An Assessment of the Deliberative Polling Process, A Component of Metropolitan State University’s Deliberative Democracy Initiative
June 4, 2008

Introduction
In launching its Deliberative Democracy Initiative in 2007-2008, Metropolitan State University brought its knowledge, resources and commitment to citizen engagement into cooperation with local public leaders, to engage citizens in local policy development. The University sought to make a twofold contribution: first, to generate broad and informed public input on an immediate policy question and thus make a substantive contribution to the debate at hand; and second, to demonstrate the potential benefit and feasibility of the Deliberative Polling® process for application to important local policy questions.

The Deliberative Polling project began in February 2008 with a survey of more than 1,000 metro area residents addressing transportation priorities and funding. Sixty-five respondents accepted Metropolitan State’s invitation to attend a follow-up Deliberation Day, at which they discussed the issues in facilitated small groups and posed questions to panels of experts and policy makers. At the end of the day, 61 participants retook the initial survey to determine the effects of information and deliberation on their views.

The project was carried out under the joint leadership of Francis J. Schweigert, Assistant Professor of Public and Nonprofit Administration in the College of Management, and Susan Shumer, Director of Community Outreach, Civic Engagement, and the Center for Community-Based Learning. A broad-based Advisory Group of 12 local transportation and policy experts informed the survey construction and briefing materials, and five transportation experts and six policy-makers served on separate panels for the deliberation on March 15, 2008. Eighteen students, faculty and friends of Metropolitan State University were recruited and trained to facilitate small group discussions throughout the day.

On May 6, 2008 Metropolitan State University contracted with Ellen Benavides, an independent consultant, to conduct a qualitative assessment of the Deliberative Polling Process, with the aim of informing future possible investments in citizen engagement, especially further use of the Deliberative Polling process. Two key questions guided interviews with the advisors, experts, policy-makers and facilitators:

1) What potential value does Deliberative Polling have to inform public policy decisions and invigorate citizen participation?

2) How can the potential impact of this process be enhanced?

Methodology
This assessment of the Deliberative Polling Process at Metropolitan Statue University synthesizes the opinions and perspectives of 26 of the 31 advisors, expert and policy panel members and facilitators who directly participated in the design of, and/or the Deliberation Day
events on March 15, 2008. **Appendix A** includes the names of all 31 prospective interview subjects. Five of these 31 individuals that were not interviewed received four or more phone calls between May 12 and May 23, 2008 and either did not respond or were not able to schedule an interview.

Frank Schweigert and Ellen Benavides jointly developed a set of five open-ended interview questions, designed to elicit opinions and recommendations about the content, process and results of the Deliberative Polling Process. **Appendix B** contains the interview questions.

Phone interviews lasted anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes. It should be noted that not all individuals gave responses to each question, but rather, spoke to the issues and opinions most prominent in the mind of each respondent. As a result, numerical tallies should not be interpreted as quantitative measures of support for these opinions. **Appendix C** presents all responses, sorted by role, i.e. - advisor, expert, policy maker or facilitator.

**Results**
Following is a synthesis of the responses to each question, highlighting key themes that arose during these open-ended conversations.

1. **What did you think about the process?** (Strengths/weaknesses of the process as a whole—to the extent you were involved—i.e., use of external advisors, construction of the briefing document, construction of the survey instrument, selection of panelists, deliberation day agenda and flow, reporting of results, etc).

Respondents described the **strengths** of the process and results in four primary areas: 1) the quality of the briefing materials, 2) having a broad and balanced mix of perspectives on each of the panels, 3) the smooth flow and logistics of Deliberation Day activities, and 4) achieving a worthwhile outcome.

Eight respondents described the briefing materials as being “good, well balanced and fair,” which provided participants at Deliberation Day with “a solid background.” Similarly, 13 respondents described the Advisory and Expert Panels as “including a great range of perspectives” with people who “knew their stuff, which allowed for a good exchange of information.”

* Nine individuals were not included in the interview pool; four facilitators were either faculty of the University or directly related to an employee, four other facilitators’ contact information was not readily available, and one member of the audience joined the policy panel as a “walk-on,” had no other involvement with the Deliberative Polling Process.
Fifteen respondents described Deliberation Day events as “going smoothly, with a good exchange of ideas and people listening to each other’s ideas.” The audience questions were viewed as “good and thoughtful,” and event planners were praised for “ensuring that people had enough time to understand and discuss the issues.”

Finally, seven respondents described the outcome of the process as worthwhile; “It seemed like a good process to see how the public feels about transportation financing and how they respond after they’ve been given information about the issues.” Another commented on “the eagerness among participants to learn more,” which reflected the overall sense of interest and engagement observed by panelists and facilitators alike.

Respondents described the weaknesses of the process in 7 primary areas: 1) Advisory Panel composition and participation, 2) timing of the process, 3) low turnout on Deliberation Day, 4) role of the facilitator, 5) Deliberation Day flow/logistics, 6) issue framing; and 7) bias/partisanship.

Five of the Advisory Group members commented on how the composition and inconsistent participation of members impacted the group’s overall sense of cohesion, several of which wondered if they’d been invited into the process part way through to add a broader perspective. Others commented that it was difficult to commit to the process without a clear sense up front of the over all time commitment and expectations, particularly during the Legislative session.

The unfortunate timing of the process was consistently mentioned throughout the interviews; the opportunity to use the results to inform the public policy debate was diminished when the Legislature passed the Transportation bill prior to Deliberation Day.

