

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HISTORY

Central Ave NE (Hwy 65)



2020 - 2024

HWY 47 & HWY 65 PLANNING STUDY

Purpose

The purpose of the MnDOT led Hwy 47 and Hwy 65 Planning Study was to better understand the existing conditions and transportation needs of a 10-mile stretch of both Central Ave (Hwy 65) and University Ave (Hwy 47). This study preceded the project design process, providing higher level evaluation and recommendations. It was also done in parallel with the Metro Transit F Line Corridor Plan, which focused on transit alternative development. The study's primary elements and timeline are summarized in the graphic below. Work was conducted across two phases:

- Phase 1: Project needs and evaluation criteria
- Phase 2: Alternatives development and evaluation

Phase 1 overview

Phase 1 of the study was conducted from spring 2020 to summer 2021. Public engagement during this time included working with agencies and the public to analyze existing and future conditions and determine project needs.

This phase of the study identified the following purpose and need elements, along with supporting evaluation criteria to apply to future alternatives. These were based on both technical analysis and community input.



Primary needs

- **Vehicle safety:** reduce injury and loss of life for all users
- **Walkability and bikeability, safety:** reduce or eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries for the most vulnerable users
- **Pavement condition:** maintain and improve roadway surface



Secondary needs

- **Walkability and bikeability, mobility:** improve comfort and access to destinations
- **Vehicle mobility:** maintain or improve operations for autos, transit, and freight



Other considerations

- Consistency with local, state, and regional plans and programs
- Consistency with local, state, and regional projects
- Cost
- Maintenance
- Bridge condition
- Transit ridership on existing or planned routes
- Supports Future F Line (BRT) Plan

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Phase 1 public engagement

The project team and its partners engaged with study area residents in October and November 2020. Due to the State of Minnesota's public health emergency restrictions on in-person meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study team adapted traditional public engagement activities to meet public safety guidance, with most activities conducted virtually.

Over 2,200 people shared input in Phase 1. Participation in activities included 1,557 survey responses, 478 comments on the online interactive map, 256 local calls made to targeted stakeholders, 15 virtual stakeholder briefings, and three virtual open houses.

Primary engagement activities included:

- Project website with online survey and comment map
- Three virtual open houses
- Project emails
- Ads on social media, community papers, and websites
- Lawn signs and sidewalk decals (90 locations)
- Outreach toolkits for partners' websites
- Media relations (press release and interviews)
- One-on-one telephone interviews
- Meetings with key stakeholders (13 sessions)

Primary themes from engagement included:

- **Pedestrian needs:** Many pedestrians don't feel safe, especially on University Ave. Pedestrians worry about cars, including speeds and traffic rule compliance. Pedestrians can also have a difficult time crossing the street.
- **Bicycle needs:** Bicyclists don't feel safe on either Central Ave or University Ave. There is significant interest in adding or expanding bike lanes.
- **Motorist needs:** People are concerned with driver speeding. People also feel like the timing of traffic lights doesn't feel right. Roads feel congested, which leads to other problems in terms of unpredictability and bottlenecks. All travelers, including drivers and pedestrians, have issues with visibility of others on the road.
- **Transit needs:** There is a high level of interest in better snow removal. Community members would like to see more bus shelters.
- **Focus area needs:** Targeted engagement on specific segments of the corridor identified locations with the most concentrated challenges and need for improvements.

Public engagement informed the development of the project purpose and need as well as supporting evaluation criteria.

Overall Hwy 47/65 study engagement:



440 public meeting attendees



3,296 survey responses



2,769 map/alternative comments



15 virtual stakeholder briefings



14 in-person and virtual public meetings



256 local calls made to stakeholders



2,829 newsletter subscribers



125 sidewalk decals and yard signs installed

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Phase 2 overview



Phase 2 of the study was conducted from fall 2021 to spring 2024. This stage included reviewing the evaluation criteria developed in Phase 1, developing concepts and potential alternatives, evaluating and selecting alternatives, and drafting a study for public and agency review.

Initially, the project team evaluated 166 concept alternatives across 10 sections of the corridor. Nineteen of these concepts were dismissed, and the remaining 147 were grouped into 35 “packages” representing typical road designs for each section. After further evaluation, the 23 packages that met the evaluation criteria were consolidated into four “corridor visions” recommended for further study.

- **Vision 1:** Lower speed roadways with roundabouts at key intersections
- **Vision 2:** Intermediate and high-speed roadways with traffic signals at key intersections
- **Vision 3:** Combination of low and higher-speed roadways at different corridor segments
- **Vision 4:** Reduced speeds throughout the corridor

Phase 2 public engagement

The study team engaged the public during key decision points in the study from fall 2021 to spring 2024.

During Phase 2, there were 325 people who attended either in-person or virtual public meetings, 2,291 people commented on concept alternatives and 1,739 online survey responses.

