DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

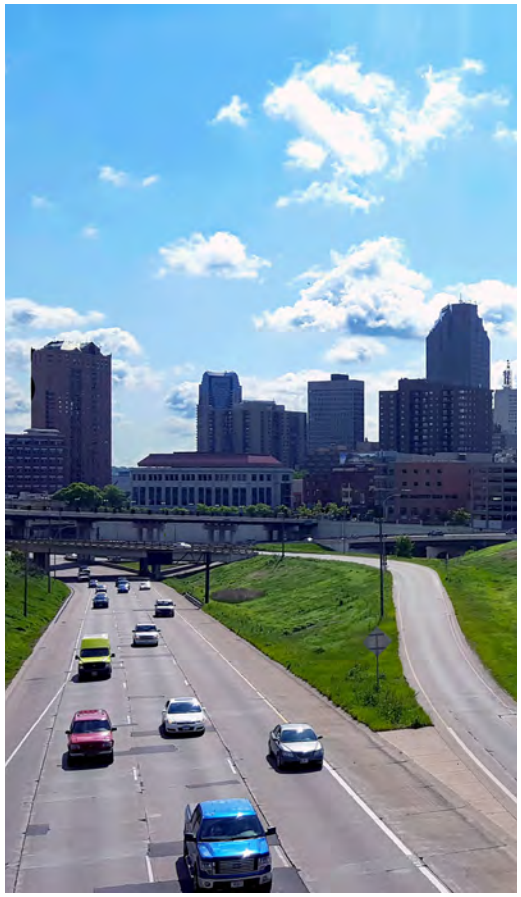
Rethinking I-94

COMMUNITY SUMMARY

08.01.2018

Behind the initiative

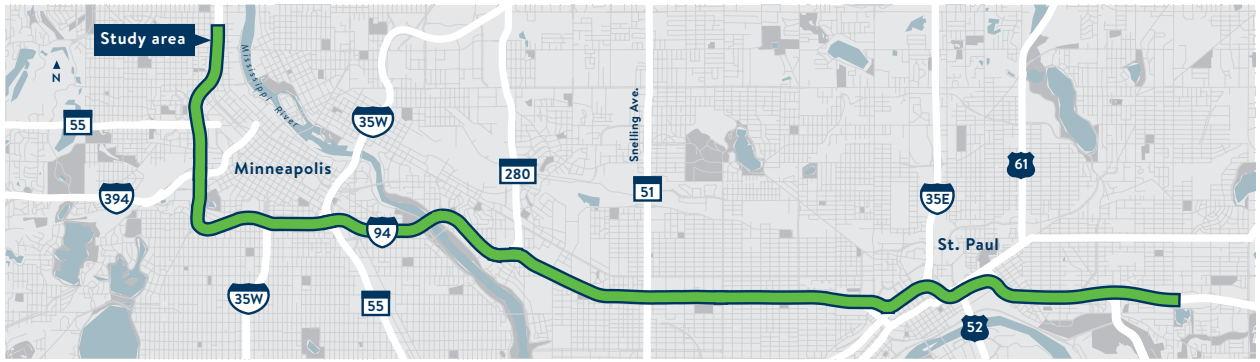
Construction of Interstate 94 in the 1960s destroyed homes and disconnected neighborhoods, including the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul. This led to a pattern of community distrust with the Minnesota Highway Department, which would later become the Minnesota Department of Transportation. More than 50 years later in the summer of 2015, MnDOT Commissioner Charles Zelle joined a group of community members and elected officials at a healing ceremony in the heart of the Rondo community. Commissioner Zelle publicly acknowledged past transportation policies and practices that disrupted and dismantled the neighborhood, and formally apologized to the community. This acknowledgment recognized the decision-making process in the 1960s that led to the destruction of a vibrant community. As a result, MnDOT formed Rethinking I-94 as part of a promise to the Rondo community — and all the communities in the I-94 corridor — to do better.



