

# **Increasing the Value of Public Involvement in Transportation Project Planning**

## **Final Report**

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## **APPENDIX B**

### **Chronology of Ayd Mill Road Public Involvement, 1988-2000**

# CHRONOLOGY OF AYD MILL ROAD PROJECT

Compiled by Peter Langworthy through reviewing stories from Highland Villager

January 22, 2002

NOTE:

AMR = Ayd Mill Road; WB = westbound, etc.; DEIS = Draft Environmental Impact Statement; FEIS = Final Environmental Impact Statement

## **BASIC PHASES:**

- HISTORIC BACKGROUND/OPENING OF I-35 E
- FIRST AMR TASK FORCE
- DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (DEIS) SCOPING PROCESS
- DEIS PREPARATION
- SELECTION OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE FOR FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (FEIS)

## **I. BACKGROUND/OPENING OF I-35E**

- Ayd Mill Road (AMR) was constructed in 1960s; it had always been intended to be a link between I-94 and the anticipated I-35E .
- Connection to I-94 was never completed because of local opposition at north end (the initial connection was going to follow RR tracks that cross over Snelling and tie into I-494 at Fairview. Merriam Park Community Council got its start fighting this connection.)
- Completing AMR was not an issue for decades because there was no I-35E to connect to, and traffic was local and relatively light. I-35E was delayed for decades because of local opposition.
- I-35E up to Randolph Avenue/AMR was opened in 1987. The last overall stretch of I-35E (West Seventh to downtown) was being strenuously opposed by RIP-35E and other groups. As concessions to these groups, the last stretch was to be a parkway with landscaping, low speed limit, etc, and an agreement not to provide direct connection to AMR initially.
- Once the stretch of I-35E to Randolph/AMR opened, substantial congestion problems appeared at the south end of AMR because motorists moving between I-35E and AMR had to make this connection through local streets (Lexington and Jefferson.). In general, more traffic was being fed into local system (primarily Lexington north to Midway, I-94). This congestion (primarily at south end of

AMR) leads call for a direct connection of AMR to I-35E. However, those at north end of AMR do not want connection at south because this will dump more traffic in their neighborhood, they say (12/16/87 story).

- In Early 1988, St. Paul City Council approves funding for the link of I-35E to I-94 in downtown. This link does NOT include a link to westbound (WB) I-94. Citizens in northern portion of AMR push for this downtown connection to WB I-94. However, city council defers this decision to the future.
- In early 1988, City of St. Paul begins to put a task force together to look at what to do with AMR.

## II. PROJECT CHRONOLOGY

March 1988	First AMR Task Force meets. It is made up of a broad range of representatives; “four district councils, six community councils, three business organizations, and an number of other neighborhood groups.” Not much information on makeup other than this. The two co-chairs are Dick Anfang and Linda Hirte.
November 1988	AMR Task Force determines that leaving AMR in existing conditions is NOT a viable option. They come up with five general options to be addressed. One of those is to connect I-35E to WB I-94 downtown (“downtown connection”). They determine that an EIS process is needed to evaluate these and possibly other options. They determine that, while something has to be done to alleviate the congestion at south end, nothing should be done about this until a way to address potential impacts of connection at north end is determined. AMR Task Force passes these recommendations to the City Planning Council.
January 1989	The City Planning Council accepts the Task Force’s recommendations EXCEPT the downtown connection. They view this as not being viable because of engineering difficulties (location of History Center complicates things, complexity of tying in with all other roadways, required takings, etc.) and cost of providing this connection. Dick Anfang of the Task Force acknowledges after Planning Commission’s determination and looking information provided by Mn/DOT that a downtown connection probably would not be viable.
1990	No significant AMR activity reported.
1991	City of St. Paul approves \$250,000 for conducting an EIS for AMR options. City assumes approximately \$1 million, total, will be required for the full EIS process. They request the balance from Mn/DOT. However, since AMR is technically a city street, Mn/DOT is limited in its ability to fund this type of project.
April 1992	In what appears to be a pretty clear “deal”, St. Paul allows the south end of AMR to be opened with direct link to I-35E during closure of Lafayette Bridge for repair, in return for Mn/DOT providing \$300,000 for AMR EIS process (Paula Maccabe, Ward 4, makes statement on proposed quid pro quo arrangement-- 3/11/92 article). St. Paul wanted \$750,000, but took what they could. City states that it will look to Dakota County for additional funds (4/92 article). The south connection is opened (only open for HOV vehicles) during the extensive

Lafayette Bridge maintenance activities without reported major problems. At end of bridge maintenance, south connection is closed with piles of dirt.

