

Thrive MSP 2040 Outreach and Engagement

Phase I Summary

June through October 2012

Conversations

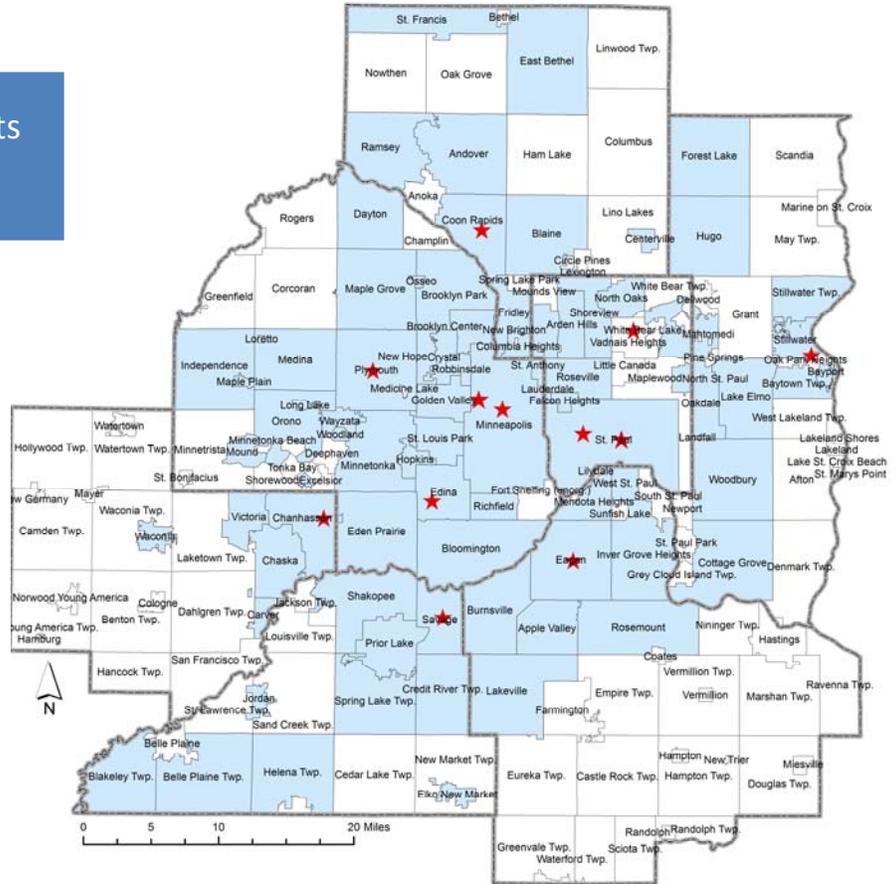
48

Participants

1,100+

Phase I of outreach and engagement for the *Thrive MSP 2040* plan had four distinct tracks, to reach as many audiences as possible with the opportunity to help establish the vision the plan will address:

- ❖ Grass-roots community engagement, specifically to reach traditionally under-represented communities and build on the successes of the Corridors of Opportunity
- ❖ Council member-sponsored listening sessions to gather ideas
- ❖ Organization-hosted events, involving conversations between the Council and organizational partners
- ❖ Ideas submitted through the online 'Your Ideas' website, sponsored by the Council



Officials from each of the communities shaded in blue attended a Thrive MSP 2040 discussion during the first phase of outreach. Red stars indicate locations of Council-sponsored listening sessions.

More than 1,100 individuals attended the various meetings, provided ideas, and participated in the discussion surrounding the vision for *Thrive MSP 2040*. Key themes include:

- ❖ Connecting jobs, housing, transit and community amenities (especially parks)
- ❖ Residents want jobs, commerce, community activities close to home
- ❖ Prioritizing regional investment, particularly in transit infrastructure
- ❖ Serving as a convener for regionally significant discussions
- ❖ Council policies need to provide some flexibility to address the specific needs of communities
- ❖ Assuring adequate water supply and improving water quality



Summary of Outreach

Grass Roots Community Engagement

Small Group Conversations with Under-Represented Communities

Purpose

To hear from under-represented people, who do not typically participate in regional dialogues, by building on the Corridors of Opportunity relationships, and to get their responses to two questions:

1. What do you like about living in the Twin Cities? What is working for you, your family, and your cultural community?
2. What could be better about the Twin Cities, for you, your family, and your cultural community?

