

APPENDIX F PRELIMINARY INTERCHANGE APPROVAL PROCESS

Background

The Preliminary Interchange Approval process is the first of several required approvals that may be needed as part of the project development process. This process is intended to be a planning-level assessment completed several years prior to construction. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the proposed project is consistent with the region's long-range plans and that its location is generally suitable for an interchange based on general transportation planning principles.

This process is a test of the acceptability of the proposed roadway network, that the interchange location is suitable for an interchange based on consistency with local and regional plans, high-level needs, functional classification of the cross-street, suitable local roadway network and associated access management, and interchange spacing. It is not a direct test of benefits and costs, regional priority or that an interchange is the best solution. Years later once the environmental process is complete, projects must demonstrate that they continue to show consistency with regional policy by completing the Metro Freeway Project Approval process (i.e., a Controlled Access Request) through the Metropolitan Council per [MN Statute 473.166](#).

This Preliminary Interchange Approval is needed before applying for several competitive funding programs including the Regional Solicitation for Transportation Projects, MnDOT's Transportation Economic Development Program (TED), and federal funds programmed through MnDOT's Freight Investment Plan.

This approval process is based on work originally done in 1979 by a joint committee of the Transportation Advisory Board and the Metropolitan Council. It has been revised and simplified over time to reflect policy changes, revised state and federal laws and regulations, and experience with applying the criteria. The rationale for requiring this approval comes from strategy 10 within the Access to Destinations Goal:

“Regional transportation partners will manage access to principal and A-minor arterials to preserve and enhance their safety and capacity”

For this approval process, the term interchange will include traditional interchanges along with any other location with grade-separated crossing roadways and one or more adjacent access connections between the two roadways.

It is important to note that some types of interchange improvement projects must go through this approval process and other types do not.

Types of interchange projects that need approval through this process:

- Addition (or removal) of an interchange on a Principal Arterial
- Addition (or removal) of any interchange access to a Principal Arterial

Types of interchange projects that do not need approval through this process:

- Preservation, safety, or mobility investments not described above (e.g., new turn lanes, added through lanes)
- Modifications to the existing ramp(s), interchange design, or configuration not described above
- New local roadway connections to an interchange ramp or ramp terminal

Evaluation Criteria

A proposer begins this review process by submitting materials addressing each of the evaluation criteria described below to the Interchange Planning Review Committee. The Committee is comprised of staff from the Metropolitan Council and MnDOT Metro District. In cases of the Interstate System, Federal Highway Administration staff will also participate. In cases where MnDOT Metro District is not the road authority, the relevant road authority is substituted (e.g. MnDOT District 3 in the urbanized part of Wright and Sherburne counties, and in some cases Anoka, Dakota, Ramsey or Scott counties or St. Paul). The relevant boundary is the federally recognized, designated planning boundary for the Metropolitan Planning Organization which includes the counties of Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, Carver, Scott, Dakota and Washington, and the urbanized portion of Wright and Sherburne counties.

The Committee will review the proposal for consistency with these criteria. In many cases a conversation between the proposer and the committee will be needed to reach a common understanding of how the proposal is or is not consistent with the region's long-term plans. The review process is completed when the committee provides a letter of findings to the proposer. The approval process is intended to be a planning-level assessment and detailed traffic modeling and analysis is not required.

1. Consistency with Local and Regional Planning – Interchange access should be considered only when it supports local comprehensive plans approved by the Metropolitan Council, as well as [Minnesota Go](#), [Thrive MSP 2040](#) and the 2040 Transportation Policy Plan.

Thrive MSP 2040 is the long-term development guide for the Twin Cities region. Its desired outcomes include:

- **Stewardship** advances the Council’s longstanding mission of orderly and economic development by responsibly managing the region’s natural and financial resources, and making strategic investments in our region’s future.
- **Prosperity** is fostered by investments in infrastructure and amenities that create regional economic competitiveness, thereby attracting and retaining successful businesses, a talented workforce, and, consequently, wealth.
- **Equity** connects all residents to opportunity and creates viable housing, transportation, and recreation options for people of all races, ethnicities, incomes and abilities so that all communities share the opportunities and challenges of growth and change.
- **Livability** focuses on the quality of our resident’s lives and experiences in our region, and how places and infrastructure create and enhance the quality of life that makes our region a great place to live.
- **Sustainability** means protecting our regional vitality for generations to come by preserving our capacity to maintain and support our region’s well-being and productivity over the long term.

