



Appendix D - Public Engagement Framework



Central Entrance Public Engagement Framework

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Central Entrance is an arterial roadway that has historically served automobile traffic and has encouraged vehicle throughput and drive-by land uses. The corridor has poor pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, multiple (and large) driveway accesses that create conflicts between vehicles and non-motorized users, and legacy bus stops that lack adequate accessibility and amenities. Coupling these challenges with high vehicle speeds makes the corridor an uncomfortable place to walk or bike, and discourages development and redevelopment along the corridor.

At the same time, Central Entrance plays a vital role in Duluth's roadway network due to local topography. Along with US 53 and West Arrowhead Road, it is one of the few direct routes connecting the city's largest commercial area to downtown Duluth and neighborhoods along Lake Superior. Although the corridor has been studied for decades and recommendations have been identified, few improvements have been implemented. This latest planning process presented an opportunity to develop a plan that can be embraced by the stakeholder agencies, businesses, residents, and corridor users.

MnDOT has scheduled a full reconstruction of Central Entrance from Mesaba Avenue to Trinity Road in 2026. This plan sets the overall corridor vision for a walkable, bikeable, transit-oriented urban thoroughfare and provides direction for MnDOT's upcoming preliminary design and public involvement processes. In 2021, the Duluth Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council (DSMIC) developed the Central Entrance Vision Plan. This plan was developed with the community, through in-person and virtual engagement, to establish a multimodal vision for Central Entrance to guide MnDOT's design and reconstruction. As part of the Central Entrance Vision Plan, the DSMIC developed this public engagement framework to carry Central Entrance engagement forward to design, engineering, and construction.

1.2 Public Engagement Framework Purpose

This public engagement framework is a roadmap and foundation for MnDOT's ultimate Public Engagement Plan. The framework will inform the engagement plan which will:

- Document and guide project interactions with stakeholders and the public



- Provide a management tool for planning, implementing, and evaluating the project's engagement activities

As the project progresses, the eventual engagement plan will be updated to reflect lessons learned, changing operating environments, and new or revised engagement tools or techniques. Setting and managing expectations, from both the public and decision makers, is critical to successful engagement.

Intentional engagement is tied to decisions. **Inclusive engagement** seeks to reduce participation barriers many communities face. Barriers stem primarily from selection of tools and techniques the community can use – or not.

This Public Engagement Framework will assist MnDOT in providing intentional and inclusive public engagement for Central Entrance.

1.3 Framework Key Components

- Community profile
- Central Entrance Vision Plan engagement efforts and lessons learned
- Moving Forward Together: Public engagement recommendations for Central Entrance

2 Community Profile

2.1 Existing Conditions Overview

2.1.1 Corridor Location

Central Entrance (Trunk Highway [TH] 194), serves an important connection between Highway 53, Duluth International Airport, and Miller Hill Mall to Downtown Duluth and the waterfront. The project area is Central Entrance from Trinity Road to Mesaba Avenue.

Central Entrance plays a vital role in Duluth's roadway network due to the local topography. Along with US 53 and West Arrowhead Road, it is one of the few direct routes connecting the city's largest commercial area to downtown and neighborhoods along Lake Superior.

There are several schools located on or near Central Entrance, the MnDOT District 1 offices are located along the corridor near its southern terminus. There are several residential areas just beyond the corridor as well as affordable housing along and near the corridor. In addition, the former Duluth Central High School site (located south of Central Entrance and east of Blackman Avenue), is anticipated to be redeveloped into a mix of residential and office uses. Because of its role in the overall roadway network, Central Entrance is an important connecting corridor for all modes of transportation.



