

Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership *Workshop*

Date: 22 October 2020

7:30-9:00 am, Sherburne County Government Center, Maple
Room <under COVID-19, meetings are either in-person or
virtual; see [Agenda](#) for dial-in information>

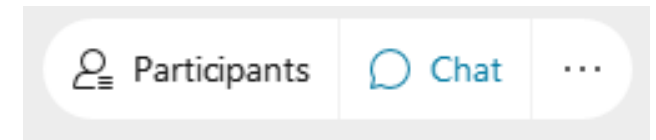
Introduction

Agenda

- 1. Welcome, Partnership introductions, housekeeping**
- 2. FHWA/MnDOT presentation and discussion**
 - a. Past and current regional studies, planning efforts
 - b. State and federal funding outlook
 - c. Realities of corridor planning
 - d. MEPA/NEPA process
 - e. Considerations, options

Housekeeping

- As usual for CMRP workshops, presentation is recorded and notes aren't taken
- There are 7 Q&A breaks in the presentation
 - Everyone will be muted until these breaks
 - Hold your questions until the breaks or
 - Use the chat function; put ??? before your question and facilitator will address at breaks
- Presentation + speaker notes will be posted on website
- Recording will be posted on website
 - For clarity and accuracy, Q&A sections will be cut from the recording
 - Q&A content will be organized, clarified, expanded as needed, and inserted into the recording as new slides with no audio



Presenters

- **Claudia Dumont, MnDOT**
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- **Philip Forst, Federal Highway Administration**
 - Environmental Specialist
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Past, current regional studies, planning efforts

- 1. Past and current regional studies, planning efforts**
2. State and federal funding outlook
3. Realities of corridor planning
4. MEPA/NEPA process
5. Considerations, options

Where we left off in 2017/2018

- **2017-18 Transportation Study**
 - Provided valuable information on traffic movements, volumes, projected volumes
 - Identified potential corridors from a traffic perspective only
 - Examined if-then scenarios for shifting traffic off TH 25
- **Transportation study is only one data set needed for decisions**
- **Regional decisions must address bigger-picture land use planning, and social, economic, and environmental factors**



2019-2020

Planning studies/Framework 2030

- Enable region to define needs
- Framework 2030 defines common vision and strategies for regional planning and economic development, and steps to collectively advance those

In contrast, MEPA/NEPA process

- Defines the transportation issues, needs, and infrastructure needed to support land use and economic development plan (vehicles, bikes/peds, transit, etc.)
- Note: Need/desire for economic development is not sufficient “purpose and need” for the NEPA process. NEPA can be a tool to define and address the ***transportation performance problems impeding an established land use and economic development plan*** from adequately functioning.

Framework 2030 Results, Benefits

- **Factbook data:** potential source for possible later transportation studies
- **New / stronger regional relationships**
- **Defines and agrees on:**
 - Relevant, aspirational vision for the region
 - Regional strategies for land use, economic growth, and interconnections
 - Overarching regional economic and land use strategy that combines the plans of Partner communities into a consolidated future land use diagram
 - Implementation recommendations that build on the region's challenges, opportunities, and capacities
- **Positions the Partnership** to collectively address regional challenges and opportunities

Q&A Break (after past studies)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: We did the traffic study in 2017-18, with the traffic changes due to COVID, would a new study be in order, or beneficial?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** Right now we're experiencing some weird things in our entire transportation system with people working at home. We expect it to rebound over time and those traffic numbers in 2017-18 will be good again -- it will just take awhile for the numbers to go back up. Those numbers should be updated at some point, but I don't think there's going to be a huge change.

Question: How far did the 94/10 study get in the process?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** It got all the way through. We have a signed EIS, but we don't have funds for construction.
- **Follow up** about what happened with the lawsuit: Nothing. It became a non-issue because we didn't have funding for the physical construction. Without funding, it became moot.



State and federal funding outlook

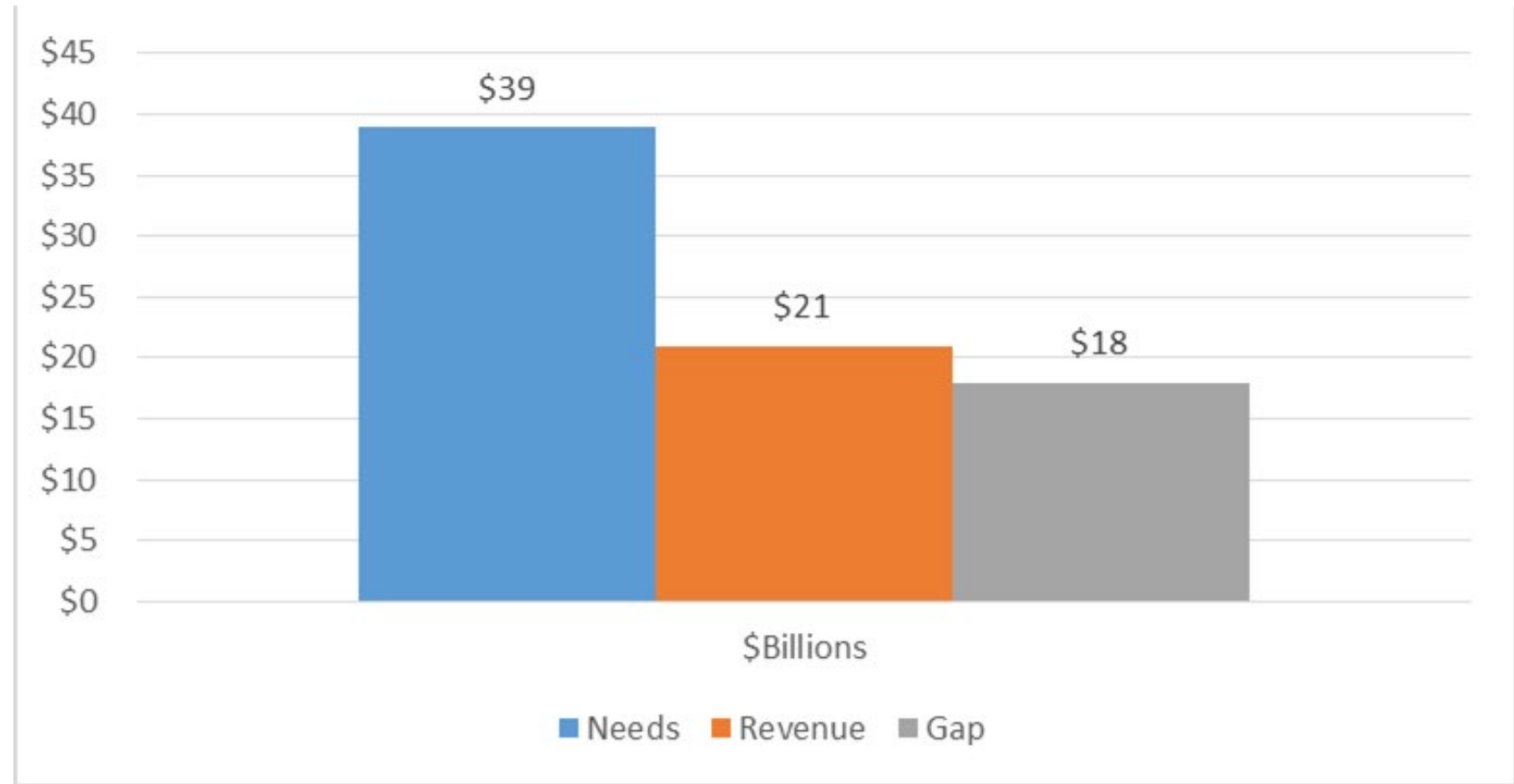
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Available Funding Isn't Meeting Projected Needs

