Changing Minds through Deliberation: 
Citizens’ Accounts of Their Changing Local Transportation Policy Preferences

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Abstract

This paper investigates how deliberative public engagement processes transform stakeholders’ understandings of complex local road transportation policy issues and their policy preferences. Scholars have argued that participants in policy deliberations gain new knowledge and perspectives, and frequently also change their own views about policy problems and solutions. We do not, however, have good accounts of how participants learn through deliberation. This paper research addresses that gap with a rich account, from participants’ perspectives, of how they learned through a series of deliberative dialogues about how to sustain local road systems in Beltrami County, Minnesota. Many individuals changed their position from strong opposition to strong support for selected policy options, and the group collectively moved from divergent to convergent views about a new local tax for transportation. We use mixed methods to analyze how the deliberative processes influenced participants to sustain or change their views, working with a combination transcripts and observations of the community meetings, surveys of attitudes before and after meetings, and follow-up interviews with participants.
Deliberation and Changing Minds

Many of the prominent claims about what is distinctive and important about deliberation, relative to other forms of democratic engagement, center on the idea that deliberation allows participants to learn or change their minds. Existing scholarship finds that learning occurs through a combination of political theory about what deliberation should do and of empirical evidence of changes in participants’ knowledge and views before and after deliberation.

Deliberation has been found to permit participants to become better informed about the policy issues (Jacobs et al. 2009) and to empathize with others’ perspectives (Young 2000, Polletta and Lee 2006). Deliberating together transforms understandings of issues and interests (Fung 2007, Mandarano 2008), allowing participants to develop an “enlarged view” of the public or commonly shared interests at stake (Abers 2000). It enables participants to exchange and generate new knowledge (Roberts 2004), including by discovering new problem definitions and solutions (Reich 1990, Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, Innes and Booher 2010). Often the conveners of deliberative conversations, not just the participants, gain new knowledge and perspectives or change their views (Roberts 2004, Innes and Booher 2010, Quick and Feldman 2011). In fact, one of the more promising proposed methods for evaluating the effectiveness of deliberation efforts relates to measuring individual and collective learning (Deyle and Schively Slotterback 2009). However, scholars and practitioners lack measures and data for evaluating whether and how deliberation does in fact have these impacts (Bryson et al. 2013), a gap this paper seeks to address.

The Policy Issue: Sustaining Local Road Systems

This research investigates a series of deliberative dialogues that were held in 2013 with interested stakeholders in Beltrami County, Minnesota about the status of the county road system, concerns about it, and options to address challenges in the quality of the infrastructure. Here, we present the context that gave rise to the dialogues.

General policy context

Persistent resource shortfalls and historic changes in usage of local road systems are challenging local government managers to keep up with maintaining their local road infrastructure. This paper is part of a larger research project which included an initial assessment of the views of diverse stakeholders about local road systems issues, including their general level of attentiveness to the issue, their perceptions about whether there is currently a problem (and if so, to what extent and what its sources are), and their preferences about a variety of options for managing local roads. The data were collected through unstructured and extended interviews with 21 persons, a review of policy documents and media coverage, and observations of policy dialogues at the state and local government levels. Through these sources, we assessed the perspectives of a variety of stakeholders, namely local public works leaders, elected officials, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the media, a variety of interest groups with particular interests in transportation (e.g., major users of roads; interest groups with particular interests in transportation generally, particular modes of transportation such as bicycling, or sustainability), and the general public. The full results of that study are reported elsewhere (Quick et al. 2014). To address the communication gaps, we developed a brief presentation about local roads issues and options for use with non-experts, viewable at http://tinyurl.com/local-roads.

