



TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH SYNTHESIS

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Use of Social Media by Minnesota Cities and Counties

The purpose of this TRS is to serve as a synthesis of pertinent completed research to be used for further study and evaluation by MnDOT. This TRS does not represent the conclusions of either CTC & Associates or MnDOT.

Introduction

Minnesota's Local Road Research Board (<http://www.lrrb.org>) is interested in knowing the extent to which Minnesota counties and cities are using social media: Which social media outlets are they using? How are they using them? Of particular interest are transportation-related communications through social media channels.

LRRB requested a nonscientific scan of counties and larger to help establish the scope of social media use by local governments for transportation purposes throughout the state of Minnesota.

Summary

In **Scope of Social Media**, we present a brief primer on the social media outlets and platforms used by local governments scanned in this effort. The **Sampling** process describes the nonscientific method by which 25 cities and 25 counties were selected for closer examination.

The **Summary of Findings** presents summary tables with statistics on the use of social media for transportation-related communication among the 50 cities and counties sampled followed by a number of observations and conclusions that may be drawn from the data.

Among the 50 governments sampled, Facebook was found to be the most common social media outlet (used by 19 for any reason and by 10 for transportation communications) followed by Twitter (used by 15 for any reason and by nine for transportation). Across all social media channels, the most common transportation-related topics for communication were planning and zoning and road construction and street closures.

The source data behind these summary findings are presented in the **Detailed Findings** section of this report. For each city and county sampled, we list and provide links to the social media outlets and platforms used and illustrate the extent of their use for transportation-related issues.

Finally, **Guidance and Best Practices for Social Media** presents websites and publications that provide further information specific to the areas of transportation and local government.



Scope of Social Media

Heidi Cohen of Riverside Marketing Strategies presents a collection of 30 definitions of social media at www.heidicohen.com/social-media-definition. Among these is Cohen's own definition, which includes helpful descriptive characteristics of social media:

Social media are the platforms that enable the interactive web by engaging users to participate in, comment on and create content [A social media outlet or platform] has the following characteristics:

- Encompasses wide variety of content formats including text, video, photographs, audio, PDF and PowerPoint. Many social media make use of these options by allowing more than one content alternative.
- Allows interactions to cross one or more platforms through social sharing, email and feeds.
- Involves different levels of engagement by participants who can create, comment [on] or [observe] social media networks.
- Facilitates enhanced speed and breadth of information dissemination.
- Provides for one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many communications.
- Enables communication to take place in real time or asynchronously over time.
- Is device indifferent. It can take place via a computer (including laptops and netbooks), tablets (including iPads, iTouch and others) and mobile phones (particularly smartphones).
- Extends engagement by creating real-time online events, extending online interactions offline, or augmenting live events online.

Social media outlets and platforms number in the hundreds, and the landscape is changing quickly. This TRS limits the discussion to those currently used by the Minnesota city and county websites sampled. These social media platforms and applications as well as the way local governments interact with the public through each medium are briefly described here:

- **Facebook** (<http://www.facebook.com/>) lets an account holder—whether an individual or a group or organization such as a local government—set up a page on the Facebook website and communicate short log entries on a Web page designated as its “wall.” Entries may include photos and links. The account holder may establish permissions to whether other Facebook users may comment on its existing wall posts, create original posts on its wall or upload images.

The extent of use of a Facebook page can generally be gauged and compared by how many users have indicated that they like that page using a “like” button featured across Facebook.

- **Twitter** (<http://www.twitter.com/>) enables an account holder to make short log entries (often called “blog”—“web log”—entries) on a dedicated page on the Twitter website. Each post is called a “tweet” and is limited to 140 characters. Tweets are usually visible to the public, but other users can register with Twitter to subscribe to—or follow—a Twitter feed and receive updates via email or mobile device.

The relative popularity of a given Twitter page can be judged by the number of followers.

- **LinkedIn** (<http://www.linkedin.com/>) is sometimes described as “Facebook for professionals,” with many similar features as Facebook. It is focused on business and professional networking, with account holders and other users interacting on the account holder's discussions page.
- **Nixle** (<http://www.nixle.com/>) allows public agencies to post messages and alerts to a dedicated local Nixle page. Users can subscribe to receive these messages via email or text (mobile phone) messaging, or through the Nixle website.
- **YouTube** (<http://www.youtube.com/>) is a video-sharing website. Account holders upload short videos that are converted to Web video playable on common browsers (Internet Explorer, Firefox) or mobile devices. Users may give the public permission to comment on videos.
- **Flickr** (<http://www.flickr.com/>) similarly is a photo-sharing website where users may be given permission to make comments on photos.
- **RSS—Really Simple Syndication** is a standardized format that allows a website owner to publish news items and let users subscribe to news feeds of interest to them. This standardization among websites using RSS allows

subscribers to set up their preferred method of receiving RSS news items, whether via the Web, email or mobile device. RSS is not associated with an external website like the other social media examples cited above.

