

Health Equity Efforts for the Bottineau Light Rail Transitway (LRT)

Impacts and opportunities: Results from a discussion of the health equity efforts for station area planning on the Bottineau Light Rail Transitway (LRT)

In 2013, Hennepin County received funding from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) to implement policy, systems, and environmental (PSE) changes to advance health equity through station area planning along the Bottineau Light Rail Transitway (LRT). Hennepin County and Nexus Community Partners (Nexus) contracted with community-based organizations that included geographic, cultural, and faith-based groups to do on-the-ground engagement around station area planning efforts and health. These groups were known as the Health Equity Engagement Cohort (HEEC). Multiple decision-making and planning entities were also involved in the process as it moved through a complicated set of local, regional, and federal planning requirements. These entities were both drivers of the project, as they worked to meet various funding and planning mandates, and recipients of recommendations developed by residents. Through this project, Hennepin County worked to promote the consideration of health equity and community engagement in broader decisions and activities within the agency. The Hennepin County Bottineau Community Works program is partnering with the cities of Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Robbinsdale, Golden Valley, and Minneapolis to identify and pursue community and economic development opportunities within the planned Bottineau LRT corridor. This report summarizes the scope of work and the results of a discussion with stakeholders about its impacts.

ABOUT THE DISCUSSION

In January 2018, a group of 29 project stakeholders attended a Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshop to assess the project's impact in different communities. Participants included Hennepin County and Nexus staff and representatives from the organizations who did community engagement work and partner cities. The REM discussion was intended to not only provide the participants a chance to consider how successful the project had been in achieving its intended goals, but also to identify the indirect or unexpected project impacts and key steps leading up to these changes.

During the discussion, all participants had opportunities to describe achievements of the project and to discuss the indirect impacts of the work from their perspective as a representative of local government or community-based organizations or as a community resident. This discussion focused on the station area planning efforts, and included the events and conditions that made those changes possible, the key activities that contributed to the development of the plans, and the "ripple effects" of those efforts. Participants also talked about challenges they encountered throughout their work. A summary of the discussion related to each area of change is included in this document. The specific impacts identified by the participants during the mind mapping exercise are listed in the Appendix.

What is Ripple Effect Mapping?

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is an evaluation tool used to better understand the intended and unintended impacts of a project.

It is particularly helpful when evaluating complex initiatives that both influence, and are impacted by, the community. REM is a facilitated discussion with project staff and local stakeholders that creates a visual "mind map" during the discussion that shows the linkages between program activities and resulting changes in the community.

This approach is intended to help demonstrate the project's impacts more holistically and to describe the degree to which different types of impacts are observed by project staff and community stakeholders.

Prepared by Wilder Research on behalf of the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

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CHANGES LEADING TO AND RESULTING FROM PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Through the efforts of Hennepin County, Nexus, and the HEEC members, the project has been successful in elevating the needs and priorities of residents into the final language of the station area plans. The plans guide the future land use of each station area and will influence what is ultimately developed within it to support community health and wellness. Having language in each plan that explicitly includes health equity and that connects transportation, land use, and human capital to community health will help keep residents' priorities at the forefront as planning, design, and implementation of the Bottineau LRT moves forward.

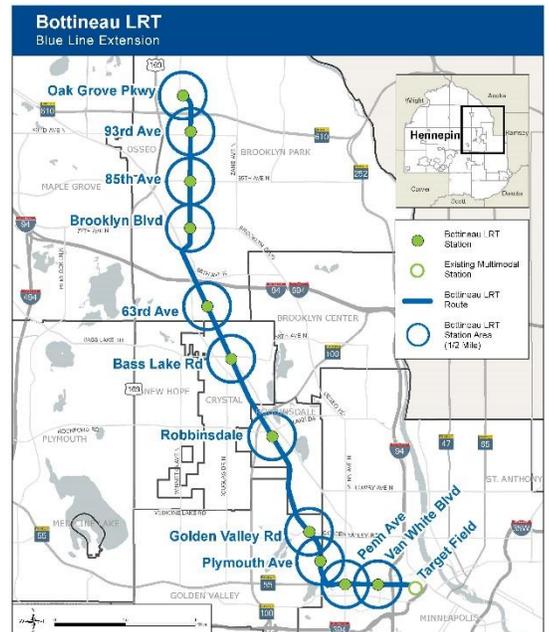
During the REM discussion, attendees talked about important features of the station area plans, the earlier accomplishments that set the stage for this work, and the unintentional impacts, or ripples, that have happened as a result of this community engagement and plan development process; these impacts and quotes from the conversation are included in Figure 3.

About the station area planning process

In 2013, Bottineau Community Works completed a health impact assessment (HIA) that found potential benefits from a well-designed Bottineau line could include increased physical activity, higher employment, decreased costs of housing and transportation, improved traffic safety, increased access to education, and increased access to healthy food. The station area planning process builds on this understanding of the importance of the built environment on health outcomes.

Through the past five years, Bottineau Community Works, in partnership with Nexus Community Partners, has subcontract with the HEEC to conduct an intensive community engagement process, with an emphasis on health equity, and to elicit substantial feedback from low income and communities of color along the planned route. These community engagement efforts have focused on residents who live within one mile of planned stations of the Bottineau line and done in three phases.

