

To: Anoka County Parks  
Fm: City of Ramsey Staff  
Re: Draft Master Plan Amendment for Mississippi West Regional Park

## Overview

The City of Ramsey is in receipt of the March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017 Draft Master Plan Amendment for Mississippi West Regional Park, (hereafter referred to as the 'Draft Amendment'). We understand that Anoka County Staff has requested City Staff's comments, and further understand that the 60 day comment period is applicable here too, which will allow enough time for review by the Park and Recreation Commission, Environmental Policy Board and City Council.

Foremost Staff appreciates Anoka County's willingness to accommodate the Riverdale Drive frontage road project, which is the impetus for the developing and submitting to Metropolitan Council the Master Plan Amendment for approval. The request for early comment is valuable as well, to ensure that the **Public's best interests** are carried forward within the original Master Plan, or improved upon within the Draft Amendment.

## Requested Revisions

The City requests the following revisions to the Master Plan Amendment:

1. Clearly name the proposed pedestrian bridge as a future Phased Improvement of the regional park, thereby to be found in conformance with the *Thrive 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, and the approved Master Plan.
2. Identify within the Draft Master Plan Amendment a schedule for a negotiated cost-share agreement for completion of the skyway and pedestrian bridge—in a timeframe that allows for a joint application in 2018 for Transportation Advisory Board solicitation for funding (and potentially other sources).
3. Add a narrative and exhibit to the Draft Master Plan Amendment that shows the realignment of the Central Anoka County Regional Trail to a safe alignment for bicyclists and pedestrians (to the location of the pedestrian overpass when complete), which also will connect the regional park directly to the Metropolitan Transit system, and thereby to come into conformance with both the *Thrive 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan as well as the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan* relating to directives for regional parks.

Further, that the City be afforded the full 60 Day Review Period in order to review the Master Plan Amendment with our Parks and Recreation Commission, Environmental Policy Board, and City Council.

Ensuring that the pedestrian bridge remain a named, phased element of the park's development is essential in calling attention to its significance as a Regional facility – as this is strategically important to securing grant funding.

## Conformance with Anoka County Policies and Plans



Evidence of the importance and relevance for continued collaboration and cooperation in securing funding for completion of the skyway and pedestrian bridge is noted on page 17 of the Draft Amendment. It cites survey results from the 2016 'Plan Your Parks' – Public Events: *“62% would prefer to walk or bike to a park as opposed to having to drive. Again, this shows support for the trail projects outlined in the amendments and shows the importance of connectivity throughout the local and regional trail system.”*



Further evidence that the pedestrian crossing with direct connection to the Northstar rail station and the 887 Bus Route stop, should remain a priority is cited on page 20 of the Draft Amendment:

*“Since the majority of participants end up driving to the parks and trails, the Department should work with County’s Transportation Division, local cities and the Metropolitan Council to ensure multiple modes of transportation options exist for access to the system and that future trails provide the needed connections between the residential areas surrounding the park.”*

## Compliance with Regional Policies and Plans

Like the City of Ramsey, Anoka County is also in the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan. Pursuant to Minn. Statute 473.864, the County’s park plans must be consistent with both the Metropolitan Council’s *Thrive 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan* as well as the *2040 Transportation Policy Plan*. Both the City and County’s comprehensive plans are reviewed by the Metropolitan Council based on three primary criteria:

- Conformance with metropolitan system plans
- Consistency with Metropolitan Council policies
- Compatibility with adjacent and affected governmental units.

When a plan meets these criteria, the Metropolitan Council authorizes comprehensive plans, and park plans to be put into effect. If a plan does not meet the review standards,

the Council can require the jurisdiction to modify its plan to conform to the Council's system plans. The City of Ramsey believes that the policies of the *Thrive 2040* system plans will be better advanced when it fully acknowledges and includes the Mississippi Skyway as a critical connection to regional systems; including transit, the Mississippi River Trail (MRT) and its important role in accessing the regional park.

*Thrive MSP 2040* also provides specific Directives for parks' implementing agencies, most notably: "Promote expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, and the transit network, where appropriate." Advocating for completion of the skyway across U.S. Highways #10 & #169 as part of the planning for Mississippi West Regional Park will advance this Directive.

