

Hennepin/First Avenue Transportation Study Study Advisory Committee Meeting #3 (Part I and II) May 2 and 9, 2016 - City of Lakes Room 101

Introductions

City staff provided Study Advisory Committee (SAC) members with a brief outline of meeting's agenda.

Study Overview

An overview of the study and activities to date was provided to the SAC by staff.

Traffic Analysis

Staff presented the components of the traffic analysis, which was conducted for both existing and future conditions. This analysis included evaluation of the "no build" conditions, as well as the six leading concepts using VISSIM traffic modeling software to account for multimodal operations (i.e., transit, bike, and ped). Below are a list of questions, comments, and responses related to the evaluation process.

- Attendees sought clarification of future traffic volumes and assumptions, noting that recent improvements (e.g., 4th Street I-35W ramp) may relieve traffic volumes in the neighborhood.
 - Staff clarified that future traffic volumes were developed with consideration of active and proposed development proposals, current traffic patterns, planned roadway improvements, and an understanding of downtown traffic patterns.
- Attendees asked if large mode shifts were assumed to account for potential reduction of motor vehicle demand.
 - Staff indicated that transit ridership data was incorporated as a part of the development of future traffic volumes, understanding that this information provides insight into future modal demands. This analysis did not assume major changes to the way transportation is delivered (i.e., automated vehicles, etc.) or significant mode share changes. None of the concepts brought forward expanded capacity or specifically prioritized motorized vehicle throughput, which could lead to induced demand.
- Motorized vehicle traffic must be slowed as to not induce more demand in the future and incentivize driving over transit, walking, or biking.
 - Staff noted that transit must remain competitive from a travel time perspective to attract riders who would otherwise travel by way of single occupancy vehicle. Transitway investments developed along congested corridors (e.g., Seattle's South Lake Union Streetcar) may have difficulties attracting riders due to unreliable service and unpredictable travel times.
- Attendees indicated that future traffic volumes may overstate demand in area based upon lessons learned from I-35W bridge collapse, noting that commuters will always find routes.
- Evaluation summary indicates that congestion along the corridor is both a "pro" and a "con" for the neighborhoods and businesses, indicating that it should not be assumed as all bad.
- Congestion may negatively impact businesses, but vehicles traveling through the neighborhood at speeds approaching or exceeding 40 miles per hour does not support business either.

- Attendees indicated that current and future residents choose to live in the area to live a (more) car-free lifestyle, noting that most parking garages are relatively full during normal work hours.
- Would the bottleneck at Hennepin/Main be eliminated if the Hennepin Bridge were converted to two-lanes in each direction?
 - Staff indicated that this would most likely move the bottleneck across the river into downtown.
- There was a concern that the conversion to two-way would result in more turning movement in the neighborhood and that a “real world” test would be needed to fully understand the operations of the corridor.
 - Staff indicated that traffic volumes were estimated for two-way operations by evaluating existing volumes and relying upon the origin-destination data collected in the June 2015. There are still concerns about two-way operations and the negative impact of vehicle congestion on transit service within and through the neighborhood.
- Why are the afternoon operations so much worse than the morning operations?
 - Larger afternoon traffic volumes and more non-work based trips during this period
 - Highest volumes concentrated on bridge out of downtown, whereas southbound morning commute builds from side streets and maxes out across bridge into downtown
 - 1st Ave provides better intersection spacing, effectively meters in traffic from side streets, better intersection spacing, has one less intersection, and does not have a six-legged intersection
 - Hennepin Ave at Main St represents bottleneck from 3-Lanes to 2-Lanes under certain concepts evaluated
 - Hennepin/Central/5th intersection is a complex six-legged intersection that introduces a bottleneck at Hennepin Ave and Central Ave
- Attendees presented the following questions related to the traffic modeling:
 - Has the 2015 (existing) traffic analysis been proven with real world timings? Has somebody driven the routes at particular times to see if it measures up?
Models were calibrated to the existing conditions and validated with existing controller signal timings, and traffic volumes. Field observations were performed to match observed queue lengths with the model.
 - Has that input data for 2015 been changed to see if the analysis is accurate calculating times?
The AM, PM and Off peak were modeled. The models included the existing signal timing and traffic volumes for those time periods. A weekend analysis was not completed, however based on observations and experience on many other corridors in Minneapolis, the weekend volumes are similar to a weekday off peak time period.
 - Has this analysis software been used in other projects (Mpls. or otherwise) where its accuracy has been verified?
The VISSIM software has been used on many projects within Minneapolis and is a standard industry traffic operation analysis tool used worldwide. Traffic modeling programs are a tool used to inform decisions and help with the evaluation process. Engineering judgement and many other factors/variables were also considered.
 - What was the method of estimating future traffic volumes and has this been verified in other projects?
There are 12 proposed or currently under construction redevelopment parcels in the study area. Future traffic volumes assume a 50% reduction in auto trips due to the availability of other modal options, but auto traffic is expected increase by approximately 10% in the study area.