Assumptions

Participants will:

- ❖ Share best when they share in their own space
- ❖ Share most deeply when they share in their own words
- ❖ Contribute well with simple practices that ensure all voices are heard and guide the time and place for their contributions
- ❖ Need only a basic understanding of what the Council does
- ❖ Feel most comfortable when government members are few and quiet
- ❖ Expect a good host/or guest to bring culturally appropriate food

Conversations

We used existing networks to be invited by communities and accepted all invitations. Council staff gave a 5- to 8-minute introduction of what the Council does through a paper graphic with photos. The conversations were designed around a Conversation Circle, so everyone took turns answering the question in his or her own words. Council staff took notes, not names, and did not synthesize or prioritize what was heard.

Participants

- ❖ African American
- ❖ Caucasian
- ❖ Eritrean
- ❖ Hmong
- ❖ Laotian
- ❖ Latino
- ❖ LGBT
- ❖ Liberian
- ❖ Native American
- ❖ Oromo
- ❖ Persons with disabilities
- ❖ Somali
- ❖ Vietnamese

Themes (paraphrased by Council staff)

What works: sense of place, parks and trails, diversity, communities and neighborhoods, available public transit, opportunity to get involved, places for art, Council's invitation to become involved in *Thrive MSP 2040*.

What could be better: more and better access to jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities, better transit service, efficient roads, acknowledging inequities, talking about race and religious diversity, eliminating the achievement gap, rental and owner affordable housing, safer neighborhoods, include a section on engaging all people in planning and policy development, particularly under-represented groups, in *Thrive MSP 2040*.

Group Conversations

11

Participants

146

Cultural Communities Represented

14

Languages Spoken

9

Organizations:

Community Engagement partners (120 invitees)

Cedar Riverside

Citizens League Young Leaders

Cleveland Neighborhood Association

Health Equity Group

New American Academy

St. Paul Mayor's

Commission on Disabilities

Skyline Tower

Skyline Tower Leadership Council

West Broadway Business and Area Coalition

Groups to be scheduled:

African American Leadership Forum

The Karen Organization of Minnesota

New American Academy

West Side Community Organization/NeDA

A sampling of participants' comments (paraphrased)

What works

- ❖ *I thought that I would never leave my apartment, that I would never have a home, that I would never have a job, that I would never get married and that I would never have a child... I have all of these now. – Caucasian man with a disability*
- ❖ *Our proud history of social struggle – Sister's of St. Joseph and AIM. – Native American man*
- ❖ *How people here love their community and their neighborhoods. – African American woman*
- ❖ *The density of desperation is not here compared to other cities I have lived in. – African American male*
- ❖ *The parks and trails and museums and art galleries and libraries are great for me and my young children. – North Mpls. Caucasian man*
- ❖ *I love living here; I have lived here for 21 years and I feel safe; I don't have to lock my door; we have a community that knows each other. – Vietnamese woman, Skyline Towers Leadership Council*
- ❖ *Life here is easy for me. – Somali man, Eden Prairie*
- ❖ *The art scene is grounded in community... voices are heard and opportunity created. – Hmong man*
- ❖ *The diversity and ability to get involved is great. – Caucasian woman, Citizens League Young Leaders*
- ❖ *The Council is changing its ways and is now engaging different types of people in its planning. That is good to see. I will be watching to see what happens next. – Caucasian man, Advocate, Mpls.*