Ramsey believes that removal of this existing planned improvement from the existing Master Plan presents a conflict with regional policies. *ThriveMSP 2040* outlines several outcomes: "*Thrive's regional vision includes five desired outcomes: stewardship, prosperity, equity, livability, and sustainability. While each outcome is described below, it is important to note that the five outcomes reinforce and support one another to produce greater benefits than any single outcome alone. The outcomes provide policy direction for this 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan.*"

The current/approved Metropolitan Council's approved master plan for Mississippi West Regional Park, shows an elevated pedestrian crossing of U.S. Highways #10 & #169 as one of the Phased improvements to the Mississippi West Regional Park. Ramsey believes it important for this improvement to remain in the Master Plan. The improvement would connect the following existing regional systems.

1. Mississippi West Regional Park Boat Landing
2. Northstar Commuter Rail - Ramsey Station
3. US Highway 10/169 (A Major Arterial)
4. Central Anoka County Regional Trail
5. Anoka County Mississippi River Regional Trail
6. Tier 1 Priority Regional Bicycle Transportation Corridor

The exhibit below shows the proposed, realigned trail corridor in a red dashed line, as proposed by the City of Ramsey.



Figure 1: COR Master Plan/Suggested Realignment of Central Anoka County Regional Trail

Considerable investments in regional improvements converge in this location, including the \$13 million dollar rail station, with \$1.1 million dollar pedestrian skyway over Veteran’s Drive, \$8 million dollar covered transit and parking facility, as well as approximately one half million in boat landing and river access improvements. Additionally, the Mississippi River Regional Trail has been completed and in use from the City of Anoka, through the City of Ramsey and into the park (portions depicted below). The trail together with two bridges on the 80-acre King’s Island represents over one million dollars in bike facilities that are also a key component of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. The Final Plans and Specifications for the Mississippi Skyway are being prepared today, and funded by a \$490,000 grant from the National Park Service.