The public agencies responsible for roads have long been aware of the many, complex issues challenging sustainability. Indeed, they have been so resourceful with efficiencies, new technologies, or deferred maintenance, that in many places their constituents have not recognized the difficulties or faced the real
costs of keeping up the road system that we have. However, a harsh winter, flooding, and some high-profile infrastructure failures have suddenly made the importance and difficulty of maintaining roads much more visible to the public. Stakeholders are not only entitled to have a say about these issues, but potentially a constraint and/or a great resource for forging solutions, where stakeholders are defined as anyone who can influence or will be affected by the decisions (Bryson 2004). The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 imposed new requirements for public involvement in the planning process in the U.S. However, thus far there has been limited public engagement on the particular issue of local road systems (Quick and Zhao 2011).

Beltrami County Context

Beltrami County is large and challenged by an extensive county road system in poor repair (Table 1). For several years, residents in some areas of the county have been complaining about deteriorating road quality, and public managers and elected commissioners have also become concerned about declining infrastructure. When a new county engineer, Bruce Hasbargen, was appointed, he began to assess the needs, formulate options, and discuss the problem with county administrators and commissioners in a different way. In December 2012, Hasbargen presented a five year road construction program to the County Commissioners, in which he estimated US$80 million are needed to bring the road system to an acceptable performance level from the current condition following years of deferred maintenance and increased traffic volume. To address these issues, in July 2013 the Commissioners took advantage of a new state policy and adopted a $10 annual wheelage tax on all motor vehicles registered within the county. The estimated US$340,000 annual revenue will service US$6 million in bonds for transportation capital improvements and maintenance. Property tax increases are considered politically untenable and insufficient because there is high percentage of non-taxable (state, federal, tribal, and nonprofit) property and rates are already considered high.

Table 1. Beltrami County’s transportation system and engagement efforts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of road system</th>
<th>The county is large (6520 km2) and challenged by an extensive county road system in poor repair. The county is responsible for 1130 km of county roads, including 485 km of gravel roads. Other roads within the county borders are managed by the federal, state, municipal, township, or tribal governments.</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic and land use features</td>
<td>Total county population is approximately 45,670. Most residents are white (75%) or American Indian (20%). The average population density is 7/km2. Land use is heterogeneous. Within the county is the city of Bemidji, which serves as a major shopping, educational, and administrative center for a large region. Other major economic activities include agriculture (crops and cattle), recreation and tourism, and timber. Within the county are extensive areas of tribal, federal, and state that is not subject to property tax and which complicate treating roads as an integrated system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public engagement topic</td>
<td>Coping with an extensive county road system in poor repair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public engagement methods</td>
<td>Focus groups with particular interest groups, followed by analysis of their input, followed by roundtable dialogue of all parties. Facilitators helped roundtable participants to focus on areas of disagreement or confusion to seek clarity, explore convergence. Evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public engagement policy outcomes</td>
<td>Participants strongly opposed doing nothing and allowing roads to deteriorate, and came to strongly support a ½ cent sales tax to fund transportation. Subsequently the county commissioners unanimously passed the ½ cent sales tax, bolstered in part by support from champions developed through the engagement efforts.</td>
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Also in early 2013, the Minnesota state legislature introduced a new policy (2013 Minnesota statute 297A.993) to allow counties to institute a ½ cent sales tax for transportation by a majority vote of their county commissioners. Anticipating Beltrami County would be considering the sales tax, county staff approached the researchers to support a public engagement effort about system-wide local road needs and options. In December 2013, the commissioners unanimously passed the sales tax, one of the first counties in the state. Interview data and commissioner meeting records indicate that the deliberative process conducted through this research was a key foundation for this policy outcome.

Research Methods

This paper is the result of an engaged scholarship project in which the researchers collaborated with the county managers and elected officials in three counties in Minnesota, including Beltrami County. The researchers’ roles included designing, supporting implementation of, and evaluating a public engagement strategy to address local roads concerns. Here we analyze the Beltrami County case because, of the three counties it was the one employing the most extensive deliberation and the one for which we have the most data. We analyzed the effects of deliberation on the participants through a combination of methods: analysis of complete transcripts of the deliberative dialogues, comparison of quantitative surveys of participant attitudes that were administered before and after the dialogues, and semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the participants following the dialogues.

