

Rethinking Interstate 94, Minneapolis – St. Paul

Project Background

- [Rethinking Interstate 94 between Minneapolis and St. Paul](#)
- Most of the construction of Highway I-94 took place in Minnesota in the 1960s
- The current project area for Rethinking I-94 includes four tunnels, over 145 bridges and over 80 miles of pavement, 23 neighborhoods, 54 parks and green spaces, and 70 schools.
- The area was chosen from Broadway Ave to Highway 61 just east of St. Paul. The focus in engagement is the communities around I-94.

Public Engagement Challenge

- Challenges included reaching out to the communities that are majority minority and gaining their trust. Most that live in the area have distrust in MnDOT because of the destruction that happened to the Rondo community when I-94 was built. The aftermath of creating I-94 was tragic for people who once lived there and the effects still carries through to this day.
- Another challenge was having two different goals in a conversation. Although the I-94 team was there to listen, most of the comments were geared toward right now to five years out versus the idea of a project that would be 20 years out.

Public Engagement Tool

- MnDOT's Rethinking I-94 project hosted six workshops where there was a great amount of information provided about the science behind the roadwork, geographic information and the history of I-94 itself. Staff made sure to include this information throughout the workshop giving opportunity to engage with the Rethinking I-94 teams and other MnDOT staff – whether it was answering questions, sharing their ideas, listening to personal problems with the highway, or just having regular conversation.
- Other than the workshops, the Rethinking I-94 project made an effort to reach out to people in the community. They attended 13 other community events that surrounded the I-94 corridor. At these events, they also gathered the community's feedback in hopes to bridge the gap of communication and trust between MnDOT and the people of the community.
- The goal was to take in comments given by the people of the community in regards to what they personally think I-94 should look like in the future.
- MnDOT provided food and drinks at all workshops as incentives as these gatherings were held over dinner hour. This expense was paid for through a purchase order and justified because of the high ratio of public attendance vs. staff support.

Key Takeaways

- Connecting and creating relationships with communities on many levels, including community stakeholders that have influence in communities they represent, provides broad and deep participation.
- Using a map and sticky note exercise in gaining information is effective and invites active participation. Also, using an interactive map (online) was effective in getting information that was more accurate because participants had a tool to provide guidance explaining where the problem area was.
- Using engagement surveys helped broaden outreach by attracting input from different ages ranges and ethnicities.
- Providing rubber ducks (giveaways) were a kid favorite each year at the community events! They proved to be an ice-breaker in encouraging parents to interact with MnDOT staff.

Level of Engagement: Inform, Consult, Involve, and Collaborate

- In Phase 1 (the corridor study), most of the engagement work aligns to informing and consulting the public. Communities were informed on what MN DOT was doing with the rethinking I-94 project.
- MnDOT staff answered questions about other projects currently underway in attempts to help the public gain a better understanding of MnDOT's function as a government agency. The I-94 team also provided open conversation, through involvement and collaboration, about what the community wanted to see, in attempts to give the community a voice.

Caveat

- Don't wait until the end of a project to evaluate, evaluations should be used for continual improvement. Take time to evaluate the process at intervals and determine ways of improvement. The team learned that providing information and feedback in a timely manner reflected a clearer value and vision for the corridor (this includes not only residents and roadway users, but also businesses and property owners along the corridor) that looked beyond the infrastructure.

Quote

- "The Rethinking I-94 staff found the community input to be valuable because it was insightful, informative and aware of transportation from a holistic perspective. The focus of the Rethinking I-94 effort is *to do better*. It is important that MnDOT not only do better along the I-94 corridor but also take the lessons learned to the larger project development processes to build support for future agency efforts." – Gloria Jeff, *Rethinking I-94 Project Director*

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