

Memo

To: Steve Kotke, City Engineer, Director of Public Works
Jon Wertjes, Director, Traffic and Parking Services
Don Elwood, Director, Transportation Planning and Engineering
Mike Christenson, CPED Director
Barb Sporlein, Director, CPED Planning
Karin Berkholtz, Supervisor, CPED Community Planning

From: Anna Flintoft, Transportation Planning and Engineering
Lisa Cerney, Transportation Planning and Engineering
Steven Hay, Community Planning

CC: Charleen Zimmer, Access Minneapolis Project Manager

Date: November 28, 2007

RE: **Minneapolis Response to Mn/DOT Downtown Minneapolis Freeway Study Final Report**

This memo summarizes Minneapolis staff comments on the recent Mn/DOT Downtown Freeway Study Final Report dated May 2007.

Comments on Technical Findings

Finding 2: The central Minneapolis area is heavily served by the freeway system. Over 60% of existing traffic on the downtown freeways enter or exit the freeways in the study area. This is a very important finding, which raises several issues.

- **Interdependency between Local Streets and Freeways** – There is a significant relationship between the freeways and local streets. City staff believes this interdependency has not been adequately explored in this study. The vision scenarios include significant changes to the local street system, including use of parallel local streets as collector-distributor roads for the freeways, as well as freeway capacity expansion. The impacts of these changes to traffic demand on local streets have not been documented in this study. The City requests that further discussion between Mn/DOT, Hennepin County and the City should be taken that outlines how this subject matter could be addressed in future studies.

- **Downtown Development and Local Streets** – As documented on page 1-7, downtown is growing with significant increases in the residential population, employment, and visitors to the convention center, stadiums, and theaters. This growth means not only an increase in trips to downtown, but also increasing competition for the physical space on downtown streets. As downtown becomes more residential and has a more diverse mixture of land uses, demands are increasing for wider sidewalks for pedestrian movement, trees and street furniture; improved transit facilities; additional bicycle facilities; and on-street parking and other curb-side uses. Freeway improvement projects must support the City’s ability to effectively manage these demands and accommodate this growth. Specifically, freeway improvement projects must be carefully planned and designed to:
 - Locate freeway access on streets which can most effectively manage vehicular movement, given the competing demands by other modes of transportation.
 - Manage peak hour freeway demand through increased use of transit.
 - Evaluate freeway capacity expansion for its impact on local streets’ ability to accommodate increased or changed vehicular traffic, as well as increased demand for street space by other modes of transportation.
 - Improve local transportation across the freeway, including adequate spacing and connectivity of streets and improved pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities on local streets crossing the freeways.

Once again, the City is interested in further discussions that will outline how such subject matters could be addressed in future studies.

- **Future Use of Freeways** – What impact do the vision scenarios have on the volume of traffic accessing the downtown area? Will 60% of the freeway traffic continue to access the downtown area, or will the vision scenario improvements result in more through traffic on the downtown freeways? Such questions should be part of the discussion as this freeway area is further discussed and evaluated.

Finding 4: Given the local context of I-94 and I-35W, there is some limited opportunity to add capacity, largely within existing right-of-way.

Future evaluations of capacity expansion should include not only an evaluation of the physical space needed for additional freeway lanes, but also evaluation of local streets’ ability to serve additional freeway traffic entering and exiting the freeway within the study area. As stated under Finding 2 above, freeway capacity expansion projects must support Minneapolis’ ability to accommodate downtown growth and the increasing competition for street space by different modes of transportation. The projected traffic demand assumed in the Access Minneapolis Downtown Transportation Action Plan was based upon the Metropolitan Council’s regional model and planned freeway and transit improvements; it did not include the freeway capacity expansion proposed in Vision Scenario 3B on I-94 throughout downtown and on I-35W to the north.

Finding 5: The I-94 Lowry Tunnel is the major control on the expansion of I-94.

Reconstruction of the Lowry Tunnel will cause significant impacts to the local roads on top of the tunnel, as well as to the adjacent properties. Because there is a desire by

many people in Minneapolis for a new vision for the Hennepin and Lyndale interchange on top of the tunnel, planning for the Lowry Tunnel must address improving the local transportation system on top of the tunnel as well.

Finding 6: Transit and managed lanes provide for efficient use of the constrained urban freeway corridors.

Transit and managed lanes have been included in this study, but have not taken a central role in the development of the vision scenarios. Given that the potential future build out of the vision scenarios may be the final freeway capacity expansion, it is critical that further and subsequent study address how this capacity will be managed over the long-term. The provision of managed lanes has been included in the vision scenario geometric concepts; however, further evaluation of effectively utilizing transit, pricing and other management strategies is needed.