Rethinking I-94 is a long-term effort to improve MnDOT's engagement and relationships with communities along a 15-mile stretch of I-94 between Broadway Avenue in Minneapolis and Highway 61 in St. Paul (**Figure 1**). The geographic limits of Rethinking I-94 reflect both portions of the two cities most impacted by the freeway's initial construction and areas where traffic, safety and highway improvements are most needed.

MnDOT initiated Rethinking I-94 in 2016 in cooperation with partner agencies and the participation of many corridor community groups and individuals. Partner agencies include the Federal Highway Administration, Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County, Ramsey County, city of Minneapolis and city of St. Paul. The agency also worked with other non-profit and government agencies who proposed transportation actions within the I-94 corridor. Examples include Seward Redesign, ReConnectRondo and the Capitol Area Architecture and Planning Board.

FIGURE 1 **The Rethinking I-94 study area extends between Broadway Avenue in Minneapolis and Highway 61 in St. Paul.**



RETHINKING I-94 HAS THREE MAIN PURPOSES

- Make it easier to travel to, along and across the I-94 corridor and establish a sense of place for the communities that live, work and play there.
- Enhance safety and mobility for people walking, biking, driving and using transit.
- Develop a community-based approach focused on reconnecting neighborhoods, revitalizing communities and ensuring residents have a meaningful voice in transportation decisions that affect their lives.

Past & present

The history of I-94 dates back nearly 100 years. Some key milestones in the development of the highway include:

- **1920s:** Minnesota Highway Department begins envisioning a major road connecting St. Paul and Minneapolis
- **1940s:** MHD begins formal development of potential route alignments
- **1945:** The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* publishes MHD's final alignment, which connects downtown Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota and the State Capitol in St. Paul
- **1950s:** MHD officials and St. Paul Mayor Edward Delaney pursued federal urban renewal funding to redevelop "blighted" neighborhoods near the State Capitol in St. Paul

FIGURE 2 **About the corridor**

80+	15	8,000	4	145	150,000+	2 million+
Miles of pavement	Miles of infrastructure	Freight trips per day	Tunnels	Bridges	Vehicles per day	Transit users per year

When I-94 was constructed in the 1960s, neighborhoods, businesses and homes were lost and communities were disconnected. Those most negatively affected were predominantly lower-income, minority or immigrant communities. Construction of the freeway also resulted in a lack of trust, miscommunication and misunderstanding between MnDOT and local communities. The early history of the highway is recounted in the I-94 documentary *Interstate 94: A History and Its Impact*.[1] The video focuses on the construction of I-94 in the middle of the 20th century and the effect it had on the communities it bisected.

Today, I-94 is at the heart of the Twin Cities metro area. Nearly 250,000 people representing a diverse range of cultures, languages and economic levels live along the corridor. In addition to homes, the corridor includes colleges and universities, libraries, art galleries, theaters, parks, museums and a wide range of businesses and industries.

1. Learn more about the documentary at www.tpt.org/interstate-94-a-history-and-its-impact/video/tpt-co-productions-interstate-94-history-and-its-impact/

About the highway

The Rethinking I-94 study team researched the I-94 freeway to better understand existing infrastructure and transportation conditions.

CORRIDOR FEATURES

The physical characteristics of the Rethinking I-94 corridor influence its performance (Figure 3). For example, most interchanges are less than one mile apart, which causes congestion. Additionally, there are many on- and off-ramps on the left-hand side of the corridor — some of these may contribute to safety and congestion issues as drivers merge across the highway. While travel lane widths generally meet current design standards for an urban freeway, shoulder widths often do not. Clearance under most bridges is less than the desired 16 to 16.5 feet. The Lowry Hill tunnel near downtown Minneapolis is also a significant bottleneck with no easy solution.

I-94 is aging and some of its infrastructure needs to be replaced. Updating assets such as pavement, bridges, tunnels, retaining walls, noise walls, and drainage structures would be required as part of any improvement project.

