



# Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership Meeting

July 9, 2025 @ 10:00 am

MN Discovery Center (1003 Discovery Dr, Chisholm, MN 55719)

## SUMMARY

**Members in attendance:** Taylour Blakeman, Ron Chicka, Sarah Ciochetto, Jason DiPiazza, Jim Foldesi, Derek Fredrickson, Karin Grandia, Rick Goutermont, Stephen Hallan, Robert Hass, Jason Hollinday, Michael Kearney, JinYeene Neumann, Gary Nelson (alt. for Terry Snyder), Trent Nicholson, Briana Patton (alt. for Jim Strezishar), Dan Reed, Whitney Ridlon, Cindy Voigt, Erika Shepard (alt for Bryan Anderson), Beth Ann Teskey, John Welle, Deb White, Brian Whiteman

**Guests in attendance:** Jason Fisher, Travis Houle, Matt Hemmila, Jim Johnson, Scott Johnson, Michael Kalnbach, Pat McGraw, Tina Neary, Michelle Pierson, Erik Rudeen, Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver

### 1. Call to Order – Attendance

Travis Houle welcomed attendees and reviewed meeting protocols. Michelle Pierson reviewed attendance procedures. Chair Trent Nicholson called the meeting attendance procedures. Chair Trent Nicholson called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees at 10:03am.

### 2. Committee Business

Chair Nicholson invited NEMNATP members to review the meeting summary from the April 9, 2025 meeting. **A motion to approve the April 9, 2025 NEMNATP Meeting Summary was made by Cindy Voigt/Jason Hollinday. Motion carries.**

### 3. Comments by Citizens Present

None brought forward

### 4. St. Louis County TA Project Change Request (Jim Foldesi, St. Louis Cty)

Jim Foldesi and Matt Hemmila representing St. Louis County presented an upcoming project along 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue West in Duluth. The project as it was originally proposed requires technical changes, and the County seeks to amend the STIP description. As the project received Federal Transportation Alternatives funds, the county noted it wanted to inform the ATP membership. They noted that user experience will be

the same, but seeking a change from identifying the project as a bituminous trail to instead develop a 10-ft wide concrete sidewalk that would allow walking, biking, and rolling.

Grand Avenue, up, AC TA funds to help pay for a multi-use trail (in STIP), intent is to build a 10-foot wide concrete trail all the way up the hill. State Aid requirements require very specific profile grades. Intent is to design under sidewalk design standards. This new sidewalk amenity would provide places for pedestrians and bikers, but will follow the profile of the road, instead of a trail. They are seeking to remove the word trail and replace with sidewalk.

Foldesi and Hemmilla were asked about pedestrian/bike counts in that area. Foldesi noted there is some use, and they noted there is a lot of bike/pedestrian traffic along 8<sup>th</sup> Street that will tie into this project. They noted this will forge a connection between the neighborhood and the Cross City Trail.

**A motion to accept a request by St. Louis County to amend the project description for the 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue West construction project (069-691-034T) which was awarded funds from the Transportation Alternatives Program to alter the deliverable from a paved trail to a 10-foot concrete sidewalk was made by JinYeene Neumann/ Jason DiPiazza. Derek Fredrickson noted support. Motion carries.**

#### 5. Corridors of Commerce Readiness Prioritization (Erika Shepard, MnDOT)

Chair Nicholson reviewed that an advisory group was formed to review applications. Erika Shepard shared slides showcasing process and funding for 2025. \$22 million available for planning, scoping, predesign, preliminary engineering, environmental analysis. Requires regional balance. 25% for metro, 35% for greater metro, 35% for greater M, \$7.7M available for Greater MN projects. A subcommittee of the NEMNATP met and scored the three submitted projects received in ATP1.

Shepard noted ATP1 was responsible for reviewing and recommending 2 readiness projects for full application, and that the two projects need to be submitted by July 11, 2025.

Application 1: Hibbing – Hwy 37 to 13<sup>th</sup> Street (beltline) along 169. Builds on a regional corridor study. \$3.4M, requesting full amount. Project scored 525/800 points

Application 2: Submitted by the MIC for an I-35 reconstruction project near Thompson Hill. This project builds on corridor study. It is a \$12M project, seeking \$6M for scoping, preliminary engineering, and environmental analysis. This project scored 515/800 points

Application 3: Duluth Seaway Port Authority submitted an application for planning, scoping, preliminary engineering, and environmental analysis for a low clearance railroad bridge on Highway 2, just west of roundabout in Solway Township. Requesting \$3,000,000 with a project total of \$3,500,000. It was noted that reconstructing to elevate the bridge would provide solutions to enhance clearing. In MnDOT freight plan. 445/800 points Great project but hard with scoring criteria.

