



Meeting Summary

** = Approval Item*

1Note Taker(s)	Tari Aanonsen, MIC Administrative/Finance Assistant	
Members Present		
	Members Present	
	Broc Allen	Douglas County Suburban Townships
	Ed Anderson	City of Superior – Citizen Rep
WI Co-Chair	Nick Baker	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
MN Co-Chair	Wayne Boucher	City of Hermantown
	Annie Harala*	St. Louis County
	Yauhen Karatai	City of Duluth – Citizen Representative
	Mike Mayou	Duluth City Council
	Sam Pomush	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	Bob Quade	City of Rice Lake
	Randy Skowlund	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	Tom Szukis	DTA
	Terese Tomanek	Duluth City Council
	Chad Ward	City of Proctor
	Scott Welsh	Solway Township
Members Absent		* Excused Absence
	Mark Johnson	City of Superior
	Rosemary Lear*	Douglas County Board of Supervisors
	Nick Ledin	Superior City Council
	Jenny Van Sickle	Superior City Council
Others Present		
	Chris Belden	Duluth Transit Authority
	Ron Chicka	MIC Director
	James Gittemeier	City of Duluth
	Sheldon Johnson	NWRPC
	Rachel Loeffler Kemp	Office of Senator Amy Klobuchar
	Patrick McDonald	Citizen of Rice Lake
	Prescott Morrill	MIC Planner
	Rondi Watson	MIC Senior Planner/Communications Coor.
	Mike Wenzholz	MIC Principal Planner



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1. Introductions / Agenda Review

MIC Co-Chair, Wayne Boucher, called the meeting to order at 6:01 pm. A “roll Call” attendance was taken. When completed, Chair Boucher moved on to item# 2 on the agenda.

2. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- Meeting Summary of 2.21.24

Chair Boucher then asked if there were any questions or changes to the February meeting summary.

Motion Discussion and Vote	Sam Pomush / Nick Baker moved to approve the 2.21.24 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 of interest that were highlighted in the Director’s Report in the agenda packet as well as some items as listed below:

Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) Washington DC Spring Meetings

– A very productive few days in DC this month with colleagues across the country as we strategize and plan for policy changes in the next federal transportation bill – two years out. There are a series of items we’re advocating for – some key ones are, 1) MPOs becoming a direct recipient for specific federal funds (whether our Planning dollars for staff and possibly other programmatic dollars), 2) having some discretionary programs that are competitive shift to formula-based funding (such as Safe Streets for All) where these funds can simply augment the Planning dollars MPOs already receive, and 3) allow for the carryover of federal funds from one fiscal year to the next allowing long-term projects to not be hindered by yearly constraints.

Our meetings over the week included speaking with both the House and Senate staff leaders responsible for drafting the bill; meeting with staff of the Urban Institute – Housing to better incorporate housing needs into transportation plans; a work session of how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can assist our work, meetings with like agencies such as the National League of Cities and Counties to align policy proposals, and finally discussions on draft language directly with the USDOT and Federal Transit Administration. Progress was made on a number of fronts, in particular having MPOs Planning dollars directly aimed at the local governing authority and eliminating the need for State oversight that often is very redundant (resource waste) and unduly political.

Lastly, in a side meeting with Wisconsin Secretary Thompson (also AASHTO President – state highway officials’ organization) we discussed collaborative efforts between our two entities aimed at how best to structure policy to get dollars “out-the-door” and used in a more expeditious manner for real world projects. This will take some more time and I’ll likely be providing more input on behalf of AMPO in upcoming AASHTO national meetings.



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Wisconsin Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) Funds – After a check with sources at the DOT, we’ve found out that the dollars for 2024 are – at least temporarily – held up in the State legislature. No funds have been allotted anywhere in the state. Since this is a federal program and dollars are targeted to – among other groups MPOs – I’m uncertain as to how this is allowable. But this is the case.

Letter(s) of Support

- a) Superior – federal grant applied for study of N. 28th St to grade separate the road from the BNSF railyard.
- b) Duluth Public Schools – to apply for a district-wide Safe Routes to School coordinator position. This would greatly assist in the plans conducted for the schools by the MIC.