The low turnout on Deliberation Day was also mentioned as a weakness; not only did it raise concerns about statistical validity of the findings, it resulted in a last minute shuffling of groups, which in one case created a situation where three facilitators worked with one group. Coincidently, this shift uncovered a conflict in understanding about the role of the facilitator.

One facilitator felt strongly that his/her role is to engage participants in an active, informed discussion, which includes correcting misinformation. Another facilitators felt that his/her role was to neutrally guide the group discussion. Two experts raised questions about whether the facilitators were able to manage conflicts within the groups, as well as whether they were able to correct misinformation participants brought to the discussion.
Eleven respondents commented on the logistics/flow of Deliberation Day that were distracting and/or raised concerns. These include questions about the length of the day (too long), the amount of time for panels (too short to fully answer the audience questions), the number of panel members (too large to go into depth), the size of the groups (too large) and the use of microphones for audience questions (disorganized).

Four advisory and policy panel members questioned the overall framing of the issues suggesting, “a more structured agenda or questions for panel members would have allowed for a more focused discussion/input on briefing materials.” One advisor felt “it wasn’t framed as far-reaching or comprehensively as it could have been, i.e. - including the federal perspective.”

The policy panel members were the least satisfied with the event, expressing frustration with the level of partisanship, the lack of sufficient time to really discuss the issues (due to the size of the panel, including the “last minute walk-on”) and their lack of exposure/involvement with the overall process. Several described the audience as “single issue” transit supporters and felt that the audience had many more questions than the amount of time for the panel. Ultimately, they felt that the questions deserved a conversation, instead of a debate dominated with campaign sound bites.

2. Have you reviewed the results? (Thoughts/reactions? Surprises/confirmation?)
Nine respondents hadn’t read the results, given the timing and demands of the legislative session. The majority either skimmed or reviewed them prior to their phone interview.

The majority of respondents felt that the Deliberative Polling Process successfully demonstrated the power of the process in engaging the public to discuss complex policy topics; “I found the results to be exciting. They confirmed what I expected could happen if you took a complex issue and presented balanced information to the public so that they could discuss and gain a better understanding.”

Specific findings that surprised several respondents included:

- Contradictory desires for road expansion and concern for the environment;
- The level of support for increased taxes to pay for transportation; and
- Public support for a sales tax on gas.

Several respondents wondered if these findings were influenced by the collapse of the 35W bridge or media coverage of the legislative veto override of the transportation bill.
Three respondents raised questions about the validity and generalizability of the results, given the small number of Deliberation Day participants and the bias introduced by their self-selection in attending the event. Two other respondents commented that the results are different from what has been discussed/reported in the past.

3. **What difference might the process or results make in your work?** (How will you use it?) Approximately one-half of the respondents indicated that they would use either the process or the results in their work, ranging from using the facilitation training to presenting the data to colleagues, policy makers and/or the public; “The results of the process will definitely make a difference in my work; it reinforced the need to educate and keep our policy agenda relevant.” “There are not a lot of sources of citizen opinion data that are objective, so these result add to the body of knowledge.”

Another third reported that the process and results would have little, if any impact on their work, either because they don’t anticipate that transportation policy will be discussed again for the next 3-5 years or because they couldn’t envision a use. Stated reasons ranged from either not having reviewed the results and/or being involved with/informed about the process, to having questions and concerns about the validity of the results, given the number of Deliberation Day participants and the potential for self-selection bias.

4. **Can you imagine a future role for this process?** (Specific topics, arenas or users) Overwhelmingly, respondents suggested that, “any issue that is divisive and characterized by polarized/extreme opinions well would be well service by this non-partisan process where the ground rules are laid out. It’s a great way to learn/listen to other perspectives. It may not change opinions, but will definitely increase understanding.” Suggested topics include:

- Education (9)
- Healthcare reform (6)
- Transportation (3)
- Global warming (2)
- Taxes (2)
- Congestion pricing (2)
- Welfare benefits
- Environmental improvements
- Land use

5. **What changes would you recommend to the process to increase potential use or impact?** Respondents suggested an array of recommendations, including:
• Recruit a consistent pool of advisors by being explicit up front about the time commitment and role so people can budget their time accordingly.
• Active involvement of decision-makers will ensure that the process and results are used.
• Participant recruitment is key and gives greater weight to the results.
• A media strategy and dissemination plan for how and when to roll out the results will increase the impact of the initiative.
• Timing is key; the results need to be presented prior to the start of the Legislative session.

Lessons Learned
Based on the interviews, the author recommends that the following key themes, critical success factors and technological/logistical considerations be reviewed prior to future efforts in this arena:

A. Key themes that arose during the conversations include:
   1. The Initiative successfully demonstrated the process’s effectiveness in engaging the public to thoughtfully discuss complex policy topics.
   2. An important feature of the Initiative was having a neutral party (Metropolitan State University) serve as convener.
   3. Future topics for consideration include health care, education, tax policy and global warming.
   4. Timing is critical; in order to have an impact on relevant policy discussions, the results need to be presented to policy makers prior to the start of the Legislative session.
   5. The increased willingness of the public to consider a sales tax on gas was a significant outcome.

B. Critical success factors include:
   1. The briefing materials were thoughtful and provided Deliberation Day participants with solid background information.
   2. The advisory and expert panels were well balanced and represented a variety of perspectives.
   3. Engaging key policy makers in the discussion will allow them to see/understand how important it is.
   4. A media strategy and dissemination plan for how and when to roll out the results will increase the impact of the initiative.
   5. Metro State’s level of investment and planning was significant; future efforts should build upon the lessons learned from this first experience.