- September 1993 SECOND AMR Task Force holds first meeting to provide alternatives for SRF and TKDA to study in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. This is the “scoping phase” of the EIS process. Mike Klassen of Public Works and Lucy Thompson of Planning and Economic Development are key city staff representatives. More groups are represented in the Second Task Force than the First. Groups represented are: Summit Hill Association; Summit University Community Council; West Seventh-Fort Road Community Council; Highland Park Community Council; Mac Groveland Community Council; “downtown”; Lexington Hamline Community Council; Snelling Hamline Community Council; Merriam Park Community Council; Hamline-Midway Community Council (**see attached map of local planning districts**); Grand Avenue and Snelling-Selby business associations; Selby Avenue Community Development Corporation; Midway Chamber of Commerce; University UNITED. Also participating are Mn/DOT, Ramsey and Dakota County, Met Council, and the St. Paul Bicycle Advisory Board.
- January 1994 Significant Task Force meeting (covered in February 1994 article). All are in agreement that the situation at the south end is a big problem which must be addressed. There is discussion of a potential downtown connection (I-35E to WB I-94). Discussion of how AMR could be connected to I-94 at north--the options available have substantial right of way impacts.
- July 1994 SRF presents assessment to Task Force that a downtown connection to WB I-94 is not viable.
- August 1994 Connection of AMR to I-94 through Pascal eliminated by Task Force because of need this would entail to replace the brand new Selby Avenue Bridge. Connection through Hamline eliminated because of the need to keep Hamline as a through street for local traffic.
- First reference to the Ayd Mill Road Coalition in August 1994 article. “A neighborhood group that is monitoring the Task Force’s work.” It had been inexistence since at least Spring 1994. Later article indicates that they hired a consultant (Bill Smith, Biko Associates) and one of their pushes is a deck over AMR so a park could be created.
- September 1994 Mike Klassan of City states that it may, after all, be physically viable to construct a downtown connection to WB I-94. However, SRF analysis shows that this would not actually divert that much traffic off of AMR. This analysis shows that a relatively small percent of trips on AMR originate in Dakota County.
- December 1994 At December Task Force meeting there is significant discussion of the possibility of a downtown WB I-94 connection. Alternatives are firming up. Linear park is one of them.
- March 1995 Public Hearing is held on the Draft Scoping Document, which proposes alternatives to potentially be studied in DEIS. At this hearing there is significant hostility expressed towards suburban users of AMR. Point is made by those in AMR neighborhoods that suburban cars cause congestion, air quality impacts,

etc, but suburban residents don't pay any taxes supporting any AMR improvements or activities.

Concordia College makes statement at Public Hearing that they are concerned about losing their athletic fields and important parking areas with some of the options being looked at. They lost their football field with I-94. Don't want to lose more.

- April 1995 St. Paul Planning Commission takes the list of alternatives determined through the process to this time and eliminates: a) linear park alternative; b) two lane with indirect north connection alternative (presumably because it would not have enough capacity), c) downtown I-35E/WB I-94 connection; and d) limited access freeway connecting at I-94 at Fairview Avenue. Commissioner Mark Vauaght is quoted with a strong statement that linear park is not viable option. Task Force representatives express frustration regarding the fact that they feel that their work is being ignored.
- June 1995 City Council approves the options to be studied in the DEIS. They add back the linear park and two lane alternatives that the Planning Commission had eliminated. The approved options for study are: no action; linear park; transportation management systems (TSM); two lane city street (parkway) with split diamond interchange at I-94 and direct connection at I-94; four lane expressway with split diamond interchange at I-94 and direct connection at I-35E; a four lane expressway with a freeway to freeway interchange at I-94 (using RR spur between Pascal and Hamline) and a direct connection at south; and a limited access freeway with a freeway to freeway interchange at I-94 (using RR spur) and direct connection at south.
- Late 1995 City of St. Paul approves \$750,000 for EIS process. It appears that funding hung up the process until this 750k allocation was made.
- May 1996 AMR Task Force reconvenes after approximately a year of not meeting. The Task force is to meet regularly and keep abreast of the analyses and activities associated with the preparation by SRF of the Draft EIS (DEIS).
- July 1997 Results of traffic analysis presented to July 21, 1997. The analysis indicates that no action alternative would make already congested local roadways and intersections even worse in the future. A number of intersections would be "over capacity".
- Some task force members express opinion that the results are less serious than they would have expected. Wonder if it is worth it to make large investments when (what they feel is) only a limited number of intersections are over capacity. Mike Klassen replies that there is no way other than providing connection at AMR to significantly relieve existing congestion conditions which will only get worse.
- December 1997 Mn/DOT proposes a revised approach to connecting AMR to I-94 at north. This approach uses existing frontage roads for access to/from I-94 rather than whole new interchange. Mn/DOT and FHWA had concerns with too many interchanges within a short stretch of I-94. This approach would also eliminate the need for any residential right of way takings. However, commercial takings would still be required and Concordia University would lose athletic

