DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

April 17, 2026

Rochelle Widmer P.E. M.S. | Director of Engineering and Facilities
City of Columbia Heights
rwidmer@columbiaheightsmn.gov

RE: Request for City Approval (Municipal Consent) of the Final Layout for SP 0207-130 (TH 65)

Dear Rochelle,

MnDOT is proceeding with plans to complete State Project 0207-130, the proposed reconstruction of Central Avenue from 37th Avenue to 53rd Avenue In accordance with Minnesota Statute 161.164, I am submitting for City approval the project's Final Layout, S.P. 0207-130, dated April 14th, 2026.

The City's approval (municipal consent) is required for this project because it:

- Alters access by removing connection to Reservoir Blvd. and alters access at several other locations.
- Reduces highway traffic capacity by removing a general purpose through lane in each direction north of 39th St. to a point approximately 450 feet south of the intersection with 49th Avenue.
- Requires acquisition of permanent right-of-way, including potential acquisition of parcels owned by Columbia Heights. MnDOT also plans partial acquisition of a number of additional parcels to acquire small amounts of permanent right of way from a number of other parcels.

Municipal consent of MnDOT projects is described in Minnesota Statutes 161.162 through 161.167 (attached).

Approval or disapproval of the final layout is by resolution of the City Council. (A sample resolution is attached). However, if the City neither approves nor disapproves the final layout within 90 days of the public hearing, the layout is deemed approved (per MN Statute 161.164).

The deadlines (per MN Statute 161.164) for the City's responsibilities regarding municipal consent of the attached layout are as follows, based on a submittal date of the final layout to the City of 4/17/2026:

- Within 15 days of receiving the final layout, schedule a public hearing (by 5/2/2026). Please coordinate the timing of the public hearing with MnDOT staff to ensure that they can be present.
- Within 60 days of receiving the final layout, conduct the public hearing (by 6/16/2026).

- Provide at least 30-days' notice of the public hearing.
- Within 90 days of the public hearing, approve or disapprove the layout by resolution (by 9/14/2026).

MnDOT will attend the public hearing to present the final layout and answer questions, as required by statute.

Project Purpose

The primary purpose of this project is to improve pavement condition and safety.

Over the past 10 years, there have been over 20 fatal or life-threatening injury crashes involving pedestrians, illustrated in the image below.