- **Email and text messaging subscriptions** are tools specific to an individual website where users may subscribe to receive updates via email or text messaging. Often a website will allow users to indicate the category or topics from which they would like to receive updates. Like RSS, it does not have the interactive component built into the other social media examples described above.

For a more complete listing of social media types, see the “Types of Social Media” page (<http://www.howto.gov/social-media/social-media-types>) published by [HowTo.gov](http://www.howto.gov), an official website of the U.S. government to “help government workers deliver a better customer experience to citizens.”

Sampling

This TRS provides an initial picture of the extent to which Minnesota cities and counties are using social media. Since an examination of all cities and counties was beyond the scope of the report, we selected a methodology for sampling cities and counties that would show current practices by both large and small cities and counties. As confirmed in the **Summary of Findings**, it was expected that the largest cities and counties would be the most likely to use social media. They are also by nature the ones poised to reach the greatest number of people. The sampling process, therefore, favored the largest cities and counties while still providing a picture of social media use across a range of sizes.

Cities

We sampled 25 cities. The League of Minnesota Cities directory (<http://www.lmc.org/page/1/city-directory.jsp>) links to the home page of all member cities and lists 141 cities in Minnesota with a population of 5,000 or greater. We selected the sample from among these 141 cities as follows:

- **Largest cities:** The 10 largest cities by population
- **Larger:** Among the next 44 cities by population, a sample of five (sorted by population, selecting every 10th city)
- **Smaller:** Among the next 44 cities, a sample of five similarly selected
- **Smallest:** Among the remaining 43 cities, a sample of five similarly selected

The complete list of cities and the sample of 25 are shown in [Appendix A](#).

Counties

We also sampled 25 counties. The Association of Minnesota Counties website provides a directory of all county websites at http://www.mncounties.org/About_Counties/county_websites.html. We selected the following sample:

- **Largest counties:** The 10 largest counties
- **Larger:** Among the next 26 counties by population, a sample of five (sorted by population, selecting every sixth county)
- **Smaller:** Among the next 26 counties, a sample of five similarly selected
- **Smallest:** Among the remaining 25 counties, a sample of five similarly selected

The complete list of counties and the sample of 25 are shown in [Appendix B](#).

Summary of Findings

Four summary tables provide statistics on the extent of social media use for transportation among the 50 cities and counties sampled:

- **Table 1** shows how many Minnesota cities sampled are using social media, both in general and specifically for transportation purposes. Results are broken down by the four city size categories described above.
- **Table 2** shows the data similarly for Minnesota counties sampled.
- **Table 3** summarizes which social media outlets and platforms are being used by the 50 local governments sampled.
- **Table 4** summarizes the specific transportation topics addressed through social media by the 50 local governments sampled.

Following these tables are observations about social media use by these governments. Details on the social media used by each individual city or county, including links to internal and external Web pages, are presented in **Detailed Findings**.

Table 1. Cities, social media use

Sample	Total	Number using social media	Number using social media for transportation topics
Largest cities	10	9	9
Larger cities	5	4	2
Smaller cities	5	2	1
Smallest cities	5	2	1
All sampled	25	17 (68%)	13 (52%)

Table 2. Counties, social media use

Sample	Total	Number using social media	Number using social media for transportation topics
Largest counties	10	6	5
Larger counties	5	1	0
Smaller counties	5	0	0
Smallest counties	5	1	0
All sampled	25	8 (32%)	5 (20%)

Table 3. Frequency of social media outlet and platforms among the governments (cities and counties combined) that use them

Social media outlet or platform	Used	Used for transportation topics
Facebook	19	10
Twitter	15	9
Email subscription	11	6
YouTube	7	3
RSS	6	5
Text messaging subscription	3	1
Flickr	3	1
Online polling	2	
LinkedIn	1	
Nixle	1	
Online forum	1	

Table 4. Transportation topics addressed through social media among the governments (cities and counties combined) that use social media

Topic	Governments that address the topic through social media
Planning and zoning	10
Road construction and street closures	9
Safety	4
Winter maintenance	4
Transit	3
Bicycle/pedestrian	3
Traffic	2
MnDOT information	2
Maintenance	2
Environment	2
Parking	1
Rail	1
Innovations	1
Educational	1

Observations

Frequency of social media

- Large cities and counties alike use social media with more frequency than small ones.
- Small cities also use social media with some frequency. Small counties, however, use them very infrequently.

