



Date: January 28, 2004
To: Mayor & Council Members
Cc: Klara Fabry, Lee Sheehy and Chuck Lutz
From: Jon Wertjes

**Subject: I-35W Lake Street Access Project
 City staff directives from TPW Committee and others**

Based on the two project briefing meetings and the January 20, 2004 TPW Committee, there were a number of questions raised about the Project. Below are the questions that were raised along with their respective answers or a response time for an answer.

Questions from CM Schiff	Answer or Response Time
1. Roundabout – will it work and will it be approved?	The proposed roundabout at 38 th Street will work, although it may take some time for Minnesota drivers to become comfortable with two-lane roundabouts. Single lane operation may be feasible until traffic demands dictate expansion to two lanes. MnDOT and the Federal Highway Administration will accept the roundabout interchange design provided that documentation of the roundabout traffic analysis satisfies their operational concerns. Mn/DOT and FHWA approval of the operational analysis is expected simultaneously with layout approval.
2. Provide a copy of 28 th Street Exit/Flyover 3D Layout	Public Works obtained six copies of the 3D layout. We will send copies to Lilligren, Niziolek, Zimmermann, Schiff, Colvin Roy and Mayor's office.
3. Compare the MCDA versus Fed/State Requirements for Property Acquisition or Relocation	Public Works staff will send to CPED staff the Fed/State acquisition and relocation standards for comparison review. Estimated schedule 45 days.
4. Is the Lake Street transit station part of the project?	Yes, the Lake Street transit station is part of the proposed project. The design of the proposed Lake Street interchange bridge includes a center transit station on top of I-35W with vertical connection to pull out bays and bus stops on Lake Street. Transit funding is \$4 million with \$2 million in hand by Metro Transit.
5. Is the 38th Street transit station part of the project?	No, the 38 th Street transit station is not part of the currently proposed project. However, the new 38 th Street interchange bridge is designed to accommodate a future transit station. A transit station has been identified in Metro Transit's Sector 5 study as future facility improvement. If funding were obtained, this transit station would be built with the 5 th lane improvement on I-35W.

6. Is the design of the Access Project compatible with LRT?	<p>Yes. The Access Project includes full width reconstruction of I-35W between 34th Street and 28th Street and the width is compatible with LRT, BRT or HOV lanes. This includes the freeway bridges.</p> <p>Long term solutions for I-35W between 26th Street and downtown are less clear. Width constraints may require LRT alternative alignments within or outside the freeway right-of-way.</p>
7. How will the remnant parcels (green space) be used and who will take care of them?	<p>The remnant parcels could be used for new or relocated development or for green space. For example, the existing McDonalds site, (after Access Project acquires and relocates), could be redeveloped with commercial and/or residential building(s) along Lake Street and green space north to the Midtown Greenway.</p> <p>Remnant parcels ownership, maintenance, and green space would be encourage to be privately held to increase tax base, provide positive care-taking, and minimize impacts to City and Park Board maintenance requirements. State, County and City are working on the parameters of operations and maintenance. Estimated schedule 4 months and will bring forward with layout approval in June 2004.</p>
8. What is the project construction funding schedule?	<p>\$20 million from federal appropriations (2003 or earlier) as a National High Priority project.</p> <p>\$25 million Mn/DOT funds are programmed in 2009-2010.</p> <p>Metro Transit funds has previously programmed \$2 million to earlier Lake Street transit improvements.</p> <p>City and County each have \$3.5 million in their Five-Year Capitol Improvement Programs (CIP)</p>
9. What are the Minneapolis Legislative delegation's viewpoints and interests related to the Project?	<p>This question has been referred to the City IGR Department. Public Works will work with IGR to inform and solicit comment from legislative delegation over the next three to six months.</p>

Questions from CM Zimmermann	Answer or Response Time
10. Why EA and not an EIS?	<p>Generally, an EA is usually used for spot improvement projects or to modify conditions. A completely new facility (through lanes or new location) usually needs an EIS.</p> <p>The Access Project's EA is very robust and substantially includes most of the analysis and subject matters of an EIS. One of the next steps in the EA process would be a determination by Federal and State officials as to whether the</p>