What isn't working

- ❖ *I can't really be myself; I talk too loud, my hair isn't right and I can't be myself here. - African American woman, North Mpls.*
- ❖ *We need a security guard in our building and more police protection; a young woman was held up coming home from the Cedar light rail station just yesterday. – Somali elder, Cedar Riverside*
- ❖ *We need an inside place to gather together; we, elders, and the women have no place to go especially in the winter and we have large families in small apartments. Since our young people and our elders cannot get jobs, we are all in the same apartment all day. – Somali man, Cedar Riverside*
- ❖ *We need better transit service at all hours of the day so that Latino people can get to and from jobs. They ride share because many are illegal and do not have licenses and if they are stopped by police for driving, they will be arrested. – Caucasian woman working with Latino community*
- ❖ *We need jobs, both elders and young people. We go to the shopping area nearby and apply for jobs. We are told that "I will call you," but they never call. I think it may be because our address is Skyline Towers or there is something else happening. – Oromo man, Skyline Towers Leadership Council*
- ❖ *I got a college degree when I came here some years ago. When jobs were available, I tried to get one and could not, so I got a master's degree. I still had trouble getting a job. I fear the same thing will happen for my son. – African immigrant man, St. Paul*
- ❖ *I am a small business owner. I know there are services to help small businesses with taxes and other costs, but we don't know how to find them. – African American business woman, North Mpls.*
- ❖ *We don't need more job training; we need jobs. We need opportunities and access to jobs on the north side. We need more equitable investments in the north side. – African American woman, North Mpls.*
- ❖ *We need to talk about race and how it creates inequity. – African American woman, North Mpls.*
- ❖ *We need more religious acceptance. We are Muslim and cannot carry alcohol in our taxi when the alcohol is visible to us. This puts us in a difficult position since we drive taxi for our wages. – Somali taxi driver, Eden Prairie*
- ❖ *We need better transit access so that the north side can be easily connected to the rest of the city. – African American woman, North Mpls.*
- ❖ *We need better transportation along 494, 169, and 212; it is inefficient, slow and confusing. – Caucasian male, Citizens League Young Leaders*
- ❖ *We need to keep Section 8 housing vouchers in Eden Prairie and we need larger affordable housing units. – Somali man, Eden Prairie*
- ❖ *We are self sufficient. We need to open our own businesses in Eden Prairie; we want to buy our clothes and food here instead of on Lake Street; to open an auto repair shop, electronics shop, Laundromat, restaurant, fast food. – Somali men, Eden Prairie*
- ❖ *We need to pay attention to energy. – Caucasian woman, Citizens League Young Leaders*
- ❖ *We need places to gather other than a bar and health service that will serve us without question. – LGBT woman, Mpls.*
- ❖ *We need to reduce the achievement gap. North High should be a good school. – Caucasian woman, North Mpls.*
- ❖ *Corridors of Opportunity and Thrive MSP 2040 needs to include a section on engagement policies and practices. – The Community Engagement Steering Committee*



Summary of Outreach Council Member Listening Sessions

Following are the major themes heard in the 12 Council Member Listening Sessions held during September and October 2012. *Central themes* were themes that were discussed at some length at many or most meetings. *Prominent themes* came up at many or most meetings. *Other topics* were also discussed.

Among ideas expressed that related directly to attendees' vision for the region:

- ❖ A region that is more diverse, including younger and older residents
- ❖ A place where we have technology
- ❖ Safe communities
- ❖ Cities are involved in the region
- ❖ There is no segregation
- ❖ We have worked out poverty issues
- ❖ We have a robust economy
- ❖ We get along and serve as a model for the rest of the country
- ❖ Communication barriers are overcome
- ❖ There is a good, solid transportation system that includes roads, trails and a complete transit system
- ❖ A region where government works in the background.

Central Themes

- ❖ **Affordable housing.** Feedback fell into one of four areas: Metropolitan Council requirements, the need for affordable housing, issues relating to providing affordable housing as well as comments regarding housing in general. Cities acknowledged the need for affordable housing, but asked for help providing new units and addressing the increasing need to rehabilitate older buildings. Participants from cities advocated for giving more credit and consideration of "natural" or existing affordable housing stock in a community.
- ❖ **Collaboration and Relationships.** Perhaps the most pervasive theme, there is a need and a desire for the Council to be a convener around issues that Council policies alone cannot resolve. The Council was also asked to facilitate collaboration among cities, as well as with/among organizations working in similar programs or on similar issues (such as housing or water supply).
- ❖ **Economic Development and Competitiveness.** Attendees expressed both encouragement and concern the Council is interested in economic development. The Council was encouraged to act in support of economic development in general terms, and to support efforts of others working in this area; an active Council role in the field was a concern to other participants. Transit and transportation infrastructure are very important for regional competitiveness. Outside employers expect great transit; our competitor regions (nationally and internationally) are stepping up to provide transit and we need to do the same, and jobs are essential to a vibrant region.
- ❖ **Engagement.** Attendees expressed gratitude for the opportunity to offer ideas, and they want to know their comments will be considered in the Thrive policies. There is significant distrust that government will act on their ideas. In addition, concern was expressed that the policies resulting from their ideas will only benefit a select few communities (such as those "within the beltway" or in transit corridors) – particularly environmental justice and new immigrant communities. Attendees also encouraged the Council to be a leader in setting standards for community engagement.
- ❖ **Funding and Priorities.** This discussion involved two main threads: the need to find adequate funding, particularly for transit, and suggestions on how to allocate and

