Hear Every Voice
Case Study: MinnesotaGO

Project Details

Fifty-year transportation visioning project for the state of Minnesota.

Location

Washington, D.C.

Organizations

Minnesota Department of Transportation, University of Minnesota, Citizens League

Budget

Project Budget: $243,000
Public Participation Budget: $145,000 (excludes steering committee and advisory group activities)

Case Summary

Context: Minnesota GO was a fifty-year transportation visioning project conducted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT). The intent of Minnesota GO was to help Mn/DOT and its partners set priorities, goals, and expectations for Minnesota's transportation system and inform a statewide multimodal transportation plan. Toward this end, the Office of Multi-Modal Planning and Innovation (OMPI) at Mn/DOT developed various engagement activities to develop a long-range vision.

This case study describes the various components of the public participation plan used for the Minnesota GO long-range visioning process.

Participation Plan: The Minnesota GO public participation plan was developed to create a coordinated outreach and engagement effort that integrates multiple methods of public and stakeholder engagement. The plan accounts for the diversity of interests from across Minnesota that Mn/DOT hoped to engage in the multimodal visioning effort, and articulates the various components of the engagement effort.

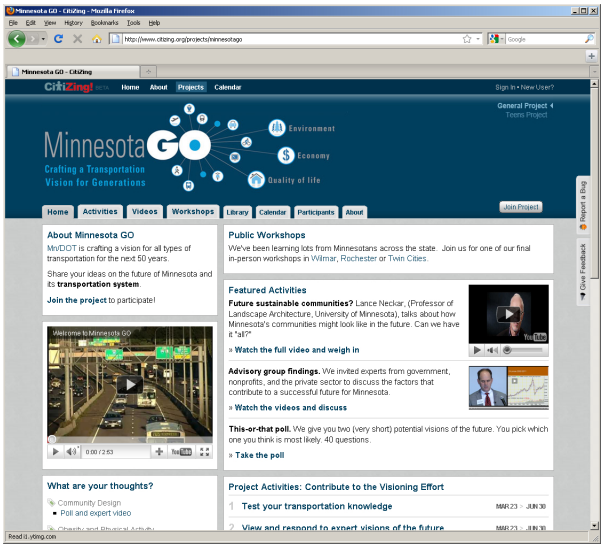
Steering Committee
Comprised of thirty-one members from across the state, the Minnesota GO steering committee was charged with developing a vision statement and set of objectives for the Mn/DOT commissioner and senior leadership. Members of the steering committee were high-level staff and decision makers representing a variety of agencies and organizations relevant to transportation in Minnesota. To develop the vision, the steering committee reviewed public comments, public workshop summaries, advisory group summary information, existing plans, and additional research. The steering committee met three times throughout the project in effort to synthesize information and develop various aspects of the vision.

Advisory Groups
Three advisory groups were convened to engage stakeholders and experts in the visioning process. Working in all-day sessions, each advisory group meeting engaged a different group of participants in a discussion of factors related to a successful future inMinnesota. The sessions were organized around three themes: quality of life, economic competitiveness, and environmental protection. Experts gave presentations on transportation

and other related topics. Participants used personal keypad voting devices to prioritize key themes and future outcomes during an interactive discussion.

Web-based Engagement

A web-based public engagement tool was developed to provide information about the multimodal visioning effort and gather insights related to the connection between transportation and quality of life, the economy, and the environment. The web-based tool, www.minnesotago.org, met ADA standards and provided participants with information and various engagement and feedback opportunities. An online tool for students (18 and under) was also developed to engage youth from across the state. Both web-based tools were promoted at various in-person events and through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter.



Citizing! MinnesotaGO website with various activities. Participants can just read information or respond to questions about transportation and the future.

MinnesotaGO Twitter feed. Project staff continually updated information on the process, workshops across the state, and Minnesota residents commented or re-tweeted information to spread the word about the project.