	<p>EA is adequate or an EIS is needed. This is part of the environmental documentation review process to occur in the next six months.</p> <p>See the pages 8 and 9 S.E.H. letter dated 1/27/04. Also, see the EA summary information in the separate emailed files.</p>
<p>11. Are there traffic impacts (28th Street) on the Anderson Elementary School?</p>	<p>The traffic analysis and forecasts for the project indicate that the No Build versus Build alternatives do not have a significant change in traffic volumes on 28th Street near the Anderson Elementary School. Also, Anderson School is one-half block removed from both 26th and 28th Streets.</p>
<p>12. Questions the economic benefit of the Project, building the freeway ramps might work just the opposite by bringing people away from Lake Street to shop/do business in the suburbs. Please review Portland Oregon study.</p>	<p>Public Works will obtain the referenced study from the Council Member Zimmermann. Public Works will seek input from CPED and marketing experts regarding this matter. A two-month timeline is anticipated.</p>
<p>13. What about access from 29th Street to the northbound entrance ramp from Lake Street? Would this serve the Well Fargo campus?</p>	<p>Access to northbound I-35W from 29th Street might be possible, however it would have the following preliminary implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase traffic on 29th Street, a local residential street • Traffic increases may not be compatible with planned uses along the greenway such as planned Crossroads Park • Wells Fargo Home Mortgage (WFHM) employees have access to northbound I-35W and eastbound I-94 via the 5th Avenue ramp north of Franklin Avenue. Approximately 24% of the WFHM employees would use the northbound Lake Street entrance ramp to get to westbound I-94. • 29th Street has limited usefulness for WFHM traffic because the new parking ramp is located on 4th Avenue, which bridges over 29th Street. WFHM traffic would need to travel three blocks extra and use 5th Avenue to 29th Street. • The proposed freeway entrance ramp would need to be shifted approximately 400 feet to the north requiring additional right of way. • This shift north results in a 400 foot reduction in weaving distance available for vehicles entering from Lake Street destined for westbound I-94 <p>For the above stated reasons, this change would be a challenge. The TAC and PAC will further examine this option and develop a formal recommendation prior to the layout approval.</p>

<p>14. Can the alignment of the proposed 28th Street exit and the Lake Street entrance ramp be located where the current 2nd Avenue bridge exists (which would eliminate the need to acquire property)? Would buses enter northbound I-35W at Lake Street? Would bypass lane be used by buses or only for passenger vehicles?</p>	<p>No. The overall width of the proposed freeway with the new ramps and transit station is wider than the existing roadway. The proposed ramp's easterly edge is 95 feet easterly of the existing 2nd Avenue bridge over the Greenway. The additional width is due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center transit station • Accommodation of future transit lanes • Northbound entrance from Lake Street • Northbound exit to 28th Street <p>The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) initially passed a resolution to not provide the bypass lane in favor of minimizing property acquisition. This bypass lane requires some additional right of way including one additional single family home on 2nd Avenue. The ramp meter bypass is intended to serve residents and workers in area. No current transit bus routes would use the bypass lane to carry passengers. However, empty transit buses traveling from the bus garage to downtown or other points north/west/east may benefit from the bypass lane.</p> <p>The bypass lane was further discussed and the PAC voted to approve layout that includes the bypass lane and the 2nd Avenue connection to eastbound 29th Street.</p>
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Questions from CM Lilligren	Answer or Response Time
<p>15. Why concept approval before EA approval? Why is concept approval being sought and not layout approval like the Crosstown Project?</p>	<p>Concept Approval of the preferred build alternative is being requested because 1) Allina is seeking some direction from the City regarding the commitments for the Sears project, and 2) City staff is seeking general support and direction about moving forward on this project.</p> <p>Layout Approval (formal detail approval or municipal consent) would be requested at a later date when the EA is approved. The EA and Layout Approvals would occur on or after June 2004.</p>
<p>16. How will the City's \$151,575 preliminary design funding to be used?</p>	<p>Preliminary design is being funded 80% federal and 20% local match. The 20% local match is being split three-ways between MnDOT, Hennepin County and the City.</p> <p>The \$151,575 contract amendment is the City's one-third that would generally be split as follows among the consultants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEH - \$135,383 • Smith Parker - \$16,192 <p>The \$135,383 SEH activities which would be reimbursed via the city cost share would be:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental analysis – Approximately 10% • Traffic analysis and modeling – Approximately 30 % • Access approval documentation with the region and federal authorities - Approximately 5% • Layout refinements and analysis – Approximately 23% • Aesthetic design along the corridor – Approximately 13% • Overall project management, including public involvement and misc. – Approximately 19% <p>The \$16,192 Smith Parker activities which would be reimbursed via the city cost share would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management • Public involvement
<p>17. Why are mitigation measures on 38th Street not extended west of Blaisdell?</p>	<p>The traffic analysis and forecasts for the Access Project indicate that the No Build versus Build alternatives do not have a significant change in traffic volumes on 38th Street west of Blaisdell (About 7000 ADT east of Lyndale with or without the proposed access changes).</p> <p>Recognizing that traffic growth on 38th Street resulting from the placement of a freeway interchange was not significant west of Blaisdell, the PAC's Mitigation and Enhancement Subcommittee voted on September 17, 2002 to not extend the mitigation/streetscaping measures west of Blaisdell. Then, on October 29, 2002 the full PAC also voted to not extend the mitigation/streetscaping to Lyndale for the same reason and because it would extend the boundaries of the Project.</p>
<p>18. What are the priorities should sufficient monies not be available for construction all at one time?</p>	<p>The Project continues to seek full funding from all partners. To date, the project has not prioritized portions of the construction based on lower levels of project funding. If this needs to occur, this would be a major Project change that would require consent of the all the partners.</p> <p>It should be noted that a full funded project would take multiple years to construct. As such programmed funding commitments would occur over multiple construction years to meet the phased construction.</p>
<p>19. Does the Project replace bridges that have recently been reconstructed or are otherwise in "good shape"? What is the age of the current bridges?</p>	<p>The Project replaces the existing ten bridges between 40th Street and Franklin Avenue either for the Lake Street access needs or the accommodation of the "5th Lane".</p> <p>A bridge in the Twin Cities Metro area can be expected to last 50 to 70 years. This can vary depending on location, preventative maintenance, traffic volumes, weather, freeze/thaw cycles, etc. Preventive maintenance includes deck washing, seal cracks, maintain joints, etc. Preventive maintenance should be done regularly to help slow bridge</p>

