



BlaineMN.gov

MEMO

CITY OF BLAINE ■ PUBLIC WORKS ■ 763-785-6165

DATE: December 29, 2020

TO: Michelle A. Wolfe, City Manager

FROM: Jon Haukaas PE, Director of Public Works 

SUBJECT: TH65 Strategy Document

The vision associated with the City of Blaine Strategic Plan Strategy #5 – Trunk Highway 65 Improvements is to reduce congestion, improve safety, and maintain community connectivity along and across the TH 65 corridor in Blaine.

This memo will describe the actions that have been completed, next steps, and assistance needed to achieve this vision. The City of Blaine is focusing on 99th Ave as the intersection to a City Street that can have the most impact on improving the corridor. The City is also supporting Anoka County in its future work at 109th.

Executive Summary - Project Focus 2021-2025

1. Receive final PEL study report.
2. Focus on design and construction of a grade separated intersection at 99th Ave.
3. Support ACHD in their design of a grade separated intersection at 109th Ave.
4. Coordinate with ACHD to complete a single NEPA review of the segment 97th Ave through 117th Ave to select the final alternative from the PEL study.
5. Secure additional grant funding for costs of design and construction.
6. Work with our legislators to close any funding gap through state bonding in the next bonding year (2022).
7. Construct frontage road improvements in the 2022-2023 timeframe.
8. Construct 99th Ave grade separated intersection beginning in 2024-2025.

Actions Completed:PEL Study

MnDOT utilized the TH 65 corridor to pilot a new program called a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) study. The PEL study is intended to streamline the actions required of the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA process requires agencies to evaluate the environmental and related social and economic effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. Agencies also provide opportunities for public review and comment on those evaluations.

The PEL study narrows down the number of potential actions to only those that meet the approved Purpose and Need of the corridor improvements, are constructible, and are financially reasonable. This narrowing to a select number of focused alternatives significantly reduces the time needed to complete the federally mandated NEPA process. The final PEL report is to be published in December 2020.

Funding

Funding for a project of this magnitude will need to be accomplished through a collection of options including federal and state grants, partnerships with state and county agencies, and local funding.

Funding will be needed at the various stages of project development and over a number of years. The earliest funding will be focused on the project development that build on the conceptual layouts alternatives approved in the PEL study – environmental review, preliminary design, and right of way acquisition. Following that stage will be the creation and approval of final construction documents, bidding, and finally the actual construction with construction support.

The 99th Ave intersection and its associated frontage road access improvements has been estimated to have a cost in the range of \$29M. Using the draft results of the PEL as a base, the City made a number of grant applications to move this project forward.

- We have requested \$10M in 2024 through the Metropolitan Council Federal Solicitation process in the Strategic Capacity category. Our project is anticipated to be funded under all potential funding scenarios. The Transportation Advisory Board will the final announcements for funding in December of this year.
- We have made application through MnDOT's Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) to improve the east side where 99th Ave and Davenport come together as access to TH65. We have been awarded \$1.53M toward that project available in 2022.

- We have made application through MnDOT's Local Partnership Program (LPP) for funds to create a west side frontage road from 99th to the north. We were recently informed we will be awarded \$624k toward that project also available in 2022.
- Finally, we will be making a funding request through the Minnesota Highway Freight Program for an additional \$7M for construction of the interchange in 2024.

The City of Blaine Capital Improvement Plan has identified \$2M in 2021 for TH 65 Improvements. These funds are intended to be used for preliminary design, environmental review, final design, and local cost sharing towards the construction of the improvements at the 99th Ave intersection.

The Anoka County Highway Department was granted \$1.5M in the 2020 State Bonding Bill toward the design, environmental review, and right of way needs for the in TH 65 at 109th Ave intersection.

Next Steps:

Representatives from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), who oversee the NEPA process, have provided guidance that a single environmental review of the segment from 97th through 117th will need to be coordinated and completed before any individual project will be approved for construction.

The State Bonding funds awarded to the Anoka County Highway Department can be used to complete the NEPA process. The City and County are in discussions of using these funds to begin the NEPA process immediately, as the results of that review will determine which PEL alternative to use for the final project development.

The County was not prepared to begin work on TH 65 for several years and so will need the City to be the lead agency to move the projects forward. The City and County will need to develop a Joint Powers Agreement to coordinate that work. We anticipate significant efficiencies in the process by jointly hiring a consultant team through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to complete the NEPA process and then a coordinated design of grade separated intersections for 99th Ave and for 109th Ave. The City will use its budgeted funds for the 99th Ave design and a portion of the environmental review while the County will use the bonding bill funds for their portions of the project.

The HSIP and LPP grants for the east and west frontage road improvements are for construction in to begin in 2022. These improvements can be done ahead of, and concurrent with the final design of the grade separated intersection work. Grant funding for the 99th

Ave intersection is for construction to begin in 2024. The County anticipates applying for construction funding of the 109th Ave intersection in the 2028 funding cycles.

Additional funds will be necessary to bring all of these projects through construction. The City will need to rely heavily on our lobbyist team to convince our legislators to support and fill the funding gap. We feel this should be much easier for them to get behind as a majority of the funding will have been secured.