Meetings

12

Attendees

323

Central Themes:

Affordable housing

Collaboration and relationships

Economic development and competitiveness

Engagement

Funding and priorities

Healthy communities, livability and mobility

Transit

Water supply and water quality

Vision for the future

One size does not fit all

prioritize spending funds. There were concerns regarding declines in public investment in infrastructure and how that affects regional competitiveness, and we heard support for a “fix it first” approach; describing a commitment to investing in existing infrastructure. Others expressed concern about regional balance in infrastructure between suburban communities and the urban core.

- ❖ **Healthy communities, livability and mobility.** There are infrastructure needs associated with health issues, such as obesity, the Council can influence. Thrive should emphasize and support measures to promote and increase active living, such as promoting and encouraging transit use, bicycling and walking. Safety is a concern; as people move around the community more on foot or on bikes they need safe walkways, crossings and bikeways. Health issues related to disparities need addressing.
- ❖ **Transit.** Comments regarding transit touched on *funding, planning* and *building* transit. City/county officials, the business community and citizens alike were concerned about how to identify and provide a stable source of transit financing. There were comments in support of expanding the transit system to create a complete system. There were also concerns about investing in transit, particularly rail transit, at all. We heard suggestions for improving how we work in partnership with suburban transit providers.
- ❖ **Water Supply & Water Quality.** Water supply is an issue of growing concern, and needing coordination. Cities need help in addressing requirements for impaired waters. There may be a role for the Council to be involved in water supply and in improving water quality.
- ❖ **One-size does not fit all.** A one-size fits all approach in visioning and subsequent policy was worrisome. There were concerns that our current policies were very general and seemed to take a “one-size-fits-all approach” that did not always mesh with community needs. Some expressed their hope that the regional vision will embrace community diversity and account for what is good for *all* portions of the region.

Prominent Themes

- ❖ **Agriculture/local food.** Providing locally grown food is important to maintaining a sustainable region. The Council should promote inclusion of smaller parcels into the Agricultural Preserve program and communicate in ways that are inclusive to immigrant farmers.
- ❖ **Education.** Education is one most important elements in quality of life and regional competitiveness. People choose where they live based on education/schools for themselves and their children. As a region we need to think about how education fits into *Thrive MSP 2040* to help foster a thriving, prosperous region.
- ❖ **Equity.** Attendees expressed there are significant gaps by race in education, income and employment. Thrive should take this issue head on. Equity needs to help drive changes in the future. The Council cannot address all equity issues, but it may be able to influence certain remedies.
- ❖ **Sewer Availability Charge (SAC) Program.** Attendees suggested changes in assessing and collecting SAC, and administration of SAC credit. Are the fees the right amount for the impact a project is placing on the system? What about paying fees over time rather than all at once?
- ❖ **Technology infrastructure.** Nearly every session included the suggestion of the region’s need for technology infrastructure and for a regional approach to this issue.
- ❖ **Transportation Connections.** Transportation is a crucial part of a thriving economy – the region needs an integrated transportation system for the future. Cities and counties should work together more effectively, especially in light of financial need and constraints. Transportation investments should be made throughout the region and regional planning should better address the freight system (rail, barge and trucks). Address housing and transportation (including transit) together.

