Information Item

Transportation Advisory Board

Meeting Date: February 18, 2026 **Date**: February 10, 2026

Topic

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgement at the Transportation Advisory Board

To: Transportation Advisory Board

From: TAB Chair James Hovland

Prepared By: Elaine Koutsoukos, TAB Coordinator, 651-602-1717

Information Item Background

The Metropolitan Council (Council) established an American Indian Advisory Council as part of development of Imagine 2050 to implement a community-centered engagement approach, initiate co-creation of a regional land acknowledgement with the region's American Indian population, and acknowledge the historic harm that American Indian people in this region have survived. The American Indian Advisory Council Background is attached. Approximately 75,000 native Americans are in the 7-county metro area. Based on immediate feedback from the Advisory Council, the land acknowledgement transformed into a land, water, and people commitments of the Council.

Acknowledgment

1. As a responsible government agency, the Council will lead in publicly recognizing the genocide and displacement that American Indian communities survived and continue to endure.
2. The Advisory Council drafted a Land, Water, and People Acknowledgement Statement for the Met Council and to include in Imagine 2050.
3. The Advisory Council encouraged the Met Council to understand the value of a statement is to increase recognition of the seven-county region as Dakota land and promote action.

The Council approved the Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgement Statement (attached).
The Council's recommendations for use include:

- Read at the start of every Council meeting and meetings of the Council's Committees
- Include in public facing planning documents and adopt as part of Imagine 2050
- Include in new employee onboarding/orientation and all employee continuing education
- Adapt for use at Council buildings and facilities including Robert Street, Heywood, and the Metro Plant. This could take many forms including a plaque on the wall or interpretive art pieces and should reflect the purpose and audience of the building.

TAB Executive Committee Discussion Summary

The Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgement has been placed at the beginning of the TAB agenda. The Acknowledgement was discussed at the October 15, 2025, TAB Executive Committee meeting. Alison Waukau, Council Tribal Liaison, provided information on the acknowledgement and recommended reading the acknowledgement quarterly or seasonally or when TAB is making a major decision. At the October 15, 2025, TAB meeting, it was decided that an action item would be prepared and brought forward to TAB to determine the frequency for reading the acknowledgement at TAB and its technical committees.

Staff Analysis

In preparing the action item, it was determined that TAB members should discuss the options for the frequency of the reading in order to provide a motion for action. TAB members are requested to discuss the frequency of the reading the acknowledgement at TAB meetings and make a recommendation for the frequency of reading the acknowledgement at the technical committee meetings. The technical committees have decided to read the acknowledgement at the January meeting each year until they receive further direction from TAB.

Metropolitan Council American Indian Advisory Council

Background

The Metropolitan Council (Council) established an American Indian Advisory Council as part of development of Imagine 2050 to implement a community-centered engagement approach, initiate co-creation of a regional land acknowledgement with the region's American Indian population, and acknowledge the historic harm that American Indian people in this region have survived. Based on immediate feedback from the Advisory Council, the land acknowledgement transformed into a land, water, and people commitments of the Council.

Highly respected and influential members of the American Indian community in this region serve on the Advisory Council. Advisory Council members represent Dakota, Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, and Lakota Tribal nations, and they represent a broad spectrum of community elders, artists, advocates, and youth representatives.

American Indian Advisory Council Recommendations for Metropolitan Council Commitments

The Advisory Council members meet with each division lead and created the following commitments.

Overall Policy and Operational Commitments

The Met Council (Council) will adopt an overarching Tribal relations policy that includes a recognition of history and impact, a commitment to staffing and resources to adequately partner with tribes and American Indian communities, a commitment to organizational education, a current Tribal consultation and American Indian community engagement policy, and support for organizational change to implement the commitments throughout the region.

Acknowledgment

1. As a responsible government agency, the Council will lead in publicly recognizing the genocide and displacement that American Indian communities survived and continue to endure.

2. The Advisory Council is drafting a Land, Water, and People Acknowledgement Statement for the Met Council and to include in Imagine 2050.