Use of social media outlets

- Facebook is the most commonly used social media outlet—in general and for transportation use—with Twitter a close second. This is consistent with Facebook’s standing as the most used social media outlet with some 800 million active users.
- As shown throughout the **Detailed Findings** section of this report, governments commonly repeat identical informational posts across multiple platforms. For example, when there is a snow emergency, a city might create an identical Facebook post, tweet and RSS news story. Likely governments see the extra effort to create multiple posting as worthwhile to reach a public with varying preferences for social media channels.
- Governments vary on the permissions granted to visitors to their Facebook walls. Some only allow users to comment on the city’s posts whereas others allow users to create their own posts. The latter type of Facebook page was generally more popular with the public, which can be illustrated using the rough metric of “Facebook likes” divided by the city population (in thousands) for the 10 largest cities in the state:
 - Cities that allow new Facebook posts by users—(Facebook likes)/(city population in thousands)
 - Rochester—74
 - Duluth (police department page on Facebook)—42
 - Brooklyn Park—38
 - St. Paul—31
 - Minneapolis—22
 - Eagan—5 (note that the city of Eagan began posting on Facebook within the last month)
 - Cities that *only allow users to comment on existing posts*—(Facebook likes)/(city population in thousands)
 - Woodbury—11

- Bloomington—6
- Duluth (main city page on Facebook)—5

From these trends it may be concluded that while allowing different kinds of user interaction on Facebook are within the account holder’s control (and all activity may be moderated at the account holder’s discretion), allowing more interaction tends to increase the use of that social media channel.

(It is noted that “Facebook likes” do not represent total users of a Facebook page since many visitors use a page without pressing the “like” button. Nevertheless, the relative number of likes can be instructive for the purposes of comparison.)

- Two of the governments sampled, the city of Golden Valley and Ramsey County, share the noteworthy practice of including on most of their internal Web pages small icons that allow users to easily create links to those pages on different social media sites. If users find a government Web page particularly valuable, they can use these icons to effortlessly create a post about it on their own Facebook walls or Twitter feeds.
- In a few cases, a city’s Facebook page or Twitter feed was not linked from its own website. This makes these pages more difficult to find.

Transportation topics

- Among the transportation areas addressed by local governments in social media, the most common either present information of most immediate concern to users (road closures and construction updates) or most likely to involve public participation (planning and zoning, often in the form of city council meetings or open houses).
- Planning and zoning issues tend to elicit a large number of responses from members of the public, who sometimes express strong feelings about eminent domain, street widening or the impacts of new infrastructure on traffic and safety.

Detailed Findings

In the tables below, each city or county name links to that local government’s home page. Links in the “Social media” column point directly to the social media page or feed.

Cities

Largest 10 cities

City	Social media	Use for transportation
Minneapolis (Pop. 382,578)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (8,333 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos • Twitter (11,882 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tweets generally repeat the city’s Facebook posts • RSS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ News items are a subset of the city’s Facebook posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook, Twitter and RSS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintenance. Street sweeping; sidewalk repairs
St. Paul (Pop. 285,068)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (8,761 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos • Twitter (4,029 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tweets generally repeat the city’s Facebook posts • YouTube • Email messaging subscription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook and Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bicycle/pedestrian. New planned bike paths ○ Innovations; Environment. Electric vehicle charging stations • YouTube <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parking; Innovations; Environment. Solar panels on RiverCentre parking ramp; electric vehicle charging stations ○ Transit and Rail. Development information