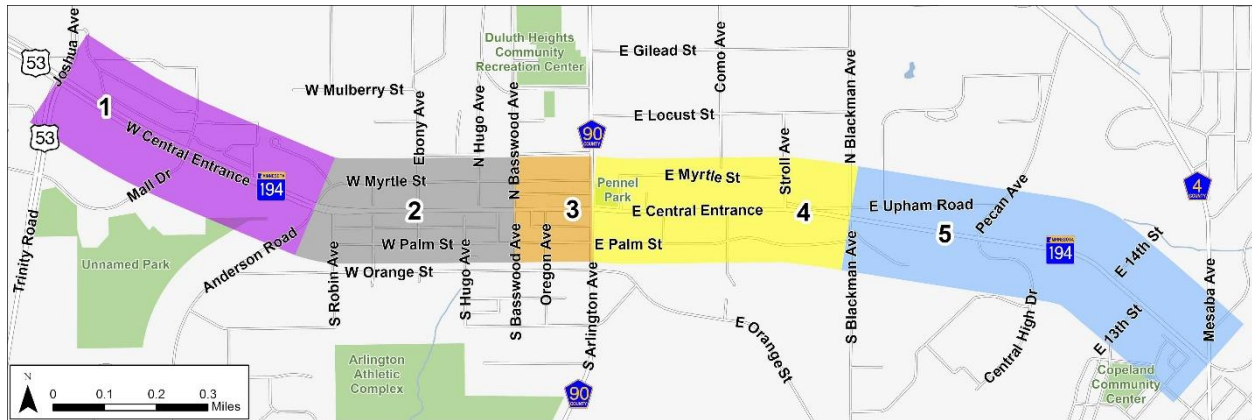
2.1.2 Identification of Zones

The Central Entrance Corridor Study (2012) divided the roadway into several segments for analysis. For the purposes of the Central Entrance Vision Plan, the zone segments originally proposed were adjusted to align with the surrounding land use and roadway context more closely. The five zones are as follows:

- Zone 1: Trinity Road to Anderson Road
- Zone 2: Anderson Road to Basswood Avenue
- Zone 3: Basswood Avenue to Arlington Avenue (County State Aid Highway [CSAH] 90)
- Zone 4: Arlington Avenue (CSAH 90) to Blackman Avenue
- Zone 5: Blackman Avenue to Mesaba Avenue (CSAH 4)

These zones are shown in **Figure 1** and are referenced throughout this document.

Figure 1 - Central Entrance Corridor Zones



Additional existing conditions information can be found in the Central Entrance Vision Plan.

2.2 Demographic Information

The following information provides an overarching demographic snapshot of the community surrounding Central Entrance. As the engagement for the Central Entrance project evolves, it should be noted that the corridor serves a larger community than the immediate surroundings including, but not limited to, the entire City of Duluth, Superior, WI, and numerous Duluth visitors. While engagement efforts will focus on the immediately adjacent community, there must be intentional outreach to surrounding communities and area visitors as the corridor serves as a main connector.

To highlight and bring intentional, inclusive engagement forward, the following demographic information (**Table 1**) presents the statistics to consider for inclusive outreach and engagement planning within a 0.5-mile and 1-mile buffer surrounding Central Entrance. These community members need specific focus. **Figure 2** provides a visual of the demographic buffer area.