3. The Advisory Council encourages the Met Council to understand the value of a statement is to increase recognition of the seven-county region as Dakota land and promote action.

Staffing and Resources

1. The Council will work to increase American Indian staff representation across all divisions and specifically hire and support Tribal Liaison(s) to work with Tribal nations and American Indian partners in new and meaningful relationships.

2. The Council will work in partnership with American Indian organizations and leaders to develop regional tools, resources, and guidelines to mitigate the volume of individual requests received by American Indian organizations. Topics include, but are not limited to, restoring or developing indigenous place names and land management practices.

3. The Council will create a reparative action fund to finance mitigation measures for known and acknowledged past harms to the environment, to Indigenous communities, to Black communities, and communities of color unjustly harmed by past local or Council actions.

Organizational Education

1. The Council will develop a required internal Tribal relations training program and expectations and support for staff to engage in ongoing learning and action.

2. The Council will work with partners to explore development of a regional Tribal Relations training course that would be available to local government staff and regional leaders.

Tribal Consultation and Engagement

1. The Council will update its Tribal consultation policy to require robust and proactive engagement with Tribal governments and relevant community organizations, following best practices and international rights for indigenous peoples. The policy will be easily accessible, include expectations for engagement beyond consultation, and establish guidance for conflict resolution.

a. In support of consultation and proactive engagement, the Council will provide funding for Tribes to conduct their own site analysis in advance of and throughout large construction projects.

2. The Council will consider convening a permanent tribal relations body to support relationship building within transportation and transit projects and operations to ensure American Indian community knowledge and perspectives inform decisions and practices.

Organizational Change

1. The Council will consider formalizing American Indian representation on the Council itself as well as through advisory councils and committees.

2. In partnership with the Governor's office, the Council will consider requesting the addition of new district seats to represent the American Indian peoples of the region.

3. The Council will establish a permanent American Indian Advisory Council to continue to guide Council activities and hold the Council accountable to its commitments. The Council will continue to support the Advisory Council in its current form on an interim basis to develop an implementation strategy for commitments adopted as part of Imagine 2050.

4. The Council will work to restructure its relationship with urban American Indian organizations by establishing formal relationships (i.e., Memorandum of Understanding, or other structure) to provide ongoing engagement, resources, and support for the American Indian communities in the region as it relates to the Council's work.

5. The Council will update its real estate policy for the disposition of Council-owned land to prioritize partnership with and the needs of Tribal nations and American Indian communities. If opportunities to return land arise, the four Dakota tribes of Minnesota must be involved and consulted.

Regional Policy Commitments

The Council will adopt policies supporting the wellbeing of Indigenous communities as a part of the regional development guide, affirming the priorities of the American Indian Advisory Council.

Regional Parks and Trails System

1. The Council will develop a cultural landscape designation and related policies grounded in Tribal sovereignty and recognition of Dakota homelands and sacred sites.

2. The Council will support waived fees for entry, activities, and events for the American Indian communities and facilitate conversations with implementing agencies to that end.

3. The Council will work with partners to do a historical and cultural inventory of the regional parks and trails system, including surveying the location, name, and history of the parks as well as cross-referencing locations with inventories of possible burial mounds.

4. The Council will develop a training program for staff from parks implementing agencies about indigenous land management practices.

5. The Council will assess the regional parks Equity Grant Program to encourage pilot programs that develop harvesting practices and policies.

6. The Council will convene conversations with American Indian partners and implementing agencies to develop policies and processes to ensure harvesting is respectful and meets community needs.

7. The Council will partner with American Indian organizations and Tribes to lead an inventory of harvestable plants in regional parks to increase understanding of existing resources and open conversations with implementing agencies.

Water Policy

1. The Council will analyze and reduce operational effects of environmental services infrastructure on sacred sites.

a. In preparation for the opening of the Wakan Tipi Center in summer 2025, the Council will proactively work alongside Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi to prioritize innovative solutions to minimize the operational impact and relocate the wastewater receiving station. The Met Council will ensure that Wakan Tipi is consulted as a priority during construction planning for any projects near the site.