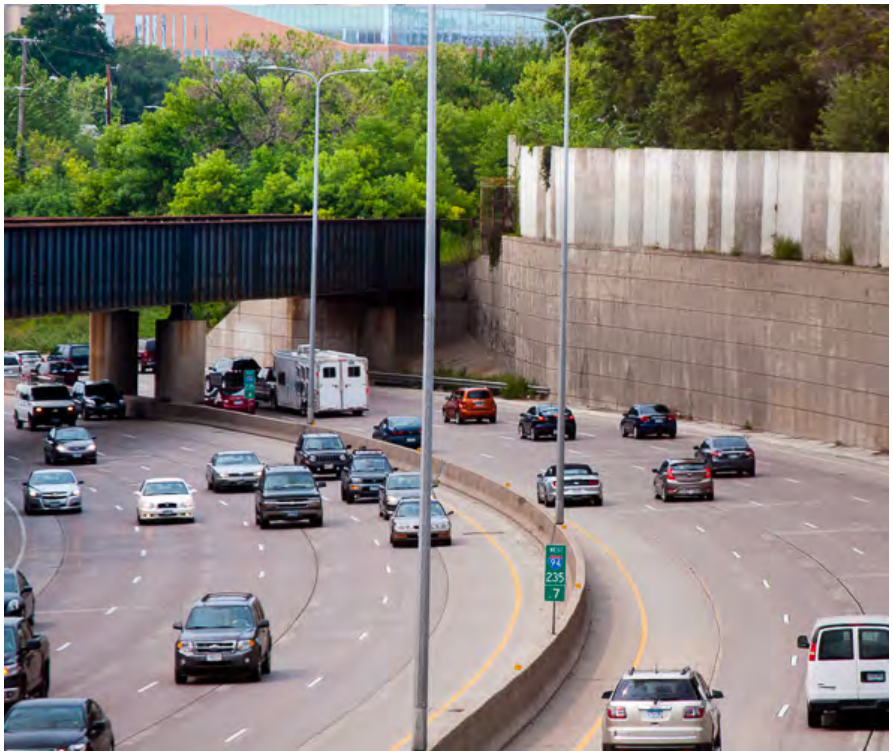


FIGURE 3

Corridor features

2,162
Drainage structures

116
Retaining walls

27
Noise walls

67
Crossings with pedestrian and bicycle facilities

41
On-ramps

40
Off-ramps

TRAFFIC CONDITIONS AND CONGESTION

The Rethinking I-94 corridor is one of the most heavily used highways in Minnesota, carrying between 150,000 and 170,000 vehicles per day. That includes about 8,000 freight trips per day, as I-94 plays a critical role in connecting area businesses to regional and national markets. Shippers, carriers, receivers and other businesses involved in the freight transportation system rely on the highway. Multiple areas of significant freight activity are located near or immediately adjacent to I-94.

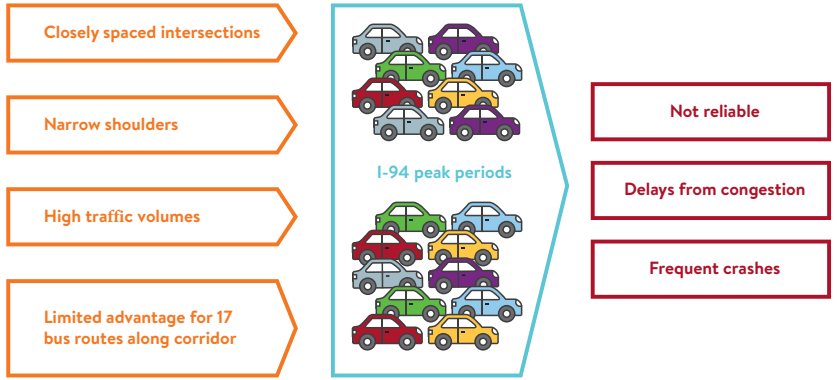
I-94's heavy use means it also is one of the most congested highways in the state. During the morning and evening peak periods, congestion adds about 20 minutes to the average trip through the corridor. Most congestion in the study area recurs daily, with considerable delay regularly around the Lowry Tunnel. About one-half of the trips in the Rethinking I-94 study area originate from the neighborhoods along the corridor. These shorter trips create congestion as large numbers of drivers merge on and off the highway in a concentrated area. Only a small percentage of trips are "through" trips that begin and end west of downtown Minneapolis and east of downtown St. Paul.