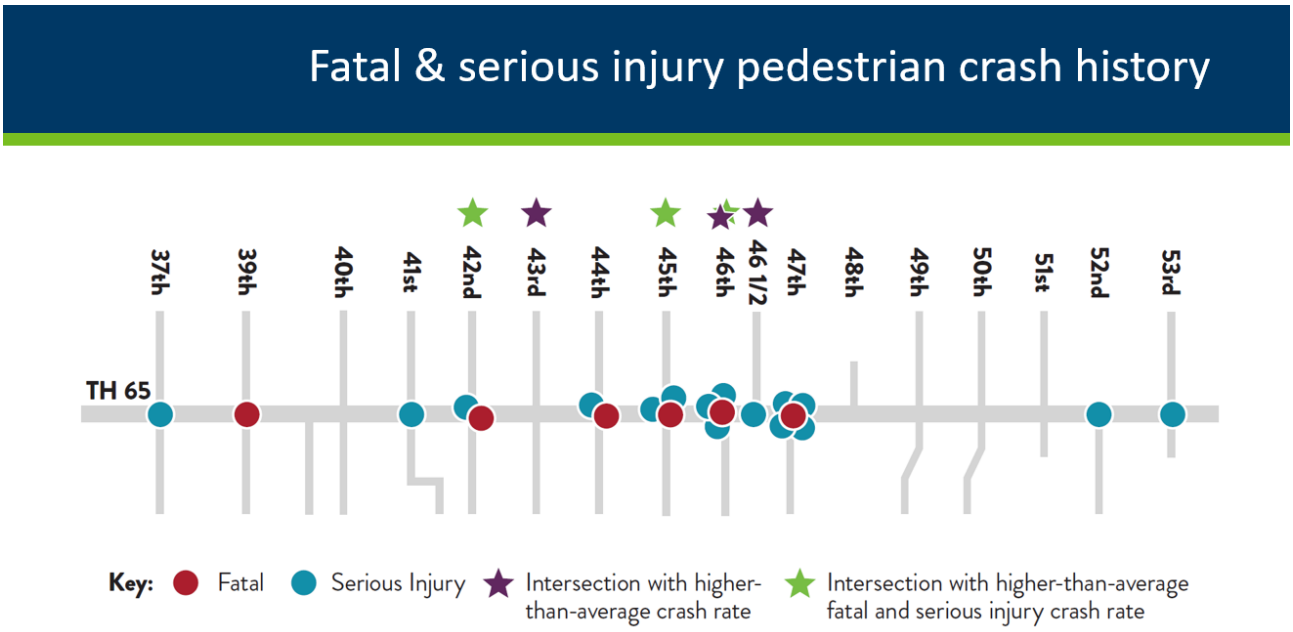

Figure 1 - Map image showing locations of fatal and serious pedestrian crashes on Central Ave.

Looking at the most recent 5 years of crash data, from 2020 through 2024, the segment of Central Avenue from 40th to 47th Ave. has experienced a rate of serious and fatal crashes (referred to as the "FAR Index") that is over **5 times** what would be considered a "critical" crash rate. This segment of Central Avenue had the **2nd highest rate of serious and fatal crashes of any Trunk Highway in the state of Minnesota**, measured by FAR Index for 2020 through 2024.

In addition to addressing pavement condition and safety issues, this project aims to address other issues along the corridor:

- Planned transit improvements associated with Metro Transit's F Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project
- Underground utility improvements
- Aging traffic signals and other roadside infrastructure
- Sidewalks that are in poor condition and are not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- A lack of safe places to ride a bicycle – Central Avenue is a planned bikeway in the Met Council Regional Bike Transportation Network

Project Description

The project includes reconstruction of the 2-mile stretch of Central Ave (TH 65) between 37th Ave. to 53rd Ave. This project will look to address safety concerns through this corridor while enhancing the connectivity and quality of life for the residents that live and use along the corridor. The project will benefit all travelers by reconstructing the road, upgrading pedestrian crossings, improving sidewalks and pathways, managing speed, expanding multimodal options, and improving transit access. MnDOT is also coordinating with Metro Transit to install improved transit stations and with the cities of Columbia Heights and Hilltop to replace local utilities along the corridor.

Property impact details
MnDOT is planning several major property acquisitions along Central Avenue for this project, which also includes some parcels not directly adjacent to Central Avenue. Permanent easements located in the layout are conservative and further discussions with Columbia Heights and stakeholders will continue through the design phase of the project. The main reasons for acquiring permanent easements in the layout are due to roadway design changes, intersection design changes, installation of roundabouts, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, and stormwater treatment requirements. Refer to attached final layout for proposed permanent easements.

Roadway Configuration
MnDOT is proposing to re-configure Central Avenue and tailor the roadway configuration based on traffic volumes. Near 694, where traffic volumes are the highest, Highway 65 will retain two lanes in each direction and a southbound auxiliary lane at the interchange will be removed. South of 49th Ave., where traffic volumes start to decrease, MnDOT is proposing to remove one through lane in each direction. A northbound bus lane will be added in the northbound direction (only) from 37th to 45th Ave., in order to improve the speed and reliability of the F Line BRT service.

One of the primary reasons to remove a general purpose travel lane where it is not needed is to improve roadway safety. The image below shows what Central Avenue looks like before and after the proposed construction – the proposed design significantly reduces pedestrian crossing

exposure and will reduce motor vehicle speeds, this is the most effective way to reduce the likelihood of future pedestrian crashes.

