

Join the Conversation: Regional Infrastructure Asset Management Summits

Spring 2019 Summary Report

Background

The Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC), in partnership with regions across the state, designed a two-part summit series aimed at improving coordination and collaboration across a diverse set of stakeholders regarding water, transportation, utilities, and telecommunications infrastructure. The series consists of meetings in the spring and fall of 2019 and is funded by Integrated Asset Management grants provided through the Michigan Regional Prosperity Initiative.

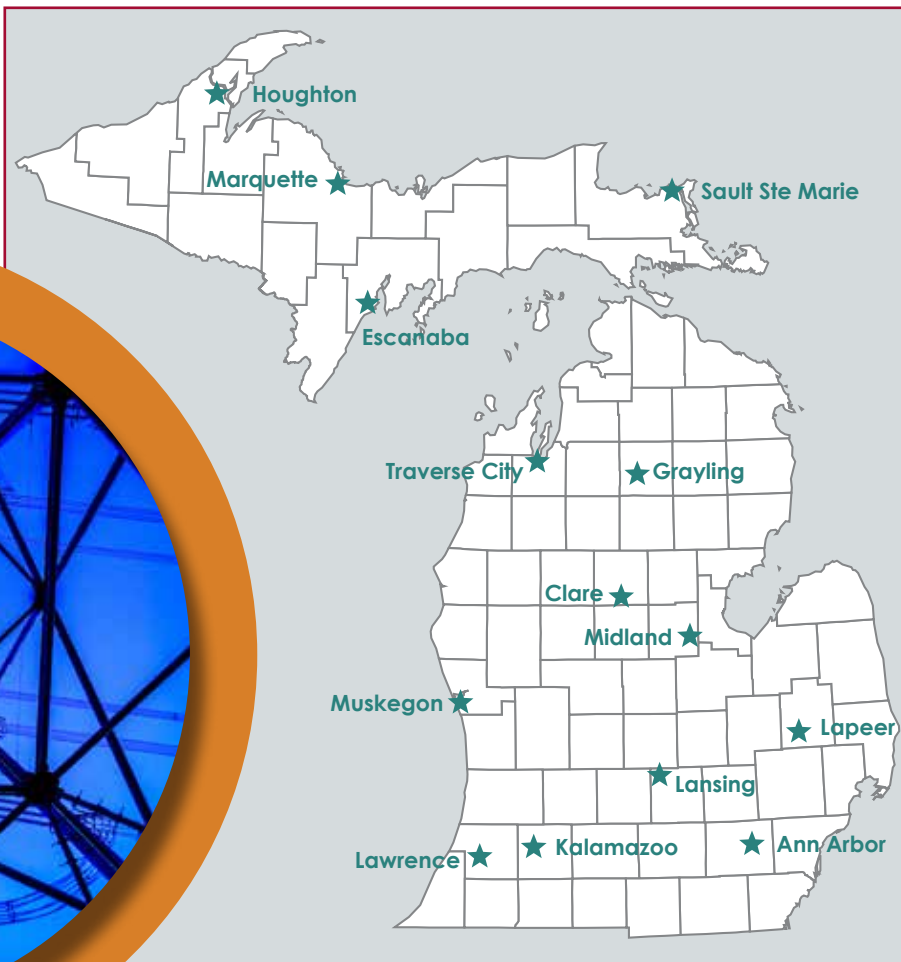
Logistics and Events

The theme for the spring summits was “Beginning the Conversation” and thus featured

introductory content pertaining to integrated asset management in Michigan and activities that prompted new conversations between participants. The format was a fast-paced mix of educational material, interactive problem-solving, and facilitated discussion.

MIC personnel worked closely with the Michigan Association of Regions (MAR) as the regional planning agencies to schedule fifteen summits across the state. The regions served as host and managed local invitations and logistics for each of the summits.

A standard presentation was given by MIC personnel to establish a common understanding of Michigan's infrastructure challenges, the concept and value of best practice asset management, and the three Michigan councils created to address statewide infrastructure asset management: Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC), Transportation Asset Management Council (TAMC), and the Water Asset Management Council (WAMC).



At registration, participants were asked which infrastructure type(s) they owned or managed and were given colored sticky dots representing water (blue), transportation (green), utilities (red), and/or communications (yellow) to adhere to their name tag. Following the standard presentation, participants were asked to “shuffle” their seating location. They reorganized into small groups to enable meeting new peers and to ensure the small groups represented diverse assets, based on their colored sticky dots. Each table was then asked to discuss and record responses to the following questions:

- How can Michigan improve the culture of infrastructure asset management?
What are we doing that fails?
What are we doing that works?
- Do you have suggestions for increasing cross-asset project coordination?
What are the barriers to project coordination today?
Where are opportunities for improvement?