1. Planned Route and Stations for the Bottineau Light Rail Transitway



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Hennepin County Public Works

1 Phase one on-the-ground engagement

In phase one, Nexus worked closely with a group of eight HEEC organizations to do on-the-ground engagement, largely with low-income communities and communities of color, to inform the station area plans at stops in Minneapolis and Golden Valley. The HEEC organizations received training on health equity and social determinants of health, as well as the station area planning process for the planned LRT route in order to build their capacity to inform the planning process. In this phase, community members were actively involved in many important planning meetings and, as a result of their involvement, suggestions from the community were incorporated to station area plans. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN-DOT) provided Hennepin County with an award for their engagement process. During this time, Hennepin County contracted with the Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) to introduce additional training on racial equity to Hennepin County and municipalities along the corridor.

2 Phase two continued extensive community engagement

The second phase used a similar process with a new HEEC cohort of seven organizations focused on stations further north along the planned route, specifically in the cities of Robbinsdale, Crystal, and Brooklyn Park. Extensive community engagement continued to both inform station area plans and to shape the request for proposals (RFP) language that would be used to select the planning consultant for these plans. Six community representatives were involved in the hiring process for a planning consultant, a notable change in process for the county. Throughout this phase of work, health equity has continued to be explicitly described and incorporated into the transit planning process, including into station area planning documents. Hennepin County continued to contract with GARE to provide training on racial equity and use of decision-making tools.

3 Phase three
advanced
planning

The third phase focused on the stage of planning referred to as advanced planning where the county and the cities will define the practical policies and designs needed to prepare for future station area investments and projects. This process will continue after HEIP funding ends. The HEEC cohort for the third phase included eight organizations. Throughout the advanced planning process Bottineau Community Works implemented a series of demonstration projects to educate cities and community members on the types of PSE changes that could be seen in station areas to improve walkability and biking. Based on health equity strategies in the station area plans, these demonstration projects test and evaluate bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Hennepin County is continuing the demonstration projects and moving from soliciting community feedback on planned station areas to implementing the kinds of changes that were planned. Early in Phase 3, Hennepin County became a member of GARE.

2. Health Equity Engagement Cohort (HEEC) Member Organizations by Project Phase

Health Equity Engagement Cohort Participation Phase 1-3

- Phase 1:** Van White, Penn, Plymouth and Golden Valley Station Area Plans
- Phase 2:** Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park Station Areas
- Phase 3:** Corridor-wide Advanced Planning and Early Implementation

Organization Name	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
1. African American Leadership Forum (AALF)		X	
2. ACER Inc. (African Career Education Resources Inc.)		X	X
3. Asamblea de Derechos Civiles		X	X
4. CAPI USA	X	X	X
5. CLUES	X		
6. Harrison Neighborhood Association (HNA)	X		X
7. Heritage Park Neighborhood Association (HPNA)	X		
8. Lao Assistance Center of MN (LACM)	X	X	X
9. Masjid An-Nur (MAN)	X		X
10. MN African Women’s Association (MAWA)		X	
11. Northside Residents Redevelopment Council (NRRRC)	X		X
12. Northwest Hennepin Human Services Council (NWHHSC)		X	
13. Redeemer Center for Life (RCFL)	X		X
Alliance for Metropolitan Stability	X	X	
Neighborhood Leadership and Organizing Program (NLOP)	X	X	

Reflections on the planning process and its impacts

During the REM discussion, attendees talked about important features of the station area plans, the earlier accomplishments that set the stage for this work, and the unintentional impacts, or ripples, that have happened as a result of this community engagement and plan development process (Figure 3). The changes include new policies within city and county governments, convening and education sessions on health equity in Hennepin County, strengthened relationships with community organizations, and increased attention to deeper community engagement practices. Frequently, community engagement in transit planning occurs within the context of public meetings, and while the changes described in this report are specific to this project, the lessons learned are applicable to Bottineau Community Works and other entities responsible for similar transportation planning projects.

Station area plans incorporate health priorities

At the time of the REM session, station area plans had been completed, a first year of demonstration projects had been conducted, and the project was transitioning into its next phase of work. During the REM session, stakeholders noted that because of the engagement process, the terminology and content of the station area plans was different than it would have been without residents sharing their input. They noted that health equity is integrated in the planning documents; that the plans make explicit connections between social determinants of health, the built environment, and health outcomes; and that the plans included a broad definition of health that includes social determinants. Participants shared examples of features of the station area plans that resulted from residents’ input, including bike and pedestrian infrastructure, traffic calming measures, housing and commercial development, employment opportunities, community gardens, a marketplace, child care, and connection to green space. One participant also noted that the Brooklyn Park station area plan document was the first plan in the city that included a direct reference to health equity.

Changes resulting from community engagement by Bottineau Community Works

HEALTH EQUITY ENGAGEMENT COHORT

Strengthening connections

"There have been some – transportation department for Hennepin County has had more understanding of how the Community Works projects are important to the roadway and how they need to mesh a little better."

"It takes a long time to build capacity and trust – that has been a really important ongoing outcome as a result of Bottineau Community Works' work. We have been able to establish relationships with community based organizations' perspectives, they see what they're doing, Brooklyn Park sees what they want."

Raising new awareness of community concerns

"There is a better understanding of structural racism, how it affects health outcomes, housing, jobs, income."

"Immigrant experiences—a set of experiences that typically isn't documented, was acknowledged. If today's the topic on housing, only discussing housing. Community brings everything when they show up. Minnesota African Women's Association shared experience of Somali experiences, cultural center, and childcare. What is culturally centered childcare? Other sets of experience are valued. Where immigrants are currently is different than a year ago."