**MnDOT Funding
– 20-year horizon**

MnDOT Forecast Revenues 2018 - 2037





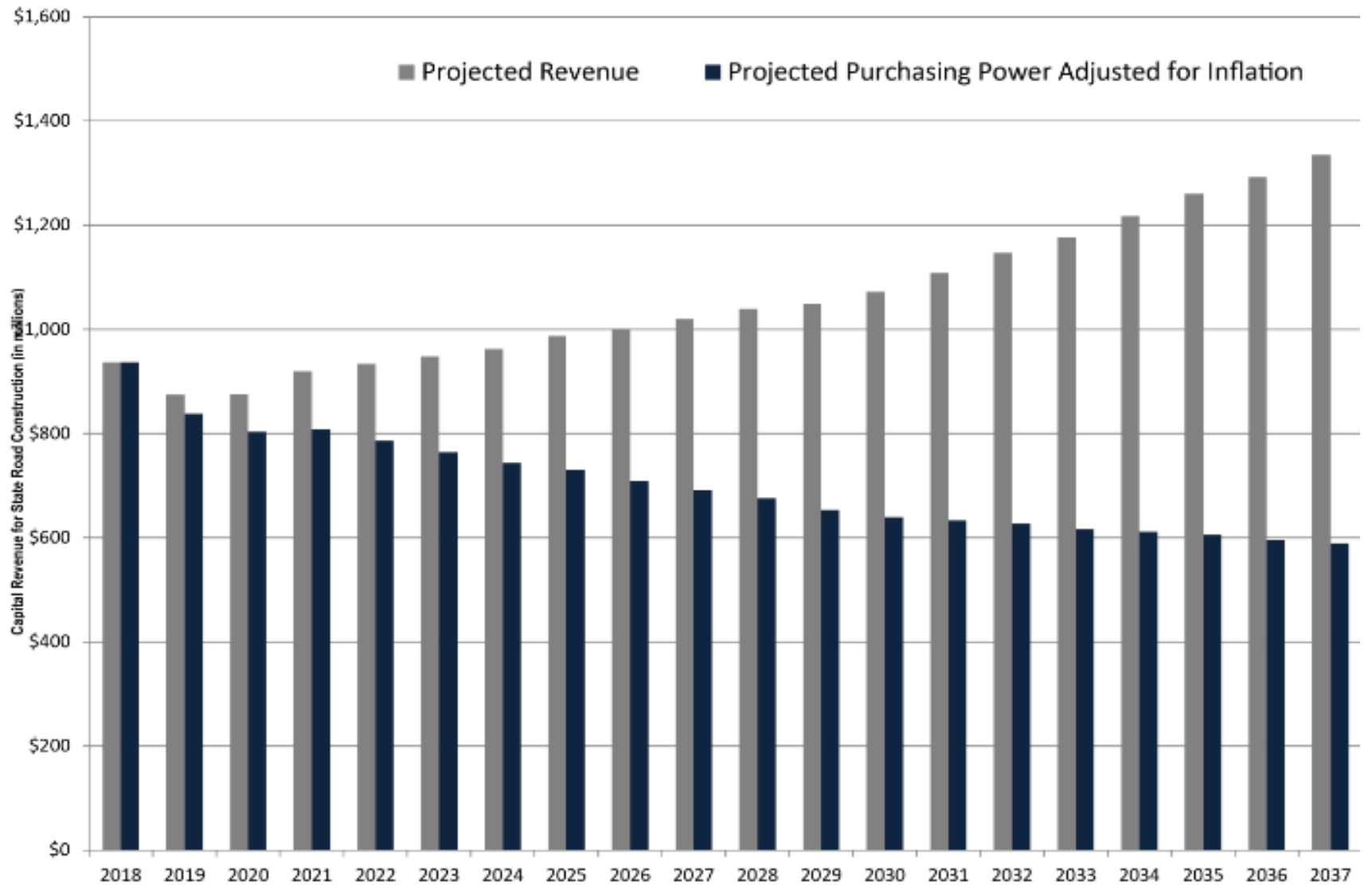
MnDOT Bonding

- MnDOT bonds have 20-year payback
- MnDOT policy limits debt service on trunk highway bonds to 20% of annual MnDOT revenues
 - FY 2020 debt service was \$213 million, which is 14-15% of annual revenues; this pays off bonds from 2000, and pays down later bonds
 - FY 2023 debt service will be \$250 million
- The real cost of bonding: \$100 million in bonds sold today will cost \$150 million by the time the debt service is paid
- Debt service limits constrain future MnDOT spending
- Learn more:
 - Download [Complete Financial Snapshot, Feb 2020](#)
 - Source web page: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/funding/>



MnDOT 2018-2037 Projected Revenue for Construction

- While total revenue is projected to increase, inflation decreases buying power



Q&A Break (after state funding)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: When MnDOT spoke with this group in 2017-18, you mentioned MnDOT's focus was on maintaining existing infrastructure, not new infrastructure. Has that changed at all?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** No, it hasn't.

Question: As we're talking about new infrastructure here, what does that mean in MnDOT terms?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** The bottom line is that any funding for this new connection would have to be local, because we just don't have the revenues to fund something like a new corridor.

Question: When a bonding bill is passed and individual projects are put in there, does that basically force MnDOT's hand to reallocate funds differently from what you have in your needs assessment?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** In some cases that's correct. In the current bonding bill (passed by the MN Legislature just last week in special session) there was some money allocated to study Highway 10 in the Wadena area. We don't have an extra \$40-50 million in our budget to build a project there so we are not sure what's going to happen -- we're trying to sort that out. It also depends on the source of the bonds. Trunk highway bonds are a direct hit to MnDOT's budget. General obligation (G.O.) bonds are from the general fund and have a different payback.

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Q&A Break (after state funding)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: How do the federal [BUILD](#) funds and other grants work? Aren't some of those earmarked for particular projects?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** Yes, that's correct. In the last several years I've submitted three federal BUILD-type grant proposals for the I-94 corridor; we weren't successful in any of those. Federal grants are only a small piece of what's needed to complete a project. Using the \$25 million example for the project noted earlier, if you get a grant for that much you still have to find funds for the rest of the project, and those would have to come from another source -- they wouldn't come from MnDOT.

