

# ADVANCING TRANSPORTATION EQUITY



District 2  
Winter 2019





**Contents**

**Executive Summary**.....4

    Findings.....4

    Recommendations.....6

**Introduction** .....7

**Methodology** .....7

    Key communities selection method .....8

        Tribal Governments.....8

        Amish.....8

    Interview teams .....8

    Data collection and analysis.....9

    Implementation meeting.....9

**Results**.....10

    Response rate ..... 10

    Types of organizations ..... 10

    Counties represented ..... 11

    Key communities represented..... 11

**Findings**.....12

    How to interpret the findings ..... 13

    Transportation interrelates with other characteristics of District 2..... 13

        Large, rural district ..... 14

        Many residents with low incomes..... 15

        Long, snowy winters..... 15

        Aging population ..... 17

        Mental health and chemical dependency ..... 18

        Housing shortage and other housing challenges ..... 19

        People with differing needs and abilities ..... 20

        Child care shortage..... 21

        Increasingly diverse languages and origins ..... 21

    Inadequate transportation options create barriers to the community..... 22

        Medical care ..... 23

Employment .....	24
Buying goods and accessing personal care .....	24
Accessing social and human services .....	25
Accessing social and recreational activities.....	26
Education.....	27
Religious activity.....	28
Private vehicles are common but not feasible for everyone.....	28
Challenges and inequities in car ownership.....	28
Help available for people who do not have their own vehicles.....	30
Rides with friends and family .....	30
Capacity of public transit does not meet demand.....	30
Challenges meeting demand.....	31
Barrier to accessing transit.....	31
Suggestions for improvement .....	33
More people are walking and biking, but infrastructure and safety upgrades are needed.....	34
Walking and biking infrastructure .....	34
Safety concerns .....	36
Other modes are available for use but still face limitations.....	36
Taxi, Uber, Lyft.....	37
Volunteer Driver Program .....	37
Other modes.....	38
Land use and natural barriers also affect access.....	38
Relationships are key to engagement.....	41
Knowledge and interest.....	41
Building and strengthening relationships.....	42
Using appropriate methods.....	43
Following up on input.....	45
People have many ideas to solve challenges with transportation equity.....	46
High-level suggestions.....	46
Policies, programs, and funding .....	46
Mode-specific improvements.....	47
Organizations provided varied definitions and examples of equity .....	47

<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>53</b>
Appendix A: List of organizations interviewed .....	53
Appendix B: Project team and interviewers .....	54
Appendix C: Demographic Analysis .....	55
Overview.....	55
Race/Ethnicity.....	56
Age.....	56
Disability .....	56
Income & Employment.....	56
Means of Travel.....	58
Appendix D: Key Communities .....	60
Advancing Transportation Equity – Key Communities .....	60
Overview of District 2 .....	60
Tribal Governments.....	61
Racial and Ethnic Minorities .....	61
Women and Girls.....	61
Elderly and Aging in Place.....	62
Low-Income (Persons Living in Poverty).....	62
Zero-Vehicle Households.....	62
Disability .....	62
Veterans .....	62
Disadvantaged Businesses Enterprises (DBEs) .....	63
Other Communities for Consideration .....	63
Appendix E: Interview Guide .....	64
Appendix F: Findings and Potential Solutions from the Implementation Meeting .....	65
Appendix G: Additional Contacts .....	69
Appendix H: Past and Current Initiatives and Opportunities .....	72

# Executive Summary

As part of its 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, the Minnesota Department of Transportation sought to better understand how transportation impacts, and is impacted by, equity. MnDOT developed a pilot project to conduct community conversations with various groups, agencies, and organizations (here forward: “organizations”) that work with and represent underserved communities in Minnesota.

In 2017, MnDOT launched a pilot in Northwest Minnesota (MnDOT District 2) to understand how community conversations could inform equitable transportation planning and practice. The process of conducting community conversations involved developing a deeper understanding of the people who live in District 2; deciding which key communities MnDOT would most like to learn about; identifying organizations that work with and represent those key communities; and holding in-person conversations between MnDOT staff and those organizations.

Conversations included a wide range of topics that sought to understand the role transportation plays in peoples’ lives and what opportunities or consequences they face based on the transportation modes that are available to them. MnDOT intends to share its findings with partners to also inform their work.

## Findings

Overall, interviewees said transportation is a key connector that provides people access to the activities they need and want to do. The modes of transportation people choose often depends on characteristics such as distance the person needs to travel, how much time it will take, current weather and road conditions, and convenience. For some people, the choice of mode is limited by further aspects, such affordability, accessibility, and ability to meet requirements (i.e., obtaining a driver’s license). In the latter situations transportation can hinder peoples’ ability to be healthy and engaged in society.



Transportation interrelates with trends and characteristics of District 2. These characteristics can add to transportation challenges, and challenges associated with some trends and characteristics are worsened by gaps in the transportation system.



Inadequate transportation options not only affect access to basic needs and services— they also affect access to other activities that contribute to wellness, including social and religious activities.



There are several modes of transportation that are available in District 2. Each has its unique contribution to the transportation system and its own limitations.



Conversations yielded ways MnDOT can contribute to advancing transportation equity, including building relationships, engaging the public, and offering input on land use planning.



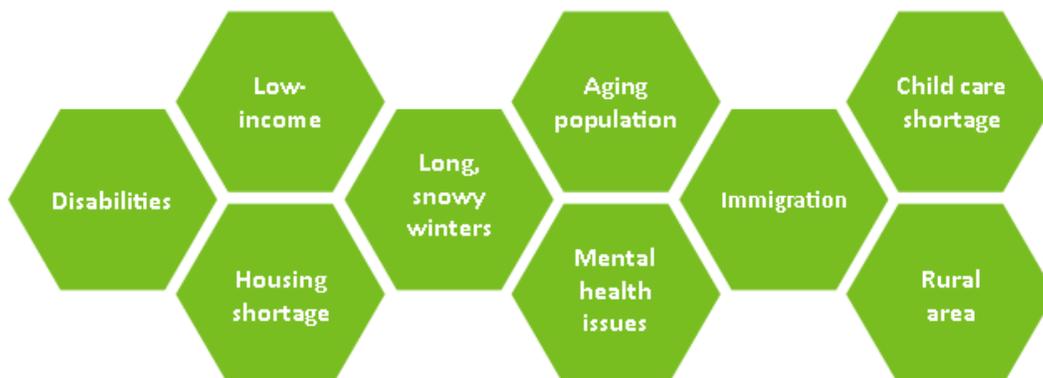
Organizations provided varied definitions of equity.

# Findings

Transportation helps people access activities to carry out their lives.



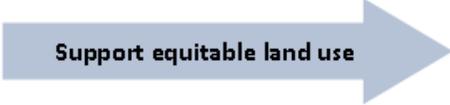
Transportation interrelates with other trends and characteristics of District 2.



These factors, combined with the limitations of different transportation modes in District 2, create transportation inequities.

- 
  - Cost
  - Getting licensed
  - Ability to drive
- 
  - Availability
  - Convenience
- 
  - Infrastructure
  - Distance
  - Weather
  - Safety

Findings included a few ways MnDOT can help advance equity.

-  **Build relationships**
-  **Support equitable land use**
-  **Engage communities**

# Recommendations

MnDOT Central Office and District 2 management team and staff reviewed findings and developed potential solutions, which consultants used to develop recommendations.

Results from this meeting and observations from consultants resulted the following recommendations:

1. **MnDOT should explore opportunities to work with partners to expand transit and other transportation options in District 2.** Opportunities include the development and support of an on-demand transit service and the expansion of the Volunteer Driver Program.
2. **MnDOT should continue to build relationships with new groups, agencies, and organizations.** Building relationships will create direct pathways for equity improvements in transportation and ways for MnDOT to provide input on initiatives that indirectly impact transportation equity.
3. **MnDOT should collaborate with other agencies, local governments, and organizations who do similar work to engage common stakeholders and partner on projects and programs.** Interview findings indicate that MnDOT could accelerate its public engagement efforts by building and strengthening partnerships with other agencies, local governments, and organizations that are engaging the same or similar target populations, depending on the circumstance.
4. **MnDOT should work with other agencies, local governments, and organizations to share information and coordinate processes to leverage existing resources to advance equity.** Potential examples include exploring ways to raise matching funds, coordinating funding and policies with other agencies, being more flexible in funding requirements, and being present, involved, and available to communities making land use decisions.
5. **MnDOT should communicate with interviewees, partners, and the broader public about the Equity Pilot and intended next steps.** This includes reconnecting with interviewees to share findings and discussing ways to work together beyond project-specific work.
6. **MnDOT Central Office should examine the District 2 Equity Pilot findings and identify those that are likely to also impact other districts and would require more systems-level consideration.** As interviews continue throughout the state, Central Office staff should identify potential ways to address broader transportation equity challenges that are likely emerge consistently across Minnesota and develop statewide solutions that would advance equity.
7. **MnDOT District 2 should continue the work accomplished in the implementation planning meeting by identifying and prioritizing which solutions need additional action planning.** First steps include translating high-level priorities into action and identifying solutions that are relatively simple to address.

# Introduction

In January 2017, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) released its updated 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP).<sup>1</sup> During the process of updating the plan, MnDOT engaged stakeholders and the public to share what they thought MnDOT should include in the plan. Participants in those conversations expressed to MnDOT the need to advance equity in many contexts, including disparities with regard to race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, and ability. In response, MnDOT included two activities in the SMTP 2017-2020 Work Plan to advance equity:

- Study how transportation affects equity and identify transportation strategies and approaches that will meaningfully reduce disparities.
- Pilot tools and strategies to better incorporate equity into project-level decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

To address the advancing equity work plan activities, MnDOT decided to conduct community conversations to gain a qualitative, experienced-based perspective of how equity is affected by transportation. Community conversations would gather information about equity concerns related to transportation from a variety of groups and organizations while building relationships, which will provide a pathway for continued engagement and initiatives to address equity concerns.

As a pilot, MnDOT contracted with Management Analysis and Development (MAD)<sup>3</sup> to:

- Build MnDOT's capacity to conduct interviews,
- Coordinate in-person interviews with 30 organizations that serve communities in MnDOT's District 2,
- Analyze the data, and
- Report the findings and recommendations.

## Methodology

The project primarily consisted of in-depth interviews with groups, agencies, and organizations (here forward: "organizations") that work with and represent key communities identified for this pilot.

The main purposes of the interviews were to:

- Better understand the organizations' perspectives about how the transportation system, services, and decision-making processes help or hinder the lives of people in Northwest Minnesota;
- Build relationships with organizations whose work aligns, directly or indirectly, with equity and transportation; and
- Identify actions to address transportation inequities.

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<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Department of Transportation. "Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan." January 2017.

<http://www.minnesotago.org/final-plans/sntp-final-plan>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> MAD is the State of Minnesota's in-house consultants that provide neutral, third party management consultant services to public sector agencies. For more information, please visit <http://www.mn.gov/mmb/mad>.

## Key communities selection method

MnDOT conducted an analysis of the eleven counties in District 2, examining the current demographics and trends in the district, with a focus on populations with known inequities.<sup>4</sup> MnDOT used the analysis to further identify and prioritize key communities to be included in the Equity Pilot.<sup>5</sup> They include:

- Communities currently underrepresented in transportation decision-making processes;
- Communities experiencing known inequities in access or outcomes; and
- Communities with unique transportation needs not well served by a business-as-usual approach.

The interviewees selected consisted of groups, agencies, and organizations that work with and represent the key communities identified, with some interviewees representing key communities selected. MnDOT District 2 and Central Office staff and other partners also identified potential interviewees. Additional interviewees were identified via snowballing—asking interviewees for suggestions on others to interview.

MAD contacted these organizations by phone and email, asked them to participate in the pilot, and scheduled interviews. Interviews were conducted from April through August 2018.

## Tribal Governments

MnDOT interviewed one tribal government for the Equity Pilot. During that conversation, MnDOT and the tribal government determined that there needed to be a different approach for equity conversations with tribal government that requires a longer time horizon. That approach is under development and will be included in a future report. The recommendations identify this as follow-up action. Input from the initial interview is included in the findings.

## Amish

Based on separate work MnDOT conducted in District 3, MnDOT also determined that a different approach for equity conversations is necessary in working with the Amish communities in District 2. That approach is under development and will be included a future report. The recommendations identify this as a follow-up action.

## Interview teams

All interview teams included at least two people. The interview teams visited the organizations in-person and asked questions from the interview guide.<sup>6</sup> These teams included MnDOT District 2 staff, MnDOT Central Office staff from Statewide Planning and Public Engagement offices, and consultants from MAD.

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to *Appendix C: Demographic Analysis* on page 55.

<sup>5</sup> Refer to *Appendix D: Key Communities* on page 60.

<sup>6</sup> Refer to *Appendix B: Project team and interviewers* on page 54.

In April 2018, MAD conducted an interview training session for participating MnDOT staff. Some staff participated in person, and others joined via Skype. The training goals included:

- Explaining the purpose and process of the interviews
- Providing qualitative research instructions, including note-taking guidelines
- Distributing project and interview materials and
- practicing interviewing

## Data collection and analysis

MnDOT and MAD developed a semi-structured interview guide,<sup>7</sup> meaning that interviewers followed the guide but could pursue other relevant topics as they arose.

Interview topics included:

- Communities' experience in accessing day-to-day activities such as work, school, medical needs, social and recreational activities, and purchasing goods and services
- Transportation facilitators and barriers to communities that allow people to attend to their needs
- Communities' safety concerns with regard to transportation
- Opportunities and challenges for the communities to engage with the government
- Organizations' perspectives on equity and how transportation can advance equity

MAD collected interview notes and conducted preliminary analysis to identify potential themes. MAD used the first stage of coding to test the themes from preliminary analysis and added codes as additional themes arose (organically).<sup>8</sup> MAD confirmed the accuracy of both preliminary and organic themes by monitoring how many times an interviewee made comments that fit in a theme and in how many interviews the topic came up. MAD then reviewed and recoded the data as necessary to ensure consistency among themes and in lower-level coding, which also emerged organically. MAD used these themes and their subcodes to develop findings.

## Implementation meeting

MnDOT Central Office staff and District 2 management team and staff met on October 22, 2018 to review findings from the Equity Pilot, develop ideas and suggestions for MnDOT that advance equity in transportation, and reflect on the pilot and identify lessons learned. MAD facilitated a multi-step process to achieve these objectives, starting by inviting attendees to rate MnDOT's level of influence over major categories of findings. For findings where ratings indicated that MnDOT had relatively high influence, meeting attendees generated ideas for solutions in small groups, and the large group identified which solutions should be high priorities for the next six to 12 months. For organizations that were suggested but not interviewed as part of the pilot, MAD

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to *Appendix E: Interview Guide* on page 66.

<sup>8</sup> MAD analysts coded data according to theme. If data could not reasonably fit a theme, they were coded as Miscellaneous or analysts created a new code to fit the new theme.

also provided an additional contacts<sup>9</sup> list to District 2 staff, who may use the information to conduct additional interviews or identify potential partnerships and future action.

# Results

## Response rate

MnDOT invited 37 organizations to participate in an interview and completed interviews with 31 organizations, for a response rate of 84 percent. Of the six organizations that were not interviewed, one was a subsidiary of an organization that was interviewed, two were unavailable during the span of interview time (and were added to the list of others to contact), two did not respond to interview requests, and one determined they were not a good fit for the pilot. No organization that was contacted for interviews declined based on level of interest or support for the project.

## Types of organizations

Table 1 illustrates the types of organizations interviewed. Most organizations interviewed were nonprofit organizations or local government entities.

**Table 1: Types of organizations interviewed**

Type of organization	Number interviewed
Nonprofit	11
Local government	10
Transit agency	4
State government	2
Private entity	2
Higher education	1
Tribal government <sup>10</sup>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>

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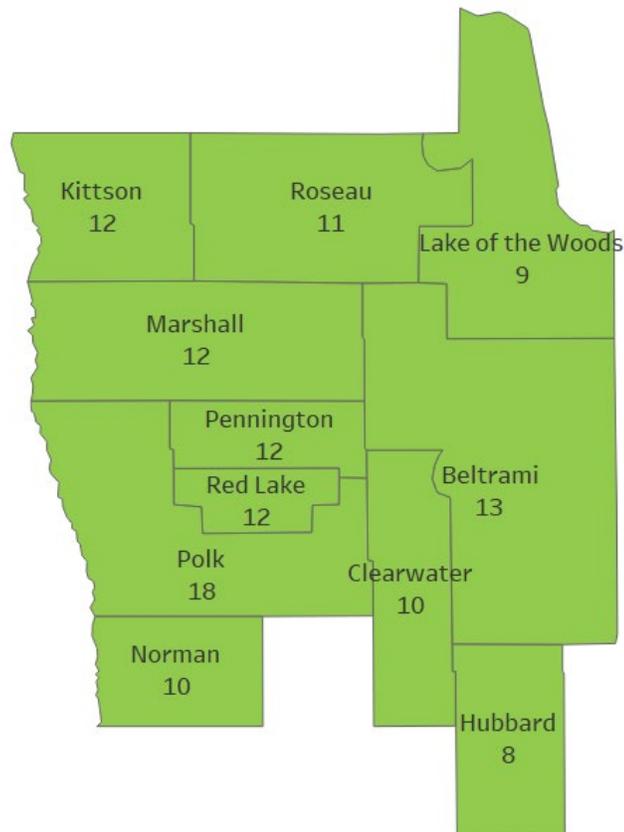
<sup>9</sup> Refer to *Appendix G: Additional Contacts* on page 69.

