



“Healthy Corridor for All”

Using a “healthy communities” frame
to shape a multi-billion dollar Light
Rail Transit line in the Twin Cities

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“Healthy Corridor for All”?

- A campaign to shape the construction and development of a major light rail transit line that will connect the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, so that it will serve the needs of vulnerable populations and lay the groundwork for a healthier city overall.
- One of the focal points of the campaign is a health impact assessment (HIA) of the zoning and land use plans being developed by the City of St. Paul.



Who is it?

■ Lead Organization:

- **ISAIAH** - an alliance of 90 religious congregations dedicated to achieving transformative structural change in order to advance racial and economic justice.

■ Key Partners:

- **Hmong Organizing Program at TakeAction MN** - only program organizing MN's new Hmong population, a growing St. Paul powerhouse
- **PolicyLink** - a national policy and research organization championing racial and economic equity by” lifting up what works



■ Light Rail Opportunities

- \$1 billion public investment in infrastructure.
- Estimated \$2 billion in public/private development.
- Entire 6-mile stretch within St. Paul will be rezoned.
- Large areas of land ripe for redevelopment.
- Communities in need of economic development and investment.
- Backbone for new, regional transit system

■ Light Rail Dangers

- Runs through vulnerable communities with history of displacement due to infrastructure construction
- Huge, complicated project...hard to impact
- “Clothesline for hanging 1,000 interests”

Target Audiences

1. Constituent groups & organizational partners

- African-American church and community
- White church and progressive groups
- Hmong immigrant business owners and residents
- Labor: food & commercial, carpenters, teachers, bus & train drivers
- Small business owners

2. Technical & policy experts

- City planners
- Public health departments
- Academics
- Policy non-profits

3. Decision-Makers

- City - Mayor & Council
- County
- Metropolitan Council (MPO)



The “Equity/Justice” Challenge

- Narrow or “special” interest
- Impractical
- Expensive
- Inefficient
- Laundry list of grievances
- “Trains should just take people from A to B”



Using Health to Talk Equity

■ What works:

- Universal/ Unifying
- Holistic, Integrative
- Measured by head; felt in gut
- Inequities speak for themselves
- Shows inequities harm even those at top

■ Challenge #1: Mainstream Framing

■ Challenge #2: Community Skepticism

Our Solution

■ “Healthy Communities”

- Inclusive
- Integrates economic/equity/environment/amenities/services
- Puts community in charge of defining what it needs

■ “Healthy Corridor for All”

- Locates the community we want to make healthy
- Unites interests around one project



Community & Partner Orgs

■ Our Message is:

- Health demonstrates inequity in ways everyone can feel, and decision-makers can't ignore.
- Healthy communities are communities that provide you and your family with the things you need to live a full and dignified life - jobs, housing, etc
- Real health comes from the power and opportunity to create healthy conditions.
- We can act together to create those conditions for all of us.
- Just making the decision and taking action to shape our fates make us healthier.



Technical & Policy Experts

■ Our Message Is:

- Public health is an objective way to assess how policies and projects interact with each other to serve or disadvantage sectors of the population.
- “Healthy communities” is a way to balance the interests and optimize the benefits for the city as a whole, and vulnerable communities within it.



Decision-Makers

■ Our Message Is:

- City of St. Paul is vying to become the “most livable city in America.” A “healthy corridor” can be the backbone of that claim.
- Health research, directed by the community and carried out by experts, gives decision-makers solid bases on which to make decisions and prioritize interests.



Our Success (so far)

- **HIA Launch!!**

- 21 community groups and partner organizations
- 14+ technical advisors from all sectors
- Public support of 2 key decision-makers

- **Interest and invitations to share what we're doing - like this!**

Ongoing Challenges

- **Keep messages targeted to audiences without spreading different, or conflicting messages**
- **Don't overpromise**



Lessons

- “Healthy Communities” makes clear that health comes from the quality of our environments, our connectedness to services and institutions, and our relationships.
- It reveals the possibility that health isn’t something we buy, or depends solely on our individual behavior.
- It’s something we build...together.