Action Transmittal: 2024-20
Program Year Extension Request: Washington County’s CSAH 17 (Lake Elmo Ave) and MN 36 Intersection Improvement Project

To: TAC Funding & Programming Committee
Prepared By: Robbie King, Planner, 651-602-4704

Requested Action
Washington County requests a program year extension for its CSAH 17 (Lake Elmo Ave) and MN 36 intersection improvement project from 2025 to 2026.

Recommended Motion
That the TAC Funding and Programming Committee recommend that TAB approve the program year extension request for Washington County’s CSAH 17 (Lake Elmo Ave) and MN 36 intersection improvement project from 2025 to 2026.

Background and Purpose
Washington County was awarded $10,000,000 in the 2020 Regional Solicitation in the Strategic Capacity category for its CSAH 17 (Lake Elmo Ave) and MN 36 interchange project for program year 2025. Beginning in 2021, several efforts to engage the community and work through potential alternatives were initiated. In their request, Washington County staff have outlined a series of landmarks that still need to be completed prior to bid letting. Given the landmarks yet to be reached, Washington County staff do not believe they can begin bid letting until January 2026, outside of the current program year. These factors combined result in their request to extend the program year from 2025 to 2026.

Relationship to Regional Policy
The Transportation Advisory Board (TAB) adopted the Program Year Policy in April 2013 (updated in August 2014) to assist with management and timely delivery of transportation projects awarded federal funding through the TAB’s Regional Solicitation. The policy includes a procedure to request a one-year extension based on extenuating circumstances within certain guidelines.

Staff Analysis
Per the Program Year Policy’s progress assessment, a minimum score of 7 is needed to be eligible for an extension. This process helps assess whether the project is in position to be able to be obligated with the one-year extension and is not a reflection on the sponsor’s rationale for needing an extension. The request obtained a score of 5.

However, Washington County staff have provided a concise project schedule to outline the tasks that will be completed so that the project can let in program year 2026. Additionally, this request is being submitted nine months prior to the December 31, 2024, deadline for extension requests with
an original program year of 2025. MnDOT State Aid and Metropolitan Council staff concur that the required score of 7 would be attained if the request were to be submitted in December 2024. Further, approving a program year extension at this time would enable funding to be added to the 2028 program year for the 2024 Regional Solicitation as opposed to pushing it to program year 2030 within the 2026 Regional Solicitation.

Routing

<table>
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<th>To</th>
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<th>Date Completed (Date Scheduled)</th>
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<td>TAC Funding &amp; Programming Committee</td>
<td>Review &amp; Recommend</td>
<td>April 18, 2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Advisory Committee</td>
<td>Review &amp; Recommend</td>
<td>May 1, 2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation Advisory Board</td>
<td>Review &amp; Adopt</td>
<td>May 15, 2024</td>
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March 8, 2024

Mr. Michael Thompson, P.E.
Chair, TAC Funding and Programming Committee
Metropolitan Council
390 Robert Street North
St. Paul, MN 55101

Re: Program Year Extension Request for SP 082-596-008,
Lake Elmo Avenue and TH 36 Intersection Improvement Project

Dear Mr. Thompson:

Washington County (County) was awarded $10,000,000 in federal funding as part of the 2020 Metropolitan Council Regional Solicitation to partially fund the removal of an existing at-grade signalized intersection with a grade separated interchange. Benefits of this project will include the improvement of regional accessibility and efficiency by relieving congestion and travel delays on Trunk High (TH) 36, improvement of corridor safety through reduction of conflict point and crash potential, improvement of multi-modal routes for cyclists and pedestrians crossing TH 36 at County Highway 17, and improvement to TH 36 and County Highway 17’s role in the regional transportation network and economy. Federal Funds were awarded for program year 2025.

Since learning of the award of federal funding in February of 2021, County staff began working through the intersection study and environmental documentation phase of this project. This phase, among other things, included a Goal Setting Meeting, a series of Public Open Houses, Project Management Team (PMT) Meetings, Local Advisory Committee (LAC) Meetings, and numerous one-on-one meetings with area property owners. Through this process, the project team, working closely with FWHA, MnDOT, and our local cities, and working through the NEPA process, have identified and dismissed over 20 possible alternatives for this intersection. Currently, 3 remaining alternatives are still being considered. The team expects to conclude the intersection study and environmental documentation phase within the next couple of months and will move forward the identified preferred alternative into the final design phase of this project.

Our current project schedule includes:

- Final approval of the Geometric Layout in August 2024
- Final approval of the Phase II Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) in August 2024
- Noise Analysis completed in November 2024
- Final approval of the Categorical Exclusion (CATEX) document in June 2025
- Completion of final plans in September of 2025
- Final Right-of-Way Certificate in January of 2026
- Authorization to Bid in January of 2026
- Bid Letting in January of 2026

Based on our current project schedule, bid letting is anticipated to be outside the 2025 FY, therefore we are requesting a one-year extension on the federal funding.