The public communication and engagement plan the researchers developed involved a model of deliberative dialogues with key stakeholders. We began with a preliminary exploration of the local roads issues, accomplished through two site visits to meet with local public works leaders and elected officials and tour the area, reviewing policy documents, media coverage, and other content, and exploratory interviews with county staff, state employees of the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and elected officials. Following this initial scoping, in consultation with the county engineer and county administrator, the researchers defined the topic and decided on a series of deliberative for the engagement process. We then actively identified and recruited stakeholders for the engagement process, in an iterative effort the researchers and local collaborators to identify a broad array of stakeholders that neither side could have generated alone.

We held three focus group consultations, each with homogenous groups of key stakeholders, followed by a policy roundtable to which all of the people invited to any of the focus groups were also invited. These meetings were designed for education, exchange, exploration, and group learning about the issues — not for decision-making. Focus group participants received a one-page handout, developed by the researchers with input from the county engineer, to convey basic information about the local road system problems. Two members of the research team, Kathryn Quick and Guillermo Narváez, facilitated a deliberative dialogue for each focus group, using a standard structured series of questions, which was the same for all three groups. The individual groups were oriented to particular populations of stakeholders: members of the business community (3), public agencies that are responsible for or that use the regional road system to accomplish their core work (11), and members of the interested public (12). For each of the meetings, at least one County Commissioner was present (2), as well as the County Engineer, who listened to the dialogue and addressed questions. County Administrator Kay Mack was present for two of the three meetings. 26 participants took part in the three groups, held August 13 and 14, 2013.

Upon entering the focus groups, and before the dialogue, all participants were asked to complete a confidential survey regarding their key concerns, their self-assessment of their level of knowledge, and their level of support or opposition for an array of policy options for managing local roads. For quantitative analysis, their expressed level of support was translated to a five-point Likert scale (Bernard, 2011: 327). The research team then analyzed the surveys and the focus group transcripts to identify key concerns to reflect back to the group at the subsequent meeting. The researchers also identified areas where misunderstandings needed to be cleared up, or where people seemed inclined to change their
support or opposition to a policy issue (in either direction) if they were given more information. Above all, the researchers facilitated the dialogue to focus on areas where there was greatest convergence and divergence in opinions and developed a way to present that information visually. The purpose was to make areas of agreement and disagreement immediately visible to the array of stakeholders, not to force consensus. This work was done at a policy roundtable with the full group on September 19, 2013. The participants comprised a diverse group of 25, including three county commissioners, senior county staff, numerous township officials and other members of the interested public, several business people, and representatives of state, local, and tribal governments.

At the roundtable, the researchers emphasized the convergences that had emerged through the focus groups. Those areas of convergence were near unanimity that the problem with local road system deterioration is serious and should be addressed, strong opposition to a management strategy summarized as “Do nothing and wait and see what happens,” and strong support for innovation for methods and management of the roads. The researchers also explained that one policy option needed to be revisited, despite strong levels of support, because it is not viable, namely reallocating funds from state-mandated programs into transportation. Finally, the researchers facilitated the small group conversations to focus on areas where there had been more ambivalence, to provide more information (where needed) and to have a more in-depth exploration of the different and often contesting perspectives on the options. In facilitating the dialogues, the researchers focused attention on the half-cent local sales tax option in those dialogues since there had been much discussion about it.

