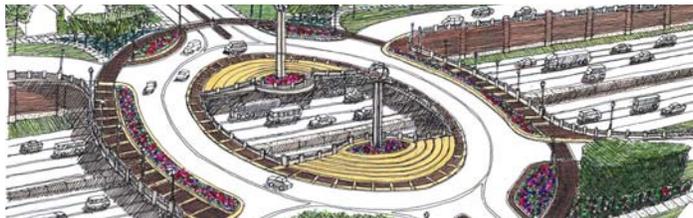


MITIGATION AND ENHANCEMENT REPORT I-35W ACCESS PROJECT



Minneapolis, Minnesota

Hennepin County, Minnesota, in association with the City of Minneapolis, the Metropolitan Council, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT)

Report completed in 2002

Project Type: Urban Freeway Reconstruction

PURPOSE

The purpose of creating a Mitigation and Enhancement Report was to document the findings of the Mitigation and Enhancement Subcommittee (M&E) of the I-35W Access Project Advisory Committee (PAC). The solutions documented in this report resulted from numerous meetings with representatives from the public, the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, the Metropolitan Council, and Mn/DOT. These representatives agreed to incorporate the improvements proposed in this report into the proposed reconstruction of a twenty block section of I-35W through south Minneapolis.

DESCRIPTION

Constructed in the 1960's, Interstate 35W through south Minneapolis was designed to improve mobility in Minnesota's largest city. Unfortunately, the adverse impacts associated with its construction were unrecognized and unmitigated by transportation officials. The neighborhoods however felt the impacts but were powerless to affect the outcome. I-35W severed vibrant communities, lowering several quality of life measures, contributing to subsequent urban decay. One particularly threatening adverse impact was how the freeway inhibited access to Lake Street, a bustling commercial corridor. Lack of access generated an impression of decline, which led to actual abandonment of several buildings that housed key businesses and institutions.

In the mid-1990's, the Phillips Partnership, a consortium of public and private interests, sought to address the many faceted problems facing the Lakes Street area. One of the keys to improving the plight of the area was to create better access from the regional transportation system to those regional businesses and institutions that had remained in the city.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



The consulting landscape architect facilitated a Mitigation and Enhancement Subcommittee that defined design objectives, suggested and evaluated design solutions, and selected a set of preferred alternatives. The designs not only mitigate impacts that may be caused by the proposed project but actually created opportunities that enhanced the livability of neighborhoods adjacent to the freeway. Indeed, of the \$153 million that would be needed to build the project, \$29 million, or nearly 1 in 5 dollars, would be spent on mitigation and enhancement. Due to the leadership provided by Hennepin County and the unprecedented investment in mitigation and enhancement, the project won the support of the local community.

CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS APPROACH

In order to avoid the mistakes of the past, Hennepin County (in cooperation with the Phillips Partnership) engaged the business, institutional, and residential communities to develop a plan that would create full access to Lake Street from I-35W. Utilizing their urban planning and design skills, a group of landscape architects working with engineers facilitated the creation of a plan that was guided by the community representatives, embraced by residents and business owners, and endorsed by public officials and transportation agencies.



The primary goal of the community representatives was to establish and maintain the character of neighborhoods by designing and managing the character of their streets. To achieve this goal, streets were categorized and then designed to manage the appropriate type and volume of traffic that matched the desires of the neighborhoods. Residential streets would support only local residential traffic and commercial streets would encourage commercial and commuter traffic. Innovative traffic calming techniques were proposed throughout a nearly 200 block area to direct vehicles to the appropriate route.

Other forms of mobility including pedestrian, bicycle, and transit networks were also included in the design. Pedestrian movements in particular were critical in creating and maintaining viable residential neighborhoods and vibrant business nodes. Creating a pedestrian friendly environment was essential to fostering neighborhood identity and community cohesion. How pedestrians moved across the freeway was a particular concern and resulted in several innovative bridge and sidewalk designs, including the design of an ellipseabout bridge that reduced air pollution and noise while improving safety and mobility.

