Alliance for Metropolitan Stability
Organizer Roundtable: Lessons learned from Central Corridor
September 30, 2010

What lessons have community organizers learned from working along the Central Corridor that can be passed on to organizers in communities affected by emerging transitways?

The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability organized a dialogue with community leaders and organizers at the Central Corridor Resource Center to discuss the lessons they learned from the development of our region's largest transportation investment, the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit. Participants shared their wins, the opportunities they see, and the challenges they face as they work to ensure community benefits from the development of new transitways in our region.

Below are the notes that were collected from five discussion groups at the roundtable. These notes have been organized with very minimal editing into these categories: 1) Organizing, 2) Advocacy, 3) Systems and Process, 4) Project Planning Process, 5) Challenges for Future Transitways:

1) **Organizing**
   Start organizing early in the transitway planning process:
   - Start organizing earlier, before alignments, before stations
   - Start early – community benefits agreements before EIS process
   - Key decisions are made early on. Changing later is uphill fight. You cannot be too early
   - Decisions are made very early on in transit development, before the community is involved – once decisions are made it is much harder to change them
   - Early education on the process
   - Don't ignore the business community especially the small businesses – it's important to bring them in early on into the community process.
   - Organize early and establish relationships with the elected officials
   - Fundraise early, find out funding sources to support your work. There must be people working full time to track the process

   Historical context:
   - Important to know history of your community
   - Rondo is still an unresolved issue; how do you foster healing to a painful past that resulted in the disenfranchisement of the community
   - Important to acknowledge history: I94/Rondo/CCLRT

   Outreach:
   - Getting people interested and involved can be difficult
   - Keep pushing people to stay involved/engaged
   - Keep people involved over time – "unified front"

- It is unbelievably complicated to keep people engaged with all of the details over time plus follow up
- Lots of meetings
- Being aware of your blind spots – who are we reaching? who are we not reaching?
- Connect new people with all the resources
- Very important to organize across race and class (this means including renters and small business owners who rent)
- Small business owners are very busy people and can't always come to meetings – find a way to ensure their voice is represented i.e. business associations
- Business community confusion - so many different organizations & people
- Leadership development of community members and small businesses is essential – identify passionate committed individuals who are willing to learn and are in for the long haul and who can regularly communicate technical information back to the community in everyday language

Vision/values/goals
- Identify common priorities between stakeholders
- Lead with values
- Visioning – what is in it for us?
- Don't realize what your power is without a vision
- Define goals and values
- Define goals and values common to disparate groups
- Important for community to have clear definable goals
- Share experiences, stories, visions

Issues/strategies:
- Keep up the all the details, events, and activities
- Identify impacts early, understand mitigations
- Community has to be proactive about getting information i.e.: parking
- Transit access – 3 additional stations – groups all agreed that all three stations should be built
- Be aware of blind spots
- Issues that we did not foresee: parking/business mitigation
- Understand gentrification and displacement as impacts of economic development
- Clarify who makes the decisions and what types of decisions
- Identify who makes decisions – technical vs. emotional vs. political
- Having people at the table isn't good enough
- Develop strategies then keep going. We can do this. Don't stop.
- Persevere – keep going. We can do this. We can go further.
- Balance between technical aspects, political environment, and emotional arguments. Try to counter technical arguments with emotional arguments. Three stations were a political decision – technical arguments were against their construction but this was also a political decision.
- Beware - early on organizers were targeted by governmental bodies for their position on the 3 stations – funding was threatened

Coalition building

- To build power it's critical to build coalitions with legitimate representation from community. Coalitions must be accountable to the local communities and invest time into a continuous 2-way communications process
- Neighborhood groups businesses, nonprofits came together to zero in on one process, and all of the pieces, and not just 1 group going it alone
- Business associations critical
- Setting up highly catalyst group of stakeholders with a "target," regional focus, and best practices
- Bring together previous unaligned groups
- Identify common priorities
- Multiple strategies – identify where you can work together
- It's okay if different groups have different strategies – you can still find a common ground
- Take time to build and rebuild trust
- Accountability to community

Messaging/framing the issue:
- Mapping and reframing issues according to community values and issues
- Present it with all of the upcoming impacts up front
- Mapping and re-framing what we needed and working outside the box
- Accepting change; getting people used to it; afraid of change
- People want to keep doing things the same way
- Accept change and new ways
- 3 stations – framing message: create the messaging that articulates the community's position i.e. infill/additional/extra stations vs. missing stations
- Framing the issue is important i.e.: missing stations vs. additional or infill stations