C. Technical/logistical concerns include:
   1. The Advisory Group meetings lacked continuity, due to inconsistent participation by many members. Being explicit about the scope of their role, time commitment and expectations would address this.
2. The timing of the initiative was unfortunate; the impact of the results was decreased because the Legislature had already passed the transportation bill.
3. The low turnout of participants at Deliberation Day was disappointing and may impact the statistical validity of the survey data and our ability to generalize from the results.
4. Few people read or remembered receiving the results, due to their involvement in the Legislative session.
5. The role of the facilitators was not always clear, which impacted the types of conversations within the small groups, resulting in a need to be consistent about whether facilitators should serve as neutral discussion guides or as informed leaders or experts.

Ellen Benavides is an independent consultant based in St. Paul, Minnesota. She works with nonprofit, government and community organizations in the areas of evaluation, strategic planning and social issue documentaries.

For more information about Metropolitan State University’s Deliberative Polling Initiative, contact Frank Schweigert 612-659-7296 or francis.schweigert@metrostate.edu
Appendix A

Deliberative Polling Initiative Interview Pool
(N=31, * indicates multiple roles played by several members of the Advisory Group)

Advisory Group
1. Bob DeBoer, Director of Policy Development - Citizens League
2. Nacho Diaz, Past Director – Metropolitan Council Transportation Department
3. Norman Foster, Senior Budget Officer – Minnesota Department of Transportation
4. Connie Kozlak, Transportation Systems Planning Manager - Metropolitan Council
5. Lee Munnich, Director – Humphrey Institute Center for State and Local Policy
7. Mary Kay Bailey, Independent Consultant
8. Erin Sexton, Director of Transportation Studies - Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
9. Clarence Shallbetter, Former staff at MN Rideshare and Volunteer at Citizens League
10. David Van Hattum, Program Manager – Transit for Livable Communities
11. Amy Vennewitz, Deputy Director for Transportation Finance – Metropolitan Council

Expert Panel
1. Margaret Donahoe, Legislative Director - Minnesota Transportation Alliance
2. Adeel Lari, Research Fellow - Humphrey Institute
3. Jim Erkel, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy
4. Jason Flohrs, Director of Government Affairs - Twin West Chamber of Commerce
5. Carl Ohrn, Policy Analyst in Transportation Planning – Metropolitan Council *

Policy Panel
1. Senator Jim Carlson
2. Representative Mary Liz Holberg
3. Carver Commissioner Tom Workman
4. Hennepin Commissioner Peter McLaughlin
5. Bob McFarlin, Acting Commissioner - Minnesota Department of Transportation

Small Group Facilitators
1. Andy Driscoll
2. Tahera Mamdani
3. Ofisa Nyaikondo
4. Gerre Carley
5. E. Glenn Gilbert
6. Colleen Callahan
7. Dina Niklas
8. Carolyn Wiger
9. Isabel Levinson
10. Sarah Nelson
Appendix B

Deliberative Polling Initiative Interview Questions

1. What did you think about the process? (Strengths/weaknesses of the process as a whole—to the extent you were involved—i.e., use of external advisors, construction of the briefing document, construction of the survey instrument, selection of panelists, deliberation day agenda and flow, reporting of results, etc.)

2. Have you reviewed the results? What are your thoughts/reactions? (Surprises/confirmation)

3. What difference might the process or results make in your work? (How will you use it?)

4. Can you imagine a future role for this process? (Specific topics, arenas or users)

5. What changes would you recommend to the process to increase potential use or impact?
Appendix C

Interview Responses

1. What did you think about the process? (Strengths/weaknesses of the process as a whole-to the extent you were involved- i.e.- use of external advisors, construction of the briefing document, construction of the survey instrument, selection of panelists, deliberation day agenda and flow, reporting of results, etc.)

Strengths (11 of 11 advisors)

• Broad representation of options reflected thinking beyond Met Council or MDOT.
• The Advisory Panel included a great range of perspectives.
• Good iterative approach to developing materials and testing them with experts.
• Sufficient time was spent developing briefing documents and choosing experts.
• I thought the committee did a good job with the briefing materials, especially given the complexity of the issues; its tough to know how to present information when we all think so differently so that questions can be framed in a way that will elicit a meaningful conversation.
• Wide variety of background and perspectives on Advisory Panel.
• Hiring a consultant to write the background materials; we didn’t have time to do so and she did a good job.
• It seemed like a good process to see how the public feels about transportation financing and how they respond after they’ve been given information about the issues.
• People who know the issues designed the survey.
• Some people are now better informed about transportation financing.
• I think most people read the briefing materials, which provided a solid background.
• The process went reasonably well, with a good exchange of ideas and people listening to each other’s ideas.
• We were given ample opportunities for input and review.
• The briefing book was good; it clearly presented the complex array of transportation financing and policy choices.

Strengths (5 of 5 expert panelists)

• Good group of experts who knew their stuff allowed for good exchange of information.
• The questions created by the groups were good ones.
• The expert panelist represented a broad range of experience and perspectives.
• Briefing materials were good, fair and balanced.
• The panel was well balanced and presented a good cross-section of perspectives.
• Panel members knew the issues were interested in getting information out, as opposed to pushing an agenda.
• The briefing materials were excellent.
• The small groups appeared to have good discussions and opportunities for people to give their input.
• The moderator did a good job of managing egos/personalities.
• The briefing materials laid the issues out well, considering how easy it is to get lost in the details of financing.
• The panel went well and the questions the audience asked were similar to those we’ve heard in focus groups about the issues.
• The experts were cordial and courteous to each other while presenting different perspectives.
• The commitment to spend the necessary time, both to plan the initiative as well as making sure that people thoroughly understood the issues and had ample time to discuss.
• The media coverage during the day was good and ensures that the information would be brought to a broader audience.