OUTCOME

The Project Advisory Committee accepted the report of the Mitigation and Enhancement Subcommittee and subsequently approved the alignment and the proposed project, including an “accommodation” for future high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, as requested by Mn/DOT. The City Council of Minneapolis and Hennepin County Board have accepted the I-35W Access Project as recommended by the Project Advisory Committee. Both bodies have passed resolutions requesting that the Minnesota Department of Transportation fund and construct the project. The CSS process used to develop the Mitigation and Enhancement report is credited with garnering the approval of the community, the city, and county. Mn/DOT has taken these recommendations under advisement but is disinclined to fund the project until increases in mainline capacity are incorporated into the final design.

Ironically, the business sector which instigated and supported this project has developed thousands of new jobs in the corridor in the last two years in anticipation of better access being supplied soon. It has formed a sophisticated advocacy group of business leaders to pressure city, county, and state governments to deliver on their promises.

Although the public is in general very supportive of the project, delay is creating time for dissent to grow. Suspicion that Mn/DOT will not fund the mitigation and enhancements required by the city and county is eroding public support. Groups that advocate no additional freeway construction are increasingly vocal, questioning the motives of all levels of government and the private sector.

CHALLENGES

Although some federal funds have been designated for this project, the plans to implement the Access Project are on hold due to Mn/DOT not supporting the project unless HOV lanes are constructed at the same time. The City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County argue that adding additional capacity is a separate project and capacity changes must have a separate environmental review. They claim that their project accommodates future HOV lanes, as initially requested by Mn/DOT, but that constructing them should not be part of this project. The state insists that the City and County provide an environmental review of HOV lanes as part of the Access Project and that construction of the HOV lanes occur concurrently with the construction of the Access Project. The two sides are currently negotiating. Additionally, a lack of adequate funding and, with a change in Administrations, the lack of an advocate at higher levels of state government is hampering the delivery of the project.

FUNDING

Funding for the study was provided by FHWA through Mn/DOT and distributed to Hennepin County. Approximately \$3 million has been spent over five years developing alternatives and the Mitigation and Enhancement report.

LESSONS LEARNED

- It is critical that all levels of government commit to the project at project initiation and articulate what must be included in the project for them to support its delivery.
- If there is fundamental disagreement between different levels of government over the scope of the project, it must be addressed at the beginning of the project, otherwise years of work could be wasted and the public trust eroded when the project cannot be delivered.
- Neighborhoods are primarily concerned about livability, which includes vehicular access and mobility, traffic management through neighborhoods, pedestrian and bicycle mobility, economic vitality, and community identity and coherence. They are also concerned about environmental degradation, desiring that a project reduce air, water, and noise pollution.
- Crime is a particular issue in many inner city neighbors and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is an approach that is perceived to help reduce crime.

- The aspirations of the neighbors must be understood before design enhancements can be introduced. In this case it was important to discover that the community was distrustful of aesthetics, thinking that it was only included to entice their support. They wanted to discuss traffic management first.
- Trust the public to be practical. For example, the public was generally more concerned about the funding of long term maintenance than were agencies.

KEY WORDS *Applicable Project Delivery Stages:* Administration, Planning, Scoping, Design

Applicable Transportation Professionals: Highway Engineers, Traffic Engineers, Structural Engineers, Urban Designers, Landscape Architects, Architects, Geotechnical Engineers, Hydrological Engineers, Archeologists, Cultural Resource Investigator, Artist

Applicable Transportation Modes: Vehicular, Bicycle, Pedestrian, Bus Transit

Transportation Topics: Visual quality, Safety, Geometrics, Design Speed, Contextual Character, Cultural Resource Inventory, Sustainable Materials, Informed Consent, Environmental Assessment, Transit Network, Bicycle Network, Pedestrian Network, Prototypical Intersections, Prototypical Street Character, Demand Reduction, Special Traffic Management Zones, public Art and Public Aesthetics

WEB LINKS <http://www.phillipspartnership.org/35w.html> (Phillips Partnership)

http://www.abbottnorthwestern.com/ahs/anw.nsf/page/community_35W
(Abbott Northwestern Web Site)

http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/vgn/portal/internet/hcnewsarticlemaster/0,2301,1273_1736_100462509,00.html (Hennepin County Web Site)

http://www.co.hennepin.mn.us/vgn/portal/internet/hcdetailmaster/0,2300,1273_1716_103089923,00.html (Hennepin County Web Site)

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