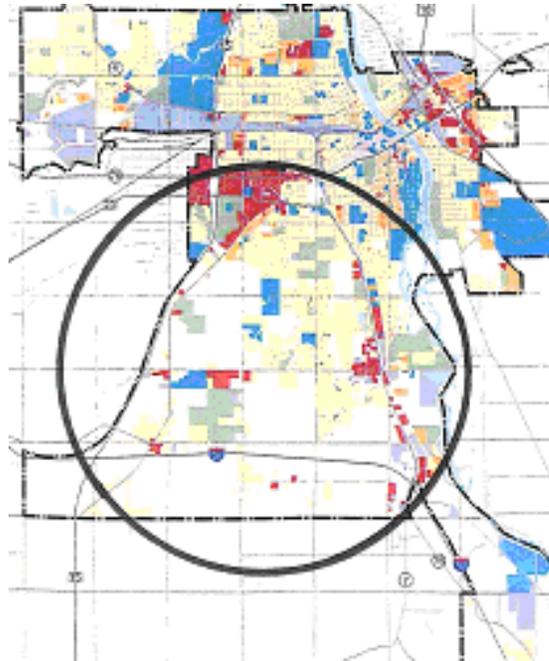


22ND/24TH STREET SOUTH CORRIDOR STUDY
PRE-NEPA SCOPING DECISION DOCUMENT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
July 2005



Prepared by
St. Cloud Area Planning Organization

For
City of St. Cloud

In Association with
Stearns County
City of Waite Park
School District 742
Minnesota Department of Transportation

BACKGROUND

In September 2003, in partnership with the City of St. Cloud, the APO initiated the 22nd/24th Street South Corridor Study. The purpose of this study was to identify a preferred transportation corridor to: 1) Improve east-west mobility between 2nd Street and 33rd Street South, which spans 2 ¼ miles with no continuous east/west roadway, and 2) accommodate future growth. Land use along this corridor is primarily wetlands, farmland, and residential property; however, an estimated 986 developable acres remain within the study area, and the City anticipates significant growth within the 20-year planning horizon. Accordingly, it is anticipated that the results of this study will be used as a tool to coordinate land use and transportation decisions, and help preserve right-of-way for a future east-west corridor.

STUDY AREA

The study area was defined based on logical termini, spacing or minor arterial routes, physical constraints and information obtained from previous plans adopted by communities involved in the study. It is located solely within the City of St. Cloud and includes a band approximately 3 miles long stretching between County Road 74 (east) and Clearwater Road (west), and approximately 2 ¼ miles wide along a north-south alignment from 2nd Street to 33rd Street (see attachment). Originally the study area extended further west, with the anticipation of a future connection at Trunk Highway 15. However, due to the timing constraints to this study, the steering committee selected CR 74 as the western termini, and has requested that a future connection at TH 15, within this study area be addressed by the State Department of Transportation in the TH 15 Access Study.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study followed the practices of a “pre-NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) corridor Study” outlined in the National Cooperative Highway Research Program Report 435 (NCHRP 435) Guidebook for Transportation Corridor Studies: A Process for Effective Decision-Making (1999). Pre-NEPA studies need to take into account the legal requirements of NEPA so that future decision-making conforms to the procedural statute.

ALIGNMENT IDENTIFICATION

NCHRP 435 identifies several “location determining statutes” that need to be addressed when comparing potential alternatives in a pre-NEPA corridor study. These statutes include Section 4(f) of the DOT Act of 1966, the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and parts of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act dealing with wetlands. In addition to the “location determining statutes” identified in NCHRP 435, environmental data collected for other potentially important issues, including: site contamination and unique plant and wildlife habitats.

COMPARISON OF POSSIBLE ALIGNMENTS IMPACTS

As sensitive areas were identified and mapped, preliminary alignment options were refined to avoid and/or minimize the impacts to these areas as well as impacts to existing properties. In addition, other transportation factors were also considered when defining alignments. This included spacing between routes, spacing between major intersections and interchanges, design standards and consistency with local and regional plans.

