

Action Transmittal

Transportation Advisory Board



Committee meeting date: May 15, 2025

Date: May 7, 2025

Action Transmittal: 2025-20

Corridors of Commerce Local Screening and Recommendation: City of Anoka's Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing Project

To: TAC Funding & Programming Committee

Prepared by: Steve Peterson, Senior Manager, 651-602-1819

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Requested action

Metropolitan Council staff requests a recommendation of the City of Anoka's Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing Project to allow MnDOT to score the project as part of the Corridors of Commerce Readiness Advancement solicitation .

Recommended motion

That the TAC Funding & Programming Committee recommend that that the Metropolitan Council recommend the City of Anoka's Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing Project to MnDOT for scoring consideration in the Corridors of Commerce Readiness Advancement solicitation.

Background and purpose

The Corridors of Commerce program includes funds for readiness advancement activities including planning, scoping, predesign, preliminary engineering, and environmental analysis. Eligible projects must be consistent with the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan and be on the Trunk Highway System. For 2025, funds are only expected to be available for projects outside of the area bounded by Interstates 494 and 694 based on regional balance requirements within Minnesota Statute 161.088.

The Project Selection Process is five phases that began in March and is anticipated to be completed by October 1, 2025.

- Phase 1: Project Solicitation – any interested party (individual, business, local unit of government, corridor group, or interest group) can submit a future project for consideration.
- Phase 2: Local Screening & Recommendations – MnDOT distributes nominations received to local screening entities to recommend up to two projects for scoring. The Metropolitan Council in consultation with the Transportation Advisory Board along with select counties (Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Sherburne, Washington, and Wright) are identified as local screening entities.
- Phase 3: Project Scoring – MnDOT will score recommended projects based on eight criteria (return on investment, economic competitiveness, freight efficiency, safety, regional connections, policy objectives, community consensus, and project deliverability).
- Phase 4: Project Ranking Selection – MnDOT will develop ranked lists based on the total scores.

- Phase 5: Public Information – MnDOT will notify project sponsors and publish the selected projects and scoring process results.

Projects Submitted During Phase 1

During the project solicitation process, seven projects were submitted within the Metropolitan Council’s Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) with a total request of \$19.635 million:

1. Anoka County: Trunk Highway 65 and Trunk Highway 10
2. Anoka County: Trunk Highway 47 and 85th Street
3. City of Anoka: Trunk Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing
4. Carver County: Trunk Highway 5
5. Dakota County: Trunk Highway 3 and County State Aid Highway 42
6. City of Elko New Market (Scott County): I-35 and County State Aid Highway 2
7. City of Elk River (Sherburne County): Trunk Highway 10

Because three projects were submitted within Anoka County, staff are recommending the Council forward the City of Anoka’s Trunk Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing project to MnDOT for scoring. All other projects within the metro have recommendations from their respective county.

As part of the third phase of the process (project scoring), projects will receive 45 points if they have a letter of support from the Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Met Council will provide a letter of support for all seven submittals.

Trunk Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing

The City of Anoka requested \$4.235 million in Corridors of Commerce readiness funds to complete the funding gap needed to further study, engage with the community and stakeholders, and ultimately design and construct improvements on a 1.3-mile stretch of Highway 47 between Highway 10 and Bunker Lake Boulevard in Anoka. This includes grade-separating the Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing, the busiest and most dangerous at-grade rail crossings in the State of Minnesota (MnDOT) and a top need in the Midwest. More details on the readiness activities are provided at the end of this transmittal.

The City of Anoka has received nearly \$12 million through the 2022 and 2024 Regional Solicitations.

As required in the solicitation, Council staff have reached out to Senator Jim Abeler and Representative Zack Stephenson for comments and approval or disapproval. This section will be updated when available.

Relationship to regional policy

The City of Anoka’s Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing project is consistent with the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan and Imagine 2050. It will improve railroad crossing safety at the most dangerous at-grade rail crossing in the state advancing transportation safety; alleviate freight bottlenecks and improve freight movements on a Tier 3 Regional Truck Corridor, and provide multimodal transportation facilities, all advancing transportation mobility and choice. This project is included in the 2025-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Staff analysis

This project is consistent with Imagine 2050, the 2050 Transportation Policy Plan, is included in the 2025-2027 TIP, and should be forwarded to MnDOT for consideration for the Corridors of Commerce Readiness Advancement solicitation.