**A motion to recommend the Hwy 169 and I-35 projects to advance to the state for the Corridors of Commerce Readiness Advancement Program for funding was made by Jim Foldesi/JinYeene Neumann. Motion carries.**

#### 6. Small Cities Discussion (Erika Shepard-MnDOT)

Shepard invited the NEMNATP membership to look at the Small Cities portion of the FY 2029 Local Funding Targets. It is noted that there is currently \$250,000 targeted for cities under 5,000 people.

Partnership members were reminded how this money is often disbursed and noted that while there are not currently projects programmed for the 2027 funds, there is high need anticipated in that year including projects in Two Harbors, Chisholm, and Proctor. In 2028, there are also not any projects currently programmed. For FY2029 there are not any projects programmed, but there are anticipated needs in Northhome, Kettle River, and Marcel.

Some questions were asked if the funds are not used one year, would they be eligible to be “banked” for a future year? It was noted that while some projects may be eligible to be advance-constructed, you cannot bank funds and they flow back to projects. A discussion about how the equity spreadsheet works, notes that even if funds flow back, the equity spreadsheet assists in making everyone whole.

Jim Foldesi noted that if you take 2027 as an example, nothing is yet in place for the available \$250,000 but there is anticipated heavy demand. A city that may be seeking funds for 2028 but ready to construct in 2027 could advance construct in 2027, but not be reimbursed until 2028. A discussion about how a city could manage this entailed and it was noted the city may have to take out a loan to advance-construct and then pay interest for a year on that loan before being reimbursed. Foldesi noted this issue has been risen at a statewide Cost Participation Work Group and they are seeking to develop some strategies to help small cities access this funding. Foldesi was asked if there is a deadline to report to the legislature? Foldesi noted that there is a deadline to report to the legislature for implementation by March, 2026, but that refinements may be allowable afterwards, and legislation from this past session will guide the work of the Work Group.

The membership identified three potential options:

Option A: If more than \$250,000 in need one year, do we distribute funds to all the requests and take funds to the counties off the top with the understanding that everything is adjusted through the equity spreadsheet?

Option B: For FY2027, could it be that Two Harbors gets \$250, then SLC takes \$230 less if up that year, and as Proctor is in the MIC service area, it does not receive funds?

Option C: AC solution, still some additional cost to the city.

Discussion continued to inquire how the \$250,000 original cap came to be? There were also comments made that one could envision that one city could need much more than the \$250,000 available in a given year. It was noted that the stability of the MnDOT cost share program has long been an issue for small communities with small projects.

Scott Johnson noted that while communities who applied for the \$250,000 also must understand there is a matching component of \$62,500.

Conversation about the Proctor project reflected on past practices with Kirkus Street, and in relation to projects in Hermantown (which is now in the equity spreadsheet but didn't used to be).

Erika Shepard and Derek Fredrickson noted that no action was required today, but wanted the partnership to discuss as this may become a more frequent issue in subsequent fiscal years.

It was noted that perhaps county engineers could continue this discussion at their upcoming meeting and hoping that guidance from the state Work Group can also help define good practices.

## 7. Legislative Update (Erik Rudeen- MnDOT)

Erik Rudeen from MnDOT's Office of Government Affairs presented remotely regarding key items from the 2025 Minnesota Legislative Session. It was noted that there were no revenue increases for aeronautics; a \$22M one time reduction for Greater MN Transit; significant metro reductions. There will be a \$11 one-time reduction for Active Transportation program; a \$1.5 million base funding was established for the Safe Routes to School program, and a \$5.7 million per year base funding for passenger rail. It was also noted that there was a \$77 million reduction for the NLX project, with \$17 remaining in the budget for NLX.

Rudeen also reviewed some reductions in the auto parts sales tax and increased electric vehicle tax and surcharges that may result in a modest net increase to the highway user fund.

Rudeen showcased other Trunk Highway Budget appropriations to include an increase in for corridor planning, increase in state road construction appropriations, funding for State Patrol headquarters, and appropriations for priority trunk highway projects.

Additionally, Rudeen presented on some changes to policies that will permit the budget to have carry forward authority, more emphasis on fraud provisions and mitigation, the ability for the Met Council to loan funds to MnDOT for the F Line, and adjustments in the retail delivery fee for fuel deliveries and road construction materials deliveries.

Rudeen noted that while individual earmarks were not included in the 2025 bonding bill as passed that there were significant funds appropriated for local roads, township roads, local bridges, major local bridges and to assist with local road wetland mitigation.

Rudeen ended his presentation by noting additional policy items and new reporting requirements. He noted that in regard to Greenhouse gas analysis there will be new procedures of offsetting emissions through natural systems, developing parks, land acquisition, and creating forests can count as offset activities and will have a portfolio approach Rudeen invited members to reach out with any questions to him at his email address at [erik.rudeen@state.mn.us](mailto:erik.rudeen@state.mn.us).