While most crashes are not severe, they cause delay to I-94 travelers and should be addressed as part of future freeway improvements. The average crash rate for the Rethinking I-94 corridor is about twice the metro and statewide averages for freeways. This is largely due to heavy congestion.

There are 67 crossings over or under I-94 that include either a pedestrian or bicycle facility. The condition of these facilities varies widely, as does the spacing of the crossings.

At least 17 bus routes use some portion of the corridor, carrying more than two million passengers per year.

FIGURE 4 **High traffic volumes combined with physical constraints cause poor performance on the highway.**



WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT I-94

Pavement is between 29 and 55 years old. It was originally designed to last 25 years.

Seven out of the twelve pedestrian-only bridges are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, which protects the rights of people with disabilities.

The crash rate is twice the average in the metro area, largely due to congestion.

Engaging our communities

The 15-mile corridor crosses through 14 Minneapolis neighborhoods and nine St. Paul District Council boundaries, and is economically and racially diverse. In addition to the 58 percent of the corridor population that identifies as white, 28 percent identify as African-American, 8 percent as Asian and 6 percent as "Other." There are six primary ethnic communities in the corridor, including American Indians, Euro-Americans, African-Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and recent African immigrants, largely from Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT OUR COMMUNITIES

The ethnic make-up of the Rethinking I-94 corridor is significantly different than Minneapolis/St. Paul and the state of Minnesota as a whole.

Ethnic diversity is distributed throughout the corridor and not concentrated in a specific location.

Cultural competence among MnDOT staff is essential to design and implement effective engagement in this historically, socially and geographically complex corridor.

FIGURE 5 **Languages other than English spoken among corridor residents**

OUR APPROACH

The Rethinking I-94 study team designed an adaptive engagement process that is adjustable based on results and lessons learned along the way. The process aimed to:

- Engage **more** voices in transportation planning
- Focus on the communities in the corridor **impacted** by the project
- **Improve** diversity and inclusion of underrepresented voices
- Interact with those impacted **earlier** in the process
- Engage with purpose to **build resilient relationships**

Engagement tasks included extensive research, surveys and relationship building between MnDOT and community members. This created mutual understanding and built a foundation of trust and communication channels for future collaboration. The team conducted desk research, developed cultural mapping and historical overviews, highlighted zone profiles, leveraged an interactive map with community comments and created a public engagement toolkit in order to better understand how to engage with communities.

2,200
Baseline surveys

800+
Phone interviews for segmentation study

1,200+
Online surveys for segmentation study

6
Visioning workshops

250
One-on-one meetings

325+
Comments from online interactive map

Key takeaways

Community members are interested in issues that go beyond the freeway itself. People want to be involved early and continuously, and to be respected and provided with accurate, timely information. They also want engagement to be inclusive and robust and their community values and visions to be reflected in designs.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Interactive workshops targeted at specific communities improve our understanding of priorities in different locations.

The interactive map allows users to engage more conveniently and provides access to valuable community input on issues.

Participation in community events helps build and strengthen relationships and mutual understanding.

One-on-one meetings are the backbone of the engagement process, allowing for more in-depth understanding and relationship building.