Strengths (4 of 5 policymakers)
• The audience questions were very good and thoughtful.
• The format was good.
• We were at the end of the day, so people had already formulated their opinions, instead of starting at square one.
• The panel was excellent; we did an adjustment “on the fly” that included Representative Shelley Madore, who contributed a great deal to the discussion.
• The panel members had lots of expertise and experience to share with the audience.

Strengths (7 of 10 facilitators)
• Very diverse/balanced pool of citizen participants (gender/age/geographic representation).
• Participants had opportunities to voice concerns.
• I liked the mix of people and perspectives.
• While I could see a change in perspectives, I didn’t see any “changes of heart.”
• The facilitator training allowed me to bring out people’s points of view without my jumping in to the conversation or taking sides.
• The training also helped facilitators to manage time well.
• The organizers were very well prepared for the day re: materials and logistics.
• The quality/stature of the expert and policy panels was great.
• I was impressed by how seriously the participants took everything.
• People showed up without an agenda.
• A very interesting mix of citizens and experts participated.
• It was a great way to engage the population in political action.
• The day went really well and smoothly.
• There was an eagerness among the participants to learn more, as well as excitement and energy about the issue.

Weaknesses (11 of 11 advisors)
• I wonder if the panels had the best composition of participants; it’s important that they give unbiased/objective information.
• More structured agenda/questions for panel members to discuss might have allowed for more focused discussion/input on briefing documents.
• The development of the briefing materials drove the survey tool and I wonder if we had enough time to do as good a job as we might have.
• The timing of Deliberation Day was unfortunate; we couldn’t control the weather, but holding it on St. Patrick’s Day might have affected the number of participants. We wanted 200 people and only got 65; does this impact the statistical significance and power of the results?
• Not as many people as we hoped for show up on Deliberation Day.
• The process of defining the issues, deciding what we wanted to accomplish and what we wanted to learn felt a little long.
• It’s a challenge to balance the perspectives of panel members who represent agencies that aren’t disinterested parties.
• Advisory Panel participants changed frequently throughout the process.
• We never really had active/substantive financing participation from the Met Council or MnDOT on the panel.
• We didn’t get to discuss the issues of trade-offs in transportation investment because we don’t know how to think about it.
• It felt that we were under the gun to complete the process within our original timeframe, but then we lost our audience when the Legislature overrode the veto.
• I don’t think that the way the issue was framed was as far-reaching or comprehensive as it should have been; for example, we didn’t include the federal perspective in our materials or discussion.
• The topic became less relevant as things changed at the Legislature; we had no ability to change course/focus at this point, so we lost our audience.
• I think I was invited to the process “late” and with the intention of bringing a different perspective to the process.
• The timing was unfortunate; the information would have had more impact before session, as opposed to during session when policy makers, agencies and lobbyists are way too busy.
• The briefing book might have been strengthened if it had been culled down to include “core questions” and then organize the material within each question.
Weaknesses (5 of 5 experts)

- I’m a strong believer in representative government; we elect legislators to make decisions about tough and complicated issues, not the public.
- I don’t think spending a few hours reading and discussing a very complicated issue really results in an educated public.
- The briefing documents didn’t present pro-con issues.
- I’m not sure it was necessary to “script” the audience’s questions and have them read by specific individuals.
- The entire premise of the process doesn’t make sense: if you educate people, you may change their attitudes, but how do you know if it makes a difference? Do more-informed people make better decisions? There is no perfect answer.
- The questions and expert panel discussion were not very probing.
- I wonder if the groups were too large for people to be fully involved/engaged in discussions.
- I would have liked to see more participants in the audience.
- It’s too bad the audience was so small.
- It’s not a huge deal, but the microphone use with the audience seemed disorganized and took up more time than it needed to, taking time away for more questions.
- Was it important that specific people from each group asked the questions? If so, it might have been helpful for the person with the microphone to plan in advance and be ready for the next questioner.
- I’m not confident that people in the small groups got their questions answered if they didn’t get asked of the panel members. I walked around and listened to some of the conversations, overhearing misinformation that wasn’t being corrected. So, at the end of the day, did these misperceptions get addressed?

Weaknesses (4 of 5 policymakers)

