Online Accessibility Plan

Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan and Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan Joint Update

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MinnesotaGO
A Collaborative Vision for Transportation

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1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is currently updating the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (SMTP) and the 20-year Minnesota State Highway Investment Plan (MnSHIP), through one joint process. The SMTP and MnSHIP are both part of MnDOT's Family of Plans, which stem from the Minnesota GO 50-year Vision. The Vision outlines what Minnesotans desire from the state's transportation system and identifies key guiding principles MnDOT strives to achieve. The SMTP is the State's highest level plan. Public involvement will be integrated with technical tasks and timelines for the SMTP and MnSHIP. Strategies for public involvement are outlined in the Public Participation Plan (PPP). This document is a companion to the PPP.

A critical part of any engagement effort is ensuring information is accessible to people of all abilities. Over the past few decades, project engagement has increasingly migrated from libraries and city halls to websites and online meetings. While in-person activities are an important cornerstone of a public involvement plan, online tools are needed to amplify the reach of a project. To this end, a variety of online tools are proposed for the SMTP and MnSHIP update.

This purpose of this document is to provide a framework for how online tools will be made accessible to people of all abilities. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that electronic information be accessible to people with disabilities. This protects people with visual, hearing, cognitive, and other disabilities. In addition to this requirement, it is simply a good public involvement practice to make information accessible to all audiences. This document provides goals, standards, and measures to evaluate the accessibility of online tools used in the SMTP and MnSHIP joint plan update.

2.0 GOALS

The overarching goal for this online accessibility plan is to make information accessible to all audiences. As with in-person activities, not every audience will respond to every tool. As such, diverse tools are leveraged to reach to a variety of audiences. The same is true for online tools. It is important that information is conveyed in more than just one way so that people can engage in a way that suits their needs. This includes taking necessary steps for people who use assistive technology. In some cases, an equitable alternate format for a participation tool is required. Wherever possible, preference will be given to a single format with the background coding to allow for the same experience. Regardless of approach, the goals below aim to ensure that information and engagement opportunities are accessible to all audiences.

The overall goals for accessible engagement are to:

- Allow people using assistive technologies to autonomously access the same information as those without disabilities.

- Convey online information using plain language to increase the ease of understanding for all people, including those with cognitive disabilities.

- When an alternate format is necessary, provide an equal opportunity for people with disabilities to access information and provide input.

- Comply with federal and state requirements.

- Evaluate the accessibility of online tools.

The intended outcome is that people of all abilities have been given equal opportunities to participate in the project process and assist MnDOT in updating the two plan documents.

3.0   STANDARDS

This section documents the standards that will be adhered to in order to fully maximize the accessibility of online engagement. This includes a team commitment to accessibility. Accessibility will be adopted into the quality assurance and quality control (QA/QC) process for the project. In addition to this commitment, specific strategies have been drafted to fully maximize the accessibility of online engagement tools. This section documents standards for the website, online participation tools, and online project documents to be developed as a part of the engagement for the joint plan update.

Website

This project will include a custom website that will enhance the engagement opportunities provided in the joint plan update. The following production and evaluation standards will be adhered to when developing and updating the website.

PRODUCTION

Website production standards were developed using Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). The following standards will be applied to website production to fully maximize accessibility.

Developer

The website will be developed by a web designer who is trained in website accessibility. For this project, the web designer will be Kelly Spitzley. Kelly received training from St. Catherine University on developing accessible websites.

Approach

Accessibility will be considered at the beginning stages of developing a website concept. By adopting an accessible approach from the onset, the functionality of the site will be considered every step of the way. This includes making intentional design decisions that will allow for information to be easily conveyed without creating barriers for people using assistive technology.

Content

Content will be developed to the following standards in order to create a website that is perceptible, operable, and understandable.

PERCEPTIBLE

Content will be made available to the senses of sight, hearing, and/or touch. This includes the following.

- Images will be tagged with alternate text.
- Equivalent alternatives to complex images will be provided.
- Decorative content will be tagged as background.
- Videos will have captions.
- Transcripts will be provided for audio content.
- Form inputs will have text labels.
- Frames will be appropriately titled.
- A logical header structure will be applied to fonts.
- Headers will be provided for any tables.
- Tab order will be logical.