fields/parking, particularly if access to Selby is maintained. [Note; this north connection approach ultimately becomes referred to as the “indirect connection” to I-94, is endorsed by the Task Force, and ultimately becomes the dominant approach.]

- April/May 1998      Neighborhoods First! Is established. Primary objective is to promote the linear park alternative. Michael Kline is quoted and seems to be a/the leader.
- July 1998            At the instigation of Neighborhoods First!, SRF looks at transit options to limit traffic in area and on AMR. Steve Wilson of SRF makes presentation at July 20 Task Force meeting. Looks at transit lines using Lexington Parkway and HOV on AMR. It appears from 8/5/98 story that the analysis did not indicate that these options would do much to limit traffic in the area (would primarily take riders from other transit lines). Point is made also that Lexington Avenue, being a Parkway, cannot have buses on it. “Some Task Force members were skeptical of the transit figures.”
- July 1998            Representatives of SRF make presentation regarding noise analysis relevant to AMR process. Based upon comments and questions, this is a significant issue for neighboring residents. SRF indicates that the DEIS will analyze anticipated noise outcomes assuming largest build alternative at noisiest locations, but will not recommend specific mitigation measures. Any decisions on mitigation measures would be made later in project with input from residents. They say that preliminary analysis indicates that state noise standards would be exceeded under the build alternative analyzed, but point out that these are commonly exceeded in the metro area. There was general discussion of potential mitigation measures such as noise walls, roadway design, and berms.
- October 1998        Midway Chamber of Commerce takes position supporting direct connection at south and indirect connection (through existing frontage roads) to north. Midway COC says it represents 360 businesses which represents one third of all jobs in St. Paul and one quarter of city’s commercial/industrial tax base. Midway COC is taking this formal position in response to Neighborhoods First! pushing for linear park.
- October 1998        Citizens for Safe Streets (CSS) is formed. This organization seems to have been in response to the push by Neighborhoods First! and Snelling Hamline Community Council for the linear park alternative. CSS focuses on Lexington as having too much traffic and being unsafe. Joan Nyberg has prominent quotes and seems to be the leader of the organization. Approximately 40 members of CSS, most of whom live on either side of Lexington, meet with Mike Klassen to voice their concerns. Joan Nyberg wonders whose neighborhood “comes first”.
- October 1998        Matt Entenza, District 64A state representative makes impassioned statements in support of linear park. Sierra Club, Transit for Livable Communities, others enter picture, framing this issue in terms of urban sprawl. Their position is that connecting AMR will make it easier for those in suburbs to move around and thus will add to sprawl.
- November 1998      Snelling-Selby Area Business Association (SSABA) releases statement supporting direct connection of AMR at south, indirect connection at north, and continued connection between Selby and AMR. They very much do not want linear park which is being promoted heavily by Neighborhoods First! and has been adopted by Snelling Hamline community council.