- Having 5 policy makers on a panel for only an hour sets up the dynamic where we end up “campaigning” vs. having a substantive discussion.
- Instead of developing ideas, we gave “sound bites.”
- The audience seemed to be leaning one way and as if they’d already made up their minds.
- As the “odd man out” (conservative, suburban) I’m not sure I was able to add much to the discussion.
- How were people selected to be participants? How “random” or “representative” of the public were they?
- The room seemed to be full of “transit” supporters, versus road people.
- The process/discussion had a single-issue focus, which is not realistic, given the reality that policy makers have to make policy decisions in the context of the total state budget and competing priorities.
• It didn’t feel like an open dialogue was possible; panelists and participants seemed interested in everyone “getting along” vs. recognizing that the whole premise of politics is based upon people not agreeing.
• Panel quickly turned partisan, including seating by party affiliation.
• The questions begged for more complete, technological policy answers that reflected the history and complexity of transportation policy; we were both limited in time and had too many panelists to do them justice. Perhaps they could have been the focus of discussion in a breakout session?
• Assuming elected officials are policy experts.
• The questions were politically topical, vs. based on policy/history or facts, so the outcome was a much more partisan debate. Was it your intention to give the audience a chance to see/experience the politics that influence how decisions are made? When you put together a panel of partisan officials during the legislative session, you’re almost guaranteed to get partisan positioning.
• The questions deserved a conversation, vs. a debate.
• Representative Shelley Madore was a “walk-on” panel member and I thought it was not fair to add her at the last minute, as it skewed the panel balance and left less time for each panel member to speak.
• I received a number of emails after the event from participants who felt that the day was “rigged” and had a definite transit bias, which they found disappointing.
• The Q/A structure felt chaotic, with people running around trying to give participants microphones to ask questions, rather than gathering them and posing them to panel members.
• The audience had so many more questions than the amount of time for the panel; it could have been longer.
• We were only there for our panel, so we didn’t get a chance to learn much about the entire process or purpose.
• Tom Workman was very quiet and seemed like an “outlier” who didn’t contribute a lot to the panel, other than to engage Peter McLaughlin in a “tete-a-tete.”

Weaknesses (7 of 10 facilitators)
• Many of the participants hadn’t thoroughly read the briefing materials.
• Many of the participants had a single-issue focus or concern.
• The panelists didn’t appear to be as knowledgeable about what was going on in other parts of the country.
• The non-specific nature of the panel responses was frustrating, underscoring the complexity of the issues.
• Participants didn’t ask questions because they didn’t know what to ask.
• Questions were quite vague, as were many of the panel responses.
• Not enough time for discussions.
• I’m not sure if “what now?” was addressed, i.e. – what does this mean/what is impact?
• Not all of the facilitators facilitated; some participated instead.
• It was a long day.
• We didn’t know how many people were going to show up, which resulted in the pre-arranged groups being shuffled; my group ended up with three facilitators.
• One of the facilitators did not fulfill his role of guiding the group discussion; instead, he interviewed each of the group members (1:1), inserted his opinions and dominated the group, which hurt the dynamics. Even when his turn to facilitate was over, he continued to participate as an “expert” in the group. His intention was that he wanted the discussion to be informed. Unfortunately, because of his behavior, there was no discussion. He ended up drafting the questions for the group in the first session and the group OK’d them.
• Unfortunately, the Legislature had already made up their mind, so it made us wonder, “What’s the point?”
• The difference between the expert and policy panelists was amazing; the policy makers actively engaged the audience and were partisan; they “campaigned” vs. answering the questions.
• There wasn’t enough time for participants to get past their own personal needs/experience to thinking about broader community needs; participants didn’t seem terribly open-minded.
• As a facilitator, I’m not sure we were clear about our role; the training was brief and I’m not sure if we were supposed to broaden perspectives or just put the participant’s perspectives onto the table.
• There weren’t enough participants that day, so groups were consolidated, as were facilitators. I was in a group of 10 with two other facilitators. Our facilitating styles were quite different; mine is engaging/stimulating and conversational style, while the other two used a more passive, listening style.
• I feel strongly that the facilitators’ role is to ensure that correct information informs the discussion; my fellow facilitators criticized me for being too involved in the discussion.
• I’m not so sure having the expert panel twice didn’t disrupt the flow and create a somewhat disjointed day. I think the groups might have been able to go deeper if they had more time to discuss the issues.

2. Have you reviewed the results? What are your thoughts/reactions? (Surprises/confirmation)
   Advisors (11 of 11)
• I didn’t have a preconceived expectation about the outcome, so I was fascinated to see the changes in opinions after spending just a day to learn about and discuss the issue.
• Most people don’t have the time/opportunity to digest information and get educated.
• The high level of concern expressed for the environment is contradicted by the fact that so many people are driving alone and want to see road expansion; they don’t see their actions in the larger context.

• Too bad the Legislature acted so fast; I think it influenced participants’ thinking/awareness during deliberation day. I wonder what might have happened if the timing had been different and participants had an opportunity to have their input influence the Legislators’ decisions.

• I think someone should critique the data and the briefing documents to see how well our results reflected the original design premises.

• If we didn’t see a change in opinion, I’d have been surprised.

• This is a very logical process; it’s a matter of educating people about complicated issues and requires time and money to accomplish.

• I was surprised by the beginning and final percent of people willing to increase taxes to pay for transportation. The percentages were different/higher than I’ve seen in other surveys during the past year or two. It makes me wonder about how the questions were worded and/or where in the survey they were asked, i.e. – the cumulative effect of multiple questions.

• I haven’t had time to read thoroughly, but I was surprised by the before and after results. I wonder if the timing of the veto and override, along with all of the media coverage ended up influencing what people thought and their level of knowledge for the survey as well as on Deliberation Day.

• I haven’t had time to read it thoroughly, but know that there was a big shift in opinions.

• The demographic information about participants needs to be included in the results so that we can generalize or compare our findings to the general population.

• How will the results be used? What does our experience mean to the larger body politic?

• The funding issue is very complicated, but once people are educated, they are more willing to consider alternative financing options.

• If the process took place over a longer time period, we could have used it to help decide how to prioritize the new transportation funding. We’ve got all kinds of questions about what the public expects/needs, but I think it’s too complicated for the general public at this time. Perhaps in the future, after we’ve narrowed the options, it may be useful to engage the public.

• I received them, but haven’t read them.

• I found the results to be exciting. They also confirmed what I expected could happen if you took a complex issue and presented balanced information to the public so that they could discuss and gain a better understanding.