Reconnecting Communities Grant – James Gittemeier, from the City of Duluth, spoke on a recent grant that was awarded to the city for the planning study to look at the I-35 corridor and surrounding land use, specifically in the downtown and West Duluth corridors. 1.8M was awarded, along with a local match funded in part, by the Knight Foundation, for a total of 2.2M. These corridors were a part of, and a recommendation of the MIC’s I-35 Corridor study. This grant will enable Duluth to look deeper and plan for the future of these areas.

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

Chair Boucher then allowed for an opportunity for Public Comment. Hearing none, he continued to item #3 on the agenda.

3. BETTER BUS BLUEPRINT UPDATE AND OTHER DTA INITIATIVES

Chris Belden, Duluth Transit Authority’s Director of Planning and Grants, gave an update on the DTA’s recent Better Bus Blueprint initiative. The presentation included a brief history of the DTA, along with current statistics that included: a fleet size of 87 buses, routes numbering 15 that run from 4:30 am to 12:00 am, operating 7 days a week, employing over 150 employees that are managed by ATE Management of Duluth and represented by the Teamsters General Local Union No. 346.

The DTA, which has a history of excellence as a top-ranking transit system, recently set out an initiative to improve upon their bus services in the Duluth-Superior area. The Better Bus Movement included three important areas of focus titled: Better Bus Stops, Better Technology and Better Bus Blueprint. The titles are indicative of the improvements that were made. The Better Bus Stops portion involves changes to signage, ADA accessibility, shelter and lighting improvements, totaling over \$2M. Better Technology involves a new Mobile App that allows for live bus tracking, as well as new fare boxes. With the Better Bus Blueprint, the DTA has started from scratch and redrew their routes, creating a fresh, new bus network. This includes more frequent service, more weekend service and has taken the first steps in planning Bus Rapid Transit service with their two new Go



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Line bus routes. The DTA has seen increased ridership every month since launching the initiative six months ago.

Another new initiative of the DTA is the Duluth Public Schools Pilot Program, which provides free rides to any enrolled high school student and all District staff. After two months of running, this program has provided over 17,000 rides to students and staff.

A few challenges that the DTA is experiencing include increased usage of rideshare services, such as Uber and Lyft, 35% of the work force working full time from home, local construction creating detours, an increase in the number of parking ramps, along with the availability and conditions of sidewalks and other accessibility issues, to name a few. One of the larger issues, however, is the labor shortage. The DTA is still in need of fifteen more drivers to be able to fully staff all their budgeted service routes.

Overall, the Better Bus Movement initiative has seen positive effects on the ridership of its transit service for the Duluth-Superior metropolitan area. The DTA looks to the future to continue to improve and provide quality transit service.

4. 2024-2027 SUPERIOR AREA TIP AMENDMENT #10*

Sheldon presented the following amendment to the 2024-2027 Superior Area TIP:

TIP AMENDMENT #10

A TIP amendment has been requested by WisDOT for construction/bridge replacement/reimbursement to Minnesota towards the IH 535 Blatnik Bridge replacement project (St. Louis River BR B16-0005 to 0001). WisDOT bond funds transfer to MnDOT scheduled for 2026.

2026 Transportation Improvements Projects (Roadway)

Jurisdiction and Project Number	Project Description		Estimated Costs & Funding Sources			
			Thousands			
			Federal	State	Local	Total
WisDOT 113-24-021	IH 535 - Blatnik Bridge Replacement Construction/Bridge Replacement/Reimbursement to MnDOT	PE ROW CONST		352,800		352,800
Amended to TIP in March 2024	B16-0005 to 0001 0.0 miles 100% WisDOT Bond Funding 1199-00-77	TOTAL		352,800		352,800

Questions regarding this project should be directed to Sheldon Johnson at 715-635-2197 or by email at sjohnson@nwrpc.com.



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No Public Comments were recorded.