The region’s 2040 Transportation Policy Plan guides the development of the region’s transportation system. Its goals are:

- **Transportation Stewardship** – Sustainable investments in the transportation system are protected by strategically preserving, maintaining, and operating system assets.
- **Safety and Security** – The regional transportation system is safe and secure for all users.
- **Access to Destinations** – People and businesses prosper by using a reliable, affordable, and efficient multimodal transportation system that connects them to destinations throughout the region and beyond.
- **Competitive Economy** – The regional transportation system supports the economic competitiveness, vitality, and prosperity of the region and state.
- **Healthy Environment** – The regional transportation system advances equity and contributes to communities’ livability and sustainability while protecting the natural, cultural, and developed environments.
- **Leveraging Transportation Investments to Guide Land Use** – The region leverages transportation investments to guide land use and development patterns that advance the regional vision of stewardship, prosperity, equity, livability, and sustainability.

Questions

- How does this proposal optimize the pursuit of the Thrive MSP 2040 outcomes and 2040 Transportation Policy Plan goals?
- How are negative impacts to any of these outcomes or goals balanced against the others?
- What opportunities for public input on the project have occurred at this early stage?
- Is this proposal identified in any local plans or studies?
- Is the land use in local comprehensive plans consistent with this proposal (comprehensive plans are required to coordinate local land uses and regional systems such as transportation) or are any amendments to local comprehensive plans anticipated?

2. Project Need – The need for an additional interchange or access at an existing location must be demonstrated and documented before consistency with the long-range plans can be found. Interchanges are generally in response to primarily a mobility need however they can be a solution to a persistent safety problem as well. Studies such as corridor studies, intersection studies and regional studies like the Principal Arterial Intersection Conversion Study can be helpful to demonstrate need. The [Principal Arterial Intersection Conversion Study](#) was completed in 2017 and prioritized future grade-separation projects into three tiers (High Priority, Medium Priority, and Low Priority) by the magnitude of the problem at each at-grade intersection. The results of this regional study can help build a case for the project. Projects classified as High Priority have larger documented problems and a larger investment such as an interchange may be needed.

In most cases, new interchanges should be built in a logical sequence when they are a part of a conversion of an arterial to a freeway. If the long-term goal is not a freeway, then non-traditional designs should be considered to match the scale of the solution to the scale of the problem and to be consistent with plans for the corridor. With few exceptions, a new interchange should be within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area.

Questions

- Is the need for this project documented in any past plans or studies?
- If the location was studied as part of the Principal Arterial Intersection Conversion Study, how is this proposal consistent with the general level of priority and investment need described in the study?
- Please attach a figure showing the existing and future (2040) traffic volumes for the interchange area, along with any congestion, safety, or other data that demonstrates the basic need for the project.
- Is the project a logical extension of an existing freeway (for arterial projects only)? If not, please explain how the proposal fits in the context of the corridor.
- Is the project located within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area? If not, please explain any anticipated timeline for this or extenuating circumstances that support this level of interchange access.

3. Functional Classification – Interchanges should only connect principal arterials or a principal arterial to an A-minor arterial. The purpose of the principal arterial system is to serve regional trips, not to substitute for inadequate local access and circulation capacity. Principal arterials emphasize mobility. A-minor arterials provide a high level of mobility but also provide a land access function. Collectors and local roads provide more of the land access function.

Questions

- Is the cross-street of the proposed project a principal arterial or A-minor arterial? If not, are there exceptional circumstances such as persistent safety problem or a non-traditional design solution to avoid environmental impacts?

