

# Executive Summary

## ULI MN MnDOT TAP Findings

In preparation for reconstruction of freeway segments that are nearing the end of their useful lives, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), under the leadership of Commissioner Charlie Zelle, approached ULI Minnesota (ULI MN) with a 21<sup>st</sup> century strategy for how interstates could be rebuilt to restore connections in adjacent neighborhoods and foster new growth opportunities on MnDOT right of way. This strategy involves constructing “lids” above the roadway and preparing freeway embankments to support development. The focus on how freeways impact adjacent neighborhoods is endorsed by Secretary Anthony Foxx of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) who has made restoring communities a centerpiece of his administration in recognition of the damage freeway construction caused to communities when they were first built in the 1960s.

MnDOT invited ULI MN to conduct a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to analyze whether private sector investment would generate sufficient revenue to pay for building “lids” above the roadway and other improvements and what steps MnDOT might take to make these projects a reality. ULI MN is uniquely qualified for this task through its interdisciplinary membership of professionals working in real estate, law, architecture and finance who volunteer their time and talent to help solve complex real estate and land use issues.

The TAP was designed to consider the I-94 corridor from Saint Paul to Minneapolis and study three specific areas—I-35W/Minneapolis Central Business District, historic Rondo Avenue in Saint Paul, and Farview Park in North Minneapolis. It also included a “lightning round” for high level observations of five other sites, and a series of questions and goals developed by MnDOT and ULI MN.

## MNDOT AND ULI MN GOALS

- 1. Reconnecting communities** that were divided and harmed by freeway construction during the system’s initial buildout in the 1960s.
- 2. Providing economic opportunity for all** by generating investment and cultivating new opportunities at lid locations and along MnDOT right of way.
- 3. Building for future growth** by modernizing the region’s transportation network and making new land available for development.

ULI MN convened a panel of experts to engage in an active three-day TAP which included site visits, interviews with community leaders, and analysis of economic data and case studies of successful freeway lid projects to develop recommendations and guidelines for moving forward.

Early on day two, the panel identified a critical conceptual breakthrough: the corridor should be considered as a whole under a single banner, not separate lid projects, and implementation should be part of a rebranded vision called **“the Healthy Communities Initiative.”**

## TAP Panelists

**Pat Mascia** TAP Co-Chair  
*Briggs & Morgan*

**Ann Marie Woessner-Collins** TAP Co-Chair  
*JLL*

**Sarah Harris**  
*University of Minnesota Foundation Real Estate Advisors*

**Seitu Jones**  
*Artist*

**Bill Lively** *Klyde Warren Park, Dallas*  
*Retired, National Geographic Society*

**Hugh Murphy** *Millennium Park, Chicago*  
*JLL—Chicago*

**Robert Pfefferle**  
*Hines*

**George Sherman**  
*Sherman Associates*

**Rich Varda**  
*Target Corporation*

## Healthy Communities Initiative:

### Improve the Physical, Environmental, Economic, and Social Health of Communities

#### PRINCIPLES: DO THE RIGHT THING AND DO IT RIGHT

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1. **Connect and reconnect communities.**
2. **Protect and enhance our environmental health.**
3. **Catalyze economic and housing opportunities for all.**
4. **Value aesthetics.**
5. **Strengthen the state's economy.**

#### RECOMMENDATIONS TO MNDOT

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**IMMEDIATE NEXT STEP:** To maintain momentum, begin the Healthy Communities Initiative within the next three months with the establishment of a taskforce of community, public, and private sector leaders to evaluate and act on the following recommendations.

- **Form a quasi-governmental public-private partnership** led by a small team of leaders to oversee a corridor-wide strategy to restore and enhance physical, environmental, economic and social health.
- **Form a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization** and identify a fundraising champion to raise money for recreational and cultural amenities and to fund maintenance and operations through an endowment.
- **Put an experienced, professional leader in charge** of managing and delivering the Initiative as a whole and set an aggressive timeline.
- **Make freeway bridge locations development-ready** when rebuilt and do as much as possible now so that neighborhoods and the development community can seize opportunities as they arise.
- **Conduct a corridor-wide parking and transportation study** to evaluate district parking at lids and how transit at lids can provide access to jobs.
- **Develop market-based conceptual plans at Rondo and I-35W/Washington Ave and pursue land use consensus at Farview Park.** TAPs or similar analyses can prepare these areas for lid projects when the time comes. At Farview Park, the City of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, and the neighborhood need a shared vision on the future of the industrial land along the river.
- **Mandate a mechanism to ensure the inclusion of affordable housing** to deliver a full range of housing choices, including a range of affordability throughout the corridor.
- **Use the corridor as a showcase for art, architecture, design, and innovative engineering and technology best practices** by engaging artists, architects and designers who will want opportunities to showcase their work. Look to the future of transportation and study emerging best practices.
- **Practice effective community engagement and support cultural connections by** working with community leaders and valuing public art, greenspace, and great design throughout the corridor.

MnDOT and the USDOT have demonstrated foresight and leadership by beginning to rethink how freeways move through the communities they serve. The ULI MN TAP panelists developed “the Healthy Communities Initiative,” an ambitious vision with significant potential to deliver on that idea. Achieving it will require strong leadership among MnDOT, USDOT and other local committed and dedicated community, public, and private sector leaders. Let’s do the right thing, do it right and start now.

For more information, please visit the [Healthy Communities Initiative](#) on our website.