

Students Speak Out Minnesota GO! Findings
June 30, 2011



Reported by Students Speak Out and the Citizens League



Executive Summary

From March–June 2011, *Students Speak Out Minnesota GO!* asked teens across the state to envision life in 2061 and then map transportation needs to fit that vision. Teens responded with interesting and insightful perspectives.

Key Themes (Page 5)

As teens discussed their vision of Minnesota’s future five key themes emerged. Teens:

- (1) are extremely concerned about the environment and energy efficiency,
- (2) are somewhat pessimistic about the life in 2061,
- (3) place an emphasis on public transportation,
- (4) described a future with closer community connections, and
- (5) emphasized the importance of preserving in person, face-to-face interactions.

Key Transportation Values (Page 7)

Teen participants believe that the three most important values in transportation planning are:

- aligning the system with other public purposes, particularly environmental stewardship (26%),
- expanding choice, with an emphasis on public transportation options (20%), and
- maintaining existing infrastructure before building new (16%).

Overview of the Process

Students Speak Out Minnesota GO! involved two primary components – online engagement via CitiZing and in person workshops.

CitiZing. Teens engaged online through the Student Speak Out’s online civic platform, www.citizing.org/studentsspeakout. Seven teens were selected to serve as Teen Commentators for the project; five of these teens were paid a small stipend for their time and contributions (two of the original seven did not participate for the duration of the project and, as a result, did not receive compensation).

The online component ran from late March through June 2011. Approximately 50 individuals participated online by joining the project.

Online participants shared their views through:

- *Introductions* in which people were asked to “share one thing you think is important to consider when thinking about Minnesota's transportation needs over the next 50 years.”
- *Quick polls* which related to weekly discussion topics
- *Weekly discussion forums* started by moderators on areas of interest

In addition, a “Learn” page provided resources on a wide variety of topics to get teens thinking about transportation and life in the future.

Workshops. In addition to the online component, there were five in person workshops throughout May and June. These five workshops were held at:

- Century College – first year students in a public policy course (White Bear Lake)
- Parkview Center School – Minnesota Future Problem Solvers group (Roseville)
- High School for the Recording Arts (St. Paul)
- Washburn Public Library (Minneapolis)
- Wilder Foundation (St. Paul)

Participants’ views were collected at the workshops in three ways:

- *Written responses* were gathered on questions. Each participant was given a handout with the questions that helped them envision life in 2061 and to think through potential impacts on transportation networks. (This document was similar to what was used in the general Minnesota GO workshops.)
- *A live “survey”* was conducted throughout four of the five workshops (for one workshop the technology was not available) via individual response devices. Participants were asked their thoughts on a series of questions and voted with a handheld keypad (individual response devices). The results were then projected instantaneously on a screen. For the majority of workshops, participants were asked their opinions on: (a) the future state of a variety of topics

(technology, community, health, finance, etc.; see the Appendix for a summary of this survey) and (b) what values they thought were important to transportation planning.

- *A large group discussion* was held after teens created or reviewed future scenarios. This large group discussion had teens describing their vision of the future, their lives within the scenario and what it meant to future transportation networks.

Who Participated?

Forty-seven people participated online, by registering on the site. Approximately 50 online surveys were taken and 224 comments were submitted. Thirty-four teens attended the workshops. (Some of the online participants also attended the workshops, so these totals may contain duplicates.) It should be noted that the project website has a much broader reach than the number who registered—it has had 1,318 visits by 495 unique visitors.

From March 23rd – June 28th there were:

- 1,318 visits by 495 unique visitors (967 from Minnesota)
- 7.07 average number of page views per visit
- average time spent on site: 11 minutes 16 seconds
- 9,319 total page views
- People from all over Minnesota participated online. The map below shows the location of those who visited online.



Students Speak Out places a high priority on the recruitment of diverse participants. The seven Teen Commentators selected for this project were diverse in gender, age, type of school and ethnicity.

