

SAPCC Transportation Committee

May 25, 2021

Present: Pat Thompson, Karen Nelson, Ray Bryan, Scott Jensen, Bailey Waters, Patty George, Kim Frair, Cecelia Ruesga, Tara Smith, Betty Wheeler

Guests: Jessica Willman SAPCC organizer, neighbors David Fan, JJ, Kathy Johnson, Michael Russelle, MnDOT staff: Rethinking I-94 Project Director Sheila Kauppi, North Area Manager Melissa Barnes, Project Manager Joshua Colas, and Dan Pfeiffer WSB, community engagement consultant

Sheila Kauppi presented about the Rethinking I-94 project.

The presentation will cover the project phases, process, draft scoping, timeline, public engagement, and how to get involved. I-94 has reached the end of its design life. MnDOT is responsible under federal law for maintaining it (with likely federal financial support over time). FHWA is a partner in this process.

Phases:

1. 2016–18, they assessed the condition of I-94, did initial public engagement, explored improvements.
2. 2018–2023, more engagement, environmental documents (federal and state requirements, called NEPA and MEPA), identify alternatives and actions needed to meet goals, and identify the program of projects.
3. After 2023: Implement: continue engagement, implement the vision, design and construct as funding allows. 20 years.

When MnDOT started the public engagement process five years ago, they did hear about congestion on the highway, but also a lot about safety, transit, health impacts, sense of place, and that job opportunities should come from reconstruction. The need for connections *across* the freeway. MnDOT shifted gears and created a program to create a Livability Framework, which is underway now (broader than I-94, it includes all MnDOT roads and highways). There have also been staffing changes, COVID, and other hold-ups happened along the way.

This is a long-term project. At this point, there is no specific plan for what the highway will look like (called “a program” in MnDOT-speak). No construction money is assigned yet. It’s a marathon, not a sprint.

NEPA and MEPA are complex processes that still have to be done.

MnDOT can have three types of roles – leader, partner, facilitator — depending on how close a topic is to literal transportation.

Elements of the process at this point that they have to share:

- Draft statement of goals: includes sense of place, connecting communities, increasing safety, creating economic opportunity, creating equity and a healthy environment. With a community-based approach focused on reconnecting neighborhoods, revitalizing communities and ensuring residents have a meaningful voice in transportation decisions that affect their lives.
- Purpose & Need statement: It must identify the transportation problems and deficiencies. Those include walkability and bikeability, safety on intersecting streets, safety on I-94, pavement condition, bridge condition, mobility, drainage capacity, noise wall condition, retaining wall condition, drainage infrastructure condition.
- Purpose:
 - improve the **asset condition** of bridges, pavement, and supporting infrastructure

- enhance **safety** of people and goods on, along, and across the corridor
- improve **mobility** of people and goods on, along, and across the corridor
- Logical termini of the project (draft): The draft project area is from east side of 35W/Highway 55 in Minneapolis to the west side of Marion Street in Saint Paul.
- Evaluation criteria: NEPA requires multiple options for social, economic and environmental impacts (called SEE). They will winnow the various alternatives through a process of each of three levels: Does each alternative meet the identified needs? Then does it have various SEE impacts? Then does it meet goals and livability outcomes?
- Tier 1 environmental impact statement (EIS) is about goals/higher level, while Tier 2 is about designs and specifics.

First they look for fatal flaws — does an alternative meet the primary needs or have unmitigable SEE impacts? That outcome results in alternatives to assess for Tier 1 EIS. This results in the preferred mainline alternative and access/interchange locations. (Access includes bike and pedestrian facilities within interchange and overpass projects.) At this point, a Program of Projects with priorities is identified.

In Tier 2, specific projects within the program are evaluated. After that – implementation happens.

Timeline – post-2023 is when project design starts, nothing will be built until at least 2025 and those would be small at first. Workforce development work will be done to bring along smaller BIPOC firms to be ready for the larger projects down the road.

There are many groups meeting on all of this. Policy Advisory Committee (made up of electeds) meets quarterly, Community Leaders group (Mpls and St. Paul organizations) meets monthly [SAPCC is represented in this]. Other monthly groups: Policy and Planning, Technical Advisory Committee, Traffic Working Group, NEPA group, bike/ped group. Livability workshops are open to all.

