## Minnesota Trunk Highway 10 Anoka County Business Stakeholder Involvement Process

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### Abstract

Trunk Highway 10 (TH10) is a major arterial roadway connecting the Minneapolis/St. Paul and St. Cloud metropolitan areas in Minnesota. TH10 (signed as US Highway 10) runs parallel to Interstate 94 along this entire route, but the two are separated by the Mississippi River; river crossings are limited. The TH10 corridor is developing rapidly as suburban growth radiates rapidly outward to the Northwest from Minneapolis/St. Paul. The highway is a freeway from its junction with Interstate 35W and for several miles to the northwest toward St. Cloud. But at the City of Anoka, it becomes a multilane expressway with at-grade intersections and some nearly direct accesses for commercial businesses. An overall planning study for the corridor completed in January 2002 recommended major capacity increases along the TH10 corridor, particularly in the Anoka area, where there is clearly a traffic bottleneck. One possibility for increasing capacity is an upgrade of part of TH10 from an expressway to a freeway with full access control and interchanges rather than at-grade intersections. This sort of conversion typically raises the hackles of commercial businesses and land developers alike.

During 2006 and 2007, a team of consultants, local governments, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) collaborated on a detailed planning study and stakeholder involvement process for a one-mile long section of TH10 through the City of Anoka. This planning process included tasks designed to understand the needs of commercial businesses along the study corridor and to directly involve them in the design and evaluation of project alternatives for the corridor. The process involved the development of a corridor economic profile, a business inventory and classification study to determine the businesses most likely to be impacted by access changes, a set of detailed business interviews, a business forum, and a business-oriented design charette. The entire process was designed to understand the concerns of business, educate them, and also to fully engage them in the planning process. The results of this process led to significant modifications in the original project alternative concepts and a surprising lack of local business and citizen objections to freeway conversion alternatives. The freeway design alternatives would involve significant changes in roadway access for businesses adjacent to the corridor, including the elimination of all direct commercial accesses from the roadway mainline. Yet, the majority of businesses were supportive of the selected project alternative—a freeway—at the end of the process.

## Introduction

### Context of the Roadway

United States Highway 10 is a major arterial roadway connecting the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis/St. Paul and St. Cloud in Minnesota. Locally known as Trunk Highway 10 (TH10), this road parallels Interstate 94 along this entire route. Separated by the Mississippi River, these two arterials have only a small number of connections. This makes TH10 the preferred route for commuters living in communities northeast of the river. TH10 experiences a shift in its design between the Twin Cities and St. Cloud. It is a limited-access freeway between its junction with Interstate 35W at Mounds View and its connection to Main Street in the city of Anoka; but northwest of this interchange TH10 becomes a multilane expressway with at-grade intersections and several instances of nearly direct access to the entryways of strip commercial developments and other land uses. (See Figure 1)

Trunk Highway 10 is part of a statewide strategic network of major highways known as the Interregional Corridor System (IRC). The objective of Minnesota's IRC system is to connect regional trade centers—providing primary status to serving regional mobility needs while putting local access needs second. It is intended to move passengers and freight safely and efficiently between trade centers at relatively high speeds. This classification conflicts somewhat with its current usage, however, as evidenced through the at-grade intersections which considerably slow the flow of traffic through Anoka.

#### **Preliminary Studies and Forecasts**

A planning study completed in January of 2002 recommended major capacity increases for the TH10 corridor. (Howard R. Green Company, 2002) Suburban growth is radiating outward from the Twin Cities, especially along this nearly fifty-mile long corridor of TH10. Regional population forecasts suggest very rapid growth through the year 2020. Even though Anoka is only projected to grow by 5 percent through the 2020 (because it is largely built out), other cities to the northwest along the TH10 route have expected rates of population growth ranging from 63 percent in Elk River to as much as 478 percent for the city of Becker. Such a growing regional population will generate considerably more traffic on TH10 through the city of Anoka because major employment centers, education centers, shopping districts, service centers, and entertainment venues are all located east of Anoka.

Increasing traffic will impact the flow of travel through the city, amplifying the roadway's existing congestion issues. A nearly one-mile segment of highway stretching northwest from Main Street to Thurston Avenue in Anoka is a particularly troublesome portion of the larger TH10 highway corridor. Currently nearly 60,000 vehicles travel through this area daily. By the year 2030 average daily travel is projected to increase by 35 percent to at least 81,000 vehicles (AADT). The at-grade intersections already create bottlenecks that delay travel times and contribute to a high rate of vehicle collisions. The remainder of this paper describes focused planning and design work along the one-mile segment through the City and County of Anoka. (See Figures 2 and 3 for aerial views.)