Following the meetings, participants were asked to complete again the same written survey they had done before participating in a deliberative dialogue. 24 persons completed surveys both before and after one of the deliberative dialogues, over half of the 42 people who attended a focus group, attended the roundtable, and/or submitted a response to the survey. Finally, confidential phone interviews were conducted with 12 participants in the deliberative dialogues, 1-3 months following the policy dialogue. Interviewees were chosen to represent a diverse array of types of stakeholders (e.g., residents, businesspeople, and public agencies) and a range of initial support to opposition to various policy options. Interviewees were asked to comment on any changes in the level of opposition or support they demonstrated between the pre-engagement and post-engagement survey. They were asked whether any changes seemed significant to them, and to explain how they came to change their minds. They were also asked to reflect on what did and did not work well about the engagement method. The interviews were conducted by Saunoi-Sandgren, who had not been present with Quick and Narváez at the deliberative dialogues, to enable the interviewees to speak comfortably and to gather better data.

This mixed methods approach offers several advantages for the depth and validity of this research. First, the researchers made intentional use of our initially naïve understandings regarding local road system transportation issues to identify and problematize the experience that other people who are not intimately familiar with these issues would experience (Geertz 1973; Fortun 2009). Being participant observers allowed us to identify jargon that needs to be unpacked, discern patterns in the views of different kinds of stakeholders whom we spoke with, and zero in on some of the common misunderstandings and divergences to prioritize in communication and engagement efforts. Second, the data provide perspectives from many kinds of stakeholders, and were gathered and analyzed through a wide range of quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry, including quantitative data from confidential individual surveys, qualitative data from in-depth interviews, content analysis of public media and policy documents, close analysis of the dynamics of group dialogues in facilitated focus groups and policy roundtable, and comparative analysis across three case studies (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2003). This diversity of views and methods allow us to triangulate among various interpretations of the policy issue and public engagement processes (Altheide and Johnson 1994; Yin 2003). Together, these features allow us to generate thick description, enhancing the validity of our interpretive analysis and inductive theory development (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Geertz 1973; Kirk and Miller 1986; Lin 1998; Locke 2001; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea
2013). We analyzed these data using standard coding, categorizing, and memoing techniques (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Lofland and Lofland 1995; Corbin and Strauss 2008).

**Deliberation Outcomes: Evidence of Changing Minds**

As mentioned, ultimately the County Commission passed a half-cent sales tax for transportation in early December 2013, with strong support of the participants in these dialogues. This stands in contrast with the fact that previously a diverse array of parties had strongly opposed the sales tax options. By all accounts, the public communication and engagement processes studied in this project were a key foundation in this transformation. The researchers are continuing to analyze the data about how the transformations in attitudes occurred, but several patterns stand out from the analysis.

Before the meeting, participants completed a confidential survey which included identifying their top three concerns about the local road system. The top items that emerged including maintenance, safety, and keeping what was in place. By the end of the community meetings, their concerns had changed somewhat. Quite remarkably, the surveys showed that following the dialogues, the participants emerged supporting, or even very strongly supporting the half-cent sales tax option. This was in contrast to many of the opinions they recorded on their pre-dialogue survey forms or stated during the initial discussions, when they were strongly opposed to the idea. However, at the conclusion of the policy roundtable, when each participant was asked to summarize briefly the one or two points they wanted to be sure that policy-makers gathered from the meeting, they repeatedly gave accounts of changing their minds through the dialogue. After the meeting, a county leader joked that it had been “like a religious revival where, at the end, people stand up and give testimony about how ‘Now I’ve seen the light.’”

Many participants, when they shared their final comments, explained that they had changed their minds by learning more about the options. For many, an important part of their changing perspectives was coming to see the sales tax as what they considered fair:

- *I came in here opposed to the sales tax. I now recognize the fairness of it and I recognize the need. Communication in the rural areas and the fact that we’re keeping in mind that we need to have arteries that go to the businesses that have value added, manufacturing and all of those, are very important.*

- *I was kind of against the sales tax, too, but it looks a little more like it might be better because you get everybody, pretty much, contributing to it that’s doing business in the county.*

- *We’re fortunate in our township because we’ve got a large tax base and we can increase our [local property tax] big time and property owners don’t even squawk about it. That is very uncommon. But going forward, we do have to think of this as a county-wide issue. It’s an issue that we’re all in together and we need to find something to do through the county that will work for all of the townships.*