ADVICE FROM LISTENING SESSIONS

The study team conducted more than 50 listening sessions and one-on-one meetings with more than 250 residents, business owners and other stakeholders. The team learned that communities along the corridor value the following top priorities:

- Be transparent about projects, and about how and when community input will be used
- When seeking input, provide communities enough time to develop a community point of view
- Help connect communities to MnDOT but also within themselves and to each other
- Meet community members at locations where they already live, work, and gather
- There are hard to reach groups across the corridor, not just in under-resourced areas
- Neighborhood association and district council resources vary
- Clarify the role of MnDOT for any given project or issue
- Be present and listen

COMMON THEMES

Through multiple engagement efforts with community members and stakeholders, the team determined the following responses as common themes for Rethinking I-94. These themes — which are not listed in order of priority — reflect the intent to understand communities more fully, and not just in relation to transportation:

- Congestion issues
- Safety issues — bicycle, pedestrian, motorist
- Improved health and environment — noise, air quality
- No identity or sense of place
- Need for more job opportunities
- Better connections across the freeway
- More inclusivity in planning needed

FIGURE 6

Our proposed engagement process provides opportunities for communities to be engaged in every step.

This proposed engagement process is a more people-centered, adaptable approach to planning and implementing projects that impact where people live, work, and play.

How we adapt

Rethinking I-94 is a pilot effort by MnDOT, and determining how Phase 1 information (see Figure 7) will be used is an evolving process. However, MnDOT intends to incorporate lessons learned from Phase 1 into department processes within the Rethinking I-94 study area. For example, extensive engagement work conducted during Phase 1 led to the development of two sets of guidelines — the Guiding Commitments for project teams and Livability Framework for communities — that outline how MnDOT will interact with communities, and plan and design projects. These guidelines could potentially expand to future MnDOT projects outside of the Rethinking I-94 study area.

GUIDING COMMITMENTS FOR PROJECT TEAMS

What people expect from MnDOT

The following will guide how MnDOT will work with communities in the future:

- **VISION.** Understanding a community's underlying values and issues of importance — now and into the future — to articulate common ground; building toward that vision with each project and demonstrating that commitment to communities over time.
- **CO-POWER.** Cultivating joint ownership of each stage of the process; acknowledging that local knowledge is valid and valuable expertise; including communities in identifying criteria for prioritizing decisions and being partners in problem solving.
- **AUTHENTIC RESPECT.** Providing timely, accessible information as well as multiple options for participation; acknowledging issues and constraints communicated by stakeholders.
- **TRANSPARENCY.** Communicating realistic timeliness, participation impact, funding realities, decision-making processes and levels of authority; making visible the context of the whole process at each step.
- **INCLUSIVITY.** Creating inclusive partnerships and teams from vision to construction; ensuring multiple voices are engaged and reflected in decision making.

LIVABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITIES

What people expect from project work

The following will guide how MnDOT will design and evaluate projects in the future:

- **HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT.** Quality of life, comfortable environment, well-being, sustainability, green space, land use, health, communication, tangible benefits.
- **ECONOMICS.** Jobs, business vitality/opportunities and development, wealth generation, revenue generation, affordability over time.
- **SENSE OF PLACE.** Legacy, vibrancy, sense of identity, cultural pride, our future.
- **SAFETY.** Personal security, freedom from danger, risk or harm.
- **CONNECTIONS.** Infrastructure aligning with meaningful physical, social and cultural community connections.
- **EQUITY.** Inclusive of all people — all races, ethnicities, incomes, and abilities — with extra effort to ensure that historically under-represented populations are included and past inequities are addressed to the extent possible.
- **TRUST.** Familiarity, cohesion, stakeholder involvement, good faith collaborations, collaborative work with an interdisciplinary and multi-jurisdictional team, resilient relationships.

Collaboration

The heart of Rethinking I-94 is to develop a new way of working with communities. Rather than focusing only on **what** — planning and designing projects — Rethinking I-94 also focuses on **how** — rethinking MnDOT's role. MnDOT works every day with communities around the state and is often asked to help with issues beyond transportation. MnDOT can assist with connections to other agencies, partners, or organizations. Part of Rethinking I-94 is to affirm MnDOT's role in supporting communities as broadly as possible. Depending on the situation, MnDOT may have one of several roles.

LEADER

For issues related to the highway itself, MnDOT is the leader and partners with local agencies and communities. This is the agency's primary and traditional mission. Examples include repairing pavement or addressing congestion issues on the freeway.