Name	Gender	City	Age	Grade	School
Joey	M	Minneapolis, MN	Under 16	8th	Sanford Middle School (public)
Louise	F	St. Paul, MN	16-19	Junior	Mounds Park Academy (independent school)
Ann	F	Roseville, MN	Under 16	8th	Parkview Center School
Jackquiline	F	Brooklyn Park, MN	16-19	Junior	Osseo Alternative Center
Nafiso	F	Minneapolis, MN	16-19	Senior	Washburn High School (Public)
Hannah	F	Rosemount, MN	16-19	Senior	School for Environmental Studies
Daniel	M	Askov, MN	Under 16		EdVisions Online School (project based, online school)

In publicizing and recruiting for the project we utilized existing Citizens League, Students Speak Out and CitiZing networks. In addition, we contacted the following people/organizations:

Cheryl Whitesett, Minnesota Future Problem Solvers
 Bethany Baker, Admission Possible
 Denise Merrick and Calahena Hals, Phoenix program
 Jake Lantry, Public Affairs Program Manager, Minnesota High Tech Association
 Doug Paulson, STEM Specialist, MSP Grant State Coordinator, Division of Academic Standards Minnesota Department of Education
 Alberto Monserrate, President CEO, Latino Communications Network (LCN Media)
 Kelsey Schonning, Youth Development Americorps VISTA, Community Education, Minneapolis Public Schools
 Liz Henry, Director of Community Partnerships, Earth Force
 Lynn Nordgren, President, Minneapolis Federation of Teachers
 Mary Cathryn Ricker, President, St. Paul Federation of Teachers
 Nic Rosenau, Homeschooler Adventures (Minnesota Homeschooling Organization)
 Aaron Grimm, EdVisions Schools
 Teresa Neal, Boys' TotemTown School (St. Paul)
 Minnesota Association of Christian Home Educators (MACHE)
 Pam Costain, Achieve Minneapolis
 Jackie, Minnesota DECA
 Orville Lindquist and Jamal Riley, YMCA Youth in Government
 Nick Koesters, President, Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership Minnesota
 LiCho Xenexai, Executive Director Hmong Youth Education Services
 Arshia Sandozi, Muslim Youth of Minnesota
 Wendy Mayer, Teacher, International Falls Public Schools (ISD361)
 Rachel Breen, Youth Group Leader, Shir Tikvah Congregation
 Mike Conway and Tony Sutton, High School for Recording Arts
 Youth Environmental Activists of Minnesota (Mike Conway and others)
 Tracy Grimm, Minneapolis Public Schools
 Nan Taylor, Independent Schools District 623
 Jeb Myers, Principal, Christo Ray High School (Minneapolis)
 Bob Schneider, Edina High School
 Molly Johnson, IQ Academy
 Kathleen Wilson, Harding High School (St. Paul)
 Sandy Reichert, Metropolitan Federation of Alternative Schools
 Bruce Hoff, Principal, Stewartville High School
 Carrie Bakken, Avalon Charter School
 Marnita Schroedl, Co-Founder & Social Capitalist, Marnita's Table

Key Themes

The online activities and in person workshops began by asking participants to envision life in 2061. Across the various conversations, a number of common themes emerged. It would be inaccurate to conclude that there is unanimity around these themes; indeed many viewpoints were represented. The appropriate interpretation is that these themes were voiced repeatedly online and in the workshops.

The top five themes were:

(1) Teen are extremely concerned about the environment and the impact the current or future activities will have on it. Energy efficiency was of primary concern.

Some findings and comments that support this theme –

- The top transportation value for teens was “alignment with other systems”; many participants cited “environmental stewardship” as the primary element to this. (See Transportation Values, Page 8, for more detail.)
- Workshop participant – “We need energy efficiency within public transportation.”
- Louise E. – “Because gas prices have risen drastically, it is a good opportunity to change transportation systems so they depend on more environmentally friendly fuels/resources.”
- Jesse B. – “... a great way to become more efficient as a state, nation and planet would be to lessen the amount of resources that we put toward transportation and travel.”
- Ann D. – “I also think that towns and communities will become more eco-friendly. I simply don’t see how our civilization can continue if we don’t.”
- Kate G. – “I hope that these changes being to occur now, as we don’t have time to wait 50 years to move away from large vehicles with one person in them for most of the day or busses or trains that only transport to hubs, but are otherwise inaccessible.”
- Teens are optimistic about our transition to alternative energy sources. Sixty-three percent of teens surveyed (n=30) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that in 2061, “Alternative energies, such as wind and solar, flourish.”

