



3. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the public involvement process utilized for the Southwest Rail Transit Study. *Appendix B: Public Involvement* contains more details on the public involvement activities.

Public involvement is important for any planning process, and was a critical component of the Southwest Corridor Rail Transit Study. A public involvement plan, developed early in the study process with input from study partners, used concepts from the Systematic Development of Conformed Consent (SDIC) public involvement process. Under this process, key stakeholders and their likely concerns and interests were identified, and outreach strategies were developed based on the analysis of issues. A plan for action was developed that offered multiple opportunities for the public, specifically for affected residents and businesses, to offer input into the study process.

Issues, concerns, questions, and other feedback from the public was sought throughout the study via community meetings and open houses, electronic and regular mail, phone calls, and meetings with neighborhood groups and groups of interested residents, and other outreach techniques. Throughout the study, public involvement efforts were guided by input from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC).

In addition to the public involvement activities, a statistically valid survey of study area residents was conducted to learn more about community attitudes towards traffic congestion, the current transportation system, and rail transit.

Public Involvement Techniques

The public involvement techniques employed during the Southwest Rail Transit Study included public open houses, special meetings and presentations, newsletters, a website, press releases, newspaper articles, city council meetings, a Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and a Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

Open Houses

Public open houses were held at key milestone points during the study process. The purpose of the public open houses was to provide the general public with study updates and for one-on-one discussions with study team staff. The issues and concerns expressed at the public open houses held to shape the analysis that was conducted as part of the study process.



The public open houses were publicized through distributing newsletters to over 500 interested persons, notification flyers in community newspapers with a circulation in excess of 96,000 residents, and emailing over 300 interested persons.

The Southwest Rail Transit study included three series of public open houses:

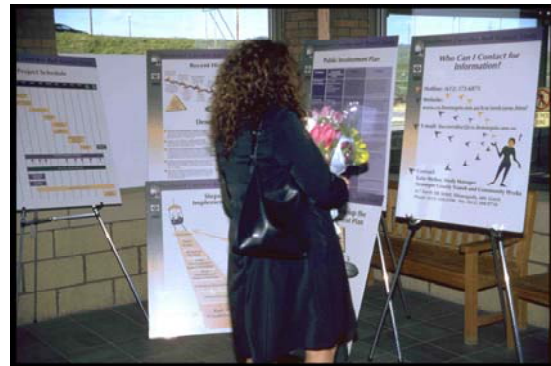
Spring 2002

Seven (7) open houses were held during the spring of 2002. The open houses were structured to allow for informal, one-on-one discussions between the project team staff and community residents. Most meetings were held in the evening or on the weekend.

Meeting attendees provided a number of suggestions and ideas that played an important role in helping the Southwest Policy and Technical Advisory Committees refine the study.

Fall 2002

Three (3) open houses were held in the fall of 2002 to provide the public with a study update as well as an opportunity for additional public input on the issues to be addressed during the process.



Spring 2003

Three (3) open houses were held in the spring of 2003 to present study findings. Presentation boards showed the impact of growing traffic congestion on future travel times, results of the resident survey, the regional transit plan, and key study findings.

Approximately 520 individuals attended the 13 public open houses held during the study process. Comments gathered at the public open houses were used to shape the study analysis. While a wide range of opinions were expressed at the public open houses regarding rail transit, the primary issues raised included the following:

- Who will use rail transit, and will there be sufficient ridership?
- Will the rail system be cost-effective?
- Will building a rail system reduce the funding available to build roads?
- What impact will there be on properties adjacent to the rail?
- Can rails and trails successfully co-exist?
- How soon can a rail line be built?
- How often will the trains run? How much will it cost to ride?
- How noisy are the trains?
- How much pollution do the trains emit?
- How safe are the trains?

Special Presentations and Meetings

In order 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 over 30 specially scheduled meetings.

Minneapolis Neighborhood Groups

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. Attending the neighborhood association meetings enabled study team staff to develop a greater understanding of the key issues for Minneapolis residents adjacent to the proposed alignments.

Business Community

In May 2003, the HCRRA hosted a meeting with business leaders to discuss their issues/concerns/questions regarding rail transit. Approximately 30 business leaders and local officials attended the meeting and participated in discussions. The concerns expressed by the business attendees included increasing congestion and delays in the region, recruitment and retention of employees, and the competitiveness of the Twin Cities as a region. In addition to this early meeting, study team staff attended eight additional meetings with business groups including the Eden Prairie Chamber of Commerce, the Twin West Chamber of Commerce, the Hopkins Rotary, and the Hopkins Business Council. A representative from both the Eden Prairie and Twin West Chambers of Commerce served on the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC).

