

I-35W ACCESS PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Background

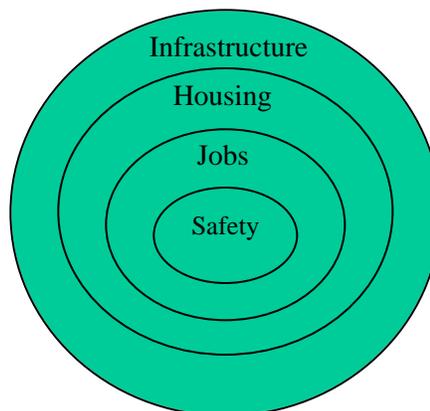
Freeway access to Lake Street and Minneapolis neighborhoods has been poorly placed and generally inadequate since I-35W was built through South Minneapolis in the early 1960's:

- No direct exit to Lake Street for vehicles coming from the north
- No entrance for vehicles heading north from Lake Street
- Spacing between ramps at 31st Street and 35th/36th Streets is not adequate and unsafe
- Congestion back-up caused on northbound I-35W by the existing entrances from 5th Avenue
- Traffic continues to grow on neighborhood streets to/from existing ramps in route to employers, residential homes, businesses and institutions

Into the future, the existing access points will be further compromised by increasing traffic at cross streets, for example Lake Street and 31st. Expected growth in traffic volumes at crucial intersections around existing access points will interrupt traffic flow, particularly if Lake Street continue to revitalize.

The I-35W Project Advisory Committee was formed almost four years ago to provide public review and community guidance to shape access improvements. The group is staffed by Hennepin County and the Phillips Partnership.

The Phillips Partnership was established in 1997 to create a strategy around investments in the Phillips neighborhood to help the neighborhood respond to challenges of crime, unemployment and disinvestments. The I-35W Access Project is an initiative of the Phillips Partnership and Hennepin County in cooperation with the City of Minneapolis, Metropolitan Council and Mn/DOT Its strategic plan takes the shape of an archery target:



The partners have invested in crime control, jobs programs, housing initiatives, and infrastructure. Since 1997, the Partnership has helped the Phillips neighborhood:

- Reduce crime by an estimated 40%
- Establish with area hospitals the nations largest health career laddering program with over 1,200 graduates

- Bring \$30 million in housing investment in West Phillips and improve real estate values
- Provide for better signage and transportation plans to help manage traffic for the neighborhood, its businesses, and major employers.

The engineering work of this Project emerges from a federal appropriation. In 1998, this Project was designated a National High Priority through the leadership of Senator Paul Wellstone and Representative Martin Sabo. The required 20% match had been provided $\frac{1}{3}$ each by Hennepin County, Mn/DOT and the City of Minneapolis. These funds support a shared leadership role by Hennepin County, who has the statutory authority to lead a public planning process, and the Phillips Partnership. The Project is staffed by the Hennepin County Transportation Department, led by Jim Grube, and the Smith Parker law firm, represented by transportation consultant Tom Johnson. Project engineers and consultants report to a Project Advisory Committee (PAC), which has responsibility for establishing Project goals, designing the public process and deciding between alternatives. The PAC recommendations are then submitted to public input in meetings held throughout South Minneapolis.

Project Goals

Project goals were established by a citizen committee appointed by County Board members and community organizations. Further described below, the Committee adopted these goals on May 25, 1999:

- Improve accessibility
- Support revitalization and economic vitality
- Enhance visual appearance while minimizing negative impacts
- Provide safe movement of vehicles while improving safety for pedestrians and transit users
- Upgrade opportunities for expanded transit service
- Enhance the sense of community within the area

Advisory Committees

In early 1999 Hennepin County created a citizen based **Project Advisory Committee** (PAC) for the purpose of reviewing Project alternatives, appropriate mitigation measures and technical studies prepared by staff and consultants. The second committee created by Hennepin County is the **Technical Advisory Committee** (TAC) consisting of transportation planners and engineers from Hennepin County, City of Minneapolis, Metropolitan Council, Metro Transit and Mn/DOT. The work of the TAC includes oversight for project design, traffic analysis, and environmental/cultural resources assessments. Their recommendations have then been forwarded to the PAC for their consideration. Simultaneously, a Mitigation/Enhancement Subcommittee of the PAC, representing mostly neighborhood organizations, have proposed a Project mitigation and enhancement report detailing features such as neighborhood gateways, public art, traffic calming, landscaping and bridge design.