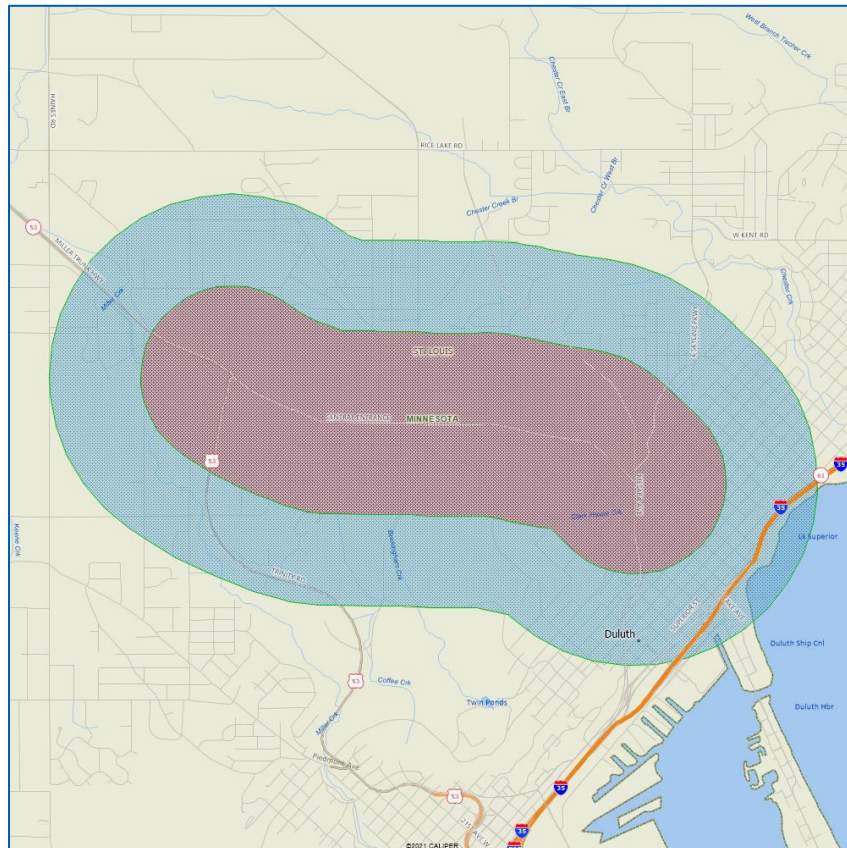


Table 1 - Key demographic statistics to consider for intentional and inclusive outreach

Key demographics	0.5-mile buffer	1-mile buffer
Non-white population (Black, Asian, American Indian, Hispanic)	17%	16%
Senior population (65+)	13%	16%
Annual household income < \$25,000	27%	36%
Zero vehicle household	15%	23%
One vehicle household	36%	35%
Two vehicle household	36%	31%
Three vehicle household	12%	11%
People with disabilities	16%	19%

Demographic information data source: American Community Survey 2015 – 2019, prepared by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Office of Planning.

Figure 2 - Central Entrance (0.5- and 1-mile buffers)





2.3 Identified stakeholders

The following were identified as stakeholders for the Central Entrance Vision Plan:

- DSMIC
- MnDOT
- DSMIC Bike Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)
- We Walk in Duluth
- Duluth Transit Authority
- City of Duluth
- St Louis County
- Duluth City Council (Ward 3, Ward 4, At-large members)
- Duluth Heights Community Club
- Central Hillside Community Club
- Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce
- Miller Hill Mall
- Central Entrance businesses
- Duluth businesses
- City of Duluth residents

Contact information for the identified list of stakeholders has been compiled and will be provided to MnDOT. The following are potential and recommended additional stakeholders for future phases:

- Faith-based organizations
- Emergency responders
- Educational institutions
- Youth organizations (Girls Scouts of America, etc.)
- Area visitors

3 Central Entrance Vision Plan engagement efforts and lessons learned

3.1 2021 Central Entrance Vision Plan engagement efforts/activities

Multiple community events were conducted to kick off the engagement process and build a foundation for the Central Entrance community vision. Due to the global pandemic and evolving guidelines, the engagement team provided multiple learning and feedback avenues. Throughout, we learned from the community's lived experiences and identified their wants, needs, and aspirations for the corridor. All events and feedback opportunities were publicized on the MIC website and social media channels, and distributed through the MIC, partner agency, and community database contact lists. The following sections summarize the engagement efforts/activities. For additional details see the Central Entrance Vision Plan.



3.1.1 Online Engagement

An online survey was developed and distributed via the project website along with a comment map where participants were able to like, dislike and provide ideas on a map of the corridor. The survey asked how people use Central Entrance, what are the challenges traveling along Central Entrance, and other questions focused on gathering vision preferences for the corridor.

3.1.2 In-person engagement – “Better Central Entrance” event

The project team participated in the “Better Central Entrance” event held June 4-5th, 2021 and hosted by Zeitgeist, a local nonprofit arts and community development organization. Community outreach included two-way learning and a survey which mirrored the online survey.

