



1.0

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Study Area

The Anoka County Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road Corridor Study includes both Anoka County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 1 and CSAH 3 between 7th Avenue (CSAH 7) and Trunk Highway (TH) 610. CSAH 1 is also known as East River Road from TH 610 to the intersection with CSAH 3, as Coon Rapids Boulevard from the intersection with CSAH 3 to the Coon Rapids/Anoka city border, and as East River Road from the Coon Rapids/Anoka border to 7th Avenue.

From TH 610 to 7th Avenue, CSAH 1 is 5.8 miles long. This segment of the corridor is located primarily in the City of Coon Rapids (5.5 miles) with the exception of the link between 9th Avenue and 7th Avenue, which is in the City of Anoka (0.3 miles). It is a minor arterial with a four-lane divided section between TH 610 and CSAH 3 and between Egret Boulevard and 9th Avenue, a seven-lane (three lanes southeastbound/four lanes northwestbound) divided section between CSAH 3 and Avocet Street, a five-lane (two lanes southeastbound/three lanes northwestbound) divided section between Avocet Street and Egret Boulevard, and a four-lane undivided section between 9th Avenue and 7th Avenue. It is typically situated within 150 feet of right-of-way southeast of 9th Avenue, and 66 feet of right-of-way between 9th Avenue and 7th Avenue. The posted speed limit is 45 miles per hour (mph) southeast of Mississippi Boulevard, 50 mph between Mississippi Boulevard and Blackfoot Street, and 35 mph northwest of Blackfoot Street.

CSAH 3, also known as Coon Rapids Boulevard, is approximately one mile long from TH 610 to CSAH 1. This segment of the corridor is located entirely within the City of Coon Rapids. It is a minor arterial roadway with a four-lane divided section, typically situated within 120 to 200 feet of right-of-way. The posted speed limit is 50 mph.

The study area is depicted in [Exhibit 1-1](#).

1.2 Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify concepts for improving mobility, increasing safety, and enhancing the appearance and economic vitality along the Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road corridor. This study presents the existing conditions along the corridor, and presents 20-year traffic forecasts for the planning horizon year of 2030. This study documents the data and analysis used to develop and screen alternatives to arrive at feasible concepts for recommendation and implementation that will be able to accommodate the forecast year traffic and provide for safety enhancements. The study does not anticipate reconstruction of the corridor to occur at one time. The identified concepts will be implemented over time as funding opportunities arise and redevelopment occurs along the corridor.

1.3 Study Process

In order to develop concepts and recommendations for long-term redevelopment and transportation improvements along the corridor, several features required review in concert with an inclusive stakeholder outreach program. Land use, demographics, transit, trails, safety, access, traffic, freight movements, as well as environmental and cultural constraints were reviewed to understand existing conditions and evaluate options for corridor improvements. Project committees and other stakeholders were engaged over an 18-month process to document existing conditions and determine recommendations with an implementation plan.



1.3.1 Project Committees

Two committees were formed for the Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road corridor study, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC).

The TAC met monthly to review issues and concerns from a technical point of view. Members provided input into the development of alternatives and other project components, while representing the issues and priorities of their respective jurisdictions. The TAC members are listed in [Exhibit 1-2](#).

TAC Members	Jurisdiction	Title
Kate Garwood	Anoka County	Multimodal Transportation Manager (Project Manager)
Matthew Parent	Anoka County	Transportation Planner
Jane Rose	Anoka County	Traffic Engineering Manager
Andrew Witter	Anoka County	Assistant County Engineer
Steve Gatlin	City of Coon Rapids	Public Services Director
Marc Nevinski	City of Coon Rapids	Planning Department and Community Development Director
Carolyn Braun	City of Anoka	Planning Director
Greg Lee	City of Anoka	Public Services Director

EXHIBIT 1-2
TAC Members

In addition to the listed TAC members; Ann Braden, Metropolitan Council; Jill Hentges, Metro Transit; Craig LaMothe, Metro Transit; and representatives from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) were invited to TAC meetings or were involved in separate meetings as relevant issues arose.

The PAC met approximately every four months to provide a broader policy perspective regarding corridor issues. PAC members served as a communication link to constituents and elected officials regarding the project. The TAC members were present at PAC meetings to present project information and share information between the committees. The PAC members are listed in [Exhibit 1-3](#).

