

## Trunk Highway 10/Ramsey Boulevard Interchange Improvement Strategy 2015

This proposed strategy is based upon several important transportation funding opportunities currently under consideration at the state, federal, and regional level. Cumulatively these opportunities offer significant promise for advancing the construction of rail crossing and interchange improvements at Ramsey Boulevard (County Road 56) and TH 10.

First, the improvement of Ramsey Boulevard/CR 56 would involve both the construction of a grade separation at the BNSF railroad crossing and the construction of a grade separated interchange at TH 10. These improvements are recognized as vital to the safety and economic growth of the corridor and have been included in Anoka County's 2030 Transportation Plan, MnDOT's TH 10 Access Study Implementation Plan, MnDOT's High Priority Crude by Rail Grade Crossing List and Ramsey's transportation improvement plan. Also, as a high volume feature of the TH 10 corridor and an access point for the Northstar Passenger Rail station, the Ramsey Blvd crossing improvements would be eligible for a variety of federal, state, and regional grant programs.

Second, state transportation funding is a high priority agenda item for this year's legislative session. While agreement on a long term funding program to address state transportation needs may be difficult to achieve given the current make-up of the legislature, a significant one time funding allocation to transportation appears to have increasing support. Whatever the outcome however, whether long term or one time, a consensus seems to exist that rail crossing safety issues created by increasing rail shipments of crude oil must be addressed. One proposal now circulating in the legislature would allocate \$122 million rail grade crossing improvements provided that the railroad companies transporting the crude oil in Minnesota match that amount. At present federal law requires only a 5% match by the railroads. Other proposals under consideration would increase funding for Corridors of Commerce, Transportation and Economic Development, and Local Road Improvement grant programs, all of which could benefit the Ramsey Blvd improvement project.

Third, at the federal level prospects for a longer term transportation funding bill appear to be gaining momentum. The President has proposed a significant increase in transportation funding which, importantly, is not tied to an increase in the federal gas tax. This is a major concession to the leadership of the US House and Senate, and while there will certainly be disagreement about the details of the funding levels and sources, a non-gas tax based proposal opens the door to a possible agreement. Again, at the federal level, rail crossing safety is viewed as a high national priority and represents an opportunity for the City of Ramsey given the presence of a BNSF mainline and the volume of crude oil shipments it does and is projected to carry.

Fourth, Anoka County has indicated that it has secured commitments from the Counties Transit Improvement Board (CTIB) for at least one additional transit access grant along TH 10 in the City of Ramsey. An existing \$10 million transit access grant is part of the funding package for the Armstrong Interchange project to be constructed this year. The County has proposed using the additional transit access dollars to create railroad underpasses under the BNSF mainline in Ramsey at either Sunfish Blvd (CR 57) or the Ramsey Blvd (CR 56). It is possible to create underpasses at these locations because of the distance between the rail corridor and the highway. CTIB funding for an underpass could be available as early as 2016. As the City's preferred priority, the Ramsey Blvd improvement would be significantly easier and less expensive to build and would support additional development in the COR and along the south side of TH 10. Building the underpass however and not simultaneously building the interchange would make both the underpass and the interchange more expensive and would double the inconvenience and disruption to the public.

Finally, the success of the Armstrong interchange improvement effort has created awareness, momentum, and an effective community support network all of which is poised to be focused now on Ramsey Blvd. As a recipient of a federal TIGER grant, TH 10 has established its eligibility for federal funding assistance. The same is true at the state level as a result of Armstrong's success in attracting both a MnDOT Corridor Investment Management Strategy grant and a legislatively guided and funded Local Road Improvement grant. The attendance at the City's Armstrong appreciation event also demonstrated a very high level of awareness of the issues affecting the performance of TH 10 in Ramsey and the existence of a strong, influential base of community support for additional efforts to make improvements in the corridor.

In and of themselves however these opportunities cannot be expected to independently generate similar successes in the future unless they are taken advantage of in a strategic and intentional way. To do so, I would propose the following steps.

- 1) Comprehensive information resources should be developed supporting the need and justification for the improvement of the Ramsey Blvd rail crossing and TH 10 interchange. The resources would underscore the issues of safety, congestion, and economic development as well as the broader benefit to the performance of the overall corridor. Community support groups which were involved in the Armstrong effort would be encouraged to use these resources to build awareness and support for Ramsey Blvd improvements.

- 2) Legislation would be introduced requesting a \$5 million appropriation for the Ramsey Blvd interchange improvement. This legislation would mirror legislation introduced for Armstrong during the 2014 session and would provide a vehicle for communicating legislative support for the project. In the end, as with Armstrong, transportation funding legislation rarely includes specific projects but the process can be very helpful in creating an environment where funding from a variety of possible sources can be discussed and hopefully brought to the table. The development and implementation of this legislative strategy could also provide a context for supporting

other legislative funding initiatives along the corridor as well as a comprehensive approach to corridor improvements.

3) Conversations should be initiated and information shared with the City's congressional delegation supporting efforts to secure federal funding for Ramsey Blvd improvements through rail crossing safety or other high priority grant programs.

4) Efforts should be undertaken with the Dayton Administration and MnDOT to explore possible funding options and schedules and to advocate for the advancement of the Ramsey Blvd improvements and other corridor improvements planned as elements of the TH 10 Access Planning Study.

5) Continuing coordination should occur with Anoka County and other corridor cities in support of corridor improvements.

## High Priority Crude by Rail Grade Crossing List

DOT #	Location	City	Operator	Corridor	Score	AADT	HCADT	Accident Prediction	Current Warning Device	Pop. Rank	Recommendation
097913L	5th St SE	Pipestone	BNSF	Moorhead - Hills	14	416	No Data	0.00947	Gates	7	Adequate/Improvable
082932W	Armstrong Blvd NW	Ramsey	BNSF	Moorhead - Prescott	14	6599	No Data	0.04133	Gates	1	Adequate/Improvable
082930H	Ramsey Blvd	Ramsey	BNSF	Moorhead - Prescott	14	6999	No Data	0.04826	Cants & Gates, Medians	4	Long-Term Grade Separation
689133X	Medina St	Loretto	CP/SOO	Tenney - La Crescent	14	6999	No Data	0.02415	Gates, Medians	4	Adequate Safety
062758K	Farwell St	Verndale	BNSF	Moorhead - Prescott	14	1207	No Data	0.0277	Cants & Gates	5	Long-Term Medians
N/A	MINTH 40	Willmar	BNSF	Moorhead - Hills	14	5000	No Data	0.03	N/A	1	Willmar WYE - Grade Separation (A)
067449P	MN 55	Nashua	BNSF	Moorhead - Hills	13	991	No Data	0.1213	Flashing Lights	1	Adequate/Improvable
082928G	Sunfish Lake Blvd NW	Ramsey	BNSF	Moorhead - Prescott	13	9099	No Data	0.05004	Cants & Gates, Medians	2	Long-Term Grade Separation
391066C	Huff St	Winona	CP/SOO	Tenney - La Crescent	13	11499	No Data	0.02902	Cants & Gates, Medians	7	Adequate Safety
103817B	30th Ave S	Moorhead	BNSF	Moorhead - Hills	13	6719	No Data	0.02178	Gates	4	Long-Term Grade Separation
061089Y	30th St NW	Willmar	BNSF	Moorhead - Hills	13	7707	No Data	0.02657	Cants & Gates	2	Adequate Safety (Oil Traffic Diversion via Willmar WYE)
689355G	MINTH 29	Glenwood	CP/SOO	Tenney - La Crescent	11	6699	No Data	0.07314	Cants & Gates, Median	1	Grade Separation