Routing

To	Action Requested	Date Completed
TAC Funding & Programming Committee	Review & Recommend	5/15/2025
Technical Advisory Committee	Review & Recommend	6/4/2025
Transportation Advisory Board	Review & Recommend	6/18/2025
Transportation Committee	Review & Recommend	6/23/2025
Metropolitan Council	Adopt	6/25/2025



Readiness Advancement Activity Description (Provided by the City of Anoka)

The City of Anoka requests \$4.235 million in Corridors of Commerce readiness funds to complete the funding gap needed to further study, engage with the community and stakeholders, and ultimately design and construct improvements on a 1.3-mile stretch of Highway 47 between Highway 10 and Bunker Lake Boulevard in Anoka. This includes grade-separating the Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing, the busiest and most dangerous at-grade rail crossings in the State of Minnesota (MnDOT) and a top need in the Midwest.

Transportation Safety

September 26, 2023 marked the 20th anniversary of one of the most tragic train-vehicle accidents in state history. In 2003, a high-speed freight train crossing Highway 47 collided with a vehicle carrying four young adults, killing all four. Additionally, a 5-year (2019-2023) crash history recorded 70 crashes along the S-curve of the corridor between north of Garfield Street at the start of the S-curve and Pleasant Street (CSAH 30). The segment observed crash rate is 3.348, which is nearly three times the statewide average of 1.220. This results in a segment with a critical index of 1.79, which means the roadway segment is operating outside of the normal range when compared to similar roadways statewide. Nearly half (49%) of the 70 recorded crashes were rear-end crashes, with 21% of those rear-end crashes resulting in personal injury. Angle crashes accounted for 17% of the total crashes in the five years covered by the study. The nature of the railroad crossing and the curvature of the roadway in this portion of Highway 47 likely contributes to the high percentage of rear-end and angle crashes as vehicles stop for a train crossing. The northern project area, from McKinley St to Bunker Lk Blvd (CSAH116), runs through a densely populated residential area. There are 10 public and 31 private driveway access points on Highway 47 causing many angle crashes. Residents face side street wait times of up to two minutes during peak traffic hours. Lacking pedestrian facilities resulted in a twelve-year-old child being hit by a car while attempting to cross the highway with his bicycle.

System Stewardship

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Railroad Administration and MnDOT, the Highway 47 at BNSF railroad crossing has the highest needs for improvement in the State of Minnesota and is a top need across the Midwest. Every project partner and documented analysis agrees that grade separation of this railway crossing is necessary. Public safety concern is very high, with 40 to 80 trains per day, at speeds up to 75 mph, interacting with 18,000 vehicles per day (450 heavy commercial) on Highway 47.

With the implementation of a bridge carrying Highway 47 over the BNSF railway, we know that rear end crashes on the corridor will be significantly reduced. Additionally, a regional mobility bottleneck will be removed eliminating the extensive backups that occur due to the two to three hours of down gate arm time each day.

Finally, the Highway 47 corridor has not been improved since 1930 and is long overdue for reinvestment to address significant safety concerns and the mobility needs of the northwest metro which has grown significantly since the roadway was first constructed.

Critical Connections

Today, the Highway 47 corridor does not meet the modern safety and mobility needs of its travelers and businesses. Highway 47 is a two-lane undivided minor arterial that carries over 18,000 vehicles, including 450 heavy trucks each day and far exceeding its design capacity. Highway 47 plays an integral role in moving people and goods north of U.S. Highway 10/169 and accessing Anoka's industrial park, home to over 15,000 jobs. It has been estimated that over 4,000 heavy trucks travel to and from the Anoka industrial park each day. Unfortunately, the railway is a major barrier for freight movement to and from several freight-generating areas near the project area. Highway 47 is also a Tier 3 Regional Truck Corridor, as designated by the Metropolitan Council. The highway connects directly to U.S. Highway 10/169 to the south, both of which are Tier 1 Regional Truck Corridors. Regular train events cause backups, far beyond the BNSF railway crossing, and over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile south to Downtown Anoka and it takes up to 20 minutes for traffic flow and system mobility to fully recover.



At both the northern and southern extents of the project area, recent highway capacity investments will increase the flow of traffic onto Highway 47 which will remain a bottleneck and a continued safety concern until improvements are made. To the north, Bunker Lake Blvd (CSAH 116), was reconstructed to increase capacity at its intersection with Highway 47. To the south US Highway 10/169 was recently reconstructed with new interchanges and overpasses moving traffic quickly through the area.