## 8. Mesabi Trail & Redhead Connector MTP System ( Sarah Ciochetto – RRA)

Sarah Ciochetto provided verbal updates regarding the progress of the Mesabi Trail to the ATP membership. She noted that the trail will be 165 miles spanning from Grand rapids to Ely and is scheduled to be completed in 2026. Ciochetto noted that the first miles were constructed in 1994, and the trail has been funded by many sources including: LCCMR, Bonding, TA, CRP, IRRR. She noted that it is typically a 2 year process for actually planning, and conducting environmental assessment and regulatory processes. She noted that with the original master planning alignment now facing completion, the RRA will be looking at connecting additional communities via trail spurs. Future connections anticipated include connecting to Side Lake, Winton, and possibly Deer River.

Ciochetto also co-organizes a new coalition of trails called the Arrowhead Coalition of Trails (ACT) which brings together all modes of trail groups and clubs including for motorized and non-motorized trails. A

meeting in Fall of 2024 was well attended, and the group is seeking to convene again this fall.

For more information on this group, visit: <https://ironrange.org/arrowhead-coalition-of-trails/>

Following the meeting, Sarah Ciochetto led a guided bicycle tour of the Mesabi Trail spur right at the Discovery center to showcase projects along the Mesabi and connections with the Redhead Mountain Bike Trail system.

#### 9. ARDC Work Plan Updates (Travis Houle)

Travis Houle presented slides highlighting the work ARDC is doing under the Transportation Grant. Houle presented on the Carlton Transportation Plan process, updates for several scenic byways, updates about the anticipated timeline and process for guiding the solicitation for federal transportation funds, gave updates on the conclusion of the Silver Bay William-Kelley School Safe Routes to Schools plan, and provided information about ARDC's bike and pedestrian counting program. Michelle Pierson also provided updates about Gitchi-Gami State Trail projects. Travis Houle also noted that he would be updating the NEMNATP membership list on the ATP website due to some recent changes from retirements.

#### 10. MnDOT Updates (Erika Shepard)

Erika Shepard presented on several topics including:

a) MnDOT Highway Freight Program. Program opened June 25<sup>th</sup>. There is \$51M available statewide, with a webinar on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Applications are due September 3, 2025. The scoring rubric places greater emphasis on connections this solicitation. Learn more here: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/ofrw/mhfp/>

b) Transportation Economic Development Program (TED): Program opened on June 30<sup>th</sup>, \$20M available, a virtual session on July 10<sup>th</sup>. Letters of interest are due July 29, and applications are due September 29, 2025. Learn more here: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/funding/ted/2025-solicitation.html>

c) Corridor Studies:

Shepard noted that the TH45/TH210 Corridor Study would be picking up and building off of the Carlton community Transportation Plan this fall. The TH45 and TH210 have resurfacing projects planned for 2035. The Corridor Study will feed into the project scoping process.

The North Shore Roadway Network Resilience Study will be kicking off soon to look at the roadway network feeding into TH 61 in Lake and Cook Counties. A risk-based assessment of corridor vulnerabilities to consider future climate event impacts will occur. There is a focus on identifying alternative local routes and where to prioritize roadway/culvert/and bridge improvements. This will be an 18-month consultant led study. Aiming to kick off in fall 2025. MnDOT will also partner with ARDC on this project for some facilitation.

TH45/210 Carlton Corridor Study- building off the Carlton Transportation Plan. Resurfacing projects planned for 2035.

Looking at traffic/bike ped volumes (\* does ARDC help with this)

Hoping to kick off in September. Consultants submitted letters of interest, seeking a consultant soon.

Shepard entertained questions, and Gary Nelson, alternate from Itasca County inquired as to the status of the Hwy 169 Cross Range study between Taconite and Pengilly. Shepard noted that MnDOT is still in the process of reviewing outcomes from the study. More information about that process can be found here: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/d1/projects/hwy169-crossrange/index.html>

#### 11. Member concerns/future meeting agenda items:

A member inquired about the process to inform ARDC if a member can not make it to an upcoming meeting. The Partnership was reminded that a simple email to Travis Houle letting him know the name and contact information of the alternate is sufficient.

No other future meeting agenda items were brought up.

#### 12. Round Robin

Bri Patton, representing the US Forest Service, noted that there is a current solicitation open for the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) open through August 29, 2025. Learn more here: <https://highways.dot.gov/federal-lands/flap/mn>

Derek Fredrickson reminded members that draft environmental documents need to be submitted by December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025 for projects in 2026.

Travis Houle noted that he would be sending out more information about federal programs like Transportation Alternatives (TA), Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) CRP, and Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation (PRTOTECT) grant programs after more is known for the upcoming solicitation in the fall.

13. A motion to adjourn the meeting was made at 11:44am by Jason DiPiazza/Stephen Hallan. Motion carries. Meeting adjourned.

**Bold print denotes need for action.**

Post Meeting: Redhead Connector Trail visit and Bicycle Tour

The next meeting of the Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership will take place on Wednesday, October 8, 2025 at 10:00am. In-person meeting location will take place at Blandin Foundation, 100 N. Pokegama Ave, Grand Rapids MN 55744.