<sup>10</sup> Information from conversations between MnDOT and tribal governments are ongoing and will be included in a separate report.

## Counties represented

Figure 1 illustrates the counties in District 2 that were represented by organizations interviewed. Most organizations interviewed worked with or represented communities in several counties. The number of organizations that serve each county are relatively proportional to the county's population, with the most organizations serving Polk and Beltrami counties (18 and 13, respectively) and the fewest serving Lake of the Woods and Hubbard counties (nine and eight, respectively).

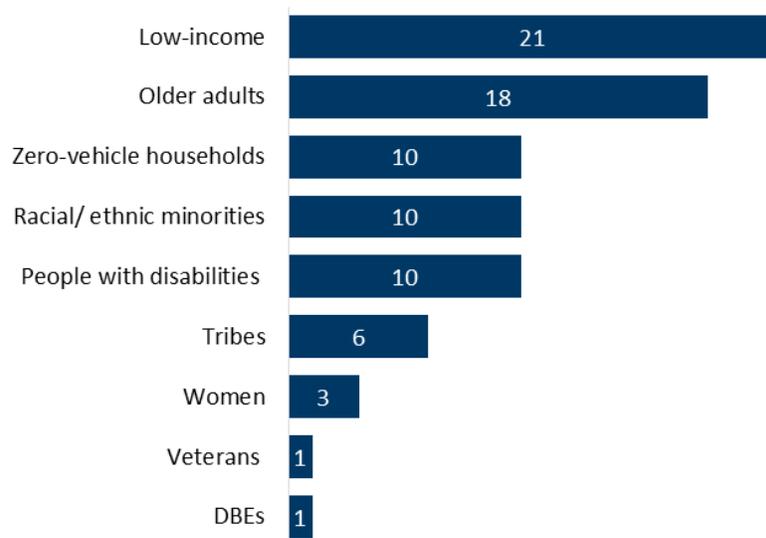
**Figure 1: Number of organizations interviewed by the counties they serve**



## Key communities represented

Figure 2 illustrates the key communities and the number of organizations that represented them. All the key communities identified at the onset of the pilot were represented by at least one organization that was interviewed. Many of the organizations worked with more than one key community, so the number of organizations in Figure 2 is a duplicate count. Organizations serving people with low incomes and older adults were highly represented, followed by people with disabilities, racial/ ethnic minorities, and zero-vehicle households. Veterans and women were underrepresented.

**Figure 2: Key communities served by organizations interviewed**



## Findings

Overall, interviewees said transportation is a key connector that provides people access to the activities they need and want to do in order to carry out their lives. The modes of transportation people choose often depends on characteristics such as distance the person needs to travel, how much time it will take, current weather and road conditions, and convenience. For some people, the choice of mode is limited by further aspects, such as affordability, accessibility, and ability to meet requirements (i.e., obtaining a driver's license). In the latter situations transportation can hinder people's ability to be healthy and engaged in society.

More specifically, conversations with organizations that work with or represent key communities yielded the following findings:

- Transportation interrelates with other characteristics of District 2
- Inadequate transportation options create barriers to the community
- Private vehicles are common
- Capacity of public transit does not meet demand
- More people are walking and biking, but infrastructure and safety upgrades are needed
- Other modes are available for use but still face limitations
- Land use and natural barriers also affect access
- Relationships are key to engagement
- People have many ideas to solve challenges with transportation equity
- Organizations provided varied definitions and examples of equity

The following sections explain each of these findings in detail.

## How to interpret the findings

Some discussions were with one individual associated with one organization, while other discussions included people from multiple organizations or people serving multiple roles. In order to be clear and accurate, analysts used the following terms:

- **Interviewee** refers to an individual
- **Organization** refers to a specific organization
- **Conversation** is a general term to include interviews where more than one organization was represented

Consultants use the terms below to describe how many interviewees, organizations, or conversations involved a topic:

- **A few** is generally two or three.
- **Several** is generally more than a few, but less than one fourth.
- **Some** is more than several, but not near a critical mass.
- **Many** is generally more than one third, but less than a majority.
- **Most** is more than half.

Quotes from the interview notes appear both in text and in call-out boxes to illustrate findings and enhance understanding of interviewee perspectives. All quotes are in italics.

## Transportation interrelates with other characteristics of District 2.

Nearly all interviewees discussed how transportation needs interrelated with other trends, challenges, and characteristics within the district. Most commonly, interviewees cited the following as either affecting how transportation works in District 2, being affected by transportation, or both:

- Large, rural district
- Many residents with low incomes
- Long, snowy winters
- Aging population
- Mental health and chemical dependency
- Housing shortage and other housing challenges
- People with differing needs and abilities
- Child care shortage
- Increasingly diverse languages and origins

Many of these characteristics add to existing transportation challenges, while some are also worsened by gaps in the transportation system.

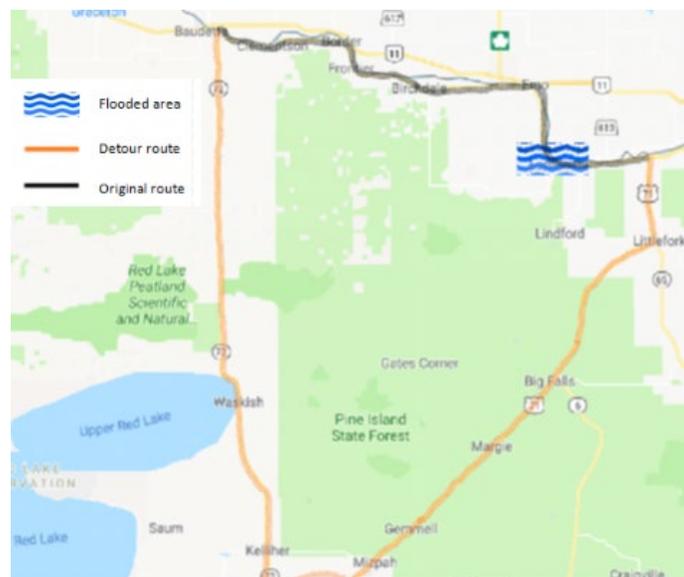
## Large, rural district

*In our rural communities we have to figure out a way. For too long we have not dealt with the reality of need. The question to ask is how we can improve services for our most vulnerable groups. I feel our region is trying to take that step, trying to handle that coordination.*

District 2 is geographically large, occupying 14,158 square miles, and is the second-largest district in terms of land area.<sup>11</sup> District 2 also has fewer residents per square mile<sup>12</sup> and fewer, smaller cities spread across farther distances than most districts in Minnesota. About two thirds of interview groups identified this characteristic as one that worsens transportation challenges. Most of these conversations were with nonprofits and other groups that served multiple counties across District 2.

One third of all conversations in this project included discussions about the rural nature of the district. About half of these conversations included comments that getting from one place to another can be difficult due to the distance and the time it takes to travel. One interviewee stated that most towns in their area—East Grand Forks, Thief River Falls, and Crookston—are about 30 miles apart. Distance limits peoples’ ability to walk or bike, leaving them only motorized options for transportation. Many of the most rural areas are not served by busses, so personal vehicles are the primary, and often the only, option for travel. To illustrate the distance challenges, one interviewee cited the 2014 flooding near Loman on Trunk Highway 11, which resulted in 126-mile detour that lasted three days.

**Figure 3: Map of 126 mile flood detour**



<sup>11</sup> Minnesota Department of Transportation. “District 2 Factsheet.” <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/information/factsheets/d2-fact-sheet.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> 11.5 people per square mile, according to the 2016 American Community Survey 5 year estimate.

Interviewees cited a variety of activities that people miss because they lack adequate transportation to travel long distances, including educational resources (especially for people living on American Indian reservations), health and legal services and appointments, testing locations for driver’s licenses, and state parks and other recreational areas.<sup>13</sup>

For those who use the Volunteer Driver Program,<sup>14</sup> costs are calculated by mile, which means that those in the most rural areas are the most costly to serve. About one third of conversations discussed the difficulties of serving a sparsely populated region. One transit agency explained that they try to reach more rural parts of their service area, but there are not enough riders to provide the frequency of services that some riders require. A few organizations said they attempt to serve the most people possible by being centrally located. One interviewee said they often bring water and other supplies to special events in case there is an emergency because there is nothing nearby. Another interviewee referred to the most remote areas that are often missed by services as “great opportunities to make change.”

## Many residents with low incomes

Among all eight MnDOT districts, District 2 has the second highest percentage of people living at or below the federal poverty level<sup>15</sup> (13 percent).<sup>16</sup> About two thirds of conversations involved the challenges people with low incomes experience. Primarily, many people cannot afford—or do not have access to credit—to buy, maintain, insure, and fuel their own vehicles,<sup>17</sup> which forces them to rely on other ways to get places. Depending on weather, area infrastructure, and distance to travel, they may choose non-motorized options. Other possible options are public transportation, where it is available, or asking their family or friends to help them. To illustrate, one interviewee stated, “They’re trying to get the most benefit they can around the availability of the transportation.”

*It always hits the people who are the poorest the most because they don’t have transportation. So they have to rely on [public] transportation system, so they miss court appointments, medical appointments, job interviews.*

## Long, snowy winters

Northern Minnesota is one of the coldest locations in the continental United States, with average winter temperatures between seven and 11 degrees Fahrenheit, depending on the location in the district. In International Falls, the closest area recorded, people can expect temperatures below freezing 198 days out of

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<sup>13</sup> Refer to *Inadequate transportation options create barriers to the community*. on page 22.

<sup>14</sup> Refer to *Volunteer Driver Program* on page 38.

<sup>15</sup> \$24,250 for a family of four in 2016, the same year the poverty rate was calculated. United States Department of Health and Human Services set the 2016 Federal Poverty Guidelines. <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>.

<sup>16</sup> Refer to *Appendix C: Demographic Analysis* on page 55.

<sup>17</sup> Refer to *Challenges and inequities in car ownership* on page 28.

the year and about 65 inches of snow, on average.<sup>18</sup> Over half of conversations addressed the fact that low temperatures and large amounts of snow create challenges for all types of transportation. As one interviewee stated, “it’s tough six months out of the year.”

*Most of the year it’s dangerous to use any other mode of transportation aside from [a] vehicle.*

Several interviewees mentioned that snow removal techniques in Bemidji cause numerous barriers. According to them, snowplows push the snow from the outside edges of the street toward the middle, where it sits until maintenance crews can remove the snow. This creates challenges for people trying to cross the street. This is most challenging when the area receives a lot of snow in a short amount of time. Interviewees recognized that snow removal crews are likely working as fast as they can to remove the snow.

Interviewees mentioned a few other areas where additional snow and ice removal would be helpful:

- Shaded areas (no specific area indicated)
- Highway 71 north of Bemidji
- Local roads near Eckles

Other modes are also affected by winter road conditions. A transit agency said unplowed driveways are difficult for busses. Another interviewee said that there are numerous unshoveled sidewalks in Bemidji, which are hazardous to pedestrians. Snow-covered or icy highways can be dangerous for bicyclists attempting to share the road with cars. Interviewees cited numerous “near misses” between cars and bicyclists.

**Figure 4: Man biking in the snow<sup>19</sup>**



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<sup>18</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Comparative Climatic Data. 2015. <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/ghcn/comparative-climatic-data>.

<sup>19</sup> Photo credit: Shane Stark. Obtained from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=snow+bike&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go#/media/File:Snow\\_Biker\\_\(5606212114\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?search=snow+bike&title=Special%3ASearch&go=Go#/media/File:Snow_Biker_(5606212114).jpg).

One interviewee described how winter road conditions can affect people who are homebound, such as older adults. They said it can sometimes take days to clear and salt or sand the road, and some people are not able to drive in winter conditions. This can lead to isolation as people are stuck in their homes for days with no access to goods, services, or socialization. For example, people who rely on Meals on Wheels services will eat frozen dinners until roads are once again navigable.

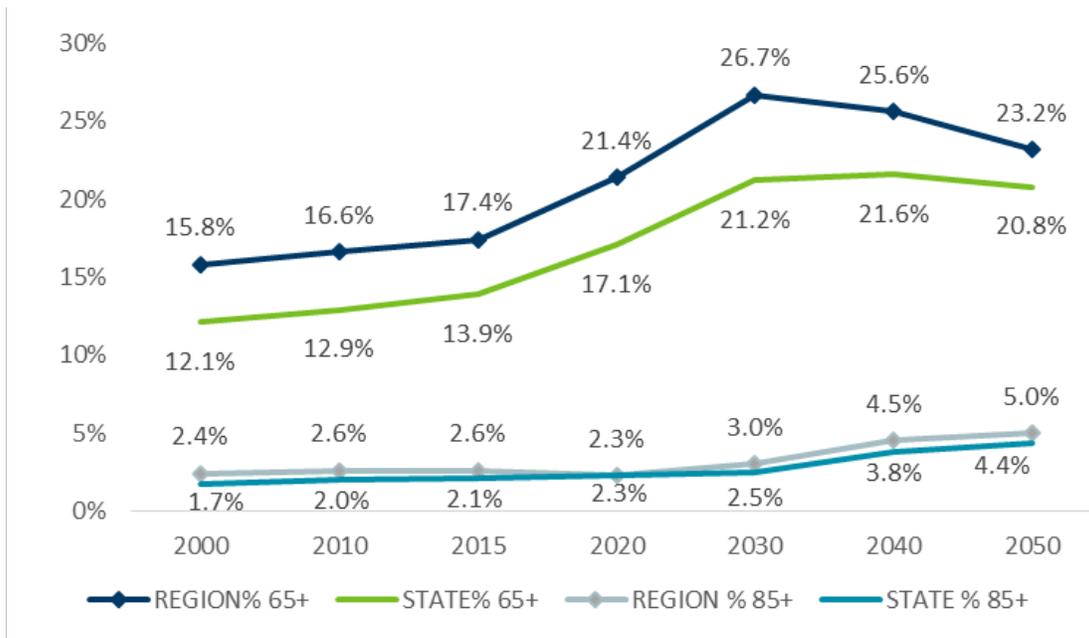
## Aging population

Nearly half of conversations included information about the district’s aging population. From 2010 to 2016, the percentage of people in District 2 over age 65 increased. This figure is currently 20 percent, compared to 15 percent in Minnesota as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

A few interviewees explained that as people age, they are often no longer able to drive or are not comfortable driving, particularly in challenging circumstances like in the dark or on icy roads. Interviewees generally spoke of the changes to the transportation system that would accommodate an aging population, such as:

- Allowing more time for pedestrians at crosswalks
- Making sidewalks safer during winter months
- Increasing capacity of public transportation

**Figure 5: Graph of the percent of the District 2 population age 65+ and 85+<sup>21</sup>**



<sup>20</sup> Refer to *Appendix C: Demographic Analysis* on page 55.

<sup>21</sup> Table created using data from Minnesota Department of Human Services and Minnesota Demographic Center. Aging Data Profiles. 2017. <https://mn.gov/dhs/partners-and-providers/news-initiatives-reports-workgroups/aging/aging-2030/data-profiles/>.

A few interviewees also discussed independent living options. Some areas in District 2, including Crookston and Kittson County, are experiencing a shortage of housing units for older adults. In other circumstances, older adults living outside of towns or cities may be reluctant to move to town. One interviewee emphasized the need to keep rural residents in their communities.

Some older adults rely on the Volunteer Driver Program<sup>22</sup> for medical appointments and, where available, other errands such as groceries.

## Mental health and chemical dependency

About one third of conversations involved discussion about mental health and substance use, particularly opioid use. Admission rates to psychiatric facilities in Northwest Minnesota remained constant from 2000 to 2015 and are slightly lower than Minnesota as a whole.<sup>23</sup> In 2016, there were 395 opioid overdose deaths and 2,074 nonfatal overdoses in Minnesota overall, both increases from previous years.<sup>24</sup> Of the 395 overdose deaths, nine (2.2 percent) occurred in District 2.<sup>25</sup> The Minnesota Department of Health reported that American Indians (the largest nonwhite racial group in District 2) were nearly six times as likely to die of a drug overdose, compared to white Minnesotans.<sup>26</sup>

While conversations regarding mental health and substance abuse varied, each anecdote contributed to the theme that serving people with mental illness or chemical dependency is very difficult, and transportation is a factor that influences peoples' ability to access treatment and the supports they need in recovery. Several conversations spoke to the prevalence of mental illness, chemical dependency, and related conditions, including autism spectrum disorder in the region, and their transportation challenges that result from a lack of providers and treatment centers for the various conditions. Below are examples of such anecdotes:

- One interviewee stated that a child can be removed from a home if the parent tests positive for drug use. When the parent is unable to access treatment, the child can remain in foster care, which is costly to the system. The interviewee added that one Volunteer Driver Program is working to coordinate visits for parents whose children have been placed outside the home.
- Another interviewee discussed how some employers are trying to work with people with mental illness, even offering to transport them to work. Another said CPR trainings now include Narcan training.
- Several organizations that provide transportation services also talked about the distance they travel for people with mental illness or chemical dependency. Children often go to Duluth (150 miles from Bemidji) or the Twin Cities metropolitan area (over 200 miles from Bemidji) for treatment; adults will go to Fargo (130 miles from Bemidji) or Duluth.