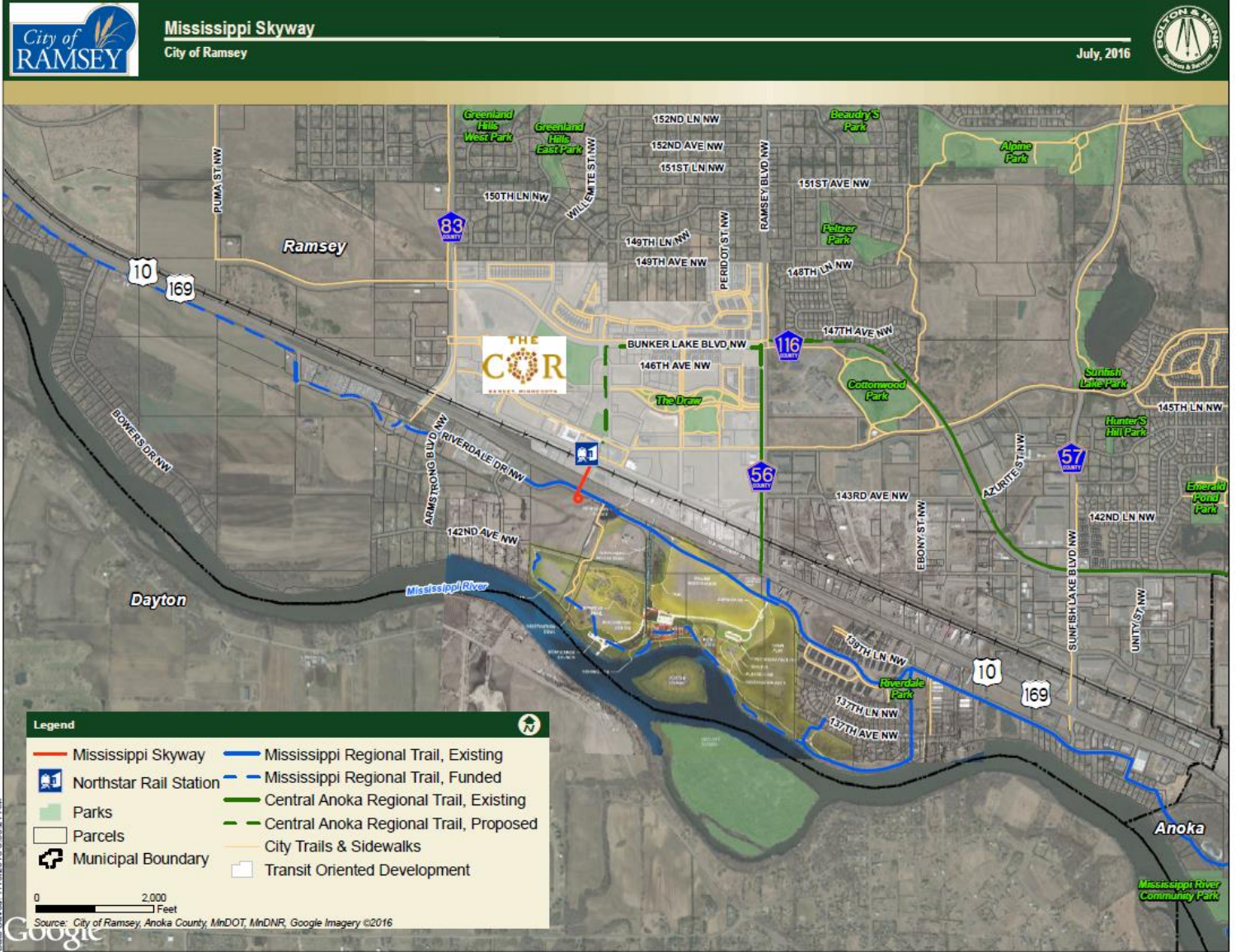


Figure 2: Regional Intersections of Mississippi Skyway

It is this inter-jurisdictional trail with multi-modal connections and host of retail services that will make this pedestrian bridge the nexus of regional systems and destinations, and merits the concurrent alignment of the Central Anoka County Trail at such time the elevated highway crossing is in place. The realigned Regional Trail should also be discussed within the completed Master Plan Amendment.



## Advancing ThriveMSP 2040 Outcomes

The following highlights anticipated *Thrive Outcomes* relating to the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan of an aligned regional trail with a grade-separated pedestrian crossing of Hwy's #10 & #169 and connection to the MRT.



*Mississippi River at the regional park*



*Workforce Housing in The COR, completed in 2013*



*Rail and bus service can provide access to the natural-resource based Mississippi West Regional Park from the urban cities*

### Stewardship

Mississippi West Regional Park possesses a bounty of natural resources, including woodland habitats, restored native prairie, and a segment of the Nation's most prominent river with Wild and Scenic designation. Advancing multi-modal connections to the park for the region's residents and visitors is a strategic investment that makes available these rich natural assets for those who choose not to travel by automobile. Broadening access to these regional amenities exposes people to the intrinsic beauty of the park and river, and thus builds support for on-going stewardship of natural resources and the environment.

### Prosperity

Investment in the pedestrian overpass will make the commercial and retail areas on both sides of Hwy's #10 & #169 more attractive to quality business that are concerned with quality of life for their employees in terms of the ability to walk during break periods to and from the park. In addition, improved connection to the trail systems the bridge will provide for, allows a greater proportion of the workforce to commute without an automobile and expands transit access – both of which enhance economic competitiveness.

## Equity



Increasingly, people are using the Northstar Commuter Rail to expand recreational access to the region's parks and trails

The transit-oriented development known as The COR includes a mix of residential housing choices for people of all incomes. Providing a 'means' to access Mississippi West Regional Park sans an automobile also means creating real choices in where residents may live, travel and recreate. The grade-separated pedestrian crossing of the highway and rail line creates the nexus between housing, transportation and recreation, and thus leverages multiple investments to build a more equitable region.

## Livability

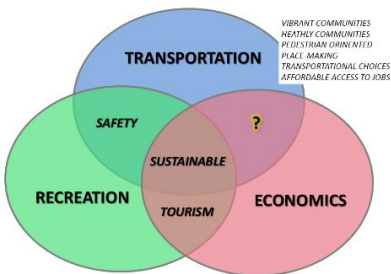


U.S. Hwy's #10 & #169 can be a barrier to accessing Nature associated with the regional park and trail on the south side of the highway. Livability is enhanced by *one* connecting piece of infrastructure - the pedestrian crossing and bicycle facility. This will provide transportation choices, and access to Nature and outdoor experiences for a range of the region's demographic and economic make-up. The COR is by design, pedestrian-oriented as well as transit-oriented. Aligning resources (the pedestrian bridge), supports walkable places and promotes healthy communities and active living.