City	Social media	Use for transportation
Rochester (Pop. 106,769)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSS • Email/text messaging subscription <p>Remaining social media are linked from the Rochester Convention & Visitors Bureau</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (7,907 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos • Twitter (688 followers) • YouTube • Flickr 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning and zoning. Airport-related issues
Duluth (Pop. 86,265)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duluth lists five separate Facebook pages, among them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Main city page (434 likes; users may comment on existing posts) ○ Police department page (3,606 likes; users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos) • Twitter (104 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tweets generally repeat the posts on the main city Facebook page • RSS • Email messaging subscription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook, on the main city page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bicycle/pedestrian. Trail improvements ○ Planning and zoning. Planning open house meeting ○ Road construction and street closures. Highlights of recent improved roads and bridges • Facebook, on police department page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safety. “Click It or Ticket” patrols
Bloomington (Pop. 82,893)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (535 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts • Twitter (270 followers) • YouTube • RSS • Email/text messaging subscription • Facebook, Twitter, RSS, email and text subscriptions all post or send the same news notices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook, Twitter, RSS, email and text <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safety. City’s Fatal Crash Review Committee; heightened enforcement of seat belts and child restraints ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ Traffic. Traffic management open house
Brooklyn Park (Pop. 75,781)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (2,859 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos ○ Link to Facebook page was not available on the city’s website • Twitter (560 followers) • Nixle • Online poll of website users on home page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Safety. Distracted driving ○ Road construction and street closures.
Plymouth (Pop. 70,576)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter (228 followers) • Email messaging subscription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ MnDOT information; Planning and zoning. MnDOT open house announcement on public hearing for I-494 expansion project • Email subscription category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transit. Committee on Transit agenda and minutes ○ Planning and zoning. Planning Commission agenda and minutes

City	Social media	Use for transportation
St. Cloud (Pop. 65,842)	None	
Eagan (Pop. 64,206)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (316 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts • Email messaging subscription 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning and zoning. Planning Commission information • Email subscription category <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning and zoning. Planning Commission meeting minutes
Woodbury (Pop. 61,961)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (684 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning and zoning. Woodbury Drive improvement project

Larger cities—sample of five

City	Social media	Use for transportation
Maple Grove (Pop. 61,567)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (5,553 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos • Twitter (500 followers) • Links to Facebook and Twitter pages were not available on the city’s website 	None
Mankato (Pop. 39,309)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (1,987 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts • Twitter (563 followers) • RSS • Email messaging subscription • Internal discussion forum (“What’s Your Take”) on selected topics • Facebook, Twitter, RSS and email all post or send the same news notices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook, Twitter, RSS and email <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road construction and street closures.
Winona (Pop. 27,592)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (7,846 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts, upload photos ○ The majority of the posts are visitors’ rather than the city’s • Twitter (439 followers) • Links to Facebook and Twitter pages were not available on the city’s website 	None
Faribault (Pop. 23,352)	None	
Golden Valley (Pop. 20,371)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email messaging subscription • Most Web pages have icons allowing users to easily create links to those pages on users’ own Facebook walls or Twitter feeds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email subscription categories <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Planning and zoning. Douglas Drive Corridor updates information; Planning Commission information ○ Maintenance. Summer street maintenance information ○ Winter maintenance. Snow emergency information

Smaller cities—sample of five

City	Social media	Use for transportation
Northfield (Pop. 20,007)	None	
St. Michael (Pop. 16,399)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (337 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts • Twitter (103 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tweets generally repeat the city’s Facebook posts 	None
New Ulm (Pop. 13,522)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (97 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Listed as “City of New Ulm/New Ulm Public Utilities” ○ Users may comment on existing posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ Winter maintenance. Snow emergency information
Cloquet (Pop. 12,124)	None	
Big Lake (Pop. 10,060)	None	

Smallest cities—sample of five

City	Social media	Use for transportation
Waseca (Pop. 9,410)	None	
Lake Elmo (Pop. 8,069)	None	
St. Francis (Pop. 7,218)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ St. Francis has established a Twitter page but has not posted any tweets • YouTube 	None
Stewartville (Pop. 5,916)	None	
Isanti (Pop. 5,251)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email messaging subscription <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sign-up form on the home page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email messaging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Winter maintenance. A subscription category is “City Plowing/Wing-Back Updates.”

Counties

Largest 10 counties

County	Social media	Use for transportation
Hennepin (Pop. 1,122,093)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hennepin County lists eight separate Facebook pages, including a general Hennepin County page (237 likes); one page is related to transportation: Cool County Initiative (190 likes) ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts • Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hennepin County lists four separate Twitter feeds: general Hennepin County page (1,963 followers), libraries, environmental services and medical center • LinkedIn (2,086 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Used primarily to link to 1,675 people employed in Hennepin County who have noted this on their LinkedIn profiles • Flickr <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Photosets are grouped by category: County Board/County initiatives, library, environmental services, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook, on the general county page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ Planning and zoning; Transit. Information about a transit project open house • Facebook, on Cool Counties Initiative page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Environmental. Announcement on Bike Walk Week in Minneapolis-St. Paul; travel tips that affect climate change • Twitter, on the general county page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ Planning and zoning; Transit. Information about a transit project open house • Flickr <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Transit; Bicycle/pedestrian. Photos highlighting transit, bike paths
Ramsey (Pop. 493,215)	No external social media presence. However, most Web pages have icons allowing users to easily create links to those pages on an array of social media sites: Facebook, Reddit, Blogger, Tumblr, Twitter, StumbleUpon, LinkedIn and a list of 335 additional outlets.	
Dakota (Pop. 388,001)	None	
Anoka (Pop. 327,005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter (1,410 followers) • YouTube 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YouTube <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educational. Video “Why Highways Buckle”
Washington (Pop. 225,000)	No social media presence. However, a social-media-related event is advertised on the county’s home page: “The Washington County WorkForce Investment Board will sponsor a business forum ‘Social Media: Why is it important for your business?’”	