	<p>deterioration.</p> <p>If the bridge is a steel girder bridge and the paint is maintained particularly under joints, it is expected that painting the steel bridge members would occur in 30 to 35 years</p> <p>The first major construction work would be some type of deck repair and/or overlay around 30 to 40 years. If a complete new bridge deck is done at approximately 50 years then 80 years of life could be expected.</p> <p>Public Works and MnDOT are compiling a summary report of the freeway bridges that will be completed in one month.</p>
20. The PAC voted back in 2000 to give special consideration to those being relocated, is that part of the current plan?	The special consideration is a strong relocation effort for business and residential owners by keeping them in the general Lake Street corridor. Some residential parties have indicated a desire to be relocated south of 40 th Street.
21. The I-35W Solutions Alliance has put forward the I-494 interchange as their first priority and the Access Project is something they care little about. What is the I-35W Solutions Alliance position?	The I-35W Solutions Alliance white paper titled "Congestion, Competition and Jobs" (pages 4 and 16) cites that the Access Project is needed along with other transit and highway needs. City staff is not aware of a priority statement from the Solutions Alliance among the multiple needs.

Questions from CM Niziolek	Answer or Response Time
22. Does Lake Street need to be widened between Blaisdell and I-35W?	<p>Yes. The proposed design of Lake Street is wider than existing Lake Street for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serve new traffic patterns anticipated with the planned re-opening of Nicollet Avenue • Serve new traffic demand associated with K-mart site redevelopment • Serve east-west traffic demands on the commercial arterial street, Lake Street, rather than residential streets such as 26th, 28th & 31st Streets • Maintain an acceptable level of service on Lake Street and avoid gridlock • Improve transit flow through this currently congested area. Also, provide local transit stops on Lake Street that will reduce or eliminate the blocking of through travel lanes • Provide left turn lanes for proposed freeway ramps • The added lanes act as "auxiliary" lanes to collect and distribute ramp traffic along Lake Street four blocks between 2nd and Nicollet Avenues. • Provides wider sidewalks

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides pedestrian refuge median islands • Provides green space or other streetscape amenities along Lake Street <p>Traffic forecasting and the preliminary design procedures related to Lake Street have been endorsed through a peer review process performed by Fred Dock of Meyer, Mohaddes Associates.</p>
<p>23. Are the auxiliary lanes (31st to 38th, and 28th) required for the project? Can they be removed?</p>	<p>The auxiliary lanes are required for the safety of freeway ramp users, primarily South Minneapolis residents and workers.</p> <p>The new design for the interchange ramps at 38th Street and 31st Street is based upon the latest design guidelines, which provide for safe acceleration from the entrance ramp or safe deceleration to the exit ramp. These acceleration or deceleration lanes and tapers are much longer the existing conditions between the 35th and 31st Street ramps. The “true” auxiliary lane length, in between the entrance and exit ramp tapers is only a city block in length. A map is being developed that will illustrate the minor pavement changes with and without the auxiliary lanes. This map will be available in two weeks.</p> <p>Operations analysis and freeway traffic simulation has shown that the auxiliary lane is necessary to maintain uniform traffic flow on I-35W and safely allow weaving maneuvers between the freeway ramps.</p> <p>Similarly, freeway traffic operations analysis has shown that extending the northbound auxiliary lane to the 28th Street exit will provide smoother flow on mainline I-35W and therefore be the safest condition for users of the freeway and the exit ramp.</p>
<p>24. The northbound entrance ramp from Lake Street has a ramp meter bypass lane. Does the meter bypass lane requiring another bridge structure? What is property impact of not having the meter bypass lane?</p>	<p>The ramp meter bypass lane would result in a 21-foot wider bridge structure than without the bypass lane. The ramp meter bypass lane would need to acquire one more residential property (from a willing seller) than without the bypass lane.</p>
<p>25. What are the commitments regarding the permanent ramp improvements north of Lake Street as it relates to the weaving issues and the northbound I-35W to westbound I-94 flyover?</p>	<p>MnDOT understands the need to study the 35W and 94 commons area near downtown. Future pending freeway changes (394 HOT lanes, I-35W Mississippi River bridge, Crosstown, and Access Projects) all will result in traffic forecast implications in the 94 commons area. MnDOT has begun initial discussions with its partners (Minneapolis and Met Council) about developing means and methods to ensure permanent ramp improvements both short and long-term.</p>



