

Session D7
Public Involvement

COMPLEXITY AND COLLABORATION: THE HARBOR TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AS A
MODEL FOR SUCCESSFUL STAKEHOLDER PLANNING AND COORDINATION

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Working through complex and controversial issues in a collaborative manner is a familiar challenge for all transportation planners, engineers and consultants. Often the main barrier to transitioning a group of willing stakeholders into a functioning working group is the lack of a champion or sponsor. The MPO is uniquely situated to serve this role, as a neutral transportation planning agency with a primary responsibility of creating opportunities for public participation.

This presentation is a case study of a long-term, diverse stakeholder group supported by the Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC), the MPO for the Duluth (MN)-Superior (WI) area. The MIC's Harbor Technical Advisory Committee (HTAC) has coalesced into a mature, largely self-directed working group with a growing list of successful planning and policy initiatives.

The HTAC is one of three advisory committees to the MIC Policy Board whose 30 diverse members all hold a stake in the continued success and health of the harbor. The MIC includes funding and staffing resources for this harbor group in its annual work program along with the typical MPO roadway, bicycle and pedestrian, transit and land use planning activities. Participation on the HTAC encourages representatives from industry, government, academic, environmental, regulatory and citizen groups on both states to recognize that although they have distinct missions they also have shared goals.

Issues affecting the Port of Duluth-Superior – including harbor security, economic development initiatives, underwater infrastructure corrosion, invasive species, legacy environmental degradation and habitat restoration initiatives – are complex, often controversial and sometimes downright contentious. None of these problems affects one group alone, and none can be addressed except through the coordinated action of many diverse organizations and individuals.

One recent example of the HTAC's successful, collaborative planning process is their work on the Erie Pier dredge materials storage site. It might seem a little hard to get excited about this "hidden in plain sight" facility on the Duluth waterfront—but it represents an entirely new paradigm for dredge material handling, and has yielded significant economic and environmental benefits to the community.

Thanks to the efforts of many HTAC members who undertook an intensive multi-year planning process, and to the US Army Corps of Engineers which subsequently agreed to make a significant investment in redesigning and re-engineering the facility, a major physical restructuring of the full-to-capacity Contained Disposal Facility (CDF) at Erie Pier was undertaken to convert it to a Recycle-Reuse Facility. It utilizes hydraulic sorting to separate out the clean, uncontaminated sand and silt that's dredged from the shipping channels for reuse in large-scale projects such as road construction and landfill cover.

The Duluth Seaway Port Authority now manages Erie Pier dredge materials as a valuable, re-usable resource instead of a waste product. By creating a cost effective and environmentally sound alternative to standard dredge material disposal practices, it will save local taxpayers the millions of dollars it would have cost to develop a new CDF.

As the only stakeholder group of its kind in the country, the HTAC has emerged as a national model for planning, collaboration, information sharing and long-term institutional involvement. It is recognized in the US-Canadian port community and by the Army Corps of Engineering as a model that can and should be replicated in other communities.