Attached please find additional information regarding this request. Please contact me with any questions at (651)-430-4336 or andrew.giesen@co.washington.mn.us.
Sincerely,

Andrew Giesen, PE
Engineer III
Washington County Public Works

Cc: Colleen Brown, MnDOT Federal Aid
    Wayne Sanderg, Public Works Director & County Engineer (Washington County)
    Frank Ticknor, Deputy Director of Public Works (Washington County)
    Cory Slagle, Assistant County Engineer (Washington County)
    Kevin Peterson, Design Engineer (Washington County)
REQUEST FOR PROGRAM YEAR EXTENSION

FOR SP 082-596-008

LAKE ELMO AVENUE AND TH 36 INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

WASHINGTON COUNTY

REQUEST BY:

Andrew Giesen, PE
Engineer III
Washington County Public Works
651-430-4336
andrew.giesen@co.washington.mn.us
1. Project Progress
   a. Project Schedule

   The list below outlines the project schedule from initialing of the intersection study to construction start. The dates highlight current project status and upcoming milestones for the project. Future activity dates anticipate program year extension.

   **Completed/In Progress**
   - Consultant Contract Awarded – July 2021
   - Data Collection – Summer/Fall 2021
   - Goal Setting Workshop – October 2021
   - Public Open House – November 2021
   - Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment Approved – December 2021
   - Begin Development of Formal Project Purpose and Need – December 2021
   - FHWA Review of Purpose and Need and Evaluation Criteria Matrix – Spring 2022
   - Formal Project Purpose and Need Open for Public Comment – June 2022
   - FHWA Concurrence of Formal Project Purpose and Need – July 2022
   - Begin Alternative Screening Step 1 – July 2022
   - Begin Alternative Screening Step 2 – September 2022
   - Public Open House – April 2023
   - Begin Alternative Screening Step 3 – May 2023
   - Agency Stakeholders Update Meeting – July 2023
   - One-on-One Project Owner Meetings – September 2023
   - Agency Stakeholders Update Meeting – November 2023
   - Public Open House – January 2024
   - Identify Preferred Alternative – February 2024

   **Future Activity**
   - FHWA Concurrence of Preferred Alternative – April 2024
   - Begin Development of Geometric Layout – April 2024
   - Geometric Layout Approved – August 2024
   - Phase II Environmental Site Assessment Approved – August 2024
   - Noise Analysis Completed – November 2024
   - 60% Plans Completed – November 2024
   - 90% Plans Completed – April 2025
   - 95% Plans Completed – June 2025
   - Categorical Exclusion Document Approved – June 2025
   - Permits Obtained – August 2025
   - Final Plans Completed and Approved – September 2025
   - Right-of-Way Certificate – January 2026
   - Authorization to Bid – January 2026
   - Bid Letting – January 2026
   - Bid Opening – February 2026
   - Bid Award – March 2026
b. Right of Way Acquisition
The County began conducting its Real Estate activities in 2022, clarifying land ownership (title work) and existing property rights upon the 30 parcels that are potentially affected by project activities.

The County is on track to acquire all necessary easements by fall 2025 and to submit Right of Way Certificate #1 in January 2026, supporting a January 2026 project authorization date and bidding activities shortly following authorization.

A layout that shows the three remaining alternatives being considered, with approximate construction limits, is included as an attachment to this narrative.

c. Plans
As the project is currently in the preliminary design phase, a preferred alternative has yet to be determined.

A layout that shows the three remaining alternatives being considered is included as an attachment to this narrative.

d. Permits
Anticipated permits for this project include the following:

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<tr>
<th>Permitting Agency</th>
<th>Permit(s)</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valley Branch Watershed District</td>
<td>Erosion Control and Stormwater Management Permit</td>
<td>Plan to obtain permit in Summer 2025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minnesota Pollution Control Agency</td>
<td>NPDES Construction Storm Water Permit</td>
<td>Plan to obtain permit in Summer 2025</td>
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<td>Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resource / U.S Army Corps of Engineers</td>
<td>Authorization to fill into wetlands under Regional General permits</td>
<td>Plan to obtain authorization in Summer 2025</td>
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<td>MnDOT</td>
<td>Limited Use Permit/Cooperative Agreement</td>
<td>Plan to execute permit/agreement in Summer 2025</td>
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e. Approvals

Anticipated approvals for this project include the following:

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<th>Agency for Approval</th>
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<td>Minnesota Department of Transportation</td>
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<td>CATEX Document</td>
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<td>Final Plans</td>
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<td>Met. Council – Metro Freeway</td>
<td>CATEX Document</td>
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<td>Federal Highway Administration</td>
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<td>Final Plans</td>
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f. Funding/Expenditures

To date, Washington County has spent approximately $850,000 on consulting fees for public engagement, preliminary engineering, and environmental documentation for this project. These costs to date have been financed solely by Washington County. The remaining preliminary engineering services, including completion of the geometric layout and noise analysis, to be completed by a consultant, are anticipated to cost an additional $200,000.
2. Justification for Extension Request

a. What is unique about this project that requires an extension of the program year?