Deepening the level of community engagement

"There's more community ownership over the Bottineau project than when it was rolled out as an alternative analysis process. There's more buy-in from people about what the Blue Line extension will do for their lives."

Bottineau Transitway

COUNTY

Increasing awareness of health equity

"Bringing forth [social determinants of health] SDOH, benefits of housing around transportation, how it impacts life expectancy of communities of color. Historically what this type does to communities of color, marginalization. Secure communities of color around gentrification, having holistic conversations. Looking at demographics along the line in a heavily transit heavy location. City looking at data and take it into consideration and have an intentional conversation around mixed-income housing. Hoping to provide housing in the production part in preservation and production."

Increasing accountability to community

"That goes back the RFP process. Someone who's been there for 24 years and drives in from Eagan. If living close to work isn't valued, will there be lasting change? People want to live near where they work. We see terrors of seeing people disconnected from people they're supposed to serve."

Gaining recognition and additional funding

"Opportunities to keep work ongoing and implemented is to identify future opportunities. Specific development proposal as city or county staff are going to inform community for opportunities to weigh in. Only way for people to engage is through open/public meetings. How do you bring more people to table?"

STATION AREA PLANNING

Increasing consideration of local business needs

"Culturally centered childcare—we work in NW suburbs in African American community, need for community and 24 hour childcare, community cohort/women of color looking to open 2 childcare centers, looking intentionally along the Line. This is a line that has predominantly people of color along the line, how do we bring more businesses, businesses of color to have access to the line."

Implementing environmental changes for active living

"It's been about bicycle connections. We're actually making bicycle connections rather than talking about it."

Adapting transportation planning

"The perception of planning has changed in the public sector. Rather than a couple of meetings, trying to involve members within the process itself."

KEY CHANGES

Implementing changes to support active living

One of the possible results of the Bottineau LRT identified in the HIA was that it could make active living (e.g., walking and biking) more accessible, which is a challenge in many parts of the metropolitan area. During the REM session, participants identified several ways that planned environmental changes facilitate active living. Participants mentioned that it is a challenge for riders to safely walk, drive, or bus from stations to their final destinations, and several environmental changes aimed to address that. Some of these changes included work toward bicycle infrastructure and including biking as part of the planning process. Though not directly mentioned by participants, the demonstration projects mentioned earlier in this report reflect one of the ways that active living has become intentionally part of the process. Collaboration with other organizations (e.g., Harrison Neighborhood Association) was mentioned as a necessary step in these environmental changes being implemented as part of station area planning.

Adapting transportation planning

Participants mentioned how the planning process itself was changed because of this initiative. Because of the feedback given by HEEC members and others in the community, station area planning emphasized community engagement, and changes were made in how meetings were conducted, allowing residents to have more say in how safety is determined. Typically, transportation planning solicits community feedback on a short timeline, often online or via community meetings, and this process allocated more time for community engagement.

Inclusion of community members throughout process. Make sure that community members are involved in steering committees, staff groups to support work. Looking for ways to include community feedback in RFPs. Trying to find ways to be flexible around procurement, takes time to take folks to participate. We're trying to find ways to compensate community organizations for their time. It has a value and it comes at a cost.

Increasing awareness of health equity

A frequently mentioned change as a result of the work was an increased awareness of health equity on many levels, including among city, county and transit staff. To have had health equity explicitly incorporated into station area planning was an important change, highlighted by county staff in their reports. Participants mentioned that the awareness of social determinants of health and how they relate to transportation planning was informative for community members and transportation planners. One example was that the importance of considering housing and its proximity to transportation has implications for life expectancy of residents, in this case, particularly residents of color. Some ideas brought forth in the session included the city gathering data on the demographic composition of communities with proximity to planned stations and reliance on transit, including mixed-income housing, and having authentic conversations with communities of color about how gentrification may impact their neighborhoods.

Bringing forth [social determinants of health] SDoH, benefits of housing around transportation, how it impacts life expectancy of communities of color. Historically what this type does to communities of color, marginalization.

Raising awareness of community concerns

Participants mentioned that the way the planning process worked created a new awareness among city, county and transit staff about concerns in the community. This level of interaction and engagement allowed a deeper understanding of the specific concerns faced by many community members who live along the planned LRT route and who work with communities along the planned route. Participants noted an increased understanding of structural racism (i.e., a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity). Much of the increased awareness was reflected in a deeper understanding of the history with which zoning and transit planning have created structural barriers for communities of color to have access to economic and other opportunities. Another way in which an increased understanding of structural racism was reflected was in the ability of HEEC members to identify connections to other areas and regions where similar structural barriers have existed and how these trends are connected. One of the ways in which participants suggested addressing structural racism was for more people of color to be in positions of power that hold transportation planning accountable.

Another area of deeper understanding was of the experiences of immigrants and concerns experienced by immigrants in the present political climate. Some of this concern was made known in the way in which meetings occurred; the deeper level of engagement with immigrants to share the experiences and challenges unique to their communities. One participant pointed out the number of undocumented immigrants who live in communities along the planned transit route and concerns about enforcement, while another pointed out the concerns about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. One of the ways this is connected to transit was in the fear of some immigrants to use transit for fear of ICE. This was mentioned in connection to a wider latitude for enforcement of immigration laws. In addition, the ways in which immigrant communities are hidden presents challenges to engagement. Participants mentioned that there is still a substantial amount of learning needed for county officials to be able to have a reciprocal understanding of issues with community members.