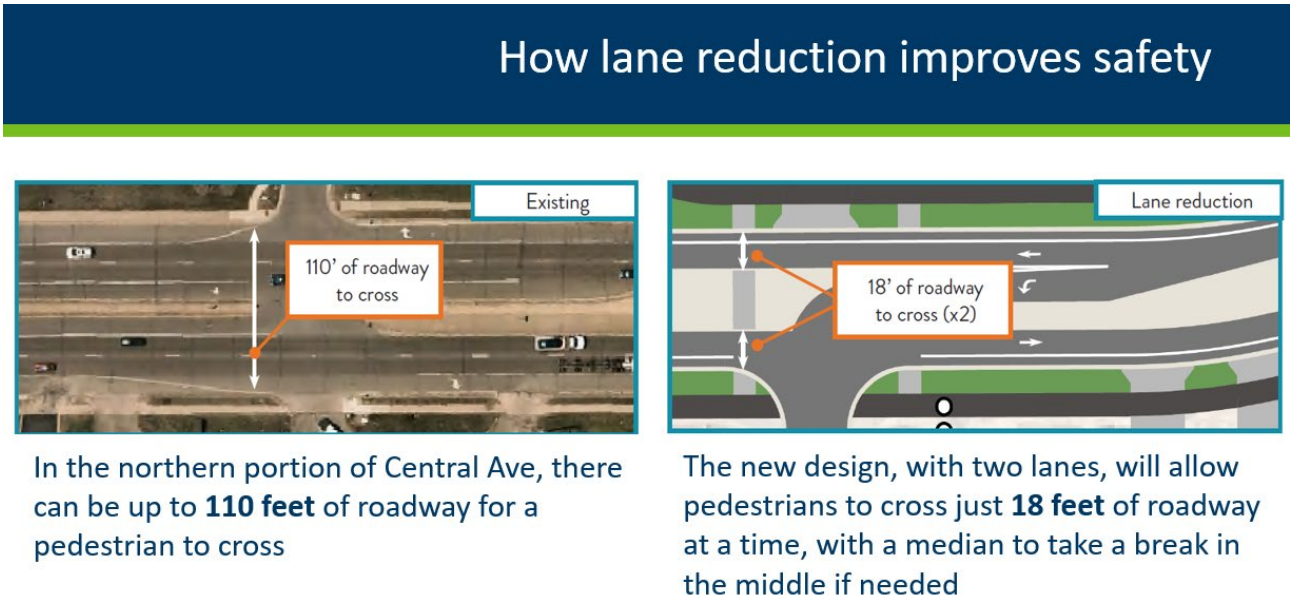

Figure 2 - Image showing pedestrian crossing differences before and after the proposed construction

Bus stops

The proposed layout has some bus stops where transit buses will stop in the (only) lane – this will lead to momentary delays as passengers board/alight buses. With bus rapid transit, passengers pay their fares before boarding the bus – this reduces delays experienced with traditional buses. On average, a bus will be stopped for about 7 seconds.

MnDOT has performed virtual simulations of how Central Avenue will function with in-lane bus stops during the busiest time of day – the afternoon rush hour. The maximum added delay with fewer lanes and in-lane bus stops that could be encountered while traveling from 53rd to 37th Avenue is about 30 seconds. Most traffic will experience lesser delays (or even travel time savings) when traveling outside of rush hour.

