

# Highway System Harms, Impacts, and Mitigation Priorities Study

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### About the study

The Metropolitan Council has initiated a new study to understand the full impacts of highway projects and to create a more just and equitable transportation future. While the construction of our metropolitan highway system significantly influenced economic growth, regional mobility, and community development, highways have had major impacts on nearby communities that may have lead to unintended and lasting harms, particularly for communities of color and low-income residents.

### 1. Why are we doing this study?

- **We value our highways.** Highways connect important destinations, activate growth and investment, and provide regional benefits. With major and ongoing investments in place, we recognize the need for wise stewardship of resources and management of change.
- **We know our highways can be better.** Highways also have major impacts and may lead to unforeseen and lasting harm to adjacent communities. These are wide-ranging and not fully accounted for in the current transportation process. Potential highway harms don't negate the benefits, but we know we can improve processes and projects to reduce harms.
- **We're seeking new insights from people in the region.** This study will give us new insights into the full impact of the regional highway system. Most investigations are on the project level, but this study considers the full region and the scope of history. We will focus on the topics that matter most to people.
- **We support solutions that expand community benefits.** The knowledge from this study will promote smarter future investments with expanded community benefit. This means corridors that work better for more people, and investments that strategically leverage broader public benefit.

### 2. How will this study progress?

- **Explore the history of regional highways.** We will look at the story of the region's highway development in the context of the nation. This will help us understand better how decisions were made and their implications.
- **Connect with people who have been and continue to be impacted by highway development.** Many of the people impacted by highway construction are still around, and a number continue to be impacted. We will listen to firsthand accounts of how people were personally affected and bring this alongside research to inform findings.
- **Determine opportunities to do better going forward.** With a solutions focus, we will talk to partner agencies and jurisdictions about opportunities at all levels to implement mitigation measures and process improvements. This means different solutions for different contexts, as impacts will vary across the region and by corridor type.
- **Advance broader understanding and support for change.** The process is intended to help people understand the issue and how to advance positive change. Since people's experiences and perspectives vary greatly, we will seek common ground and understanding on core principles with differentiated strategies.

### 3. What do we hope to achieve?

- **More community benefits and fewer burdens.** This study will look into how highway projects can be better planned, designed, built, and maintained to advance positive outcomes and mitigate negative ones. We will look at how projects are done now and make recommendations related to potential harms.
- **Strategic and coordinated investments.** Highways are a major catalytic force in areas due to their scale and impact, triggering other investments and changes. This study will look at how investment decisions get made and how the public sector can be more strategic in terms of coordinated approaches to further shared goals.
- **Common ground across differences.** Perhaps the most ambitious goal, this study strives to create common ground in topics that have historically resulted in significant divisions. This includes finding commonalities in terms of benefits and harms to people, and the desire to center public health and wellbeing in public processes. But this also means acknowledging differences. We will identify different approaches for different areas, while still ensuring that the pieces contribute to a vision of progress overall.

### 4. What input do we need from you?

- **Your own experience.** Everyone has a story to tell about the impact of our highway system; your history is also the highway's history. Good, bad, or indifferent, you can help inform the story being told.
- **Your own preferences.** How do you travel the area? What do you like and dislike about highways? What could be better? We need to know what you see as needing improvement, or what is working just fine as is.

- **Your reflections and feedback.** As we generate findings and outcomes, we need input about whether they resonate with your own understanding.

### 5. How will this project progress?

- **Phase 1:** Kickoff (November 2024 through March 2025) - project kickoff, participant recruitment, research and engagement plan development
- **Phase 2:** Research and Investigation (April through December 2025) - research of harms categories and pilot corridors, initial round of public engagement
- **Phase 3:** Framework Development (January through May 2026) - identification of key findings and development of implementation concepts
- **Phase 4:** Plan Development and Review (June through December 2026) - report development and review process

#### For more information

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