Question: Is it correct that if a MnDOT project gets federal [BUILD](#) grant it forces MnDOT's hand to reallocate those funds, not necessarily based on need, but rather on the fact that you got either state bonding money or federal [BUILD](#) grants?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** That's correct

Question: How would that kind of (grant-based) process work, under what conditions or circumstances, any recent examples, and so on?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** MnDOT has a [Corridors of Commerce](#) program. The legislature made bonding dollars available for projects that fit the C of C criteria. The 94 expansion between St Michael and Albertville got some of those funds. The funds weren't quite enough to fully fund that project, so the district had to defer some other projects in order to pull funds forward to make that happen. We were just informed that the Highway 23 North gap between Richmond and Paynesville (which was a District 8 project out of the Willmar office) is short \$12-13 million and now they're saying, Well, we applied for the project, but it's in your district so you (District 3) have to find the money. District 3 doesn't have it, so we'll have to defer projects here in our district -- pavement, safety, intersection improvements -- to make up those gaps. Our revenues are fixed except for these special programs that get launched through bonding efforts or if specific federal grants would come in like a [BUILD](#) grant.

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Q&A Break (after state funding)

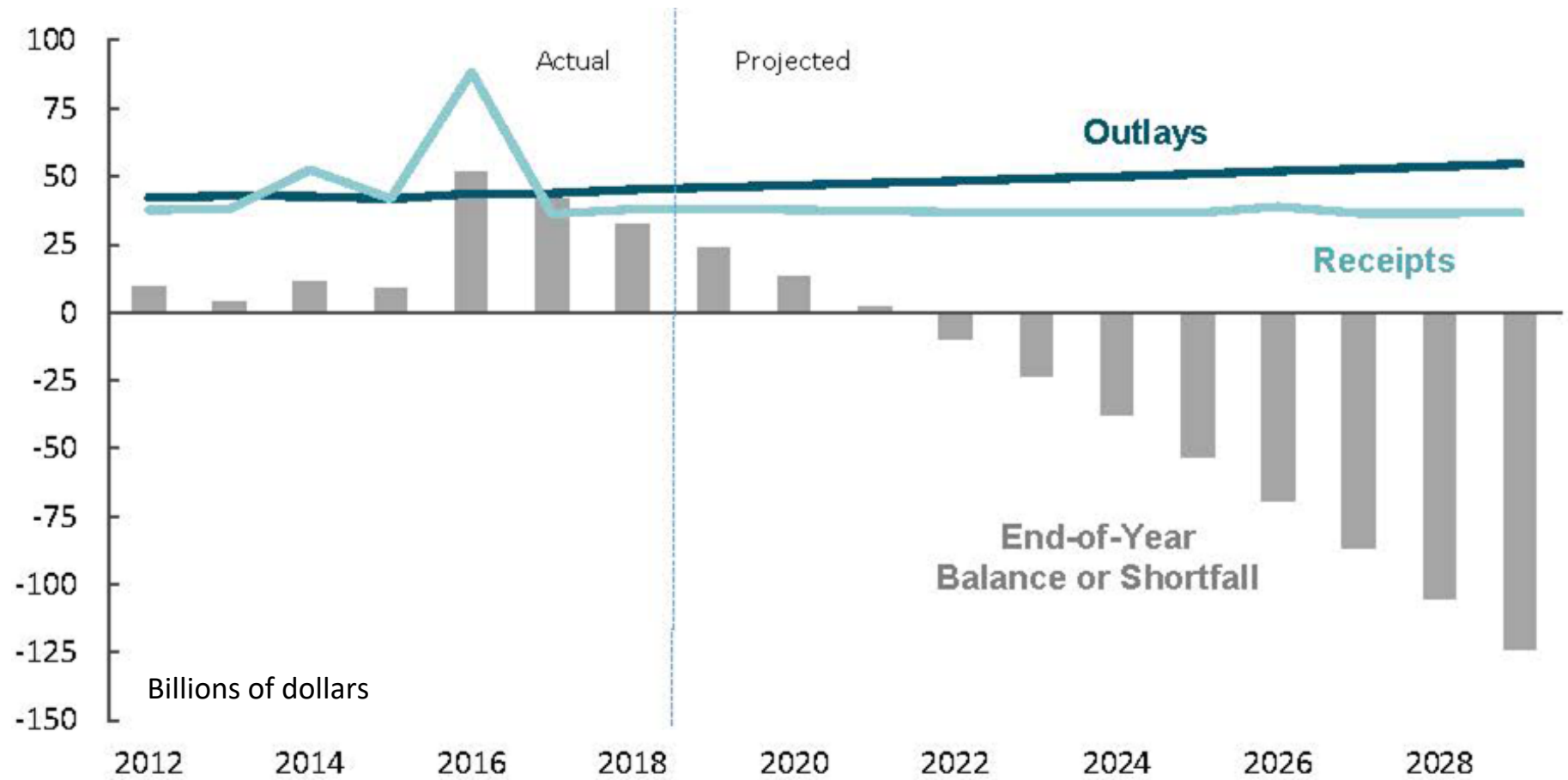
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Comment: When some projects pop up and MnDOT has to find the money by taking it from another project, it's not a win-win scenario by any means. We as elected officials have to be willing to fund these needs, and talk with the public about this. They understand -- they want their roads to be in good shape, they want their commute time to be less. And without funding the needs, it's going to be very challenging; it's not fair to ask other entities to give up their funding to fund another project, because they're all important.



