



Metro District
1500 West County Road B2
Roseville, MN 55113

June 29, 2021

Terry Randall
Public Works Supervisor
City of Spring Lake Park
1301 81st Avenue NE
Spring Lake Park, Minnesota 55432

RE: Trunk Highway 47/65 Planning and Environmental Linkages Study – Request Review of the Purpose and Need Statement and Evaluation Criteria Reports.

Greetings,

Following up from our last correspondence in May 2020, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration’s Highway 47/65 Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study has progressed over the last 12 months developing the project Purpose and Need statement and Evaluation Criteria. As a recap, the PEL program is a tool for creating efficiency in transportation project development and supporting agencies to accelerate project delivery (See Attachment 1, FHWA’s PEL factsheet, for additional information) by jumpstarting the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process with a high-look planning level study.

The PEL Study area includes two parallel north-south corridors of Hwy 47 (University Avenue) and Hwy 65 (Central Avenue), each approximately 10 miles long, for a total of 20 highway miles. Within the PEL Study area, Hwy 47 and Hwy 65 pass through the cities of Minneapolis, in Hennepin County, and Columbia Heights, Hilltop, Fridley, Spring Lake Park, Coon Rapids, and Blaine, in Anoka County (see Figure A-1, TH 47/65 PEL Study Area, in Attachment 2). TH 65 is a vital link for traffic traveling between the Twin Cities urban core and northern suburban and exurban communities. Roadway character and configurations vary considerably, from 30-mph undivided urban-grid city streets with sidewalks and driveways, to highway-speed four-lane divided principal arterials carrying 35,000-45,000 vehicles per day.

This PEL study seeks to develop a thorough understanding of how all modes of transportation function with respect to the needs of the residents and businesses of the study area, and to then examine a range of alternatives that can effectively address safety, operational and mobility issues identified. To accomplish this, the TH 47/65 PEL study has development the Purpose and Need statement and Evaluation Criteria.

We request your review and comments or questions on the PEL Purpose and Need and Evaluation Criteria reports within 30 days of receipt of this letter, see links below to the Highway 47/65 PEL website.

A PEL study does not supplant obligations for consultation in a future NEPA process, but electing to not review and comment (as appropriate) on a PEL study following 23 CFR 450 requirements does mean that you may lose an opportunity to effect change in a future environmental process. ***Failure to comment is considered acceptance.***

Highway 47/65 PEL Website: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/hwy47andhwy65study/>

The next step of our PEL Study, after gathering public and agency input on the Purpose and Need and Evaluation Criteria, will be to start the alternatives development and evaluation process. An Alternatives Analysis report will summarize this process and is expected sometime next year. We will provide a notification when it is available for review. Please contact me at Anthony.Wotzka@state.mn.us or (651)234-7712 for questions or additional information.

Sincerely,



Tony Wotzka, PLA
North Area Coordinator
MnDOT Metro District
TH 47/65 PEL Project Manager

Enclosures

Attachment 1 – FHWA PEL Factsheet

Attachment 2 – TH 47/65 PEL Study Location Maps

cc:

Andrew Emanuele, FHWA

Lynn Clarkowski, MnDOT

Lisa Elliott, MnDOT

Nani Jacobson, MnDOT

Brigid Gombold, MnDOT

ATTACHMENT 1

PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES

FHWA PEL Fact Sheet

FHWA PEL website: https://www.environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_initiatives/pel.aspx

Planning and Environment Linkages



What is PEL?

Planning and Environment Linkages (PEL) is a valuable tool for creating efficiency in transportation project development and supporting agencies to accelerate project delivery.

- » **PEL represents a collaborative and integrated approach** to transportation decision-making that considers benefits and impacts of proposed transportation system improvements to the environment, community, and economy during the transportation planning process.
- » **PEL assists project delivery.** Agencies can agree to a project's purpose and need, define the preliminary range of alternatives, eliminate unreasonable alternatives, and begin public involvement and documentation of planning decisions through PEL.
- » **PEL is flexible.** Practitioners can use a variety of authorities to implement PEL in a way that meets their individual needs.