STEERING COMMITTEE

In September of 2003, a Steering Committee was established comprised of the following affected communities and stakeholders: City of St. Cloud, Stearns County, City of Waite Park, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), and School District 742. St. Cloud Area Planning Organization staff facilitated meetings and assembled technical information. This committee met on a regular basis throughout the planning process. A list of representatives from each agency and notes of Steering Committee meetings can be found in section B of the Appendix. The purpose of the Committee was to analyze proposed project alternatives and ultimately recommend a preferred alternative for further study in the NEPA process.

PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Involving the community in the deliberation over major transportation investments creates a means of exchanging information and viewpoints in an effort to identify issues, outline potential alternatives, and assess impacts prior to determining a course of action. Participation was sought from a broad-section of the populace, with the intent to pursue facts behind the impacts, benefits and costs of various alternatives in accordance with Public Hearings, 23 USC128. Additional information relative to public involvement is available in Appendix C.

The APO's Public Involvement Plan (PIP) outlines the agency objectives in governing public awareness and creating opportunities to facilitate input. Therefore, the following section briefly outlines how these objectives were obtained specific to the 22nd/24th Street South Corridor Study.

Coordination with planning partners

- Respective resources agencies were notified of the study, early in the planning process to provide an opportunity for review and comment.

Early, continuous and proactive agency and non-agency involvement

- A total of three informational meetings were held throughout the study. Each meeting opened with a presentation updating the public on the data collected and the study process. During each meeting a large group question and answer session was facilitated by the committee. The session was concluded with one-on-one discussions with attendees.

Identification of potential stakeholders and the traditionally underserved

- The Steering Committee was comprised of all potentially affected jurisdictions and/or agencies. A direct mailing was sent to the property owner along all of the proposed alignment alternatives. Announcements were placed on the public access channel 19 and media notices were sent to all local newspapers and radio stations. In addition, information about public meetings and study updates were placed on the City of St. Cloud and APO websites, when feasible.

Access to timely information

- A listserv was developed to update residents throughout the planning process. Study updates were placed on the APO and the City of St. Cloud's websites. In addition, information and data collected was made available to any interested party by contacting the APO offices.

Adequate opportunities for public input

- The public was given various opportunities to provide input. More specifically, at the January public information meeting comment cards were provided to each attendee. In June, the handouts included a map of the study area soliciting suggestions on new alignment alternatives and a questionnaire.

Timely agency response to and incorporation of ideas

- A list of common questions and answers were developed and made available at the June public informational meetings and online. Individual meetings were held with residents and various neighborhood groups. Staff responded to numerous emails. In addition, staff received several letters, resolutions and petitions supporting or rejecting various alternatives.

STUDY RECOMMENDATION

In January 2005, the 22nd/24th Street South Steering Committee voted unanimously to preserve right-of-way along 24th Street South, as the Preferred Transportation Corridor, from Stearns County Road 74 to Clearwater Road. Figure 11 illustrates the preferred alignment alternative. In addition, the Committee recommends access at Stearns CSAH 75 from Traverse Road be redesigned to facilitate access to 16th Street south and to limit/prohibit Traverse Road access.

Note: Based on transportation planning principles, the Committee concluded that an additional east-west corridor between Cooper Avenue and Stearns CR 74, south of 24th Street and north of 33rd Street, should be considered by the City of St. Cloud, but that many factors, including potential social, economic and environmental impacts, need to be further researched.

Because this is a preservation project, the Committee identified the minimum criteria for enabling the EA process. The criteria is as follows: 1) Vehicle AADT of 6000 or greater along 22nd Street South, 2) measurable increase in vehicular or pedestrian incidents within the study area, And 3) Availability of funding. Accordingly, the 22nd-24th Street South Steering Committee developed a resolution (Resolution R-1) outlining their preferred alignment alternative, the criteria for initiating the EA, and a list of issues to be addressed in the EA. In summary, the Committee's recommendation is based on the following:

- 24th Street provides good system continuity and is centrally located within the study (service) area.
- 24th Street facilitates desired signal spacing and access along CSAH 75 (Roosevelt) helping to maintain mobility.
- 24th Street corridor has been shown in area plans such as the St. Cloud Comprehensive Plan, Stearns County's Long-Range Plan, and the St. Cloud APO Transportation Plans. Accordingly, area residents, businesses, and agencies were able to better plan for future improvements.