- **Transit** - Effectively utilizing transit to manage freeway demand will require strong partnerships to address not only provision of transit lanes and stations, but also funding of transit vehicles, operations, and marketing. This should be stated in the study.
- **Dynamic Pricing and Other Management Strategies** – In addition to transit, additional strategies may be effectively deployed to help manage congestion in the corridor, such as dynamic pricing and real-time traveler information. These strategies need to be evaluated in coordination with other physical improvements and capacity expansion.
- **Prioritizing travel patterns** – In addition to management strategies, the capacity on the freeway system may also be effectively managed by prioritizing which travel patterns are most appropriately served by the downtown freeways. For instance, very short trips entering and exiting the freeway system within the study area might be better served by the local street system. Similarly, long trips entering and exiting the freeway system outside the study area might be better served by circumferential routes outside of Minneapolis. Currently, the study and the vision scenarios do not address the issue of which travel patterns must be or are most appropriately served by the downtown freeway segments. (e.g. Who truly needs to use the Lowry Tunnel and who can avoid it?).
- **UPA** – As we move into the next studies, how do the Downtown Freeway Study vision scenarios relate to the recent Urban Partnership Agreement application which focused upon reducing congestion through transit, tolling, technology, and telecommuting or other congestion reduction measures?

Finding 7: Setting priorities for preservation and project development will be critical to making progress.

Given the cost of maintaining and upgrading the downtown freeways, City staff agrees that prioritizing and phasing projects will be important. However, agreement amongst all stakeholders on those priorities and projects is critical. Currently, the vision scenarios do *not* address most of Minneapolis' needs related to the freeway system,

access to and from the freeway system, and local access across the freeway system. Mn/DOT should work with Minneapolis to ensure that freeway improvement projects support Minneapolis' goals of providing a good transportation system for all modes of transportation, including a well-connected and safe street network for motor vehicles, transit vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians. Specifically, Minneapolis is committed to improving streets and transportation facilities for transit, bicycling, and walking. Development of future improvement projects should include a comprehensive evaluation of opportunities to improve the connectivity and quality of the local street system across the freeways for all modes of transportation, as well as the impact of freeway access changes on traffic demand on local streets.

Comments on Plan/Program Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Mn/DOT and its partners should continue toward completion of current project construction and planning efforts.

- **Crosstown** - Minneapolis believes it is critical for the BRT lane to reach the 46th Street BRT Station in the northbound direction in an effective manner after the Crosstown project is complete. It is important for BRT to be successful.
- **I-35W River Bridge** - Mn/DOT's design should be consistent with MnDOT, Met Council and Minneapolis goals.

Recommendation 2: The Vision Scenarios and the list of potential Downtown Minneapolis Freeway projects should be used as guidance for additional planning, program development, and project development efforts.

- **Vision Scenarios and Reconstruction Projects** – As discussed under Finding 7, reconstruction projects which build toward a long-term Vision Scenario will need to be developed in close partnership with Minneapolis. These projects, as defined in the vision scenarios, significantly impact the local transportation system, in terms of network connectivity and traffic demand. As these projects are developed, impacts and improvement opportunities for the local street system should be evaluated.
- **Accommodation Projects** – Mn/DOT should provide Minneapolis formal notification and opportunity for review and comment on the accommodation projects.

Recommendation 3: The I-35W/I-94 Central Interchange, south of Downtown Minneapolis, should be the first priority for additional design studies and potential project development.

- **Impacts to Local Transportation System** - The I-35W/I-94 Central Interchange design in Exhibit 2-1 includes significant changes to the local transportation system, including access changes at Franklin, 3rd Avenue S, 19th Avenue S, and 11th Street S, and a new cul-de-sac on 18th Street. No evaluation of the impacts

of these potential changes to the local street system has been completed. Mn/DOT should work closely with Minneapolis to evaluate whether these proposed changes have merit or not.

- **Potential Reconnection of 24th Street South** - Given the proposed changes to the existing flyover ramp at 24th Street, Mn/DOT should work with Minneapolis to evaluate the feasibility of reconnecting 24th Street across I-35W and the resulting effect on traffic operations on parallel streets, such as Franklin, 26th Street, and 28th Street.

Recommendation 4: The next highest priority for design study in the coming years is to address decision-making on expansion of the Lowry Tunnel, including possible capacity additions on I-94 and connecting roadways.