At the conclusion of the small group activity, MIC personnel and regional staff facilitated a group discussion to share results and gather feedback.

Results and Observations

The spring summits and ensuing feedback well exceeded expectations. There is keen interest in collaboration and coordination across the state. This was precisely measured through the breadth and diversity of responses and approximated through decisive head-nods when asked, “Was today’s summit a success?”

Each region attracted a diverse and engaged register of participants, offering unique perspectives and eliciting animated conversation. After attending one summit, several attendees registered for additional summits and/or requested confirmation that they would be invited to the fall summits. Of note, many non-asset owning participants (e.g. planners, economic developers, state agencies, local officials, etc.) intentionally attended multiple summits, stating that the events were an ideal platform for engaging with constituents and actively listening to their concerns.

Bringing together the varied infrastructure owners and managers allowed issues and misunderstandings to be resolved real-time. Many of the summits acknowledged communication barriers between the public and private sectors or between state and local governments. This recognition prompted candid conversation and in at least three known instances, allowed a chronic communication problem to be corrected in the moment.

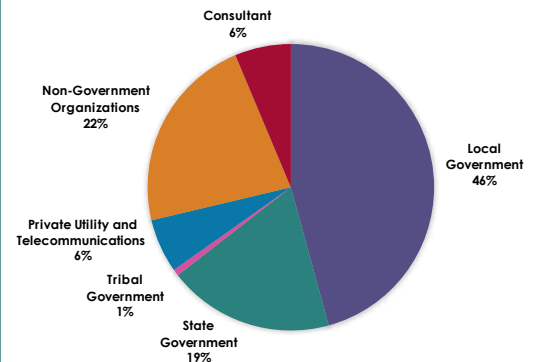
Common Themes and Feedback Highlights

While each summit was a unique reflection of that region’s geography and circumstances, there were several reoccurring themes that translated across the state. Stories of resource constraints and missed opportunities for coordination were prevalent, but so were stories of collaborative success - highlighting communities that had joined together to share procurement or construction costs, leveraged data to educate residents and leadership to support a millage, or saved money

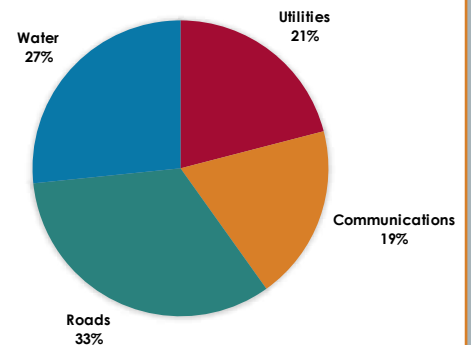
SUMMIT AGENDA

- 10 Minutes – Introductions
- 30 Minutes – Presentation
- 10 Minutes – Break and Room Shuffle
- 30 Minutes – Small Group Activity
- 60 Minutes – Facilitated Discussion

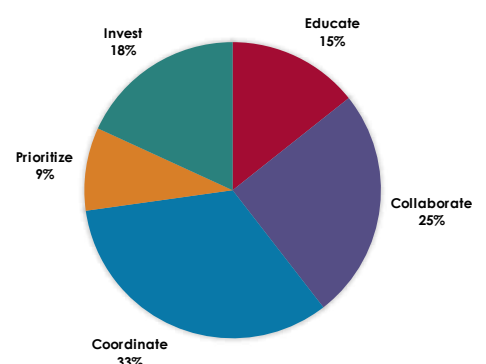
DISTRIBUTION OF ORGANIZATIONS



ASSET DISTRIBUTION AS SELF-IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS



FEEDBACK DISTRIBUTION AS ALIGNED WITH MIC GOALS



and reduced citizen burden by replacing underground infrastructure while reconstructing a road.

In contrast to the shared themes, each summit also prompted “ah-ha” moment(s) where the conversation diverted into a local concern or the shared recognition of a systemic problem – often unrelated to infrastructure, but still impacting collaboration and coordination. Feedback identified the “busyness” of schedules and the rapid turnover of staff as constraints to collaboration, complexity and limited staff as disincentives to application for funding/financing programs, and the unintended consequences of large, multi-year projects, such as scarcity of affordable housing for contractors.

The spring summits provided a platform for candid conversation, active listening, and a comprehensive catalog of feedback. The intent was not to develop a solution. Feedback will be elevated through the ongoing efforts of the three Michigan councils and future summits, and where feasible, leveraged to direct statewide infrastructure-related activities.

A full listing of the summit feedback, organized by region, can be found at the MIC website: www.michigan.gov/mic. A few common themes, and their alignment with the MIC goals, are listed below (Table 1).

