

Fridley: Highways 47 (University Ave) and 65 (Central Ave)

DRAFT – Goals and Strategies

Introduction

Input gathered by Fridley community members has been clear. Traveling from east to west in Fridley often means a difficult journey. The two main highways that pass north and south, University Avenue (Hwy 47) and Central Avenue (Hwy 65) offer important regional access for increasing volumes of traffic, but have become hugely problematic for local residents trying to navigate or cross, especially by foot or by bike. The thought of anyone, especially a child or mobility challenged person, attempting to cross these major corridors is cause for concern. The tension between regional and local needs is at a crossroads in Fridley – in its truest form.

The challenges and problems identified above are not easily solved. There are things that can be implemented in the short-term that must be done immediately to improve safety. However, for major changes to occur, it will take considerable time, effort and resources, as well as collaboration between the City of Fridley, Anoka County Highway Department, and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) through a series of projects and redevelopment efforts to achieve long-term goals. Spring Lake Park, Columbia Heights and affected neighboring communities could be collaborated with for continuity of design.

To begin addressing these problems and challenges that exist along Highways 47 and 65, the city and MnDOT have partnered to gather community input about ideas for how the two highway corridors can find a better balance between these tensions. This is especially important as land uses along the corridor continue to evolve and change, increasing access for non-motorized traffic (pedestrians, bikes, strollers and wheelchairs), and the needs of users crossing the corridors have become more apparent given the rise in number of crashes, injuries and fatalities. How can these major corridors better align with the diverse needs and changing communities they serve? What do we want these corridors to be? And how can we begin planning for those changes to happen?

Overview

Highways 47 and 65 provide north-south regional mobility to commuters traveling from Anoka County (and in the case of TH 65, from areas even further north) to the core of the Twin Cities. The two corridors bisect the city of Fridley and create barriers to east-west travel. Both highways, owned by MnDOT require balancing to efficiently move the traffic flow moving north and south, and the need to calm traffic to provide greater safety for pedestrians and bikes that attempt to navigate wide intersection crossings. To solve for traffic flow and congestion, MnDOT provides more “green” time on the traffic signals for the north-south traffic, which in turn limits the time provided to motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists traveling east-west and exacerbates challenges identified by the city. Long wait times even outside periods of peak north-south travel cause pedestrians and vehicles to take risks. Pedestrians cross without a cross walk signal, and vehicles are more likely to run red lights.

Because of the ease of traffic flow north-south and design of the highways (feeling more like a rural highway or throughway with wide medians and expansive right of way), speeds can be excessive, which hinders east-west connectivity and mobility for all users – motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The lack of safety is felt and documented at multiple spots along these highways, primarily at the major intersections (57th Ave, 61st Ave, Mississippi, 69th Ave, 73rd Ave, 81st Ave, and Osborne Rd). The City of Fridley, MnDOT and Anoka County share these concerns over safety. Both MnDOT and Anoka County have conducted safety studies to identify ways to solve for safety concerns, and they are in the early stages of implementing those improvements.

Bus stops along both corridors need improvement, which would increase transit as a viable option. From the dangerous placement of the bus stops (e.g. near freeway entrance ramps), poor maintenance, lack of lighting and access, inadequate snow removal service, and the need for updating in general, there is much that can be done to make transit more user-friendly and safe.¹

Another dimension to the discussion is around creating a sense of place and identity. People slow down when they see something interesting. According to MnDOT data there are more local trips on University Avenue than Central Avenue. Fridley wants people to know they are in their community, and to share a sense of pride about what that means. How can the experience of these major corridors reinforce that sense of place? What would capture the unique characteristics that make Fridley stand out?

¹ Metro Transit’s Arterial Transitway Corridors Study considers expanded service of the regional bus rapid transit (BRT) system to include University Avenue (HWY 47) through the City of Fridley. For more information, go to: <https://www.metrotransit.org/Data/Sites/1/media/pdfs/atcs/ATCS%20Final%20Report.pdf>

University Avenue (Highway 47) has become more of a main-street for local trips, suggesting that future improvements should work toward creating a local feel with more multi-modal access. Consider the role that the medians could play to calm traffic and create a greater sense of place. Meanwhile, Highway 65 is used more as a principle arterial. Corridor treatments should reflect these qualities in regard to their look and feel, speed levels, and multimodal accommodation. In addition, the southern portion of both corridors (I-694 – Mississippi Street) warrant slower speeds due to the closer proximity of the land uses to the street, than the northern portions (73rd Avenue – Osborne Rd).

As a result of the community input, seven primary goals have been identified along with a number of supporting strategies.

