

MEETING SUMMARY

October 24, 2007

Marble City Hall

Mayor David Lotti, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:40 PM and asked attendees to introduce themselves. Forty six people signed the attendee sign in sheet.

Andy Hubley of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) offered a brief update on the Readiness Assessment before turning things over to Mn/DOT. Denny Johnson asked attendees to refer to the handouts and attached map that was handed out. Mr. Johnson pointed out that the 71 percent of Mn/DOT funds currently going to preservation will need to be increased when Congressman Oberstar's earmarks expire. He further stated that there's barely enough money for preservation now; this hampers the ability of Mn/DOT to take part in this project due to a lack of funds. Referring to the map, three of the four segments open for expansion are still planned however that expansion is currently planned for 2024-2030. The cost estimates contained there were only broad brush estimates.

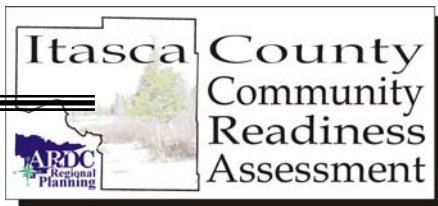
In response to attendee questions Mn/DOT officials stated that there are smaller improvements that are planned to solve immediate needs resulting from the construction of the power plant, such as the addition of turn lanes on Highway 65.

Staff from Congressman Oberstar's office reiterated their May 25th request for information from the communities so that his office could work with Mn/DOT. The information requested includes Highway 169 traffic counts and economic development information. The staff made a point to say that there is an equity account of \$680 million that may be tapped, and that the Congressman is interested in making this a priority project but that he is still waiting for the information he requested.

Mn/DOT staff reported that District One is a 10 percent district (meaning that they receive roughly 10 percent of the state's transportation resources). There is currently a \$60 million annual budget and that budget falls \$10-15 million short of meeting basic needs. They again reiterated that there is no money available.

The Itasca County Community Readiness Assessment is a cooperative project of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission with support from Itasca County, Range Area Municipalities and Schools, Excelsior Energy, and area communities.

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In response to attendee questions Mn/DOT reiterated that the current financing scheme is inadequate; a political answer is what is needed in order to get the money. There's currently a \$1 billion short fall in MN transportation annually.

State legislators in attendance stated they would support bonding if Mn/DOT would guarantee the project, Mn/DOT's response was they can't make guarantees; decisions are made during the planning process.

Mn/DOT stated that if we were able to get a dispensation from the Federal government earmarked for this project it would help the political process because the Governor could match it. It was also stressed that 2009 is when the current Federal Transportation plan is set to expire, it's the best chance to get this on to the table but it's also when they start spending more than they're bringing in. Further, it'll help Mn/DOT because they want to capture that 80% Federal match while they can, if the 80 percent is there they can find the money by moving projects and priorities around. The example of black topping 35 South of Hinckley instead of laying new concrete in order to do work in Virginia.

Mn/DOT again stressed financing, the gas tax was passed in 1988 at \$0.20 but there hasn't been an increase since and the buying power of that \$0.20 has decreased to \$0.13.

It was asked what Mn/DOT's participation was in the major project EIS documents. Andy Hubley inquired as to Mn/DOT's look at the project cumulatively, not individually. Mn/DOT stated they did examine the potential traffic numbers for the projects, but not cumulatively.

An attendee asked a question regarding traffic through Calumet, the feasibility of going around town and the threat to pedestrian traffic. Mn/DOT's response is that the plan is to go through town with a five lane highway along the current line; the middle lane would be a turn lane accessible to both directions of traffic.

The meeting as concluded with Andy Hubley promising to get a draft packet of traffic counts to Oberstar in 4 weeks and a final in six weeks.

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