Federal Highway Trust Fund Balance

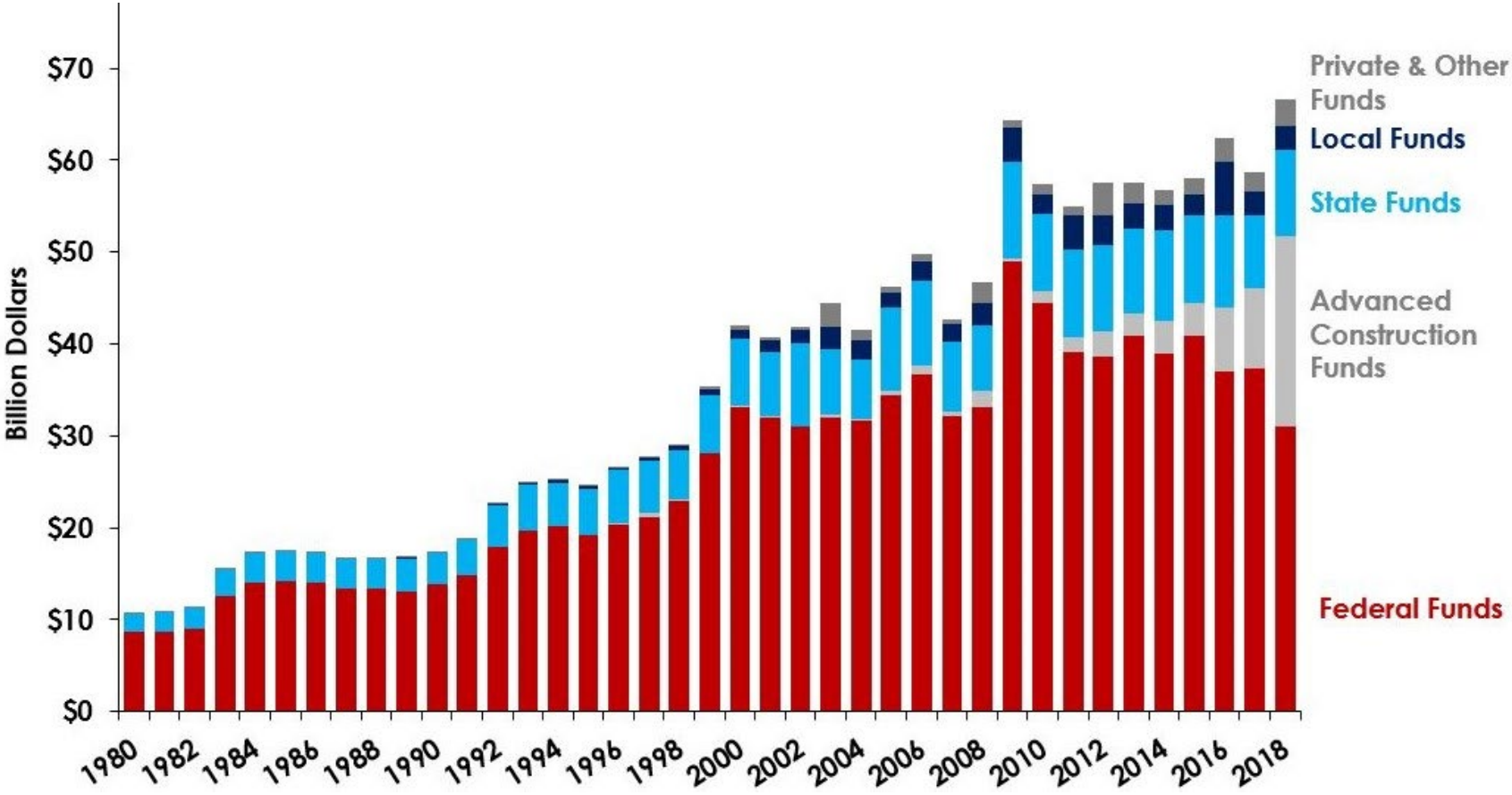
- Federal Highway Trust Fund revenues come from federal gas taxes, which are dropping; absent an infusion from other sources, funds won't be available





Federal Highway Trust Fund

- Graph below shows declining availability of federal funds for highway and bridge projects, nationally
- “Advanced construction funds” are state/local costs that are *eligible* for federal funds, but for which no federal funds are currently available



Sources: American Road and Transportation Builders Association and Federal Highway Administration

Q&A Break (after federal funding)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: Are the one-time [BUILD](#) grants *outside* of these federal funds (from the previous slide)?

- **Answer (FHWA):** Yes, the [BUILD](#) grants are outside the federal funds (red bars from previous slide). [BUILD](#) grants came out of the general fund. If you look back at the USDOT discretionary grant programs over time, you'll see the funding source is a mixed bag. Some discretionary grant programs used dollars from the general fund whereas other grant programs used federal Highway Trust Fund dollars.
- **Follow up question:** So the previous graph doesn't include *all* federal funds, just the majority?
- **Answer (FHWA):** Correct, the red bars reflect a majority of the federal funds -- the value of the federal formula funds plus the value of any discretionary grant program that used Highway Trust Fund dollars. The INFRA discretionary grant program and the bridge bundling program used Federal Highway Trust Fund dollars. The TIGER and BUILD discretionary grant programs used general fund dollars.
- **Follow up:** It seems like the trend going forward is sort of a money grab from different pots, while in the past you could count on the Highway Trust Fund as the primary source.
- **Answer (FHWA):** That's correct. Unless there's a change in something like the federal gas tax or a regular series of infusions from the General Fund, we would anticipate this downward trend continuing not only in the Highway Trust Fund balance, but also in its purchasing power (as was explained for MnDOT funds).

Question: Are these issues related to what we hear about there being a huge national need for much more infrastructure investment?

- **Answer (FHWA):** Over the years, FHWA has begun advocating for a performance-based approach to the condition of the transportation system, in part because the trends were becoming apparent -- so we're advocating for good system condition and reliability. The federal aid highway program has not taken away the ability to do capacity expansion, but we have encouraged more focus on the system being in good repair, and a performance-based approach to solutions that make the dollars stretch as far as they can while providing adequate system performance.
- **Answer (MnDOT):** We've been building highways and bridges for a very long time, and a lot of them are nearing the end of their useful lifespans. Parts of the Interstate system were built in the 1970s, and at 50 years old they will need significant repairs. With declining federal and state funding plus inflation, we have some real problems facing us in the future.

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Q&A Break (after federal funding)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: What I'm seeing and hearing is that, as elected officials, when we look at these downward funding trends, without going back and advocating for increases in federal and state gas taxes, it's going to continue to be a challenge. Expecting this all to fix itself without being willing to fund the needs...we're all leaving [federal and state transportation agencies] short of funding that you need to do your jobs. What kind of increase in gas tax are we talking about that would begin to make progress in our highway system and for our state.

- **Answer (MnDOT):** MnDOT leadership is running scenarios about we could do with increases, but the problem isn't just the gas tax and license tab sales. Cars are becoming much more fuel efficient and the vehicle trend is away from fossil fuel, so we need to find other ways to fund transportation other than relying on the gas tax.
- **Follow up comment:** We need to be on top of that as well -- also with cars that are getting gas mileage -- the whole system needs a good look. We as electeds have to be willing to advocate for what the needs are to continue to make progress.

Question: Is MnDOT capable of using public-private partnerships for projects?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** Yes. It's something that our management has been promoting, however it's hard to come up with those types of projects because they tend to be very focused in a specific area. We had one instance in the state where a large company contributed toward the construction of an interchange because it provided access to their site. As far as the freeway system or other roads, I think you'd be looking at a toll system, and we haven't had much interest in that in this state.

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Q&A Break (after federal funding)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: Is it safe to say that we, as units of government, have failed to budget properly to resolve both growth and maintenance of existing systems. These charts and projections seem untenable when combined with revenue sources.

- **Answer (MnDOT):** Yes. You nailed it. It's a lot more exciting to have funding for a new project than maintain something you already have.
- **Further MnDOT clarification** about who owns/maintains something with private funding: It would go back to MnDOT because you couldn't expect a company to have the resources to plow or maintain a ramp, bridge, etc. -- they would have contributed something toward it, not fully funded it themselves.
- **Follow-up** participant clarification: So similar to a business building on a road and they have to build in turn lanes to enhance the current road to meet their business needs, they don't own the road but they do help pay for some of the upgrades. **MnDOT:** Correct.

