

Highway 5 / Shepard Road Access Options Study

As work on the *Shepard-Davern Small Area Plan* and Zoning Study are concluding, St. Paul Public Works is proposing to engage the community in a study of the possible realignment of the Highway 5/West 7th-*Shepard Road* connection with the goals of:

- Improving both West 7th Street and Shepard Road for pedestrian and bicycle crossings.
- Creating a better distribution of the traffic between Shepard Road and West 7th Street.
- Reducing traffic volumes and speeds on both roadways.

TH 5 and Shepard Road Interchange



Background

- The recently adopted *Shepard Davern Area Plan* identifies significant opportunities for the area bounded by West 7th Street/Hwy 5, Shepard Road/Mississippi River and Homer Street to become one of the most vibrant attractive neighborhoods in Saint Paul. With its existing mix of affordable housing, cultural diversity, easy access to downtown and the airport and significant amounts of land ready for redevelopment, the area is poised to become an even stronger community and commercial center than it is today. A number of issues, however, stand in its way including: high traffic speeds on West 7th street, lack of connection to the Mississippi River and the lack of a pedestrian friendly street environment.

Specific plan recommendations include:

- Slow the traffic coming into the city off the Highway 5 bridge onto West 7th Street, both to improve the safety of the pedestrian environment along West 7th, and to help create the feeling of a Gateway to Saint Paul.
- *The Great River Passage Plan*, in its efforts to more closely tie the Mississippi River to the city and its neighborhoods, makes a series of recommendations for the River Valley focused on “protecting and enhancing natural areas, creating gathering places and improving access by transforming Shepard Road.”

Key recommendations include:

- **Redesign streets to improve park access while enhancing private development potential.** The alignment and cross-section of Shepard Road in this area has significant potential to be modified because of the pending redevelopment projected for the area to the west. As part of the site planning and urban design of adjacent redevelopment sites, evaluate alternative Shepard Road alignments that remove the existing frontage road, expand potential development and increase park area along the bluff edge. Alternative roadway designs should minimize required roadway width, enhance park frontage aesthetics, expand park land and integrate improved local storm water treatment strategies.
- **Reduce traffic speeds.** Reduced roadway speeds will provide a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists while accommodating projected volumes of all traffic types including commercial vehicles.
- The *City of Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan* (February 2010) clearly lays out policies of improving public streets for all users, not just drivers. In particular, it states that alternatives should be examined to enhance safety through right-of-way design, including narrowing or removing lanes on roads. The Comprehensive Plan also links infrastructure projects like street improvements, to the growth of employment, services, parks and schools.
- The *Riverview Major Investment Study* (August 2000) identified the need to create a better balance of traffic between West 7th Street and Shepard Road which was followed by recommendations by the Planning Commission and a City Council Resolution that asked MnDOT to study the issue. A budget was approved in 2007 for St. Paul Public Works to participate in a joint study of Shepard Road and West 7th street between the Mississippi River crossing and I-35E. The other partners (MnDOT, Ramsey Count and the Metropolitan Council) did not secure funding and the study stalled.

- *The Riverview Corridor Study* was launched by the Ramsey County Regional Rail Authority to study transit options in the corridor. How those options affect and would be affected by traffic on both West 7th Street and Shepard Road underscore the importance of having good data and traffic models as well as the ability to strengthen whatever right-of-way is selected as a transit street.
- Johnson Brothers purchased the former US Bank site (bounded by Gannon Road, Shepard Road, Davern and Norfolk) and is proposing a multi-phased redevelopment. City Planning approached Johnson Brothers with the question of whether their redevelopment planning process might not be an opportunity to address some of the traffic issues in the area as identified in multiple planning efforts. They were receptive to that discussion, see value in a realignment of Shepard Road and have planned their site to accommodate that possibility.
- SRF has been engaged to create a detailed traffic model of the study area and to lead a community process to ensure all reservations and ideas are considered and addressed.

Proposed Study Process

- A Community Advisory Group will be convened with a diversity of interests including those who have expressed reservations about any re-routing.
- The Community Advisory Group will be supported by a Technical Advisory Group comprised of staff from Saint Paul Public Works, Planning and Economic Development, and Parks and Recreation, as well as other agencies.
- The study recommendations will be reviewed by the Planning Commission and City Council.
- No funds have been identified for the construction of the selected alternative.

Task Forces

There will be a Project Management Team and two task forces established as part of the study:

- The Community Advisory Group (CAG) - will be comprised of community members from a variety of stakeholder groups.
- The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) – will be comprised of members representing MnDOT, Metropolitan Council, Ramsey County Regional Rail, PED, Parks, and the Project Management Team (Public Works, SRF Consulting and Zan Associates).

Proposed Timeline

- March 2014
 - Department of Public Works releases RFP for study consultant
- May 2014
 - Department of Public Works selects SRF Consulting Group to conduct the Study

- Public Works Staff holds background meeting with Transportation Committee of the Planning Commission
- July 2014 – October 2014
 - SRF collects data information related to the study area
- November 2014
 - Public Works staff holds background meetings with:
 - Shepard Davern Task Force
 - Transportation Committee of the Highland Park Community Council
- December 2014
 - Mayor and Council Check-ins
- February-May 2015
 - Community Advisory Group Convened
 - Community Advisory Group Meetings
 - Technical Advisory Group Meetings
 - Community Outreach Meetings
 - Mayor and Council Check -ins
- June 2015
 - The Project Management Team, Community Advisory Group and Technical Advisory Committee make recommendations for public review
- August – September 2015
 - Release Draft Feasibility Report for public review
The Feasibility Report will document concept development and evaluation, agency coordination, public outreach and determination of the recommended alternative. The report will also lay out next steps for project advancement. A public hearing will be held at the Planning Commission.
- October 2015
 - Update and submit a Final Feasibility Report to the Planning Commission and City Council
The Feasibility Report will be updated to reflect comments received during the draft report review period.

Design Criteria and Issues

The Great River Passage Plan identifies a number of design criteria for roads in the area:

- Shepard Road should have a parkway-like design similar to Shepard Road from Randolph to Eagle Street, suggesting that it be 4 lanes wide with a 35-40 mph design speed.
- West 7th Street and Edgcumbe Road both should have grade-separated connections to Shepard Road and Highway 5 with a 25-30 mph design speed.
- Edgcumbe Road must have a bicycle/pedestrian trail connection to the Mississippi River Trails.

In addition, there are design issues that will be evaluated through the study. They include:

- Will traffic signals be needed at the Wheeler/Shepard and the Mississippi River Boulevard/Shepard intersections?
- Where will roadways be located and connected? (i.e. Wheeler, Mississippi River Boulevard, Stewart Street, Munster Avenue, Edgumbe Boulevard, Graham Avenue)
- What are the future traffic volume estimates for West 7th Street, Shepard Road, Davern Street, Mississippi River Boulevard and the surrounding neighborhood? This will be evaluated under a number of scenarios including doing nothing (“no build”) and modifying the connections to I-35E at Shepard Road and West 7th Street.
- What will be the impacts on the area with or without potential transit options being considered in the Riverview Corridor Study?

For additional information, please contact:

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Contact Mark for technical questions, engineering concerns, and for information about the consulting team.

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Contact Michelle to get on the mailing list for the study, to find out about public meetings, and to learn how to contribute to the conversation.