Recommendations

The City of Fridley, Anoka County, and MnDOT have discussed the changing nature of University Avenue (Highway 47 and Central Avenue (Highway 65) for many years due to changing land uses and properties closer to University and Central Avenues. The unsightly nature of these transportation corridors has created aesthetic concerns. Equally important is how the highways relate to, and what they say about, the community. MnDOT and the County also perceive the change, and invite the opportunity to hear from the community to enlighten their policy decisions. To that end, the following goals were defined:

- I. Improve safety for non-motorized (pedestrians and bicyclists²) and motorized users at key intersections and along the highways (57th Ave, 61st Ave, Mississippi, 69th Ave, 73rd Ave, 81st Ave, and Osborne Rd)³.
- II. Improve the east-west roadways to better serve the community and invite greater mobility for all
- III. Enhance the sense of place and community identity - including but not limited to identifying one as a main street
- IV. Better align Highways 47 and 65 with redevelopment and evolving land uses and densities
- V. Provide better accessibility and connectivity to local businesses and community destinations
- VI. Improve transit options and functionality (i.e. bus rapid transit currently being planned the Highway 65)

² Includes wheel chairs, segways, electric bikes, scooters, and other low speed personal devices.

³ Note that there is no 69th Avenue intersection on Highway 65, and 57th Avenue at Highway 65 is referred to as Medtronic/57th Avenue.

VII. Work toward mitigating air, noise, water pollution and environmental impact

Goals and Potential Strategies

I. Improve safety for non-motorized (pedestrians and bicyclists) and motorized users at key intersections along the highways (57th Ave, 61st Ave, Mississippi, 69th Ave, 73rd Ave, 81st Ave, and Osborne Rd)

- A. Slow speeds (calm traffic) through design elements and visual cues.
 - B. Prioritize multimodal design at intersections (57th Ave, 61st Ave, Mississippi, 69th Ave, 73rd Ave, 81st Ave, and Osborne Rd). This could be done through a number of elements such as:
 - Protected bike boxes or bikeways
 - Accommodating both recreational and commuter biking
 - Connected sidewalks and multiuse trails
 - Making trails and sidewalks more visible to motorists
 - Wider/more prominent cross walk markings
 - Placement of stop bar being set back to make pedestrians/bicyclists more visible
 - Pedestrian lead with signal timing
 - Shorten crossing distance where possible
 - Median refuges and push buttons for signals at halfway crossing points
 - Consider pedestrian crossings on Central and Fireside Drive to accommodate residents of Fridley Terrace (i.e. ADA compliant overpass, underpass, crosswalk, light, etc.)
 - ADA compliant facilities – countdown timers, audible sound, etc. (Make sure pedestrian crossing signals are loud enough for people that are visually impaired)
- Coordination with the Anoka County Highway Department will be needed for Osborne Road and Mississippi Street, as it is the road authority for these corridors.*
- C. Lengthen turn lanes to allow vehicles to slow down in time, and consider protected left turn lanes at key intersections (Mississippi Street and Osborne Rd).
 - D. Consider stop light delays from red to green so that the intersection is cleared before traffic restarts.

- E. Consider a pedestrian/bicycle well-lit underpass crossing at Mississippi and University Avenue, or at 69th Avenue as part of the Rice Creek Regional Trail, and connect to the Mississippi River trail.
- F. Consider flashing yellow turn arrows at all intersections to improve traffic flow.
- G. Add solar lighting at intersection corners and along stretches of highway for more visibility.
- H. Add pedestrian and bicycle connections along Highway 47 where it goes under I-694.

II. Improve the east-west roadways to better serve the community and invite greater mobility for all

- A. Prioritize multimodal design for intersecting roadways.
- B. Narrow the distance to cross the streets from all directions through the use of medians
- C. Bring bike trails closer to the main roads when approaching intersections, so that cars turning right can see them.
- D. Calibrate traffic light timing to allow for sufficient time for pedestrians to cross safely, and for left turn lanes to proceed without needing multiple cycles (Example of good light timing – County Road 10 & Able).
- E. Consider blinking yellow left turn arrows at all intersections in each direction to improve traffic flow.
- F. Suggested improvement for Mississippi St NE (Coordinate with Anoka County Highway Department):
 - Study the traffic on Mississippi St NE to determine if all lanes are necessary. Consider restriping Mississippi Street as a 3-lane section. Where possible convert to bike lanes with buffers (Coordinate with Anoka County Highway department), and dedicated right-turn only lanes in both directions on Highway 65
 - Create barriers or buffers between sidewalks and Mississippi St NE – too close to fast traffic and not safe for kids
 - Provide sidewalk connections to get to bus stops north of Mississippi St NE
 - Address drainage under railroad
- G. Suggested improvements for 61st Avenue NE:

- 61st Avenue NE intersection at University Avenue should be a pedestrian focal point for east-west access, connecting to the Northstar Commuter Station.
- H. Suggested improvement for 57th Avenue NE:
 - Add sidewalks along 57th Avenue to connect residential area to shopping area west of University Avenue.