3.1.3 Facilitated virtual workshops

A series of two facilitated virtual workshops were held on June 24th and 29th, 2021 to facilitate more in-depth discussion on the issues people experience in the Central Entrance corridor. The workshops featured a presentation component, which provided background information on previous plans and studies and results from the initial online and in-person survey. Following the presentation, workshop participants were divided into breakout groups and participated in virtual corridor walks using recent video footage taken in each of the five zones. Facilitators and attendees then recorded findings and discussion items using a participatory mapping activity.

3.1.4 Community Advisory Committee

The Central Entrance Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was established to provide advice to the Steering Committee during development of the vision and concepts. The purpose of the CAC was to serve as a voice for the community and provide lived experiences and expertise, as individuals who frequently travel along Central Entrance. Through two separate virtual meetings, CAC members representing residents, businesses, and community organizations (We Walk in Duluth, Bridging Hearts, and the MIC Bike Pedestrian Advisory Committee) provided feedback and input on the following:

- Past study recommendations to carry forward or to set aside
- Needs and issues for all travel modes
- Vision confirmation and refinement
- Review and comment on design concepts

3.1.5 Feature Survey

Draft concepts for Zones 1-5 along with information on various roadway design features were presented in an online survey for the public and local businesses. There were general and specific questions related to feature preferences and priorities such as wider boulevards or a wider median. Multiple choice and open-ended questions were included. Public surveys were distributed to and through project stakeholders, the Steering and Community Advisory Committees, local partners, and the MIC’s social media accounts. For the business survey, the questions were the same except for additional questions asking for the name and location of the responding business. In addition to the survey distribution



tactics used for the public survey, a local business advocacy group (APEX) distributed the survey link to local businesses, and postcard mailers were also mailed to businesses along Central Entrance.

3.2 Lessons Learned

Table 2 presents lessons learned during the engagement process for the Central Entrance Vision Plan. These takeaways were gleaned from engagement findings, feedback from the engagement participants, project team, and the Steering and Community Advisory Committee members.

Table 2 – Lessons learned

Lesson Learned	Supporting detail	Associated Recommendations in Section 4
Businesses were reluctant to participate.	Despite several invitations to participate, very few comments were received from businesses in the corridor and those that use the corridor.	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8
Bicycle and pedestrian advocate voices are engaged and articulate – but other voices were not heard.	During engagement activities, there was robust participation from bike and pedestrian advocates and feedback related to bike and pedestrian needs in the corridor. Also, conversations and feedback from the community centered on this topic. But there were rarely other corridor needs brought forward by the community members that participated. There was a lack of transit users and other modal users.	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8
Meeting people where they are with interactive, in-person engagement resonated with the public.	The neighborhood was grateful and energetic to participate in a community activity (Better Central Entrance Event) in their neighborhood. A great deal of positive feedback on the event itself was received. The neighborhood seems to crave a portal where they can commune with each other and feel heard. Community members responded	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4



Lesson Learned	Supporting detail	Associated Recommendations in Section 4
	well when asked for their ideas – in workshop, comment map and survey.	
The <u>why</u> is very clear to the community – people know improvements are needed in the corridor.	Clear timelines and clarity of stages/phases needs to be shared. <u>What</u> and <u>when</u> will be the keys to maintaining interest and engagement. “Long way off” construction is difficult for people to connect to.	4.1,4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.8, 4.9
Scope and breadth of engagement was too narrow.	Engagement tactics did not meaningfully connect with or reach users of the corridor outside of the immediate corridor, commuters, Duluth visitors, or commercial users.	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4
Property owners in the corridor are concerned with potential expansion of right of way, and there is a perception MnDOT construction projects can mean loss of property.	Some of the concepts recommended for consideration will require early, intentional, and transparent engagement so property owners are fully aware and informed of potential right of way impacts.	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.6
Some transportation users of the corridor lack knowledge (terms and functionality) regarding potential elements and features such as roundabouts and facilities for pedestrians and bikes.	Many comments surrounding confusion with roundabout functionality and safety benefits. Also, shared use path and other bicycle and pedestrian terminology was confusing to some.	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8
Visual examples of real projects connect well to explain possibilities	The public, Steering and Community Advisory Committees responded well and provided robust feedback when the project team shared actual built	4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8



Lesson Learned	Supporting detail	Associated Recommendations in Section 4
and demonstrate benefits and challenges.	examples of potential elements, features, and concepts that may be integrated into the corridor.	

