



TAC Agenda Topics and Project Updates

September 17, 2024 Meeting

Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council Meeting Summary

* = Approval Item

Note Taker(s)	Tari Aanonsen, MIC Administrative & Finance Assistant	
Members Present		
	Chris Belden	Duluth Transit Authority
	Chris Carlson	City of Superior – Public Works
	Trish Crego	City of Hermantown - Alternate
	Kate Ferguson	Duluth Seaway Port Authority
	Jim Foldesi	St Louis County
	Derek Fredrickson	MnDOT District 1
	James Gittemeier	City of Duluth
	Jason Jackman	Douglas County
	Todd Janigo	City of Superior – Public Works
	Cari Pedersen	City of Duluth
	Cindy Voigt	City of Duluth Engineering
	Maren Webb	MnDOT Dist 1
	Tom Werner	Duluth Airport Authority
	Skip Williams	Active Transportation
Members Absent		* Excused Absence
	Jeff Abboud	WisDOT
	David Bolf*	City of Hermantown
	Chris Lee*	City of Duluth
	Jess Rich	City of Proctor
	Vacant	Economic Development
	Vacant	Mobility Challenged Community
Others Present		
	Ron Chicka	MIC Director
	Patrick Huston	MnDOT District 1
	Jeff Knudsen	SRF Consulting
	Bryan McCoy	MnDOT District 1
	Prescott Morrill	MIC Transportation Planner
	Elinor Rosenberg	City of Duluth - AmeriCorps
	Dena Ryan	FHWA - MN
	Erika Shepard	MnDOT Central Office
	Mae Sommerfeld	WisDOT NW Region (Transitioning to Member)
	Robert Sullivan	MARAD
	Rondi Watson	MIC Senior Planner/Communications Specialist
	Mike Wenzholz	MIC Principal Planner



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Meeting Summary

1. Introductions / Agenda Review

Ron Chicka, MIC Director, called the meeting to order at 1:35 pm. A “roll call” attendance was taken. When completed, Ron asked if there were any questions or other changes to the agenda. There were none. Introductions of Bryan McCoy of MnDOT and Mae Sommerfeld of WisDOT occurred.

2. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- Meeting Summaries of 8.20.24*

Ron then asked if there were any questions or changes to the August meeting summary.

Motion Discussion and Vote	Skip Williams / Tom Werner moved to approve the 8.20.24 meeting summary. There was no further discussion; the motion was approved unanimously.
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- DIRECTOR’S REPORT:

Director Chicka reported on several items as listed below:

Central Entrance - Ron will be presenting the MIC’s Central Entrance plan to the City Council in the next couple of months. MnDOT will be holding public meetings on the possible design of the reconstructed corridor, possibly in September or October. We will pass along the public meeting information as soon as we are made aware of it.

Duluth Area I-35 Corridor Study - The MIC has also been asked to talk with a West Duluth business group regarding the MIC’s I-35 Corridor Study and to give an update on how that plan is being used to inform the current and future needs of the corridor, and the impacts to West Duluth .

Reconnecting Communities National Summit - James Gittemeier spoke of his recent attendance of the Reconnecting Communities National Summit that was held last week in St Paul. Communities who either received the grant or who had applied for (or are interested in applying) were invited to attend. The event is part of a national movement to restore and overcome the lasting damage to communities affected by the Federal Highway Act of 1956. Others from our area who attended were Rondi Watson of the MIC, Andrea Crouse of Zeitgeist, and MIC Policy Board member Yauhen Karatai.

MIC Area Safety Action Plan – AECOM is wrapping up their work and will present the results in either October or December for both the TAC and the Policy Board. This plan has involved (a) the screening and prioritization of the previously identified six key emphasis areas; (b) selection of countermeasures; (c) identification of potential project improvements and prioritization of future projects.



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3. BLATNIK BRIDGE & TRAFFIC MITIGATION PLAN

Pat Huston of MnDOT and Jeff Knudson of SRF Consulting, gave a general update on the Blatnik Bridge Project and reviewed mitigation strategies that are planned during the four to five years of construction.