Strengthening connections

The most commonly mentioned change was the strengthened connections created as a result of this work. These occurred on several levels, both between and within community and government agencies. The collaborative nature of this effort required building connections and deep, honest dialogue between agencies, cities, and organizations. Some of the ways in which connections were made have been formalized, while others remain informal but ongoing. Connections between government agencies include departments gaining a greater understanding of each other's work. One participant mentioned Hennepin County Public Works and Transportation departments better understanding one another.

Hennepin Community Works has helped as a result of HEEC to build connections that are taken for granted in Minneapolis. That has been helpful to plug into community organizations so that they feel like they're part of the planning. It's through the relationships that work gets done. The connections help to get things done, help the community organizations in their work as well.

Considering local business needs

One of the important ways that participants mentioned the planning process being adapted through this work was in a deeper consideration of the needs and prosperity of businesses along the planned route. Some of this included thinking through the ways that riders would be able to easily access businesses near planned stations. There was a connection, then, to the planned work and demonstration projects done showing how biking and walking could be implemented in station areas. Specific ways that participants mentioned that local business needs could be considered would be in how existing businesses, specifically those owned by women and/or people of color, would be affected by the planned stations. This was not limited to existing businesses, however; participants mentioned that communities should have a voice in the RFP process for hiring a planning consultant as it impacts local businesses, that the needs of communities along the planned route be considered in which business are invested in, and developing businesses that invest in the health of communities along the planned route. A city representative mentioned that changing zoning policies to lessen the distance between planned stations and buildings.

Deepening community engagement

The work accomplished by Bottineau Community Works represents a new level of community engagement by Hennepin County and city staff which was informed by working with HEEC members. This was reflected in both a greater amount of investment in community engagement, and also in a deeper level of input received from the community. The types of engagement conducted gave community organizations a stronger role in decision-making and treatment as experts and partners. Participants mentioned this being a mutual learning experience; the deeper level of engagement by community organizations was also reflected in greater interest among community members in participating in the process. This increased involvement of community members and stronger advocacy has led to a deeper recognition of the importance of community feedback by city and county officials.

Some of the ways that participants mentioned the deeper level of community engagement benefiting community members was an increased understanding in the planning process. Because the timeline and structure of transportation planning are often unknown to community members, this deeper level of engagement presented an opportunity to educate community members about how most effectively to engage in the transportation planning process. This, to some participants, represented a shift in power that allowed community members greater ownership of the decisions that affect their daily lives, opportunities to find work, and health. In addition to helping the county gather more accurate feedback, government entities built stronger connections and became more accountable to the communities along the planned route. This more robust level of community input also garnered greater buy-in among the communities along the planned route. Taking the time to create a shared vision for what the planned route and its impacts on health equity could look like allowed for a common language between government and community and fostered stronger relationships.

Increasing accountability to community

Related to this deeper level of community engagement, several participants mentioned that this work led to a greater level of accountability of government and transit planning officials to the community. An example of this increased accountability was a change in the level of community involvement in the RFP process. One participant mentioned that city and county staff need to feel accountable to the members of the community, and this may be difficult when staff do not live and work in the communities their decisions are most directly impacting. Another way participants mentioned valuing community members and having greater accountability was in recognizing that community members aren't paid to attend public meetings and in finding ways to recognize the contribution of community members and organizations' and their time. Additionally, one participant mentioned that the ways in which HEEC brought together organizations doing work in sectors directly connected to transportation, such as housing, and increased the sustainability of health equity in communities along the planned Bottineau LRT. The kind of collaboration between the county and non-government offices (NGOs) offers a deeper level of accountability to community through this relationship.

Gaining recognition and funding

One final change mentioned by participants was that the work done by Bottineau Community Works has garnered recognition locally and positioned HEEC organizations to be able to contract for additional funding. This structure has also allowed Hennepin County to inform community members about opportunities to pursue funding. Some HEEC community organizations have procured additional funding (one example is through subcontracting opportunities within a Federal Transit Administration grant) and the deep level of engagement and knowledge about the project positioned their organization to have the capacity to receive it.

CHALLENGES

Although most of the discussion focused on identifying changes that participants had experienced or observed through this project, the group did spend some time discussing specific challenges that impacted the project.

Project complexity and intensity

Some participants described challenges with coordination of partners and resources, particularly aligning the timelines of government agencies and communities. They also discussed ongoing challenges with community engagement in certain communities, and the potential of individual, organizational, and community burnout, particularly during long-term projects. Multiple participants mentioned that the number of meetings, people, and overall work involved in the station area planning process challenged the schedules of some community members and the capacity of community-based organizations. Similarly, some cities lacked the capacity to engage in the kind of community engagement work done through this planning process. One participant expressed concerns that despite the intensive efforts for community engagement, city and county officials, especially those further removed from this project, may still not be aware of the concerns of all communities impacted by the planned Bottineau LRT.

Changes in the political climate

A number of participants mentioned that the current political climate has led to increased fear among residents who belong to marginalized communities, and that it made conversations about race and racism necessary in order to have the level of engagement sought for this work. One participant mentioned that the climate after the 2016 presidential election has changed the tone of conversations during this work. Another participant mentioned that the tolerance for voices and perspectives from marginalized communities has changed and decreased.