Individuals

Study team staff met with individuals who had specific concerns regarding how rail transit plans might affect them.

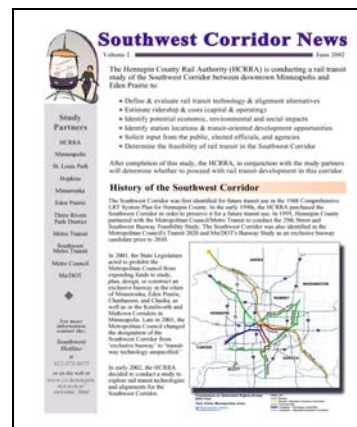
Newsletters

Five project newsletters were developed and distributed to over 500 interested individuals. The purpose of the newsletters was to provide general information, study results and public open house notifications. The newsletters discussed the study process, reviewed transit technologies, summarized the results of a resident survey and publicized open houses. See Appendix C for copies of the Southwest Newsletters.

Web Site

An Internet web site was designed and maintained by Hennepin County to provide updated information on the study's progress and information about opportunities for public comment on the study.

The web site address is <http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/tcw/southwest/swhome.htm>.



Press Releases

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

Newspaper Articles

Over 50 news articles appeared in the local community newspapers: the Eden Prairie News, the Sun Current, the Sun Sailor, the Southwest Journal, and the Lakeshore Weekly News. The combined circulation of these local community newspapers is in excess of 96,000 residences. In addition to the community newspapers, three articles appeared in the Minneapolis Star Tribune, which has a circulation of over 400,000. An inventory of these news articles is included in *Appendix B: Public Involvement*.

City Council Briefings

Study team staff met with the potentially affected city councils in the spring of 2002 and fall of 2003. The purpose of the meeting in the spring of 2002 was to inform them that the Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority (HCRRA) was interested in partnering with them to conduct the Southwest Rail Transit Study and was asking that they appoint representatives to the Southwest Policy and Technical Advisory Committees. The purpose of the meetings in fall of 2003 was to present the study findings and the Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) recommendation and to receive their feedback.

Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)

A Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) composed of elected officials or their representatives from the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, and Minneapolis, Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, Southwest Metro Transit, the Three Rivers Park District, the Twin West Chamber, and the Eden Prairie Chamber was assembled. The Southwest PAC provided policy guidance throughout the study process and developed a recommendation for the HCRRA regarding whether rail transit should continue to be studied as a feasible option for a Southwest Rail Transitway. The Southwest PAC met seven times during the study process.

Southwest Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) composed of technical staff from the cities of Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, St. Louis Park, and Minneapolis, Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit, Southwest Metro Transit, the Three Rivers Park District, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT), and Twin City Western Railroad was assembled. The Southwest TAC developed a recommendation for Southwest Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) consideration regarding which rail transit alternatives should be considered in future studies. The Southwest TAC met 12 times during the study process.

Resident Survey

In response to suggestions made by the public, a telephone survey of a random sample of study area residents was conducted. CJ Olson Research Inc., an independent market research firm, conducted a survey of residents in the southwestern study area concerning their perspectives on traffic congestion, the current transportation system, and rail transit. *Appendix D: Resident Survey* contains a copy of the questionnaire for the Southwest Resident Survey.

Methodology

The probability sampling method was used to survey a representative random sample of the general public, which allows for developing projections regarding the general public. Telephone interviews were completed with adults from 650 randomly selected households in the cities of Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, Eden Prairie, Edina, and Chanhassen. Completing 650 interviews resulted in statistical reliability at the 95% confidence level of $\pm 3.8\%$.

Survey Respondents

Of the 650 survey respondents, 113 reside in Minneapolis, 113 reside in St. Louis Park, 111 reside in Hopkins, 113 reside in Minnetonka, 125 reside in Eden Prairie, 38 reside in Edina, and 37 reside in Chanhassen. Seventy percent of the survey respondents are employed full-time, part-time or were self-employed. The majority (86%) of respondents worked at locations other than their homes. The roadways used on a daily basis include I-494, Crosstown 62, Excelsior Boulevard, Highway 7, and Highway 100. The majority of survey participants said their usual travel mode is driving alone.