III. Strengthen the sense of place and community identity

- A. Incorporate classic design that will stand the test of time, look elegant, and proudly represent the community.
- B. Identify sustainable, low maintenance landscape solutions that provide aesthetic appeal and environmental mitigations.
- C. Use low, native plantings that are tolerant of road conditions and won't obstruct sight lines near intersections.
- D.** Work toward a consistent use of fencing, lighting, and design to allow corridors to feel more cohesive (work with neighbors to determine style and maintenance plan). **No chain link!**
- E. Consider fencing only in residential or high use areas for both corridors.
- F. Ensure that fencing does not block sight lines.
- G. Consider long-term landscape maintenance costs (e.g. irrigation, replacement of plants, etc.), and options to utilize hardscape strategies when needed to minimize maintenance costs.
- H. Create unique features that are memorable and showcase Fridley's assets (e.g. Fridley Civic Campus and Rice Creek Regional Trail, Moore Lake, Medtronic, etc.).
- I. Supplement colorful signage such as banners on street lights to celebrate and recognize Friendly Fridley (or "Welcome to Fridley" signs).
- J. Light up the road signs for better visibility.

IV. Better align redevelopment and evolving land uses with the Highways 47 and 65

- A. Create development review standards that bring buildings closer to roadways – providing visual signals that slow traffic.
- B. Work with property owners along the roadways to encourage landscaping and beautification on private land.
- C. Enhance corridors through public/private partnerships.
- D. Create different objectives for University and Central Avenues. University to be have more of a city boulevard feel (slower and more business oriented), and Central to provide faster traffic flow (more industrial above Mississippi St NE).

V. Provide better accessibility and connectivity to local businesses and community destinations

- A. Consider ways to enhance service roads to better attract visitors to local businesses (e.g. create a main-street feel, special service districts to maintain landscaping, etc.).
- B. Improve way-finding.
- C. Enhance non-motorized access to regional and community park and trail facilities (consider a grade separation for pedestrians/bicyclists at 69th Avenue NE).

VI. Improve transit options and functionality (i.e. bus rapid transit is currently being planned for Central Ave to 53rd Avenue to University and anchor at the Northtown Park and Ride)

- A. Improve transit stops, access, and experiences by providing
 - A dedicated pull-off for buses
 - Transit shelters where none exist
 - Improved transit shelters to protect people from the elements
 - Sidewalk connections that are ADA compliant and connect to a broader network other than just being at the transit stop
 - Pedestrian-scale lighting
 - Waste and recycling collection (note: more than containers that overflow)
 - Landscaping (encourage citizen groups to assist with maintenance – adopt a road)

- Move bus stop to the north side of 57th Avenue so that it is not near the entrance of I-694
- Move the bus stop at the Hackman connector at Central Avenue

Coordination with Metro Transit will be needed for bus stops improvements

VII. Work toward mitigating air, noise, water pollution and environmental impact

- A. Address drainage and storm water issues caused by heavy rains and snow melt.
- B. Don't disturb the ecology of Moore Lake, and connect Rice Creek Regional Trail to Moore Lake Park.
- C. Consider a safe trail for anglers to the east-west Moore Lake connection that doesn't disturb the shoreline.

Community Engagement

Recognizing that refinement and implementation of potential improvements will require on-going dialogue and collaboration, the City and MnDOT are committed to the following as opportunities for more detailed planning and implementation occur:

- Identify *community standards* for aesthetics along the corridors (e.g. lighting, fencing, barriers, landscaping, etc.).
- Provide opportunities for stakeholders to inform street design options during project planning.
- Incorporate broad-based public involvement from stakeholder groups when considering design improvements.
- Provide regular updates on upcoming studies, projects, existing status, etc. on the corridors at council meetings or in community newsletters.
- Engage more with the Anoka County Highway Department so that the needs of residents and businesses are heard and can be incorporated in to upcoming improvement projects/studies.

- Incorporate goals and strategies outlined in the City's comprehensive plan as they relate to development/redevelopment along these corridors when considering highway improvements.
- Metro Transit planning for expansion of bus rapid transit (BRT) service must include community stakeholders and transit users.

Implementation Objectives:

To advance these goals and strategies, it will be helpful to prioritize in the following way:

- 1.) Identify potential funding sources and submit requests for Highway 47 and 65 improvement projects (potential sources include: BUILD grants, safety grants – Highway Safety Improvement Program, Transportation Enhancements Program, and Surface Transportation Program). Funding for improvements on local connecting roadways could come from: Cooperative Agreement Program, Transportation Enhancement Program, Local Roadway Improvement Program, and from the Surface Transportation Program (specific county highways).
- 2.) Address short term goals that correlate with the MnDOT and Anoka County safety studies. Both studies have identified critical safety upgrades that can be implemented in the near-term. Keep the community updated on plans.
- 3.) Mid-term goals should focus on the sections of Highways 47 and 65 that run from I-694 to Mississippi Street NE. This southern portion of the highways already has land uses that promote traffic calming and increases in pedestrian and bike activity
- 4.) Long-term strategies that advance the northern segment of Highways 47 and 65 (Mississippi Street to Osborne Road) that would require major road redesign, such as roundabouts or separated grades.

Lessons and inspiration can be gained from other corridors across the region, such as:

- TH 96 in Shoreview
- Silver Lake Road in New Brighton
- HWY 97 at HWY 61 in Forest Lake
- 66th Street in Richfield
- TH 61 in White Bear Lake

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