In addition, the Metro Transit currently operates four Northstar Commuter Rail trains per day that use the railway. This includes two trains in the morning peak hour and two in the afternoon peak hour. The Northstar Commuter Rail Anoka Station is just east of the project area at 4th Avenue (CSAH 31). The National Railroad Passenger Corporation also currently operates Amtrak's Empire Builder daily on the railway, which could potentially become busier if Amtrak's North Coast Hiawatha route continues to move forward.

Climate Action

The adjacent Rum River is one of six designated Wild, Scenic, and Recreational rivers in Minnesota and is a tributary to the Mississippi River. The segment of Highway 47 near the BNSF railway crossing is only one hundred feet from the bank of the Rum River and in violation of a state statute protecting our waterways. Exhaust emissions from vehicles idling in the regular backups pump pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere and run off pollutants into the river.

Transportation is just one of the contributing factors for environmental pollutants in the project area. Some adjacent land uses, such as a metal recycling facility on the northwest quadrant of the BNSF and Highway 47 intersection, have contributed to significant public health and environmental impact concerns. This facility has outdated equipment and practices that have been grandfathered in to continue to allow their operations. A common practice is the crushing of vehicles with an outdated compactor. Pollutant runoff has led to a well-documented history of water plume pollution that has resulted in the MPCA permanently shutting down a city well within the project area. Additionally, the Anoka-Hennepin School District building experiences regular vibrations during crushing activities and staff members have experienced health impacts causing them to no longer utilize the third floor of the building. School district staff have also found metal shaving dusting covering the daycare playground equipment.

Healthy Equitable Communities

The project area's significant environmental concerns impact many of the city's residents and vulnerable populations. The City of Anoka is small in terms of land area, approximately seven square miles. The proposed project area is in the physical center of the city. Of the 18,000 residents in Anoka, 44% (7,900) live within 1-mile of the Highway 47 corridor and project area. The project area has high multi-modal demand with a mix of residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, open space, and park land uses adjacent to the highway corridor.

According to the Metropolitan Council, the project area contains census tracts with a population in poverty or population of color above the regional average. The demand for affordable transportation access is high with 20.4% of nearby residents making less than \$35k a year, compared to 14% county-wide and 10.4% of households have no vehicle. At the southern end of the project is the Pleasant Street intersection which is an important pedestrian and bike access point that connects east across the Rum River to 4th Avenue. This intersection provides access to multiple transit stops, including the North Star Light Rail and Amtrak stations, as well as all-day express, rush hour, and local bus routes.

According to the Metropolitan Council's January 2023 Housing Assessment, of the 7,846 total housing units in the area, 42 percent (3,136) are affordable to households at or below 50 percent of the AMI; 2,480 units (33 percent) are affordable to households between 51 percent to 80 percent of the AMI. Additionally, there are 438 publicly subsidized rental housing units located in census tracts within a half mile of the project area and 374 within the city limits.



Open Decision Making

Safety and mobility concerns at the Highway 47/BNSF railroad crossing and along the highway corridor have been long-standing with communities surrounding the project area. These issues and planning efforts to mitigate them. The 2016 Rail Grade Crossing Safety Report (MnDOT), 2016 Railroad Separation at Highway 47 (Ferry St.) Feasibility Study (MnDOT), 2018 Anoka 2040 Comprehensive Plan update, 2022 Minnesota Rail Crossing Safety Action Plan (MnDOT), 2021-2023 Highway 47 and BNSF Railroad Crossing Study (MnDOT) all document and confirm that this railway crossing is the most dangerous in the State of Minnesota and requires grade separation.

In 2019, Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan visited the site of the Highway 47 and BNSF railway crossing to highlight the most significant railway crossing improvement needed in the State of Minnesota. Governor Walz quoted "At the intersection we visited today, there were seventeen car accidents in four years. We're talking about seventeen car accidents in just 150 feet. That's no coincidence. This is not safe". As a result, the 2020 Minnesota State Bonding included funding allocations to make enhance safety improvements at priority railway crossings, including this one.