2) **Advocacy**
- Build relationships with decision makers
- Levels of jurisdiction – talk with multiple jurisdictions in the same room
- Two monoliths: public institutions and diverse stakeholders then navigating the complex relationships – develop peer-to-peer relationships
- Cultivate political champions – our political partners came to our rescue at important decision making points
- Ask for what is needed at higher levels
- Getting all parties to inform all of the nuances, goals, and benefits of housing, economic, environment, and connections
- The 3 stations was a political decision on an emotional argument. It wasn't the technical arguments that won although they were important. Technical vs values based decisions

3) **Systems and Process**
- Elected officials get to travel to other areas to see examples of existing LRT lines but it is important to know this is a long term process 50-100 years and progress will come over time in phases: planning then construction (how to survive and thrive as a community) and then the

time it takes to establish the economics of the community: strengthening existing (surviving) businesses and developing new economic opportunities.
- Clarity on who makes decisions when and what is the process: Federal, County, City, Met Council
- Complex public agencies that aren't in good communication with each other
- Make elected officials own this as a regional issue
- Transportation is not really as important to politicians and others as the money that can be gained
- It is not just the community groups job but it is also the public entities job – public engagement needs to change
- Resources has been focused on researching other cities rather than investing in local community involvement
- On the CCLRT we learned of some issues too late such as loss of parking and the impacts on small business survival - as a result there are not enough resources dedicated to resolving these very important issues.
- Business needs were not documented early resulting in lack of funding to deal with the issues
- Top down planning
- Minneapolis transit overlay district

4) Project planning process

Community engagement
- Process initiated behind closed doors, policy makers make it difficult to change later on
- Process needs to be opened up to community from the beginning
- People had to know what they were looking at – technical documents need to be accessible
- Community needs to be proactive and push for information
- Language is a barrier – notices sent to landlords (often live out of town) instead of tenants
- Early in the process, key decisions are made without community input
- It maybe difficult to get public involvement early on
- Getting information that is understandable and accessible to the average person is important but has been lacking
- The whole process does not fit well with community involvement
- How do you get community at the table early on so you don't have to undo what has been planned/decided on?
- Public engagement needs to change

Communications
- Good project begins with a definition of goals
- Information on how decisions are made is not transparent
- How information is released/disseminated is key
- Information has not been provided on time
- Loss of trust resulted from public officials making statements that turned out to be not true. This was a direct result of minimum levels of engineering required at various stages.

- Businesses: confused about information, what it means, who to turn to, material is not translated, materials go to landlords and not to the business owners

Planning process

- Project team lead by engineers who are focused on constructing LRT line. Its not about how we get from point A to point B buts its about how we live – how we create a livable community
- Whatever we decide on has to work for a very long time.
- LRT will bring about enormous change that is unavoidable – how can these changes be the most beneficial and least harmful
- People live here because of what is here – housing, businesses, local economy, jobs
- Technical information vs values of the community
- Old development sites and other existing sites are "ripe" for development and visioning
- Short-term investment vs. long-term investment
- An issue that was overlooked early on was accommodating pedestrians and bicycles – unfortunately for CCLRT these came last.
- Attention to details early on such as the timing of light signals for seniors crossing the LRT line; location of transit power substations
- Station area planning had detailed complexities around narrowing the sidewalk such as what do you do with the snow in the winter and how to coordinate the complex bureaucratic systems that have oversight over this and aren't always in good communication with each other
- Change the process

5) **Challenges for future transitways**
- Bottineau/SWLRT: engage marginalized neighborhoods, forge uncommon alliances, race is important, identify community goals
- MICAH work in Minneapolis: Rail storage, Southwest, Bottineau paving the way
- This is a resource here – Central Corridor Resource Center – establish it for each line
- Relocation of freight rail through St. Louis Park neighborhoods
- Train storage yard in Bassett Creek Valley – segmentation of that project
- Get institutions out of the stigma of base building
- Hiawatha was unplanned and there was little economic development planning
- Bottineau challenges: alignment – one alignment would pass by North Minneapolis the other would have a big impact on a residential neighborhood. Freeway construction has already walled in North Minneapolis with limited access. Currently assessing the opportunities and the impacts. The distrust comes from being historically disregarded and negatively impacted by the current economy: foreclosures, school cut backs, crime