There's not a lot of tolerance to people hearing voices, elders from African Americans, to listen, and to hear and not to be afraid of losing the limelight. There's a direct challenge to how pervasive fear is.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Lessons from this project have application for transportation planning in other routes and other communities. This process has demonstrated the possibility of building stronger relationships and trust between government entities and community organizations and members. The process also demonstrated the level of knowledge needed on the part of government about structural racism, equity, and the substantial investment needed to build the kinds of relationships that elicited the kind of feedback given by community members. The following questions are intended to help both Bottineau Community Works and similar organizations consider ways to further support meaningful community engagement in future transportation planning projects.

- What kinds of resources are necessary to build the kind of connections that led to the HEEC?
- How can health equity more frequently be incorporated into transportation planning?
- What kinds of relationships are needed to successfully implement these changes?
- How can other entities build these kinds of relationships so that transportation development can be more equitable?
- What kinds of strategic relationships with partners from the private sector might advance this process in future work?
- How can the advanced planning and implementation stages of planning continue to build meaningful relationships?

APPENDIX: Project impacts identified by discussion participants

Implementing environmental changes for active living

There is a tangible change; new bike lines, commercial development.

It's been about bicycle connections. We're actually making bicycle connections rather than talking about it.

Bike policy/Harrison Neighborhood Association--Redeemer, Nelson Memorial Highway crossing the road, people had died. Importance of redesign to be bike + pedestrian friendly.

Adapting transportation planning

Strengthened inclusion of government process, varies on circumstance.

The idea of bringing the focus to station area and transit planning is something new and different.

There's more cross-departmental communication within cities. Having holistic conversations. County would invite community to talk about a stop sign, community would start complaining about landlords, rent going up. When you call communities in, they're going to have conversations. Don't talk in silos.

Station area planning sessions react to resident lives. Safety is imposed.

Plan is result of process. There have been various projects, transit line has moved along. Demographic of people involved in planning is different from earlier. Broader selection of people involved. Came out of Corridors of Opportunity. We work in consulting world, hiring other firms. It's changed our general practice, more far reaching. More representative of the broader group that participated. It's a process change, we're beginning a process change in our organization.

Amendment to station area plan that City worked on through Hennepin County's work.

One of the reasons I was brought onto Bottineau is to share because Southwest is a little ahead, to share from Southwest to Bottineau, but the sharing has gone back and forth. Some of the art spaces, wayfinding work, haven't been done in Southwest. Ways of involving underrepresented groups can be lessons to Southwest. In the Southwest corridor, we paid attention to naturally occurring affordable housing (that doesn't have some sort of restriction keeping rent affordable, but because of age/amenities can't command rent). Bottineau is starting to pay attention (though they did some with ACER). Both lines have been involved in efforts for preservation of affordable housing. Both lines are coming together (outside of community works project, has taken a life of its own with cities and other organizations).

Perception of planning has changed in the public sector. Rather than a couple of meetings, trying to involve members within the process itself.

Community engagement is more integrated in language at Hennepin County Community Works. Community engagement elevated as important element to community planning, in terms of health equity. Community organization integration in all planning. Starting with health impact assessment, land use plan, advanced planning linking up definitions and policies and systems needed for implementation.

One example is that traditionally, community engagement is a task in our contracting process (i.e., if hiring a consultant, community engagement is a task asked of the consultant). Based on feedback from groups gathered before I joined the project, community groups don't have technical expertise and can't compete for contracts and get added on for engagement as an afterthought. When structuring our FTA contract, we carved out community engagement in a bunch of ways in its own contract so that organizations with expertise in community engagement could compete for the work. That way the one who had the contract had to subcontract with others in the corridor. Did it in the FTA grant, trying to see how to do subcontracting in other work.

Integration--system impact. There's not one thing that's being pushed that doesn't have an impact. Show linkage in how systems impact housing, economic development. Decisions aren't being made in isolation.

Inclusion of community members throughout process. Make sure that community members are involved in steering committees, staff groups to support work. Looking for ways to include community feedback in RFPs. Trying to find ways to be flexible around procurement, takes time to take folks to participate. We're trying to find ways to compensate community organizations for their time. It has a value and it comes at a cost.

The station area planning process sponsored by Hennepin County really sort of brought this concept of working collaboratively and collectively in a holistic way around stations to fruition. I'm kind of guessing, but it seemed like with cities doing city work, communities doing community work, station area planning brought all parties together in a more organized fashion. Helped people make connections, build relationships, and work on stuff more collectively?

There's more info planners can take into consideration now.

I don't know if there have been changes in Hennepin County's policies. There have been Community Works staff members more geared toward including community.

Increasing awareness of health equity

The work we do with health equity engagement cohorts helps connect health with other factors, shape city policies through Harrison Neighborhood Association's work.

Health equity strategies are in station areas.

Health Equity Scorecard, conversations around race allows for a level of transparency where people have additional context to understand how policies and government have marginalized communities of color. Restrictive covenants--there wasn't a level of understanding. That's a different type of conversation.

Work of cohort members--relationship and partnership with Hennepin County. Joan's position [Community Engagement Coordinator], and others have brought a health narrative to station area planning. Includes health in station area plans that cities are basing their work from, that may not have a Health Equity Engagement Cohort member attached to.

