

**Date:** 08/10/2021  
**Title:** 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study  
**Presented by:** Lora Mattox  
**Department:** Planning & Community Services  
**Presentation:** Yes

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## Information

### RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) approve the 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study based on the recommendations of the City-County Planning Board, Billings City Council, and the Board of County Commissioners.

### BACKGROUND (Consistency with Adopted Plans and Policies, if applicable)

The goal of the 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study is to analyze opportunities to develop transportation connections to, from, and within the corridor for non-traditional and non-motorized facilities and identify connectivity opportunities to the existing transportation system in the area. The study was developed with assistance of a Project Oversight Committee (POC). The committee included representatives from Planning, City Engineering, County Public Works, MET Transit, local and state Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) staff, Billings Industrial Revitalization District (BIRD), Schnitzer Steel, East Billings Urban Renewal District (EBURD), Downtown Billings Alliance (DBA), Billings TrailNet, YMCA, and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). In addition to regular meetings of the POC, two public meetings and outreach to property owners were held as well as emailed updates to the City Council and Board of County Commissioners. More on stakeholder and public involvement meetings and opportunities are outlined further in this memo.

The goal of the study was to analyze and develop the following information:

- Provide a comprehensive analysis of the opportunities to develop transportation connections to, from and within the corridor for multi-modal uses;
- Identify connective opportunities to the existing transportation system;
- Incorporate, as appropriate, elements from adopted plans and studies;
- Provide broad opportunities for community involvement to help inform the study;
- Develop a vision for the corridor that incorporates transportation elements and considers adjacent land uses; and
- Develop implementation priorities, including phasing and funding opportunities.

Feasibility Criteria – The following discussion provides the feasibility criteria used to develop the study. The criteria included:

- Railroad agreement and support -- it was essential that the study include how a transportation corridor may amicably co-exist with existing rail operations;
- Property owner agreement and support -- success of the corridor will only be achieved if property owners understand and support potential changes in land uses and ensure that respect will be given with current land uses;
- Right-of-way availability -- the east and west ends of the 5th Corridor are very different and have to be treated separately while keeping a cohesive corridor. The portion west of North 27th Street has been reclaimed by private owners and wayfinding and creative routes will have to be explored, the section east of North 27th Street is primarily right-of-way for Montana Rail Link, any proposed improvements will need cooperation from the rail company;
- Public support -- development of this corridor will require securing public support, public and private funding will be the best way to promote a successful corridor;
- Safety -- safety of a continuous corridor for all users is a desire of the numerous stakeholder groups who participated in the study;
- Costs -- because of the magnitude of the corridor and its differences, it will likely be developed in phases with a variety of funding sources. It was important to identify and understand potential costs of improvements, this not only allows for future planning, but provides the information needed to apply for grant funds;
- Phasing -- to accommodate rail operations, the improvements will need to be phased as opportunity arises.

The study determined that the 5th Avenue North corridor can be completed over time to create a multitude of high-amenity non-motorized connections. The study includes implementation recommendations and strategies for the identified visionary concepts. It also provides pilot project suggestions, phasing priorities and potential funding sources.

### STAKEHOLDERS

Sanderson Stewart and City staff met with a variety of key stakeholders. The intent of these one to one meetings was to understand the opportunities for development, potential obstacles, and issue in the redevelopment of the corridor. Five meetings were held with landowners, developers, social service providers, adjoining neighborhoods, and transportation advocacy groups. A full list of the agencies and property owners are listed on page 18 of the study. In conformance with the Yellowstone County Board of Planning Public Participation Plan, a robust public participation process was developed. Because this study took place during the height of the pandemic, public events and meetings were held virtually. A website was developed to provide information and a platform for the public to provide feedback. Two virtual open houses were held, the first in the fall of 2020 to introduce the study to the public and solicit public opinion. Comments solicited during this meeting were used to develop a corridor vision, goals, and improvements. Virtual open house number two was held in February 2021 to present the draft corridor study and solicit comments.

This study has been reviewed and acted upon by the City-County Planning Board, the Billings City Council, and the Board of County Commissioners. The Planning Board conducted a public hearing prior to its recommendation of approval. Each governing body is forwarding a recommendation of approval to the PCC. Approval of this feasibility study does not require the governing body to implement any part of the study.

### ALTERNATIVES

The Policy Coordinating Committee may:

- Approve the 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study; or,
- Not Approve the 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study

Not approving the 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study would be contrary to the recommendations of approval forwarded by the Planning Board, City Council, and the Board of County Commissioners.

### FISCAL EFFECTS

The contract for the 5th Avenue North Corridor Feasibility Study was budgeted at \$97,000. The majority of the funding is through the MPO's Federal PL (planning) funds. PL funds for this project required 13.42% local match, which was provided through the Planning Division's FY21 Budget utilizing its County-Wide Planning Mill Levy revenues. Implementing projects identified in the study are not included in this budget.

Adoption of this study does not program funds to be expended. Prioritizing project identified in this plan would be part of the City's CIP process.

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**Attachments**

Study Area  
5th Ave North Feasibility Study