(2) Except for the environment and energy, teens are somewhat pessimistic about life in 2061, particularly the future state of our health.

Some findings and comments that support this theme –

- 63% of teens polled (n=30) said that they agreed or strongly agreed that in 2061, “The incidences of obesity, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s reach crisis proportions.”
- Teens agreed or strongly agreed with the more pessimistic statement in five of eight questions about life in 2061. The more pessimistic outlooks were in education (40%),

- health (63%), the economy (47%), finance (57%), and community (50%.) (See the Appendix for additional detail on this survey.)
- Hannah O. – “You would think with all the breakthroughs in technology and the medical field in general, the life expectancy would be a sure shot to improve, however, until the other problems are fixed, I can't see it going anywhere but down.”
 - Joey L. – “The climate as we know it would no longer exist, because the sheer damage done to the environment in the past 200 years would have critically damaged the weather patterns leaving weather erratic...”

(3) Teens place an emphasis on public transportation and consistently cited public transportation as a valuable component to future transportation networks.

Some findings and comment that support this theme –

- Teens frequently mentioned the importance of mass transportation in ensuring both strong communities and economies in their scenarios.
- Louise E. – “...public transportation will become much more popular for people commuting to work because this is more environmentally friendly.”
- Joey L. – “Most mass transportation (airplanes, buses, subways, etc.) will have to use alternative energy sources and will likely become the primary means of transportation for people both in the city and far out like to St. Cloud.”
- Hannah O. – “Pushing the use of the public transportation system to help combat climate change will be effective...”
- Workshop participant – “I think mass transportation would be necessary [for a strong economy] to keep prices cheap.”

(4) Teens described a future built around close-knit communities with many aspects of future life – including mass transportation – increasing our sense of connectedness.

Some findings and comments that support this theme–

- Many teens felt that energy restrictions would require more public transportation and decrease time spent with technology, which would bring communities together for more “unplugged” social interactions.
- In more “severe” scenarios, many teens described close-knit communities brought together through the sharing of goods and services and a desire to be more self-sustaining communities.
- Workshop participant – “Mass transit and car pooling would allow people to get to know one another...”
- Hannah O. – “A strong mass transportation system would be needed, impressive light rail systems that allow families to connect on weekends and for neighbors to greet

- each other on the commute home from the office. Children [could] form bonds with the kids they ride the mass transit] system with...”
- Nafiso M. – “Gas will increase and the need for public transportation will also. Transportation will unite people.”

(5) Teens believe technology will play a big role in 2061, but said electronic or virtual communication cannot replace in person interactions.

Some comments that support this theme–

- Joey L. – “... it feels better to talk to someone in person than over a computer...”
- Hannah O. – “I definitely agree that programs such as Skype will get to be even more stronger, but I don’t see them replacing a real relationship either.”
- Louise E. – “...the idea that people can so easily lose touch with the physical, real work is scary. I think it is imperative that, as new communication tools are invented in the future, we remember that there is so much to be gained from face to face communication. If we were to lose daily, personal interactions with each other, I think we would lose, in a sense our humanity. We would lose the ability to interact with each other in the real work and therefore lose the ability to understand each other.”

Transportation Values

After discussing future possibilities, teens were asked to consider future scenarios and to talk about what these scenarios might mean for transportation. After reading, thinking through and discussing the scenarios, participants were asked: “Given this scenario, what values to you think should be used for transportation planning and investments over the next 10-25 years?”

Participants were asked to select two options from the following list:

- (1) Fix it first – maintain existing infrastructure before building new
- (2) Expand choice – prioritize diversity of travel choices
- (3) Support existing communities – prioritize investments in existing communities before expanding to serve yet-to-be-built communities
- (4) Align system with other public purposes – emphasize environmental stewardship, economic competitiveness, public health, energy independence and education
- (5) Emphasize reliability/predictability – the reliability of the system and predictability of travel time are more important than speed
- (6) Regional connectivity – ensure regional centers are connected to each other and to the Twin Cities
- (7) *Use partnerships – coordinate with the private sector and with other units of government to make transportation projects and operations more efficient
- (8) *Other (describe)

*These two options were available online, but not in all/any of the in person workshops.