• I think the front-end survey is important and allows you to assess where people are.

• The survey tool itself was fairly comprehensive; I wonder if it might have been more effective if it was pared down to the key questions.
• I think the notion of a “sales tax for gas” was blurred with a “gas tax” and is a gimmick of sorts, since it wasn’t in the survey.

**Experts (5 of 5)**
• The results were flat, not earth-shattering; I expected people to end up where they did, based on what I observed that day.
• I was very interested to see that learning allowed people to be more confident about their views.
• I was impressed that people were willing to give up a Saturday to participate.
• I wasn’t surprised by the change in opinions, mostly interested to see the shift in the public’s and willingness to make investment in transportation system.
• Sometimes, the public is ahead of the politicians.
• Yes, I got the results and read them 3 weeks ago; they confirmed what I already thought, especially the changes in opinion about funding after people have solid information about the topic.
• It’s too bad the Legislature already enacted the transportation bill; I would have used the data to make our case with the policy makers.
• Yes, I read the results and was interested to see that the public was willing to support a sales tax on gas, which is an idea that hasn’t had much public support in the past.
• It was refreshing to see that people were willing to put new money on the table and make a new investment, vs. sticking with reallocating existing funds.
• The fact that people changed their thinking after the discussions was cool.
• I think the public’s need to do something was crystallized after the 35W bridge collapse.
• Yes, I got the results and was excited to get them. Unfortunately, I only had time to skim them, as this has been a busy time with the Legislature.

**Policymakers (4 of 5)**
• Most of the people seemed in favor of taxes to fund transportation, which is not what the polls tell us people are interested in.
• I haven’t had time to read the report, but its right here on my desk and I fully intend to read it in the future.
• I might have received them, but I haven’t read them.
• I don’t know if I got them. If I did, they arrived during the session, which is a very busy time for all of us.

**Facilitators (7 of 10)**
• Yes, I looked at the results and found it interesting and bizarre that 67% of the respondents said “yes” to a sales tax on gas, which was a complete change in opinion, given the fact that my group was totally against taxes.
• I didn’t receive the results. After getting them, I thought it was very well written and wonder how you intend to share them with policy makers/the legislature.
• The results confirmed for me that people make decisions based on the information they have, which often isn’t balanced, accessible, user friendly or what they need.
• You did a great job of presenting a lot of information in an accessible and clear way.
• I just skimmed the results, but was struck by how the participants reported that they were better decision-makers as a result of the briefing and experience.
• I don’t know if we would have influenced the Legislature, due to the timing.
• I’d like to get the results of your evaluation.
• I only briefly reviewed the results to see if people’s opinions had changed. I was more interested in this than why they changed.
• I don’t know if I received the results. I might have and just filed them away. After reviewing them, I wonder about how the pre-survey data coded so that you could compare the pre-post survey responses of the 61 people. I’m also concerned about how representative these 61 people who filled out the pre and post survey are of the general population. Also, since they volunteered, isn’t their self-selection, even within a random sample, a bias?
• I didn’t disagree with any of the findings; I was surprised by how the population contradicted itself re: maintaining vs. expanding roads.

3. What difference might the process or results make in your work? (How will you use it?)

Advisors (11 of 11)

• I’d like to use the results to show policy makers that they can’t presume that the public thinks a certain way.
• The process shows that if the public spends time, they can learn and change their attitudes about policy issues.
• I’d like to know more about the polling component of the experience; how “random” or “representative” were the 65 participants? Did their opinions change as well?
• I’m not sure.
• I’m not sure we resolved the question of how to provide information in an affordable way; we also didn’t get a simple answer to a complicated problem.
• We may occasionally use the results, but there’s so much survey data out there already.
• I think a good follow up question is how to do this on a greater scale.
• The process and results won’t impact my work unless it percolates up to legislative leadership via media coverage or interest on the part of the policy makers who participated to share the results in a hearing.
• The questions about competitive pricing may be useful in addressing public misperceptions about it.
• I’ll look at the competitive pricing attitudes to see how they compare with other research.
• It’s valuable to know how reality squares with the public’s beliefs.
• I suspect the Legislature isn’t going to address transportation issues in the near future; Senator Murphy was recently quoted as saying they’re done with transportation for the next 5 years. I wonder if there will be an appetite for dealing with “big picture” issues next session.
• Since the Legislature passed the transportation bill, the results will have less of an impact for me, since we’re no longer fighting for funding.
• I don’t have a way to use the process or results.
• I don’t envision using the process or results in the near term. I think people want to see what MnDOT is going to do with the new funds and would be surprised if we went back to them right now to get their input.
• I don’t plan to use the process in my work, but I think people “in the trenches” at MnDOT would find it useful.
• Since I didn’t really participate and haven’t read the results, I can’t comment.
• We’re not going to discuss transportation policy for another 3 years, so the results are irrelevant now and will be out dated in 3 years.
• I printed out a quote from the results that I’ll use in presentations to groups re: looking at congestion, alternatives and environmental impact holistically to support policy changes.
• There are not a lot of sources of citizen opinion data that are objective, so these results add to the body of knowledge.
• I will look for more opportunities to engage/meet with others on the Advisory Panel.
• I wonder if I was invited partway through the process?
• I didn’t get to participate as fully as I might want to, given the busy Legislative session.
• Was Deliberation Day audio/video taped? I’d be interested in watching/listening to it to learn more about the experience.

