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General Plan Overview

The St. Cloud Metropolitan Area will grow by approximately 60,000 people, or the equivalent of one City of St. Cloud by the year 2030. Over this time period, St. Cloud Metro Area cities and counties will face an estimated \$270 million expansion funding shortfall, or about \$400 million in total, when including St. Cloud Metro Area unmet expansion needs on the State Trunk Highway system. **The effect of this funding shortfall for St. Cloud Metro Area motorists, after the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization's (APO's) 2030 Roadway Plan is implemented, will be approximately 118 more miles of congestion than we experience today.** How do we address this monumental problem?

Overall road and bridge funding within the St. Cloud Metro Area has averaged approximately \$25 million annually over the last sixteen years. Of this amount, approximately 54 percent has been provided by local funds, approximately 15 percent has been provided by state-aid funds to counties and cities, approximately 12 percent has been provided by State funds to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and approximately 18 percent has been provided by federal funds. Almost all "expansion" of the principal and minor arterial system within the St. Cloud Metro Area has historically involved a significant level of federal funding, and some level of State and/or state-aid funding. Accordingly, State/state-aid and federal funding must be the cornerstone of any long-term solution to the area's growing congestion problem.

On the State/state-aid side of the equation, the most significant challenge continues to be the inability to obtain a permanent increase in revenues generated through the State "Highway User Tax Distribution Fund" (HUTDF). The HUTDF currently generates approximately \$1.3 billion annually, which is divided 62 percent to MnDOT, 29 percent to counties and 9 percent to cities over 5,000 population. This fund currently receives revenue from a constitutionally dedicated State gas tax of 20 cents per gallon, which has not been increased since 1988; constitutionally dedicated license fees, which were reduced in year 2000 under the Ventura Administration; and 32 percent of the Motor Vehicle Sales Tax (MVST) that is legislatively dedicated from the General Fund.

On the federal side of the equation, Minnesota has recently been awarded a 46 percent federal funding increase in the "SAFETEA-LU" transportation bill; increasing overall federal funding apportionments to the State from approximately \$410 million annually to approximately \$600 million annually. However, after reductions for earmarks, a statewide "Central Fund", MnDOT "Bond Accelerated Projects (BAP) and other miscellaneous set-a-sides, the APO will likely see less than a 10 percent increase in its \$1.95 million annual target from the District 3 ATP.

So, how does the St. Cloud Metro Area address 118 more miles of congestion by the year 2030 when the 20 cent State gas tax is now worth 13 cents today and very little of the SAFETEA-LU increase will likely be available to local units of government?

We can start by supporting the 100 percent constitutional dedication of MVST to transportation at next year's November, 2006 election, and by effectively utilizing the recently approved St. Cloud Area local option sales tax. However, significant, long-term, strides toward reduced congestion for St. Cloud Metro Area cities and counties must also involve a reversion back to the

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pre-1999 statewide vehicle registration formula (prior to the Ventura Administration); implementation of innovative financing mechanisms, such as Congressman Mark Kennedy's FAST proposal; a 5 to 10 cent State gas tax increase and annual indexing of this tax to keep pace with inflation; and rigorous efforts to secure as much federal funding as possible through the ATP process, the HPP process and the statewide "Central Fund" process.

Other Plan Elements

In addition to the growth, financial and roadway challenges outlined above, this Plan also sets a vision as to how many other aspects of transportation should assist in the overall growth and economic prosperity of the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area. These other important considerations include public involvement, access management, freight, Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit, air quality and environmental justice.

Corridor Preservation

This Plan includes many proposed roadway alignments that are currently in danger due to the significant growth occurring in the St. Cloud Metro Area. It is a priority of the St. Cloud APO to work closely with its local government partners and MnDOT to take a pro-active approach in protecting these critical transportation corridors. As funding and staff time permits, proposed projects on new alignment should be reviewed through the required State and federal environmental review processes **prior to** development pressures presenting themselves. Selected alignments from these processes should be protected with official maps.

Protection of necessary right-of-way along new or existing alignments should occur through the subdivision platting process, through building set-backs negotiated during rezoning or permitting, through site plan reviews, or by outright purchase, when necessary.