4. Local Roadway Network and Access Management – Interchange access is not to be provided if the need is justified only as a convenience for short trips; to compensate for lack of a planned adequate complementary minor arterial or collector system; to compensate for deficient minor arterial or frontage road capacity; or to correct collector or minor arterial capacity deficiencies caused by poor design or excessive access to adjacent parcels. Regional travel demand for the principal arterial system will take precedence over local or land parcel development and related access needs.

When an interchange is proposed on an arterial, the project should at a minimum include the removal of all access within one-half a mile of the center of the proposed interchange and any at-grade full-access intersections within one mile along the free flow side of the interchange. It is recommended that access needs should be evaluated as part of an overall corridor plan or sub area plan

Questions

- Please describe the existing and planned local road network?
- Could improvements be made to this local system to better serve local trips instead of the constructing the proposed project?
- Will the project remove all access within one-half mile of the center of the proposed interchange and any median openings within one mile of the center of the proposed interchange?
- Describe any frontage road or other access changes that will be needed along with the project?

5. Interchange Spacing – Interchanges should be spaced at a minimum of one mile apart (center to center) along a freeway. Interchanges spaced less than one mile apart will require justification and may require special design features such as auxiliary lanes to maintain safety and efficiency. If it is determined that it is appropriate to locate an interchange at less than one mile spacing or to modify an existing interchange with this deficiency, the safe operation of the main roadway must be maintained. Outside of the Metropolitan Urban Service Area, interchanges are typically not needed within two miles of each other along a freeway due to the lack of intense development.

Questions

- Is the project at least one mile from an existing interchange within the Metropolitan Urban Service Area or two miles from an existing interchange in rural areas?
- How is the proposed project consistent with the future vision for the corridor?
- From a planning-level perspective, what are the upstream and downstream impacts of the project?

Approved Projects

Proposals that have successfully completed this process are listed in Table F-1 and shown on Figure 1 as programmed where funding has been identified or planned where funding is still being sought.

Table F-1: Programmed and Planned Projects that have successfully completed this process

#	Location	County	Proposed Changes	Status
1	US 10 at Thurston Ave	Anoka	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2021
2	US 169 at 101st Ave	Hennepin	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2021
3	TH 252 at 66th St	Hennepin	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2025
4	TH 252 at Brookdale Dr	Hennepin	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2025
5	TH 252 at 85 th Ave N	Hennepin	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2025
6	TH 36 at Manning Ave	Washington	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2021

#	Location	County	Proposed Changes	Status
7	TH 13 at Dakota Ave	Scott	Replace intersection with interchange	Programmed in FY 2022
8	I-494 at Argenta Trail	Dakota	Full access in proximity to existing overpass	Planned
9	TH 36 at TH 120	Ramsey/Washington	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
10	TH 36 at Lake Elmo Ave N	Washington	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
11	I-35E at CR J	Anoka/Ramsey	Access to and from the north where to and from the south exists	Planned
12	I-35W at CR J	Anoka/Ramsey	Access to and from the north where to and from the south exists	Planned
13	US 10 at Ramsey Blvd NW	Anoka	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
14	US 10 at Sunfish Lake Blvd NW	Anoka	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
15	I-94 at TH 610	Hennepin	Extension of CR 610 to the west with access to and from the east on I-94	Planned
16	TH 610 at East River Rd	Hennepin	Access to and from the east where to and from the west exists	Planned

#	Location	County	Proposed Changes	Status
17	US 169 at TH 282	Scott	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
18	I-94 at CR 19	Wright	Entrance to the east at existing partial interchange	Programmed in FY 2021
19	I-94 at Nabor Ave/CR 22	Wright	New interchange on existing freeway	Planned
20	TH 65 and 99 th Ave	Anoka	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
21	TH 65 and 117 th Ave	Anoka	Replace intersection with interchange	Planned
22	TH 169 and South of Bluff Dr	Scott	Construct overpass and make access modifications	Planned

Figure 1. Programmed and Planned Projects that have successfully completed this process