Other Themes

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| ❖ Accessibility | ❖ Politics and policy continuity |
| ❖ Aging | ❖ Planning and zoning |
| ❖ Council forecasts & demographic changes | ❖ Redevelopment |
| ❖ Environment and parks | ❖ Size of the region |
| ❖ Infrastructure | ❖ Sustainability |
| ❖ Livable Communities Programs/TOD grants | ❖ Systems integration |
| ❖ Parks and natural resource protection | ❖ Workforce development |



Summary of Outreach Organization-Sponsored Events

During Phase I of Thrive Outreach and Engagement, Metropolitan Council members and staff held 25 conversations about *Thrive MSP 2040* with all of the Council's formal advisory committees, stakeholder organizations (such as MetroCities and Envision Minnesota), and other standing committees / boards (such as the Counties Transit Improvement Board and the Corridors of Opportunity Policy Board). As of Oct. 24, 2012, these events attracted 392 attendees who engaged in robust discussion about what they would like to see in *Thrive MSP 2040*. The following key questions and themes arose repeatedly across the events:

Conversations

25 groups

Attendees

392

Key themes:

Affordable housing

Attracting /retaining
young adults

Balance in approach

Emphasizing water
supply

Establishing
re/development
priorities

Improving access to
parks

Keeper of the region's
vision

New voices in
engagement

Regional transit system
development

- ❖ Who is **the keeper of the regional vision** to 2040? The Metropolitan Council has a statutory requirement to produce a metropolitan development guide. However, the Council's regulatory functions and appointment by the governor have led some to question if the appropriate keeper of the regional vision. If *Thrive MSP 2040* is the Council's appropriate vehicle, then there needs to be an effort to build up the Council (particularly outside the urban core) and convince people that the Council is the right keeper of the vision. Broader ownership of the regional vision beyond the Metropolitan Council – especially business leadership such as The Itasca Project and the Chambers – would help the vision be more resilient.
- ❖ What is the appropriate **balance** of a regulatory approach – seeing *Thrive MSP 2040* as an update to the Framework and the Council's four systems – and an aspirational or visionary approach to *Thrive MSP 2040* that leads with economic competitiveness?
- ❖ **Water supply** needs to have a greater role and emphasis in *Thrive MSP 2040* and local comprehensive plans. We had previously assumed that our region would always have enough water, but we are now seeing the impacts of groundwater withdrawals on surface water. Local comprehensive plans should include available local water supply or plans as to how to acquire water to support development. The Council should get the word out about pending water shortages; communities need to be scared.
- ❖ What are the **priority sites for development and redevelopment**? If there could be regional agreement on a small number of development and redevelopment opportunities that are priorities, then developers, funders, permitting agencies, investors and others would all work together to focus resources on shared goals. Broad agreement on the priorities would help ensure that all partners are pulling together.
- ❖ Local governments are supportive of **affordable housing** in the region, but believe strongly that the current formula for the allocation of affordable housing need is out of date. In particular, local governments want to see the formula recognize the increase in affordable housing that resulted from the housing crash and to acknowledge the communities that have an extensive supply of naturally-occurring affordable housing that has preservation needs.

- ❖ Our region's **parks, natural resources, and trails** are key assets that set our region apart and help to attract and retain young adults. However, stakeholders want the Council to be more intentional about ensuring that residents can reach parks by transit and that residents of the core have access to nearby regional parks. Similarly, stakeholders want the Council to be more intentional about how the regional trail network supports bicycle commuters and connects with the region's multimodal transportation system.
- ❖ What does our region need to do to attract **18- to 34-year-olds**? This age cohort tends to be the most geographically mobile and, unlike previous generations, those who are moving today are often choosing where they want to live first, finding a job and a career second. Because of changing generational preferences, transit and walkable communities are playing larger roles in creating an attractive quality of life. Aging Baby Boomers may also have similar preferences for transit and walkable communities.
- ❖ Stakeholders want to see the build-out of the **regional transit system** – preferably sooner rather than later. A high-quality transit system is seen as critical to economic competitiveness, both to attract a talented workforce and to help employers access their employees. The region is perceived to be slipping behind in light-rail development relative to our peer regions. Areas that are not currently well-served or even served by transit would like to access transit.
- ❖ With the region's changing demographics, it becomes critical to ensure that a range of voices are heard by using new approaches to **engagement**. Stakeholders who were at the table for conversations about Thrive wanted to know that a diversity of participants had opportunities to engage.