## **Initial Project Options**

Although detailed design alternatives were not created until after initial contact and the processing of business input, a set of several general improvement options was developed in the project's infancy. As always, "doing nothing" was an option. Several other generic enhancements were also brought up for the businesses to review and consider. Less drastic options included making "spot" improvements at the worst bottleneck locations to address the most pressing problems. Other more comprehensive methods involved the separation of turning traffic from through traffic by adding designated through-lanes and turn-lanes at all at-grade intersections. The most extreme measures included applying full access management to the highway through the substitution of grade-separated interchanges for existing at-grade intersections and the alteration of some nearby local street networks to provide for a better supporting roadway system for the mainline highway.

To establish full access control along this stretch would transform the road from an expressway to a freeway. Extending the freeway portion of TH10 would convert at-grade intersections to interchanges (between Thurston Avenue and Main Street), affecting traffic patterns on the adjacent local roads. Such an improvement strategy could increase capacity along this route while also addressing many existing safety issues. These changes would inevitably impact the neighboring business and commercial activity—as well as nearby residents. Typically this sort of roadway modification raises major concerns and contempt from local business owners, developers, and other landowners because it can change the accessibility of their properties. It was, therefore, a priority of the project team to educate and involve these people in the development of project goals and in the consideration of alternatives for TH10 through Anoka.

## **Business Involvement Process**

The goal of this study was to identify an alternative that would not only address mobility and safety improvements, but that also would minimize the negative impacts to local businesses, residents, and the environment. To attend to the latter portion of this goal, the project management team took several steps to directly involve area businesses and other stakeholders in the decision-making process. Working with these people to assess and understand their needs was considered a key component to a successful outcome. The effort to incorporate these stakeholders in the process included taking an inventory of the businesses in the area, conducting interviews with some of them, them, and holding public input sessions--including a business forum, a design charrette workshop, and other open meetings.

### Area Business Inventory

The first step toward engaging the area stakeholders in the planning process was to take an inventory of all the businesses, land owners, and other occupants of the parcels that might be affected by access changes to the roadway system. Within this inventory, the team identified the type (i.e. retail, service, office) and customer orientation (i.e. "driveby", "destination", "mixed") for each business. A "drive-by" business is one that depends a great deal on impulse on the part of customers. An example would be a convenience store. A "destination" business is one that depends almost totally on planned trips by customers. An example would be an insurance agent. A mixed business is somewhere in between. An example might be a national chain "sit-down" restaurant where some "drive-by" customers might be attracted by a logo on a sign. (See Appendix A for details on the inventory results.)

The results of the inventory showed that the 39 businesses in the area were concentrated heavily in retail activities and personal services. The inventory also revealed that businesses of TH10 corridor were more focused toward "drive-by" and "mixed" customer orientation than had been the case in similar corridors that have been studied in a similar manner in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan region. (About a third of businesses were in these categories as opposed to one-quarter in previous studies.) As a result, travel times related to accessing the businesses and visibility were deemed to be quite important. These became focal points in the development of detailed project design alternatives. Another notable finding is that the health of commercial activity in the area appears to be good, with few vacancies and a considerable amount of current customer traffic even with the relatively high level of congestion.

#### **Business Forum**

The next step in the business involvement process was to hold a business stakeholder forum. Only businesspersons along the corridor were invited to this event with the assistance of the City and the local chamber of commerce. The purpose of the business forum was to introduce the corridor study to the businesses in the area and to inform them of a timeline for the study and other activities that would occur as a part of it. Secondly, it also provided them with an opportunity to express their initial concerns about both the highway and the study itself. Businesses were specifically allowed to "vent" any frustrations during the Forum once some background on the corridor study was presented.

The first part of this business forum presented an introduction to the TH10 corridor and an explanation of why it was being studied. It included the background, contextual, and forecast information (essentially the information provided in the introductory portion of this document) of the TH10 study. The next part of the forum outlined the generic improvement concepts (also presented above) that were being considered. Nothing approaching a detailed design was presented at the forum.