Teen participants said that the three most important values in transportation planning are aligning the system with other public purposes (mainly environmental stewardship), expanding choice and maintaining existing infrastructure before building new.

Value rankings were as follows:

	#	%
Align the system	34	26%
Expand choice	27	20%
Fix it first	21	16%
Ensure regional connections	18	14%
Support existing communities	13	10%
Emphasize reliability	13	10%
Use partnerships	5	4%
Other	1	1%
Total	132	100%

Value #1: Align the system (26%)

Ann D. – “...with emphasizing our environmental stewardship we are ensuring the one of our greatest resources will remain as one of our greatest resources.”

Hannah O. – “I also think that because everything is a system, in order to make sure there’s order, it’s important to align the system to emphasize the importance of public health and push for environmental stewardship.”

Workshop participant – “There is such stress on fossil fuels. We have to use and align what we have.”

Workshop participant – “View transportation with multiple lenses. It’s more than just getting from Point A to Point B.”

Value #2: Expand choice (20%)

Joey L. – “...with...gas prices, there should be more options to travel with, given that cars [might be] restricted.”

Workshop participant – “Expand choice, create choice to lower costs. Use public transportation [options] to lower cost.”

Ann D. – “Diversity in our travel choices would make it possible for us to separate and raise ourselves above other places...”

Value #3: Fix it first (16%)

Workshop participant – “With new technology, no one thinks about the long-term environment impact ... Don’t add new. Make what we have better.”

Hannah O. – “It’s important to work on the efficiency of the systems that are already in place in order to make sure that when gas prices do reach ... \$12 a gallon, we can have ... a more effective system.

“I feel as though because this is such a broken society, it’s incredibly important to fix the brokenness before we move on to building more.”

Louise E. – “...it seems like the existing infrastructure is a good starting place to build from. Instead of totally restructuring the entire infrastructure (which would take a lot of resources), it makes sense to try to use what is in place already.”

Some Additional Themes

Teens envision great change in the way we travel - from restrictions on car use to more purposeful use of transportation. They spoke of the development and incorporation of smart technology into vehicles and the elimination of gas-powered engines.

Some findings and comments related to this theme –

Louise E. – “I think banning traditional emission cars in cities where there is easy access to public transportation would be a great way to reduce greenhouse gases. This could easily be implemented in cities with extensive public transportation systems such as the subway systems in New York, Boston, etc. If St. Paul/Minneapolis were to consider this, our public transportation system would probably have to be improved. However, work on the light rail system seems to be progressing and it does not seem implausible that in fifty years we could be living in a city that is car-free.”

Kate G. – “I think that people will be more purposeful about traveling, and do so when there is a need to meet with others, but not just for “seat time” either in an office or at a school.”

Louise E. – “...public transportation will become much more popular for people commuting to work because this is more environmentally friendly. Also in cities like London, permits must be bought in order to drive into the city because of limited space for driving and parking cars. Cars will also become more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. Everyone will have hybrid cars or even cars powered by electricity or water.”

Brady S. – “Transportation will probably be different too. More electric cars, light rails, freeways, and possibly electric airplanes. Oil will probably be scarce or used up, and we will rely on wind, solar, geothermal, and hydroelectric energy.”

Joey L. – “...traditional cars will probably be out of function, replaced by some sort of smart transportation. Vehicles of the future will be able to do anything ordered. So, basically, you'd talk into a microphone and the car/plane/segway would automatically go where you needed it to go. Most mass transportation (airplanes, buses, subways, etc.) will have to use alternative energy sources and will likely become the primary means of transportation for people both in the city and far out like to St. Cloud.”

Jesse B. – “... a great way to become more efficient as a state, nation and planet would be to lessen the amount of resources that we put toward transportation and travel. While I am not suggesting that we altogether stop traveling and shipping goods, a lot of energy could be saved by cutting down on transportation... cutting back would also reduce the fossil fuels emitted.”