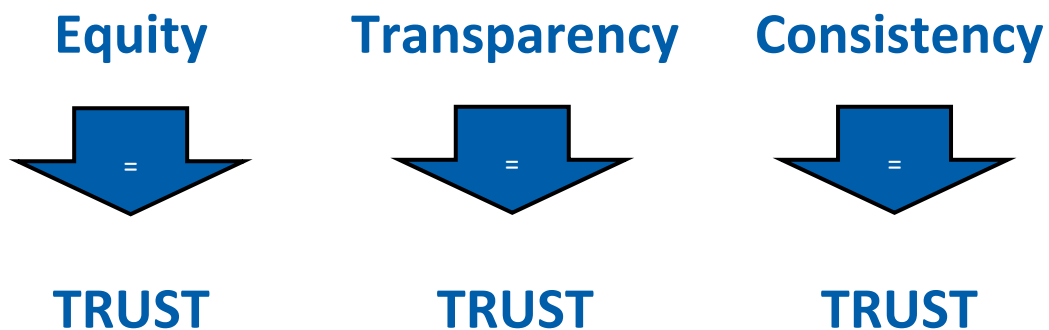
4 Moving Forward Together: Public engagement recommendations for Central Entrance

The following section outlines recommendations to inform and guide the development of the Central Entrance Public Engagement Plan for MnDOT’s reconstruction project in 2026.

For effective buy-in by the public and stakeholders, the plan should be developed collaboratively with identified stakeholders. Input and feedback on the plan itself should be the first facet of engagement and outreach – setting the tone for the project and the community.

4.1 Establish fundamental guiding principles

A project of this magnitude and importance to Duluth must establish fundamental guiding principles for engagement and outreach. After established, it will be imperative to not only follow the principles but to have them at the forefront of all outreach – visible to the project team and participants. The following guiding principles are recommended:



To engage more diverse populations and historically underrepresented people in engagement activities, removing barriers to participation is key. Proven measures that MnDOT traditionally does not employ should be considered to remove participation barriers. These could include participation stipends and transportation reimbursement (transit passes or gas cards), and/or childcare options or stipends.



The fundamental guiding principles for engagement and outreach are an extension of the guiding values developed as part of the Central Entrance Vision Plan:

Safe & equitable multimodal transportation system: Central Entrance will be a safe, accessible, and comfortable street for all people, making walking, biking and transit viable and an easy choice while moving people and goods in cars, trucks, and buses safely and efficiently.

Healthy, walkable community: Central Entrance will support denser, connected, and transit-oriented land use patterns and multimodal travel year-round.

Thriving local business community: Central Entrance will meet the needs of new and existing businesses by providing reasonable access and creating opportunities for new types of development and redevelopment.

Sustainable and resilient corridor: Central Entrance improvements will address long-term infrastructure needs and create opportunities for green infrastructure.

A vibrant gateway to Duluth: Central Entrance will be an attractive corridor that welcomes visitors and residents alike to the City of Duluth and the Central Entrance business district by establishing a sense of place.

4.2 Create engagement goals and objectives

In collaboration with the stakeholders, develop goals and objectives for each phase of the project. These goals and objectives must be clear, concise and reflect the established fundamental guiding principles. Goals and objectives should steer engagement that is:

- Intentional
- Inclusive
- Interactive (virtually and in-person)
- Comprehensive

It is recommended to carry forward goals that mirror those set forth in the Central Entrance Vision Plan:



Build trust



Set and manage expectations



Consistently educate



Reduce barriers to participation



Create early buy-in



Provide opportunities for input on real decisions

4.3 Identify, promote, and cultivate the right level of public involvement

Relying on past practices and outcomes desired, MnDOT, project partners, and stakeholders must describe the role the community can have in the decision-making process and where their input can be fundamental to decisions. It is imperative to be clear from the start.