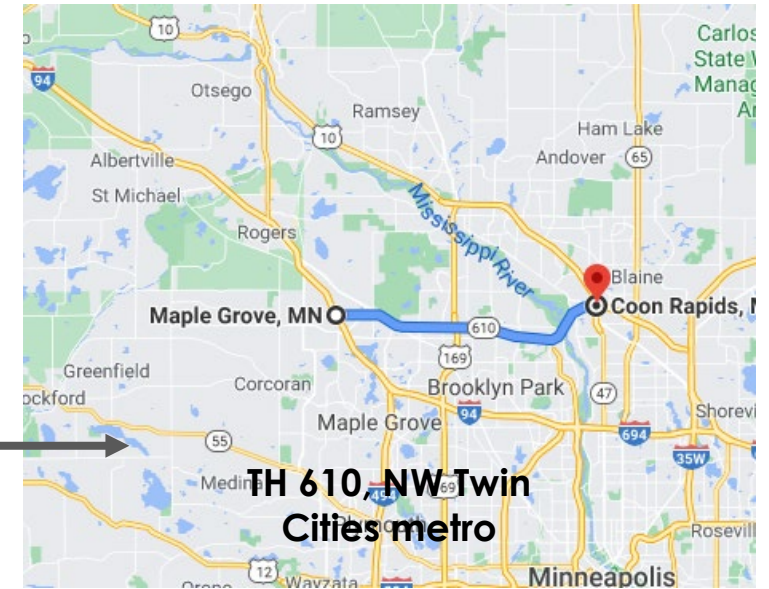


Realities of corridor planning

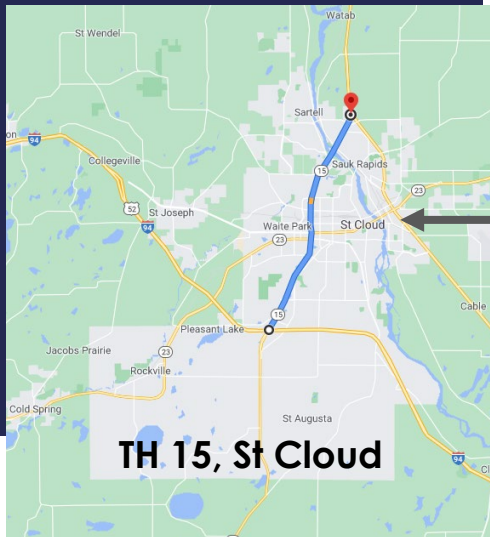
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Corridor Examples

- Successful corridor projects with clearly defined needs
- State and federal funding provided during decades of huge transportation investments
 - TH 610, 11 mi: studies began in the 1970s, construction began in the 1980s with projected completion c. 2025
 - TH 371, 5.2 mi: Studies began in the 1970s; completed, including bridge, in 1998
 - TH 15, 9.2 mi: Studies began in the 1970s; completed in 1995
- These state/federally funded *corridor* projects made connections to regional networks



TH 610, NW Twin Cities metro

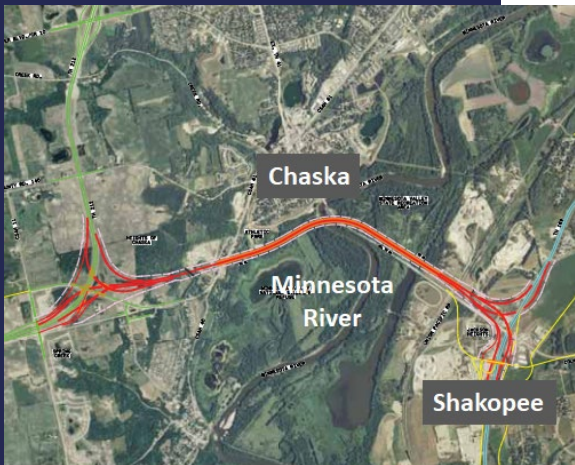


TH 15, St Cloud

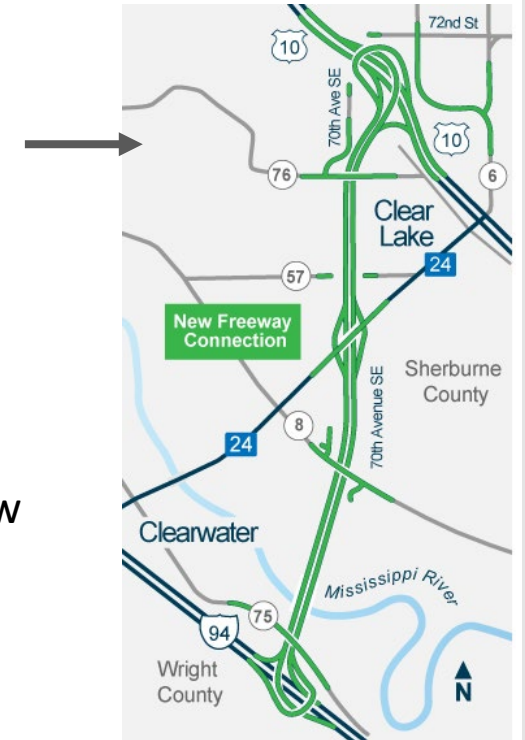


TH 371, Brainerd bypass

Corridor Examples



- **Unsuccessful / stalled**
 - **I-94/TH 10:** started in 1997 to improve safety and support regional needs; completed EIS and identified preferred corridor in 2007; lawsuit by local property owners stalled project; MnDOT recently notified jurisdictions of no foreseeable funding, freeing land for other uses
 - **TH 41 river crossing:** started in 2002 to improve safety, allow travel during flooding, and support regional needs; multijurisdictional partnership established common goals, completed EIS, and identified preferred corridor in 2015; no foreseeable funding
 - **St. Cloud Area Planning Organization, new river crossing:** pushed since late 1990s; no studies due to competing regional needs
- **Conclusion: Even with demonstrated need and completed process, there are no funding guarantees**



For a Corridor Serving this Region...

- **Only foreseeable source of funds for this corridor is local**
- **Total costs for a future river crossing corridor are likely \$135-\$165 million**
 - In today's dollars, based on per-mile costs for similar corridors
 - Using estimated corridor lengths from 2017-18 transportation study (2.5-5 miles)
- **Actual costs depend on numerous, unknown factors**
 - Costs would include multiple studies, engineering, land acquisition, and construction of roadway, bridge, ramps/access to local roads
 - Costs are driven by final corridor route and roadway/bridge specifications
 - Other unknowns include environmental issues, landowner impacts, land acquisition costs, archeological discoveries, geotechnical issues, legal challenges, etc.
- **Requirements for CMRP to proceed**
 - Generational commitment
 - Powerful and sustained regional collaboration and planning, strong and persistent public trust, and substantial investments of financial and political capital
 - \$1-3 million for planning + a reasonable path through the state/federal

Q&A Break (after realities of corridor planning)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: With the need to focus on *regional* significance for these large corridors. Would it be accurate to say that focusing on the improvement of commercial freight traffic would be a more viable angle for state and federal partnerships vs. local traffic solutions?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** I wouldn't focus it solely on freight, because you have lots of residents in your area, you are already working on a regional solution, and freight is just one component. You need to focus on the long term. You may get a freight facility and then they might go out of business, so you don't want to "hang your hat" on just one thing. You want to have that regional or more "global" perspective.