County	Social media	Use for transportation
St. Louis (Pop. 196,067)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The general county page (12 likes) includes overview information only, with no wall or postings ○ Dedicated county Rescue Squad and county jobs pages • Twitter (20 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tweets are only about jobs in St. Louis County • YouTube <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Property and land use videos only • RSS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ Planning and zoning. Rail facility open house
Stearns (Pop. 144,096)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (564 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts • Twitter (240 followers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recent tweets appear on the county's own home page ○ Tweets generally repeat the county's Facebook posts • YouTube • Flickr 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook and Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ Planning and zoning. Parks and trails grant projects • YouTube <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Winter maintenance. Snowplow video ○ Planning and zoning. 33rd Street South Corridor Project video ○ Safety. Drunk driving campaign video
Olmsted (Pop. 137,521)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The county does not have a general page but instead only four targeted Facebook pages: Homeland Security and Emergency Management (619 likes), sheriff's office, and others ○ Users may comment on existing posts, create new posts • Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Similarly with Facebook, the county does not have a general page but one targeted Twitter feed on Homeland Security and Emergency Management (117 followers) ○ Tweets generally repeat the county's Facebook posts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook and Twitter <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Traffic. New traffic signals in use ○ Road construction and street closures. ○ MnDOT information. Reposts/ re-tweets of information released by MnDOT
Scott (Pop. 124,092)	None	
Wright (Pop. 114,787)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email messaging subscription 	None apparent

Larger counties—sample of five

County	Social media	Use for transportation
Carver (Pop. 87,545)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (53 likes) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Users may comment on existing posts • Email/text messaging subscription (interactive link on home page) 	None
Clay (Pop. 54,476)	None	
Kandiyohi (Pop. 41,088)	None	
Douglas (Pop. 35,467)	None	
Polk (Pop. 31,088)	None	

Smaller counties—sample of five

County	Social media	Use for transportation
Pine (Pop. 28,419)	None	
Meeker (Pop. 23,405)	None	
Dodge (Pop. 19,770)	None	
Aitkin (Pop. 16,149)	None	
Wadena (Pop. 13,445)	None	

Smallest counties—sample of five

County	Social media	Use for transportation
Cottonwood (Pop. 11,659)	None	
Swift (Pop. 10,307)	None	
Clearwater (Pop. 8,440)	Online poll of website users on home page	None
Big Stone (Pop. 5,510)	None	
Traverse (Pop. 3,799)	None	

Guidance and Best Practices for Social Media

There has been extensive documentation of social media best practices across industries and user groups. We conducted a Web search to identify guidance and best practices for social media as they relate specifically to transportation and to local government. Findings come from a variety of sources, including social media providers, government websites and industry organizations.

Transportation

AASHTO 2011 New Media Survey: Twitter, Facebook Growing as Effective Media Tools for State Departments of Transportation, Communications Brief, August 2011.

<http://communications.transportation.org/Documents/ResearchBriefPR-8-11.pdf>

The use of Twitter and Facebook by state departments of transportation has increased substantially in the last 12 months, according to a new survey released by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. Thirty-one states now use Twitter and 25 states are using Facebook on a regular basis to distribute information on traffic, emergencies, road closings, job postings, and other transportation-related data to more than 200,000 people across the country.

The survey was conducted by AASHTO's Subcommittee on Transportation Communications (<http://communications.transportation.org/Pages/default.aspx>).

Strategic Approaches to Developing a Social Networking Page, Transportation Research Board, 2011.

<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/dva/ccc/trbsocialnetworkingguidance.pdf>

It seems like everyone is jumping on the social networking bandwagon. Professional organizations have pages on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, and some are gaining hundreds (sometimes thousands) of fans, members, and followers. But, is using social media right for your committee? We will explore 6 steps that you should consider prior to developing a social networking page. If you already have a page in place and you are looking to strengthen it, these steps could help you enhance the content or maintenance of your page.