When equity became part of the conversation. We need to anchor change. Someone who's been in the same job for 24 years, making change beyond the terms for official is important. Making recommendations for county, city, for what could be low-hanging fruit for longer systems change.

Bringing forth [social determinants of health] SDOH, benefits of housing around transportation, how it impacts life expectancy of communities of color. Historically what this type does to communities of color, marginalization. Secure communities of color around gentrification, having holistic conversations. Looking at demographics along the line in a heavily transit heavy location. City looking at data and take it into consideration and have an intentional conversation around mixed-income housing. Hoping to provide housing in the production part in preservation and production.

Comprehensive planning process--huge opportunity to move health language to local policy.

Amendment to 20% affordability on housing. Neighborhoods would have been excluded.

Raising new awareness of community concerns

Amount of anxiety of what it means to be American.

Increased understanding of structural racism

Recognition by policymakers in Brooklyn Park contribute to geographic disparities. 'Haves' in North and 'Have Nots' in South--that's where gaps exist.

Seeing the value of health equity narrative in lived experience. In Brooklyn Park, you can see where people live longer in the city by drawing a line through it. It seems abstract until you start discussing it.

Regional impact. There is a history of policy and zoning that has created the circumstance where communities have been penalized and awareness has been uplifted.

It would be hard to decouple. Stationary planning, how long it took to walk across Nelson Highway. Racial equity lens is hard to take it off, it happened separately. The work around racism, policy, Harrison Neighborhood Association, Home Act, became more known through Health Equity in Prevention and work done at the County.

Taking what is local and looking at it globally. What's happening in our neighborhoods, there is a larger systemic reality.

There is a better understanding of structural racism, how it affects health outcomes, housing, jobs, income.

In 2012 there weren't conversations about race. Race, racial equity policies are being passed. Race training, conversations are happening city-wide, organizations. County, Met Council. Our community has played a hand in bringing that conversation to the forefront. There's language about authentic engagement--developing policies, creating models--a core thing that's come out of this work.

Hennepin County housing inventory presented at HEEC was helpful. Brooklyn Park still uses that as reference.

How is conversation of race/racial equity different? Work in Brooklyn Park mixed income housing policy.

Increased understanding of immigrant experience

Immigrant experiences--a set of experiences that typically isn't documented, was acknowledged. If today's the topic on housing, only discussing housing. Community brings everything when they show up. Minnesota African Women's Association shared experience of Somali experiences, cultural center, and childcare. What is culturally centered childcare? Other sets of experience are valued. Where immigrants are currently is different than a year ago.

Election of current president changes immigration landscape. Undocumented people make up a great body of our communities. Our numbers are going to change as statuses are terminated. That puts our communities in a place of uncertainty, our safety. Immigration landscape is a huge detriment to a lot of the communities that are along the line.

Enforcement has increased, there is more visibility of ICE.

Immigration enforcement; because there's a wider latitude for enforcement and going into communities, people feeling afraid.

People feeling afraid about if they use transit. Fear of people attending events that are government-sponsored.

Immigrant fears--the immigrant community is more afraid of the line than excited. Immigrants and residents are now aware of their rights because of the work we've done.

Now more than ever people are hiding. Immigrant communities haven't had a chance of getting out of the shadows. There's been more relationships between community groups and the county. The county doesn't understand the community, data to gather. There isn't a reciprocal understanding. Homeland Security being on the line, ICE being on the line on the way to work. These are fears that were brought up immediately. They're still there.

It's corridor-wide. All the immigrant communities in the areas are impacted.

More presence of people of color in positions to hold policy and strategy accountable.

Strengthening connections

Partnerships expanding among cities, counties, and other organizations.

I didn't have most of those relationships previously. I had worked with cities, Nexus Community Partners, and Harrison Neighborhood Association, but everyone else was a new relationship.

Have done the work but more to do. Brooklyn Park and ACER have worked together independent of Bottineau Community Works, but provide them opportunities to work on these things. Other cities like Crystal and Robbinsdale aren't as familiar with HEEC/Blue Line Coalition organizations but are open to it. As they work to bring BLC committees in the work going forward, Bottineau Community Works can play a role in fostering those relationships. Minneapolis does partnership well.

There have been some – transportation department for Hennepin County has had more understanding of how the Community Works projects are important to the roadway and how they need to mesh a little better.

For example – Bottineau Community Works was instrumental in helping Hennepin County transportation think about West Broadway not just as a roadway but as a place that needs more amenities to make it more comfortable. Street enhancements (lighting for pedestrians, enhancements, street furniture) make it comfortable for people, not just cars, and previously Hennepin County Transportation would be focused just on the roadway.

It takes a long time to build capacity and trust – that has been a really important ongoing outcome as a result of Bottineau Community Works' work. We have been able to establish relationships with community based organizations' perspectives, they see what they're doing, Brooklyn Park sees what they want.

Helps everyone feel connected and on the same page.

The most important change I've seen is the coming together of outside organizations who are advocating – who meet together to make a strategy for what they want to advocate for, push a common message. Thinking of the Blue Line Coalition (stakeholders that represent varying organizations that have been involved with Bottineau Community Works – they are more linked together than they would have been without this). A lot of groups that are in the HEEC are also members of the Blue Line Coalition; there's overlap, but overall, by working together, by realizing then getting specific asks of the city and county, their voice is stronger.