Hoping to be able to do in-person events, popups, public hearings this summer and fall. Comments can also be sent to them, or given at meetings of the PAC and Community Leaders. Livability Workshops are open to all to attend on Zoom (held during daytime hours, generally). Find out more at dot.state.mn.us/I-94minneapolis-stpaul

Sheila can be emailed at sheila.kauppi@state.mn.us

Discussion and questions

Note that the MnDOT staff in attendance were sent this statement by the Transportation Committee co-chair before the meeting:

As you probably realize, a key concern in our neighborhood is the 280 interchange - both in terms of any changes that may be on the horizon, and its effect on the neighborhood in general in terms of livability. We have a lot of ramps and a lot of heavy truck traffic, side by side with increasing numbers of new residents living in multifamily buildings near the Green Line.

I noted while reading the preliminary draft Purpose & Need and supporting documents that generally our neighborhood's part of University Avenue falls outside the half-mile that is being considered, but clearly I-94 (and 280) dominate the area. 280 in particular cleaves South St. Anthony Park apart, to the point where most people don't even know that the western portion is in Saint Paul, let alone St. Anthony Park.

Comment from Nelson: Need for coordination between MnDOT and Saint Paul to redesign frontage roads. I bike on 94 frontage roads. Many are wide and dangerous with drivers coming off freeway at speed. So much real estate there that could be repurposed for safe, low speed cars, bike paths, pedestrian amenities and greening/share. MnDOT response: There is a frontage road map – we will get a copy of it.

Question from Waters: What about emphasizing Green Line use as part of reducing VMT on 94? MnDOT response: Coordinating with Metro Transit on connections, since the trip someone needs to take is not necessarily directly on the east-west corridor. Follow through to make sure that happens.

Question from George: The big question: What will be the effect on South St. Anthony Park of the Rethinking I-94 project? MnDOT response: It's not known now, it will depend on which alternatives are identified and then which one(s) are chosen based on the variables. It ranges from leave it as is (fixing physical problems) to removing it, with other options said along the ways, such as adding a MNPass lane, adding a bus shoulder, reconfiguring the 280 interchange/lanes. This is Tier 2 stuff, in MnDOT/planning/process terms, though – Tier 1 is defining the Purpose & Need and goals, etc.

We then discussed truck traffic in SSAP, impact on livability. Noise, emissions, pedestrian/child safety. Thompson said, part of solving it would be building a connection from Pierce Butler Route to Energy Park Drive (as in SAPCC's 10-year plan) and Wheeler added, improving the direct connection down Vandalia to 94, as was mentioned in the West Midway Industrial plan.

Wheeler pointed out that the draft statement of goals seems to prioritize livability and use the right terminology, but that mobility, asset conditions and safety and especially mobility will win out, especially for freight trucks and SOVs. Real livability means LOWER speed limits, not more throughput.

Bryan pointed out that highway connectivity makes work like his possible, where companies have outsourced IT support. He travels to many places outside the Twin Cities multiple times each week.

Thompson pointed out the concept of induced demand. Making a highway larger or making 280 more of an interstate with a higher speed limit encourages more people to make trips, then results in the same level of congestion later. Rethinking I-94 is meant to be a road for the next 50 years in the midst of climate change.

Russelle pointed to the city and state goals on climate change, carbon neutrality... how does MnDOT view that? Adaptability for the future is a huge benefit. What is the vision of a climate change future that underlays the program? MnDOT staff responded that there is a Sustainable Transportation Advisory Committee (Russ Stark is on it), and noted the recent state VMT reduction goal.

What livability means to Waters: she would like to be able to commute on foot across the 94/280 corridor at Franklin, but it's extremely unpleasant. Make sure cars won't hit her when crossing because they don't expect pedestrians.

Pelham Bridge needs major work. Includes planning to ensure possible future Midtown Greenway Extension bike connection. This current railroad route runs right under Pelham Bridge.

Pavement materials on highway 280 (effect on sound) — comment sent in by a neighbor who couldn't attend: Pavement on 280 is being redone from 94 to Energy Park in 2026, to 35W in 2027. Bridge work is likely too, will be assessing how much work needed. Melissa Barnes is a key MnDOT staff member on 280 (Ramsey County). We would like to have her back to talk about it.

Thompson pointed out these investments in 280 indicate MnDOT's continued commitment to making it part of the interstate system and inducing demand, rather than decreasing VMT. After the 35W bridge fell, 280 was a temporary detour but has never returned to lower use. The last traffic light (at Broadway) is funded for removal in 2024, based on safety argument. The committee requested details on the crash data to see how much is property damage vs. severe injury or death. Greater speeds also cause crashes, at higher speeds.