Key Survey Findings

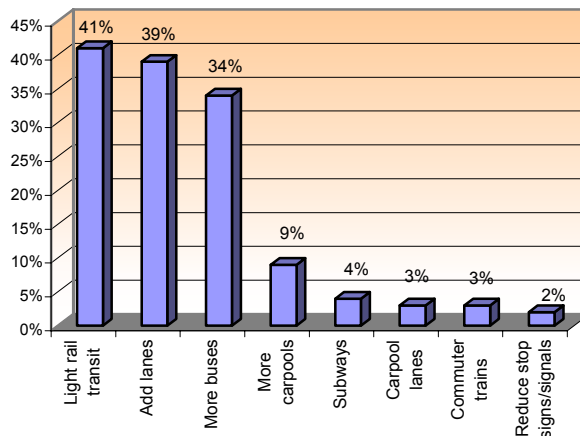
Traffic Congestion

Over 90% of the respondents think that traffic levels on the roads they use will increase over the next five years.

Best Congestion Solution

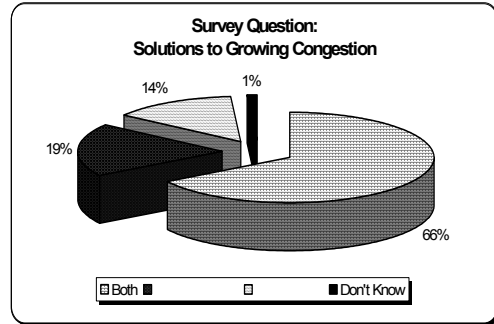
When survey respondents were asked the open ended question of what they thought would be the best solution to traffic congestion, the most frequent responses were: light rail transit (41%), adding lanes (39%), more buses (34%), more carpools (9%), subways (4%), carpool lanes (3%), commuter trains (3%), and reducing stop signs/signals (2%).

Congestion Solution(s)



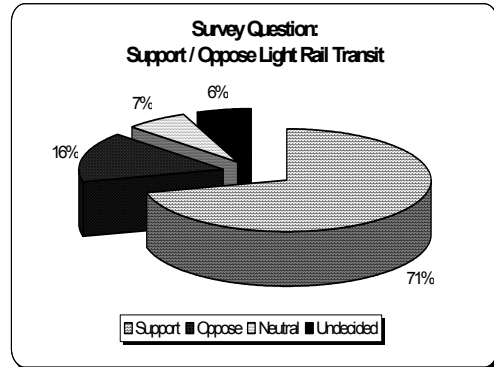
Preferred Improvements (Roads, Transit, or Both)

Two-thirds (66%) of the survey respondents said a combination of highway improvements (like adding lanes) and transit improvements (like buses or light rail) would be the best solution to traffic congestion in the southwest metro area.



Support or Opposition to Light Rail Transit (LRT)

71% of survey respondents stated they support a light rail transit option running through Eden Prairie, Minnetonka, Hopkins, and St. Louis Park to downtown Minneapolis; 16% stated they oppose this option; 7% stated they were neutral; and, 6% stated they were undecided.



When separated by city of residence support for LRT is 79 % in Minneapolis, 75% in Hopkins, 73% in both St. Louis Park and in Minnetonka, 66% in both Edina and Eden Prairie, and 57% in Chanhassen. Opposition to LRT is 22% in Chanhassen, 21% in both Eden Prairie and Minnetonka, 16% in Edina, 14% in Hopkins, 11% in St. Louis Park, and 9% in Minneapolis.

Reasons for Supporting LRT

When the 71% of respondents who stated they support LRT were asked why, they stated they believe it will:

- Reduce traffic congestion (63 percent)
- Cut pollution (22 percent)
- Result in a faster commute (17 percent)
- Provide transportation choices (16 percent)
- Eliminate the need to pay for parking downtown (15 percent)

Reasons for Opposing LRT

When the 16% of respondents who stated they oppose LRT were asked why, they stated that they believe:

- It will be too expensive (35 percent)
- People won't use it (32 percent)
- Routes won't take people where they want to go (18 percent)
- Money would be better spent on roads (15 percent)
- They don't want rail transit close to their homes (12 percent)
- They might lose the use of bike trails (6 percent)