## Sustainability

The Mississippi Skyway exemplifies sustainability as bicycles will always be an efficient means of short trips - made more effective especially with the proposed bridge's physical connection to the commuter rail station. With a 100-plus year lifespan, the facility will help to ensure regional vitality for generations to come. This also adds and preserves capacity for all the public and private investments it connects to, thereby quite literally investing in the future.



## Integration



The pedestrian facility will be the embodiment of the intentional combining of related activities and infrastructure to achieve more effective results in coordinating the way people travel, commute, work and play. The bike and ped bridge will be an example of the County, City and Council effectively working with all partners and stakeholders throughout the region to secure funding for a project that will have multiple benefits.

## Collaboration



The Mississippi Skyway, with its direct connection to the National Mississippi River Trail and U.S. Bikeway #45 - when completed with a realigned Central Anoka County Trail, will be an unequalled example of collaboration in advancing the region most effectively towards shared outcomes. The pedestrian bridge is an expensive facility, no single entity has the capacity to fund it alone, and therefore a *shared* strategy is truly in the region's interest. Indeed, it is the Metropolitan Council's mission to foster these partnerships and reciprocal relationships to address regional opportunities and solutions – therefore maintaining the pedestrian bridge as a named Phased improvement within the Master Plan for the park is essential.

## Accountability and Additional Directives



*Ramsey Station, October 2014:  
People use the rail and bus service for commuting, efficient access to the airport, as well a connection to the region's trail systems*

Identifying the proposed pedestrian bridge over U.S. Hwy's #10 & #169 as a priority for the regional partners to secure Federal funding; will fulfill the Council's mission of an equitable return on investments across the geographic region. This positions the Council, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park agencies, municipalities, the National Park Service, and state partners to effectively collaborate on:

~ Expanding the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan



~ Provides a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high quality natural resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and enhances quality of life in the region

~ Promotes expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and the transit network, and as such, strengthens equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents - across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and abilities

## Advancing 2040 Regional Transportation Policy Plan



Following the abstract on pedestrian bridge's relevance as a regional improvement directly associated with the park, is a summary of *Thrive's* 2040 Transportation Policy Plan's *objectives* (in quotes) and why it is imperative that the completion of the skyway over Hwy #10 and Riverdale Drive remain a named Phased Improvement within the Master Plan for Mississippi West Regional Park – and for the Master Plan Amendment to be consistent with the Transportation Policy Plan's goals, objectives and strategies.

### Project Abstract

The Mississippi Skyway is a pedestrian bridge extension of the existing skyway over Veterans Drive from the 800-stall public parking ramp to the Northstar Ramsey Rail Station. The extension will continue over U.S. Highways #10 & #169 to the Regional Park and Trail on the south side of the highway and frontage road.

This section of Highways #10 & #169 is a barrier to pedestrian and bicycle movements at the Ramsey Station. It is a 4-lane divided highway that is a primary east-west route in Anoka County, serving as a commuter corridor to the Minneapolis/Saint Paul Metropolitan Area with annual average daily traffic of 39,000 vehicles per day in the immediate project area. BNSF freight rail line runs parallel to the highway, and there has been a nearly 40 percent increase in freight traffic since 2012, with 71 trains per day each day at present. This rail line also serves as the Northstar Commuter Rail Corridor.



~ "Overcome physical barriers and eliminate critical systems gaps."

The proposed extension of the bicycle and pedestrian bridge both addresses gaps and barriers within the regional systems, and at the same time will improve convenience and continuity for bicyclists and ADA accessibility.

~ "Facilitate safe and continuous trips to regional destinations."

Developing the proposed multiuse trail and bicycle facility (skyway extension) within the Tier One **Regional Bicycle Transportation Network** will improve the convenience and safety of bicycling and ADA accessibility along, and connecting to, existing facilities - including the Mississippi River Trail and the regional park.

~ "Integrate and/or supplement existing and planned infrastructure."

The Mississippi Skyway provides the connection between regional amenities creating an effective nexus between housing, transportation, employment and recreation. The Mississippi Skyway will **link existing and future public investments with a single project, enhancing the value of each.**

~ "Provide improved opportunities to increase the share of trips made by bicycle."

The dramatically improved, safe connections the skyway extension will accomplish - together with access to transit will increase the likelihood of choosing bicycling for transportation over other travel modes – and especially for Metropolitan area residents beyond the City of Ramsey.