The next phase of engagement should be developed using MnDOT's Strategic Framework for Public Engagement Planning (Link: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/publicengagement/documents/plans-templates/PE%20Planning%20Framework.pdf>), which includes the spectrum of public participation developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to help determine where and when to apply the five distinct phases of participation decision-making power. Engagement should avoid engaging communities in a way that leaves them with the impression that their involvement is going to be two-way and input is going to be central to the final decision when the agency, planner, engineer or engagement team only has the license to reach inform and consult.

To build and maintain trust, expand awareness, and increase community ownership using a variety of engagement methods is important. Choosing tactics that are intentional and appropriate while setting clear expectations, especially when working to achieve a deeper level of engagement beyond inform and consult is key. What level of public engagement can be achieved?

IAP2 – Levels of Public Impact: Roles of Public in Decision-Making:

- **Inform**
- **Consult**
- **Involve**
- **Collaborate**



- **Empower**

Based on the lessons learned and feedback received, the most impactful and trust building recommendation for level of engagement would be at the least, **involve**. It is feasible and recommended to incorporate injections of **collaborate** at multiple stages and phases.

4.4 Develop outreach strategies and tactics to achieve intentional and inclusive engagement

Outreach strategies must maintain and build on the already established interest and support from the public and stakeholders. It is clear people know the corridor needs to be improved. Collaboration with known stakeholders can be leveraged to expand on the knowledge of the why, to include broader and more diverse involvement and focus on gaps in knowledge and advocacy. Recommended strategies include, but are not limited to:

Recruit through-line ambassadors – Those individuals involved and active in early stages of the project can spread reliable and consistent messages throughout the life of the project. These people are not “selling” the project but can be relied on to pass on accurate information and project feedback opportunities.

Door to door business outreach – One of the lessons learned during the development of the Central Entrance Vision Plan was the challenge of reaching businesses and communicating the need to be involved at this early stage of project development. As the project moves forward, establishing direct contact with business owners and employees along Central Entrance will be key to ensuring participation in the process. Door to door outreach could include initial face to face project team introductions, surveys at multiple points during the process, or other intentional business-focused tactics.

Involve trusted community advocates and leaders – Meet with trusted community advocates and leaders to glean strategic insights and partnership opportunities. This process will help identify appropriate engagement strategies, but also where and how community partners and resident experts can lead and become ambassadors for the project and community participation.

Community-led roundtables and forums – In addition to, or incorporated with the traditional open house offerings or community pop-ups, partner with existing community groups and resident leaders to co-lead activities such as:

- Creative Placemaking Demo - temporary demonstration project, integrating art, history, or music which will cultivate strong ownership and partnerships.
- Coffee chats – regular opportunity to sit down with a project team member and community members at a local coffee shop and ask questions in a casual and conversational environment.
- Listening sessions – community co-led, interactive, on the corridor sessions to get detailed observations and feedback.



“I know you” videos – Short form videos of informed community voices - sharing opinions and knowledge. This is a good opportunity for businesses to get involved. This promotes their business and project participation.

“Beyond the neighborhood” pop-ups – Find opportunities to connect with people that are beyond the corridor neighborhood such as community events where there are Duluth residents and visitors that may use Central Entrance, but do not live in the immediate vicinity.

4.5 Clarify decision making processes, decision points, and metrics for measuring engagement success.

Effective public participation results in greater consent-building by producing informed consent—a process that develops shared knowledge and understanding from which people can go along with something even if they are not in 100 percent agreement. Developing informed consent is key to implementation success. Stakeholders and community members go beyond simply approving a plan; they are equipped to make informed decisions, and understand where they agree enough to support the plan or project, resulting in more ownership and people who defend the project.