There's some more focus on it. I don't know if it's specifically as a result of these initiatives and just as engagement from cities and agencies are becoming more engaged with local organizations and underrepresented communities, that might be just a broader change.

Between ACER and HNA.

We're new to Harrison, there wasn't consistency and structure. HEEC gave me the ability to know what's happening. A lot of the work we're doing now around housing, trying to work with ACER, came out of our work. We're using examples from others.

ACER was one of the first organizations to have a relationship with Brooklyn Park. Community engagement department, job of community engagement, work we were able to do resonated with me.

Involvement of immigrant and African Americans has emerged. African American community elders weren't able to be a part of the conversation historically, trying to minimize the tension, making the connections and links.

Nuance of scarcity and time. Aren't we all suffering the same? We have different interests. We suffer from policies, how can we coexist and uplift?

Corridors of Opportunity brought us together. Emerging infrastructure to support engagement. COO served as a framework that served as a catalyst, result of Green Line advocacy.

They've become more organized. The Met Council had the Corridors of Opportunity grantees in the 2010 timeframe and that really was designed to help build up local community organizations. At that time, you had organizations – not really joining forces together or coming together... they were more stand-off independent organizations. Under the HEEC, you started to see more of the organizations focused on finding common ground that they are all advocating for and sharing/amplifying that message amongst each other.

Strengthened relationships between the group has strengthened efforts.

That's an important shift in practice that's worth noting. The strength of relationships, skills, development that community groups have placed. A new space to come together.

Hennepin Community Works has helped as a result of HEEC to build connections that are taken for granted in Minneapolis. That has been helpful to plug into community organizations so that they feel like they're part of the planning. It's through the relationships that work gets done. The connections help to get things done, help the community organizations in their work as well.

Bottineau corridor is complex, goes through lots of different communities. It's an income diverse, racially diverse, culturally diverse corridor.

Finding common/similar issues that we might not have been aware of.

We had pushback from community, displaced, accessibility. Making sure they're being heard has been impactful. Making sure community members are being heard.

It's got to be collective work.

It's the collective impact to leverage outcomes. Sustainability can't reside in outside funders. Outside funders should serve as an outside catalyst. Thinking about this is different--it's not reactionary. You need a lot more lead time. This isn't a short story. That's a resiliency part. With all the other issues, we can't fall asleep on City Council issues. The awareness and thinking about systems change has changed.

Organizations are more willing to collaborate after the process. Alignment with goals through collaboration.

Maintain partnerships past planning stages. Relationships break apart after the planning.

Emergence of Blue Line Coalition--cities, counties, Corridors, Central, SW, Blue Line coalition emergence is significant for the future for the corridor.

This laid the groundwork for the city and county; BCBS set the stage for emerging trends along Van White.

Increasing consideration of local business needs

How does this impact business and policy? Small entrepreneurs, where is growth taking place? W. Broadway, public health, accessibility--what's going to happen to businesses that support our health when the Line comes in?

Culturally centered childcare--we work in NW suburbs in African American community, need for community and 24 hour childcare, community cohort/women of color looking to open 2 childcare centers, looking intentionally along the Line. This is a line that has predominantly people of color along the line, how do we bring more businesses, businesses of color to have access to the line.

Hoping, trying for RFPs to go into communities first. How are we spending county funds? If you've got a contract in place, if there aren't policies in place for contractors. Communities wanting equitable policies to negate decades of disinvestment.

A big part of the station area planning process that came out of community involvement was to focus on bike and pedestrian connections to the stations (making them more walkable). In doing that, the city has a role in improving its zoning that would change how buildings are developed so that buildings are close to street, fenestration at the street level (not parting at sidewalk), people are more comfortable. Need to make people comfortable getting to the train, it's not enough to [simply] put a train in. Working on that actively came out of station area planning. That input came from the community.

Business Development--understanding of different businesses along the line. Weren't considered in market studies are now being considered. At a recent county meeting, ethnic business/women businesses--the building will be considered for the developer.

Challenges

There's not a lot of tolerance to people hearing voices, elders from African Americans, to listen, and to hear and not to be afraid of losing the limelight. There's a direct challenge to how pervasive fear is.

Election of our current president has changed tones for conversations. Significant event, funding that goes with that will have an impact over the next 3 years.

Station area planning was an intense schedule. 2-4 meetings/month. Big group, big room meetings. Didn't always prepare HEEC groups for a relationship into advanced planning. Advanced planning is lining things up for implementation. A lot of complexities, layers of accountability, how the money lands, that naturally causes tensions because it's no longer just words, it's actual investments. I'm not sure station area planning prepared everyone for a productive relationship in advanced planning.

I'm afraid that counties and cities understand impacts of Blue Line, but aren't aware of communities that are impacted by Blue Line. Despite of the work we've done with communities, that level of understanding isn't there. They don't get us.

Issues of capacity--support community-based groups, community work about engagement. Cities and county has felt the impact of. Robbinsdale doesn't have community engagement staff. Some cities have limited capacity because of their size to take on corridor-wide issues. It's opened opportunities that have yet to be realized on how resources move.

Unintended/negative impacts?

There's a big challenge for nongovernmental entities--the time, we weren't defined to do the work. It's practice. So much of the work is to be reactive. It's a huge capacity challenge for community organizations.

Deepening the level of community engagement

Engagement is done in a matter that reflects intent.

