
2.0 Public Involvement

2.1 Overview

This chapter documents the public involvement efforts that were employed over the course of the Southwest Transitway Alternatives Analysis (AA), and includes a summary of the public outreach strategy, public outreach activities and media coverage of the study.

2.2 Background and Assumptions

Public involvement is important for any planning process, and was a critical component of the Southwest Transitway AA. Meaningful public involvement increases community and public trust in the study process and reduces the risk of making less than optimal decisions. With a comprehensive public outreach process, it is possible to work collaboratively to make a lasting contribution to quality of life. Public involvement is more than an agency requirement and more than a means of fulfilling a statutory obligation. The Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) and its partners demonstrated a strong commitment to public involvement throughout the Southwest AA as central to good decision-making.

2.3 Strategy

A public outreach plan was developed in January 2005 at the outset of the Southwest Transitway AA with input and direction from study partners on the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). It includes strategies that built upon successful outreach work conducted as part of the 2003 *Southwest Rail Transit Study*. Consistent with the Systematic Development of Informed Consent (SDIC) public involvement process,¹ the HCRRA and its partners built upon established relationships with community and business groups, and the knowledge of community issues. In addition, efforts were made to reach out to a broader range of stakeholders to further strengthen the outreach effort.

Implementation of the *Public Outreach Plan* ensured that study information was provided to the public in a timely manner, and that multiple opportunities were provided for input from the public, particularly residents and businesses that would be most affected by a transitway. Information was provided through presentations at a wide range of venues, and through distribution of newsletters, a study web site, and newspaper articles. Input, feedback, concerns, and questions from the public were sought throughout the study at community and neighborhood meetings, business meetings, open houses, and city council meetings. Also, the interactivity of the study website allowed for electronic submittal of comments throughout the study.

Ongoing input from the public was critical to the development of study goals, the range of alternatives studied, and the study recommendations. All comments received from the wide range of outreach activities were recorded and made available to Southwest PAC and TAC members and to the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (see Appendix B for a summary of comments received).

2.4 Key Stakeholder Groups

The *Public Outreach Plan* identified key stakeholder groups for continuous, two-way communication. Key stakeholder groups included study area residents, neighborhoods and

¹ The Bleiker SDIC process identifies key stakeholders and their likely concerns and interests, and outreach strategies are developed based on the analysis of local issues.

neighborhood organizations, business owners and state legislators. Representatives from each study area municipality and from agency partners participated on the study’s two advisory committees, and assisted the project team in communicating with local organizations within their respective communities.

Activities undertaken with stakeholder groups are documented in the following section.

2.5 Public Outreach Activities and Results

2.5.1 Presentations and Meetings

A key strategy was to connect with citizens at places and times when groups gathered to discuss a range of community issues, for example, at neighborhood meetings, business associations, and other such venues. To expand outreach efforts beyond traditional open houses, and to respond to issues, concerns, and questions of groups of interested individuals, the study team staff attended, made presentations, and heard input at more than 40 community and business meetings. At these meetings, the presentation approach and materials were tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of each group. In all cases, handouts and presentation materials including fact sheets and route maps were distributed, and in some cases, more formal PowerPoint presentations were made.

Neighborhood and Special Interest Group Meetings

Meeting with existing community groups allowed for presentations to be tailored to the needs and interests of each group, and the settings encouraged dialogue and frank discussion of issues and possible ways to address concerns.

In the City of Minneapolis, neighborhood associations serve as a key point for discussing important public policy issues prior to their discussion with the Minneapolis City Council. Study team staff met with the potentially affected Minneapolis neighborhood associations throughout the study process to provide information to community leaders and residents about the study and to provide additional opportunities for feedback.

The study team also attended meetings with residents of the study area's suburban cities, including city-wide events and special meetings to discuss possible impacts of a Southwest Transitway. In addition, special interest groups such as the Uptown Business Association, the Midtown Greenway Coalition, the Cedar Lake Park Association, the League of Women Voters and the Riley-Purgatory Watershed District requested presentations.