Experts (5 of 5)
• I wouldn’t use the process with the public; it might be a useful tool for policy makers.
• We’ll put an article about the deliberative polling process in our next newsletter because I want our readers to know that a more informed public is willing to invest funds to address transportation issues. I don’t know what kind of ripple effect this will have in terms of future research or action on the part of our readers.
• The results of the process will definitely make a difference in my work; it reinforced the need to educate and to keep our policy agenda relevant.
• It would have been great to get the results on February 12th when the session started; the public’s willingness to put new money on the table would have changed the discussion, especially because a neutral party conducted the research, which makes the outcome that much more credible.
• What people who are not experts/working in the field think is very important to understand.

Policymakers (4 of 5)
• I learned that the process is a powerful tool if you want to educate or persuade a group of people to agree on something.
• Since I only participated in the panel and haven’t read the report yet, I can’t comment.
• In skimming the results, I was impressed by the percentage of movement/increase in perceived knowledge and opinions, but I don’t know how objective it is.
• None, since there wasn’t any real interaction between the audience and the panel.
• Since I didn’t read the results, I can’t address the question, but I can say that serving on the panel made me think differently about some of my colleagues’ positions.

Facilitators (7 of 10)
• I’d use the facilitation skills I learned in the future; it’s a non-committal way to hear what people think and why.
• I use facilitation in my professional life.
• I’ll use the facilitation process in the future when I want to get input from groups.
• I’m not sure how the results will be useful to me in the future.
• I don’t plan on using the results or process in the future.
• I’m not likely to use the process. Having reviewed the results, if I felt more confident about their statistical validity, I would find ways to use them.
• The beauty of the day was that it gave real people the opportunity to weigh in on real issues.
• I’ll definitely be able to use my facilitator training in my workplace.
• The process was a great learning experience.
• I see the value of a process that informs public opinion and level of public engagement; unfortunately, the potential statistical weakness of the results makes me question the “spin” of the report about the day’s experience and outcomes.

4. Can you imagine a future role for this process? (Specific topics, arenas or users)
Advisors (11 of 11)
• I can imagine that issues such as K-12 education, health care reform or any topic where there is a referendum and an unhappy public would be good topics for this process.
• MnDOT congestion pricing.
• As a citizen engagement strategy, this would be a great alternative to the “truth in taxation” hearings where the government has already made a decision and yet, invites the public to give input after the fact. People could get involved/informed up front and
change the dynamics/outcome of the scenario where you’ve got a pissed off public and defensive government.

- I think deliberative polling would be helpful anytime a governmental body is thinking about enacting a policy change that is rife with misunderstanding and is divisive, especially if a vote is going to take place.
- Any of the top 5-7 issues we face as a region or state would be applicable.
- Its important to think about how to educate the public about policy issues, the cost of solutions and what this means in terms of changing their behavior as well.
- Topics such as education, taxes in general and taxes and behavior taxes generate.
- Public interest groups could use the process to educate policy makers about what the public thinks.
- Public support for education or any other complex topics.
- I think any significant policy issue could benefit from the process.
- I think the Humphrey Institute convened a citizen’s jury a few years ago about polling and pricing, which had an impact because the policy makers kept referring to it and ended up voting against it. How do you plan to follow up with Legislators with the results so that they will think about these issues next session?
- How much of a public good should be invested in a private benefit?
- I’m not sure how the opinions of 65 people will impact the opinions of the rest of the public. Are these people opinion leaders? Will they talk with coworkers/neighbors about the experience?
- People in transportation are grappling with how to make decisions about long term funding priorities.
- Public policy groups or the Chamber of Commerce might find this process useful for future discussions about managing congestion, taxation, etc.
- Transportation people are always looking for new ways/approaches to involve the public.
- Healthcare, education, transportation, environmental improvements.
- I wasn’t at Deliberation Day, so I can’t comment.
- I can imagine lots of applications for the process with challenging policy issues, e.g. – land use or climate change. The State will be releasing recommendations about climate change and the process could be very helpful in determining which approaches the public will endorse.

Experts (5 of 5)

- Any complex topic such as health care or education.
- The process was clearly successful; any contentious issue the Legislature and Governor are currently at an impasse on would be good to consider.
- Any political issue that is complicated and in the forefront would be good, i.e. - tax policy, education.
• If the override veto hadn’t happened prior to Deliberation Day, it would have been interesting to see how the media would have reported our results and whether it would have impacted the final outcome of the legislation.
• Any issue that is a big system issue, is expensive and the public doesn’t really understand, but has lots of opinions about is a good one for the process, i.e. – education and health care.
• Issues that people talk about a lot and hear sound bits about, but don’t understand the complexity.
• Non-biased/partisan groups need to sponsor these kinds of exercises, i.e. – Citizen’s League or Metro State.
• I think the process could be very helpful to use to find out what the public thinks about climate change and what actions the public is willing to support to address. The MN Climate Change Advisory Group is about to release their findings, which include a number of recommendations, all of which the Legislature turned into studies. The timing is perfect; between now and next session you could use the process to start the discussion and present the results before the Legislature convenes.

Policy Makers (4 of 5)
• Education or waste/landfill discussions.
• Education, health care.
• Welfare benefits, where the taxpayers and recipients could spend time together and address many of the misperceptions about those who receive services, i.e. – nursing homes, vs. “deadbeats.”
• We should do this every day! There are so many issues, such as transportation, education, health care, budgeting that taxpayers don’t understand or are misinformed about. They tell us to “re-prioritize” how we allocate and budget, but they don’t understand the complexity of budgeting.
• Our society needs “adult civics” opportunities to force people to think, listen to other points of view and struggle to understand things that are difficult to think about. This would have a significant impact on the level of policy discussions and decisions.