- **Priority** – The prioritization of decision-making on expanding the Lowry Tunnel over decision-making related to the Central Corridor LRT and Industry Square Interchange is illogical, given the short timeline for the Central Corridor LRT. In addition, this prioritization is inconsistently documented on pages ES-3, 2-1, and in Exhibit 1-2.
- **“Policy Choices” related to I-94 Regional Expansion** – What are the policy choices referenced on page 2-9 related to the role of the Lowry Tunnel in I-94 expansion “much beyond the immediate downtown Minneapolis area,” and what are the geographic extents of the potential I-94 expansion? This statement raises concerns over the appropriate use of the downtown freeway system. Given that the downtown freeways are located and interconnected with the most congested and densely populated area in the state, the regional freeway system should be designed to accommodate long-distance through trips, particularly during the peak period, on the freeway system outside of the downtown Minneapolis area.

Recommendation 5: Other priorities for design studies concern the I-35W Mississippi River bridge and the adjacent Industry Square Interchange (I35W/ 4th St./Washington Ave.).

- **Priority** – As stated above, the prioritization of decision-making on the Lowry Tunnel over the Industry Square area is illogical, given the timeline for the Central Corridor.
- **Central Corridor LRT** - The Central Corridor LRT preliminary engineering is beginning now. Mn/DOT should continue to actively participate in this work and ensure that the LRT design does not preclude potential changes to the Industry Square interchange, including adding access between 3rd and 4th Streets and I-35W to the north.
- **City Staff’s Conceptual Design** – The conceptual design offered by City staff for the Industry Square area should not be considered the City’s “vision,” as

stated on page 2-9. The design is one idea developed by City staff with the intention of broadening the vision scenarios to better address the needs of not only the freeway system, but also the local transportation system. The objectives of this design were to:

- utilize excess capacity on 3rd/4th Street;
 - reduce the traffic demands on Washington Avenue S, which provides the only freeway connection to 35W to the north and the only street level connection across the freeway;
 - reduce the width of this unusually wide freeway corridor;
 - accommodate the planned Granary Road access to 35W; and
 - provide better connections between the Cedar Riverside neighborhood and downtown.
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- **10th Avenue Bridge** – The 10th Avenue Bridge is not included in any of the final vision scenarios (1, 2, or 3B). Therefore, we don't understand why the final report states that "local design and construction issues should consider the interaction between these two bridges and the most effective uses for both river crossings."

 - **Washington Avenue** – The final report should state that there is no redundancy in access to I-35W to the north. Besides the 4th/University interchange north of the river, Washington Avenue is the only point of access to I-35W to the north in the study area. City staff believes this is a significant weakness of the current freeway design. Additional access at 3rd and 4th Streets, maybe 8th Street, and at Hennepin should be evaluated. As stated on page 2-11, "high demand for interchanging traffic in the Industry Square area make redundancy and flexibility desirable."

 - **East Hennepin Avenue** - Does the completion of the Hennepin Avenue I-35W interchange reduce the traffic demand at the Washington Avenue Interchange? City staff would like to see these model results and further discuss the implications and how this idea should best move forward independently of the Downtown Minneapolis Freeway Study efforts.

 - **Conversion of 5th Street Ramp to 7th Street** – The proposed conversion of the 5th Street ramp exiting I-94 to 7th Street is one of the recommendations of the draft Access Minneapolis Downtown Transportation Action Plan intended to improve freeway access to downtown. It was included in the vision scenarios, but is not mentioned in the final report. We believe this was an oversight and should be included.

 - **Local Vehicular Access Across the Freeway** – The Industry Square area has the widest spacing between local streets crossing the freeway of any portion of the study area. Washington Avenue is the only local street which crosses the freeway between Cedar Riverside and Downtown. The area also has some of the highest traffic volumes on local streets at Washington and Cedar Avenues. This lack of connectivity, coupled with high traffic volumes on local streets, and

significant changes to local streets in the vision scenarios raises many concerns which need to be further evaluated. Mn/DOT, Hennepin County and Minneapolis should work together to comprehensively evaluate the interrelated needs of the freeways and the local transportation system in this area.

Recommendation 6: All future study plans should be developed to incorporate consideration of project impacts, capital costs, and potential mitigations/enhancements. Mn/DOT should take the lead role to encourage and coordinate various future studies of the Downtown Minneapolis Freeway System.

In addition to incorporating consideration of project impacts, capital costs, and potential mitigations/enhancements, all future study plans should be integrated with Minneapolis' initiatives related to Access Minneapolis and should support Minneapolis' goals of managing future growth through increased use of transit, walking, and bicycling.

Recommendation 7: Mn/DOT should take the lead role to encourage and coordinate various future studies of the Downtown Minneapolis Freeway System.

The City agrees this is Mn/DOT's role and we look forward to discussing the regional and local multimodal systems to collectively reach the best solutions.