Group discussions took place after the attendees were able to take in the general idea of the corridor and the intent of the project. To make these discussions easier to control and to ensure that everyone would have a chance to have their voice heard, smaller groups were formed (for added simplicity, by the table at which they were sitting). Attendees were asked to think about and share their ideas on a number of issues; including current and potential traffic problems in the area as well as about which groups may be impacted by any change in the design and functionality of the roadway. Once the small groups had compiled a list of their concerns each shared them the entire group. The forum concluded with the description of future activities related to the TH10 corridor study.

### **Detailed Business Interviews**

To gain a more thorough perspective of the concerns and activity of commerce in the area and for each specific company, the team selected a sample of businesses from the inventory to conduct individual interviews. This sample was selected to be representative of different business types along the corridor, but some of the more "concerned" businesses from the forum were deliberately chosen so their concerns could be followed up. In-person interviews were preferred, but in some cases, these proved to be not possible. (This was particularly true where businesses were branches of larger corporate entities.) Telephone interviews allowed the team to acquire additional information or to seek clarification of any thoughts from initial contact.

Questions in the interviews focused on both the businesses and the roadway. Businessoriented questions centered on the conditions, trends, and customer base of each business. Other questions about TH10 inquired about the individual's major concerns for the roadway as it exists and also concerns for any potential change to it. There was, of course, a focus on accessibility and access in the interviews. (See Appendix B for selected portions of the business interview script used in this planning and design study.)

These interviews showed there was a considerable amount of agreement among the businesses about several issues. All of the business people who were interviewed agree d

that the roadway as it existed was not functioning well. Businesses also agreed that traffic will increase substantially in the future and that roadway improvements will be necessary. This led to the consensus that the "no build" (or "do nothing") option would not be good for their customers in the long run. The business community shared a main short-term concern about mitigating the disruption of customer access during project construction phases. A second major concern involved the process of right-of-way acquisition for new or expanded roads and streets; the possibility of major takings of parking spaces to expand mainline or supporting roadway systems was the main concern in this regard. As a note, some of the interviews first produced the idea of tying-in the TH10 frontage road system with Anoka's Main Street. This concept proved to be important in later phases of the study.

### Business Design Charrette and Public Information Open House

Following the completion of the interviews, the designers on the consultant team developed a set of preliminary design concepts. These fell into three broad groups: "do nothing", "improved at-grade expressway", and "freeway" with several variations on the latter two themes. Performance metrics were developed for each concept, including traffic simulations using both current and future, forecast projects. The traffic simulations proved to be very valuable in illustrating the difficulty in making the "improved at-grade expressway" options work with future traffic even if the roadway were to be widened considerably. Traffic level of service measures were very poor even at 2006 peak hour traffic volumes. (See Figure 4 for an example visualization.)

Corridor businesses were then given the opportunity to review, consider, and improve preliminary ("generic") project design alternatives developed by the consultant team during a design charette workshop. Similarly to the business forum, the charrette had an excellent number of participants. Twenty-five businesspeople came to the charette to help the project management team better understand the needs of the business community and to discuss methods that would minimize the impacts of business activity during the roadway construction. Although this does not seem like it large number of attendees, it represented almost two-thirds of the 39 businesses in the corridor inventory.

To begin the charette, the participants were grouped into thirds by their business' general area along the project corridor. Each group was allowed the first forty-five minutes to review, discuss, and document issues with and develop new ideas regarding the alternatives in relation to their own geographical area. They were then given two fifteenminute blocks to discuss each of the other two geographic areas. Groups were prompted to consider key components concerning the design alternatives, including: connectivity, local access needs (frontage, backage, and service roads), regional access needs (links onto and off of the main route), and visibility issues. The three groups were urged to take a holistic approach within their discussions—to focus on the general roadway locations rather than the specific locations of driveways, parking areas, and other details of access. At the end of the charrette, the groups reconvened to summarize what each group had discussed and to explore the next steps in the corridor planning and design process. The major outcome of the charrette was that both the "do-nothing" and "improved at-grade expressway" alternative groupings received little of no business support. A near consensus had developed supporting the "freeway" alternatives. Another outcome was that there was almost unanimous support for a freeway with a split diamond design for the interchanges, an improved supporting roadway network, and a formalized connection to Anoka's Main Street. This last design feature was termed "Flap A" in later, more detailed project designs. (See Figures 6 and 7 for design concepts.)