Placement of corridor preservation as a top priority by Metropolitan Area elected officials and transportation staff will result in reduced right-of-way costs, lower social and environmental impacts, and a more connected, effective and efficient overall transportation system.

Project Programming Process/5 Year TIP

MnDOT has established eight (8) Area Transportation Partnerships (ATPs) throughout the State to manage the programming of federal transportation projects. Each of these ATPs are responsible for developing a financially constrained Area Transportation Improvement Program (ATIP) that is submitted for funding approval and incorporation into a financially constrained State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). As the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the St. Cloud Area, the APO must develop its own Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that is incorporated into the Central Minnesota ATIP and the STIP.

Federal funds available to the Central Minnesota ATP are sub-targeted 75 percent to MnDOT District 3 and 25 percent to four regions that represent local units of government in District 3 (Region 5, Region 7E, Region 7W and St. Cloud APO). Currently, the Central Minnesota ATP receives approximately \$38 million of federal formula funding for annual programming, with

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\$28.5 million provided to MnDOT District 3 and \$9.5 million provided to local units of government. The St. Cloud APO has been receiving approximately \$1.95 million of the \$9.5 million local federal share (20.53 percent). This figure will be changing slightly with the implementation of a new statewide ATP federal distribution formula and increased federal formula funds available to ATPs from the new SAFETEA LU federal highway bill.

This relatively constant APO annual sub-target has allowed the APO to evolve from a 3 to 4 year TIP and program new federal projects every other year instead of annually. This every other year programming approach has allowed the APO to program approximately \$4 million instead of \$2 million each project solicitation, allowing for the programming of larger impact projects. With SAFETEA LU now requiring a minimum 4-year TIP, the APO will continue this every other year programming approach by adding a voluntary 5th TIP year.

TEA-21 Planning Factors

Outlined below is an overview of how the Roadway Plan and other elements of the 2030 Plan address the seven “Planning Factors” required under TEA-21. Action items for these Planning Factors are also elaborated upon in Exhibit 1E in the Introduction Chapter.

1. ***Metropolitan Vitality:*** *Support the economic vitality of the metropolitan area, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity and efficiency.*

The 2030 Plan supports the planning factor of ***Metropolitan Vitality*** by recommending a program of system-wide transportation improvements that will best address forecasted congestion and safety issues created by forecasted land use growth. Proposed roadway expansion projects and supplementary transit and bicycle/pedestrian improvements within the 2030 Plan will help ensure that the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area maintains its attractiveness as a the major housing and commercial hub of Central Minnesota.

2. ***Safety and Security:*** *Increase the safety and security of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.*

The Roadway Plan supports the planning factor of ***Safety and Security*** by first addressing the most significant areas of congestion and crashes, as identified by the 2030 travel demand model and Metro Area Transportation System Management (TSM) data. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan provides for a system of on and off-road facilities that are integrated into the roadway system, thus reducing the potential for bicycle/pedestrian and auto related crashes. The Transit Plan also discusses safety and security measures that have been taken by the St. Cloud Metropolitan Transit Commission such as video surveillance equipment on buses and emergency communication devices to contact police and fire departments.

3. ***Accessibility and Mobility:*** *Increase the accessibility and mobility options available to people and freight.*

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The Transit Plan and Roadway Plan both support the planning factor of *Accessibility and Mobility*. The Transit Plan's discussion of proposed fixed route service expansion to St. Joseph and St. Augusta will provide new transportation access and mobility options for these communities and the entire Metropolitan Area. The Roadway Plan's recommendation to construct a Michigan Avenue Interchange with T.H. 10 will make the St. Cloud Regional Airport a more accessible and attractive option for airfreight and also more accessible for St. Cloud Metro Area travelers utilizing the popular "Northwest Link" to the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport.