2. The Council will advocate for a new political imagination of how water policy and standards are created and implemented that integrates a framework based on water as a relative.

a. The Council will take a leadership role in coordinating between Tribal staff and relevant state agencies' staff including Tribal Liaisons.

3. The Council will explore ways to include Tribes and American Indian organizations in funding opportunities while removing barriers to providing regional sewer service to Tribes, when requested.

Environmental Justice

1. The Council will integrate environmental justice work across divisions. Council leadership at all levels will support it through staffing, funding, and integration into project work.

2. The Council will work to increase regional understanding of the American Indian communities, including historical and contemporary environmental injustices faced by the American Indian communities to address community concerns and maximize direct community benefits for the future.

3. The Council will ensure that it produces data and metrics that are clear, accessible, and relevant to the American Indian communities and be accountable to its commitments.

Transportation Policy

1. The Council will engage the American Indian communities and organizations early in station remodels, especially for stations in areas with large American Indian populations.

2. The Council will continue using public art and explore using American Indian languages to build a sense of place at new or remodeled stations.

3. The Council will continue to partner with American Indian organizations including Metropolitan Urban Indian Directors and Saint Paul Indians in Action and to work together on safety issues in and around Metro Transit facilities.

4. The Council will provide guidance to cities and counties around best practices – based on free, prior, and informed consent - for Tribal engagement in transportation projects.

a. The Council will collaborate with partners involved in the Riverview Corridor project to reflect on the process and identify opportunities to document the full, equal, and effective participation from Tribal nations, with the intention of using any lessons learned in future projects.

5. The Council will identify how the transportation system can better support and serve Dakota, Ojibwe, and Ho-Chunk cultural resources and implement those actions.

Housing Policy

1. The Council will update its housing voucher programs and selection process to begin reconciling the historic racism and relocation that creates unsheltered American Indian people on their homelands. The distinct political status of American Indian people sets the basis for the Council's governmental responsibility to act on the disproportionate number of unsheltered American Indians.

a. The Council will update its Administrative Plan in preparation for opening the Housing Choice Voucher waiting list in 2025 to set aside a percentage of waiting list placements for households that identify as American Indian. The Council will engage with the American Indian community to determine to appropriate set-aside percentage. The Council will share the process and outcomes of this policy change with other HRAs in the region.

2. The Council will partner with American Indian community organizations to work on targeting new vouchers coming through programs like Bring It Home.

3. The Council will work through its role on the Fair Housing Implementation Council and the Continuums of Care to identify funding opportunities for which American Indian community organizations could apply in future Requests for Proposals.

4. The Council will engage with the American Indian households receiving Metro HRA vouchers on wealth building strategies and future potential homeownership programs.

5. The Council will identify ways to increase investment in American Indian organizations and projects by reducing barriers to accessing grants and funding with a priority for American Indian organizations providing supportive services for residents or developing deeply affordable housing.

6. The Council will explore the inclusion of fair housing guidance specific to Tribal citizens for communities and development partners in the region, as part of housing policy resources for

communities seeking to meet fair housing policy requirements for Livable Communities Act grants.

7. The Council will partner with American Indian organizations to develop relevant technical assistance on homeownership programs for American Indian people to increase understanding of the programs in the region's housing sector.

Dakota Makoce k'a Mni Okiciyaka:

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment - Short Statement

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the land we currently call Minnesota and specifically the seven-county region is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota Oyate who are present and active contributors to our thriving region. The Metropolitan Council commits to address the unresolved legacy of genocide, dispossession, and settler colonialism and the fact that government institutions, including the Metropolitan Council, benefitted economically, politically, and institutionally after the forceable removal of the Dakota Oyate. The Metropolitan Council is dedicated to action - starting with the 2024 Land, Water, and People Commitments - to support the Dakota Oyate, the eleven federally recognized Dakota and Ojibwe Tribes in Minnesota, Ho-Chunk Nation, and the American Indian Communities representing over 150 diverse Tribal Nations that call the seven-county region home.