Table 2.1 Meetings with Neighborhood and Special Interest Groups

Date	Group
April 26, 2005	Opus Condo Residents Group
May 9, 2005	Midtown Greenway Land Use/Transportation Committee
May 18, 2005	Bryn Mawr Neighborhood Association
June 6, 2005	Kenwood Isles Neighborhood Association
June 8, 2005	I-494 Corridor Commission
June 13, 2005	Whittier Alliance
June 21, 2005	Bassett Creek community

September 12, 2005	Cedar Lake Park Association
October 11, 2005	West Calhoun Neighborhood Association
November 12, 2005	League of Women Voters
November 17, 2005	St. Louis Park neighborhoods
November 22, 2005	Citizens for a Loring Park Community
January 12, 2006	West Tonka League of Women Voters
February 1, 2006	Riley-Purgatory Watershed District
February 13, 2006	Cedar Lake Park Association
February 23, 2006	SouthWest Metro Transit Commission
September 5, 2006	Cedar Isles Dean Neighborhood Association (CIDNA)
September 10, 2006	CIDNA Fall Festival
September 11, 2006	Kenwood Isles Neighborhood Association
September 27, 2006	Minneapolis Neighborhoods along Alternative C
October 10, 2006	Minnetonka City-wide Open House
October 12, 2006	St. Louis Park Neighborhoods
October 19, 2006	American Society of Civil Engineers – Mn Chapter
October 26, 2006	Minneapolis Transportation Mgmt Organization
October 28, 2006	Stevens Square Citizen Group
November 21, 2006	East Isles Residents Association

Business Meetings

Business groups represent an important constituency. Businesses have a vital interest in transportation issues for a variety of reasons. Many rely upon the ability to move goods throughout our region and can be severely impacted by congestion. In addition, their operations are affected by the ability of their employees to get to and from their jobs. The overall economic competitiveness of a region is greatly affected by the quality of the transportation system serving that region.

The *Southwest Transitway AA Public Outreach Plan* included the business community as a major stakeholder. To ensure that the business community was engaged in the Southwest Transitway AA, the HCRRA hosted a meeting with study area business leaders in March 2005 to discuss their issues, concerns, and questions regarding the proposed Southwest Transitway. Approximately 35 business leaders and local elected officials attended the meeting. In addition, the Eden Prairie, Twin West, and Minneapolis Regional Chambers of Commerce were invited to participate as members of the Southwest PAC. Members of these chambers also participated in the Southwest PAC Funding Subcommittee. Study team staff also attended 11 other meetings with business groups at key intervals throughout the Southwest Transitway AA.

Table 2.2 Meetings with the Business Community

Date	Business Group
February 15, 2005	Eden Prairie Rotary Club
March 15, 2005	Uptown Business Association
April 8, 2005	Breakfast Meeting with Interested Businesses
August 16, 2005	Hopkins Business Council
September 1, 2005	Hopkins Rotary Club
September 2, 2005	St. Louis Park Sunrise Rotary Club
August 22, 2006	Twin West Business Council
September 21, 2006	Lake Street Business Council
October 10, 2006	Eden Prairie Chamber Government Committee
November 28, 2006	Edina Realty
December 5, 2006	Edina Chamber – Government Relations Committee
November 9, 2006	Minneapolis Regional Chamber

Open Houses and Public Hearing

The Southwest Transitway AA included two series of public open houses, held at key points during the study process to provide the general public with study updates and an opportunity for interaction with study team staff.

The open houses were publicized through distributing newsletters, sending news releases to local newspapers and television stations, posting notices on the Southwest Transitway study website (www.southwesttransitway.org) and study partner websites, and emailing more than 300 interested persons. More than 125 individuals attended the 6 public open houses. Those attending were offered the opportunity to comment in several ways: with one-on-one conversations with study team staff, through a flip chart display of comments at each open house, and through comment cards. The comment cards could either be submitted at the open houses or sent in at a later time (comment cards were designed to be used as postcards, with the Hennepin County address written on the back). Another option offered to was to add their mail and email address to study mailing lists. This information was added to a study database that was used for public notices and distribution of study information.