Evaluation Summary

Staff presented leading one-way and two-way concepts identified by study's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), composed of City, Hennepin County, Metro Transit, and MnDOT staff. Below are a list of questions, comments, and responses related to the evaluation process.

- Center-running bridge concept may not be supported by DeLaSalle and Park Board due to location of station.
 - Staff will provide an update on streetcar study to DeLaSalle and Park Board staff to better understand their concerns. Center-running streetcar on the bridge allows for (*and does not preclude*) left-side or right-side running streetcar north/east of Main Street.
- Concepts must reflect long-term plan to extend streetcar further to the north along Central Ave.
 - Staff understands these plans, noting that this can be accomplished whether streetcar is left-side or right-side running for either the one-way or two-way concepts.
- Concepts do not yet consider potential State-Aid variance requests (e.g., narrowing travel lanes, reducing curb reaction distance, etc.) that could further expand the pedestrian realm.
- If two-way concept is carried forward for more detailed analysis, the following items must be considered:
 - Restoring two-way operations along Hennepin Ave between 5th Street and 7th Street.
 - No left turns at Hennepin/Central/5th intersection.
 - Closure of vehicle access at 5th Street (maintain bike/ped movements).
 - Discuss opportunities related to redevelopment of Holiday/White Castle site.
 - Closure of 6th Street between Central Ave and Hennepin Ave.

ACTION: Continued coordinate with CPED staff regarding Holiday/White Castle redevelopment.

ACTION: Determine potential closure of 6th Street and need for emergency vehicle access.

ACTION: Identify left-turn volumes occurring at Hennepin/Central/5th intersection.

Concept Layouts

- All concepts must have interim solutions.
 - This was a prerequisite for advancement for more detailed analysis.
- Can lane widths be reduced below 11 feet?
 - This area serves buses and trucks, thus there is a need for lanes wider than 10 feet. There are other measures to reduce visual lane widths, such as wider striping.
- Bicycle facilities similar to First Ave N in downtown are not preferred, but supportive of greening elements and sidewalk-level cycletracks.
- Three-lanes dedicated for vehicular traffic for the one-way concepts are not preferred and not supported, but there is openness to dedicated transit-only lanes. This provides a continuation of the high speed travel from the bridge and induces the continual growth of traffic in the neighborhood.
- Biggest problem with the one-way concepts is the left-side running streetcar. This design is not intuitive and puts transit facilities on both sides of the street.
- Parking will remain a big concern for businesses in the neighborhood relying upon pull-up parking in front of stores. There will need to be trade-offs when allocating space.
- Those in attendance all preferred two-way configuration over one-way configuration, which has been consistent throughout all phases of the study. There is a desire to see an interim two-way concept tested.
- Split preferences between long-term two-way concept, split between 2-1B and 2-1C.
- Staff reiterated that the study would not be providing recommendations and no capital projects have been identified along Hennepin or First Avenues.

- The study will document the results of the analysis along with the pros and cons of each concept.

Next Steps

Documentation is expected to be complete by early June. The results of the study will be presented to management and elected officials during this timeframe. Outreach to the neighborhoods, business association, and the City's Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committees is expected in July.

ACTION: Meeting materials and report will be posted to the study website as soon as possible.