- Why do I need a plan first prior to creating a social networking page?
- Six Questions to Consider Prior to Developing a Social Networking Page
 - What are your committee's goals?
 - Who is your audience?
 - What are your resources and how will you maintain the page?
 - What content does your customer value?
 - How will you scope your message?
 - How will you measure success, increase followers, and facilitate interaction?
- Required elements for TRB Committee social networking pages
- How to leverage content from TRB to your social networking page
- How to close your social networking account
- Questions regarding social media or other web tools

Social Media: A Two-Way Bridge Across the Divide, presentation by John Lisle, Director of Communications District of Columbia Department of Transportation, 2011.

<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/webinars/09-21-11/Lisle.pdf>

This presentation describes the significant changes in the last two years in how the District of Columbia Department of Transportation communicates with its customers. It describes the successful implementation of a number of social media platforms and lessons learned. For example, the author makes these points regarding the agency's successful Twitter feed:

- Established @DDOTDC as a resource and an authority, especially during an emergency or storm
- But also, we were accessible and responsive

- Today more than 8,400 followers
 - Day-to-day: field complaints, answer questions and take service requests
 - Ramp it up during emergencies, weather events, incidents—in short, any time great numbers of people are turning to Twitter for information
 - Respond rapidly to comments and questions
 - Has garnered very positive feedback and improved image of agency

What's the Worst That Can Happen? How to Stop Worrying and Love Social Media, Susan Bregman, Oak Square Resources, LLC, TRB 2011 Annual Meeting, Paper #11-1937, 2011.
<http://amonline.trb.org/12kb25/1>

Much has been written about how transportation providers can use social media to benefit their agencies. Benefits include educating riders about available services, engaging the community and encouraging feedback, recruiting new employees, and creating a personality for what could otherwise seem like a faceless bureaucracy. This paper identifies some of the issues that keep some organizations from getting started with social media. These may include concerns about technical requirements, digital divide and accessibility, staff management, controlling the conversation, record-keeping requirements and cyber-security. These concerns are examined and strategies are presented, based largely on the experience of other transportation organizations. Examples include social media posts drawn from agency websites on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Web 2.0 Tools for Customer Communication: Strategies and Practice at the Washington State Department of Transportation, Lloyd Brown, *TR News*, No. 271, November-December 2010: 18.
<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews271.pdf>

After a snowstorm in 2006, the Washington State Department of Transportation launched a blog to communicate with citizens and soon began developing a suite of Web 2.0 communication tools, including Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, and Facebook. The author, an architect of the efforts, traces the successes, failures, and lessons learned and examines the issues of privacy, archiving, accommodating special needs, staffing, and training.

Planning for an Organization's Social Media Debut, Janet Fraser, *TR News*, No. 271, November-December 2010: 19.
<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews271.pdf>

Social media tools can bring organizations closer to the public and to partners. A preliminary investment of time is required to set goals, identify the target audience, and acquire the necessary resources to execute the plan with success. An organization seeking to apply social media tools for public outreach should first answer three questions: (1) Why use a social media tool? (2) Who is the intended audience? (3) What is the plan for using a social media tool?

Social Networking in the Test Mode at State Agencies, Susan Sillick, *TR News*, No. 271, November-December 2010: 22.
<http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/trnews/trnews271.pdf>

A survey of state departments of transportation (DOTs) shows that access to social media or Web 2.0 sites is not universal. The survey responses from 34 state DOTs revealed that 20 block Facebook, 15 block Twitter and Ning, 10 block LinkedIn, and 7 block Google Groups. The slow adoption of social media by state DOTs parallels that of the Internet. Many states restricted use of the Internet until officials realized its value in the workplace and created policies for its appropriate use.

Local Government

Government on Facebook: Resources

http://www.facebook.com/government?sk=app_4949752878

Facebook has published a page specifically for governments that provides guidance on creating and using Facebook. Sections on this page of particular interest to local governments and agencies include:

- Need Help?
 - Create a Facebook Page
 - Tips & Best Practices, including a link to Facebook's Government Best Practices Guide (<https://facebook-inc.box.net/shared/idnp0hs026>)
 - Other Resources

- Frequently Asked Questions
 - I'm a US state or local government interested in using Facebook?
 - How are Pages different from personal profiles?
 - How do I setup a Page?
 - Which Page Category should I Choose?
 - How do page admins work?
 - How do I turn off comments on posted items?
 - What control do I have over comments posted on my page?