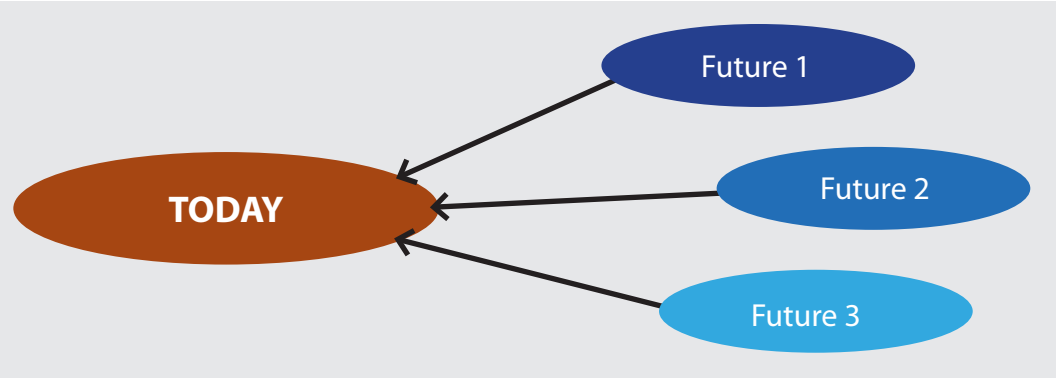
Public Workshops

A series of 10 public workshops, including one online workshop, were held in locations across the state of Minnesota. The workshops were focused on actively engaging the public and stakeholder participants in a scenario planning exercise. Meetings began with a project overview, a welcome video by the Mn/DOT commissioner, and a description of the small group activity. The intent of these meetings was to learn what future transportation options people desired and what principles should guide a transportation agency.

The majority of the public workshop meeting time was devoted to a small group (6-8 participants) scenario planning activity in which participants engaged together in actively considering conditions 50 years in the future that might influence transportation planning, policy, construction, and management in Minnesota. The scenarios were informed by steering committee and advisory group discussion and web-based engagement efforts, with the greatest influence coming from a series of interviews with more than a dozen University of Minnesota faculty and research staff. The interviews highlighted alternative futures relative to key issues such as technology, energy, fuels, safety, water, demographics, and health.

In the small group discussions, participants were immersed in one of three scenarios by reviewing materials and responding to questions. To accommodate various learning styles, three pieces of information were given to participants: a scenario narrative described life in this future; a score card provided a barometer of how this future compared to 2011 on various topics (e.g., environment, economy, workforce, education); and a map illustrated how this future may impact various areas of the state. After reading and reviewing the scenario information, participants were asked to write down and discuss their answers to a variety of worksheet questions. Questions ranged from how a future scenario would impact personal choices to what principles should guide a transportation agency given the assigned scenario. To facilitate group activities and capture discussion and themes in the workshop activity, a trained small group facilitator and a scribe were assigned to each group.

Scenario Planning



Scneario planning is a strategic planning method that some organizations use to make flexible long-term plans.

After the small group activity, participants reported their top principles to the larger group in a live-polling format using personal keypad voting devices. Additional comments by participants were also encouraged. Reporting back to the larger group allowed workshop participants to hear the other scenarios and identify

An example of scenario information given to participants during the workshop small group activity.

common and disparate responses across the various scenarios. Additionally, results were used by Mn/DOT staff and the steering committee to better understand public preferences for key principles that might guide the agency's future decision making.

Targeted Outreach

Targeted outreach efforts were made to encourage participation from often underrepresented communities (e.g., lower income residents, racial minorities, new immigrants). The project team felt strongly that one benefit of the public meetings was to engage in a cross-cultural conversation. Therefore, the project team made a concerted effort to encourage underrepresented communities to participate in the public workshops held around the state rather than conducting targeted outreach meetings in isolation. Working through existing Mn/DOT contacts and through a new list of non-profit and other organizations serving underrepresented groups (e.g., service providers, advocacy groups), a focused communications effort was conducted to promote participation in the process.

Public Hearing

Upon completion of the draft vision statement but prior to it being finalized, Mn/DOT conducted a formal public hearing to gather public comment on the proposed vision. The hearing was simulcast to each district office to allow broad participation around the state. During the comment period, comments were accepted in various formats, including through the web-based engagement tool. Translation services were available upon request.

The Minnesota GO visioning project engaged many voices from various communities across the state of Minnesota. Project information can be found at www.minnesotago.org.

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