Engagement methods included:



Project website with online survey and comment map



11 in-person and virtual public meetings



Pop ups and targeted engagement activities



Ads on social media, community papers, and websites



Lawn signs and sidewalk decals



Outreach toolkit for partner distribution



Media relations (press releases and interviews)



Meetings with community groups



One-on-one telephone interviews

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Primary themes from engagement included:

- **Roads:** While traffic speeding was identified as a concern, low speed alternatives were not heavily endorsed due to other considerations. Traffic calming and the addition of green areas were frequently noted as a welcome strategy. Parking-related issues were another common theme, both from the perspective of needing parking to support small businesses as well as safety concerns around parked cars.
- **Multimodal:** People expressed concerns about pedestrian and bicycle safety within all concepts. Many people felt unsafe walking and biking along the corridors. Shared use paths received mixed reactions, while there was general support for adding or expanding bike lanes.
- **Intersections:** Engagement participants also expressed concerns about intersections, including issues with current signal timing, safety of pedestrian crosswalks, and mixed feedback on the possibility of adding bump-outs.

This feedback informed the selection of the four vision concepts that moved forward for further consideration. **Of the four, Corridor Vision 1 received the most support, followed closely by Corridor Vision 4.** However, the concepts did not account for all issues, so – while they were inspiration for what was considered in future phases – there was some additional work needed to get to the next set of project alternatives. The chart below shows what items were and were not covered during this study.



Considered during study

- Intersection crash rates and crash severity
- Pedestrian and bicycle safety
- Pedestrian level of service
- Bicycle level of traffic stress
- Pavement condition
- Traffic operations
- Transit route and station placement
- Consistency with plans and policies
- Estimated high-level project and maintenance costs
- Stormwater management needs
- Vehicle access impacts
- Right-of-way impacts
- Bridge condition
- Historical and cultural resources
- Environmental justice
- Section 4(f) and 6(f) resources



Not considered during study

- On-street parking demand and removal impacts
- Accommodation of both northbound and southbound bus lanes
- Specific access closure impacts, as well as emergency vehicle access
- Treatments for specific intersections, including freight mobility assessments
- Transit facility design specifics
- Specific lane, shoulder, and facility widths
- Non-road infrastructure needs including drainage, signals, signing, bridges, and noise barriers
- Connected and automated vehicle readiness
- Site-specific hazardous and contaminated materials assessment

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Central Ave NE (Hwy 65)



2024 - 2025

CENTRAL AVE NE IMPROVEMENTS

Purpose

The purpose of the Central Ave NE Improvements Project was for MnDOT, local agencies, and the public to collaborate on a new design for Central Ave. (Hwy 65) between University Ave SE and Interstate 694. This work built upon the study and public engagement conducted in the Hwy 47 & Hwy 65 Planning Study. This project involved working closely with Metro Transit on the integration of the METRO F Line, a planned bus rapid transit line that will provide improved transit service on Route 10.

This project has multiple phases, with associated engagement:

- **Phase 1:** Raising awareness and connecting (April to July 2024)
 - » Phase 1 was a preparatory phase focused on agency coordination; there was no significant public engagement besides general education and awareness via agency conversations.
- **Phase 2:** Previous study wrap-up and project goal setting (July to December 2024)
 - » Phase 2 focused on initial concept development, building on the vision concepts from the previous study and adding additional technical analysis.
- **Phase 3:** Concept alternatives evaluation (January to April 2025)
 - » Phase 3 focused on development and evaluation of roadway concept alternatives.
- **Phase 4:** Preferred concept review (May to August 2025)
 - » Phase 4 focused on finalization and refinement of a selected corridor alternative.

Design concepts



Concepts evaluated in this study have largely been based on Visions 1 and 2 from the previous study.

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Public engagement

Community input supported the development and refinement of alternatives, which helped the project team reach a preferred design. Community members were also asked to weigh in on changes to specific intersections and areas.

Engagement methods included:

- Online survey
- In-person and virtual public meetings
- Community pop-ups
- Meetings with community groups
- Meetings with business and property owners
- Mailings
- Door knocking

Key takeaways:

- **Safety and accessibility:** Safety was the most consistent and urgent theme. Community members emphasized the need to:
 - » Reduce vehicle speeds through traffic calming measures.
 - » Improve pedestrian and cyclist safety with wider sidewalks, separated bike paths, better lighting, and clearer crossings.
 - » Address multimodal safety, especially south of 37th Avenue, where support was strong for sidewalk-level bike lanes and dedicated transit lanes.
- **Transit reliability:** There was strong support for enhancing public transit through the integration of the METRO F Line. Key themes included:
 - » A desire for dedicated bus lanes and improved stop infrastructure.
 - » Ensuring accessibility for elderly and disabled riders.
 - » Clarifying bus lane rules and addressing concerns about in-lane bus stops during congestion.
- **Community and business vitality:** Participants voiced a clear desire for the redesign to support local businesses and reflect the cultural character of the area. This included:
 - » Maintaining access during and after construction.
 - » Creating a vibrant, walkable corridor that attracts customers.
 - » Incorporating placemaking elements like street furniture, signage, and public art.
 - » Concerns about construction impacts and property values were also prominent, especially among business owners.