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<sup>22</sup> Refer to *Volunteer Driver Program* on page 37.

<sup>23</sup> Minnesota Compass. "Mental Health Admissions." Accessed November 2, 2018. <https://www.mncompass.org/health/mental-health-admissions#4-4396-g>

<sup>24</sup> Minnesota Department of Health. "Opioid Dashboard." Accessed November 2, 2018. <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/healthimprovement/opioid-dashboard/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> Minnesota Department of Health. "Drug overdose deaths among Minnesota residents, 2000- 2016." 2016. Accessed November 2, 2018. [http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/healthimprovement/content/documents-opioid/2016DrugOverdoseDeathReport\\_Final.pdf](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/healthimprovement/content/documents-opioid/2016DrugOverdoseDeathReport_Final.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Minnesota Department of Health Opioid Dashboard.

- One interviewee said it is very challenging to treat substance abuse if a person does not have housing, and that the same can be said for transportation. Challenges compound for people with chemical dependency because their circumstances or actions may prohibit them from having a driver's license. A transit agency said they had to stop providing transportation to methadone clinics due to safety concerns for the riders.
- One interviewee said serving people with mental illness accounted for about one third of the 55,000 miles of transportation their organization provided.

Several interviewees also expressed concern that not having transportation, especially in rural areas, can lead to social isolation for people, particularly older adults. Isolation and lack of social interaction can affect peoples' mental health. Winter storms that further hinder travel increase interviewees' concerns for social isolation.<sup>27</sup>

## Housing shortage and other housing challenges

Conversations commonly referred to a shortage of housing, referring to housing people can afford, home ownership, and specific populations for whom obtaining housing is a challenge. According to Census data from 2012 to 2016, 25 percent of all households in Northwest Minnesota were considered "cost burdened," meaning over 30 percent of the household budget was spent on housing.<sup>28</sup> For renters, the percentage of cost burdened households is over 40 percent.<sup>29,30</sup> Both figures are higher for older adults, especially in Polk and Lake of the Woods Counties.<sup>31</sup> In 2015, the home ownership rates among white households (78 percent) was 25 percentage points higher than households of color (53 percent).<sup>32</sup> Half of all renter households in Northwest Minnesota are in Beltrami and Polk Counties.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, more than one third of owner-occupied homes and one third of all rental units were built prior to 1960.<sup>34</sup>

Over one fourth of conversations referred to the current housing shortage as a challenge. One interviewee explained that housing and transportation are interconnected, using an example of residents living in the outer areas of a city who need to get to the grocery store in the city. Another interviewee said that housing and transportation costs combined might account for 40 percent of the household budget in East Grand Forks.

A few organizations explained that people who are disadvantaged, such as older adults, people who have low incomes, people with disabilities, people with mental illness or chemical dependency, American Indians, and veterans experience different challenges in relation to housing and transportation. One interviewee said it is difficult to treat people with chemical dependency if they do not have housing. Another interviewee described

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<sup>27</sup> Refer to *Large, rural district* on page 14.

<sup>28</sup> Minnesota Compass. Custom Geographic Profile for District 2 Counties and Mahnommen County. Accessed November 2, 2018.

[https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom/customprofile?report\\_id=2ce30e43b3a6d63773d6d4383e696362](https://www.mncompass.org/profiles/custom/customprofile?report_id=2ce30e43b3a6d63773d6d4383e696362)

<sup>29</sup> Census data claims 45 percent. US Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.

<sup>30</sup> The State of the State says 42 percent. Minnesota Housing Finance Agency. State of the State Housing Report. 2017. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6RPwPgu6BjTT2VEVDk5TjzWTQ/view>

<sup>31</sup> State of the State Housing Report.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

housing as a public health challenge because people from other cultures do not always understand how housing works in the United States, and language barriers can limit their ability to understand and carry out tasks such as making appointments or signing paperwork. The interviewee elaborated that because the person with the strongest English skills typically works outside the home, these tasks often fall to the person that stays in the home whose English skills may be limited.

A few interviewees specifically mentioned a shortage in senior housing.

## People with differing needs and abilities

District 2 has the second highest disability rate (12.3 percent) in the state.<sup>35</sup> About one fourth of conversations mentioned that transportation is a challenge for people with disabilities. For example, one interviewee described the perspective of some people they have worked with by saying, “Access is more important than safety. I don’t care if it’s safe, just take me there.” The interviewee told a story about a man who had his friends strap him to the back of a pick-up truck to attend an event; he did not want to miss it because he could not find transportation.

***People with disabilities have the most unique challenges.***

While one interviewee said their city is working to improve compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, a few others identified large gaps. One interviewee said they work with their clients to ensure they are treated fairly in terms of ADA requirements, while another noted there does not seem to be enough emphasis on ADA compliance. For example, one interviewee said not all resurfacing projects have included curb cuts, and sidewalk detours are not always available during construction. The same interviewee also mentioned that larger cities and major routes have been doing better, particularly with signals and crossings.

Other perceived challenges interviewees identified included:

- Unshoveled sidewalks and curb cuts are not accessible
- One city is piling snow in wheelchair accessible parking
- Some busses do not have functioning lifts
- Pavers are not very wheelchair-friendly
- Travelling outside the district is difficult to coordinate and can be expensive
- Travelling during nights and weekends is difficult in some areas and impossible in others due to lack of transit services

One interviewee in the northern part of the district also mentioned that they are experiencing a shortage of group homes serving people with disabilities.

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<sup>35</sup> Refer to *Appendix C: Demographic Analysis* on page 55.

## Child care shortage

*People didn't have cars, shoes, daycare, so that was a barrier for them to show up for work every day.*

Minnesota's child care shortage is well-documented. *A quiet crisis: Minnesota's child care shortage* illustrates the shortage by region.<sup>36</sup> In Northwest Minnesota, child care licensing capacity would need to grow by 37 percent to meet demand.<sup>37,38</sup> The article also notes that, "In rural areas it's not unheard of for a parent to drive upwards of 40 miles round trip, from home to another community to drop their child off with a provider, then to another community for work."<sup>39</sup> Those without cars would be very limited in their ability to access child care.

About one fourth of conversations included various challenges related to the lack of child care. In Roseau County, all of the day care options are home day care providers, which often have shorter operating hours than day care centers. People sometimes need to work more than one job to pay for daycare. Working parents may not be able to access employer-sponsored transportation because it does not include stops for daycare. Those without regular child care also may not be able to access child care for medical appointments.

## Increasingly diverse languages and origins

As of 2016, about two percent of people living in District 2 were born outside the United States, nearly twice as many as in 2000.<sup>40</sup> Table 2 illustrates their areas of origin.

**Table 2: Area of origin for newcomers to District 2<sup>41</sup>**

Area of origin	Percent of newcomers to District 2
Asia	33.8
Latin America (includes Mexico)	22.2
Europe	16.9
Other North America (Canada)	16.9
Africa	8.8

<sup>36</sup> Center for Rural Policy and Development. "A Quiet Crisis: Minnesota's Child Care Shortage." September 2016. <https://www.ruralmn.org/a-quiet-crisis-minnesotas-child-care-shortage/>

<sup>37</sup> Figure includes Mahnomen County, which has otherwise been excluded from the study.

<sup>38</sup> A Quiet Crisis: Minnesota's Child Care Shortage.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Refer to *Appendix C: Demographic Analysis* on page 55.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

About 1.3 percent of the District 2 population speaks English less than very well.<sup>42</sup> One fifth of conversations talked about newcomers or people with limited English proficiency. Several organizations cited challenges providing services to people with limited English proficiency. One organization recognized the need to speak with people in person and importance of having professionals and key leaders that “represent and understand those populations.” Another explained that the availability of bilingual services is lacking.

Several organizations also cited cultural challenges associated with day-to-day activities. One organization identified challenges such as establishing residency, integrating into community, and receiving social or health services as activities that tend to be difficult for newcomers. Another organization explained that linguistic and literacy differences among cultures regarding paperwork can impede a household’s ability to conduct normal activities.

*Many refugees have never ridden—much less driven—in a car when they come over.*

Regarding transportation, organizations said newcomers often rely on public transportation. When public transportation is unavailable, they look to other modes, such as taxis, biking, or walking. Taxi fares can add up quickly. People in Bemidji often walk over a mile in each direction to get groceries. Others share rides with strangers through rideshare programs or apps. Organizations that cited challenges say they try to provide assistance to newcomers by organizing shuttles, donating bikes, and providing training to help them get a driver’s license.

## **Inadequate transportation options create barriers to the community.**

Nearly all interviewees underscored how inadequate transportation creates barriers in accessing basic needs and necessary services. Most commonly, interviewees highlighted the following as ways people are impacted by the availability of transportation options:

- Medical care
- Employment
- Buying goods and accessing personal care
- Accessing social and human services
- Accessing social and recreational activities
- Education
- Religious activity

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<sup>42</sup> Refer to Appendix C: Demographic Analysis on page 55.

## Medical care

Nearly one third of conversations discussed the limited transportation options available for community members to access medical services. Interviewees highlighted challenges for those who do not live in town, older adults, veterans, people who need chemical dependency treatment, people with low incomes and newcomers to the region, including immigrants, international students, and out-of-town students. A few interviewees noted that the sparse population and vast distances between medical facilities contributes to a large reliance on transportation.

Several conversations identified specific types of medical treatment that were particularly difficult to access. They noted that dental care, specialty care (such as dialysis treatment and chemical dependency treatment), and mental health services often prove challenging for people to access because of lack of facilities in the region.

In Lake of the Woods County, some treatments may require travel to Bemidji or Roseau (100 miles away), or outpatient treatment center for chemical dependency (60 miles away). Another interviewee said limited mental health services in the northern portion of the district means people often “rely on law enforcement to take them to North Dakota who [sic] has better mental health than Minnesota.” The interviewee also noted that children with mental health needs have to be taken to Duluth or the Twin Cities for services, which results in children staying in the emergency room for treatment or the county paying for transportation. Another interviewee mentioned that veterans who go to Veterans Affairs Hospitals have a difficult time finding transportation.

***Traveling to doctor appointments is a whole day affair. Many people often have to rely on family, friends and neighbors who can take off of work or are available to drive them to the hospital.***

A few interviewees said that people often rely on family, friends, neighbors, and social services to access these services. One interviewee noted that, “we have situations where social workers are doing 5:30 am kidney transport runs for clients on dialysis.” A few interviewees identified Volunteer Driver Program<sup>43</sup> or transit as services that can help with transportation for medical purposes, but others also discussed transportation provided by medical facilities or the burden of transportation that falls on these facilities. An interviewee explained that finding transportation can take hours for medical patients, which increases the cost of their visit. Medical facilities have even resorted to using the ambulance to take people home, according to one interviewee.

Several conversations said limited schedules, needing to call ahead, and needing to allot a full day to doctor’s appointments make public transit difficult to use. Transit agencies said they do not have the capabilities to serve people who need to visit the doctor multiple times per week, especially people in outlying or smaller communities. Another interviewee noted that even where medical facilities are accessible through transit, lack of child care means parents must take children to their own medical appointments.

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<sup>43</sup> Refer to *Volunteer Driver Program* on page 37.

## Employment

*We have people who would like to work, but the economic burden of owning a vehicle is a lot.*

Just over half of the conversations discussed barriers to employment that people face because they do not have feasible transportation options. Most commonly, interviewees said not owning a personal vehicle can hinder people's access to employment. While transit and employer-provided transportation can help where it exists, interviewees stressed the challenges for people who work outside normal business hours. "Transportation to jobs [is a challenge], specifically shift work being outside bounds of the bus service, and location of the businesses is not ideal for transit," stated one interviewee. Another interviewee noted limited tribal transit system schedule and services, which creates challenges for American Indians to commute from the reservations to jobs in the city.

Several interviewees highlighted the limited transit schedule and inability to combine multiple stops, such as daycare or groceries, often limits peoples' ability to rely solely on transit for work. As one interviewee said regarding employer-provided transportation, "That system is set up to provide rides to work, but really it only answers the need to get employees to the business. However, it doesn't address the human needs of those employees, like daycare." Other interviewees discussed how transit schedules limit the ability of those who do late shifts, evening shifts, and weekend shifts from using it to go to and from work.<sup>44</sup>

Limited transportation options can prevent people from moving forward from challenging life circumstances. One interviewee shared a story of such an instance:

*A gentleman was incarcerated, got out with nothing. We diligently worked with this gentlemen, got him into an apartment, got a license, but we're missing that last piece— a car. He's cleaning the floors at the supermarket that is within walking distance. We can't go much further. But he doesn't have transportation to get further up. So transportation is preventing him from advancing or getting a better job.*

## Buying goods and accessing personal care

*It is easy to take for granted something as simple as going to the grocery store, but that can be a difficult situation for some people.*

About half of the conversations discussed how transportation impacts people's ability to buy goods and access personal care such as shopping at Target and Wal-Mart, going to the barber, and buying groceries. Most commonly, interviewees cited that older adults, low-income households, students, and newcomers to the region such as immigrants, international students, and out-of-town students were the most impacted.

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<sup>44</sup> For more details on transit schedules, refer to *Capacity of public transit does not meet demand* on page 30.

Interviewees discussed the long distances needed to travel to obtain personal goods, particularly food. As one interviewee noted, “There are times where I’ll drive 60 to 70 miles to buy groceries.” Another interviewee said, “Food is expensive up here so people leave the county to leverage their SNAP benefits.” Access to food is further limited by winter road conditions, which prevent people from traveling to access fresh food.

A few interviewees identified challenges related to using transit, such as the limited schedule and limits on how many bags buses allow passengers to carry. The limited schedule of transit services often results in people waiting long hours to be dropped off and picked up and hinders peoples’ ability to run multiple errands per trip. One interviewee stated:

*The people that need transit the most may not be community based. And when we think of transit we often just think of the simple trips—the transportation needs of someone to get to an appointment. We don’t often think of transit in terms of a multiple-stop trip. Someone that needs to get to an appointment, and the grocery store, and maybe stop at the barber.*

One interviewee noted that Medicaid rules governing covered transit services often prevent stops at places to purchase goods.

Interviewees also shared anecdotes about newcomers such as immigrants or international students walking long distances through snow and ice carrying bags due limited transit options. As an interviewee in one conversation said:

*We’ve learned that they [immigrants/newcomers] have limited opportunities for even the simplest tasks like getting groceries. The bus would only come twice a day, so they don’t have ways to do these things. They aren’t necessarily adept at asking for assistance. That is why you will see some mothers pushing carts through the snow.*

## Accessing social and human services

A few interviewees discussed the impact a lack of feasible transportation options has in accessing social and human services, such as attending court, probation hearings, and accessing social assistance programs. These conversations often highlighted the resources required by county social services to coordinate transportation services so that clients or patients can access these services. A few mentioned organization staff or social workers even providing transportation to clients so they can access services.

One organization explained the following challenges with providing food assistance to low-income families:

- Long waits between drop-off and pick-up for buses in the Bemidji area
- Bus services charge extra for transporting packages<sup>45</sup>
- Locations not accessible for pedestrians and bikers

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<sup>45</sup> For more detail on transit schedules, refer to *Capacity of public transit does not meet demand* on page 30.

***We have almost all services available, [the] challenge is that some services have barriers that limit ease to access, particularly for those who do not have access to a vehicle.***

Another organization highlighted access issues and safety concerns for victims of sexual or physical violence with regard to using public transit or other modes of transportation, including biking or walking, to access social services. As they noted, “[Transit service] runs on a schedule with specific time or day to various communities. This does not help when someone is in crisis and needs transportation immediately.” The organization continued by saying, “We don’t recommend our clients use these modes [biking or walking] because it’s difficult to travel with several kids by bike, and walking may not be safe when they are trying to be discrete about where they are going.”

Several conversations discussed how lack of transportation to these services further complicates people’s lives. Participants described situations where criminal cases escalated unnecessarily or where parents were prevented from seeing children in child protection services. As one interviewee stated, “They [those on probation] may be required to meet with a probation officer during a scheduled time. If they are too poor for reliable transportation they miss probation meetings and then their criminal case escalates.”

## **Accessing social and recreational activities**

About a third of the conversations centered on how lack of feasible transportation options creates barriers for the community in accessing social and recreational activities, such as going to the movies, visiting a state park (which are located several miles out of town), or attending after-school activities. This is often more difficult for low-income families, older adults, people with disabilities, school-aged children, and newcomers to the region including out-of-town students, international students, and immigrants.

***Other activities may be community events like attending a play or go to the library. Or other evening activities. They just have to wait until regular business hours if they rely on city transit.***

A few interviewees noted that, depending on the mode available and the location of the schools, students are unable to participate in after-school activities, such as Friday night sports, including home games. This is particularly significant for those families who do not own vehicles or who do not have access to public transit. As one interviewee noted, “For Head Start families, that [transportation] is a great cost...transportation cost is higher than fee to get into it [recreational activities].”

