

# 9. Participation

This chapter details the MIC's process for ensuring timely and substantive public participation during the development of the MTP.

## Duluth-Superior Long-Range Transportation Plan



## Sustainable Choices 2050

<b>Engaging the Public in Transportation Planning .....</b>	<b>9-2</b>
<b>The MIC's Planning Process.....</b>	<b>9-2</b>
Sidebar: Federal MTP Outreach Requirements .....	9-2
<b>MTP Public Engagement Plan .....</b>	<b>9-2</b>
<b>Stakeholder Identification.....</b>	<b>9-3</b>
<b>Stakeholder Engagement Activities .....</b>	<b>9-4</b>
Develop a Brand.....	9-4
Sustainable Choices 2050 Web Page.....	9-4
Jurisdictional Consultations .....	9-5
Public Survey .....	9-5
Targeted Stakeholder Focus Groups .....	9-6
Presentations, Discussions and Consultations .....	9-6
<b>Release of Draft MTP for Public Comment.....</b>	<b>9-6</b>
Public Open Houses .....	9-6
<b>Presentation of Final MTP for Approval.....</b>	<b>9-7</b>

## Engaging the Public in Transportation Planning

A major theme of *Sustainable Choices 2050* is that the cost of needed improvements to the transportation system far exceeds the funding available to address those needs. Difficult choices must be made regarding the use of scarce transportation dollars.

The long term effect such decisions will have means that public engagement and stakeholder involvement are critical elements of the MTP process.

### The MIC's Planning Process

The MIC is committed to reaching out to and engaging diverse community members throughout the transportation planning process. 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 IJJA legislation.

In accordance with the public participation requirements of 23 CFR 450.316 and as described in its Public Involvement Plan, the MIC works to ensure that all stakeholders are given ample opportunity to participate in decision-making processes and thus help to shape the transportation policies, programs and projects in the Duluth-Superior area.

As detailed in Appendix C, MIC staff conducted or participated in numerous public participation activities with a broad and diverse group of stakeholders over the two-year course of the Plan's development. These included:

### MTP Public Engagement Plan

The first step was to devise and document a public engagement plan, in keeping with federal regulations and the MIC's Public Involvement Plan, but specific to the MTP.

### Stakeholder Identification

Stakeholders are persons or groups who are directly or indirectly affected by a proposed action, as well as those who may have interests in the MTP process or the ability to influence or contribute to its outcomes.

An extensive effort was made to obtain and verify current email addresses for a broad range of organizations and individuals, in keeping with federal requirements and the MIC's commitment to seek out and consider the needs of those historically underserved by existing transportation systems.

## FEDERAL MTP OUTREACH REQUIREMENTS

Throughout the process, MIC staff followed its [Public Involvement Plan](#) which incorporates the public participation requirements of 23 CFR 450.316:

- Provide reasonable public access to information.
- Incorporate the use of electronic methods and visualization techniques.
- Provide early & continuous opportunities for involvement.
- Offer timely information to citizens, affected agencies, private entities and other interested parties.
- Give adequate notice of public involvement activities and ample time for public review and comment at key decision points.
- Hold public meetings at convenient times and accessible locations.
- Ensure the inclusion of non-motorized users, the disabled, the elderly, minority, low-income and other traditionally "underserved populations".
- Include the consideration of the potential impacts of decisions on social and natural resources and reach out to relevant agencies and stakeholders.
- Develop and regularly review a public participation plan.

A comprehensive mailing list was compiled that included interested parties (agencies, groups and individuals) as well as current MIC Board and committee members as well as targeted groups and individuals, as described below.

Example stakeholder groups are shown in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1 Example Stakeholder Groups

Traveling Public, Residents and Employees	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Commuters
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Visitors
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Residents within the MPA
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Workers employed within the MPA
Government Officials	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	MIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Municipal elected and appointed officials
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	County elected and appointed officials
Transit Agencies	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Duluth Transit Authority
Special Interest Groups and Agencies	
	Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce
	Duluth Business Association
	West Duluth Business Club
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Emergency service providers
	School District Transportation Officials
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sierra Club or other Environmental Organization
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Bicycle Organizations

**Environmental Justice, ADA, and other groups with specialized transportation needs**

In accordance with Title VI legislation and subsequent executive orders, federally funded projects must not create disproportionate adverse impacts on environmental justice communities (racial minorities and low-income persons). Similarly, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires transportation facilities be designed to adequately serve disabled persons and older adults. Effectively engaging these persons in the planning process requires culturally sensitive outreach and developing partnerships with organizations serving those populations.

**Transportation Advisory Committee**

The MIC’s Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), consisting of Duluth and Superior area planners, engineers and modal representatives was enlisted as a primary advisory group for the MTP.

Their input was requested on all aspects of the MTP during their regularly scheduled monthly meetings by reviewing the vision and goals, providing feedback on chapters as they were

**STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION TOOL**

The MIC’s Stakeholder Identification Tool translates the requirements of CFR 450.316 into a detailed listing of local organizations and individuals potentially interested in and/or affected by the transportation policies and projects included in the MIC area MTP. Briefly, those interested parties included:

- Citizens/General Public
- Government and Public Agencies
- Public Transportation Operators and Users
- Private Transportation Operators
- Multimodal Freight Providers and Customers
- Non-Motorized/Active Transportation Advocates
- Human Services Providers and Recipients
- Natural and Historical Resource Preservation and Protection Groups and Agencies
- Business and Economic Development Interests
- Educational Institutions
- Tribal and Federal Lands Agencies

In addition to those identified by MIC staff, visitors to the Sustainable Choices 2050 website were invited to submit their email address if they were interested in receiving updates.

drafted, and assessing key take-aways from data collected and public comments.