Minnesota Office of Enterprise Technology's Resources for Social Media for State Government, 2011.

<http://mn.gov/oet/policies-and-standards/social-media/>

According to this Minnesota state government Web page, "Governments everywhere are dealing with the opportunities and challenges of social media technologies. Our resources section contains links to helpful information and research about policies, usage and best practices being used by other organizations and state governments." The page includes links in the areas of:

- Policy development
- Surveys and research
- Guidelines and best practices

Using Social Media in Government, HowTo.gov, September 27, 2011.

<http://www.howto.gov/social-media/using-social-media>

This Web page states that "[s]ocial media tools present unparalleled opportunities for collaborative government—but implementing these tools in government comes with unique challenges. Become familiar with relevant policies, and take advantage of the many good examples across government to help you implement these tools." It includes links in the areas of policies and guidance and best practices and examples.

10 Examples of How Local Government can use Twitter, Michael Riedyk, DotGov, Inc., 2009.

<http://dotgov.com/2009/11/10-examples-how-local-governments-can-use-twitter/>

(Note: DotGov, Inc. describes itself as a "new Gov 2.0 startup company.") Although this blog entry is two years old, the items detailed in the post remain relevant. The headers of the post are:

1. News & Events
2. City Service Announcements
3. Job Postings
4. Transportation
5. Emergency Management
6. 311 City Services
7. City Council
8. Council Election
9. Innovations & Ideas
10. Citizens Groups

Each item includes a brief description and example. Item 4, Transportation, points out that the Oregon Department of Transportation (<http://twitter.com/#!/oregondot>) "has been doing a great job by tweeting on road conditions, traffic jams, weather and travel information. They also have a great safety tip: Don't Tweet 'n Drive!"

Online Engagement, Technology & Social Media: Best Practices and Resources, Institute for Local Government, undated.

<http://www.ca-ilg.org/node/2614>

This page "links to publications, best practices, reports and other resources to help counties and cities engage their residents using online engagement, technology and social media."

- **Web 2.0 and Beyond: Online Tools for Community Building.**
Session at the 2010 League of California Cities' Annual Conference Resources
Includes links to PowerPoint presentations and podcasts.

- **Legal Issues Associated with Social Media: A “Heads Up” for Local Agencies**, June 23, 2010.

<http://www.ca-ilg.org/socialmedialegalissues>

From the Web page: However one describes it—social media, Web 2.0 or “the Groundswell”—communication has been transformed by Internet technologies that allow users to communicate directly with each other. Traditional institutions (including the mainstream media and public agencies) no longer play a controlling role in information flows. There are a number of implications, including important legal issues, for local agencies to consider when they’re involved with social media. This new paper from the Institute for Local Government identifies the law that exists and how cities and counties are addressing the legal issues.