Why Use PEL?

State and local agencies can achieve significant benefits by incorporating environmental and community values into transportation decisions early in planning and carrying these considerations through project development and delivery. **Benefits include:**

» **Minimize duplication of efforts**

A PEL approach improves information sharing and early consultation among State DOTs, Federal agencies, and resource agencies, resulting in reduced or eliminated duplication of work in planning and NEPA processes.

» **Documentation**

Taking a PEL approach can help document planning information and decisions for environmental review and NEPA.

» **Decisions & analysis to inform NEPA**

PEL uses transportation planning decisions and analysis, including purpose and need, identification of preliminary alternatives, and elimination of unreasonable alternatives, to inform NEPA.

» **Flexible approaches**

PEL can be implemented using a number of approaches, making it a flexible and adaptable tool across States. States can employ PEL to supplement and enhance their existing processes while still realizing PEL's benefits.

» **Enhanced community involvement**

PEL can give the public an early opportunity to assess project components and provide meaningful input on future projects in a way that is more accountable and responsive to the community.

» **Improved relationships & coordination**

Taking a PEL approach often improves relationships and coordination with partner agencies, including stronger information sharing and better communication.

PEL Resources

Visit the PEL website at environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_initiatives/pel.aspx to access these resources:

» **Trainings & workshops**

Watch pre-recorded webinars that provide a detailed overview of PEL, walk participants through using PEL for historic preservation, and provide guidance on corridor studies, among other topics.

» **Guidance**

Browse detailed guidance on a number of key initiatives that encourage the integration of planning and the environment in the transportation decision-making process. Topics include collaborative decision-making, corridor planning, freight, and land use, among others.

New resources coming soon!

- » **PEL Guidebook.** Coming fall 2019, the PEL Guidebook will serve as a tool for practitioners and will illustrate multiple, flexible approaches for using PEL.
- » **NHI PEL Training Course.** A two-day training. The NHI training course will cover what PEL is and how you can use the PEL approach in your state. Coming fall 2019.

Funding Flexibility

PEL offers flexibility in funding. Planning funds (Metropolitan Planning [PL]/State Planning and Research [SPR] and Surface Transportation Program Block Grant [STPBG]) can be used for aspects of PEL studies, including corridor and feasibility studies, which can be used to accelerate project delivery. For more information on funding options and verifying funding eligibility, please visit www.fhwa.dot.gov/federalaid/projects.pdf

The FAST Act & PEL

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) continues efforts to streamline project delivery:

- » Efficient environmental reviews for project decisionmaking (Section 1304),
 - » Integration of planning and environmental review (Section 1305), and
 - » Development of programmatic mitigation plans (Section 1306)
- » Learn more about the FAST Act at environment.fhwa.dot.gov/legislation/authorizations/FASTact.aspx

One Federal Decision & PEL

In accordance with Executive Order 13807, USDOT and other Federal departments signed a memorandum of understanding in April 2018 to implement a process that delivers environmental reviews and authorization decisions for major infrastructure projects as One Federal Decision (OFD).

A key goal of OFD is to reduce the average time to complete environmental review processes to two years. Using a PEL approach can facilitate this accelerated review process timeline.

- » Learn more about OFD at environment.fhwa.dot.gov/nepa/oneFederal_decision.aspx



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

Want more information?