- Late 1998
- A number of organizations represented on Task Force formally identify their preferred alternatives:
- Hamline Midway Coalition: no build
  - Highland District Council: two or four lane parkway
  - Mac Groveland Community Council: two lane parkway
  - Merriam Park Community Council: no build
  - Midway Area Chamber of Commerce: two lane or four lane roadway
  - Snelling Hamline Community Council: linear park
  - Summit Hill Association: two lane parkway
  - Summit University Planning Council: four lane roadway
  - Snelling-Selby Area Business Association: two lane or four lane roadway, if access to Selby is maintained (with no access to Selby, they prefer no action)
- February 1999
- Draft Environmental Impact Statement is approved by City Council for publication and 30 day public comment period. This DEIS is released and identifies and evaluates six alternatives: no build; Transportation System Management; linear park; two lane roadway with direct connection at south and indirect northern connection (existing frontage roads) through RR spur between Pascal and Hamline; a four lane roadway with same direct connection at south and indirect connection at north; a four lane roadway with direct connection at south and “bridged ramps” for connection at north (more expensive than base indirect connection, but less congestion on frontage roads).
- March 1999
- A joint City Council/Planning Commission public hearing on the DEIS is held. 120 people attend, about three dozen people speak. No surprises, relative to positions outlined above. One thing that all agree on is that something should be done regarding the congestion at south end where connection is made from I-35E to AMR.
- (The next step in the EIS process is to select an overall preferred Alternative to study in more detail in the Final Environmental Impact statement [FEIS].)
- August 1999
- AMR Task Force votes (August 23) for linear park as preferred alternative. There are 20 voting Task Force members representing nine local district councils, two business groups, the Bicycle Advisory Board, and RIP-35E. They are not required to vote in accordance with the formal positions of their organizations. Each voter ranked each of the following alternatives from 1 (worst) to 3 (best): no build, Transportation System Management, linear park, two lane connected roadway, four lane connected roadway.
- September 1999
- Steve Gordon, a Planning Commissioner and co-chair of AMR Task Force says that he will not support the recommendation of the Task Force. While he put

forth the voting system used (it is a method used by the Sales Tax Revitalization Board), he later acknowledged that it might have been flawed (9/8/99 story).

A representative of Summit Hill Association (SHA) and a representative of the West 7<sup>th</sup>/Fort Road Federation gave the linear park the highest ranking, even though their respective organizations had voted for the two lane connected parkway. Conversely, the two Snelling Hamline Community Council representatives told Steve Gordon that, while they personally did not prefer the linear park option, they felt compelled to give it their highest ranking because that is what their organization favored (is unclear whether the council forced them to vote for linear park or if it was their decision) (9/8/99 story).

Mike Klassen (11/3/99 story) later suggests that the voting process was skewed by “numerous changes in Task Force membership” (Villager language) over previous six months. He said that several Task Force members were appointed after the release of the draft EIS and just prior to the final vote. He also noted that some of the organizations represented on the Task Force did not vote on August 23 because they could not come to agreement on a preferred alternative.

[PRL Note: it seems that another factor is that the two connection options “split” the connect vote. Had there been two linear park options, say one with an expensive created wetland and one without, this may have decreased chances for an overall outcome favoring a park under the voting system used.]

October 1999

St. Paul Planning Commission on October 22, 1999 votes to recommend building a four lane roadway. Steve Gordon, a Planning Commissioner, said that generally the Planning Commission follows the recommendations of its citizen task forces. “However, he said that the group’s recommendation for a linear park was ‘substantially flawed’ by the process used to arrive at it.” (11/3/99 story).

Gordon told the Planning Commission that the four lane option is the best way to provide traffic relief for local north-south streets, especially Lexington. “If you get rid of the roadway, you don’t get rid of the traffic”, he said. He said that removing AMR and replacing it with a park would increase traffic on adjacent city streets by about 10,000 vehicles a day. He added that building a four lane road would not preclude developing green space along AMR. (11/3/99 story).

The “bridged ramps” design was not selected for north connection. Mike Klassen suggests that while this design would have taken some traffic off streets (on or close to frontage roads), he did not think the additional cost for these ramps (\$9.3 million) was affordable.

December 1999

Mayor Norm Coleman supports Planning Commission’s recommendation for four lane connected roadway.

December 1999

200 members of umbrella group “No Connect Coalition” filled City Council Chambers December 22, largely to protest the vote of the Planning Commission. This group “dwarfed” the half dozen members of Citizens for Safe Streets who attended the council meeting.

April 2000

St. Paul City Council votes (5-2) for two lane connected parkway as its preferred AMR alternative at April 12 council meeting. Project would include ban on

trucks and 35 MPH speed limit. No residential takings would be required, but some business takings would be required. This compromise position was engineered by Patrick Harris (Ward 3). Jerry Blakey had always supported the two lane option. Harris got Dan Bostrom and Jim Reiter to “sign on” after they had previously supported the four lane alternative. Dan Bostrom’s position had been that he favored some connect alternative, either two or four lane. Jay Benevav (Ward 4, which includes Merriam Park and Snelling Hamline Planning Councils) and Kathy Lantry vote against.

Council directs Department of Public Works to develop funding and construction plans by June 2000.

Steve Gordon says that he can live with two lane option, although he prefers four lane.

No Connect Coalition very vocal at the council meeting. At a No Connect rally before the council vote, Jay Benevav called Harris’ plan “fiscally irresponsible and plain idiotic”.

No significant coverage in the Highland Villager after this point.