While there was disagreement over the extent of population growth (some thought it would explode, others felt it would level off), teens discussed the repercussions of population growth, such as resource allocation, overcrowding and government regulation.

Some comments related to this theme –

Louise E. “The human population has already exceed its carrying capacity ... usually when a population does this the population levels off or decreases because there are no longer enough resources to support the population. Do you think the human population is an exception to this rule or will the population decrease?”

Louise E. – “... the average life span has been rising. This would likely lead to overpopulation, causing numerous problems such as more pollution, cramped living conditions and lack of resources for everyone to live at a high standard of living. This poses questions such as: ‘How do we regulate pollution? How should resources be distributed?’ “

Joey L. “When the immigrants were coming over during the Industrial Revolution, they were crowded into small areas with insufficient waste. It’ll probably happen again, as conditions get worse.”

Teens think online classes will become more popular, but the traditional model (with a physical building and in person interaction with teachers and peers) will continue. They emphasized the importance of connecting with peers and teachers in person. School and work schedules will become more flexible.

Some comments related to this theme –

Jackqueline G. – “Although i do believe that the internet is a wonderful tool when combined with other learning techniques i do not believe that the internet alone should be what we teach our next generation with.”

Wyatt J. – “I think that ... [we] will be working in ways that are flexible when it comes to time and place. Advances in technology may allow us to use computers and communication devices to do almost any job remotely. Working from really anywhere at anytime will be the norm. That could completely change the nature of our cities and homes as we become less ‘settled’ or tied to one place.”

Hannah O. – “I really want to see a push in education too, and I don’t just mean laptops in schools. I mean, experiential learning – sending kids out there to figure out the world, because I think the strongest education systems are those that get the kid out of the classroom and out of the lecture halls.”

“In fifty years, high schools will have a more integrated focus (in my opinion)... schools will be focused more towards real-world learning experiences with more opportunities to get outside and learn by doing not be hearing.”

Joey L. – “My grandchildren won’t be learning at schools because most learning will be done via computer.”

“And if I don’t see a push in education I swear I’ll go crazy!”

Liz F. – “My grandchildren are being education through online courses and robots teaching us instead of hiring teachers, because the school budget problem can’t be solved yet.”

Nearly all participants said climate change will impact life in 2061. However, students are split on the degree to which it will impact daily life. Some said the changes in the next fifty years will be drastic (i.e., contributing to WWII), while others said the impact would be smaller in scale (i.e., wet areas wetter, dry areas drier).

Some comments related to this theme –

Daniel B. – “It is the year of 2061 and the world is gradually growing back from world war three. The war started when our governments couldn’t decide whether or not to go green ... People [will be] constructing water turbines and windmills all around me.”

Wyatt J. – “I could imagine a future where we will be able to predict with more accuracy how the changing climate will affect weather patterns like extreme temperature and precipitation swings, or catastrophic events like hurricanes and earthquakes ... People will be able to migrate or relocate temporarily to avoid disaster or simply to be more comfortable.”

Nafiso M. – “... if Minnesota’s climate changes, the economy will change.”

Joey L. – “The climate as we know it would no longer really exist, because the sheer damage done to the environment in the past 200 years would have critically damaged the weather patterns leaving weather erratic and basically unpredictable.”

Brady S. – “The climate will have changed. I'm assuming the temperature will be the main change. Most of the world will be warmer, which will cause more thunderstorms and severe weather.”

Teens said development patterns will change because of population growth and climate change. They said living sustainably, preserving “natural beauty” and agricultural land should be valued in development decisions.

Some comments related to this theme –

Louise E. – “We must work to preserve natural beauty. Already there are so few places where we can escape from noisy traffic, perfectly manicured lawns and polluting factories. As we work to preserve natural beauty we must also remember that there is value in preserving historically significant people, places and objects. Both nature and history are equally important and should both be saved for future generations.”

Hannah O. – “I see a major shift in architecture... to be more “green” and eco-friendly... becoming “one with nature” while maintaining the beauty and preserving they ecosystem and causing as little harm as possible... living more sustainably.”

Ann D. – “The population ... is estimated to grow to 9 billion [in 2050]. This means compact living.”