Table 1: Common Themes and Alignment with MIC

Collaborate
Lack of current contact information due to frequent staff turnover or retirements and/or not knowing who to call limits collaboration
Data sharing is a challenge due to confidentiality and liability concerns, security issues, inaccuracies, and/or lack of available data
There is a desire to collaborate, there just isn't enough hours in the week to participate in all the meetings – bringing everyone together at one event, like the regional summits, is very helpful
Coordinate
In many local instances, coordination across assets and/or between public and private entities is improving. That said, there are still too many road cuts to new roads – increasing citizen burden and reducing the lifespan of the road – “Dig Once”
Project coordination has a direct impact on the bottom line – significant cost savings have been recognized
Prioritize
Infrastructure owners and managers are too often forced into a reactionary mode, rather than operating proactively and leveraging asset management
It is difficult to properly prioritize work given the requirements and strict cycles of funding sources
Infrastructure owners and managers need to better account for risk, criticality, and impact of asset failure when prioritizing projects
Educate
It is important to educate ourselves, local leaders, and the general public regarding the true cost of ownership over the lifecycle of an asset and the value of asset management principles
“Worst First” and reactive fixes are not asset management
Success stories exist and they need to be championed
Staffing is a challenge – talent gaps and budget constraints limit the ability to meet asset management goals
Invest
Significant financing and funding sources are not aligned – fiscal years, funding cycles, and application requirements all vary – impacting the ability to coordinate and leverage multiple sources
The process of applying for grant funding is cumbersome – the cost of application and reporting requirements if awarded often outweigh the value of the grant
Continue to build on successful programs, such as the SAW (Stormwater Asset Management) grants

“Local politicians, community leaders, utilities, anybody that’s working with infrastructure or that’s making decisions needs to be involved,”... “if you pave a road, you want to make sure everything is fixed underneath so you don’t have to dig it up two months later.”

*Alan Cooper, Manager
Wexford County Road Commission*

“I was surprised at the level of comradery and desire to work together by the different players in the room. Attendees seemed in agreement that the plan to coordinate efforts and meet regularly is a good one.”

*Jenelle Jagmin, Economic/
Community Development Analyst
Michigan Department of
Agriculture and Rural Development*

“The financial opportunities can be so limiting that we end up planning a project to the funding source, not funding the project that we’re planning.”

*Linda Basista, City Engineer
Sault Ste. Marie*

“Our table found this conversation so valuable – we’ve exchanged contact information so we can meet up again every year.”

Participant at Kalamazoo Event

“This communication is needed. As leaders, we aren’t here to change your mailing address or sense of place, but we do need to work together to build resilient and regional infrastructure.”

*Former local government
official at Lansing Event*

“Our two communities are neighbors. This guy and I used to get together for lunch all the time, but we haven’t seen each other in a year or more. We just need to set aside time to talk and collaborate.”

Participant at Muskegon Event

“The summits were well coordinated and provided significant opportunities to interact with our customers as we collaboratively build a culture of asset management.”

*Mark Conradi,
Departmental Analyst, Michigan
Department of Environment,
Great Lakes, and Energy*

* Mark attended all 15 summits.



SPRING SUMMITS – BY THE NUMBERS

15 summits in **14** communities over **6** weeks

450 participants including government officials representing local, regional, state, and tribal jurisdictions, private utilities and telecommunications, non-governmental organizations, and consultants

246 different organizations represented across the summits

879 individual pieces of feedback

Fall Summits and Next Steps

MIC personnel and regional staff are currently working to schedule the fall summits. These summits will be similarly hosted across the state and will take place from mid-October through mid-November 2019.

The fall summits will incorporate and build upon the feedback gathered at the spring summits. The successful, interactive format will be replicated with a focus on three activities: (1) introduction of the TAMC/WAMC asset management templates, (2) demonstration of new technology aimed at integrated project coordination, and (3) completion of an asset management readiness assessment survey that can be used to support best practice asset management processes.

Acknowledgments

Regional Hosts and Liaisons: Michigan Association of Regions (MAR), Nicole Baumer, Heather Bowden, Derek Bradshaw, Steven Duke, Kathy Egan, John Egelhaaf, Jane Fitzpatrick, Sue Fortune, Jeff Hagan, Erin Kuhn, Dotty LaJoye, Jacob Maurer, Christina McEmber, Alanna Mingay, Diane Rekowski, Ryan Soucy, Jerry Wuorenmaa

Council Members and Staff of the Michigan Infrastructure Council, Water Asset Management Council, and Transportation Asset Management Council

Summit Presenters: Mark Conradi, Joanna Johnson, Jon Kangas, Erin Kuhn, Jessica Moy, John Weiss