4. ***Energy and Environment:*** *Protect and enhance the environment, promote energy conservation, and improve the quality of life.*

Both the Transit Plan and the Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan support the planning factor of *Energy and Environment* through their promotion of non-vehicular modes of transportation. Additionally, all roadway projects proposed in the roadway plan must undergo rigorous environmental review consistent with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

5. ***System Connectivity:*** *Enhance the integration and connectivity of the transportation system, across and between modes, for people and freight.*

The Roadway Plan supports the *System Connectivity* planning factor by recommending three new river crossings within the Metropolitan area that will provide critical connections to existing and future arterial roadways and land use. One crossing is proposed along the Mississippi River in the vicinity of 33rd Street South. Two river additional crossings are also proposed along the Sauk River in the western portion of the Metro Area in the 3rd Street/28th Avenue Corridor and the Stearns CR 134/Pinecone Road Corridor. The systematic implementation of these river crossings, along with implementation of strategies to better serve truck, air and rail modes of transportation, as discussed in the Freight Plan, will provide for a more integrated and connected transportation system that serves both people and freight.

6. ***System Management:*** *Promote efficient system management and operation.*

The 2030 Transportation Plan addresses the *System Management* planning factor by encouraging the continued application of Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technologies in the St. Cloud Metro Area, and also by promoting the application of new ITS technologies, as appropriate. Additionally, the Roadway Plan incorporates system management principles by considering high crash rate intersections identified in the TSM Report.

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7. ***System Preservation:*** *Emphasize preservation of the existing transportation system.*

The APO collects transportation financial data from all local units of government to monitor their investments in system preservation activities. Historically, APO Area cities and counties have expended approximately 80% of their total local and state-aid funding, or \$8.7 million annually, on project orientated preservation activities. A straight trend-line forecast of this preservation investment over the forecast period, adjusted for inflation, equates to an annual preservation investment of approximately \$15 million. With no pavement management system data available at this time, it is assumed that this projected level of local investment will allow for adequate preservation of the system. Accordingly, 2030 forecasted city/county federal dollars are being directed primarily toward system capacity improvements, with a small set-a-side for safety deficiencies and enhancement projects.

Public Involvement

A total of nine (9) public informational meetings have been conducted by the APO over the course of developing the 2030 Transportation Plan. A thirty (30) day comment period was also held on the entire draft 2030 Plan Document from October 28, 2005 to November 28, 2005. During the thirty (30) day comment period, the draft Plan was made available to the public via the APO website, as well as the St. Cloud Times and other local media sources. Significant coordination has also taken place with key APO planning partners including the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and St. Cloud MetroBus. Appendix B provides documentation of all public involvement opportunities for the 2030 Plan, as well as citizen and review agency comments received during the thirty (30) day comment period.

Summary of Plan Key Points

- The Plan forecasts 60,000 additional people and 24 additional square miles of urban development by the year 2030 within the APO Planning Area.
- The Plan allocates \$87 million of the \$94 million local federal roadway forecast to capacity improvements in an effort to partially address a 2030 forecast of 256 congested lane miles; 1/3 of the collector/arterial system in the APO Planning Area. The remaining \$7 million of local federal funding is placed in set-a-sides for bicycle/pedestrian enhancements and roadway safety projects.
- The Plan makes construction of the 8th Street Bridge/Pinecone Road federally earmarked project and the University Bridge federally earmarked project the top APO project priorities.

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- The Plan assumes that all system preservation of the local collector/arterial system will be funded with local or state-aid funds.
- The Plan endorses APO development of a 5 year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the programming of projects every other year to facilitate construction of larger projects.
- The Plan endorses aggressive pursuit of additional State and federal roadway funding to reduce an estimated \$17 million annual roadway funding shortfall.
- The Plan endorses a significant focus on corridor preservation with federally earmarked dollars and ATP federal funds to limit future social, economic and environmental impacts of projects.
- The Plan encourages sound access management “best practices” for reconstruction and new alignment projects to maximize safety and maximize the useful life of roadway capacity.
- The Plan encourages incorporation of bicycle and pedestrian improvements into the roadway system whenever warranted and feasible.
- The Plan introduces Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) as a new element, and outlines existing ITS technologies currently operating in the St. Cloud Metro Area.
- The Plan identifies the important role freight plays in the local, regional and State economy.
- The Plan documents air quality and environmental justice issues for proposed roadway projects.
- The Plan takes a comprehensive look at the local transit system facilities and projected needs.