

Highway 61 Hastings Corridor Visioning Study

Executive Summary

June 2024

The goal of the Hastings Highway 61 Corridor Visioning Study was to obtain community input for the evaluation of alternatives that help to create the long-term vision for Highway 61 between 4th and 36th Streets in Hastings. The existing roadway (portions of which were last reconstructed in 1931) is nearing the end of its useful life and warrants replacement. The Visioning Study project started in February 2022, with final recommendations recognized through a resolution of support passed by the Hastings City Council in June 2023.

Existing Conditions and Challenges

An extensive public engagement program was conducted to facilitate three phases of work during the Visioning Study: 1) Issues, 2) Alternatives, 3) Recommendations. Public meetings and stakeholder outreach were conducted during each phase of work. With public input including a public open house held in May 2022, the project team identified the following key issues for the corridor:

- **Traffic volume and speed.** – Over 30,000 vehicles use the corridor daily (projected to be at 40,000 by 2040), with significant portions of heavy truck use during the day. The combination of high volumes and excessive vehicle speeds divides the community and creates a barrier to the safe movements and flow of the City. A majority of the 2.3-mile-long corridor is characterized by four 12-foot lanes (two running in each direction) plus an alternating 12-foot center left turn median lane. This configuration is perceived as enabling high speeds that create discomfort for motorists and pedestrians.
- **Safety.** – Over 370 crashes occurred during the five-year study period, with several pedestrian crashes identified. 13 of the 26 intersections have a crash rate higher than the statewide rate, including at Highway 316 where the rate is more than three times higher (0.43 vs. 0.13).
- **Multimodal uses.** – Pedestrians and bicyclists have difficulty crossing Highway 61 and travelling along the corridor. From the Vermillion River to 36th Street, there are significant gaps in the sidewalk or trail network. The wide lanes, multiple driveways, and vehicle speeds are not conducive to a comfortable environment for those who do not drive.
- **Access.** – With more than 120 businesses fronting Highway 61, the density of access points along the corridor creates additional safety and congestion challenges.



Purpose and Need for Alternatives Development

Through early public engagement and analysis, the project team was able to identify corridor needs that project alternatives would be intended to address. The purpose of alternatives developed during the corridor study was to facilitate safe and efficient multimodal movement of people and goods on the Highway 61 corridor while maintaining infrastructure at a state of good repair and enabling community connections.

The second public comment period and open house held in August 2022 was used to present, and obtain feedback on, a variety of alternative design concepts. In addition to the issues described above, key specific locations in the corridor that required analysis of multiple alternatives included the Highway 316 and the Highway 55 intersections. Both represent critical turning movements in the corridor.

Recommendations

The Visioning Study's final phase of work involved presentation of preliminary corridor recommendations at the third public meeting in March 2023. Key recommendations included the following:

- *Downtown pedestrian safety.* – Closure of the median break at 5th and 7th Streets. A median at these locations with fewer vehicle turning movements can serve as a “refuge” for pedestrian crossings.
- *Highway 55 intersection.* – Closure and reduction of some access points and reconstruction of the deteriorating Todd Field wall will allow for longer turn lanes for vehicles turning from Highway 61 to Highway 55. These movements currently back up and cause congestion on Highway 61.
- *Access closure and new traffic signals.* – Additional consolidation of access points between 12th Street and 18th Street reduce conflict points and enable safer mid-block pedestrian crossing locations in addition to new traffic signals at 18th Street and 23rd Streets.
- *Highway 316 intersection.* – Conversion of this intersection to a roundabout is proposed, providing continuity with the recently completed Highway 316 corridor improvements. This improvement helps resolve the traffic operations and safety issues caused by a heavy left turn movement from southbound Highway 61 to Highway 316.



Visualization of proposed median refuge for pedestrian crossings on Highway 61.

Benefits

The proposed project will include reconstruction of the corridor for a revitalization of all infrastructure assets. The improvements will be done in conjunction with the City of Hastings' planned reconstruction of critical public utilities in the corridor.

Traffic modeling for the current and proposed corridor demonstrates notable travel time benefits are expected because of this project. This result is most apparent for southbound travel during the afternoon peak period (around 5:00pm):

- In 2022, the typical trip from 4th Street to 36th Street during the afternoon peak period would take approximately 4.8 minutes to complete.
- If no improvements are made to the corridor, that travel time will increase to approximately 22 minutes in 2040.
- With the improvements proposed in our recommended alternative, travel time over the same distance will take approximately 5.2 minutes.
- In short, with the proposed improvements, travel times are expected to remain similar to current conditions while the corridor will feature safer and more accessible conditions for all users.

The proposed improvements include new roundabouts, traffic signals, and trail segments, a backage road system for business access, and a new pedestrian bridge over the Vermillion River. New pavement, stormwater management features, and technology (such as lighting and electric vehicle charging) will create a more resilient roadway corridor. The plan also identifies community space-making opportunities for art or other public facilities. This vision is designed to have Highway 61 better serve its combined roles as the heart of Hastings and a major thoroughfare for the larger region.



Concept for a new roundabout at the Highway 316 intersection.