One week after the charette, the project management team hosted a broader public information session through which they gathered input from the general public. (Attendees were mostly residents and local decision-makers.) This session was conducted as an open house. The project management team reviewed notes collected from each group during the charrette. Then they compiled their suggestions along with the ideas generated during the public information session into a map. This allowed the team to visually show which alternative the businesses and stakeholders preferred and how it could be adapted to best serve them. Once again, the freeway alternative with tight diamond interchange designs and a formal connection to Anoka's Main Street was overwhelmingly preferred. Figure 5 shows a composite of the comments from both meetings.

## Conclusions

The stakeholder involvement process used for the TH10 Anoka County Planning and Design Study used the following broad steps:

- Analysis of the corridor context, including demographic forecasts and future traffic
- A detailed commercial inventory with categorization of businesses by type
- Separate stakeholder involvement tracks for businesspersons and others
- An initial business forum to allow for education and airing of concerns
- A set of detailed business interviews targeted toward a sample of corridor businesses
- A business design charette
- An open house for the general public

This business involvement process produced a nearly universal consensus among both business people and the general public showing strong support for the grade-separation alternatives—especially Alternative B. This "tight diamond freeway" design would eliminate at-grade intersections at Thurston Avenue and Fair Oak Avenue and add new, continuous frontage and backage roads, thereby increasing automobile efficiency throughout the system. It would also increase bicycle and pedestrian safety in the area, by eliminating high speed turns directly off TH10 to the adjacent businesses. The process also generated a unique outcome: the business participants created a design element (the Main Street Connection or "Flap A") that the consulting team had not thought of.

An important limitation of the process used for the TH10 project is that it appears to have taken a considerable amount of time and extra resources versus a conventional public involvement process. In effect, two parallel stakeholder involvement processes were conducted. One process was for the general public, while in the case of the TH10 Anoka project much more effort was directed toward involving the business community in project planning and design.

However, the end results of this process have been very positive. The high level of business and stakeholder cooperation was a big asset to the progress of project planning. From the outset, business people and others in the general public were willing to listen and learn. Through the intensive use of simulation and visualization strategies the stakeholders were able to gain a better understanding of the potential effects of each alternative, including the do-nothing option. In turn, this allowed those people to produce better, detailed, and more targeted responses. Little was heard in the way of generic opposition to the application of stringent access management treatments to this corridor. In addition, the corridor businesses were able to put a unique "signature" on this corridor plan with their "Main Street Extension" concept. It is unlikely that the consultant team would have come up with this concept without the help of the businesses.

## Figures



### Figure 1: TH 10 Corridor Context

Note: Anoka is toward the East end of the overall corridor at the junction with US Highway 169 Source: Howard R. Green Company, 2002



Figure 2: Studied Segment (Approximately One Mile in Length)

Source: CTRE



Figure 3: Aerial View of the Study Area Looking Northwest

**Source: SRF Consulting** 

Figure 4: Existing Facility/Traffic Intersection Level of Service (Turning Delays) Visualization



Note: Photo shows long queues in both directions at the PM peak

Figure 5: Composite Graphic of Stakeholder Involvement Comments from Business Charette and Open House



Source: SRF Consulting



Figure 6: Most Supported Alternative: "Tight Diamond Freeway"

Source: SRF Consulting



## Figure 7: Flap A: The Main Street Extension Concept

## Note: Shown near the bottom as an element of a non-selected, at-grade expressway alternative Source: SRF Consulting

### References

Howard R. Green Company, 2002, "TH10 Corridor Management Plan: TH24 in Clear Lake to I-35W", prepared for the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

### Acknowledgement

Special thanks to Bradley Grefe, an undergraduate student at Iowa State University in Community and Regional who composed the first draft of this paper based upon a Power Point presentation by the authors.