Many indicated that, while they did not like the idea of a new sales tax, they had come to see it as the most practical option for addressing the problem given the political dynamics in play:

- *It seems like the consensus in here is a way to fund this through a half-cent sales tax. And it will be unpopular. But it will also be unpopular if nothing is done.*

- *Well, I wasn’t supporting that half percent at all when I came in here today. But as I heard everybody talking and everybody explain stuff to me and picked up this and picked up that, it’s not just such a bad deal. I mean, we’ve got to do something to do this.*
At the rate money is currently flowing for road projects with our existing policies, we'll have different county commissioners before we are done raising the money to fill the gap. So if a resolution was passed, for example, we're going to raise $20 million dollars or $30 million dollars—whatever the money is—through that half cent sales tax for these specific road projects, that might be a way to be able to keep the plan going as commissioners change and the political climate changes.

My thoughts are having a safe, efficient road system is going to be expensive, but not having one that's safe and secure and efficient is probably more expensive. So we have some real tough decisions that we have to face. But I think if we base those decisions on sound fact and research and science, we can make sensible, lasting intelligent decisions that will stand the test of time and people will appreciate those decisions down the road.

There were also interesting dynamics regarding the effects of the deliberations on trust in government. One participant had so strongly opposed the sales tax that, before the deliberative dialogues, he had traveled to the state capitol to lobby against it when the state legislature was considering introducing it as an option for local jurisdictions. At the end of the roundtable, he questioned the county’s calculations about the funding gap, suggesting that he did not find it credible, or that the figure might simply be so large that people would give up, feeling helpless to address it. However, this was in the context of a suggestion that the county improve their outreach so that they could pass the tax, which he had changed his mind to accept was the way to proceed.

I agree with the idea that a tax is going to have to be done to get this project going. I question whether the dollar amount [being given as a justification for the total shortfall in funding we have to make up through the tax] is the right amount. US$80 million [the county engineer’s estimate of the amount needed to restore roads to an acceptable level of service] is an awfully big number for a lot of people. You might want to try a different type of presentation and start with a lower amount.

Others, however, seemed to have gathered more respect and trust in the public managers through hearing from them, having a chance to dialogue with them and learn that the problems are complex and that they are trying their best with their resources. They suggested that a great deal more communication was needed, on an ongoing basis, to build others’ trust:

I think as far as cost cutting, that’s something we need to leave up to the highway department themselves as far as trying to micromanage any of that. I think that’s their business.

The highway department painted themselves in a corner, no question about it. We had a different county engineer, and [our new one] inherited a problem, no question about it. Bruce, you’re doing a fine job. But I agree with a lot that’s been said: people need to be educated and you need more communication.

The comments about communication suggest that participants in the dialogues expected that other people would feel similar, if only they had more information and dialogue as well. As one said:

If indeed the county commissioners are on the same page, and it’s put out to the residents of the county that roads are now what need to happen, they are the next priority in Beltrami County, I believe there would be a wonderful reception would be. That’s the take I get personally from people, almost every day talking to someone about road. I really think people are willing to pay for it if they know they’re paying for it, not paying for somebody’s bigger salary or something like
that. I think people are ready to have that be the problem that’s being solved in whatever way: bonding, half cent sales tax, whatever is come up with.

The shift sales tax was the most remarkable, but it was not the only area in which the participants accomplished convergence, where they had begun with widely divergent and even conflicting views. The feedback about the sales tax presents very strong evidence of a shift in attitudes, but shifts are also notable in the quantitative data collected in the pre- and post-meeting surveys of participants.