Mr. James Grube
Director
Hennepin County Public Works
Transportation Department
1600 Prairie Drive
Medina, MN 55340-5421

January 27, 2004

Dear Mr. Grube:

The I-35W Access Project Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Minnesota state environmental review processes to fulfill requirements of both 42 USC 4332 and M.S. 116D. Hennepin County is the I-35W Access Project proposer and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) is the Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for the I-35W Access Project's environmental documentation. The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (MEQB), Mn/DOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) share jurisdiction of the EA process.

At the Federal level, the EA is used to provide sufficient environmental documentation to determine the need for a Federal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or that a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is appropriate. At the State level, the EA is used to provide sufficient environmental documentation to determine the need for a state EIS or that a Negative Declaration is appropriate. At the state level, this document also serves as an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW). Minnesota Rules 4410.1300 allows the EA to take the place of the EAW form, provided that the EA addresses each of the environmental effects identified in the EAW form. The I-35W Access Project EA includes each of the environmental effects identified in the EAW form.

Preparation of an EAW is mandatory under Minnesota Rules 4410.4300 subp. 22, under the following subsections:

- 4410.4300 subp. 22(b) – Construction of additional travel lanes on an existing road for a length of one or more miles.
- 4410.4300 subp. 22(c) – For the addition of one or more new interchanges to a completed limited access highway.

A Scoping Information Document was prepared and approved by the I-35W Access Project Technical and Project Advisory Committees in fall 2000 which documented the development of project alternatives, identified potential environmental issues, and to alert the public of imminent EA preparation. The decision to prepare a combined EA/EAW (typically referred to simply as the "EA") was made in late 2000 by concurrence of staff of Hennepin County, the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, Mn/DOT and the FHWA based on the aforementioned Minnesota Rules. The later addition of the HOV and other project components did not change the EA or mandatory EAW processing

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Mr. James Grube

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requirements nor did it change thresholds to require a mandatory State or Federal EIS. For a highway project to require a State EIS, it must be a road on a new location which is four or more lanes in width and two or more miles in length (Minnesota Rules 4410.4400, subp. 16). A Federal EIS is typically prepared in concurrence with the State EIS process.

Mn/DOT and FHWA staff provided guidance by reviewing a working draft of the EA in July 2002 to gauge the level of impacts anticipated, review suggested mitigation, and ensure compliance with state and federal regulatory processing. Detailed special studies have been prepared over the past several years to provide sufficient responses for mandatory EAW questions and to fulfill additional Federal impact analysis requirements, including traffic impact studies, an Environmental Justice determination, air and noise impact studies, a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment to determine the likelihood of potentially contaminated properties, and a cultural resources (archaeological/historical) investigation. The results of these special studies have been coordinated with other state agencies, including the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office. Detailed summaries of anticipated EA impacts were also prepared and distributed to Technical and Project Advisory Committee members and community members at public meetings specifically held for the project.

The EA document, when reviewed, approved, and signed by Mn/DOT and the FHWA, will be made available for public review and comment in accordance with the requirements of 23 CFR 771.119 (d) and Minnesota Rules 4410.1500 through 4410.1600. A public hearing is not required for the EA; however, the project sponsor has determined that a public hearing is appropriate and will schedule a hearing in accordance with state and federal noticing requirements once the EA has been signed and released for public review. The testimony received at the public hearing and written comments received will be documented and considered by the FHWA to judge the sufficiency of the EA, assess the need for potential corrected, updated, or supplemental information, and determine whether or not a FONSI or EIS is warranted as the next step in the process. It is SEH's professional opinion that an EIS will not be warranted for the proposed project based on the extensive assessment of impacts described above and the successful implementation of acceptable mitigation with the agencies and communities involved.

Sincerely,
SHORT ELLIOTT HENDRICKSON, Inc.



Scott L. McBride, PE
Principal

SLM/rdh