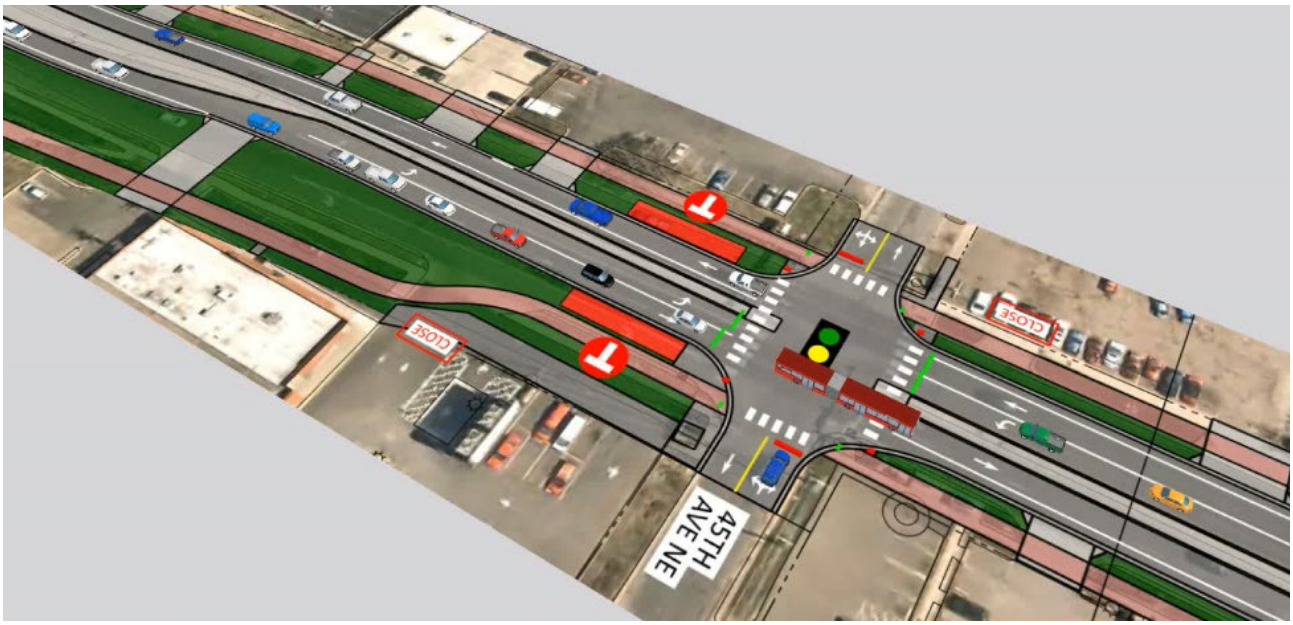

Figure 3 - Screen shot of traffic simulation of bus stopping in-lane at 45th Ave.

Roundabouts

The proposed layout includes five roundabouts in intersections that were previously governed with a signal or had no intersection control. Changing these intersections to a roundabout provides a number of benefits:

- In a statewide study, single lane roundabouts were found to be the single most effective tool to reduce motor vehicle speeds, more so than other tools like curb extensions and median islands. On a corridor with speeding issues, we believe this to be an essential component for traffic calming.
- Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons (RRFB) will be added at strategic locations during final design for pedestrians to navigate roundabouts safely.
- The roundabouts will also allow for a shorter crossing distance for pedestrians, decreasing the amount of time that they spend walking through lanes and reduces pedestrian crossing exposure.
- In a statewide study, single lane roundabouts showed an 89% reduction in fatal crashes, 83% reduction in serious injury crashes, and a 60% reduction in all injury crashes. Unbalanced multi-lane roundabouts (2 Lane and 1 Lane) showed a 78% reduction in serious injury crashes and an 18% reduction in all injury crashes.

Access Modifications

The proposed layout shows a new intersection layout at 37th Ave. and Central Ave. that adds a cul-de-sac at the end of Reservoir Blvd., and removes the access to/from Central Ave. The 5th leg at the intersection of 37th Ave. and Central Ave. increases intersection delay and crash risk. At the request of the City of Columbia Heights city council, MnDOT will close this access completely. This will reduce crash risk and reduce intersection delay at the intersection of 37th and Central. Refer to attached layout for additional access modifications.

Off-site Infiltration basins
The proposed layout shows the proposed off-site infiltration basins to help achieve the requirements for phosphorus removal. These infiltration basins will require MnDOT to acquire the portion or whole parcel and install new storm sewer to MnDOT's system. Alternatively, Columbia Heights could take ownership of these basins and negotiate the routine and non-routine through the cooperative construction agreement.

Planned Project Schedule

The project is planned to be constructed in multiple different sections, from 2028 to 2030. MnDOT will attempt to maintain vehicle access during construction, however, it may be necessary to close certain segments of Central Avenue fully during construction. In this instance, access will be maintained to businesses and residents via side streets, MnDOT will coordinate full closures with affected property owners ahead of construction.

City's Estimated Project Costs

Some project costs are the City's responsibility, as detailed in MnDOT's cost participation policy. (See the policy and the *Cost Participation and Maintenance with Local Units of Government Manual* at MnDOT's this website: https://edocs-public.dot.state.mn.us/edocs_public/DMResultSet/download?docId=39065478).

