“Healthy Corridor for All”

Using a “healthy communities” frame to shape a multi-billion dollar Light Rail Transit line in the Twin Cities

Phil Steger, ISAIAH
“Healthy Corridor for All”? 

- A campaign to shape the construction and development of a major light rail transit line that will connect the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, so that it will serve the needs of vulnerable populations and lay the groundwork for a healthier city overall.

- One of the focal points of the campaign is a health impact assessment (HIA) of the zoning and land use plans being developed by the City of St. Paul.
Who is it?

**Lead Organization:**

- **ISAIAH** - an alliance of 90 religious congregations dedicated to achieving transformative structural change in order to advance racial and economic justice.

**Key Partners:**

- **Hmong Organizing Program at TakeAction MN** - only program organizing MN’s new Hmong population, a growing St. Paul powerhouse
- **PolicyLink** - a national policy and research organization championing racial and economic equity by” lifting up what works
Light Rail Opportunities

- $1 billion public investment in infrastructure.
- Estimated $2 billion in public/private development.
- Entire 6-mile stretch within St. Paul will be rezoned.
- Large areas of land ripe for redevelopment.
- Communities in need of economic development and investment.
- Backbone for new, regional transit system

Light Rail Dangers

- Runs through vulnerable communities with history of displacement due to infrastructure construction
- Huge, complicated project…hard to impact
- “Clothesline for hanging 1,000 interests”
Target Audiences

1. Constituent groups & organizational partners
   - African-American church and community
   - White church and progressive groups
   - Hmong immigrant business owners and residents
   - Labor: food & commercial, carpenters, teachers, bus & train drivers
   - Small business owners

2. Technical & policy experts
   - City planners
   - Public health departments
   - Academics
   - Policy non-profits

3. Decision-Makers
   - City - Mayor & Council
   - County
   - Metropolitan Council (MPO)
The “Equity/Justice” Challenge

- Narrow or “special” interest
- Impractical
- Expensive
- Inefficient
- Laundry list of grievances
- “Trains should just take people from A to B”
Using Health to Talk Equity

What works:
- Universal/ Unifying
- Holistic, Integrative
- Measured by head; felt in gut
- Inequities speak for themselves
- Shows inequities harm even those at top

Challenge #1: Mainstream Framing

Challenge #2: Community Skepticism
Our Solution

“Healthy Communities”
- Inclusive
- Integrates economic/equity/environment/amenities/services
- Puts community in charge of defining what it needs

“Healthy Corridor for All”
- Locates the community we want to make healthy
- Unites interests around one project
Our Message is:

- Health demonstrates inequity in ways everyone can feel, and decision-makers can’t ignore.

- Healthy communities are communities that provide you and your family with the things you need to live a full and dignified life - jobs, housing, etc.

- Real health comes from the power and opportunity to create healthy conditions.

- We can act together to create those conditions for all of us.

- Just making the decision and taking action to shape our fates make us healthier.
Technical & Policy Experts

Our Message Is:

- Public health is an objective way to assess how policies and projects interact with each other to serve or disadvantage sectors of the population.
- “Healthy communities” is a way to balance the interests and optimize the benefits for the city as a whole, and vulnerable communities within it.
Decision-Makers

- Our Message Is:
  - City of St. Paul is vying to become the “most livable city in America.” A “healthy corridor” can be the backbone of that claim.
  - Health research, directed by the community and carried out by experts, gives decision-makers solid bases on which to make decisions and prioritize interests.
Our Success (so far)

- HIA Launch!!
  - 21 community groups and partner organizations
  - 14+ technical advisors from all sectors
  - Public support of 2 key decision-makers

- Interest and invitations to share what we’re doing - like this!

Ongoing Challenges

- Keep messages targeted to audiences without spreading different, or conflicting messages
- Don’t overpromise
Lessons

- “Healthy Communities” makes clear that health comes from the quality of our environments, our connectedness to services and institutions, and our relationships.
- It reveals the possibility that health isn’t something we buy, or depends solely on our individual behavior.
- It’s something we build…together.