FIGURE 9 - Injury and Fatal Crashes (2003-2012)



HIGHWAY 10 ACCESS PLANNING STUDY

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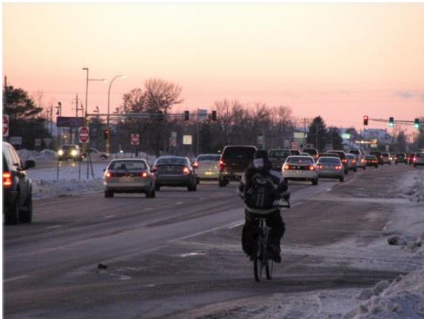
Excerpt from the Hwy 10 Study - Injury and fatal crash locations along Hwy 10 in Ramsey, 2003-12

The Draft Amendment cites on page 11: *"Conflicts between pedestrians and vehicular traffic will be kept to a minimum by reducing the number of trail and road crossings within the park and by working with the City of Ramsey to ensure safe crossings at city road intersections. Treatments for these areas may include signing, striping and signalized pedestrian crossings."*

The above strategy to mitigate conflicts may be effective immediately adjacent to the park, but would be deficient with respect to bicyclists and pedestrians utilizing the Central Anoka County Trail as it exists today. The intersection of Ramsey Boulevard and Highways #10 & #169 (below) has traffic speeds of 60 MPH and is more than 220' feet across – and including turn lanes, has 32 points of conflict to negotiate.



As evidenced by the above image of existing conditions, MnDOT and Anoka County Highway have not maintained the crosswalk striping. This should be addressed, as the 8' foot sidewalk (presently serving as the Central Anoka County Trail) connects to the intersection at the northwest, and an 8' bituminous trail is also at the southeast. Both are considered elements of the MRT and US Bikeway #45.



The proposed realignment of the Central Anoka County Regional Trail concurrent with the proposed pedestrian bridge discussed above, should be shown within the completed Master Plan Amendment, as it will provide demonstrable safe pedestrian and bicyclist's benefits for accessing the park from north of U.S. Highways #10 & #169.



Wayfinding is discussed on page 10 of the Draft Amendment. The City of Ramsey supports the signing plan outlined in the document. The final Master Plan should note that adjacent to the touch-down point of the proposed pedestrian bridge there is large wayfinding sign with maps of the local parks and trails – with the other side showing the entire National Park Service area from Ramsey to Hastings. This sign is within a plaza with seating along the MRT and across from the trail leading to the river in Mississippi West Regional Park.



Skyway location

MnDOT double sided Interpretive Kiosk

Public Engagement and Participation is discussed within the Draft Amendment on pages 12 through 21. However, **it appears there was no community engagement specific to Mississippi West Regional Park**, nor was the City of Ramsey informed or invited to host public input on the plans for the park. As with most regional parks, the primary users are those nearest the park. The COR will have more than 2,000 residential units directly to the north of the park, with many more adjacent to this pedestrian oriented development – thousands of Ramsey residents are within walking and biking distance of the park today. In terms of Origins (residential units) and Destinations (the Regional Park), there exists the highway and rail line barrier discussed above. To the east of Ramsey in the City of Anoka, a similar situation of Origins and Destinations exist, and fatalities have occurred when pedestrians have crossed this same highway. Recently, hundreds's of thousands in public monies have been expended in constructing physical barriers in an attempt to save lives. It is imperative that Anoka County Parks and the City of Ramsey develop a cost-share plan for the ultimate construction of the remaining portion of the Mississippi Skyway, considering other Regional partners – and seek funding for grant monies that are uniquely available for pedestrian and bicycle facilities. This will be prudent planning and cooperation, in stark contrast to the potential future action of expending public monies on barriers.

In conclusion, the City of Ramsey unequivocally recommends that the Draft Master Plan Amendment be revised to:

- Clearly name the proposed pedestrian bridge as a future Phased Improvement of the regional park, thereby to be found in conformance with the *Thrive 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan*, and the approved Master Plan.
- Identify within the Draft Master Plan Amendment a schedule for a negotiated cost-share agreement for completion of the skyway and pedestrian bridge – in a timeframe that allows for a joint application in 2018 for Transportation Advisory Board solicitation for funding (and potentially other sources).
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Respectfully,

The City of Ramsey