Initiation of the Southwest Transitway AA (non-NEPA scoping) Open Houses

Three open houses were held during the spring of 2005. These open houses were intended to announce the initiation of the Southwest Transitway AA and to act as informal, non-National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) scoping meetings. Information at these open houses included the intended scope of the Southwest Transitway AA, the history of the Southwest Transitway, the purpose and need for a Southwest Transitway, the Southwest Transitway goals and objectives, and the initial set of Southwest Transitway alternatives. including documentation of transitway options that had been considered during previous studies and dismissed from further consideration.

Presentation of the Preliminary Southwest TAC Recommendation Open Houses

Three open houses were held in the fall of 2006 to present the preliminary Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) recommendations and to solicit input from the public. The public input received at the open houses was shared with the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) prior

to the formation of the final Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) recommendation in November 2006.

Table 2.3 Open House Dates and Locations

Date	Location
<i>Initiation of Southwest Transitway AA</i>	
May 10, 2005	Eden Prairie – SouthWest Metro Station
May 11, 2005	Hopkins – Hopkins Depot
May 12, 2005	Minneapolis – Kenwood Recreation Center
<i>Presentation of Preliminary Southwest TAC Recommendation</i>	
October 24, 2006	Minneapolis – Bryant Square Park
October 26, 2006	Hopkins – Eisenhower Community Center
November 2, 2006	Eden Prairie – SouthWest Metro Station

Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) Public Hearing

The HCRRA held a formal public hearing on January 23, 2007 for the purpose of soliciting public comment on the final Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) recommendation on a preferred course of action for the Southwest Transitway (Appendix C). The public was notified of the public hearing through the required public announcement in Finance and Commerce on January 9, 2007. Notice was also published in the Southwest Journal, Downtown Journal, Hill and Lake Press, Eden Prairie News, and Sun Current. In addition, information on the public hearing was distributed to Southwest PAC and TAC members and to the study email distribution list.

2.5.2 Legislative Breakfast

The *Public Outreach Plan* called for communications with various constituencies that have or will in the future have a particular stake in the outcome of the Southwest Transitway AA. State legislators are such a group, given that state funding will be an important element of total project funding should a transitway project move forward. A breakfast meeting to present information about the Southwest Transitway AA and to solicit input from State legislators representing the study area was convened on August 21, 2006 at the Hopkins Depot Coffee House. Hennepin County Commissioner Gail Dorfman, Chair of the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee, co-hosted the meeting with Representative Frank Hornstein. Seven key legislators representing areas along the corridor attended, as well as nine Southwest PAC members and three local officials. In addition, Hennepin County Commissioner Dorfman and members of the study team met with individual legislators at various intervals throughout the study to provide study updates and to solicit input.

2.5.3 Meetings with City and Agency Partners

Study team members met with city councils, council committees, and city staff at intervals throughout the study to provide study overviews and updates, to determine route and station options, and to invite input. It is critically important to connect with city councils and staff, given that they are in close touch with the interests and concerns of their residents, and are key to ensuring that the project reflects those interests and concerns. The following table shows dates when meetings occurred.

Table 2.4 Meetings with City Staff and Council Members

Date	Group
March 15, 2005	Eden Prairie City Council
August 17, 2005	St. Louis Park Staff
August 18, 2005	Hopkins Staff
September 15, 2005	Edina Transportation Commission
September 22, 2005	Minnetonka Staff
September 27, 2005	Eden Prairie Staff
November 1, 2005	Minneapolis Staff
September 19, 2006	Eden Prairie City Council
September 25, 2006	Minnetonka City Council
October 17, 2006	Minneapolis Staff
October 19, 2006	Edina Transportation Commission
October 24, 2006	Hopkins City Council
November 14, 2006	Eden Prairie City Council

2.5.4 Advisory Committees

A key public involvement strategy was to connect with key constituencies or study partners through the creation of a policy oversight group, the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), composed of representatives of cities, agencies, and business leaders. A staff advisory group, the Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was also formed to provide oversight and guidance to the study team and to advise on public outreach efforts. Members of both of these groups were instrumental in communicating issues on behalf of the public constituencies they represent, and in ensuring that the study addressed public concerns.

Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)

The Southwest PAC was composed of elected officials or their representatives from Hennepin County, the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, Edina and Minneapolis, the Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, SouthWest Metro Transit, the Three Rivers Park District, the Twin West Chamber of Commerce, the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce. It was assembled to provide policy guidance and develop the final study recommendation on a preferred course of action for the Southwest Transitway. The Southwest PAC met eleven times during the study process. One of those meetings included a tour of the Hiawatha LRT line.

Table 2.5 Southwest PAC Meetings

Date	Agenda / Topics Covered
March 2, 2005	Study overview; Discussion of study goals and objectives; Presentation of <i>Public Outreach Plan</i>
May 20, 2005	Tour of the Hiawatha light rail line
July 27, 2005	Public outreach update and website demonstration; Presentation of initial alignment alternatives and proposed evaluation criteria
August 24, 2005	Presentation of and comment on proposed evaluation measures

September 14, 2005	Public outreach update; Response to questions raised about evaluation measures; Presentation of enhanced bus, BRT, and LRT technologies; Formation of Funding Subcommittee
January 11, 2006	Public outreach update; Update on Funding subcommittee work
February 24, 2006 (Funding Subcommittee)	Presentation and discussion of federal transportation funding; review of draft report to the full PAC
April 12, 2006	Review of Definition of Alternatives; Presentation of Funding Subcommittee findings
June 14, 2006	Legislative update; Presentation of preliminary capital cost estimates; Presentation on land use issues
September 13, 2006	Joint PAC and TAC Workshop to review preliminary study findings
September 27, 2006	Review of TAC recommendations; Public outreach update
December 13, 2006	Final PAC meeting to prepare recommendation to the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority

In addition to the primary work of the PAC, a subcommittee of the PAC explored transitway funding issues. Three meetings were convened in late 2005 and early 2006 to hear input from experts on regional, state, and federal funding, and to discuss funding issues as they relate to a Southwest Transitway project. The subcommittee presented a report to the full PAC on April 12, 2006, including recommendations for action. Among those was a recommendation to support an important transit ballot amendment, the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) amendment. In response, the PAC adopted a resolution supporting this ballot amendment to increase dedicated state funds for roads and transit.

Table 2.6 Southwest Funding Subcommittee Meetings

Date	Agenda / Topics Covered
October 27, 2005	Presentation and discussion of regional transportation funding
December 16, 2005	Presentation and discussion of state transportation funding
February 24, 2006	Presentation and discussion of federal transportation funding; review of draft report to the full PAC

Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

The Southwest TAC was led by the Hennepin County Study Manager, and included technical staff from the Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, SouthWest Metro Transit, the Three Rivers Park District, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), Twin City & Western Railroad, and the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, Minneapolis, and Edina. It was assembled to provide technical guidance during the Southwest Transitway AA. The Southwest TAC met 16 times throughout the study period.

2.5.5 Newsletters

Four project newsletters were developed and more than 5,000 were distributed throughout the study area. The newsletters discussed the study process and study results, reviewed transit technologies and routes, described the regional transit plan, and publicized open houses. See Appendix D for copies of the Southwest Newsletters.

In addition, study partners from four suburban cities published articles about the Southwest Transitway AA in their city newsletters. These articles described the alternatives being studied and encouraged citizens to attend upcoming meetings.

2.5.6 Website

An Internet website was designed and maintained on behalf of the HCRRA to provide updated information on the study's progress, study maps and reports, and information about opportunities for public comment on the study. The website address is www.southwesttransitway.org. In addition to providing study information, the website was structured to allow for submission of comments and to accept requests for email addresses to be added to the study e-mailing list.