The 2021-2023 Highway 47 and BNSF Railroad Crossing Study (MnDOT) identified a concept and cost for grade separating Highway 47 over the BNSF railway. However, the study did not address Highway 47 safety needs associated with the S-Curve north of the railway and excess highway access points in the neighborhood section between McKinley Street and Bunker Lake Boulevard (CSAH 116). To address community concerns along the Highway 47 corridor, the City of Anoka led a 2019 study that resulted in recommendations for the section from McKinley Street to Bunker Lake Boulevard (CSAH 116) that serves a large established neighborhood. In recognition of additional needs along the Highway 47 corridor, in 2024 MnDOT and the City of Anoka reached an agreement that the city would take over of the project. This shift in leadership aimed to ensure comprehensive goals addressing safety, mobility, and environmental needs throughout the entire Highway 47 corridor from Pleasant Street to Bunker Lake Boulevard (CSAH 116) would be met.

Economic Competitiveness

The railway that crosses Highway 47 in the project area, is the BNSF's busiest line carrying materials from the Bakken Oil Field in North Dakota and Montana. During the past decade, the Minneapolis-St. Paul area has seen a spike in rail traffic from the oil fields travelling to Chicago and farther east destinations. Today, more than two-thirds of the Bakken Oil Field's daily production of 1.2 million barrels is shipped by rail, with most of it moving through Minnesota into Minneapolis-St. Paul and on to Wisconsin for delivery to the East Coast and Gulf Coast. During past coordination associated with the U.S. Highway 10/169 Improvement Project, BNSF railway communicated the high possibility of adding a third track in the project area in the near future.

The Metropolitan Council designated Highway 47 as a Tier 3 Regional Truck Corridor because of the truck volumes it carries daily (450) to the adjacent industrial park (home to over 15,000 jobs) and throughout the region via its direct connection to U.S. Highway 10/169 to the south and CSAH 116 (Bunker Lake Boulevard) to the north. It is estimated that over 4,000 heavy commercial vehicles are traveling to and from the industrial park in a given day placing significant demand on this surrounding highway system. U.S. Highway 10/169 is a Tier 1 Regional Truck Corridor carrying approximately 1,400 to 2,300 HCAADT daily, which will likely increase with safety and capacity improvements made with the recently completed City of Anoka Highway 10 project.



Senator Jim Abeler
Senate District 35

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Senate

State of Minnesota

May 12, 2025

To: Metropolitan Council and Transportation Advisory Board

RE: Legislative Comment on City of Anoka's Corridors of Commerce Readiness Request

Dear Members of the Metropolitan Council and TAB,

As the State Senator representing the City of Anoka and surrounding communities, I write in strong support of the City of Anoka's request for **\$4.235 million in Corridors of Commerce readiness funds** to advance long-needed safety and mobility improvements along **Highway 47 between Highway 10 and Bunker Lake Boulevard**.

I formally **approve of this application** and encourage you to advance it to MnDOT for scoring consideration.

This corridor includes the **most dangerous at-grade rail crossing in Minnesota** and is a known regional priority, with significant crash history, public safety concerns, and freight mobility challenges. The requested readiness funds would enable the City to complete environmental review, community engagement, and final design work needed to address both the rail crossing and the outdated S-curve that cuts through a residential neighborhood.

This is an opportunity to support a project that checks every box of the Corridors of Commerce program: safety, system stewardship, critical connections, equity, and economic vitality. Thank you for your work and for the chance to offer these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Abeler". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Senator Jim Abeler

Zack Stephenson
State Representative

District 35A
Anoka County



Minnesota
House of
Representatives

May 12, 2025

Steve Peterson
Metropolitan Council Transportation Services
390 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55101

Dear Mr. Peterson,

I am pleased to support the Corridors of Commerce grant application for the City of Anoka transportation improvements along Highway 47 between Highway 10 and Bunker Lake Boulevard in Anoka, including improvements at the Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing.

This project provides a significant opportunity to improve safety, enhance mobility, and increase efficiency for both residential and commercial traffic through the corridor. Currently, the Highway 47/BNSF Railway Crossing is the most dangerous at-grade rail crossing in the state, and five studies in the past 10 years recommend grade separation for improved safety and accessibility for all modes of transportation, including pedestrian and bicycling, along with accommodating future growth to the area. Investments along this corridor would improve traffic flow for area residential traffic and commercial traffic accessing Anoka's industrial park, which along with the railway access, has local and regional significance.

I am committed to continue partnering with MnDOT and the City of Anoka as they develop this project and explore other funding opportunities. I look forward to continued cooperation with MnDOT, the City of Anoka, and all the stakeholders involved in the project as this effort moves forward to improve critical safety and mobility on Highway 47.

Thank you for your interest and support in improving Minnesota's transportation system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "ZS" with a stylized flourish.

Zack Stephenson
State Representative 35A