Recommendations for use:

- Read at the start of every Council meeting and meetings of the Council's Committees
- Include in public facing planning documents and adopt as part of Imagine 2050
- Include in new employee onboarding/orientation and all employee continuing education
- Adapt for use at Council buildings and facilities including Robert Street, Heywood, and the Metro Plant. This could take many forms including a plaque on the wall or interpretive art pieces and should reflect the purpose and audience of the building.

Dakota Makoce k'a Mni Okiciyaka:

Dakota Land, Water, and People Acknowledgment – Long Statement

The seven-county region sits upon a creation site of the Dakota Oyate, where Mnisota Wakpa (Minnesota River) and Haha Wakpa (Mississippi River) converge on a sacred site called Bdote (where the rivers meet). Mni Sota Makoce, also known as Minnesota, holds immense significance as the origin of Dakota identity, languages, stewardship practices, and ways of life. For the Dakota people, there is not a separate creator and creation, a belief that is meaningfully encapsulated in the saying "Mitakuye Oyasin," which translates to "we are all related." This interconnectedness guides the original instructions the Dakota

hold for the land, their traditions, and their place within the broader circle of existence. It is the spiritual source from which the Dakota Oyate originated and where they committed themselves to conserve, transmit, and steward their ancestral lands and ways of life for the next seven generations. For countless generations, Mni Sota Makoce (The Land of Mist) has always been the primary identity shaper for the national character and life of the Dakota Oyate.

Land that makes up Minnesota is also the ancestral homelands of the Ojibwe, Ho-Chunk, and the Ioway peoples. Violent settler-colonial policies- such as the passing of the Homestead Act, which facilitated the influx of settlers into these lands, and the 1863 Dakota Removal Act, which resulted in the systematic incarceration and forced displacement of most Dakota people from Minnesota- historical injustices, and traumas inflicted upon the Tribal communities have had far-reaching and enduring impacts. Despite the legacy of genocide, Tribal Nations' sovereignty and right to exist as distinct Nations persist to this day.

The Metropolitan Council acknowledges that the land we currently call Minnesota and specifically the seven-county region is the ancestral homeland of the Dakota Oyate who are present and active contributors to our thriving region. The Metropolitan Council commits to address the unresolved legacy of genocide, dispossession, and settler colonialism and the fact that government institutions, including the Metropolitan Council, benefitted economically, politically, and institutionally after the forceable removal of the Dakota Oyate. The Metropolitan Council is dedicated to action - starting with the 2024 Land, Water, and People Commitments - to support the Dakota Oyate, the eleven federally recognized Dakota and Ojibwe Tribes in Minnesota, Ho-Chunk Nation, and the American Indian Communities representing over 150 diverse Tribal Nations that call the seven-county region home.

We are dedicated to ensuring a rights-based approach in our partnerships and decisions and promoting the wellbeing of the Dakota and Ojibwe Nations, as well as American Indian communities in the seven-county metro region. We will adhere to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and Minnesota Private Cemeteries Act, and actively pursue restoration of Dakota Lands where feasible, recognizing the importance of returning lands to their rightful stewards.

Summary of the Commitments

As part of Land, Water, and People Commitments, the Metropolitan Council is dedicated to the following:

- The Metropolitan Council will adopt an overarching Tribal Relations Policy that includes a recognition of history and impact, commit to supporting staffing and resources to adequately partner with Tribes and American Indian communities, commit to organizational education, develop a current Tribal Consultation and American Indian Community Engagement Policy, and support organizational change to implement the commitments throughout the organization and with partners across the region.
- The Council will adopt policies supporting the wellbeing of American Indian communities as a part of the regional development guide, Imagine 2050, affirming the priorities of the American Indian Advisory Council and commitments in the Regional Parks and Trails System Policy, Water Policy, Transportation Policy, Housing Policy, and Environmental Justice Framework, specifically.

Recommendations for use:

- Create a Council webpage about American Indian and Tribal relations that includes the long statement.
- Use the long statement where recognition or moments of reflection are appropriate and needed, and in organizational education.
- Include as part of educational resources for employees, residents, and local governments.