Question: If there's \$1-3 million for the planning and EIS and one was already completed on the I-94/10 study, would that have to be redone?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** That project (94/10) happened so long ago the environmental documents aren't valid anymore. We would need to revisit all the assumptions that were made and see if it still made sense to fund this corridor. Traffic patterns have changed. I know that if you're using the Google maps app in your car, it will route you through Monticello instead of on TH 24 -- so for all practical purposes the I-94/10 study is not valid anymore.

Question: For the bonding bill just signed that includes bonding for the Becker Industrial Park, that is projected to be one of the largest industrial parks that I'm aware of in the state. It's a great opportunity for our region and for the state. It's going to change the traffic patterns, along with our being the fastest-growing area, I get concerned that we're not putting enough emphasis on the need to address what these growth patterns are going to do for our area. It will increase truck traffic and residential traffic because more people are moving out here. How does that change MnDOT's thoughts on this just being a local issue?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** When you mention that the Becker area is poised to have one of the largest industrial areas in the state, that really highlights the need to do good land use planning -- because the land use planning feeds into the transportation needs, which we can pull into those studies and figure out the best solution for this area. So MnDOT is aware of the changes going on, but a lot more information is needed before any decisions are made and anything moves forward.

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Q&A Break (after realities of corridor planning)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Question: Could you draw parallels or comparisons between the I-94 efforts of that committee, and if there were any lessons learned 5-6 years ago when it wasn't even on MnDOT's radar to go to 6 lanes and now look what we have? What can be learned from that process that can be applied to this situation?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** Regarding number of lanes, there was a study done back in the 1990s showing the need for additional capacity on I-94, and actually that showed the need for 5 lanes between Maple Grove and Rogers, and we're actually just now getting a 4th. For extending capacity out to the west, the I-94 Coalition had worked toward expansion for quite awhile, and the piece from St Michael to Albertville was funded through the Corridors of Commerce program, so that was a special allocation. The section from Rogers to St Michael was an earlier bonding bill for expansion. The section from Monticello to Clearwater was different because we don't have the same capacity needs, but needed to maintain 2 lanes of traffic in each direction during construction. Because of the amount of temporary widening that would need to be done, it got a little bit political because it looks bad to build temporary widening and then tear it out and not give travelers that extra lane. So there were a lot of different factors at play in those projects, and they were also established transportation corridors. I-94/10 stalled because of the budget that was required to deliver it. One of the most recent estimates -- from a number of years ago -- was about \$132 million, which with inflation would be about \$200M, and we just don't have funding available for that long of a connection any more.
- **Follow up question:** Would it be plausible to think that if the need were demonstrated -- it is a state need -- and if this group stayed together with the same focus the I-94 coalition had, that politically enough pressure could be brought to bear to create legislation or a bonding bill? There's obviously huge state benefit here and the locals need to support it as well. If this group stays and works together to create that kind of momentum, that we could accomplish the same thing?
- **Answer (MnDOT):** It's possible. The I-94/10 project had a different focus. That was trying to carry trucks and recreational traffic from the Metro to northern Minnesota, and provide freight connections for those really long trips -- because TH 24 was very congested -- and still is. But businesses along TH 24 didn't want to lose the income generated from the people coming through, but they also didn't want the traffic. This is still an issue.



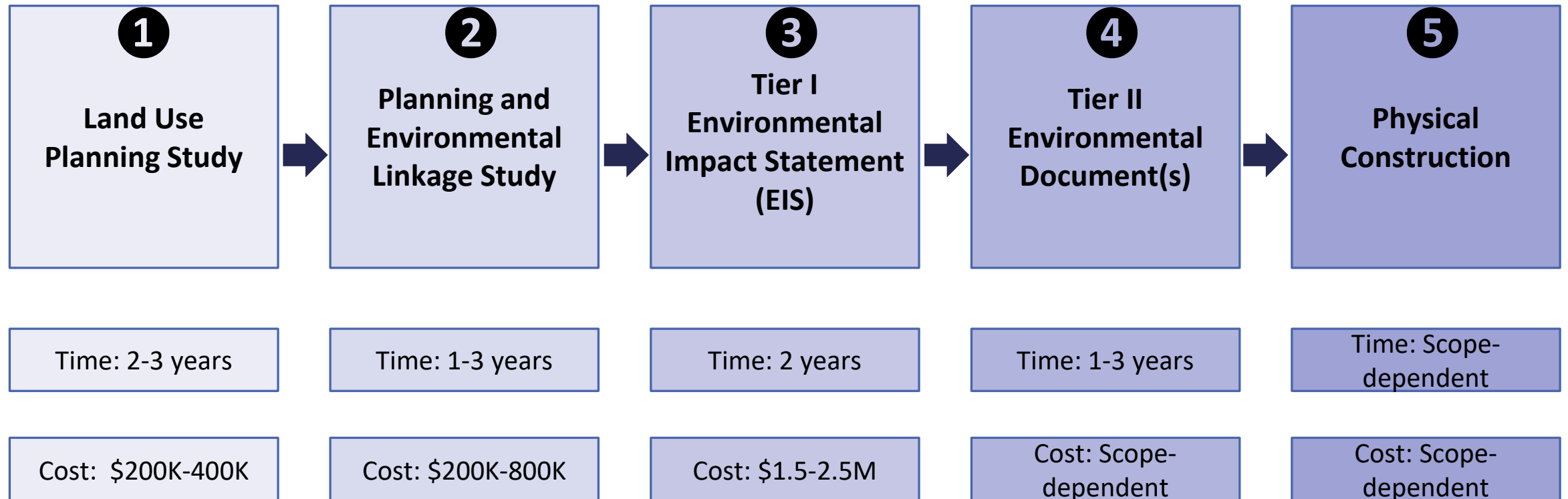
MEPA/NEPA process

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Path to decide what, if anything, is built

- MEPA/NEPA: [Minnesota](#)/[National](#) Environmental Policy Act
- Studies are sequential
- Note: Process requirements, details, and timing depend on the project; this is a summary and should not be relied on for any formal action or decision





1

Land Use Planning Study

- **What do I get from a land use planning study?**
 - A common regional vision, strategies, and implementation plans for multi-generational development with minimal waste
 - If jurisdictions align local plans accordingly, the result is a mutually beneficial regional land use plan
- **How does it feed the next step in the process?**
 - Assists in defining traffic analysis zones
 - Anticipates origins-destinations
- **What does it take to move to the next step?**
 - Resolving differences and conflicting stakeholder priorities
 - A regional land use plan that all buy into