PARTNER

For issues or situations that cross over agency disciplines or missions, MnDOT is a partner with communities and other agencies. Even though MnDOT might not be leading a conversation or an investment, the agency may be involved in important ways. Examples include bridges that cross a freeway or local roads that connect to a MnDOT road.

FACILITATOR

While MnDOT's primary mission is focused on transportation, the department also has the capacity to assist with other issues that may arise — from local transportation issues, to housing and public health, to economic opportunity. While these are not issues MnDOT controls, the agency has an interest in the broader health of its communities. MnDOT staff often know who to contact at other state and local agencies for assistance.

Our process

The first phase of Rethinking I-94 — conducted between January 2016 and August 2018 — focused on understanding the corridor and its communities. The wide range of engagement and technical tasks helped to establish a foundation for future planning and project work. Phase 2 — anticipated to begin in summer 2018 and last two years — will focus on developing a corridor-wide environmental document. The second phase intends to find agreement on actions that address transportation and transportation-related needs in the corridor. MnDOT and local partners also may implement individual actions on or related to I-94. This phase will continue to build relationships with neighborhoods through community engagement.

FIGURE 7 **Rethinking I-94 is planned to continue through multiple phases.**

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE IMPROVEMENTS

During the first phase of Rethinking I-94, community members frequently commented about their desire for improved pedestrian and bicycle connectivity adjacent to and across I-94. These improvements would restore a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood transportation network that existed before the freeway was built.

Although no specific pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements were identified, the team developed maps that show potential indicators or populations — such as poverty status, low-wage workers and zero car households — that are in greater need of crossing improvements.

Phase 1 identified the goal of improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities parallel to the study area to improve connectivity and use the existing public right-of-way. This information will serve as a starting point for potential improvements that will be discussed during the next phase.

FREEWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Although Phase 1 did not result in a formal evaluation of freeway improvement alternatives, the study team worked to develop concepts for future consideration. The team developed two general types of concepts: spot mobility improvement concepts and managed lane concepts. While these two concept types will be carried forward in Phase 2, others may also be developed.

Spot mobility improvement concepts are potential solutions that can address a mobility and/or safety issue in a specific location. These improvements typically come from a smaller project that delivers benefits at a reasonable cost, such as signing and striping, ramp realignments and interchange improvements. The study team identified potential improvements at 19 locations and analyzed each location for improving safety and reducing congestion. Those with clear benefits are recommended for further analysis in Phase 2, or for possible short-term implementation, if applicable.

Previous studies identified I-94 as a corridor that could potentially benefit from a MnPASS lane — a freeway lane that is restricted during peak travel times to transit, motorcycles, vehicles with two or more occupants or solo drivers who pay a fee. The team did not make any recommendations on the concepts identified in Phase 1.

Next steps

Phase 1 produced initial ideas for improving I-94 both on and across the freeway. These concepts will serve as a starting point for Phase 2, which will consider a full range of solutions. To get involved and help the Rethinking I-94 team during Phase 2, or to view the full Phase 1 report, please visit **mndot.gov/I-94minneapolis-stpaul**.

WHAT WE KNOW AFTER PHASE 1 OF RETHINKING I-94

- I-94 is an aging, highly traveled freeway for both neighborhood users and commuters.
- I-94 has complex congestion, safety and investment needs.
- People living and working in the corridor are culturally diverse, reflecting the changing makeup of Minnesota.
- People in the I-94 corridor want to be engaged more proactively with MnDOT; the agency is committed to doing better.
- Listening to people — and learning how to reach them — is a critical part of successfully planning for the long-term future of the highway.
- MnDOT developed and is learning to implement new guidelines for how to work better with communities in the corridor.
- Specific solutions to address transportation and non-transportation issues in the corridor will be developed in future phases of Rethinking I-94.

Learn more at **dot.state.mn.us/I-94minneapolis-stpaul**

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION