

Highway 97 Improvement Project – Environmental Assessment Worksheet

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) has prepared an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) for its Highway (Hwy)¹ 97 project as required by state law ([Minnesota Rules 4410.0050](#)). MnDOT uses the EAW to describe the basic facts and impacts of a project and to decide if a more detailed environmental document (environmental impact statement) is needed. The EAW also lets the public know about the project, provides information on permits needed to build the project, and helps identify ways to reduce impacts to the environment. The EAW is not meant to approve or deny a project but be a source of information to guide other approvals.

Project Overview

The project rebuilds about 1.8 miles of Hwy 97 from a two-lane (one lane in each direction), undivided, rural road to a two-lane, divided, urban road in the cities of Forest Lake and Columbus. Most (1.7 miles) of the project is in Forest Lake. The project includes a roundabout at Fenway Ave North, a trail for those that walk, bike, and roll, turn lanes at key intersections, lighting, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, traffic signal work, and stormwater treatment.

Executive Summary of EAW

The EAW uses a state-required form which includes questions about potential impacts to the environment because of the project. The Hwy 97 EAW has attachments (titled A – M) that provide more background information and communications with experts in topic areas in the questions. Attachment A includes maps and figures, while the other attachments include information and communications on wetlands, geology, contamination, threatened and endangered species, vegetation, noise, cultural resources, floodplains, and recreational areas.

Table 1 provides a summary of each question in the Hwy 97 EAW. Please refer to the full EAW for more details.

¹ Note – Highway 97 is called “Trunk Highway 97” or “TH 97” in the EAW. Trunk Highways include interstate, U.S., and Minnesota Highway routes.

Table 1: Summary of Highway 97 EAW Questions

Questions(s)	Subject(s)	Summary	Attachments
1 - 6	Project Title, Proposer, RGU, Reason for EAW Preparation, Project Location / Description	Questions 1-6 describe the project and its location. MnDOT is the proposer and Responsible Governmental Unit (RGU) for the project. The EAW was prepared because it will impact at least one acre of a public water wetland (Minnesota Rules 4410.4300 Subpart 27.a). Question 6 describes the need for, and purpose of, the project.	A (Figures 1-6)
7	Climate Adaptation and Resilience	Question 7 includes data on potential changes in future temperature and rainfall. MnDOT considers future climate and includes design elements in the project to meet future conditions. Design elements for land use, water resources, contamination, and fish, wildlife and plant communities are in Table 6.	A (Figure 7)
8	Cover Types	Question 8 identifies acres of different land cover types (trees, grass, wetlands, farmland) before and after MnDOT builds the project. Most land next to the roadway is grass/lawn, wetlands, or farmland. It also notes the amount (in acres) of trees MnDOT will be cutting down. The project will increase the amount of paved surface in the project area.	A (Figure 8)
9	Permits and Approvals Required	Question 9 includes a summary of federal, state, and local permits needed to build the project, and the status (are they done, are they in process, or are they complete) of the permits.	N/A
10	Land Use	Question 10 provides a summary of existing land uses (homes, businesses, airports, farms, parks) next to the roadway. Rebuilding Hwy 97 will impact the Lamprey Pass Wildlife Management Area owned by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR). MnDOT has worked with MDNR to reduce project impacts to Lamprey Pass. The project works with current and planned land uses for Forest Lake and Columbus. Both cities expect to have more development next to and near Hwy 97. The project will not impact flights into or out of the Forest Lake airport. A part of the project is in a 100-year floodplain. A study of the floodplain (Attachment L) indicates there are no significant impacts.	A (Figures 3-6, 10-12, 14), K-M
11	Geology, Soils, and Topography/ Landforms	Question 11 summarizes existing geology, soils, and topography (hilly, flat) in the project area as well as soil removal, grading, and erosion and sediment control activities that will be used during construction. The topography of the project area is flat. Parts of the project have soils which are not good for roads. In these areas, a suitable light-weight fill material will be used to make the roadway stronger.	A (Figure 15), B
12	Water Resources	Question 12 summarizes impacts water. Several wetlands and one creek were identified along with wells within 100 feet of the project. The project also includes ponds and other elements to help manage additional stormwater that comes from the increase in paved surfaces. The project will impact 3.3 acres of wetlands and wet ditches. MnDOT is preparing permits for these impacts for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. MnDOT will provide replacement wetlands in a different location as a part of the project.	A, (Figures 5, 16-19), C, L,
13	Contamination/ Hazardous Materials / Wastes	Question 13 summarizes areas of known contamination. Because MnDOT was worried there could be pollution in the ground next to the roadway, MnDOT conducted additional studies and tests on the dirt/soil. These studies are Phase I and Phase II Environmental Site Assessments. Please refer to the EAW for a summary of this work. This section describes MnDOT's ways for dealing with project waste and identifies materials that may require special treatment.	A (Figure 5), D, J
14	Fish, Wildlife, Plant Communities, and Sensitive Ecological Resources	Question 14 includes a summary of plants and animals in and around the project area, including those protected by state and/or federal laws. The EAW describes what the project will do to avoid or decrease impacts to protected plants and animals. Input from the MDNR and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in the EAW and Attachments E, F and G.	E, F, G
15	Historic Properties	Question 15 identifies cultural resources and historic properties. MnDOT works with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to identify these properties and to determine if the project will impact these properties. SHPO considers the Forest Lake Airport to be historic. MnDOT determined the project would not negatively impact the airport.	H
16	Visual	The highway and area next to it do not have beautiful or unusual views.	None
17	Air	Question 17 describes impacts to air quality, including pollution from cars and trucks, dust, and odors. The project does not require a detailed air quality analysis because traffic volumes are below state limits requiring a detailed analysis and because Minnesota meets current air quality standards. MnDOT provides a list of activities the people rebuilding the roadway can use to reduce dust and odors during construction.	None
18	Greenhouse Gas Emissions / Carbon Footprint	Question 18 summarizes greenhouse gas emissions that are likely to happen during construction and after the project is built. Greenhouse gas emission estimates for doing nothing (No Build) and the proposed project (Build) alternatives are in Table 17 in the EAW.	None
19	Noise	Question 19 identifies traffic and construction noise impacts. MnDOT does not expect the project to increase traffic noise. Construction of the project will increase noise, but the noise increase will only be during construction. Information on construction noise is in the EAW. Most construction activities will be during the day.	I