Increased engagement by organization and individuals --the LRT projects and all the related projects.

Youth at Redeemer have engagement in process. This is your community, at least be engaged in the process, civic engagement, consuming the information. We have skin in the game.

Community is a lot more engaged. Community members have learned the process of how government works. Including the timelines of government. People have started taking life back, standing up for what's just, what's best for their community because they've learned these processes. This is the impact of gentrification, their landlords. Community is more empowered now than when we first started the process.

Learning went both ways. Government, cities, and counties learned about community needs. Community groups learned about planning, built relationships with cities. Two way street in learning.

Creating new communication connections.

There is a different level of trust. It's a mammoth system. There is more trust, communication, accountability. Communicates back to community about bike lanes, different than what it might have been before. There is more resilience. More impact more voice. How do you eat a 100 lb elephant--one bite at a time. Bike routes, Greenway, feel more empowered to put our foot in the sand. Sued the DOT of not removing snow in our areas. Highway 55, snow remover, lanes for handicap we felt empowered to have a voice through this process.

Institutionalizing change--fear that this may be seen as a groundbreaking success. Iceberg of culture within the city and the county which goes beyond city officials, those that are elected, to those implementing that need to change. If that doesn't happen, the relationships will erode. When relationships change, all the work is lost.

Level of risk--put leadership capital on line to vouch for community process. Resource--taking time that may go towards something else. For staff w/city or county, there's a risk that you have to take. There's opportunity costs and change within community organization or institution, a comfort level or risk people take. It creates tension.

Blue line coalition and relationship with Hennepin County Community Works.

Have an ongoing meeting schedule with Blue Line Coalition [Hennepin County/Bottineau Community Works staff meet quarterly with Blue Line Coalition reps]. Have added Blue Line Coalition to staff group that meets monthly. They are included in intersections work in the steering committee. There's a lot of overlap between Blue Line Coalition and the HECC. Trying to incorporate them into committees guiding the work done through Bottineau Community Works.

Community based organizations are recognized by city and county.

Feel like there's more organizations to tap into. The job is to represent communities. Different level that makes it easier, representatives of those group carry messages back to organizations. It was different when we engaged with community earlier, haven't been aware of various groups, there's more groups now for us to work with.

First time there's community representatives in city/Bottineau technical group.

In the past it's been consultant based, whereas now it's actual communities in the corridor that will be there in the future. Sustainability in relationship base that's an asset to Bottineau.

Our work ebbs and flows, how do you maintain relationships across contract work or whatever is going on? Just to be there and maintain our knowledge.

[Hennepin County] is way more intentional about equity – looking at impacts on people in community, much more intentional about involving community and trying to be clear (it's a work in progress) with community groups about how they can be involved and have their voices heard in our project.

Alignment around a common vision has been helpful to be the focus.

Common language to do common work, moving from programs to civic engagement.

Stronger connection with community organizations to distill down those messages. Individual voice can get lost in hearing, consolidate a lot of info.

Government Alliance on Race and Equity program - process, model is seen throughout Twin Cities. Hiring of staff at various levels. Having people be more engaged in elections.

In the past, Brooklyn Park would be doing city stuff, there would be public input but it wouldn't be as robust as it is.

The one thing I think has been eye-opening is the level of community organization that has happened in the corridor. One of the things that was unique about the HECC model was that it brought groups together to share and learn along with Hennepin County staff about transportation planning. None of the corridor organizations have transit planning in the focus (usually housing). We ask people to participate but they don't have background in how planning works or how to engage the planning process. It was innovative to have this space and time where organizations could drill down and learn from each other – that was really unique.

There's more community ownership over the Bottineau project than when it was rolled out as an alternative analysis process. There's more buy-in from people about what the Blue Line extension will do for their lives.

There's more buy-in, but it's more visible buy-in, so that helps ensure that the greater community knows that it's important to these people that the Blue Line extension gets built and all that comes with it.

I think that you've seen agencies being more receptive toward suggestions of community, taking and factoring in their requests, what they're looking for. For the project, we've added seats to our Corridor Management Committee that include Blue Line Coalition, a seat at the table with government officials to make recommendations toward the [Metropolitan] Council. Their seat is in an advisory committee to the Met Council that informs policy. Laid out in state statute for light rail projects.

Increasing accountability to community

Following transportation, equity, to pick something out of that that we can hammer, that housing is one of those things. If we don't do something like that, our communities are at risk. In a way that county and NGOs can work together on sustainability or for communities--Housing.

That goes back the RFP process. Someone who's been there for 24 years and drives in from Eagan. If living close to work isn't valued, will there be lasting change? People want to live near where they work. We see terrors of seeing people disconnected from people they're supposed to serve.

Leadership and building upon a framework that's already in place. Leadership are accountable to being made aware that there is a way of engaging.

Community isn't more empowered, it's more informed. City is not the client. Community is. Keep everyone informed, the benefit should be for the community, not the county.

Community aren't paid to be there. I had to take time out of work to do this. We value community members time and organizations have to be valued. It's an important meeting that I can't afford not to attend.

Gaining recognition and additional funding

There is a line for additional funding. Being knowledgeable about the project, helped make the case for the FTA grant. McKnight.

Opportunities to keep work ongoing and implemented is to identify future opportunities. Specific development proposal as city or county staff are going to inform community for opportunities to weigh in. Only way for people to engage is through open/public meetings. How do you bring more people to table?