If you are interested in learning more about the PEL program and would like to discuss opportunities for your agency to accelerate project delivery, you can submit a request online at:

environment.fhwa.dot.gov/env_initiatives/pel/request_pel_info.aspx

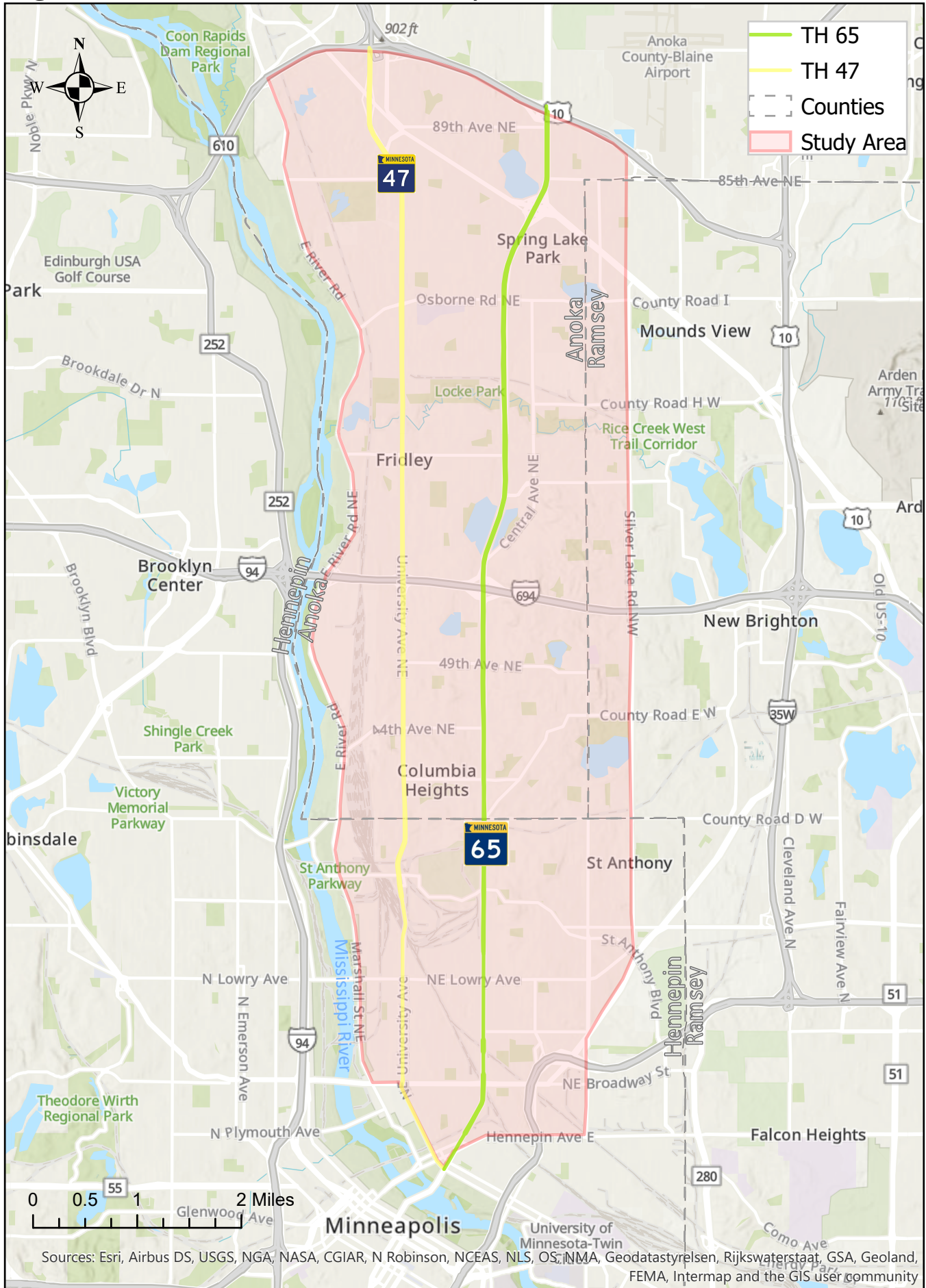
Attachment 2

LOCATION MAPS

Figure A-1: Study Area Location Map

Figure A-2: Study Area Map and Buffer

Figure A-1: TH 47/65 PEL Study Area



Sources: Esri, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, INMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap and the GIS user community