When finished, Framework 2030 positions the Partnership to align local plans, which creates a solid basis for defining regional transportation needs

Total time expended from start of land use study: 1-2 years
Anticipated cash outlay since start of land use study: \$0.2-0.4M

2

Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) Study

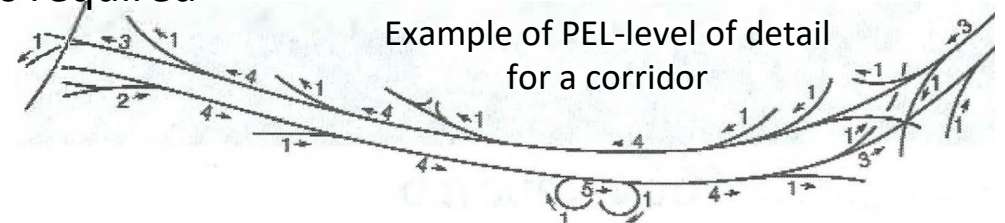
Lifespan: 5 years after FHWA final concurrence

- **What is it?**
 - Any type of transportation planning study conducted at corridor or subarea level that **links planning information directly to NEPA, with FHWA involvement**
 - Most helpful when: Project funding is reasonably expected, problem is not well defined, and solutions are not identified
- **PEL studies identify:**
 - Transportation problems to be addressed + evaluation criteria
 - Environmental setting and preliminary impact assessment
 - Stakeholder/public/resource agency concerns
 - Initial alternatives to be vetted, followed by a reasonable set of alternatives to move forward into NEPA -- no preferred alternative is identified

PEL studies do not:

- Guarantee federal funds
- Reduce the level of NEPA analysis required

Total time expended from start of land use study: 2-5 years
Anticipated cash outlay since start of land use study: \$0.4-1.2M





2

Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) Study

Lifespan: 5 years after FHWA final concurrence

- **How is a PEL different than a Feasibility or Corridor Study?**
 - PEL incorporates NEPA principles and the information is readily transferable into a later, more streamlined NEPA process
 - At defined milestones, FHWA issues concurrence
 - Develops environmental data to screen alternatives based on environmental laws and transportation needs
 - Uses an endorsed framework to coordinate technical work such as travel demand, purpose and need development, public and resource agency outreach, and more

Total time expended from start of land use study: 2-5 years
Anticipated cash outlay since start of land use study: \$0.4-1.2M

3

Tier I Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Lifespan: 3 years
after Record of
Decision issued

- **What is it?**
 - Study that broadly analyzes transportation and environmental issues
 - Continues broad engagement from PEL
- **How does it feed the next step in the process?**
 - Tier I EIS results in a preferred build *corridor* (or no-build option)
 - Provides environmental clearance for corridor location and access point locations (not for physical construction)
- ***What does it take to move to the next step?***
 - Adequate public and resource agency engagement
 - Fulfilling MEPA and NEPA requirements.
 - Issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) by the lead federal agency

Total time expended from start of land use study: 4-7 years
Anticipated cash outlay since start of land use study: \$1.9-3.7M



4

Tier II Environmental Document(s)

Lifespan: 3 years
after decision
document issued

- **What is it?**
 - Study that analyzes transportation and environmental issues for specific designs; requires construction funding to be reasonable foreseeable
 - Continues broad engagement from Tier I
- **How does it feed the next step in the process?**
 - Selects a preferred alternative for physical construction
 - Provides environmental clearance for physical construction
- **What does it take to move to the next step?**
 - Lead federal and state agencies issue decision documents
 - State plans updated, with dedicated project funds
 - Project proposer obtains all necessary permits
 - Let contract for physical construction

Total time expended from start of land use study: 5-10 years
Anticipated cash outlay since start of land use study: \$2.4-5.3M

Q&A Break (after NEPA)

The questions and answers on this topic are taken from the workshop video, cleaned up and clarified as needed to be more useful

Further elaboration (FHWA): For the Planning and Environmental Linkage (PEL) study, once it's completed and receives FHWA concurrence, has a 5-year life span. So it's an opportunity to apply NEPA principles in a very structured framework -- so the Partnership can work together, engaging the public and resource agencies, and have a lower level of investment than jumping into a Tier I or II EIS, while still making progress on transportation needs, considering the pros and cons of various corridors, and determining which corridors are unreasonable (clearly would not meet "purpose and need" -- it wouldn't have the chance of moving the performance numbers in the right direction to address the defined transportation problems).

Question: In looking at this project, would the work we are doing now with Framework 2030 be considered pre-step 1 in this process?

- **Answer (FHWA):** Effectively, yes, because Framework 2030, combined with updates from the Partners to their land use plans and having that commonly agreed to land use vision, would allow the definition of traffic generators. From there, we can see how those traffic generators affect the existing network, define transportation problems, and have a jumping off point to define and address those problems.
- **Further clarification:** Aligning land uses across jurisdictions to create a commonly agreed-to land use plan is required to generate good traffic numbers and traffic modeling -- which we need to see the appropriate range of solutions and work together to get to that one solution to the corridor location that will be workable for all.
- **Example (Anne Carroll):** For my work on TH 41 in the Shakopee area, one of the things they did, similarly to CMRP, is form a coalition to resolve hugely complex issues across federal and state regulations, which they accomplished because of the relationships they had created. In spite of clearly identified need and federal and state approval, in the end there was still no money.

Clarification (FHWA): The I-94/10 project was a Tier II; the Highway 41 project in Shakopee was a Tier I

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Q&A Break (after NEPA)

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Reminder/clarification that this is a “corridor” project, not a bridge project. Using the 2017 initial traffic study as a baseline, the corridor could be 2.5-5 miles long, including on/off access and connections to local streets.

Question: When we first started this process I don’t think the Becker industrial park potential was even in the thought process, though we all knew we were trying to grow our commercial and industrial base. This is a big deal for the industrial park and what Becker is going to be able to do now. Is there anything there that changes what we’re needing to address with our traffic patterns and so on. I am concerned that we need to take this seriously to be successful.

- **Answer (FHWA):** As you go through the spectrum of studies and see the number of years at the bottom of each slide, at each stage we use the best available information. So as traffic changes locally, if you were to go through that entire spectrum or only part, one of the things that should be asked at every stage is whether that traffic has changed -- whether it be numbers, origins and destinations, or both. It’s important to update the studies to be sure that what you have on the table is a viable solution. These are living documents that are updated as regions and projects change. However, traffic numbers are not generally updated in advance of seeing the actual network effect. We typically use the best available data at the time from the traffic counts. Sometimes a sensitivity analysis might be done to see how things might change in given scenarios, but we typically use the actual number, then forecast those numbers 20 years out.
- **Elaboration (Anne Carroll):** One of the things that can bring this kind of effort to its knees is major conflict among jurisdictions. Building consensus, relationships, public support and trust is absolutely essential. The challenge is financial; with the bleak federal and state projections, it’s essential to understand those from the beginning and plan accordingly and intentionally.