Thompson reiterated how much 280 affects South St. Anthony Park, dividing Westgate completely. The idea of a cap/lid or liner buildings from Territorial to Wabash is in our 10-year plan. She also mentioned the idea of closing the north-bound ramps at Territorial (in terms of the effect on truck traffic on Territorial, which is "not a truck route"). That the 280/94 interchange itself could use its own community engagement process. Despite this, SAPCC was not contacted during Rethinking I-94 Phase 1 public engagement, which was a missed opportunity.

Follow-up topics:

- Frontage road map for Saint Paul (via Sheila Kauppi)
- Send 280 speed limit resolution to Sheila Kauppi
- 280 crash data at Broadway (Melissa Barnes)
- Ask Melissa Barnes back to talk to the committee about 280
- West Midway Industrial study and other past studies about connections

Territorial Road project update

Contractors are lined up for the new sidewalk between Seal and Carleton. Still waiting for hole-filling on the old dry well, but it's a top priority now with the HOA manager. Tires from our past project have been in storage. Stephen Mastey can get them recycled. Jensen will contact him.

Tree-limbing

Now that trees are leafed out, we should identify the spots that need limbing to ensure visibility at corners, of signs and of flashing beacons (RRFBs). The actual pruning may have to wait until winter, because many tree species can't be pruned during active growth. (Ask Stephen M. from the Environment Committee)

- Raymond RRFBs (both sides of the street), Como
- Territorial new bike lane signs
- "Not a truck route" signs on Territorial
- Elementary school corner (Scudder and Gordon)
- Cross check with Environment Committee on trimming

Street speeds

20 Is Plenty signs (get more to be ready for future Raymond detour, other needs), Your Speed sign location move... we have emailed Beth Stiffler several times but it has yet to be moved.

Cleveland rebuild project

Timing still unknown (for phase 1 this summer, Como to roughly Buford). Among other trees, 2 oak trees on the east side near Commonwealth Terrace are marked for removal. Both are probably 100-150 years old, and are right in the middle of the new 8' path. Thompson has emailed the Environment Committee co-chairs, will follow up with Ramsey County project manager to see if anything can be done.

In closing, we noted that this is Ruesga and Smith's last meeting, because they are moving out of the neighborhood. We thanked them for their service and how they have contributed to pedestrian safety especially, and hope that they will be active in their new neighborhood in Saint Paul!

For the next agenda. Items we did not have time for:

Let's not forget to approve the April as well as the May minutes!

Heavy trucks

Truck route distance ordinance? Anything else we can follow up on about truck traffic.

Public Works

General follow up on communication (10-year plan spots: Valentine south of Como, Carter at Chelmsford, Cromwell north of Territorial).

Final wording of the Highway 280 speed limit resolution, as approved by Environment Committee and the SAPCC board at the May meeting:

Resolution Against Raising the Speed Limit on Trunk Highway 280

Whereas TH-280 was originally designed before the modern interstate highway system, primarily for slower and lighter truck traffic, and continues to have short entrance and exit ramps in spite of recent improvements, creating difficulty merging into traffic or crossing lanes to exit;

Whereas this segment of highway is significantly more dangerous than other state highways considering crash rates, ramp density, and length of segment;

Whereas the highway is prone to winter icing and spring flooding;

Whereas the 85% rule, used to determine optimum speed by traffic engineers, is under question and may be about to be changed on the federal level;

Whereas the traffic noise from TH-280 is already intolerable to the neighboring residents, in spite of sound walls;

Whereas drivers exiting the highway into the adjacent neighborhoods often fail to completely slow down to surface street speed limits;

Whereas increased speed limits would require greater acceleration of both light- and heavy-duty vehicles entering the roadway, increasing emissions of hydrocarbons, CO, NOx, and fine particulate matter;

Whereas higher vehicle velocity increases both air pollution and climate change, because it promotes resuspension of particulate matter, increases tire wear, and decreases efficiency of fuel combustion;

Whereas an increased speed limit sends a signal contrary to St. Paul's commitment to combating climate change, as shown in its Climate Action and Resilience Plan, since transportation is the largest portion of Minnesota's carbon footprint;

Be it resolved that the St. Anthony Park Community Council opposes raising the speed limit on TH-280.