The need for a bridge replacement is due to its “poor” condition rating and anticipated need for closure predicted to occur by 2030. The replacement of the Blatnik would return the facility to a “good” condition rating and would prevent service interruption in MnDOT’s Bridge Inventory.

MnDOT has determined that the existing alignment will be utilized in the new build, minimizing impacts to property and wetlands, allowing for the shortest construction time and increased safety by eliminating risk of construction alongside traveling vehicles. This also provides the lowest cost alternative for this project.

Designs include either the Tied Arch or the Cable Stay bridge type options. While one may cost more upfront to build, the other may make up for in more affordable long-term maintenance costs.

The current estimated cost of the project is around 1.8 billion dollars. Current funding commitments include \$400 million from WisDOT, \$400 million from MnDOT and \$1.06 billion in awarded federal funds. An Additional \$216 million in federal funds are being applied for through the 2024 Bridge Investment Program (BIP) grant. Awards have not yet been announced.

A multi-agency working group has been established to bring together state and federal agencies to participate in bi-monthly meetings to keep relevant parties up to date on the project as well as weigh in on issues as the project proceeds. A subcommittee has also been formed to include representatives from both states and includes multiple agencies that meet quarterly. This provides the leadership needed to review and address permit needs and other important issues that arise throughout the span of the project.

A “Design-Build” delivery method has been chosen for the bridge construction project, allowing for the efficient coordination between the design and construction teams and may result in lower cost growth over the course of the project.

2024 field investigations are currently underway, including a Pile Load Test program at six locations, shallow excavation of 22 select future proposed pier locations, the construction of a permanent access road on Connors Point, geotechnical borings and contaminated material borings: all to be completed by December of 2024. Footing designs will be “perched” when possible, to reduce interactions with contaminated soil and water.

MnDOT, with the aid of their consultants at SRF Consulting, have looked at traffic patterns using data from a 2017/2018 INRIX Data Study, as well as a 2018 WisDOT study that reviewed diversion impacts to the City of Superior during a full closure of the Blatnik Bridge. Data from the 2019 MIC Diversion Study confirmed several routes of interest, including Belknap, Winter,



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21st and 18th on the Wisconsin side and Haines, Highland, Grand and I-35 on the Minnesota side. Additional data from recent counts, streetlight data and data from the MIC Model are also informing traffic mitigation needs during the closure.

This data shows that roughly 10,000 vehicles have already diverted to the Bong Bridge during the construction of the Twin Ports Interchange Project. Because of this, Superior is already experiencing congestion in downtown corridors. Data also shows that the majority of vehicles traveling from one state to the other, are staying within the metropolitan areas.

While it is conceived that the Bong Bridge will be able to handle the anticipated additional remaining 20,000 vehicles, several improvements are planned to help the flow of traffic to move on and off the bridge and at predicted pinch points. Some of these improvements include:

- A routed detour utilizing US Hwy I-35 and US Hwy 2
- A truck route along Winter Street to avoid most of Belknap
- Extending east and westbound storage lanes along Belknap
- The Temporary elimination of left hand turns at Banks and Ogden from Belknap
- Optimize the Belknap signalized corridor and coordinate platoons
- Alternate Route signage and Local Traffic Only signage at US Hwy 2 near roundabout at Garfield and Belknap Avenues
- Encourage use of Susquehanna Avenue as Alternate Route
- Improved pavement markings, increased lighting, placement of “Your Speed” radar and “No Trucks” signs
- Removal of street parking near pedestrian crossings
- 4-way stop, compact roundabout or temporary traffic signal at 46th Ave & W 8th St
- Possible temporary traffic signals at 40th Ave and W 8th St
- At 46th Ave & W 1st St: improve pavement markings, increase lighting, possible permanent traffic signal installation with lane control signals; the same considerations at 46th and Grand Ave
- Monitoring of pinch points over the course of the construction project and then make any necessary adjustments

The timeline for the Blatnik Bridge replacement is as follows:

- Preliminary Design and Permitting in 2024-2025
- Procurement and Letting in late 2025-2026 (Active contract Summer of 2026)
- Final Design in 2027-2028
- Bridge is closed beginning sometime in 2027 and is closed for approximately four years during construction

An informational Blatnik Bridge Open House will take place on October 15th for community outreach.