In July of 2000 both Advisory committees concluded the “scoping” process where thirty (30) location alternatives were considered along with several design options. Public “**open houses**” were held at several locations in the Project area giving local residents and businesses an

opportunity to view these alternatives and provide recommendations. Then in August the PAC formally selected their preferred alternatives for the project. They were:

- Northbound entrance from Lake Street
- Southbound exit to Lake Street
- Northbound exit to 28th Street
- Replace the existing I-35W bridge over Lake Street
- Replace other bridges where necessary
- Relocating existing 35th and 36th Street ramps to 38th Street
- Redesigning the existing 5th Avenue entrance ramp to northbound I-35W and eastbound I-94
- Extend existing freeway auxiliary lanes to improve traffic flow to and from these new ramps

Accommodation of Future HOV Lanes

In December of 2001 both advisory committees responded to Mn/DOT's request for the Access Project's design to accommodate Mn/DOT's long-term vision for the freeway currently; identified as High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes. Providing HOV lanes are not a part of the Access Project. Mn/DOT has committed to keeping the HOV initiative separate and will initiate a project development and public participation process sometime after 2015.

Public Involvement

From the beginning public/neighborhood participation has been a major component of Project Development. This participation began with the establishment of a citizens "communications" committee in 1998; they were very instrumental in identifying several ramp location alternatives. In March of 1999 the PAC was appointed by Hennepin County consisting of representatives from neighborhood organizations, business associations, non-profits and major employers. A primary function of this Committee and its members has been to maintain liaison and two-way communication with the organizations they represent. The PAC has also sponsored three rounds of "public open houses" at critical decision points and is planning for a fourth round in mid-November of this year. Newspaper articles, invitation letters, and more than 25,000 flyers were distributed inviting residents to participate in each round of "open houses".

Public surveys have been conducted at each of these "open houses" where predominately favorable comments have been received. In addition, more than 120 separate neighborhood and community meetings have been held since 1998.

Technical Studies

South Minneapolis Traffic Study

In conjunction with this Project the City of Minneapolis has completed comprehensive traffic study addressing traffic changes expected as a result of the Access Project and the reopening of Nicollet at Lake Street. Also included was consideration for changing current one-way streets to two-way and the proposed Sherman redevelopment project north of Lake Street. The study area extended from 42nd Street to Franklin Avenue and between Blaisdell and 5th Avenues. Twenty

(20) year forecasts were prepared to 1) inform decision-making about ramp locations and mitigation requirements; and 2) establish design requirements for local streets in the study area.

The critical nature of traffic forecasting in the process prompted a PAC request for a peer review of the process used to derive the forecasts. Similarly, the relationship of the mitigation and enhancement concepts to neighborhood livability were also “peer reviewed” for purposes of review in the process used to determine these concepts. Traffic projections for I-35W and north/south and east/west local streets were also developed as a part of this study. On balance, the study concluded that future traffic can be appropriately distributed throughout the project area. Information is available depicting traffic increases and decreases on specific streets and intersections with and without the 1) Access Project; 2) reopening Nicollet at Lake; and 3) changing current one-way streets to two-way. Peer review findings have supported the methodologies used to determine findings, conclusions, recommended changes and the proposed traffic mitigation measures.

Environmental Assessment/Historical site inventory

The Project’s preferred alternatives have undergone an environmental analysis covering:

- Social and Cultural Environment
 - Land use
 - Social issues
 - Visual quality
 - Environmental justice
 - Infrastructure and public services
 - Bicyclists and pedestrians
 - Historical, archeological and cultural resources
- Economic Environment
 - Right-of-way and relocation
 - Construction alternatives
- Natural Environment
 - Fish, wildlife and ecologically sensitive resources
 - Endangered species
 - Physical impacts on water resources
 - Water use
 - Erosion and sedimentation
 - Water quality/storm water runoff
 - Geological hazardous/soil conditions
 - Air quality
 - Noise
 - Parks, recreation areas, trails
 - Hazardous waste sites/contaminated properties

In each category an assessment was completed identifying the potential for adverse impact and recommendations for mitigating these impacts. In early 2003, Project staff is planning to hold a formal public hearing regarding the Environmental Assessment.

Properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places have been inventoried and impacts assessed in compliance with the federal section 106 review process. Twelve eligible sites were determined unaffected by the project. Three properties: Healy Block Historical District, the Minerva Apartments, and the 29th Street Greenway (railroad trench) have been determined to be adversely affected by the project and the appropriate mitigation measures will be provided.

Preliminary Design Plans/Layouts

Preliminary design plans and layouts have been prepared for each of the preferred alternatives in cooperation with PAC and TAC members. Several years have been spent in developing, revising and adjusting the plans in response to the public and agency input. On October 29, 2002, the PAC took formal action approving the Preliminary Design Plans/Layouts and the proposed mitigation/enhancement measures.

Mitigation/Enhancement Measures

The PAC's Mitigation/Enhancement Subcommittee has developed a vision for this Project; to "create a project that enhances the lives of residents by improving the safety, well being, and cohesion of their neighborhoods adjacent to I-35W in South Minneapolis."

An overarching Project objective is to manage "traffic so that commercial and commuting traffic is relegated to commercial corridors leaving residential traffic for the residential streets.

Goals pertain to 1) improving pedestrian safety, providing sidewalks/crosswalks and pedestrian amenities; 2) improved function and appearance of transit stops and transit stations; 3) linking the 29th Street Greenway with transit service on Lake Street; 4) provide community gateways, landscaping and developing architectural facades for highway structures; 5) integrating public art reflecting the values of the community; 6) developing a classification system for all streets within the project area and then recommending appropriate streetscaping and traffic calming measures; 7) make lane widths, median and intersection revisions; and 8) unique features and designs for bridges to be replaced between Franklin Avenue and 42nd Street.

Lake Street

As a part of the I-35W Access Project, the Lake Street section between Blaisdell and 5th Avenue will be reconstructed and streetscaped. Two traffic lanes will be maintained in each direction unimpeded by vehicles making right and left turns. A median is proposed for the center of Lake Street for pedestrian safety and for establishing shade trees, shrubs and flowers. Sidewalks would be expanded to fourteen (14) feet on each side for pedestrians, bus riders, shoppers and streetscape features. Street furniture, pedestrian level lighting, banners and other public amenities will also be provided. A critical element of roadway design envisions the placement of right and left turn lanes enabling turning movements without obstructing traffic flow. From Blaisdell west and 5th Avenue east Lake Street will not significantly change.

With the reopening of Nicollet Avenue at Lake Street and with the implementation of the Access Project, Lake Street will need to range from four to seven lanes (including turn lanes) between Blaisdell and 5th Avenue. This width varies depending on traffic levels at intersections. In no case will the number of through and turn lanes exceed seven and this only occurs at three locations: just east of Nicollet; on the east side of Stevens Avenue; and on the west side of 1st Avenue. Pedestrian crosswalks will be designed to optimize public safety while alerting motorist to a substantial level of pedestrian movement.

Funding

The I-35W Access Project has been designated by Congress as a **National High Priority** given its contribution to revitalizing neighborhoods through economic development, job creation, improved housing and crime reduction. Congress emphasized the importance of connecting South Minneapolis with the regional transportation system. Since receiving the high priority designation, \$10.7 million of federal funding has been appropriated and another \$34 million is being requested over the next three years. Mn/DOT has committed \$98 million for this Project on the condition that transportation funding will increase by state legislative action in either 2003 or 2004. Another \$10 million will be needed from regional and local governments. The total project cost is now estimated at approximately \$153 million including nearly \$30 million for the mitigation/enhancement features.

Transit

The Project's design includes a transit hub at I-35W/Lake Street with vertical connection (elevators and steps) between the north/south express service and east/west local service on Lake Street. Transit time advantages will be provided on Lake Street by using right-turn lanes as bus lanes. Existing bus stop infrastructure will also be upgraded.

Approvals

Preliminary design plans are scheduled for completion by December 31 of this year. Plans and layouts will then be submitted to the Federal Highway Administration, Mn/DOT, Metropolitan Council, Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis for their review/comment/approval.

Proposed Schedule

12/31/02 – completion of preliminary design plans

3/1/04 – final design plans and specifications completed

Mid-2004 – construction bids obtained

Late-2004 – construction begins on first stage

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