As the Central Entrance corridor advances in design and engineering there will be a number of critical decision-making points. It is imperative to be clear from the start what the decision-making process is, who the decision makers are, what power they hold, and to identify where consent building needs to occur to advance the outcome or achieve a decision based on informed consent. This also aligns with the public participation level (4.3).

Future decision-making processes should:

- Include the Central Entrance Vision Plan’s Guiding Values
- Identify potential problem areas before they occur, and where key consent-building is needed
- Develop strategic approaches to ensure people come along with the change
- Ensure inclusion and a more diverse representation of the community, especially people who have not traditionally been engaged
- Increase public understanding of project constraints, opportunities, and challenges
- Provide clear pathways for how people can be involved and decide the degree of their involvement

Potential Key Decision Way Points:

- Deciding the multimodal preferred alternative design, which might include understanding people’s tolerance or readiness for change (e.g. what is public sentiment on slightly increased commute times when traveling by car)
- Developing the access management plan



- Developing maintenance agreements, which will likely need to support MnDOT, the City, and/or region in shifting how funding is prioritized to support safe and reliable network for all users and modes, especially in the winter months

Potential metrics for measuring engagement success:

- Increased understanding of the project, and having enough information to understand the why and how of key decisions
- Improved trust and confidence in government
- Increase in civic (public) participation, especially from historically under-represented or engaged communities
- Strengthen and build new partnerships and community relations
- Support the capacity building, including leadership development, of neighborhoods and community members

4.6 Identify potentially contentious issues

Identification of potentially contentious issues is important, especially when detailing the decision-making points and process(es), to understand where resources and efforts need strategic focus and attention. While working to build informed consent, this is where understanding the points of contention or opposition to move more people along—where the ‘Not In My Backyard-ers’ (NIMBY) move to “I might still disagree, but Okay In My Backyard” (OKIMBY). Potentially contentious issues should be collaboratively identified with targeted stakeholders, drawing upon a broader range of local expertise and relational connections. This should happen during the development of the Engagement Plan where key messages and engagement tactics should be identified.

Potentially contentious topics might include:

- Removal of travel lane(s)
- Right of way acquisition
- One-way street configuration
- Eliminating or consolidating driveway accesses
- Right-in/right-out driveway access
- Changes in land use, including perceptions of what density means or concerns of displacement
- Roundabout intersection safety, especially for people with disabilities
- Longer commute times by car
- Traffic moving onto neighborhood or nearby streets



4.7 Provide and maintain detailed contact information for identified stakeholders

This recommendation suggests maintaining contact information that goes beyond the typical contact information database for stakeholders. For a project of this magnitude, additional details and tracking on each stakeholder should be included such as:

- Power/interest
- Key interest/issues
- Communication method preference
- Expectations
- Opportunities/Risks
- Ability to impact

4.8 Include a strategic communications plan

To achieve the best engagement results, accurate, consistent, plain language, and timely project communications must be a priority. It is recommended to include a strategic communications plan in the Engagement Plan. This should be created in coordination with MnDOT's project team and MnDOT Communications. It will provide a framework for communications, complement the Engagement Plan, and build a group of diverse, interested stakeholders. The plan must focus on key messages and how they become positional statements or ways in which the project is being messaged and reinforced throughout all stages. The starting point for developing key messages going forward should be the Guiding Values developed as part of the Central Entrance Vision Plan (see Section 4.1). In addition to key messages, the plan will:

- Ensure that all communications have a consistent message of equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Identify key audiences and associated tools and strategies for coordinated communication efforts
- Identify communication materials including news releases, email updates, web updates, tweets, maps, Facebook posts, Instagram posts, factsheets, and website updates
- Provide a clear living timeline of project activities, including project management touchpoints, open houses, and pop-up events
- Focus communication strategies on underrepresented stakeholders in past engagement activities



4.9 Define the specific action steps, techniques, and timing for public engagement

The Engagement Plan should define the engagement timeline. The timeline must include who will do what and with what resources. Peaks and valleys of engagement can be highlighted to prepare the public. There must be a clear explanation and emphasis on feedback loops.

Trust erodes when people forget or when they think they are forgotten.