MnDOT has attached a Good Faith Cost Estimate for SP 0207-130. Below is a summary of estimated costs for the City:

SP 0207-130

- Overall Current Project Budget – $55,800,000
- Columbia Heights project cost share – $1,026,000 plus city-requested utility construction
    - City share before individual project maximum contribution
        - $6,011,666
    - City individual project maximum contribution
        - $226,000
    - Items not subject to individual project maximum contribution
        - Signal at 43rd - $800,000

Please note that Columbia Heights has hit the individual project maximum contribution of $226,000 for FY28 under the current Cost Participation Policy. However, the locally proposed signalized intersection at 43rd Ave is considered "non-eligible" and therefore is not subject to the City's maximum contribution. The proposed signal is "non-eligible" as the signal at 43rd is a local request and was not determined through MnDOT's internal scope. Columbia Heights' planned utility improvements are not included in the Columbia Heights project cost share – any city-requested

utility construction will be 100% city cost, not subject to the “individual project maximum”, and in addition to the city costs listed above.

City’s Maintenance Responsibilities
MnDOT is currently responsible for most routine maintenance along Central Ave today, and this will continue post-construction. Under the Cost Participation Policy (CPP), below is a summary of city maintenance responsibilities is below:

- Routine maintenance of all sidewalks, shared use paths, and pedestrian refuge island
- Removal of snow from parking lanes on trunk highways
- Maintenance of markings at intersections on local roads
- Maintenance of parking-related markings installed on MnDOT roadways
- Maintaining, locating, and ongoing electrical costs for continuous or intersection lighting systems within the corporate city limits*
- Non-routine maintenance and routine maintenance and operation of pedestrian hybrid beacons and rectangular rapid flashing beacons
- Routine Maintenance of drainage elements, not including culverts**
- Maintenance of any amenities or aesthetic features on the roadway***
- Maintenance of Trees and non-stormwater related Green Infrastructure

*Except at roundabouts, where the City and MnDOT will share the cost of roundabouts maintenance which includes the lighting within the roundabout and approach or exiting lighting to the end of the splitter island, painted delineation, or up to approximately 400 feet from the roundabout.
**Routine maintenance includes removal of sediment debris, vegetation and ice from grates and catch basins. Replacement of grates or manhole covers. Pavement repair around manholes and catch basins.
***Amenities include streetscape or other elements not essential for roadway operations. This includes things like bike racks, garbage cans, benches, or similar elements. The scope of amenity construction with the project is yet to be determined.

Stormwater Infiltration Basin Maintenance Obligations
According to the Cost Participation Policy, there are maintenance obligations outlined as routine and non-routine. The Cost Participation Policy outlines baseline obligations and payments, but the final responsibility of maintenance tasks can be negotiated in a cooperative construction agreement.

According to the Cost Participation Manual, the owner performs routine maintenance for ponds and drainage treatment features within their right-of-way. Routine maintenance includes the following:

- Removing litter
- Clearing ice

- Mowing and vegetation management
- Minor erosion repairs
- Sediment and debris removal from structural pollution control or pre-treatment devices
- Utility Locates

Per the Cost Participation Manual, non-routine maintenance costs are determined by the ratio of contributing flow into the basin. Non-routine maintenance includes the following:

- Sediment removal beyond pre-treatment sediment removal.
- Major erosion, structure, pipe, and drain tile repair.
- Clearing drain tile.
- Replacement of filter media.

If the city chooses to follow the recommended Cost Participation Policy maintenance obligations, the City will be responsible for a percentage of non-routine maintenance. Current estimations show the city appears to contain roughly 37% of the contributing area, so we are estimating that they will take over 37% of the non-routine costs. This will be refined as the project design progresses through the final design. As stated previously, the maintenance obligations and costs can be negotiated through a cooperative agreement to ensure a fair representation of maintenance for all partners.

Please refer to the attached Layout for proposed locations of infiltration basins.

MnDOT will continue to coordinate the details of stormwater treatment with the city as the project moves through final design.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this submittal.

Sincerely,

Christopher Bower

Digitally signed by Christopher Bower
Date: 2026.04.17 13:07:22 -05'00'

Christopher Bower
North Area Engineer
christopher.bower@state.mn.us

Attachments:

- Final Layout for SP 0207-130, dated 4/14/2026
- MN Statutes 161.162 – 161.167
- Estimated Project Costs
- Sample City Resolution
- Timelapse Engagement Summary

cc:
Mathew Thibert
MnDOT Project Manager