- Instructions that rely upon visual cues will not be used (e.g., click in the upper left corner)

- Color will not be the sole means to convey information.

- Audio that automatically plays for more than three seconds will have a way to stop, pause, or mute.

OPERABLE

Logic will be applied to website structure to maximize operability. This includes the following.

- Wherever possible, functionality will be available using the keyboard.

- Keyboard focus will not be locked or trapped in one part of the page.

- Page time limits will not be used.

- Automatically scrolling or updating content will have the option to be stopped.

- No page content will flash more than three times per second.

- Pages will have descriptive and informative titles.

- The navigation order of links and elements will be logical and intuitive.

UNDERSTANDABLE

Website content will be developed in a way that is easy to understand. This includes the following.

- Content will be written in plain language.

- The language of the page will be identified.

- Sufficient labels, cues, and instructions for interactive components will be used.

EVALUATION

The website will be tested prior to launching. Following the initial design and any consequent major updates, the website will undergo an accessibility evaluation using the following tools.

Achecker.ca

This tool checks websites against accessibility standards and provides a work-up of issues. Any known problems will be addressed.

508Checker.com

Like AChecker, 508 Checker will be used to check website compliance. Any known problems will be addressed.

Window-Eyes

Window-Eyes is a screen reading software application for the blind and visually impaired. The free download version of Window-Eyes will be used to check website accessibility.

Online Participation Tools

There are a variety of survey tools proposed on this project. The following standards will be adhered to for any online tools created.

PRODUCTION

Website Standards

All of the above website standards will apply to online participation tools.

Alternate Format

Where a single format is not possible, an equal participation alternative will be provided. Within the PPP for this project, the MetroQuest engagement tool does not allow for full accessibility. As such, an equal engagement tool will be developed as an accessible alternative. This will be achieved using an accessible Constant Contact form or similar technology. If other online participation tools have barriers to accessibility, an equal alternate format will be provided.

EVALUATION

The same steps outlined for the website will be used to evaluate the accessibility of online participation tools.

Online Project Documents

Documents posted to the project website will be developed and checked for accessibility.

PRODUCTION

Accessibility will be considered from the onset of developing any project materials. This will allow for thoughtful design of project information. As with the website, documents will be produced to a standard that is perceptible, operable, and understandable. This includes the following.

- Documents will be written in plain language.

- File names will be concise and will not contain spaces or special characters.

- Document properties (title, author, subject, keywords, and language) will be set.

- Documents will not contain watermarks.

- Images will be tagged with alternate text.

- Complex images will have descriptive text that describes the concepts demonstrated graphically.

- Multilayered objects will be flattened into one object that has alternate text.

- Color will not be used as the sole way to convey a concept.

- Tables will be assigned headers.

- Heading styles will be used.

- Paragraph styles will be used instead of blank spaces or pressing enter.

- Page numbering codes will be used.

- Footnotes will be made using the Word footnote function.

- Email links and URLs will have descriptive hyperlinks and be linked to the correct destinations.

- Documents with a Table of Contents will be made using the Table of Contents field in Word.

- When there is no way to make content accessible, an equal alternative will be made available.

EVALUATION

The following steps will be used to evaluate the accessibility of documents to be posted online.

Microsoft Word

Documents originated in Microsoft Word will be run through the accessibility check. Any problems will be resolved prior to exporting to PDF.

Acrobat

Wherever possible, documents posted to the website will be done so as PDF files. Prior to finalizing a PDF, it will be run through the accessibility checker. Any problems will be resolved.

4.0   MEASURING OUTCOMES

This is the first online accessibility plan created as a part of a PPP for MnDOT. The outcomes of this focused effort will be evaluated to improve the process for future efforts. Outcomes will be measured using both qualitative and quantitative means. Questions include the following.

- How many people encountered barriers when accessing information online?

- How does this compare to traditional public involvement efforts?

- How did the evaluation tools work?

- Are there other ways to evaluate accessibility in the future?

- What concerns were expressed?

- How could the process be improved in the future?

- What standards should be applied in future efforts?

These questions will be asked throughout the engagement process, and this document will be revised to reflect what is learned.