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20	Transportation	Question 20 describes impacts on traffic and parking. Except for a small gravel parking space for MDNR employees to access Lamprey Pass, no additional parking spaces will be created. The project is not expected to increase traffic; however, future traffic is expected to grow by about 23 percent over the next 20 years due to planned growth and development.	None
21	Cumulative Potential Effects	<p>Question 21 provides an overview of anticipated effects that may come from other projects, and continued growth and development in the project area, along with the project. Together, these activities are called “cumulative effects.”</p> <p>The timing and location of future development along Hwy 97 is unknown but is likely to occur over the next 20 years. Table 19 in the EAW identifies potential cumulative effects related to geology/soils, water resources, contaminated and hazardous materials, fish and wildlife resources, noise, and transportation.</p>	None
22	Other Potential Environmental Effects	MnDOT does not expect the project to cause other impacts.	None

Next Steps

MnDOT will make public the EAW in the Minnesota EQB Monitor. This begins a 30-day period during which anyone can provide comments on the EAW and the Hwy 97 project. MnDOT will also put an official legal notice in the Forest Lake Times. After the 30-day comment period, MnDOT must decide if an EIS is needed. MnDOT will prepare a Record of Decision, including a Findings of Fact and respond to comments collected during the comment period. MnDOT will distribute notice of this decision in the EQB Monitor and to those that provide comments on the document.

List of EAW Attachments

- A. Figures
- B. Geology
- C. Wetland Documentation
- D. Contaminated Properties Documentation
- E. Section 7 Correspondence
- F. DNR Correspondence
- G. MnDOT Roadside Vegetation Management Review
- H. MnDOT Cultural Resources Unit (CRU) Correspondence and Section 106 Documentation
- I. Noise Determination Correspondence
- J. MnDOT Regulated Materials Unit Correspondence
- K. MnDOT Aeronautics Unit Correspondence
- L. Floodplain Documentation
- M. Preliminary Section 4(f) De Minimis Determination