The following figure demonstrates the attitudes of support (represented with green, for “go”), neutrality (represented in yellow, for neutral / proceed with caution), and opposition (represented with red, for “no”) that people expressed for different policy options. The side-by-side columns contrast their views about the same policy issue before and after participating in a dialogue. Collectively, they increased their opposition to turnbacks (reassigning county roads to townships or cities) and increased their support for limiting use or charging fees for road use by heavy vehicles and for the half-cent sales tax.

![Figure 1: Shift in attitudes, pre- and post-engagement, on policy areas of initially high divergence in attitudes.](image-url)

All of the participants interviewed later spoke highly of the meeting process and felt it was a meaningful use of their time. This came as a surprise to many, as they said they had very low expectations of the meetings before attending. The explanation they give for their low expectations was that they had previously attended many bad public meetings. They were referring to meetings called by various public agencies, not particularly or exclusively Beltrami County. Asked to explain what they had disliked about those previous meetings, they said that they had not learned anything new, that progress was not made on the problem, or that they felt they were not able to contribute to or influence understandings of the issues and solution. In contrast, they felt that in the dialogues conducted in this project, there was genuine multi-directional communication and learning among the attendees, the "right" people were present and listening to the communication (e.g. county engineer, county commissioners), and they did influence policy outcomes.
Analysis

Our preliminary analysis of transcripts of the deliberative dialogues, the pre- and post-meeting surveys, and the confidential interviews suggests several reasons for participants changing their minds:

The dialogues allowed people to gain more complete information about the issues and to become better informed about options. This was critical for them to change their minds about the nature of the problem and the viability and attractiveness of different policy options. The idea of the half-cent sales tax gained increased acceptance as participants realized that the revenues would be specifically targeted to transportation and as a way to capture revenue from purchases made within the county. Many local road users do not live in Beltrami County or do not pay property taxes, but do make purchases in the county, which is a regional hub for shopping. At the same time, they learned that property taxes, which are already high, would have to be multiplied several times in order to gain the same revenues as a sales tax, or accepted the fact that some funds used for other county activities may not legally be reassigned to roads.

They gained new perspectives and became more empathetic by associating the issue with individuals and their stories. For example, they heard from township fire companies and a trainer for ambulance staff that their teams would drive fire trucks and ambulances as fast as possible to respond to emergencies, no matter the condition of the roads, but that poor conditions imposed terrible wear on their vehicles. People who had been invited because they had contacted the county to complain about the conditions on their particular segment of the county road system heard from others all over the county with similar concerns. Collectively, they and other stakeholders began to see that the problem was widespread and systemic, and that the solutions would have to be systemic as well.

New measures for evaluating and managing the problem became available for consideration. In the dialogues about the worst roads, a sense also emerged that their deterioration was symptomatic of a system-wide problem with underfunding that would need to be addressed holistically and strategically. At the same time, stories from more rural areas of the county compelled people to see their needs differently. Notably, school officials from rural school districts described how poor road conditions make their students’ trips to and from school – sometimes as long as three hours a day - very uncomfortable. Hearing that the county engineer was prioritizing road repair based upon the highest number of vehicle miles traveled on given roadways (i.e., the highest volume of traffic), a school district superintendent suggested that “qualitative” as well as “quantitative” measures should be used. Residents of outlying areas of the county chimed in, suggesting that while only a small percentage of the total traffic in the county may be using their closest county roads, a very high percentage of their travel – to work, school, shopping, services, or church – was on that road. Their point of view was compelling, and at the conclusion of the roundtable, the county engineer told the group he would begin considering what he described as “qualitative as well as quantitative” measures to identify needs and priorities.

Non-experts became more modest about their level of knowledge. The survey that participants completed before and after the deliberations included a question about how well-informed they considered themselves to be about local road issues. Paradoxically, those with specialized expertise or responsibilities for local road systems were less likely to consider themselves highly informed than members of the interested public. Our interpretation, which we would like to probe with additional data collection and analysis, is that representatives of agencies that manage or depend upon roads within the county are more aware of the complex relationships connecting multiple features of the system, options for managing it, and tradeoffs, and so judged their capacity to understand the system more modestly. Following the meetings there was greater recognition by other parties of the complexity of these issues.