Appendix A. Cities sampled

Cities sampled are shown in bold, yellow-highlighted cells

Largest		Larger		Smaller		Smallest	
City	Pop.	City	Pop.	City	Pop.	City	Pop.
Minneapolis	382,578	Maple Grove	61,567	Northfield	20,007	Waseca	9,410
St Paul	285,068	Coon Rapids	61,476	Willmar	19,610	Mound	9,052
Rochester	106,769	Eden Prairie	60,797	West St Paul	19,540	Virginia	8,712
Duluth	86,265	Burnsville	60,306	Columbia Heights	19,496	East Grand Forks	8,601
Bloomington	82,893	Blaine	57,186	Forest Lake	18,375	Rogers	8,597
Brooklyn Park	75,781	Lakeville	55,954	Stillwater	18,225	Thief River Falls	8,573
Plymouth	70,576	Minnetonka	49,734	Albert Lea	18,016	Detroit Lakes	8,569
St Cloud	65,842	Apple Valley	49,084	Hopkins	17,591	Little Falls	8,343
Eagan	64,206	Edina	47,941	Anoka	17,142	St Anthony Village	8,226
Woodbury	61,961	St Louis Park	45,250	Red Wing	16,459	Cambridge	8,111
		Mankato	39,309	St Michael	16,399	Lake Elmo	8,069
		Moorhead	38,065	Hibbing	16,361	Oak Grove	8,031
		Maplewood	38,018	Sartell	15,876	Crookston	7,891
		Shakopee	37,076	Buffalo	15,453	Wyoming	7,791
		Richfield	35,228	Ham Lake	15,296	Mahtomedi	7,676
		Cottage Grove	34,589	Hutchinson	14,178	Baxter	7,610
		Inver Grove Heights	33,880	Robbinsdale	13,953	Orono	7,437
		Roseville	33,660	Marshall	13,680	Victoria	7,345
		Andover	30,598	Brainerd	13,590	New Prague	7,321
		Brooklyn Center	30,104	Otsego	13,571	Shorewood	7,307
		Winona	27,592	New Ulm	13,522	St Francis	7,218
		Oakdale	27,378	Bemidji	13,431	Albertville	7,044
		Fridley	27,208	North Mankato	13,394	Litchfield	6,726
		Savage	26,911	Hugo	13,332	Waite Park	6,715
		Owatonna	25,599	Fergus Falls	13,138	Belle Plaine	6,661
		Shoreview	25,043	Sauk Rapids	12,773	St Joseph	6,534
		Austin	24,718	Worthington	12,764	International Falls	6,424
		White Bear Lake	23,797	Monticello	12,759	Spring Lake Park	6,412
		Chaska	23,770	Vadnais Heights	12,302	Minnetrista	6,384
		Ramsey	23,668	Mounds View	12,155	Kasson	5,931
		Faribault	23,352	Cloquet	12,124	Stewartville	5,916
		Champlin	23,089	East Bethel	11,626	Glencoe	5,631
		Elk River	22,974	North St Paul	11,460	Jordan	5,470
		Chanhassen	22,952	St Peter	11,196	Delano	5,464
		Prior Lake	22,796	Mendota Heights	11,071	Montevideo	5,383
		Hastings	22,172	Alexandria	11,070	Corcoran	5,379
		Crystal	22,151	Grand Rapids	10,869	Falcon Heights	5,321
		Rosemount	21,874	Waconia	10,697	Morris	5,286
		New Brighton	21,456	Fairmont	10,666	St Paul Park	5,279
		Farmington	21,086	North Branch	10,125	Redwood Falls	5,254
		Golden Valley	20,371	Big Lake	10,060	Isanti	5,251
		New Hope	20,339	Little Canada	9,773	Zimmerman	5,228
		Lino Lakes	20,216	Arden Hills	9,552	Lake City	5,063
		South St Paul	20,160	Hermantown	9,414		

Appendix B. Counties sampled

Counties sampled are shown in bold, yellow-highlighted cells

Largest		Larger		Smaller		Smallest	
County	Pop.	County	Pop.	County	Pop.	County	Pop.
Hennepin	1,122,093	Carver	87,545	Pine	28,419	Cottonwood	11,659
Ramsey	493,215	Sherburne	84,995	Le Sueur	27,895	Pope	11,212
Dakota	388,001	Rice	61,980	Brown	26,361	Watonwan	11,164
Anoka	327,005	Crow Wing	61,009	Mille Lacs	26,169	Jackson	11,150
Washington	225,000	Blue Earth	58,254	Lyon	24,640	Lake	10,966
St. Louis	196,067	Otter Tail	57,817	Todd	24,375	Yellow Medicine	10,430
Stearns	144,096	Clay	54,476	Meeker	23,405	Swift	10,307
Olmsted	137,521	Chisago	50,344	Wabasha	22,282	Marshall	9,951
Scott	124,092	Winona	49,288	Fillmore	21,151	Stevens	9,827
Wright	114,787	Goodhue	45,807	Martin	20,768	Rock	9,535
		Itasca	44,729	Nobles	20,445	Pipestone	9,423
		Beltrami	43,169	Houston	19,832	Murray	8,778
		Kandiyohi	41,088	Dodge	19,770	Clearwater	8,440
		Benton	38,688	Waseca	19,469	Lac qui Parle	7,464
		Mower	38,666	Hubbard	18,890	Norman	6,850
		Isanti	38,576	Renville	16,531	Wilkin	6,634
		McLeod	37,279	Kanabec	16,276	Grant	6,078
		Steele	36,221	Roseau	16,201	Lincoln	5,963
		Douglas	35,467	Aitkin	16,149	Big Stone	5,510
		Carlton	34,116	Redwood	15,791	Cook	5,329
		Morrison	32,919	Faribault	15,283	Mahnomen	5,072
		Becker	32,230	Sibley	15,126	Kittson	4,691
		Freeborn	31,636	Pennington	13,709	Lake of the Woods	4,327
		Nicollet	31,313	Koochiching	13,658	Red Lake	4,168
		Polk	31,088	Wadena	13,445	Traverse	3,799
		Cass	29,036	Chippewa	12,721		