Mn/DOT’s Ombudsman Program
Collaboration and Process
Overview

Ombudsman exists to rebuild trust within the agency and provide neutral issue resolution

Strong collaboration between agency partners is part of successful project management

Education of the public and partnership members on the environmental and municipal consent processes can be critical
A Large Organization
Tragedy to Transparency

‘...the collapse meant "we lost the public trust and confidence" of motorists.’
Ombudsman

Source: Webster’s

1: a government official (as in Sweden or New Zealand) appointed to receive and investigate complaints made by individuals against abuses or capricious acts of public officials

2: one that investigates, reports on, and helps settle complaints
Defining the Ombudsman

• Neutral, informal and independent
• Limited confidentiality
• Not in statute
• Identify and meet interests of all parties
• Statewide focus to an issue
• Make or override some decisions
• Identify trends and needs for systemic change
• Provide feedback to the organization
Ombudsman Does Not...

• Advocate for one party or point of view
• Own any formal process or policy
• Replace formal processes
Who We Serve

Metro District vs. Outstate Districts

- Metro: 48%
- Outstate: 46%
- Statewide: 6%
What People Called About

- Access
- Business Impacts
- Consultant/Contractor Issues
- Damage
- Drainage
- Ethics/integrity
- Information
- Maintenance
- MnPASS
- Noise
- Planning, Programming and Design
- Right of Way
- Safety
- Signage

Contacts From 2008/2009
Contacts From 2010
Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Count</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in Policy/Process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change/Modify Decision</td>
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<td>Education/No Change</td>
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<td>Open</td>
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<td>Referral</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Settlement</td>
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Challenges

Familiarity with the agency
Early intervention
Recognizing conflict
Contract specifications/Contractor relationships
Technical procedures/policies
Legal
Case Studies
Corridor Vision

Trunk Highway 13 Improvements

Legend
- P: Port
- Rail Line
- South Frontage Road (Completed)
- Quentin Avenue (Completed)
- Dakota Avenue
- Chowen Avenue
- TH 101
- CR 5

1 inch equals 1,500 feet

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Corridor Vision

- Principal arterial from TH 169 to I-35
  - Expressway status
- Improved safety and mobility
  - TH 13/TH 101 intersection is #18 on top 200 crash list
  - TH 13 has highest # of trucks; Ports of Savage
  - Capacity will be doubled with project from 4400 vehicles per hour
Savage 13-101 Project Area
Ombudsman Process

• Complainant contacts Governor’s Office; forwarded to Ombudsman’s Office

• Discuss project with:
  – Metro Area Manager and Area Engineer
  – Complainants
  – Access Management expert
  – County and city staff and mayor
  – Commissioner
Savage Business Complaints

- Municipal consent process misinterpreted
- Access restrictions will hurt business
- Process acceleration due to stimulus money
- Lack of information for traffic, impacts (safety and mobility improvements – where’s the proof?)
- Being heard
Options and Conclusions

• Allow some existing accesses to exist upon project completion

OR

• Maintain integrity of project design and the public process and proceed as scheduled
Options and Conclusions

• Summary and Commissioner’s Order

• Interpretation of MN Statute 161.164 at 12/7/09 public hearing and options available/not available for Municipal Consent:
  • City Council packet
  • Staff interpretation
  • Public interpretation

• Rushing the processes

• Strong collaboration between agencies
To Delay Municipal Consent or Not to Delay, That is the Question
Corridor Vision

- TH 371 serves Central Lakes area from Little Falls through Brainerd/Baxter to Cass Lake
- Expansion from two to four lanes from Nisswa to Pine River
- Improved safety and mobility desired
- Pequot Lakes: thru-town vs. bypass
Brief Project History

• 2001: Start of process
• Environmental study conclusion #1: preferred alternative is thru-town
• Change in city council; re-investigate costs to city and desires of community
• Environmental study conclusion #2: preferred alternative is bypass
• Conclusion of environmental process and start of municipal consent process pushes into 2010
• Fall election with potential shift in city council
Ombudsman Process

• District contacts Ombudsman’s Office
• Discuss project and other details with:
  – District staff
  – Small group of business owners
  – City staff
  – Elected officials
  – Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner
Options and Conclusions

• Mn/DOT’s three options:
  • Proceed as scheduled with public hearing and MC
  • Delay MC until after election
  • Delay MC until after January 1, 2011 and the new city council

• Conclusion:
  • This is a local issue
  • The district will do what the locals want
  • Mn/DOT will not interfere with the preferred timing
  • Proceed as scheduled

• Strong collaboration (Mn/DOT, county, city)
Questions?

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