Summary of Outreach

Online Channels

Your Ideas and Social Media

Central to the *Thrive MSP 2040* Outreach and Engagement Plan was providing a variety of options for the public and stakeholders to plug into the Thrive MSP effort, and to provide alternatives to the more traditional methods of in-person meetings. An online communications and outreach strategy identified in the plan, included the following aspects:

Key Goals

- ❖ Provide a **variety of options** for engagement
- ❖ Engage **traditionally under-represented** groups
- ❖ Leverage **technology**
- ❖ Facilitate ability to **follow issues** through the process

Elements

- ❖ Exposure to *Thrive MSP 2040*
- ❖ Promotion and Reach
- ❖ Your Ideas
- ❖ Social Media

Summary of Results

1. Promote *Thrive MSP 2040* effort and increase exposure to the effort
 - ❖ Millions of online impressions (potential views online)
 - ❖ Engagement with new audiences/groups
 - ❖ Significant exposure via traditional media, through both media coverage and paid advertising (in regional and ethnic outlets)
2. Communicate Thrive MSP effort with partners, through e-newsletter and social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube)
 - ❖ Partners promoted engagement
 - ❖ New audiences reached
 - ❖ More Interactive engagement (comments on Facebook, questions via Twitter)
3. Create 'Your Ideas' idea-gathering platform
 - ❖ Provided additional channel for engagement
 - ❖ Primarily people who would not otherwise participate
 - ❖ Adds important context to ideas expressed (voting/comments)
 - ❖ Fosters important discussion, in an accessible format
 - ❖ Forum will continue through life of project
 - ❖ Those initially engaged continue to follow the project
4. Use Social Media for discussion, promotion
 - ❖ Partner agencies, engaged participants also distributed to their channels (especially Twitter, which generated discussion)
 - ❖ Followers used Twitter and Facebook to submit ideas, ask questions
 - ❖ Media could reuse content
 - ❖ Ability for immediate feedback/discussion

Online Impressions

10 million

Ad-generated clicks

4,500

Online users

294

Ideas Submitted

123

Comments

348

Votes

1,473

Top Topics

Balancing tax base

Community amenities

Commuting patterns

General Transportation Issues

Linking multiple modes

Prioritizing investment

Themes & Topics on Your Ideas site

Overall Themes:

- ❖ Many of the ideas submitted, while generally part of one of the categories available on the Your Ideas site, illustrated the interconnected nature of these regional issues.
- ❖ Users encouraged the Council to use a strategic approach to infrastructure investments (particularly in transportation), acknowledging the importance of connecting people to community amenities, jobs, and housing.
- ❖ As expressed in the in-person meetings, several users suggested ideas that relate to the Council's role in managing the elements of the Thrive plan and the region's growth, and greater collaboration among local governments, as well as between local governments and the Council.
- ❖ Users also encouraged the Council to consider providing or improve information and resources about the region's amenities, such as walking and biking routes/trails, transit information, and greater explanations of regional systems.
- ❖ In terms of creating a regional vision, users suggested the region needs a strategic approach to technology investment and infrastructure.

Top Category: Transportation

- ❖ Two dominant themes among transportation ideas submitted involved transit-system investment and current transit service and related amenities.
 - Specifically, several users suggested (and supported ideas) that encouraged creating a method for transitway (commuter, light-rail, and bus-rapid transit) development and creating a specific method for long-term funding of transit development and service.
 - Users suggested the need for more regular transit service, particularly for individuals who work outside traditional 9-5 work hours, or otherwise rely on transit beyond traditional business hours.
- ❖ Users identified several bottlenecks on the regional highway system, as well as bridges needing improvement.
- ❖ Users suggested ideas surrounding value pricing for highways and transit and mileage-based fees to fund transportation.
- ❖ Various ideas related to biking and walking, as well as connecting those two modes to transit and community development, were also suggested.
- ❖ An overarching theme of regional balance also appeared in the ideas suggested.

Other Themes

- ❖ Issues not either directly within the Council's purview or that involve multiple agencies – these issues will be forwarded, as appropriate, to partner agencies, as well.
 - Zoning issues as they relate to community development and creating community amenities
 - Addressing regulatory barriers to development and growth
 - Land use as it relates to overall community health
 - Addressing equity, both in planning and in the tax base
- ❖ Issues that involve multiple systems
 - Housing near transit
 - Jobs near transit
 - Development that addresses walkability and access to transit
 - Connecting regional trail systems, such as the Grand Rounds in Minneapolis and St. Paul