dredged materials. The EPMP provides local and state perspectives on the operations of the Erie Pier facility, with the shared goal of prolonging the life of the facility through processing and beneficial use of dredged material placed in the facility. Proper and efficient operation of Erie Pier is very important to maritime transportation in the Duluth-Superior port.
- Numerous recommendations of the updated EPMP have been implemented, some of which have led to physical improvements at the Erie Pier facility.

Duluth International and Sky Harbor Airports

While an MPO has limited influence on airport operations, the Duluth-Superior area has three airport facilities that are important for the movement of people and goods.

Key improvements and efforts Duluth International Airport has made over the past five years to support the Duluth-Superior area transportation system include:

- Reconstruction of Taxiway A is currently ongoing and includes replacement of deteriorating asphalt with concrete, new edge lighting, and improved drainage.
- Construction of a new general aviation hanger complex, which includes a 5-bay heated and insulated ranch hanger.
- Secured grants and other funding for significant near-future improvements including a new air traffic control tower (to replace the current 70-year-old unit) and a new corporate hanger.
- Key improvements Sky Harbor Regional Airport has made over the past five years to support the Duluth-Superior area transportation system include a new realigned runway to reduce conflicts of the approach over an old-growth forest.
- New airport terminal replaced a 50-year-old terminal.
- New snow removal equipment storage facility.
- The key improvement made at Richard I Bong Memorial Airport in the City of Superior over the past five years to support the Duluth-Superior area transportation system was a crack sealing effort on the runways. There are plans to construct a parallel taxiway in the future.