Motion Discussion and Vote	Nick Baker / Sam Pomush moved to approve the 2024-2027 Superior Area Tip Amendment #10 for adoption. There was no further discussion; the motion was approved unanimously via roll call vote.
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5. FY2025 & FY2026 MINNESOTA CARBON REDUCTION PROGRAM (CRP) FUNDS PROJECT ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPROVAL*

Prescott Morrill presented the 2025 and 2026 CRP projects as selected and agreed upon by the jurisdictions for approval by the MIC Policy Board.

FY2025 CRP Funds - will be used to help support the Raise grant in funding the Active Transportation Corridor in the West Superior Street Reconstruction Project. Primarily the funding will be used to construct EV charging stations.

FY 2026 CRP Funds - will be used to for the Campus Connector Trail, segments 4 & 5 at St. Marie Street and College Street.

No Public Comments were recorded.

Motion Discussion and Vote	Nick Baker / Ed Anderson moved to approve the 2025 and 2026 CRP funded projects to the 2028 Duluth Area TIP for adoption. There was no further discussion; the motion was approved unanimously via roll call vote.
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6. 2024 SAFETY ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Prescott Morrill and Rondi Watson gave an update on the MIC's 2024 Safety Action Plan, as well as the Safe Streets for All federal grant work that will be occurring in 2025 and 2026.

The MIC's consultant, AECOM, is currently performing an in-depth analysis of the traffic network in the MIC planning area, following the federal Safe System Approach that has been adopted by MnDOT. This is different than the traditional approach of waiting for serious crashes to occur before making changes and instead, identifies the risk factors and proactively makes the necessary changes. This consultant led work will identify countermeasures, estimate costs and prioritize projects in the MIC's planning area. A final report will be delivered in October 2024, detailing the study methodology and results.

In 2025, the SS4A grant work will expand upon the MIC work that will be completed in 2024. The goal of this funding is to develop a Sustained Safety Culture, that would influence how our community accepts and prioritizes transportation safety strategies, to eliminate or reduce fatalities and serious injuries on our transportation network. Work that needs to be done going forward will be to revise the scope of work and reallocate the budget to take into account the work that will have been completed in 2024 and to incorporate a demonstration project. Also, we will be working with local jurisdictions to determine how the local match component will be divided.



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7. HARBOR TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (HTAC) UPDATE

Mike Wenholz gave an update on the recent meeting of the HTAC that took place on March 6, 2024. Some highlights from that meeting include:

- The meeting was well attended by 51+ attendees.
- A presentation was given by the MN Sea Grant on identifying beneficial use priorities for dredged material from the port of Duluth-Superior.
- The 2023 Shipping Season in Review as presented by the Duluth Seaway Port Authority.
- A presentation by the US Coast Guard Marine Safety Unit Duluth Unit Overview.

8. ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

- Yauhen Karatai inquired about opportunities to join the group that is currently working on the SS4A grant. Currently, the technical committee has been formed to begin developing the scope of the plan. There will be opportunity for community input when the plan is in the implementation phase.
- Chad Ward offered a statement regarding an event that took place last week at the Proctor High School in which several emergency vehicles responded by way of Boundary Avenue to Hwy 2 to Second Street. This is another example of how the City of Proctor could benefit from an on/off ramp at I-35 and Ugstad Rd. Had it been in existence, the response time would have been reduced by ten to fifteen minutes.
- Randy Skowlund asked if the old Blatnik Bridge will need to be torn down in advance of the new bridge going up. Nick Baker responded that it would, with an explanation that the concern is with the stabilization of the new pilings if it were torn down after the new bridge was constructed. Director Chicka offered that we would try to have MnDOT present information on the Blatnik Bridge project at some point in the near future.

9. PROJECT UPDATES

- **Administrative Modification #8 to the 2024-2027 Duluth Area TIP**

St. Louis County, JCT US 2 and Munger Shaw Rd

St Louis Co is requesting an increase of the total project cost in FY2024 for the construction of left turn lanes at the intersection of US 2 and CR 223 (Munger Shaw Rd), in the order of \$300,000 (from \$925,000 to \$1,225,000) because of updated project costs and inflation. This project remains fiscally constrained.

- **ADJOURN:** With no further agenda items, discussions or announcements, Chair Boucher adjourned the meeting at 7:48 pm.