i. **Border of Two Cities with Different Goals/Priorities**
   The project is located on the border of two cities, with differing goals and priorities. Whereas the City of Grant is an established rural residential community committed to retaining its rural character and the City of Lake Elmo is one of the fastest growing communities in the Twin Cities metropolitan area over the past decade—with the majority of growth planned in areas designated by the Metropolitan Council as Emerging Suburban Edge. While parts of the City of Lake Elmo have rural characteristics they wish to preserve, the City acknowledges that development patterns are changing and urbanization has accelerated in recent years, necessitating infrastructure that can accommodate increasing traffic volumes.

ii. **Confined Business District**
   One of the major challenges in the project area is the potential impact on the City of Grant's business district. Being that Grant is a small community, this business district represents a significant portion of the City's tax base. Moreover, because of land use designations, any business relocation would likely move business outside of city boundaries, thus impacts to any of the businesses are strongly disfavored by the City of Grant.

iii. **Significant and Varied Engagement**
   With the concentration of businesses, as well as residential and institutional uses near the intersection of Highway 36 and Lake Elmo Avenue, this project demands extensive and varied engagement. The project team has coordinated many engagement activities with:
   - Other agencies, such as MnDOT and FHWA, to ensure all project requirements are being met.
   - 11 unique businesses and River Valley Christian Church, through multiple, individual meetings to understand their operations and how various scenarios may impact them.
   - City staff and representatives to discuss how the project aligns with future city plans and community priorities.
   - The general public through multiple open houses – to provide information on the project to those who live nearby and for those who travel regularly on Highway 36 or Lake Elmo Avenue.

iv. **No Silver Bullet**
   Given the above factors, no single project layout will satisfy the desires of all stakeholders. The process of narrowing in on a preferred alternative has and continues to be methodical in reaching a solution that best responds to the given circumstances.
b. What are the financial impact if this project does not meet its current program year?
If the project is not delivered in its current program year, the existing $10,000,000 of federal funds would be forfeited, resulting in a substantial project funding gap that could delay or jeopardize the implementation of this project.

c. What are the implications if the project does not obtain the requested extension?
If the project does not obtain the requested extension, the existing $10,000,000 of federal funds would be forfeited, resulting in a substantial project funding gap that could delay or jeopardize the implementation of this project.

A delayed project would prolong congestion and travel delays on Trunk Highway (TH) 36, as well as corridor safety concerns related to conflict point and crash potential, and insufficient facilities for cyclists and pedestrians crossing TH 36 at County Highway 17.

d. What actions will the agency take to resolve the problems facing the project in the next three to six months?
Continued coordination with the City of Grant, City of Lake Elmo, MnDOT, and FHWA to:

1. Ensure that the project teams come together to select a preferred alternative
2. Complete the geometric layout
3. Complete the Phase II Environmental Site Assessment
4. Ensure that the project will be completed by the anticipated deadline of June 2026

ATTACHMENTS:
Attachment 1: Progress Schedule for Program Year Extension
Attachment 2: Remaining Alternatives
Attachment 1: PROGRESS SCHEDULE FOR PROGRAM YEAR EXTENSION

Enter request date

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Check status of project under each major heading.
2. Enter dates as requested for each major heading.
3. Enter points as suggested by each applicable response.
4. Total points received in the TOTAL POINTS line on the last page. **The minimum score to be eligible to request an extension is seven points.**

**ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION**

**PROJECT MEMORANDUM**

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**EITHER**

Not Complete

Anticipated Date of Completion: **June 2025**

If prior to January 31 of the program year, enter 1.

**OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC HEARING** (not necessary for project memorandum)

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**FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT** (not required for project memorandum)

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If prior to March 31 of the program year, enter 1.
STUDY REPORT (required for Environmental Assessment Only)

- Complete/Approved If checked enter 1. _____
  Date of Approval ______________
- Not Complete
  Anticipated Date of Completion ______________

CONSTRUCTION PLANS

- Completed (includes signature of District State Aid Engineer)
  Date ______________ If checked enter 3. _____

- Completed (approved by District State Aid as to SA Standards but not signed)
  Date ______________ If checked enter 2. _____

- Not Complete
  Anticipated Date of Completion September 2025
  If prior to June 30 of the program year, enter 1. 1

RIGHT OF WAY ACQUISITION

- Completed (includes approval of R/W Cert. #1 or #1A) If checked enter 2. _____
  Date ______________

- Not Complete
  Anticipated Date of Completion January 2026
  If prior to December 31 of the year following the original program year, enter 1. 1

ENGINEERS ESTIMATE OF COSTS

- Completed
  Date January 3, 2024

- Not Complete
  Anticipated Date of Completion ______________
  If prior to December 31 of the year following the original program year, enter 1. _____

AUTHORIZED

Anticipated Letting Date February 17, 2026

Anticipated letting date must be prior to June 30 in the year following the original program year, so that authorization can be completed prior to June 30 of the extended program year.

TOTAL POINTS 5