### **MIC Policy Board**

The elected officials and community appointees on the MIC Board members were another key stakeholder group. They received much the same information as the TAC at several of its monthly meetings, and were similarly asked to provide input as the planning process progressed.

### **Federal and State Agency Personnel**

MIC staff provided the first draft of the MTP to MIC's oversight agencies (FHWA, FTA and Minnesota and Wisconsin DOTs) for their preliminary review before it was released for a 30-day public comment period, followed by a formal review session during the comment period.

## **Stakeholder Engagement Activities**

Comments and input received from public engagement activities is detailed in Appendix C. Key activities included:

### **Develop a Brand**

A project brand and logo was developed for use throughout the project to consistently identify the MTP for use across all print and electronic media and during public engagement activities.

### **Sustainable Choices 2050 Web Page**

The project web page <https://dsmic.org/planning/long-range/> was developed and maintained as the primary resource for current information about the MTP. including:

- Background info and scope of work
- Link to online public survey
- Notifications of upcoming public meetings
- Links to draft plan chapters

### **Jurisdictional Consultations**

An early step in developing the transportation project list and fiscal constraint components of the MTP, MIC planning staff met with officials from every MIC-area jurisdiction. For the first time these consultations were held as a group (Minnesota and Wisconsin) instead of individually.

The purpose of the consultations was for our jurisdictional

## **Who Was Involved**

Public involvement is integral to good transportation planning. Key participants and opportunities included:

**Advisory Committee**—The MIC's Transportation Advisory Committee was consulted on a nearly monthly basis during all phases of the Plan's development.

**MIC Policy Board**—The MIC Policy Board was updated on a nearly monthly basis during all phases of the Plan's development.

**Community Members**—The online survey platform Survey Monkey was utilized in the early development of Sustainable Choices 2050.

**Agency & Modal Consultations**—MIC staff met with representatives from MIC-area jurisdictions and multimodal stakeholders more than 30 times to discuss key issues and gather information specific to each.

**Focus Groups**—AECOM & MIC staff facilitated 5 group discussions.

partners to learn about the vision and goals of the MTP, and to share the key takeaways from our public involvement efforts to date.

It also served as an opportunity for a group discussion among the jurisdictions to share their transportation wants, needs and short– mid– and long-range projects to be considered for inclusion within the MTP.

They were also asked to share any known project ideas or suggestions for future additional study within the next 25 years, and to identify which of the five planning perspectives/goals of *Sustainable Choices 2050* would be key drivers of each project idea or suggested study. Details about the results of these consultations are presented in Appendix C.

### Public Survey

The study team developed an online survey during the existing conditions and needs assessment phase of the MTP. The survey was publicized via a link to be distributed through the outreach contact list, MIC mailing lists, partner organization distribution, and via MIC social media. The survey allowed participants to describe their vision for the region’s transportation system, key areas of concern, and ideas for the future.

Survey results were used to complement technical analyses in confirming the MTP goals and objectives and to identify key transportation issues to be addressed through project development and evaluation. Over the course of the first phase of planning, 422 survey responses were received. Survey themes are summarized in Appendix C.

Figure 9.2 Facebook Ad—MTP Public Survey



Two open houses were held in Duluth and Superior to provide an opportunity for members of the public to ask questions and give input into the draft Metropolitan Transportation Plan.



### Targeted Stakeholder Focus Groups

To develop in depth understanding of issues and opportunities, the MIC’s consultants from AECOM conducted individual focus groups with leaders of stakeholder groups with special interests in regional transportation. These groups were identified with MIC staff based on key transportation issues indicated in the issues and opportunities analysis. AECOM and MIC staff, conducted three individual focus groups with leaders from stakeholder groups who have special interests in regional transportation in December 2023. These stakeholder groups were identified based on the key transportation issues highlighted in the issues and opportunities analysis:

- Pedestrian issues
- Sustainable transportation
- Equity and environmental justice
- Port and freight interests
- Older adults
- People with disabilities

### Presentations, Discussions and Consultations

As summarized in Appendix C, MIC staff presented information, held discussions and conducted consultations with more than 30 committees, community groups, modal representatives and agencies over the two years of the MTP’s development.

### Release of Draft Plan for Review and Comment

The first draft of the document was submitted for initial review and comment by the FHWA, FTA, MnDOT and WisDOT on July 10.

After incorporating many of those comments, the draft MTP was released for the required 30-day public review and comment on August 5 and a formal agency consultation was held on August 8.

Two public open houses were held on August 14 and 15, at locations in Duluth and Superior, respectively.

All comments received, as well as the MIC’s responses, are summarized in Appendix D.

### Final MTP

The final MTP will be presented for adoption by the MIC Policy Board at its regularly scheduled meeting on October 16, 2024.



### Focus Group Discussions

The stakeholder focus groups complement the MTP’s public engagement effort in two ways:

First, it allowed a more in depth exploration of stakeholder values and perceptions in two focus areas that are important to the region’s residents and elected and appointed officials.

Second, it allowed the plan to reflect the multiple viewpoints and voices of the Duluth-Superior region. As with the results of the public survey, findings from the focus groups were used in conjunction with analysis of transportation system performance to develop recommendations for long-term improvements to serve all travelers in the region.





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