Central Ave NE engagement:

-  620 public meeting attendees
-  846 survey responses
-  30+ business meetings
-  20 community pop up events
-  13 neighborhood presentations
-  5 city council presentations
-  37,224 postcards sent
-  689 business postcards hand delivered
-  1,710 newsletter subscribers
-  310 public meeting comments

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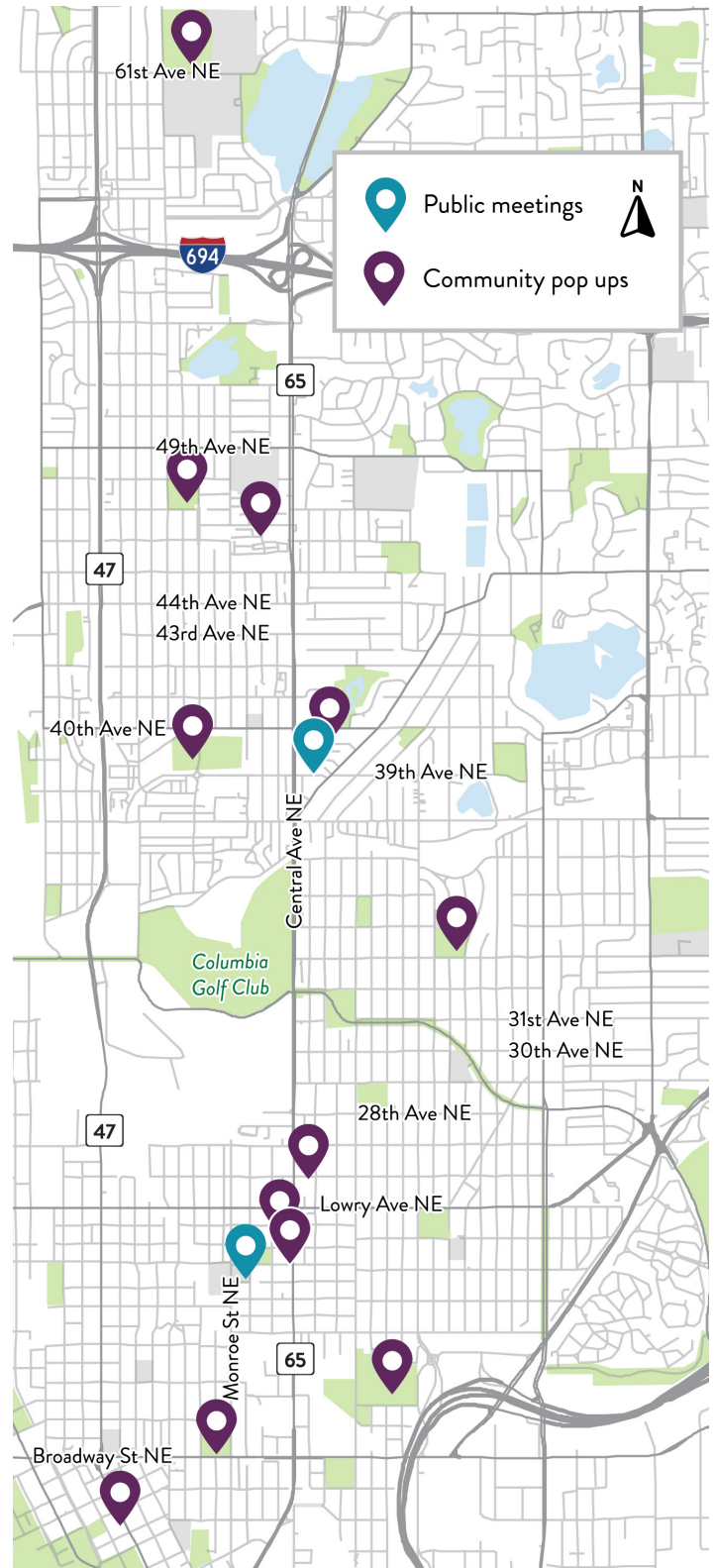
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Key takeaways continued

- **Environmental enhancements:** Green infrastructure was widely supported as both a beautification and sustainability strategy. Feedback included:
 - » Adding and maintaining diverse tree species.
 - » Designing greener medians and rain gardens.
 - » Using landscaping to calm traffic and manage stormwater runoff.
- **Traffic management:** Traffic congestion and flow were major concerns, particularly at key intersections like Lowry Avenue, St. Anthony Parkway, and 53rd Avenue.
- **Roundabout education:** While roundabouts received mixed feedback, many supported single-lane designs for safety and called for more public education to reduce confusion.
- **Parking tradeoffs:** Parking emerged as a divisive issue. While some prioritized transit and pedestrian space over on-street parking, others—especially business owners—expressed concern about losing parking. Suggestions included shared district parking and off-peak bus lane use.
- **Access changes:** Access changes at intersections like Reservoir Boulevard and 32nd Avenue also drew mixed reactions, which will require thoughtful communication going forward.

Phases 1 through 3 of engagement were used to inform concept development and refinement, as well as selection of a preferred alternative. Phase 4 involved presenting the preferred alternative to the community and gathering final feedback.



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