	Business Name	Business Type	Destination Or Drive-by?
North Side	Perkins Restaurant	Sit-down Restaurant	Mixed
	Pizza Hut	Sit-down Restaurant	Mixed
	Taco Bell	Fast Food Restaurant	Drive-by
	Insurance #1	Service	Destination
	Insurance #2	Service	Destination
	Video Transfer	Service	Destination
	Anoka Appraisal	Service	Destination
	Pawn America Payday Loan	Service	Destination
	Kentucky Fried Chicken	Fast Food Restaurant	Drive-by
	Phillips 66	Automotive	Drive-by
	North China Restaurant	Sit-down Restaurant	Destination
	ERC Environmental Resource	Service	Destination
	Verndole C & C	Service	Destination
	Youth First	Service	Destination
	Head Start	Service	Destination
	Better Value Liquor	Retail	Mixed
	Bait Shop	Retail	Mixed
	Guarantee	Service	Destination
	American Family Insurance	Service	Destination
	Generation Homes Inc.	Service	Destination
	Worldwide	Service	Destination
	Mortgage	Service	Destination
	Cemetery	Cemetary	Destination
	Vineyard Restaurant	Sit-down Restaurant	Destination
	First Bank	Service	Destination
	Super 8 Motel	Lodging	Mixed
South Side	Convenience Store/Car Wash	Automotive	Drive-by
	Quick Oil (Valvoline)	Automotive	Destination
	K-Mart	Big Box Retail	Destination
	Bank	Service	Destination
	New Strip Office/Retail (unleased)	Mixed Use	Destination
	Church	Sevice	Destination
	Premier (developer)	Service	Destination
	Culver's	Fast Food Restaurant	Mixed
	Super America Convenience Store	Automotive	Drive-by
	McDonalds	Fast Food Restaurant	Drive-by
	Firestone (tires & gasoline)	Automotive	Mixed
	McKinney	Service	Destination

# **Appendix A: Business Inventory**

# **Appendix B: Selected Portions of Business Interview Script**

CTRE

8/7/2006

#### ANOKA COUNTY TH 10 - BUSINESS INTERVIEW SCRIPT

This section is to be filled in by the CTRE interviewer prior to the personal interview.

Interview Code Number:				
Interview Date:				
Business Name:				
Street Address:				
City:				
Interviewee Name:				
Position of Interviewee:				
Contact Telephone Number:				
Parcel Has Direct TH 10 Frontage? Yes / No				
Distance from TH 10 Mainline:				
Distance from Nearest TH10 Intersection or Interchange:				
Rough Percentage Occupancy (If readily observable):				
Rental Rates (If available):				

End of Part 1 (This Page to Be Filed Separately)

1

CTRE

Interview Code Number:

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

The Center for Transportation Research and Education (CTRE) at Iowa State University is conducting research on behalf of Anoka County TH 10 Corridor Study team regarding the impact of potential improvements to Trunk Highway 10 through the City of Anoka. The research is focused on the impact on commercial properties located near the roadway.

Your cooperation is important to this study. You would help us greatly by answering the following questions, which we expect will take about 30 minutes of your time. We understand and will note if you choose to decline to answer any question.

#### General Business Information

- How long has your firm been in business?
- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years

2. How long have you (the interview subject) been with this business at this location?

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years

3. How long has this firm been in business at this location?

- Less than one year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- More than 20 years

4. What is the type of ownership is this business?

- sole proprietorship
- partnership
- public corporation
- franchise
- division of local corporation
- division of national/regional corporation
- private corporation
- other

#### 8/7/2006

#### CTRE

#### Interviewer: If a franchise or division of a corporation ...

4a	Where are corporate decisions made about the location of facilities?   individual facility decision   in the Twin Cities area   beyond the Twin Cities area (specify location)	
_	a mixture of local and headquarters input	
5.	In general, has the location chosen for your business along TH 10 been very positive somewhat positive neutral somewhat negative very negative	
5a.	. Would you care to elaborate?	

#### Roadway Access Information

6. What was the roadway situation at this site when your business initially selected this site?

7. Has there been any change in the highway access to your business since you have been at this location? What type of change?\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_Yes

How did the change in access affect your business?

\_\_\_\_\_

What specific steps did you take in response to the change? (e.g. changes in location, signage or advertising)

If you hadn't taken any of those steps, what would have been the effect on your business?

No

## CTRE

#### Customer Information

8. Generally, from what distance do most of your customers come?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Less than one mile away
- 1 to under 5 miles away
- 5 to under 10 miles away More than 10 miles away
- \_\_\_\_\_ More than 10 miles away

9. Generally speaking, would you say your business more dependent on customers that would be turning off from the highway or those arriving from the abutting neighborhood?

- from Trunk Highway 10
- from the neighborhood

9a. Can you estimate the percentage split of customers who turn off the freeway or arrive from the abutting neighborhood?

% from Trunk Highway 10 % from the neighborhood

10. Do your customers comment on the accessibility of your current business location? Yes

 	-
	No

10a. If yes, are their comments generally:

- \_\_\_\_ Favorable
- Unfavorable

10b. Could you say more about this? (Either favorable or unfavorable comments)

11. Does your business use any special signage to indicate the route from TH 10 to your site for customers? (Special signage may include either large-size signs or off-site signs.)

\_\_\_\_Yes No

11a. If "yes", what type of special signage?