2.5.7 Press Releases

Hennepin County produced press releases during the course of the study to provide local media with study updates and to publicize the public open houses.

2.5.8 Television and Newspaper Articles

The Southwest Transitway AA received coverage in the local community newspapers including the Sun Current, the Sun Sailor, the Eden Prairie News, the Southwest Journal, and in newsletters of local groups and cities. This coverage helped raise public awareness since the combined circulation of local community newspapers is in excess of 100,000 residences. In addition to the community newspapers, 7 articles appeared in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, which has a circulation of over 400,000.

Local TV stations began to track the Southwest Transitway AA in the fall of 2006. Three local TV stations and at least one radio station ran stories on the study in conjunction with the second series of public open houses.

Table 2.7 Media Coverage

Date	Media Source	Article
March 3, 2005	Minnesota Bike Trails	SW Regional LRT Trail Log
April 4, 2005	Star Tribune	Hiawatha's Early Success Provides Momentum
April 24, 2005	Star Tribune	Public Forum Set for Proposed Rail Line in West Metro
April 2005	Sun Current / Sun Newspapers	Local News: Getting Around
May 17, 2005	Star Tribune	Residents Weigh in on Transit
May 19, 2005	Sun Current / Sun Newspapers	Shedding Light on Rail, Bus Transit
May 2005	Hopkins City Newsletter	Ad for Community Open Houses in May
September 26, 2005	Eden Prairie News	Planned Prairie
January 2 - 15, 2006	Southwest Journal	Potential LRT Lines Explained
August 21, 2006	Star Tribune	Announcement: Southwest Transit Study on Twin West Chamber Minnetonka/Plymouth Business Council agenda
May 2006	Uptown Neighborhood News	LRT Line Could Connect Uptown with Downtown and Eden Prairie Opinion Article: LRT in Uptown?

June 28, 2006	Minnetonka City Newsletter	Southwest Transitway Study to Result in Preferred Alternative
July 12, 2006	Eden Prairie News	Still Chugging Along
August/September 2006	St. Louis Park Perspective	Interested in Transit? Here's your chance to get on board
August 2006	Metro Transit Newsletter: Takeout	Transit Options Being Studied in Southwestern Metro
September 14, 2006	Star Tribune	Study: 2 Light-Rail Routes Could Land Federal Funds
September 14, 2006	Pajamas Media web site	Study: 2 Light-Rail Routes Could Land Federal Funds (Star Tribune article)
September 14, 2006	KSTP TV Channel 5	Possible Light Rail Line for West Metro
September 26, 2006	Twin West Newsletter	Ongoing: Southwest Transitway AA
September 26, 2006	Star Tribune	West cities plan possible routes for light rail into Minneapolis
October 10, 2006	Star Tribune	Want to get onboard light-rail planning? Here's how
October 11, 2006	Sun Newspapers	Light rail could come to southwest suburbs by 2015, officials estimate
October 18, 2006	Sun Newspapers	Light-rail plans described
October 25, 2006	WCCO TV Channel 4	En Route Toward A New Southwest LRT Line
November 2006	Ralph's Reader (Minneapolis Councilmember Ralph Remington)	Transitway Alternatives Narrowed Down
December 1, 2006	Southwest Journal	On track for rail

2.5.9 Animated Presentation

An animated presentation was prepared and shown at the Fall 2006 open houses, on the local cable access channel, and at the HCRRA's public hearing in January 2007. The nine-minute video presents an overview of the AA process, describes the alternatives evaluated, and provides the rationale for the preliminary Southwest TAC recommendation. The video was created in a fashion to be easily shared and revised for future use in continuing to communicate with the public regarding the proposed Southwest Transitway.

2.5.10 Study Displays

In response to a request from city study partners, a mobile bi-fold display board was prepared to show study results and preliminary recommendations. The display was used at city meetings and was also prominently displayed at the Eden Prairie Center Mall for several weeks during the November/December 2006 public input period