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4. DRAFT 2025-2026 MIC WORK PROGRAM

Ron Chicka presented an overview of the Draft 2025-2026 MIC Work Program, which included the addition of a new short-term project involving the Safe Streets For All grant funding that the MIC was awarded late last year. This award includes \$250,000 in federal grant funds, along with a \$62,500 local match which will be covered by a state grant awarded by the State of Minnesota. We will build on the MIC-area safety analysis work conducted by AECOM which will be completed in 2024. The focus of this work will be public engagement, political buy-in and encouraging a community-wide safety culture. An RFP will be posted in early 2025 for a consultant to lead this work.

Another notable addition to the Work Plan will involve performance-based planning in relation to the TIP and other MIC planning processes. This is an outcome from our recent Long-Range MTP 2050 work. A full draft of the MIC's 2025-2026 Work Program and Budget were included with the meeting materials for the September 17th meeting.

Questions regarding the Draft 2025-2026 MIC Work Program should be directed to Ron Chicka at 218-529-7506 or by email at rchicka@ardc.org.

5. LONG RANGE MTP 2050 PROJECT UPDATE

Mike Wenzholz gave an update on the Long Range MTP, which work is nearing completion. Comments that came in from the technical advisory team have been addressed in the final document. None were significant enough to warrant a new Public Comment Period. Maps have been incorporated into Chapter five.

No public comments were received from the community.

The final document will go out one week prior to the TAC meeting and the MIC will be asking for the TAC's recommendation to the MIC Policy Board for their adoption of the plan.

6. DULUTH-SUPERIOR METROPOLITAN BIKEWAYS PLAN 2024

Prescott Morrill presented an update on the Metropolitan Bikeways Plan 2024, which is due to an update every five years or so. Goals and priorities of the plan were reviewed and discussed by the BPAC and its subcommittees. The following priorities are suggested to be incorporated:

- **Bike-ability/micromobility/accessibility:** a priority to ensure that all trips can be made by most modes
- **Year-round reliability**
- **Low-cost/high benefit projects** – latent demand (*"I would...but for..."*)
- **Sustainability** – carbon footprint of the transportation network – *mode shift > electrification*
- **"Primary Arterial Network"** – East/West & up-down the hill

New themes and topics for the plan include: All Ages and Abilities, Everyday Routine, Short Trips (first/last mile of DTA connections-identifying network gaps), Route Planning/Decision Making criteria, and maintenance.



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Maps will also be updated in the plan, including short-trip generator areas, Environmental Justice areas, connections to DTA infrastructure and bike infrastructure updates.

Future schedule for this update includes the review by the Bike Subcommittee in October and review and recommendation by the BPAC in November. The plan will then go to draft reviews by the TAC and MIC Policy Board in October and December. The hope is to have the finalized plan on the January 2025 agenda for adoption by the Policy Board.

TAC personnel offered feedback to MIC planning staff and asked that once the priorities are determined by the BPAC, to please let jurisdictions be aware and give enough time for them to review and give a “reality check” on these items.

7. ROUND TABLE

- Prescott Morrill stated that the CRP Solicitation for Letters of Interest is open from October 7th to November 1st. Jurisdictions will then hear back within two weeks and be invited to submit an application. This first solicitation is for funding years 2027, 2028 and 2029. The MPO will have CRP Targets to follow.
- Cindy Voigt mentioned that 3rd Street in Duluth is now open from construction and now includes a buffered bike lane.
- Maren Webb announced that MnDOT District One is hiring for a new planner position.
- Chris Belden asked to please keep the DTA and driving staff in mind when planning and announcing detours. Short notice makes planning their routes very difficult. Next week is also an opportunity for folks to try driving a bus.

8. PROJECT UPDATES

- **There were no project updates for this meeting.**

9. **ADJOURN:** With no further agenda items, discussions or announcements, Director Ron Chicka adjourned the meeting at 3:33 pm.