Considerations, options

1. Past and current regional studies, planning efforts
2. State and federal funding outlook
3. Realities of corridor planning
4. MEPA/NEPA process
5. **Considerations, options**

Options, Roles, Responsibilities

- **Short/mid-term options** -- Framework 2030 and your work together as a Partnership position you well to:
 - Work toward a regional vision and continue engaging stakeholders
 - Collaborate to achieve your land use and economic development priorities
 - Find short/mid-term solutions to regional transportation challenges, such as local road system upgrades that address regional needs, reduce current problems, *and* complement a possible future river crossing
- **Roles and responsibilities if a corridor is pursued:**
 - As public agencies, MnDOT and FHWA staff will continue working with the Partnership as you consider options -- understanding that MnDOT's priority is maintaining the integrity of existing facilities vs. system expansion
 - MnDOT would address implications for other roadways (I-94, TH 10, TH 25, etc.)
 - Other relevant agencies would be involved, such as US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish & Wildlife, Mn DNR; state, federal, and Tribal agencies for historical and archaeological clearances, etc.

Q&A Break (after options)

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Question: How could the Partnership prevent the stalling or failure of *this* project -- after hearing about those other projects that went through the process in good faith, got to the end, and then were dead. Certainly you can't remove all risk, can't eliminate all the unknowns, but what are optimal pathways forward for the Partnership?

- **Answer (FHWA):** Thinking about the spectrum of studies and understanding that the ones we execute are situation-dependent, the important thing is to keep doing what you've been doing. That's been a challenge with some of the groups on other projects we've mentioned today -- they hadn't all gotten together for that common vision, they hadn't arrived at a land use plan that was mutually viable. The important thing is to keep going on that front, keep working together -- it's a living conversation that we have here, and part of that is, what do you want to accomplish for your reputational and financial outlay for these studies? That, relative to what you see as your funding realities. Those are not the "be all, end all," but they can help inform a discussion with the parties at the table today about the right mix of studies. That feeds a discussion of the pros and cons, as opposed to jumping to a single answer.
- **Further clarification** that many of these studies have both legal and practical expiration dates, which informs discussion of start and end dates for these, plus a realistic look at where the funds are coming from -- then deciding how to proceed. It is so important to bring many jurisdictions and public perspectives to the table so you minimize the surprises. There are many unknowns you can't address in advance (like what's under ground that's not recorded), but you can listen to and try and address priorities and conflicts, build on commonalities, find agreement and leverage that.

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Q&A Break (after options)

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Question: What are the top 2-3 factors considered when deciding on the location of a new river crossing?

- **Answer (FHWA):** For a NEPA process today, when alternatives are being defined and vetted, a lot comes down to how well the transportation problem is defined, then balancing the acceptable performance of a given alternative against the social, economic, and environmental impacts. Those help define what a location is most viable option -- so not just best performance, but what performance can you achieve for something you can actually afford.
- **Further clarification** that route decisions lean into land use, and doing things in order. So going from Framework 2030 into a deeper and more intense land use conversation among the jurisdictions that takes awhile -- then you have clarity around intended future land use at a regional level. Then the transportation analyses work from that regional land use.

Question: What percentage of travel/traffic do you think would be reduced by adding another river crossing?

- **Answer (MnDOT):** We have no way of forecasting that until land uses are well defined, and even then it's just a forecast.

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Q&A Break (after options)

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Comment: When we ask how we get to success and what to avoid, we (Wright Co planning) have land use plans, we have a Monticello orderly annexation area, we have a transition area, I-94 and 10 are established, we have a Highway 55 corridor that was going to be improved and we have a mapping ordinance on that -- but it's not happening, and I've had to tell property owners for numerous years now what they can and cannot do with their property. I'm glad we did not have the (I-94)/Hwy 10 corridor that's now not taking place -- it sounds like for this transportation issue we need to get this land use stuff resolved, done, and agreed upon so we can focus on the environmental planning, and financing, the bonding, whatever the processes are done. I can't speak for the County board members, but as an office we don't have an appetite for a large area that might have extra restrictions or a future potential area when we don't have clear-cut goals or consensus on where this crossing is going to take place. My impression was that it was the Monticello area; if it's now going out to the Silver Creek or Clearwater area again, I don't know how we get this figured out.

- **Response (Anne Carroll):** You raise exactly the points that have to be made. Consensus must be reached on regional land uses among the jurisdictions (different from a formal, cross-jurisdictional agreement) and where they abut -- then going through a study process before any commitments are made on routes. When route decisions are made through a collaborative process, they aren't imposed on anyone.
- **Follow-up comment:** So maybe the two years of meetings on route consensus were putting the cart before the horse; it was pretty clear there were limited options. Everyone only has so many resources; there can't be a multiyear conceptual land use discussion when patterns are established -- the river, I-94, Highway 10, traffic studies, the cities are there, everyone has land use plans...agreements, consensus, building relationships, that's great this is coming out of that, but if that's the first step then it needs to be done. It can't go year after year after year.
- **Response (Anne Carroll):** That's the purpose of Framework 2030, which is yielding that cross-jurisdictional look at commonalities, conflicts, and a land use "framework" and the issues to be addressed in the next steps.

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Follow-up answer (MnDOT):

- It sounds like Wright County may have a better-defined land use plan, which is good. I think the issues in Sherburne County are much different and more fluid, especially with the amount of undeveloped land between Highway 10 and the river -- they have work to do to determine what their land use looks like and how the transportation network will serve that development. They have to get that done before we can talk about corridors.
- The corridors identified in the 2017-18 traffic studies were just what-if scenarios; there was no science or environmental review behind them -- just lines on paper. The reason they were focused on Monticello was only because the City was driving that study, and when they didn't like some of the options that were thrown out there, everything basically came to a halt. That's when everyone realized these issues were much bigger than the City, the work needed to include the cities across the river, and the corridor has to serve everybody and be mutually inclusive. So they brought in Anne Carroll as the process consultant and re-formed as the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership, changing its focus away from solely transportation to regional land use and economic development planning.
- The work on Framework 2030 has included a lot of basic self-discovery for the Partners. If you look at the Factbooks, they cover what our population looks like and where it's centered, here's where people are working and not working, where they're commuting, where there is developable land. So they've learned a lot about themselves as communities and as a region, which is necessary before they can decide what they want to look like in the future -- then determine how transportation supports that. They're doing great work, it's a long process, and you can't jump to those corridors because there was nothing behind them.
- Doing the transportation study before land use was sorted out was premature. The Partnership/Framework 2030 has a well-defined geographic area and they're looking at issues within that.
- **(FHWA)** looks at this large defined area with multiple jurisdictions as regional, and as you saw with the funding projections and how few projects actually make it to physical construction, working together regionally for one desired outcome is your best chance to find a solution that works well for all of you. Even if it doesn't come to fruition, you still have a bigger-picture land use vision, goals, and strategies to help with your day-to-day activities. It's great that this group has come together and is doing useful work.

Let us know
what we can do
to help...

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