Trust with the county government was built over the course of the meetings, but participants requested improved and ongoing communication about highway issues. Participants’ combative ness and frustration with the county government, particularly the highway department, diminished as the dialogues proceeded. Constituents voiced their opinions freely and asked hard questions. They found that the county engineer,
commissioners, and administrators took them seriously, answered their questions, and sympathized with many of their concerns. Several commented that they came to see the county had more limitations, and/or was doing a better job than they had realized. During the meeting, they pressed for more information and criticized some decisions that had been made. When they heard the county engineer, administrator, or commissioners explain their actions, residents were more accepting of the decision. However, they indicated they would have been less confused or angered in the first place if the county had explained it to them with signs on the road, better media coverage, or letters to them.

Implications

As noted, this analysis is preliminary. However, it provides new insights into the mechanisms in play in whether and how deliberation transforms participants’ understandings of the nature of public policy problems and preferences about public management options. Scholars of deliberation in a variety of public affairs and political science fields have made numerous claims that deliberative processes lead to participants’ individual and collective. These are often normative arguments about why deliberation should change minds, or empirical analyses of pre- and post-meeting data (such as the survey used in the current study) that provide evidence of people changing their minds. What we are missing is a rich account of how participants learn through deliberation. This paper is a modest contribution to addressing that gap through adding participants’ perspectives of how they learned through the deliberative processes. To strengthen the analysis, in 2014-16, three to four additional cases will be developed to support comparative analysis by employing the same research design of deliberative interventions, data collection instruments, and analysis, in an additional three to four regions of Minnesota. Preliminary grounded theory development from the existing data point us to two several areas for additional analysis in the data we currently have and will collect, as follows.

First, the issue of trust/distrust in government, so often evoked by public management scholars, is in play in this case. Intriguingly, the data suggest that deliberative processes tend to enhance trust in government. Trust is a poorly defined construct, and there are numerous potentially confounding causal mechanisms that might explain an increase or decrease in trust. Ozawa (2012) has suggested that trust and distrust in government are influences by some combination of four factors: regular communication, faith that government is acting with care for the public welfare and interest, confidence in the technical competence of administrators, and consistent behavior and performance (such that failures or mistakes decisions can be accepted, if they are clearly inconsistent with the general pattern and are explained). We would like to probe these features in our data and their interplay, for example the connection between deliberation as an opportunity for increased communication and the perception of competence or caring that it facilitates.

Second, there is a dynamic complication of the different types of knowledge in the case. Potential barriers among different ways of knowing the issue were rendered into junctures and resources for joint problem solving (Quick and Feldman 2014). The county engineer’s acceptance of “qualitative” criteria as well as traditional engineering measures for prioritizing road construction work is an example of technical measures being discovered and developed through an exchange of different kinds of views. Often different types of knowledge are distinguished as informal, embodied, experiential, context-based, or locally specific “lay” knowledge on the one hand, and formally developed, generalizable, and codified or certified “expert” knowledge on the other (Scott 1998; Yanow 2004; Feldman et al. 2006). In policy-making, expert knowledge is typically privileged (Fischer 2000; Thacher 2009), with an assumption that extensive or special effort is needed to make the complex, expert view understandable to the lay stakeholder or nonexpert policy maker, or that nontechnical stakeholders must advocate extensively to have their perspectives be considered (Jasanoff 1990; Dawes, Creswell, and Pardo 2009). In this case, however, we find that the exchange of views was relatively unproblematic. People seemed to easily understand one another, once given the chance to engage in two-way communication over several meetings. In many ways, “experts” like the county engineer and administrators may have traveled as
much distance as any “lay” participant in gathering new perspectives. These are dynamics we hope to explore further in the existing data and those we will be collecting in additional cases.

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