

*"Hear Every Voice"*  
**Mn/DOT's Public Involvement  
Process and Document**

**VISION STATEMENT**

To proactively seek early and continuing public input and involvement so that Mn/DOT is responsive and accountable to its traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, communicates effectively with the public, and makes the best possible transportation decisions promoting safety and enhancing the quality of life for Minnesota's citizens.

In August 1997, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) set up a Public Involvement Task Force for the purpose of developing guidance for planners and program managers on designing and implementing public involvement that results in decisions that meet the needs of the public.

Mn/DOT and local practitioners have always included public involvement in their project development. However, surveys revealed that the public believes public involvement is done too late or after decisions have already been made. Now, more than ever, people expect greater accountability from public agencies and officials. They also demand higher levels of quality from government products and services, and want a significant role in determining how those services are delivered.

Well thought-out public involvement plans and strategies could mean the difference between projects that are implemented in the way they were designed and projects that get stalled, delayed, watered down or vetoed.

Membership of the Task Force consisted primarily of Mn/DOT staff. Persons serving on the Task Force represented both the transportation planning and project development in an effort to blend these disciplines resulting in the streamlining of project delivery. The 25-member Task Force met over a period of 10 months to review federal and state requirements for public involvement and best practices nationwide.

In order to involve the public in the work of the Task Force, market research was conducted in areas around the state. Persons identified to serve on these focus groups were selected at random and were asked to provide input on how Mn/DOT could improve the effectiveness of its current public involvement/participation techniques and strategies.

Focus group respondents told us that they:

- Are more likely to get involved in causes where they can make a difference.

- Are more interested in getting involved in projects that impact their personal situations.
- Have had to limit their involvement due to time commitments of careers and family.
- Derive a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction from their involvement experiences.
- Have an obligation to give something back to their communities.

The new guidance developed by the Task Force called “Hear Every Voice – a Guide to Transportation Decision Making at Mn/DOT” was approved by the Federal Highway Administration on June 7, 1999. The Guide was developed to help Mn/DOT planners and project managers make transportation decisions that meet the needs of the public while also considering available funds, environmental issues and local needs.

The goal of the “Hear Every Voice” Guide is to affirm Mn/DOT’s commitment to put customers first, treat them with respect and balance their interests to achieve the greatest public good. One of Mn/DOT’s new strategic objectives is to streamline the process for transportation system improvements. Another strategic objective is providing the information needed for objective decision making. In order to achieve these objectives, public involvement must be done early and continually.

The “Hear Every Voice” Guide includes guidelines on how to:

- Adhere to federal and state laws pertaining to public outreach
- Involve stakeholders who are traditionally underserved
- Develop public involvement plans
- Involve the public in the planning, programming and project development processes
- Implement public involvement techniques used successfully by Mn/DOT practitioners

Appendices to the “Hear Every Voice” Guide include:

- USDOT Public Involvement Techniques for Transportation Decision Making
- Mn/DOT’s Environmental Justice Draft Guidance
- Non-Traditional Transportation Stakeholder/Dialogue Project Report and Handbook

Several inserts were issued with the first edition of the Guide – including samples of effective brochures, newsletters and a copy of FHWA’s “Community Impact Assessment – A Quick Reference for Transportation.”

The “Hear Every Voice” Guide and supporting state and federal documents are available on Mn/DOT’s Web site at [www.dot.state.mn.us/engserv/tecsup/edata/hev/index.shtml](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/engserv/tecsup/edata/hev/index.shtml).