Interviewees often connected the lack of transportation options for social activities to issues of social isolation, specifically for older adults and people with disabilities. As one interviewee said, “Many communities offer a community meal—often aimed at the elderly community. It’s such an important service for them because if they can’t make it, it can be isolating and can also prevent them from getting a meal.” This is particularly difficult for

people with disabilities, because they often encounter additional accessibility challenges.<sup>46</sup> One interviewee said it is “really difficult to recreate; parks aren’t accessible, resorts aren’t accessible, fishing piers aren’t accessible; transportation is so difficult in general that how to recreate is the furthest thing from mind.”

A few conversations also highlighted that recreational opportunities are often difficult to attend for newcomers to the region, including immigrants, out of town students, and international students because those activities are often in the evening and transit is not available at that time.

## Education

About one third of the conversations discussed how transportation intersects with educational opportunities for people in District 2. Interviewees specifically identified the challenges lack of transportation create for American Indians, low-income families, school aged-children, and college students— including international students, in accessing educational opportunities.

*We’ve heard from people that had to quit a class because they just couldn’t find reliable transportation.*

One conversation discussed the transportation challenges for American Indian students to access educational opportunities in the Bemidji area despite its proximity to Leech Lake, Red Lake, and White Earth reservations—the three largest in Minnesota. The interviewees noted the distances between the campus and the reservations are often great with limited transit available. They also stated that for those American Indian families that live in the city, there is often a lack of transit options to their school locations. As one interviewee noted:

*Even in town lots of Native families who go with the charter schools—Bemidji busses go north but not to Voyageurs. [I] see a lot of students on the shoulder biking or walking to Voyageurs because parents are at work.*

Another interviewee said that families have safety concerns and do not feel comfortable allowing children to bike to school because bikes must share the road with large vehicles.

A few conversations described challenges associated with schools or educational institutions providing transportation. For example, Head Start provides bussing for students and attempts to locate its schools centrally to reduce transportation burden and cost, but it is still challenging for families to travel the distance needed to drop off children at these locations. Another interviewee said funding options to transport low-income students would be helpful.

One interviewee also noted how a lack of broadband connectivity in the region intersects with a greater need for transportation opportunities for educational purposes. According to the interviewee, “The area is pretty deficient in a broadband sense, you don’t get educational opportunities because there is no broadband, and you rely on transportation for educational purposes.”

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<sup>46</sup> Refer to *People with differing needs and abilities* on page 20.

## Religious activity

*On weekends, our elderly people can't get to church and the grocery store at times. When it's 40 below they can't take the bus, so there's a lot of [asking for rides].*

A few interviewees discussed how lack of feasible transportation options creates barriers for the community in accessing religious activities. Interviewees often noted that people with disabilities or older adults who do not have access to transportation are unable to participate in religious activities (i.e., go to church). Another interviewee noted the importance of access to religious activities on a regular basis during the week, especially for older adults. A few interviewees mentioned that in some cases faith-based organizations pay to provide transportation but noted that such services are unsustainable and expensive to operate.

## Private vehicles are common but not feasible for everyone

*If you're going to live up here you need a car or you'll be homebound.*

According to two-thirds of conversations, private vehicles are the most commonly used and most critical mode of transportation. Interviewees gave several reasons for the widespread use of private vehicles. First, private vehicles allow people to travel long distances, which is common in District 2,<sup>47</sup> safely. A few interviewees stated that it is common to travel two hours for many purposes. One person said, "Every time I get in my car, I'm travelling at least an hour." Another said, "I drive 45 minutes to work, which is normal."

Several interviewees also commented that a personal vehicle allows people to do what they need to do and go where they need to go, which other transportation modes do not allow. As one interviewee stated, "You couldn't bring timber home on a bike or bus." Personal vehicles allow people more options to live and work where they choose. Compared to transit, one interviewee said, people with cars do not need to prioritize which stops or activities are most important to them.

While they noted that personal vehicles are the most common or critical mode used in District 2, several interviewees mentioned the need for other options.

## Challenges and inequities in car ownership.

Nearly all conversations referred to challenges and inequities associated with car ownership. Most interviewees talked about challenges associated with getting a driver's license and the ability to afford a vehicle. They also cited challenges regarding safety and sharing vehicles.

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<sup>47</sup> Refer to *Large, rural district* on page 14.

*If you don't have a car you're pretty much out of luck and out of commission.*

### **Barriers to obtaining a driver's license**

Interviewees cited several barriers to getting a driver's license, which include poverty, citizenship status, English proficiency, race, and previous criminal activity.

Several interviewees noted that language barriers make it more difficult for people who are new to the United States (especially refugees) or in the United States temporarily (typically students) to pass the knowledge and skills tests and provide the documentation required to get a driver's license. A few interviewees said that newcomers, especially refugees, are often unfamiliar with driving when they come to the United States.

A few interviewees said that American Indians living on reservations experience challenges obtaining a driver's license. Licensing centers are not nearby, and people cannot lawfully drive to the centers without a license.

For those whose license has been revoked, transportation can become very complex, according to several interviewees. The following process description is a paraphrased combination of input from those interviewees:

*It is up to the individual to figure out how to get to court appointments. This is especially difficult for people that do not have a driver's license. If they cannot get to court, the court issues a warrant for their arrest. They also need to get to work, or they could lose their job. To prevent the warrant, some people choose to drive themselves to court, regardless of not having a driver's license. If the person is caught driving, they could get a ticket for driving without a license or driving after revocation. These situations become more complicated when people are trying to access treatment for drug or alcohol charges or visiting their child who is in foster care.*

### **Costs of owning and driving a car**

For people with low incomes, owning and driving a car can be very expensive. Even if a person can purchase a car, they may not be able to afford maintenance, insurance, and fuel.

About one third of conversations involved comments that people who cannot afford personal vehicles often purchase unreliable, poorly-maintained vehicles. Then, they risk their vehicle breaking down and being stranded or unable to travel, and, as many interviewees stated, they cannot afford repairs to the vehicle. Minor equipment violations can lead to a police encounter, which in some cases could escalate to other charges. One interviewee referred to this as "another example of cases being escalated simply because they are too poor."

In addition to repairs, interviewees said the cost of fuel and insurance can make owning a car unaffordable. As one interviewee said, "Car insurance is a big deal up here, a lot of the folks have high premiums, based on marital status, gender, credit score, people in limited or fixed income, and they have higher premiums because they don't have the credit." Another interviewee cited instances where people had let their insurance lapse to pay for gas. Yet another interviewee said they have observed many vehicles along the road that had run out of gas.

*Many people rely on cars to get around, so if [people] can afford a car often times they can't afford the maintenance and upkeep of a car, which makes the cars they drive hazardous and unsafe, which prevents them from driving and accessing certain services.*

A few interviewees discussed households that share one car. Sharing a car can also be challenging for two or more adults who either work or run errands for the household. “And then if that car breaks down,” one interviewee said, “that’s 6 working people who are out of a car.”

## Help available for people who do not have their own vehicles

About one fifth of conversations discussed ways organizations try to help people purchase a vehicle, obtain a driver’s license, or maintain their vehicle. A few other organizations work with American Indians or refugees to obtain their driver’s license. A few others provide gas vouchers and loans or other funding for emergency car repair. One interviewee said they provide a mobile health unit to provide health access and minimize the need for people to travel.

## Rides with friends and family

For those that do not drive or do not have their own vehicles, nearly half of conversations said they ask for rides from others who have vehicles—often friends, neighbors, community members, or family.

*Because we are a helping community people help one another with rides. If I see someone in the community and if it's someone we serve, I'll give them a ride; especially if it's cold.*

## Capacity of public transit does not meet demand.

Nearly all the conversations discussed transit options available in the region including transit services within and between cities. Transit services available in District 2 include the following:

- Arrowhead Transit – serving International Falls in Koochiching County
- East Grand Forks Transit – serving East Grand Forks in Polk County
- Fosston Transit – serving City of Fosston in Polk County
- Paul Bunyan Transit – serving the counties of Beltrami, Lake of the Woods, and Roseau
- Tri- Valley Heartland Express – serving the counties of Clearwater, Kittson, Mahnomen, Marshall, Norman, Pennington, Polk, and Red Lake
- Jefferson Lines and Greyhound – intercity bus travel with stops in Bemidji, Bagley, Fosston, and Crookston

Transit services within cities operate within a specified service area from a central location. For example, Paul Bunyan Transit operates within a 10-mile radius of the City Hall in Bemidji, while in Roseau and Warroad, the service area is within a 4-mile radius of the center of the communities.<sup>48</sup>

## Challenges meeting demand

Several conversations with transit agencies identified challenges to meeting communities' needs. These conversations highlighted the following challenges in meeting the demand for transit:

- Availability of funding to expand services
- Lack of bus drivers
- Land use planning<sup>49</sup> and the need to set up areas to provide transit services
- The need to address the stigma associated with using transit
- Riders' preference for amenities on buses, such as WiFi
- The need to increase ridership
- Safety concerns around bus shelters

*[There are] many issues with public transit – [the] bus comes, people aren't ready, and transit won't stop there again. [People] couldn't take the bus to drop kids off and get back on the bus [and] can't take groceries on the bus.*

## Barrier to accessing transit

Nearly all of the conversations discussing transit options referred to the challenges with relying on transit services, including limited availability, hours of service, costs, and others.

### Availability of service

Several interviewees noted that even where transit is available, locations served are limited. This includes specific locations within the cities, as well as key destinations in other cities. As one interviewee noted, "some transit services have limitations; [you] can get [a] trip to [a] medical appointment but not also the grocery store." Another interviewee observed that in some parts of the region, transit services were expanding to provide services for contract riders for employment, but that leaves fewer buses available for dial-a-ride services for other riders. A few interviewees mentioned that some transit services do not provide assistance to people who need help getting on and off the bus, which limits transit services for older adults and people with disabilities. One interviewee explained, "My mother in law is 84 and frail and bus drivers can't touch her. So [she] has to rely on other means – easier to get in a taxi than on a bus, and taxi drivers will help. But they're

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<sup>48</sup> Paul Bunyan Transit. "Services." Accessed November 7, 2018. <http://www.paulbunyantransit.com/services/>. <sup>49</sup> Refer to *Land use and natural barriers also affect access.* on page 38.

expensive.” Another interviewee noted that some buses do not have lifts to assist passengers, which limits accessibility for people with disabilities.

***Bus service is not provided everywhere. Buses won't pick up in certain locations due to personal safety reasons or too many no shows.***

In the East Grand Forks area, the transit provider has dial-a-ride services for people with disabilities in addition to the fixed-route system. Regular, fixed route systems can be difficult for people with disabilities to access, especially in the winter, because people still need to get to the bus stop. Dial-a-ride services meet people at their location and are, therefore, necessary or preferred by some people with disabilities. The existence of two transit options (fixed route and dial-a-ride), according to one interviewee, may limit integration for people with disabilities.

### **Hours of service**

Nearly one third of conversations identified the limited hours of transit services as a major barrier. Most of them said that where transit is available, the hours are limited to weekdays from early morning to early evening. Some transit services in larger cities—such as Bemidji, Crookston, East Grand Forks, and Thief River Falls—operate a limited schedule on weekends, but weekend transit services were not available in other parts of the region. Interviewees noted that the limited hours often create barriers for the community in accessing activities, including employment, buying goods, medical services, and recreational activities, especially when they fall outside service hours.<sup>50</sup>

***Monday through Friday, when the bus is running, it's easy to carry out day-to-day [activities] if you rely on public transportation. Weekends are much harder.***

### **Dial-a-ride operations**

The majority of transit services available in cities in District 2 are dial-a-ride services.<sup>51</sup> Many conversations discussed dial-a-ride operations and the challenges associated with not having a fixed route. Most often interviewees explained that dial-a-ride is inflexible compared to fixed routes because riders are expected to adhere to the schedule they created with the transit agency, which does not allow the driver to modify the route as other priorities arise. A few interviewees identified additional challenges with dial-a-ride, including long wait times for pick-up, buses not waiting for people, or not being able to reschedule if they miss a scheduled pick-up

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<sup>50</sup> For more details on barriers, refer to *Inadequate transportation options create barriers to the community*. on page 22.

<sup>51</sup> City Area Transit services in Grand Forks operates a fixed schedule route with limited hours of service in East Grand Forks. City Area Transit also operates a dial-a-ride service for people with disabilities.

time. A few interviewees also mentioned that transit services can refuse services for people who have missed a scheduled pick-up.

***[They] often need trips instantly, so dial-a-ride doesn't work—or people don't or can't always plan ahead.***

### **Cost of transit**

A few conversations discussed the cost of transit as a barrier for community members in accessing transit services. One interviewee noted that transit costs continue to increase, which disproportionately affects people on fixed incomes, including people with disabilities. Several interviewees discussed ways organizations try to make transit more affordable, such as a University of North Dakota subsidy for transit passes in Grand Forks/ East Grand Forks area, and public and private health plan coverage for transit services. Some transit providers offer special passes, including summer passes for children and families and discounted passes for older adults. However, one interviewee noted that even where health plans will cover transit, they may restrict coverage to transportation for medical purposes.

***We need a dedicated transit route system for the Bemidji area. Make it more reliable, more availability, and less costly.***

### **Other issues**

Interviewees also discussed other issues that affect the use of transit services, including:

- Rules against carrying items on the bus;
- The inability to use transit for travel requiring multiple stops (i.e., drop children off at daycare, or stop at grocery store);
- Road conditions;
- Winter weather; and
- The stigma of riding transit.

A few interviewees said winter and snow removal issues create barriers for people riding transit. Passengers sometimes have to climb over snowbanks at bus stops to get on the bus. Some buses will not drive on gravel roads, according to one interviewee. A few interviewees described negative public perception of using transit, with one interviewee saying, "There is a huge stigma associated with riding public transportation. They say they aren't elderly, disabled, low-income, they don't want to be associated with those groups."

### **Suggestions for improvement**

Nearly two thirds of conversations included suggestions for improving transit services infrastructure in the region. Most of these conversations highlighted the need for expanded coverage and hours of service (including

weekends) in Crookston and Bemidji. Many conversations also referred to existing services in the Bemidji area and discussed the need for fixed route services in Bemidji. One interviewee noted, “Call for service ride [dial-a-ride] is not working—see a lot of empty buses around. If we had a fixed route people would know when the bus would be there, it would be more predictable.” Other recommendations include:

- Remove limits on, or costs associated with, carrying packages on buses;
- Establish a designated, fixed route system to widely-used destinations, such as shopping centers, malls, colleges, and clinics;
- Market bus services and increase public awareness to reduce the stigma associated with transit use;
- Expand long-distance route services between cities and between cities and the Twin Cities; and
- Use technology (e.g. iPads) as a means to keep busses on schedule for pick-ups.

## More people are walking and biking, but infrastructure and safety upgrades are needed.

Two thirds of conversations referred to people walking or biking as means of transportation. In Bemidji, several interviewees said walking and biking is increasing as more people move downtown. In Crookston, an interviewee estimated about half of bikers are commuting to work, and half are biking for recreation and health benefits.

A few interviewees stated some people walk or use bikes because they do not own cars. In East Grand Forks a network of bikers who do not own cars is beginning to emerge, according to one interviewee. A few interviewees also mentioned bike share programs in Bemidji, which are especially useful to students and tourists.

Conversations with interviewees also yielded feedback on the infrastructure for walking and biking in District 2 and many safety concerns, particularly with children travelling to and from school and winter weather.

### Walking and biking infrastructure

Many conversations talked about the infrastructure that is available for biking and walking. Paths and trails are currently available in some areas and used mostly for recreation, though some interviewees cited other uses. While interviewees said connections are improving, like access to Wal-Mart in Crookston, they also identified many areas for improvement.

#### Sidewalks and trails

*A number of our lower income individuals do not use public transportation because they have a bike and we have good bike trails.*

Several interviewees commented on the availability of sidewalks and bike trails, particularly in Bemidji, Thief River Falls, East Grand Forks, and Fosston. Bike trails are especially useful to recreational bikers, connecting

them to downtown areas and local destinations, such as state parks. A few other interviewees said other connections are improving and identified areas that will need more work to improve safety and accessibility.

As walking and biking becomes more popular, many areas in District 2 will need to reassess their infrastructure, according to several interviewees. For example, cities will have to figure out how to connect various destinations, like places of employment, schools, and places for recreation or shopping on bike routes. Several interviewees cited cities that are planning for increased walking and biking.

In East Grand Forks, one interviewee said the city has built designated bike facilities but not yet to the degree that they have planned. The city is also currently working through an ADA transition plan, identifying barriers to accessibility. Only one bridge has good bike and pedestrian access, according to one interviewee, cutting people off from work, retail centers, and other amenities in Grand Forks. Interviewees also said bike and pedestrian access to Highway 2 is lacking.

In Fosston, there are currently no sidewalks or bike lanes, but the city is looking into opportunities to fund them. One interviewee noted that pedestrians and bicyclists have to cross Highway 2 to get to the high school and said safety improvements are needed at that crossing.

One interviewee cited the Heartland State Trail, which runs parallel to Highway 34 in Park Rapids and along Highway 371 to Cass Lake, as important to pedestrians and bicyclists. A few interviewees also identified areas for improvement, such as the inclusion of sidewalks in new developments. They said also many streets, such as 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Birchmont Street near Lake Bemidji, have parking on both sides and two lanes of traffic, leaving no room for bikes. Specific locations that are difficult to access by biking or walking include the hospital, Wal-Mart, and Target, according to interviewees. In one conversation, interviewees said biking to Wal-Mart or Target seems particularly dangerous and that there have been bike and car collisions and “lots of close calls” in that area.

Several interviewees cited Thief River Falls, where Digikey—a major employer in the area—has begun working with the city to create a more livable community for its employees. This includes infrastructure for bicycles, sidewalks for pedestrians, and a central retail area. Interviewees said bike paths are too narrow for certain bike carts and that many people opt to either walk or use golf carts.

## **Shoulders**

In addition to trails, a few interviewees said shoulders are important for bicyclists. Wider shoulders—at least four feet, they said—“relieve worry for pedestrians and bike users about being hit.” A few interviewees said that shoulders are key to pedestrian and bike access, especially in rural areas. Interviewees identified Beltrami County Road 20 in Bemidji as one area bike commuters avoid due to lack of shoulders. One interviewee added that rumble strips on shoulders can be problematic for bicyclists.

## **Intersections and crossings**

Several interviewees said intersections and crossings are inaccessible for older adults or people with disabilities, including few or intermittent curb cuts. For example, a few interviewees mentioned that Highway 2 is difficult to cross because there are not enough crosswalks. Interviewees also said crosswalks are misused by drivers (not stopping) and unused by pedestrians (crossing elsewhere).

## Safety concerns

*Perception of safety prevents people from even trying [to walk or bike]*

Over two thirds of conversations included references to walking and biking as unsafe. A few interviewees said, despite their desire for their children to bike to school, parents prefer to drive their children to school because they perceive it as safer than biking or walking. In northern parts of the district, interviewees cited fast-moving traffic, particularly lumber trucks, as threatening to safety. One interviewee suggested that a predominant focus on vehicle crashes has taken focus away from safety and crash information from other modes.

### Weather-related safety concerns

Most references to safety regarding walking and biking involved weather, usually winter weather. Challenges interviewees mentioned regarding biking and walking in winter weather included:

- Temperatures are too low to walk or bike for much of the year.
- People new to the area might not have the right clothing.
- Snow piles up along sidewalks, in parking spots, and other areas. One person said the snow piled up so high, pedestrians could not reach the signal for the crosswalk.
- Sidewalks and curb cuts are not always adequately shoveled. In some areas, this forces people onto shoulders of the roads.

*It's tough 6 months of the year. There are people who do it [bike] out of necessity and recreation.*

### Other challenges to biking and walking

Some interviewees cited other challenges to biking and walking. For example, biking is not feasible if a person is ill or transporting children. Bikes often are stolen from apartment buildings. Some cities have ordinances that require permits for bike racks or prohibit carrying bags while biking. A group in Bemidji is discussing signage for bikers that people can understand even if they are not avid bikers. Additionally, bike racks are not available at all places, including public buildings.

## Other modes are available for use but still face limitations.

Nearly all conversations included discussion of other modes, such as the Volunteer Driver Program or provider- and employer-based transportation, that fill gaps between biking, walking, driving, and using transit. While some of these other modes could be scaled to meet transportation needs, none is a complete solution to inequities in transportation.

## Taxi, Uber, Lyft

Over half of conversations referred to fare-based transportation, including taxis, Uber, and Lyft. About one fourth of interviewees said they would like to see ridesharing in their community, particularly in the northernmost counties. A few interviewees referred to Uber or Lyft services in their community. In one case, the driver quit because to cover their costs, they had to raise fares higher than people were willing to pay. In the other case, availability is very limited. One interviewee suggested a subsidized Uber-like service.

Larger cities in District 2, including East Grand Forks, Crookston, and Thief River Falls have taxi or rideshare services, but several interviewees said such services, especially taxis, are very expensive because they generally bill per mile. In most communities, taxis are not accessible for people with disabilities. A few interviewees also expressed safety concerns with taxi and rideshare services.

*I keep thinking there's a great opportunity for an Uber-like service. By having a ridesharing service it would help take away the stigma for those who are transit dependent.*

## Volunteer Driver Program

Over one third of conversations mentioned Volunteer Driver Program, where county human service agencies or nonprofits coordinate volunteers, who use their own car to drive public and private health plan recipients to appointments—usually medical appointments. Public and private health plans (including Medicaid) reimburse drivers for their mileage.<sup>52</sup> Many programs provide transportation for other insurers and people who self-pay, and some provide transportation for reasons beyond appointments and charge the cost of mileage.

About one fourth of conversations referred to the Volunteer Driver Program as an important resource to their community, sometimes driving hundreds of miles for appointments in Fargo, the Twin Cities, or Rochester. Recently, the program has provided more transportation for parents to visit their children in foster care.

Several interviewees mentioned financial challenges associated with the Volunteer Driver Program. In some cases people need a referral for their insurance to pay for use of the program. Drivers are reimbursed for loaded miles—when the client is in the car—but not for the travel to and from their home to the clients'. One interviewee said drivers may travel 40 minutes to pick up a client. Family members are reimbursed for less than other volunteers. Recent changes in tax law now require volunteer drivers to report their reimbursement as income, except the 14 cent per mile standard deduction for charitable causes.<sup>53</sup> According to one interviewee, this disproportionately affects drivers who have low incomes.

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<sup>52</sup> National Volunteer Transportation Center. Accessed November 13, 2018.

<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=3767&z=132>.

<sup>53</sup> Minnesota Department of Revenue. "Volunteer Mileage Reimbursement." Accessed November 13, 2018.

[http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/individuals/individ\\_income/Pages/VolunteerMileageReimbursement.aspx](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us/individuals/individ_income/Pages/VolunteerMileageReimbursement.aspx).

Volunteers are often retired adults, but one interviewee said college students also volunteer. A few interviewees expressed concern that there are not enough volunteer drivers to meet demand. For example, one interviewee said, “We currently have one volunteer driver. We need about 4 to 5 to be effective.” Another said they would like to pay volunteers beyond the mileage reimbursement.

*We went to our board and said we need help with finding drivers for seniors who are living on slim a budget, and that didn't get too far.*

## Other modes

Interviewees mentioned several other modes people use when those mentioned above are not feasible. For example, health, veterans’ services, criminal justice, victims’ services, human services, and behavioral health organizations provide transportation for their clients—but often only in extenuating circumstances. One interviewee said community health representatives can provide transportation to tribal elders but are not allowed to touch people, so the service is limited only to people who can get in and out of the vehicle unassisted. A few organizations mentioned their staff have, on occasion, driven clients home because there are no other options— even though it is discouraged.

Interviewees also mentioned the following modes or potential modes:

- Medi-vans provide services for people to get to medical appointments, but their availability is limited.
- Options for passenger trains; Amtrak’s schedule is “unfavorable.”
- Some churches provide transportation for their parishioners to attend religious services.
- A few employers provide transportation, which allows employees to save money and avoid relocation; destinations are often limited to work and home and do not account for other needs such as dropping children off at daycare or getting groceries.
- Especially in the most remote areas, people use all-terrain vehicles, but interviewees expressed concern that there are not enough trails and people do not follow the rules of operation.
- Flying may become more common in the future; one business will allow people to occupy spare seats in return for donating to a nonprofit.
- Some services, such as Amazon, grocery delivery, and I-TV for medical appointments, allow people to avoid travelling altogether.

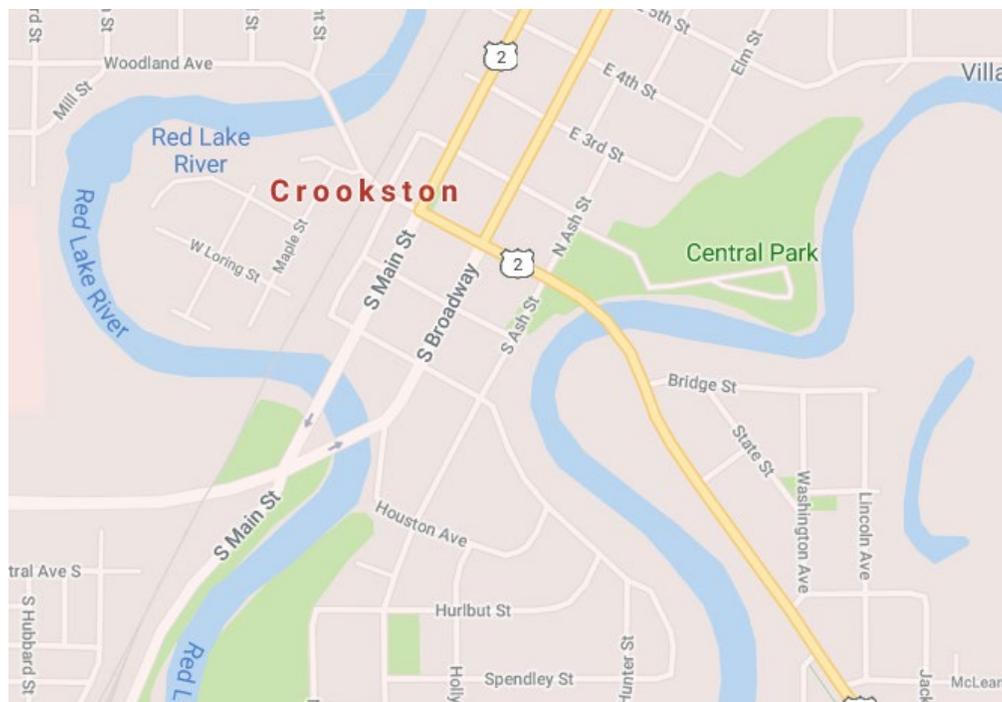
## Land use and natural barriers also affect access.

Two fifths of conversations discussed the role land use has in peoples’ ability to access locations. About one fourth of conversations discussed areas that were easy to access, mainly downtowns or centrally located destinations. Interviewees said a downtown or central location made places more accessible because it is easier for people to walk or use transit and people are more familiar with the location. One interviewee said cities built on a grid make it easier for people to access places by different modes. In Fosston, Highway 2 is challenging for people to cross, so it is helpful that places people most want to access are on the same side of the street, according to one interviewee.

*Businesses and services located in downtown areas help make things more accessible.*

About one third of conversations involved a description of places that are difficult for people to access, interviewees generally identified locations away from downtown or locations that are more spread out. Interviewees further explained that areas outside of the city are not usually feasible to access by biking, walking, or transit. As an example, interviewees cited the movie theater in Bemidji, which is five miles outside of town. A few interviewees said the location or relocation of new housing developments and health and human service locations, such as clinics and hospitals, food shelves, and schools, on the outskirts of town worsens distance challenges.

**Figure 6: Map of Crookston, Minnesota showing Highway 2, the Red Lake River, and the Railroad**



In the western part of the district, interviewees cited other barriers. One interviewee said Crookston is segmented by the railroad, the Red Lake River, and Highway 2. The Red River divides East Grand Forks, Minnesota from the larger, more commercialized Grand Forks, North Dakota. In addition, only two bridges accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists, limiting access to Grand Forks, especially for those in southern East Grand Forks. In East Grand Forks, the grocery store is located on the northern end of town, which is challenging for people on the southern end of town (across the Red Lake River) to access.

Figure 7: Map of Grand Forks, North Dakota and East Grand Forks, Minnesota<sup>54</sup>



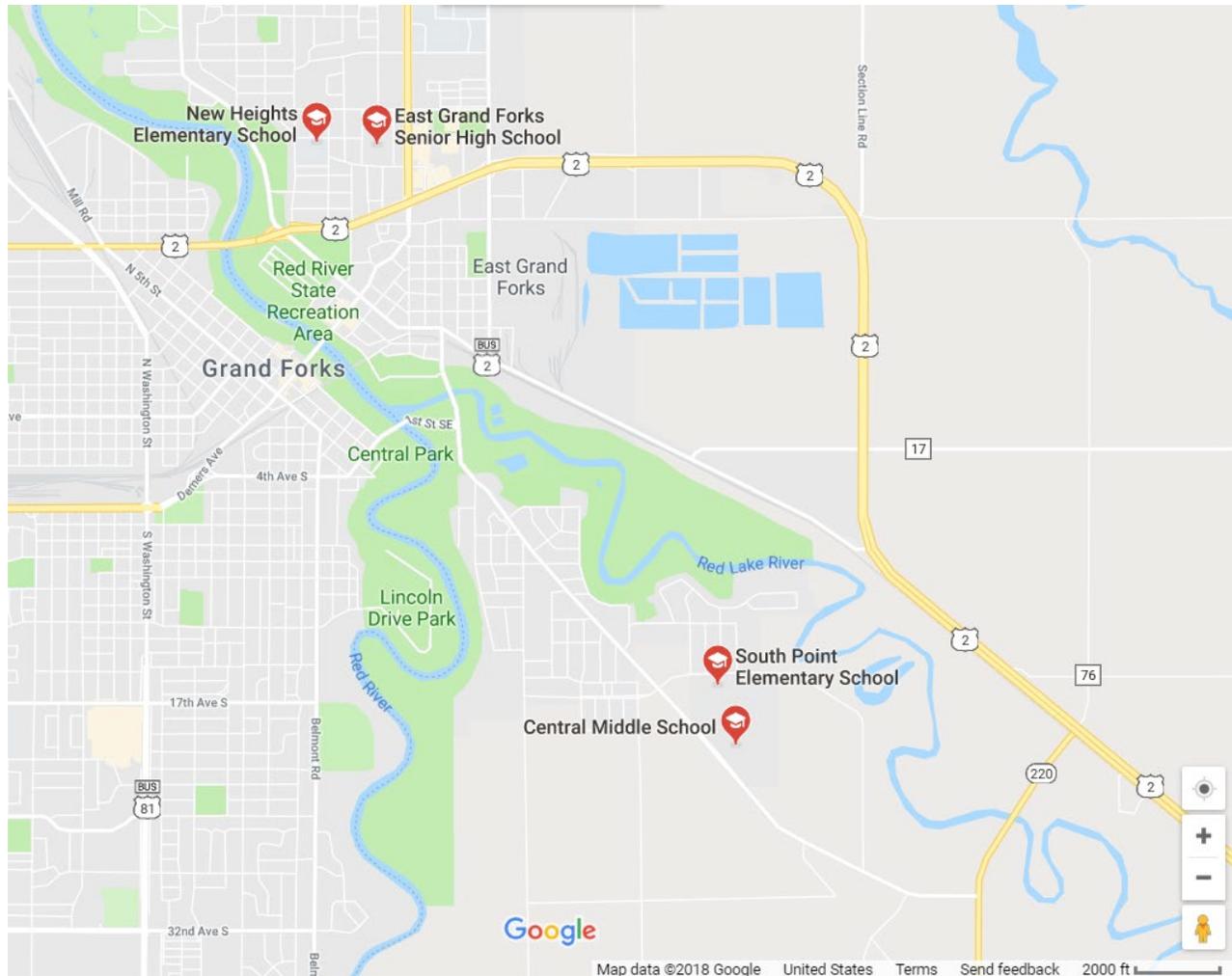
An interviewee also discussed the location of public schools in East Grand Forks is challenging as shown in Figure 8. Each of the four schools East Grand Forks School District serves a different age group:

- New Heights Elementary School serves Kindergarten through 2nd grade
- South Point Elementary School serves 3rd grade through 5th grade
- Central Middle School serves 6th grade through 8th grade
- East Grand Forks Senior High School serves 9th grade through 12th grade

East Grand Forks High School and Central Middle School are three and one half miles apart. One interviewee expressed that the distance creates transportation challenges for the schools and parents, especially parents of students attending different schools.

<sup>54</sup> Map developed by the City of Grand Forks.

Figure 8: Map of East Grand Forks schools



## Relationships are key to engagement.

Nearly all conversations involved discussions about ways people engage, how government could be effective in community engagement, challenges to engagement, and what interviewees have seen as effective engagement.

The most commonly cited ways people engage are to call their local government or nonprofit organization or to attend various types of meetings.

## Knowledge and interest

About one third of conversations involved the importance of the public's knowledge of and interest in the topic and how to engage. Several interviewees observed that people generally do not engage nor give feedback. As one interviewee put it, "There is a general sense that people just seem less inclined more than ever to come to public meetings. People are busy, [there is a] larger sense of individualism. There are less people running for public offices nowadays as well."

Several interviewees explained that people generally will not engage in topics that are not of direct interest to them, perhaps due to time management and competing priorities, according to one interviewee. Interviewees mentioned that topics like pipelines, housing, and changes in fishing rules typically generate more interest than roads and bridges because they have direct impact or are high profile.

*The community forum on fishing rules will be packed.*

In one case, an interviewee expressed exasperation that meetings are often well-attended by people who owned property and wanted input on how their tax dollars were spent, but there were few voices to represent those affected by the policy, such as public transportation recipients. The difference in representation reflects a power dynamic.

A few interviewees said it may be difficult for the public to know how or when to engage. People may be unaware of meetings that occur, and may not know who to call when they have a question or feedback. One interviewee said that even seemingly well-connected people are often unaware or unengaged until “the bulldozer shows up.” That interviewee wondered how, then, to reach out to and inform other groups who might have less access to information.

A few interviewees also suggested the public might not have enough knowledge of the topic to provide input. For example, people might not know of plans to construct a trail or enough understanding of how funding works to have strong opinions or engage.

## Building and strengthening relationships

*[It] takes a lot of work to do engagement well – [you] have to have a trust relationship.*

Three fourths of conversations included references to building relationships with the public. Several interviewees said that relationships are key to engagement. The public and organizations want a trusting relationship, rather than more transactional input processes. Interviewees said people want to feel like their input makes a difference. One interviewee said when government asks the public for input, it often feels like a decision has already been made. Instead, effective engagement involves, “listening first to fully understand needs, establish[ing] connections ahead of time then maintain[ing] relationships.”

### Engagement through regional and local collaboration

To be successful in engagement, many interviewees suggested collaborating – with regional or local groups. They emphasized working with regional groups, like regional development corporations (RDC), community action partnerships (CAPs), and existing groups in specific areas that are already organizing, as ways to be successful in building and leveraging relationships. As one planning organization said:

*We are not a provider; rather we help provide the opportunity for conversations and collaborations to take place. We help to ask the questions, develop conversations, or help identify opportunities for additional collaboration or discussions to take place, especially in rural communities.*

In addition, interviewees suggested the following groups and places to connect with:

- Senior centers
- Meals on Wheels
- Local religious leaders
- Locations where people with disabilities live and work
- Food shelves
- City councils
- Public health agencies

A few interviewees provided examples of instances when state government worked with local government and organizations to engage the public. One interviewee cited the Minnesota Department of Health's Health Equity initiative, which involved meeting with and hearing from community members. The same interviewee also said the Department of Employment and Economic Development has coordinated with RDCs and nonprofits to get public input.

***Even though social media is important ... [we] still cannot neglect the old ways; [we] need to find a balance.***

Interviewees also suggested that state government has a role in supporting collaboration among individuals and organizations. For example, a few interviewees cited MnDOT's Toward Zero Deaths Coalitions as ways the state can engage and participate with stakeholders in the community. Many interviewees offered examples of ways local individuals and organizations are already working together, such as professional collaboratives and coalitions, community and church groups, health and human services organizations, economic development and stewardship groups, and groups focused on wellness and biking. Such groups often involved mayors, county commissioners, city council members, law enforcement, religious leaders, judges, schools, public health professionals, business owners, and people who provide human services. A few interviewees said they would like to see more state government at the table in these groups, not only in groups initiated and led by state government. Interviewees also said that nonprofits need a voice with state agencies and cited Community Resource Connections as an organization that provides that voice.

## Using appropriate methods

### Meetings

Most conversations involved references to meetings as a way to engage the public. The majority of these conversations included organizations who use meetings and say they are the best way to engage people because people generally prefer face-to-face interaction. Interviewees said in-person conversations are valuable because they involve people that are affected by policies.

*Part of it is wanting to know and asking the questions and having the right people at the table...The listening needs to start happening more than the talking.*

Many interviewees also provided suggestions for strong in-person engagement:

- Hold ongoing, quarterly meetings
- Include county engineers or attend county association meetings
- Emphasize meaningful personal interaction
- Hold meetings in the communities
- Listen to and share personal stories
- Reach out to communities prior to meetings to learn more about context

In addition, several interviewees provided suggestions for holding meetings with the public to ensure meetings are meaningful and inclusive, including:

- Timing events according to target audiences: Evening events create challenges regarding dinner and child care. Weekend meetings may resolve some challenges, according to one interviewee. Those involved in education are more able to attend summer meetings.
- Location of events: Most people know where the public school is. Meetings related to aging can occur at senior centers. Similarly, meetings that include people with disabilities could occur where those people live and work.
- Considerations for meeting attendees: Some people may need, but not want or know how to ask for, language services. People may also find city hall meetings intimidating. Child care, gas vouchers, and food and beverages may also make it more feasible for people to attend meetings.

A few organizations cited other types of in-person engagement, such as participation in events that are already occurring (not initiated by MnDOT), like fairs and public meetings, or events that generate curiosity, like pop-up events.

## **Broadcast and print media**

*Anything you put in the newspaper here is read like religion.*

Several interviewees explained that internet (via broadband or cellular data plans) is still not available or dependable for many people. More conventional methods, such as broadcast media and newspapers, remain effective methods of communication. In particular, interviewees said newspapers are widely read, and small town papers are, “dying for content.” A few interviewees also said people write letters to the editor.

A few interviewees noted challenges they see with local media. One interviewee said they did not feel as if local media supported transit, and they typically focus on negative stories. Another interviewee expressed concerns

that there were not any publications or radio stations in languages other than English. The interviewee said this could be particularly challenging for people coming from Somalia, who may be more accustomed to verbal communication.

## Social media

Many conversations mentioned the use of social media as a way to communicate and engage with the public, with most saying social media is useful and should be more widely used. Several interviewees observed that social media use varies among age groups. For example, one interviewee said people ages 18 to 25 do not use Facebook as often as other groups and may be better reached via text or Snapchat. Another said older adults may be less likely to engage via social media.

Several interviewees also mentioned they receive emails and comments on their website.

## Contact local government officials

Several interviewees said, when people have questions or feedback, they contact local government officials and employees or staff at nonprofits they are familiar with, such as those at CAPs. Interviewees say these individuals help people by connecting them with or passing their messages onto the appropriate contact. They also advocate for people in their region. A few people said they operate as proxies for people looking for answers or solutions, using stories from individuals to communicate the local impacts of policies.

*As far as county government goes, I have people approach me saying “we need this problem solved. Can you help us?” People know you’re a county government employee and they will literally show up to your house.*

## Different formats for input

Several interviewees suggested that, to be successful, government should provide people with different formats for engagement. This allows people to use the formats that work best for them without excluding people. For example, in addition to public meetings, governments could provide opportunities for online comments.

## Following up on input

*People make very good comments, if they don’t see the results on the street, the next time they ignore the survey.*

About one fifth of conversations included references to the need to follow up and provide feedback on public input and to leave communication open. One interviewee empathized that it is sometimes difficult for those working in government to respond to the public as quickly as they would like. People need to know that things may change based on the input organizations get. Similarly, another interviewee said people want to see results

based on their input. A few interviewees also acknowledged that following-up on input people give can be challenging when the organization cannot provide the service requested or when there are conflicting interests.

## People have many ideas to solve challenges with transportation equity.

Over half of conversations offered suggestions for how to make the transportation system more equitable. Some suggestions were high level and focused on the future, while others were practical and involved changes to policy, programs, or specific modes.

*If we had a more multimodal culture, mindset, we could open up capacity for communities to get around.*

### High-level suggestions

About one third of conversations involved high-level suggestions to change the focus of transportation and look to the future. Interviewees that suggested changing the focus referred to both the way transportation infrastructure is designed and who it is designed for. They said that the transportation system is generally designed for cars, which interviewees perceived as the safest mode of transportation. Instead, interviewees said, the transportation system should focus on the least safe modes and aim to serve the most currently underserved populations.

*Look toward the least protected population as becoming the most protected populations; design for the least protected. Carry that idea through to the finish.*

A few interviewees said planning should involve emerging technologies and the future of transportation. For example, interviewees mentioned driverless cars as an innovation that could have strong impacts on equity and rural transportation. One interviewee said they saw air travel as becoming more and more important, particularly for businesses, so planning should include funding for airport hangars.

### Policies, programs, and funding

About one third of conversations suggested ways MnDOT or its partners could use policies, programs, and funding to improve the transportation system for underserved populations. Interviewees suggested MnDOT coordinate with other agencies, governments, or nonprofits where necessary to sustain or improve services. As one interviewee said, “The DOT will never be able to design a system that works. [They] need to coordinate all the systems that are already out there – public and private. Strong arm them if you have to; tie funding to better service.” The list below highlights suggestions for how city, county, and state government can improve transportation equity:

- Improve coordination among transportation modes
- Provide emergency car repair loans
- Help people get to court
- Reduce emphasis on fines
- Remove barriers for people to get driver’s licenses reinstated
- Continue funding to nonprofits that provide transportation fares
- Support nonprofits that provide donated vehicles to people who need them
- Ensure there is either a law enforcement or public health presence in each town
- Remove outdated ordinances, such as those prohibiting backpacks for bikers (local governments)

## Mode-specific improvements

*If I had a magic wand, we need a dedicated transportation service that serves the hospital.*

About one third of conversations involved mode-specific improvements. Most of these comments involved transit.<sup>55</sup> In general, interviewees said they would like to see more transit in rural areas, a fixed-route system, coordination among transit systems, additional busses, and improved connections to the Twin Cities. A few interviewees said improved coordination to provide transit services to key stops, such as the hospital, nursing homes, residences for people with disabilities, and retail and service centers would be helpful. A transit agency added that improved service, along with improved communication to the public about transit’s capabilities and limitations may solve some challenges and strengthen relationships.

Several interviewees suggested modes that are not currently available in District 2, or only available in a small area. A few interviewees said if Uber had a stronger presence in the area that may lessen the stigma for those who are transit dependent. One interviewee suggested subsidizing Uber as a way to lower transportation costs. A few other interviewees suggested passenger trains, such as a mini light rail that made key stops in Bemidji.

## Organizations provided varied definitions and examples of equity

Two thirds of conversations discussed the meaning of equity. Interviewees provided a wide variety of definitions and explanations of how they interpret the meaning of equity or how it applies to the work they do. Figure 9 illustrates the words interviewees used. Several interviewees discussed equity in terms of improving access and removing barriers to advance opportunities for communities. A few interviewees elaborated that equity is about fairness and access to services regardless of race or socio-economic status. Others added that equity is about

<sup>55</sup> For a complete list of suggested improvements to transit, refer to *Challenges meeting demand* on page 31.



# Recommendations

MnDOT Central Office and District 2 management team and staff met on October 22, 2018 to review findings. For findings where MnDOT staff indicated the agency had relatively high influence, meeting attendees generated potential solutions in small groups, and the large group identified which solutions should be high priorities for the next six to 12 months.<sup>56</sup>

Results from this meeting and observations from MAD consultants resulted the following recommendations:

## **1. MnDOT should explore opportunities to work with partners to expand transit and other transportation options in District 2.**

Specifically, MnDOT staff identified and prioritized two opportunities to expand transportation options:

- Using transit funding and technology to develop and support on-demand transit services
- Partnering to expand the Volunteer Driver Program.

Technology exists that allows transit agencies to coordinate on-demand transit services. MnDOT should consider use and fund the implementation of technology to provide on-demand transit. This would include training transit providers on the use of on-demand services (including system directors and boards), developing an investment plan to provide services seven days per week and coordinate connections among transit services, and prioritize serving unmet transit needs through application funding requests.

Staff also brainstormed ideas to work with organizations that administer the Volunteer Driver Program to connect with more resources and expand eligibility. In addition to information on funding options, MnDOT could assist the Volunteer Driver Program in expanding recruitment of volunteer drivers and use lessons that the agency has learned from working with Lyft and Uber to promote the program.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of MnDOT's Office of Transit and Active Transportation. However, there may be some work that is specific to District 2 or other areas within MnDOT.

## **2. MnDOT should continue to build relationships with new groups, agencies and organizations.**

As part of this project, MnDOT connected with many groups, agencies, and organization not traditionally engaged in transportation processes. It is important for MnDOT to continue to build on these relationships. Additionally, while many new relationships were established as part of this project, there is also opportunity for MnDOT to connect with even more new organizations. Interviewees were asked to provide information on who else would be important to talk to regarding transportation equity. Those that were not contacted for interview as part of this project were included as a list of potential contacts for District 2 staff.<sup>57</sup> Using this list and others added through additional engagement, MnDOT

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<sup>56</sup> For full results from the Implementation Meeting, refer to *Appendix F: Findings and Potential Solutions* from the Implementation Meeting on page 65.

<sup>57</sup> Refer to *Appendix G: Additional Contacts* on page 69.

could advance potential solutions identified by staff, including improving the leadership’s understanding of the needs of specific groups.

MnDOT is also committed to continuing to develop approaches to connect with and hear from the tribal communities and Amish communities in District 2.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of District 2. However, there may be some work is more appropriately addressed at the statewide level or with the support of the Public Engagement and Constituent Services office or other areas within MnDOT.

**3. MnDOT should collaborate with other agencies, local governments, and organizations who do similar work to engage common stakeholders and partner on projects and programs.**

Interview findings indicate that MnDOT could accelerate its public engagement efforts by building and strengthening partnerships with other agencies, local governments, and organizations that are engaging the same or similar target populations, depending on the circumstance. Staff also suggested and prioritized connecting with other agencies and the appropriate staff to “create wins” as they relate to public engagement on various projects or programs.

Staff further discussed opportunities to get involved in meetings held by other groups and invite other groups to MnDOT meetings. For example, staff suggested that MnDOT could involve city councils on public engagement initiatives for smaller projects. Additionally, MAD consultants maintained a list of other transportation-related initiatives that emerged from interviews.<sup>58</sup> Where relevant, District 2 can use this information to continue to build partnerships with other agencies, local government, tribal governments, and organizations and connect with other initiatives. By doing so, MnDOT could advance potential solutions identified by staff, including:

- partnering to inventory biking and pedestrian infrastructure needs as they relate to equity,
- increasing its knowledge of who to partner with regarding various transportation modes, and
- improving coordination of transportation.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of MnDOT District 2. However, there may be circumstances that are more appropriately addressed at the statewide level or by other areas within MnDOT.

**4. MnDOT should work with other agencies, local governments, and organizations to share information and coordinate processes to leverage existing resources to advance equity.**

Staff noted many opportunities that currently are not being maximized and suggested ways that they could work with different groups in District 2 to use available funding to provide people access to adequate transportation options. For example, staff mentioned scenarios where local governments and transit agencies are required to locate or develop matching funds for state contributions, but they are not always able to do so. Staff suggested MnDOT can work with local government to identify options for

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<sup>58</sup> Refer to *Appendix H: Past and Current Initiatives and Opportunities* on page 72.

matching funds. Another example would be MnDOT clarifying ways existing funding can be used through outreach and education.

Staff further suggested ways that MnDOT can work with partners to leverage current resources, such as:

- Having conversations with local governments about winter maintenance needs and how, through partnership, they achieve shared goals, such as increasing peoples' ability to bike and walk safely in the winter;
- Working with the Department of Natural Resources to more effectively leverage resources for biking and walking infrastructure;
- Considering ways to be more flexible in investment guidelines to ensure projects have adequate resources to make change or update that advance equity;
- Being present, involved, and available for communities who are making land use decisions to provide input on how they might maximize accessibility for all modes of transportation; and
- Connecting with other state agencies to identify overlapping legislative and funding priorities.

By building and strengthening relationships with other government agencies and organizations doing related work (Recommendations 3 and 4), MnDOT can create opportunities to provide input on plans and ideas that have indirect impacts on transportation resources.

This recommendation is a shared responsibility. Some of the work in this area will involve coordination at the district level and is the responsibility of MnDOT District 2. However, some of the work is more statewide or programmatic in nature and is the responsibility of functional area offices within MnDOT or agency leadership.

**5. MnDOT should communicate with interviewees, partners, and the broader public about the Equity Pilot and intended next steps.**

MnDOT staff recognized the importance of both continuing the momentum of equity work and communicating to those who contributed to the findings of this report. They emphasized the need to communicate the findings and next steps of the equity pilot. Continuing to build and strengthen relationships with interviewees will involve reconnecting with interviewees to share the findings of this report in addition to engaging with them on subjects beyond this project. District 2 staff also suggested creating a scorecard that would communicate how MnDOT is accomplishing this work and attribute the work to information gleaned from equity interviews.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of MnDOT District 2. However, there may be circumstances that are more appropriately addressed by other areas within MnDOT.

**6. MnDOT Central Office should examine the District 2 Equity Pilot findings and identify those that are likely to also impact other districts and would require more systems-level consideration to.**

As interviews continue throughout the state, Central Office should brainstorm potential ways to address broader transportation equity challenges that are likely emerge consistently across Minnesota and develop statewide solutions that would advance equity. Central Office staff should also identify how the findings from this project can be integrated into existing plans and programs, and future work related to transportation and equity.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of MnDOT's Office of Transportation System Management to lead, with input from relevant areas throughout MnDOT and support from agency leadership.

**7. MnDOT District 2 should continue the work accomplished in the implementation planning meeting by identifying and prioritizing which solutions need additional action planning.**

At the implementation meeting, staff expressed that they would like more time to create action plans to address findings and recommendations included in this report. MAD continues to work with District 2 staff to translate their high-priority issues and proposed solutions into action.

This recommendation is primarily the responsibility of MnDOT District 2, but District 2 can involve other areas within MnDOT as necessary.

# Appendix

## Appendix A: List of organizations interviewed

Individuals from the following organizations participated in interviews:

Be Well (Polk County Public Health)  
Bemidji Food Shelf  
Bemidji State University  
Community Health Services, Inc.  
Department of Employment and Economic Development, Northwest Minnesota Business Development  
Cities Area Transit  
Fosston Transit  
Global Friends Coalition  
Grand Forks East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization  
Headwaters Regional Development Commission  
Indus School  
Inter-County Community Council  
Kittson County Social Services  
Lake of the Woods Social Services  
Land of the Dancing Sky Area Agency on Aging  
Leech Lake Tribal Government  
Legal Aid Services of NW Minnesota  
Lutheran Social Services  
Ninth Judicial District (Beltrami County)  
North Country Community Health Board  
Northwest Community Action, Inc.  
Northwest Minnesota Foundation  
Northwest Minnesota Multi-County Housing and Redevelopment Authority  
Northwest Regional Development Commission  
Options: Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living  
Paul Bunyan Transit  
Roseau County Human Services  
Rural Transportation Collaborative  
Sanford Health  
Tri-Valley Opportunity Council  
Tri-Valley Transportation Programs

## Appendix B: Project team and interviewers

The following people were involved in planning, design, data collection, analysis, and/or implementation of the District 2 Equity Pilot:

### MnDOT District 2 Staff:

- John Anderson, District Engineer
- Jim Curran, Assistant District Engineer – Program Development
- Mike Ginnaty, Portfolio Manager
- Stephen Hufnagle, Transportation Operations Supervisor
- Paul Konickson, Bridge Engineer
- Darren Laesch, District Planning Director
- Terry Melcher, Director of Public Engagement
- Jake Mortvedt, Transportation Operations Supervisor
- Nathan Overgaard, Transportation Operations Supervisor
- Bill Pirkel, Assistant District Engineer – Operations
- Brad Scott, Administrative Manager

### MnDOT Central Office Staff:

- Katie Caskey, Policy Planning Director
- Donna Koren, Market Research Director
- Keith Mensah, Senior Planner
- Mark Nelson, Director of Statewide Planning (on mobility)
- Renee Raduenz, Market Research Manager
- Roberta Retzlaff, Planning Program Coordinator
- Philip Schaffner, Director of Statewide Planning (acting)
- Siri Simons, Senior Planner

### MAD Consultants:

- Lisa Anderson, Senior Management Consultant
- Mariyam Naadha, Senior Management Consultant
- Abra Pollock, Senior Management Consultant

# Appendix C: Demographic Analysis

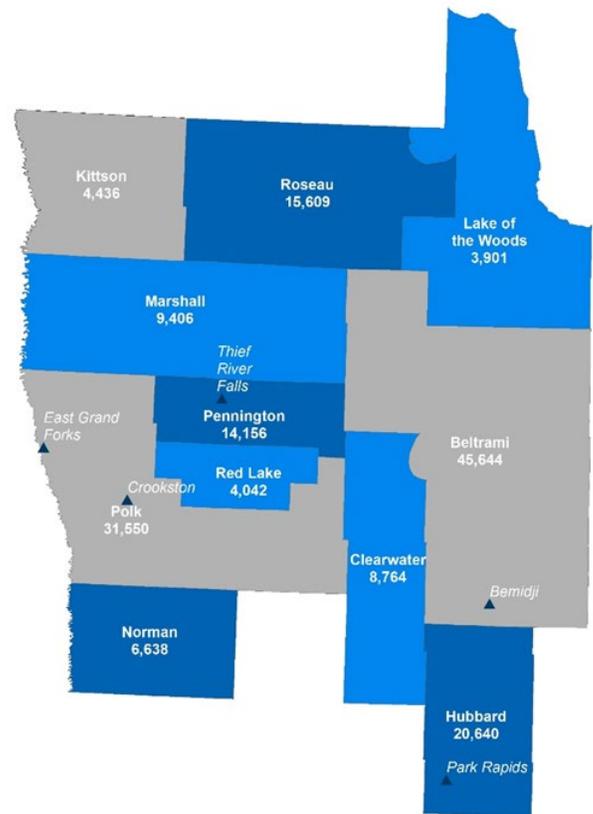


Located in Northwest Minnesota, MnDOT’s District 2 includes 11 counties. In terms of population, it has lowest population of the MnDOT districts, comprising 3% of the state’s total population. In terms of land area, District 2 is the second largest district. This report summarizes some of the key demographic characteristics of District 2. Unless otherwise noted, the figures in this document are derived from the 2016 American Community Survey 5-year dataset.

## Overview

- **164,786** – District 2’s total population (Figure 10).
- **0.7% increase** – District 2’s population increased from the 2010 Census by an estimated 847 persons.
- **Beltrami County** – Beltrami County is the largest and fastest growing county in the district. It has an estimate population of 45,644, an increase of 2.7% from the 2010 Census.
- **Low population density/urbanization** – District 2 has a population density of 11.5 persons per square mile. 28.1% of the district’s population lived in an urban area with a population of 2,500 or more.
- **65,546** – Total households in District 2. Average of 2.5 persons per household.
- **Cities** – Bemidji is the largest city in District 2 with an estimated 2016 population of 14,664 (Table 3). East Grand Forks is part of the Grand Forks urbanized area. In 2010, the urbanized area had a population of 61,270.

Figure 10: Map of District 2 counties and populations



**Table 3: Largest Cities in District 2**

City	Population
Bemidji	14,664
Thief River Falls	8,726
East Grand Forks	8,636
Crookston	7,814
Park Rapids	3,898

## Race/Ethnicity

- **Minority** – 13.9% of residents belong to a minority racial or ethnic group. Beltrami County has the highest percentage minorities at 27.1%. Hispanics are the second highest minority demographic group in the district after American Indian.
- **American Indian ancestry** - Persons with American Indian ancestry account for 7.2% of the district population. District 2 has the highest percentage of individuals with American Indian ancestry, and is second to the Metro District in total number of individuals with an American Indian ancestry (11,887 in District 2 and 17,090 in Metro District).
- **Nativity** – 97.9% of the district’s population was born in the United States, and 69.4% was born in Minnesota. Asia and Latin America were the most common places of origin for those not born in the U.S.
- **Limited English Proficiency** – The 2016 American Community Survey estimated 2,000 persons in District 2 speak English less than very well. After English, Spanish is the most common language spoken.

## Age

- **Youth** – 23.8% of the district’s population is 17 and under. Statewide, 23.5% of the population is age 17 and under. Approximately 25% of the populations of Beltrami, Clearwater, Red Lake and Roseau are age 17 and under.
- **Seniors** – 17.8% of the district’s population is 65 and older. Statewide, 14.3% of the population is 65 and older. An estimated 23% of the populations Hubbard and Kittson are age 65 and older.

## Disability

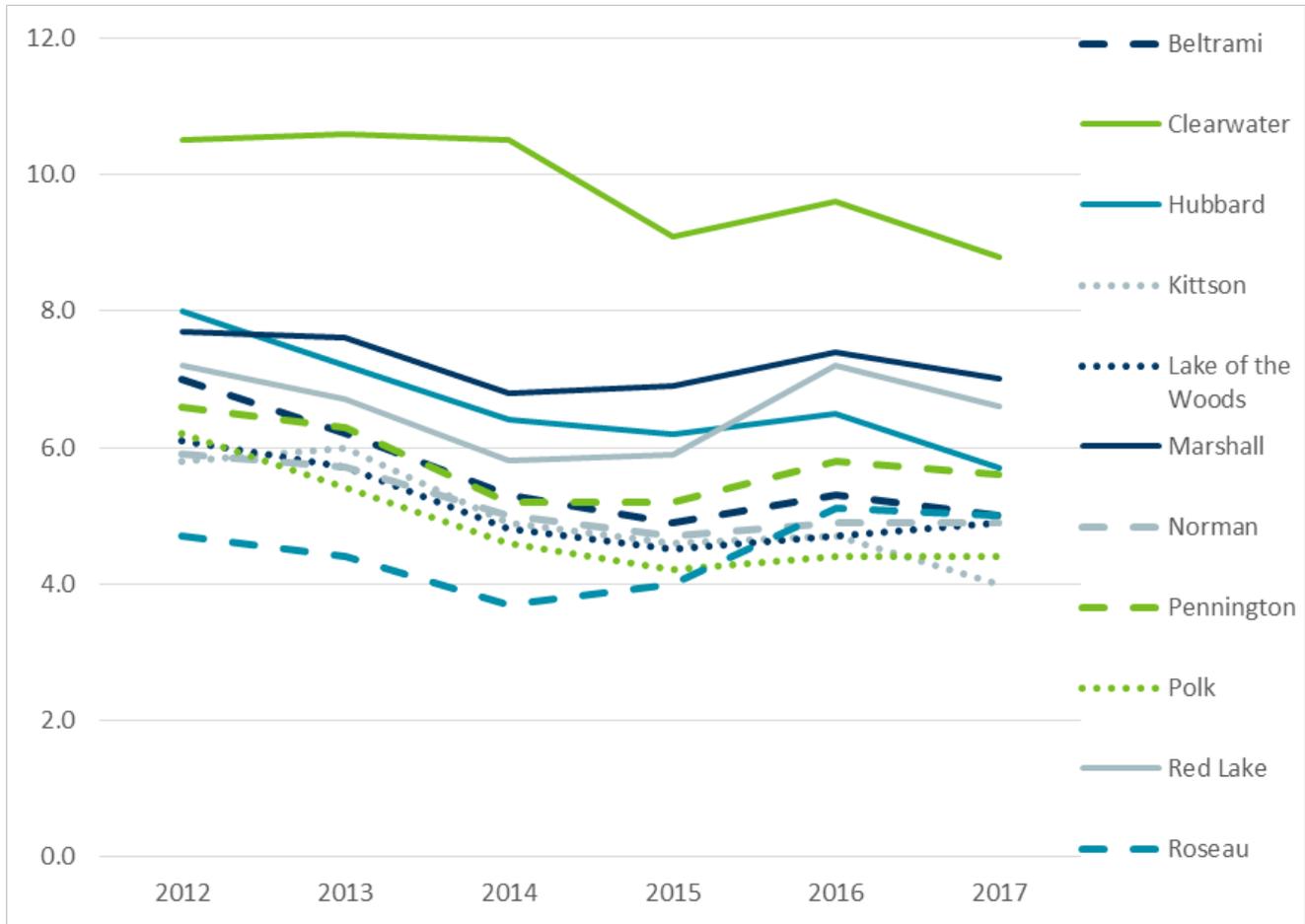
- **People with disabilities** – 12.8% of the district’s population are people with disabilities. Types of disability includes hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, and self-care or independent living difficulties.

## Income & Employment

- **Median Income** – District 2’s median household income is \$50,330; the statewide average is \$55,560. Average per capita income is \$26,176; the statewide average is \$28,534.
- **Poverty** – 21,162 persons, 12.8% of District 2’s population, is in poverty. In terms of actual numbers, District 2 has the second fewest individuals in poverty compared to other districts. In terms of percentage of district population, District 2 has the second highest among MnDOT districts.

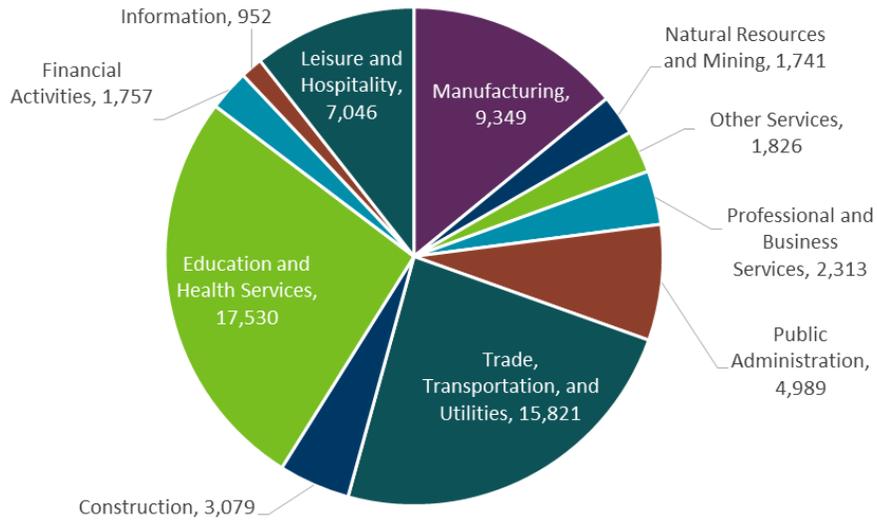
- **Unemployment** – Unemployment rates have been trending down in District 2 (Figure 11). This matches the statewide downward trend of unemployment. In 2017, the statewide unemployment rate was 3.6%, a decline of 2% from 2012. As of 2017, Clearwater County has the highest unemployment rate at 8.8% and Kittson County had the lowest at 4%.
- **Industry** – Education and Health Services and Trade, Transportation and Utilities accounted for half of the jobs in District 2 (Figure 12). Manufacturing and Leisure and Hospitality are the next highest employment industries in the district.

**Figure 11: Unemployment in District 2, 2012-2017<sup>59</sup>**



<sup>59</sup> Chart created using data from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. “Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2012-2017.”

**Figure 12: District 2 Employment by Industry<sup>60</sup>**

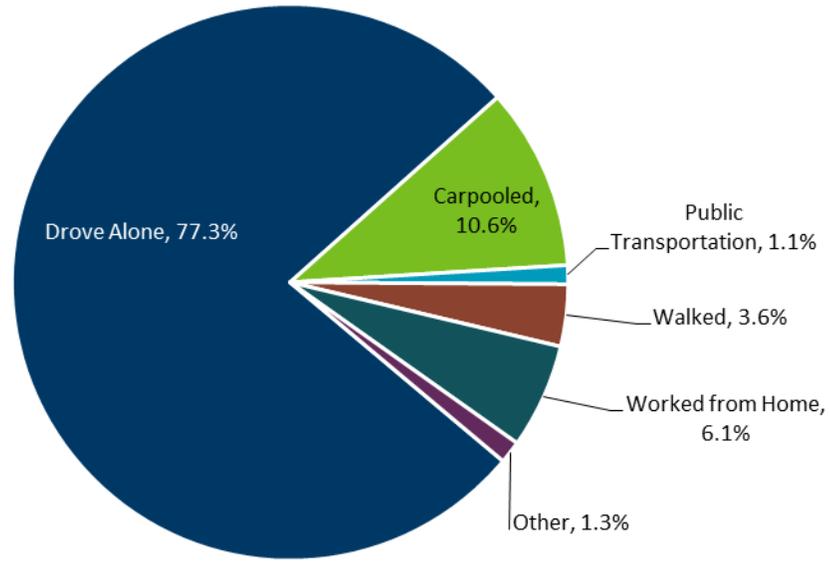


## Means of Travel

- **Drove alone** – 77.3% of workers 16 and older drove alone to work (Figure 13). Statewide, 78% of workers age 16 and older drove alone.
- **Zero vehicle households** – 6.0% of District 2 households do not have a vehicle.
- **Commute time** – 48.5% of workers age 16 and older who did not work from home had a commute time of less than 15 minutes; 5.3% had a commute time of 60 minutes or more. Pennington County had the greatest percent, 69.7%, of workers with a commute time of less than 15 minutes. Norman County had the greatest percent, 9.0%, of workers with a commute time of 60 minutes or more.

<sup>60</sup> Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. “Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages.” 2016.

**Figure 13: District 2 Means of transportation to work**



**Table 4: County-by-county comparison**

County	Total population	% Minority	% 17 & under	% 65 & older	% People with disabilities	Household median income	% Persons in poverty	% Zero vehicle households
Beltrami	45,644	27.1	25.3	14.4	12.0	\$45,201	18.1	7.2
Clearwater	8,764	14.7	24.7	19.4	16.3	\$44,203	16.4	7.4
Hubbard	20,640	6.7	21.7	23.4	14.8	\$49,742	11.4	4.2
Kittson	4,436	3.7	21.6	23.4	14.5	\$51,484	10.8	4.7
Lake of the Woods	3,901	6.0	18.5	21.8	12.3	\$45,732	8.0	5.0
Marshall	9,406	6.1	23.1	19.8	12.2	\$56,340	7.4	4.6
Norman	6,638	10.1	23.0	21.8	11.2	\$52,083	11.5	4.2
Pennington	14,156	8.8	23.1	16.7	12.9	\$51,156	8.6	6.3
Polk	31,550	11.4	23.5	17.1	13.0	\$53,059	12.5	6.6
Red Lake	4,042	7.1	24.6	18.7	12.5	\$49,800	10.3	8.5
Roseau	15,609	7.2	24.9	15.6	10.5	\$54,827	8.0	4.8

# Appendix D: Key Communities

## Advancing Transportation Equity – Key Communities

This section summarizes key communities within District 2 for potential inclusion in the Advancing Transportation Equity project to provide a starting point for interviewee identification. The populations were identified based on the current demographics and trends in the district and include populations with known inequities.

Key populations are identified below, additional background and analysis about each community is included in the following paragraphs.

- Tribal Governments
- Racial and Ethnic Minorities
- Women
- Elderly and Aging in Place
- Low income
- Zero-vehicle households
- People with disabilities
- Veterans
- Disadvantaged Business Enterprises<sup>61</sup>

It is important to recognize that these groups are not discrete. The transportation concerns often overlap and a potential interviewee may represent multiple groups. Additionally, an individual may belong to more than one of the communities identified and may experience overlapping inequities.

## Overview of District 2

Located in Northwest Minnesota, MnDOT's District 2 has a service area that includes three Tribal Governments and 11 counties, including Kittson, Roseau, Lake of the Woods, Marshall, Beltrami, Polk, Pennington, Red Lake, Clearwater, Norman, and Hubbard. It has the lowest population of the MnDOT districts – 3 percent of the state's total population. In terms of land use, District 2 is the second largest district.

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<sup>61</sup> Though they were examined as a potential key population, MnDOT later determined Disadvantaged Business Enterprises were outside the scope of this project.

## **Tribal Governments**

Past treatment of American Indians has contributed to the social and economic inequities American Indians experience today. How these inequities affect the transportation experience for American Indians living in District 2 should be part of the Advancing Transportation Equity project. Some known concerns include pedestrian safety on or near reservations as well as involvement in transportation planning and decision-making processes, specifically related to the projects that would affect tribal members both on and off the reservation.

In order to effectively engage, understand, and improve transportation equity for people of American Indian ancestry, it is important to know the political and geographical jurisdictions of reservations and recognize the sovereignty of tribal governments. There are three reservations within District 2: Red Lake, parts of White Earth, and Leech Lake.

In total, people of American Indian descent represent the largest racial minority group in District 2, at 7 percent. In regards to total number of American Indian individuals, District 2 is second to the Metro District with 11,887 in District 2 and 17,090 in Metro District. Within District 2, Beltrami County has the largest American Indian population at 21 percent of the county's total population (overall, people of color and American Indians make up 27 percent of the population in Beltrami County).

## **Racial and Ethnic Minorities**

Racially biased policies and practices of the past have led to present-day inequities for people of color living in Minnesota. This includes inequities at a broad scale (employment, wealth, education) and also specific to transportation (access, safety, participation in decision-making). As such, it is important to include the concerns of these groups in the Advancing Transportation Equity project.

People of color make up 14 percent of District 2's population. As mentioned previously, people of American Indian descent are the largest racial minority group in District 2, making up 7 percent of the total population. Hispanics of any race make up 3 percent followed by Black/African American at 1 percent. Polk County has the highest Hispanic or Latino population at 6 percent of the county's total population. Even though people of color are not heavily represented in District 2, learning and understanding potential transportation inequities influenced by race is necessary for advancing transportation equity.

Language differences are another key consideration related to racial and ethnic minorities. 2,000 people in District 2 speak English less than very well. After English, Spanish is the most common language spoken. Language barriers can make transportation harder for people who speak English less than very well and should be considered as part of this project.

## **Women and Girls**

Women of all ages make up 50 percent of District 2's population. This is similar to the state as a whole. A common transportation concern for women is safety, such as walking to and waiting for public transit, especially at night. Additionally, access to health care services can be an issue for women and girls, particularly in rural areas. Both safety and access to health care should be considered as part of this project.

## **Elderly and Aging in Place**

Between 2010 and 2016, District 2 experienced an increase in its 65 and older demographic. This is true for all of Minnesota. However, District 2 has a slightly higher percentage of 65 and older residents—20 percent compared to Minnesota’s 15 percent.

The proportion of people living in the same house a year ago was 4 percent higher in District 2 (90%) than it was for the state (86%). This possibly indicates that some elderly residents are choosing to age in their homes. If this scenario is true, then concerns surrounding access to services and care providers should be taken into consideration as part of this project.

## **Low-Income (Persons Living in Poverty)**

The primary transportation equity concern for low-income households is the ability to access jobs, services, and other opportunities. At 13 percent, District 2 has the second highest percentage among all MnDOT districts of people living at or below the poverty line. Racial differences in poverty rates between white residents and people of color are very noticeable, especially pertaining to American Indian and Black/African American populations. In Beltrami County, 37 percent of the American Indian population lives at or below the poverty line compared to 13 percent of its White population. Similarly, 34 percent of Blacks and African Americans live at or below the poverty line in Beltrami County.

## **Zero-Vehicle Households**

Six percent of households in District 2 do not have a vehicle. Equity concerns with zero-vehicle households are related to access to jobs and other opportunities. The availability and frequency of transit service, bicycling and walking options, are important when considering the transportation needs of zero-vehicle households. For the Advancing Transportation Equity project it will be important to investigate if there are overlaps between race, income, and gender with zero-vehicle households.

## **Disability**

District 2 has the second highest disability rate in the state. As such, special focus on the transportation experience should be considered for the following disabilities: hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care or independent living difficulties. Better understanding the various nuanced experiences will help to ensure the individuals experiencing these disabilities are able to travel with the same ease and access as those who do not have a disability.

## **Veterans**

Veterans often experience disabilities at a higher rate than the population as a whole. Every county in District 2 has a higher percentage of veterans compared to the overall state (6 percent). In addition to mobility concerns, access to veteran’s services in District 2 should also be considered as part of this project.

Mobility concerns specific to veterans who are of American Indian ancestry will also be important for this study. American Indians have one of the highest records of military enrollment (25 percent) when compared to the general population (3 percent). Less than 50 percent of eligible American Indian veterans access their earned benefits.

## Disadvantaged Businesses Enterprises (DBEs)

Women, minority, and small business enterprises who operate in District 2 and have transportation related services may experience equity issues related to procurement and vendor contracts. Minority-owned companies in Minnesota “were awarded work totaling \$14.3 million, less than 1 percent of the state’s total spending of about \$2 billion...between July 2014 and July 2015.”<sup>62</sup> Identifying and engaging DBEs with transportation services in District 2 will help identify opportunities to more equitably distribute the benefits from transportation spending in Minnesota.

## Other Communities for Consideration

Information is not readily available for all demographic groups. In some cases data is not regularly collected and reported or in other cases individuals may not feel comfortable providing information. However, just because data is limited does not mean communities do not experience transportation inequities. The list below identifies other potential populations for consideration in the Advancing Transportation Equity project:

- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual
- Minority religious groups
- Immigrants, refugees and migrants
- People released from incarceration
- Amish

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<sup>62</sup> Pioneer Press. “Minnesota’s minority-owned companies get fraction of state business.” August 10, 2016. Accessed December 2, 2018. <https://www.twincities.com/2016/08/10/minnesotas-minority-owned-companies-get-fraction-of-state-business/>

## Appendix E: Interview Guide

Interviewers used the following questions to guide their conversations and were instructed to use probes to further explore topic areas.

- 1) Broadly speaking, what are some challenges facing the community or communities you serve/ represent?
- 2) Which transportation modes are most often used by the community to carry out day-to-day activities? (Including attending work, school, health care appointments, social, and cultural activities?)
- 3) Which modes are most critical and what challenges do they encounter in accessing these modes? What, if any, locations are particularly difficult to get to?
- 4) How well are non-motorized modes and public transportation in this area meeting (or not meeting) the needs of the community?
- 5) What, if any, safety concern does the community have with regard to transportation?
- 6) Can you describe a transportation project or program that impacted the community your organization serves/ represent and how the community was involved in the decision-making?
- 7) What, if any, examples do you have of when the community has been successful in advocating on issues important to them?

## Appendix F: Findings and Potential Solutions from the Implementation Meeting

MnDOT Central Office and District 2 staff developed the following potential solutions during an October 22, 2018 meeting that was facilitated by MAD. Staff also voted on which solutions they believed MnDOT should prioritize initiating in the next six to 12 months. Those that got votes are in **bold**, and the number of votes will be in parentheses.

### **Finding 1: Private vehicles are the top transportation mode, but some populations face barriers to obtaining a driver's license.**

MnDOT influence: low

Potential solutions: none

### **Finding 2: Transit agencies have challenges meeting communities' demand for services.**

MnDOT influence: moderate to high

Potential solutions: See Finding 3

### **Finding 3: Community members face barriers in accessing transit services.**

MnDOT influence: moderate to high

Potential solutions:

- **MnDOT could potentially use and fund on-demand technology to create on-demand transit. (7 votes)**
  - **Train transit providers on on-demand services (including system directors and boards).**
  - **Develop an investment plan for services seven days per week that connects communities via coordination among transit service.**
  - **Through application funding requests, MnDOT can make serving these unmet needs and creating connections a priority.**
- Restructure Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils.
- Explore funding opportunities for transit agencies to match state funding and expand services.
- Influence policy makers and engage customers (also tied to public engagement).
- Meet with transit agencies twice per year.
- Coordinate with human services.

## **Finding 4: Biking and walking are growing in popularity, but more infrastructure is needed.**

MnDOT influence: high

Potential solutions:

- Work with local governments and organizations to inventory need and use for biking and pedestrian infrastructure and tie it to equity needs.
- Assess (annually?) MnDOT pedestrian crossing timing.
- **Increase education and outreach about funding that exists and ways it could be used. (2 votes)**
- **Help connect communities to matching fund resources (to match state funds). (2 votes)**
- Provide information on where facilities exist – we can't build everywhere.
- Make sure there are bike and pedestrian detours on projects.
- Continue to ensure we take advantage of all opportunities to make improvements efficiently.
- Prioritize locations related to equity needs – to prioritize projects, funding, work, etc.
- Work with partners (i.e., Department of Natural Resources) to better coordinate and leverage resources.
- Better understand the needs of specific groups – locations and use (i.e., Amish communities).

## **Finding 5: The community has safety concerns related to biking and walking.**

MnDOT influence: high

Potential solutions:

- **Have conversations with local government about winter maintenance needs and how we can partner to achieve shared goals, including people walking and biking. (5 votes)**
- Provide better lighting around bike parking.
- Provide guidance to communities on buying and installing bike racks.
- Review how we prioritize maintenance activities and what impacts those decisions have.
  - Help people understand the trade-offs when we prioritize efforts.
- Consider ways MnDOT can address peoples' feelings of personal safety when walking and biking.
- Elevating local, personal stories about why it is important to make safer places for walking and biking.

## **Finding 6: Other transportation options exist, but they too have limitations.**

MnDOT influence: moderate to low

Potential solutions:

- **Expand the Volunteer Driver Program (3 votes):**
  - **Combine resources.**
  - **Expand eligibility.**

- **Better recruitment for drivers.**
- Encourage Lyft and Uber services in rural areas.
  - Subsidize services for eligible needs.
  - Research why their services don't exist in rural areas.
  - **Use lessons learned in Uber or Lyft and promote use in Volunteer Driver Program. (1 vote)**
- Determine which agency(ies) is(are) responsible for working with other transportation options.

## **Finding 7: Land use and natural barriers impact access.**

MnDOT influence: varies from moderately low to moderately high

Potential solutions:

- **MnDOT can do a better job of exploring options for pedestrian crossings. (1 vote)**
- Engage users to identify needs and help prioritize investments.
- Consider all system impacts when making decisions on locations for various facilities.
  - MnDOT's role is to partner and communicate with local communities.
- **Consider more flexibility in investment guidelines. (4 votes)**

## **Finding 8: Building and strengthening relationships is key to engagement.**

MnDOT influence: high

Potential solutions:

- Build off work that's already been done:
  - Manufacturers' Perspectives study.
  - Amazon effect—look at how Amazon effect on services.
  - WIG 2.0 survey—utilize contacts.
  - Equity work and questions.
- Determine how to make best use of the work on equity interviews.
  - Ensure and communicate we are not wasting their time.
  - Create a scorecard to show what we're accomplishing and quid-pro-quo.
- **Connect with other agencies' needs/desires with the correct project or program staff to create wins. (5 votes)**
  - **Collaborate with other agencies, governments, and organizations that are doing similar work to MnDOT and engaging the public. (2 votes and recommendation to combine with above bullet)**
- Collaborate with other agencies to determine legislative priorities and where there is commonality or overlap.
- Create a shared language and definitions.
- Clarify influence in discussion compared to information to them.
- When and where people can engage with MnDOT:
  - Set regular times people can interact and engage with MnDOT, so people and groups know the schedule and have the ability to communicate.

- For example, coffee and conversations.
  - On smaller projects, involve city councils in meetings.
  - Get involved in other agencies' regular meetings and attend on a regular basis.
- Take temperature checks on where people are getting information (i.e., newspapers, Facebook, others). The public engagement survey may be a source of information.
- Hold regular informational meetings as a means to let people know what is happening.
  - Allow customers to bring concerns/issues—not project-based, more open.
  - For example, Commissioner on Wheels.
  - 2019 new leadership direction.
- Being able to show how resources are, were, and will be used.

## Appendix G: Additional Contacts

The table below illustrates organizations and people that interviewees suggested MnDOT contact. The table reflects all information currently available. These contacts are an opportunity for D2 staff to expand upon the findings of the Equity Pilot and explore additional areas of interest that arise from findings and recommendations. D2 staff could use the same interview questions as those in the Equity Pilot, modify the questions to suit their own uses, or develop new questions for future conversations.

Organization	Connection to transportation equity
Adult Day Services	
Altru Clinic and Hospital	
Arrowhead Transit	
Assisted living	
Bemidji Downtown Business Association	
Bemidji Leads	
Churches	Many people contact first
City governments/councils	
Community Resource Connections	
County commissioners	
County engineers	
County government	
County health services	May have information on newcomer communities
County SHIP coordinators	
Development Homes	
Energy & Environment Research Center	
Grocery stores	
Heartland Express	
Homeless centers	

**Organization****Connection to transportation equity**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Connection to transportation equity</b>
Human resource group	
Indian Health Services	
Kittson Memorial Health Center	Can speak to employees and daycare needs
Leech Lake Community Health representatives	Work with tribal members on health issues
Local entities	
Lutheran Social Services	
Medical systems	
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Help people access parks
Minnesota Workforce Center	
North Dakota ADA	Accessibility work may cross into Minnesota
Occupational Development Centers	Work with people with disabilities
Podco, LLC	
Polk County Social Services	
Roseau City Planner	
Roseau Occupational Development Center	
Roseau Veterans Services Officer	
Sanford Health Windsong	
School districts	
Senior centers or senior living facilities	Work with more ambulatory older adults
Shifting Gears	Fixes and provides bikes in Bemidji
Tamarack Court Assisted Living	
Tribal colleges	
United African Community	

**Organization****Connection to transportation equity**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Connection to transportation equity</b>
University of Minnesota Crookston	Works with International Diversity and connected to the community
Valley Community Health Centers	
Veterans Affairs Administration	
Young people	May have suggestions for engagement

## Appendix H: Past and Current Initiatives and Opportunities

The section of this report titled Relationships are key to engagement.<sup>63</sup> highlights input from interviewees that suggests the need for ongoing and strengthened partnership among government agencies and between state government, local government, and nonprofits to improve transportation equity in District 2. The table below lists initiatives identified by interviewees that may be relevant to MnDOT’s work in equity. Interviewees offered varying amounts of detail based on their top-of-mind recollection of the initiative. In some cases, MnDOT is already involved in the work.

Organization	Work or potential work for collaboration
University of Minnesota Crookston	Provides transportation to students on campus and in community.
Bemidji Food Shelf	Would like to implement a mobile food shelf to travel to communities like Blackduck and Kelliher.
Community Action	Designed own program with grants to support transportation for older adults to run errands in addition to medical appointments
School districts	Some provide programming where parents can drop off and pick up children and allow kids to stay after school
Churches	Attempting to address transportation challenges for parishioners
Transit for Our Future (MnDOT)	Improves customer access to MnDOT for transit agencies
Toward Zero Deaths Coalition in Polk County (MnDOT)	Collaborating to engage communities
City governments	Often apply for grants for improvements like sidewalks
Public health and city planners	Community engagement and coordinate systems (laws, regulations, funding streams, systems, etc.)

<sup>63</sup> Refer to Page 41.

**Organization****Work or potential work for collaboration**

Commissioner on Wheels tours	Collaboration and community engagement
Bush Foundation	Funds transportation initiatives in District 2
Department of Employment and Economic Development	Transportation Economic Development and Transportation Economic Development Infrastructure grants, funds for entrepreneur and start-up businesses, regional network meetings
Sanford Health, other area health care facilities	In some cases provides transportation for patients.
Bike Crookston	Group of individuals advocating for biking-related improvements, such as bike paths.
Grand Forks/ East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization	Community engagement and planning related to transportation in East Grand Forks
Bemidji Leads	Collaboration among leaders in Bemidji to address community concerns, including transportation
City of Thief River Falls	Increasing number of bike paths in Thief River Falls, revitalizing the downtown area
Bemidji physicians group	Advocating for ridesharing and biking in Bemidji
Options Interstate Resource Center for Independent Living	Provides training on travelling with a person with a disability.
Transit agencies	Coordinate rural transit
Minnesota Department of Health	Health equity initiative

**Organization****Work or potential work for collaboration**

Minnesota Department of Corrections	Sends probation officers to specific locations to meet with people on probation--avoids probation violations due to inability to meet
Minnesota State and K-12 education	Address labor shortage
Essentia Health	Provided trips to Fargo but had to stop due to conflict of interests
Marshall County	Has living at home programs for older adults
Area health and mental health providers	Provide ways to meet with patients remotely and avoid travelling