- Oak Hill Elementary had agreed to set-aside one hundred (100) feet of right-of-way along the northern portion of the property, for a future roadway, prior to constructing the school in 1989 (Appendix E).
 - The DNR approved a plat, which identified one hundred (100) feet along the northern edge of the Barthelamy Oak Forest (immediately east of Oak Hill), for a future roadway (Appendix E).
 - 24th Street is the least disruptive alternative to the area neighborhoods, in which existing residential developments would not be bisected. As the City approved residential plats, developers were notified of potential plans to construct an east-west facility and many of the residents were informed of the roadway prior to constructing or purchasing property.
- 24th Street required thirty-six (36) to thirty-nine (39) less takings (both partial and full), resulting in fewer impacts to homeowners.
 - 24th Street right-of-way costs were approximately six (\$6) to eight (\$8) million dollars less than 16th or 22nd Street Alternatives.
 - 24th Street allows the best opportunity to control access, which enhances mobility, improves safety, and maintains the integrity of the roadway.
- 16th Street and 22nd Street alternatives have numerous driveways that directly open onto the proposed roadway facility.

FACILITY CHARACTERISTICS

The Committee agreed that ultimately the corridor is envisioned as a minor arterial that would connect to adjacent communities and facilitate the movement of traffic from predominantly residential areas to businesses. A typical cross-section of arterial roadways is illustrated in Figure 12. However, the initial design will be determined during the EA process.

Due to the current built and natural environments throughout the study area, a more context sensitive design approach is recommended. This necessitates greater consideration in designing a facility that reflects the vision of the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Therefore, the preliminary design portion of the NEPA process should address pedestrian and bicycling facilities, review student crossings, and identify various landscaping techniques to reduce negative impacts (i.e. lighting, boulevards, fencing, plantings, etc). Accordingly, the Committee has developed the following list of issues to be addressed in greater detail through the NEPA process.

Planning Issues

- Access along TH 15 between 33rd Street South in St. Cloud and 7th Street/CR 137 in Waite Park, which will be addressed in the TH 15 and TH 23 Corridor Study.

- Forecasted congestion issues along Clearwater Road in St. Cloud and 7th Street/CR 137 in Waite Park.
- Impact of the 33rd Street expansion from Roosevelt/CSAH 75 to Granite View Road in Waite Park.
- Assess along CSAH 75/Roosevelt, which will be addressed in the CSAH 75 Corridor Study.

Design Issues

- Minimize impacts to environmentally sensitive areas.
 - 4F impacts on Barthelemy Oak Forest and Serenity Park.
- Safety relative to Oak Hill Elementary.
- Access management along the 24th Street, to preserve the integrity of the corridor.
- Coordination with District 742 and private property owners relative to preservation of ROW.

THE NEXT STEP

In the January, the St. Cloud APO Policy Board reviewed the 22nd/24th Street South Steering Committee's recommendations, which were then forwarded to the City of St. Cloud and Stearns County for their consideration.

Note: A draft resolution was developed by the St. Cloud APO Board, but was not approved at the meeting, in January 2005 (Resolution R-2). Based on the understanding, that should the City of St. Cloud and Stearns County recommendations vary considerably; the APO Board would propose an appropriate course of action.

In May 2005, St. Cloud City Council passed a resolution (Resolution R-3) in support of 24th Street, as the preferred transportation alignment, to advance into the next phase of the environmental review process (NEPA). In June 2005, Stearns County Board concurred with the City's recommendation and passed a similar resolution (Resolution R-4).

The next phase of the study encompasses a detailed environmental review of the proposed 24th Street Alignment and the No-Build alternatives by completing and Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). However, both jurisdictions have agreed to initiate the next phase of the study only after the expansion of 33rd Street South to four-lanes from TH 15 to CSAH 75.