Facilitators (7 of 10)
• Anytime a group of people needs to get something done.
• It’s particularly useful when people don’t need to vote first, but rather, get to hear each other’s opinions and perspectives.
• Issues that are divisive and characterized by polarized/extreme opinions would be well served by this non-partisan process where the ground-rules are laid out; it’s a great way
to learn/listen to other perspectives. It may not change opinions, but will definitely increase understanding.

• Neighborhood development issues (street improvement) or MnDOT projects could benefit from this process.
• K-12 education and health care policy decisions would be well served by this process. It would be interesting to involve parents and students in the education discussion.
• It’s an interesting and flexible process that could be used with many issues.
• I’m not sure if the process has applicability in other arenas. It would need to be tweaked. The process would be a great tool for the community to use with decision-makers. For example, I could imagine using it with the Parent-Teacher-School Administrators at my children’s school.

5. What changes would you recommend to the process to increase potential use or impact?

Advisors (11 of 11)
• I can’t think of any.
• I’m surprised that people were willing to give up a Saturday, even for $75.
• I worry about the statistical validity of the results.
• In the future, I think more attention needs to be paid to recruitment.
• Many advisors only came to a few meetings; I think it would have been better to have a more consistent set of advisors participate regularly.
• I think it would have been helpful to have a more fleshed out sense of the time commitment and role of advisors presented at the outset so that we could budget our time and participation.
• More active involvement of the actual decision makers will ensure that the process and results are used. You need to engage the key policy makers in the discussion, which will lead them to see/understand how important it is.
• If you want to influence policy makers, I’d change the timing to the late spring/early summer and have the results ready for early fall when the Legislature convenes.
• How and when the results are released is key.
• Frank could submit a research paper to for the Transportation Research Board conference in January, where a variety of national audiences would find the results to be of interest.
• MnDOT and the Humphrey Institute host a periodic roundtable forum on “Rethinking Transportation Financing,” which would be interested in the project and results.
• We need to pose the questions differently so that the trade-offs and choices are presented to the public.
• Use explicit examples to show what role each party plays (Feds, State, Counties, Cities, Met Council, MnDOT and taxpayers/public).
• Screening/demographic data collection at front end is critical.
• I don’t have any suggestions for refinements to the process, as I wasn’t involved enough.
• Timing is everything!
• Invite participants with a stake in the process and outcome.
• Invite Advisory Panel members who are committed to attend consistently.
• Include a journalist or public communications perspective onto the Advisory Panel to help get issues narrowed down to a reasonable set of questions.

Experts (5 of 5)
• More skillful facilitators who could manage the conflict within their groups and would were able to stick to their role, instead of jumping in with their own opinions.
• Smaller discussion groups.
• A smaller policy panel would give panelists more time to discuss issues in depth.
• I’d like to see the results of this evaluation. (2)
• More participants.
• More opportunities for discussion/conversation after getting the “basics” down.
• Ensure that people have read the briefing materials beforehand so that we don’t have to start at square one with basic facts.
• Did the facilitators summarize/document the discussions? I’d be interested to see it if they did.
• If you taped/recorded the panel presentations, would panelists be more/less prone to present information in a neutral fashion?
• Timing is so critical; you need to see the issue before it is already decided.
• A better sense of rolling out the results; a media strategy.
• Perhaps if the day had been shorter, more people would have come.
• Having participants generate the questions might result in some points not being covered; it might have been useful to pose questions in the briefing materials and/or to have the expert panel pose questions for the small groups to discuss.

Policymakers (4 of 5)
• I’m not sure if the process served the organizers well; what are they promoting?
• More time or fewer panelists in order to fully debate issues.
• I’d like to see the results of the evaluation.
• The process discussed transportation in a vacuum; I’d like to see a similar approach with a cross-section of people who consider transportation in the context of health care and education, who need to balance them against each other and make choices or prioritize their decisions, which is what policy makers have to do.
• I’d create a better, more balance mix between elected officials and ‘public policy careerists.’
• I can’t really answer, since I only participated on the panel.
• I think it would be helpful to include information about how the process of lawmaking works so that the audience/public understands how their input can have an impact.
• The timing of the Deliberative Polling exercise was out of synch with the Legislative process; if you want to have an impact, you need to have your information ready before the session starts in January.

Facilitators (7 of 10)
• It helps to have people draft questions on paper so that the group can be clear about what they’re really asking.
• Some facilitators were not as good as others; they didn’t listen/guide and were disruptive because they couldn’t resist letting everyone know what they knew.
• I’d have included policy makers and experts in the small groups so that they could listen to the conversation and learn that their own assumptions/decisions may need to change.
• What would happen if there were multiple, shorter meetings over a period of time?
• I think we needed more time for the groups to discuss the issues.
• The panel members could have their staff on hand so that they could be follow-up on issues where there were no ready answers.
• I’d shorten the day and perhaps have one less expert panel.
• I’d give it a higher public profile, more publicity.
• I wonder about how representative the participant pool is of the general population?
• I wonder if my passion got in the way of my facilitation?
• I don’t have enough experience to suggest changes to the process.
• I’d tweak the process by creating a more concentrated time for participants to discuss issues; I wonder if the whole purpose of the day was to see if, at the end of the day, we could arrive at consensus and present our position to policy makers? I had to leave before the 3rd group discussion, so I don’t know.