Brady S. – “The world's population will be much higher, and we will run out of room for farming and developing. Taller buildings will be built even in small towns, because we will need as much space for agriculture as possible.”

Teens are split on whether or not rural areas will decline and cities will grow in population. However, they envision more self-sustaining communities and describe a future where transportation networks allow for efficient and inexpensive travel.

Some comments related to this theme –

Joey L. – “I believe that trains and extended lightrail such as the one being discussed from St. Cloud to Minneapolis will begin to replace cars for intra-travel. Passenger rails such as Amtrak,

are cleaner than cars and are comfortable transportation, and I feel they are going to make a comeback.”

Louise E. – “I definitely think that communities will at least try to move toward being self-sustainable. Growing and depending on local food would reduce the cost of transportation and be healthier because fewer preservatives would need to be used.”

Hannah O. – “I think transport of good through the market is going to become more efficient as cities become more sustainable... thinking along the lines that it’s far more efficient (sic.) and logical to produce goods close to home so the prices don’t skyrocket because it was expensive to ship it in.”

Appendix

“This or That?” Below is a summary of “This or That” survey administered to teens as part of the workshops (n=30). Teens were presented with two statements (top and bottom of each question, below) and asked to select which statement they most agreed with.

1.) Education: Minnesota loses its status as a national leader in education.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	2	7%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 40%
Agree	10	33%	
Neutral	7	23%	Neutral: 23%
Agree	8	27%	Agree/Strongly Agree: 37%
Strongly Agree	3	10%	

Minnesota develops a 21st century educational system and becomes the undisputed “education state”.

2.) Health: The incidences of obesity, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s reach crisis proportions. (multiple choice)

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	6	20%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 63%
Agree	13	43%	
Neutral	6	20%	Neutral: 20%
Agree	3	10%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 17%
Strongly Agree	2	7%	

Minnesotans turn to healthy lifestyles, dramatically reducing health care costs.

3.) Environment: The 2060s look like the 1960s with burning rivers and frequent smog alerts; invasive species take over our lakes.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	3	10%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 27%
Agree	5	17%	
Neutral	10	33%	Neutral: 33%
Agree	10	33%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 40%
Strongly Agree	2	7%	

Minnesota has created a reverence for its natural resources, reaching an exceptional balance of pristine wilderness, urbanized areas and tourism/recreation based on the natural environment.

4.) Economy: Nearly all small, Minnesota business has disappeared.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	9	30%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 47%
Agree	5	17%	
Neutral	5	17%	Neutral: 17%
Agree	10	33%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 37%
Strongly Agree	1	3%	

Small businesses thrive; the vast majority of people are self-employed or work in very small companies.

5.) Energy: We continue to rely upon nonrenewable energy courses, like gas and coal.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	3	10%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 17%
Agree	2	7%	
Neutral	6	20%	Neutral: 20%
Agree	11	37%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 63%
Strongly Agree	8	27%	

Alternative energies, such as wind and solar, flourish.

6.) Finance: Personal and public debt has become so massive that most spending is paying off our debt.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	8	27%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 57%
Agree	9	30%	
Neutral	10	33%	Neutral: 33%
Agree	2	7%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 10%
Strongly Agree	1	3%	

Spending habits of Americans are reformed; personal savings rates are healthy and public budgets are sound.

7.) Technology: Technology liberates us, allowing us to “do everything” without going anywhere; drastically reducing the costs of almost any transaction.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	2	10%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 30%
Agree	4	20%	
Neutral	8	40%	Neutral: 40%
Agree	5	25%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 30%
Strongly Agree	1	5%	

Technology has become a prison – we are monitored 24/7 by big corporations and government.

8.) Community: Community disappears as a geo-spatial notion; our community is no longer those we live near, but those we interact with across Minnesota and the globe. We lose common ground with our neighbors.

	<u>Responses</u>		
Strongly agree	4	20%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 50%
Agree	6	30%	
Neutral	5	25%	Neutral: 25%
Agree	3	15%	Strongly Agree/Agree: 25%
Strongly Agree	2	10%	

The proliferation of virtual social networking places a new premium on face-to-face contact and local gathering spots flourish.