PAC Members	Jurisdiction	Title
Paul Johnson	City of Coon Rapids	Council Member
Scott Schulte	City of Coon Rapids	Council Member
Joe Sidoti	City of Coon Rapids	Council Member
Mark Freeberg	City of Anoka	Council Member
Jeff Weaver	City of Anoka	Council Member
Dan Erhart	Anoka County	Commissioner
Scott LeDoux	Anoka County	Commissioner

EXHIBIT 1-3
PAC Members



EXHIBIT 1-1 Study Area

1.3.2 Public Involvement

The project’s public involvement plan (PIP) consisted of various activities to engage stakeholders and obtain input on the study process. In addition to regular meetings with the two project committees, local agencies/ organizations, regulatory agencies, residents, and business owners were invited to provide input through several different techniques. Informational postcards, the local newspaper, and city/county websites were used to disseminate information, notice public meetings, and provide contact information for project team members.

The goals and objectives of the public involvement process were to:

1. Facilitate active and collaborative participation by local units of government.
 - a. Give a voice to Anoka County, the City of Anoka, and the City of Coon Rapids within the corridor.
 - b. Utilize project committee participation to keep elected officials informed.
 - c. Keep lines of communication open.
2. Help the public to feel comfortable with the proposed project and the process of decision-making.
 - a. Build trust between stakeholders and the TAC.
 - b. Keep key stakeholders engaged throughout the entire process.
 - c. Let stakeholders know why their participation is important.
 - d. Be respectful of previous and underlying political and community issues.



3. Collect public input to make a better project.
 - a. Give the public enough information to be able to make meaningful comments on the project.
 - b. Keep lines of communication open.
 - c. Be respectful of public ideas and input.
 - d. Consider public input when making decisions.

The intended outcome of the PIP was for the public to feel satisfied with their level of participation, and to know they assisted the county and cities in creating a project that met the overall purpose. It was important for the public to feel positive about their contribution, facilitating a feeling of local ownership in the project that would continue through subsequent phases.

The corridor business community was divided into two groups by city – an Anoka business group, and a Coon Rapids business group. Five meetings were held with area business owners during the course of the project, in April 2009 (Anoka and Coon Rapids), December 2009 (Anoka and Coon Rapids), and April 2010 (Coon Rapids). An additional meeting focusing on the businesses along the East River Road segment in Coon Rapids was held in February 2010.

Three sets of open houses were held over the course of the project and were promoted to target residents as well as other key stakeholders. The March 2009 open house communicated general project information and study purpose, and facilitated an exercise of identifying issues and corridor vision with the public. The February 2010 open house illustrated initial concepts for public comment. The last open house occurred in June 2010 where final recommendations were presented for public input.

Members of the project team also made presentations to the city councils and planning commissions of Anoka and Coon Rapids at two points during the study. The project updates were provided once in February/March 2009 to provide project information and background, and once in May 2010 to present recommendations for feedback.

A schedule showing the public engagement process is shown in **Exhibit 1-4**.

EXHIBIT 1-4
Public Involvement Schedule

Work Task	Concepts											Recommendations								
	1 Dec 2008	2 Jan 2009	3 Feb 2009	4 Mar 2009	5 Apr 2009	6 May 2009	7 Jun 2009	8 Jul 2009	9 Aug 2009	10 Sep 2009	11 Oct 2009	12 Nov 2009	13 Dec 2009	14 Jan 2010	15 Feb 2010	16 Mar 2010	17 Apr 2010	18 May 2010	19 Jun 2010	
Technical Advisory Committee Meetings	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Policy Advisory Committee Meetings						◆						◆					◆			
Public Open House Meetings				▲											▲					▲
City Council Meetings			●															●		
Agency Coordination Meetings†					■													■	■	
Business Owner/Renter Meetings					■								■		■		■			

*Residential meetings did not occur separately, but were incorporated into public open house meetings.

†Specific separate agency coordination meetings included with: Anoka-Hennepin School District, Mercy Hospital, Hospital Emergency Services, Anoka-Ramsey Community College, Anoka County Parks, Metro Transit

1.4 Corridor Vision

Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road has served the communities of Coon Rapids and Anoka over many decades, providing an important transportation link and quickly becoming a corridor of regional significance. As the communities have grown, the land uses and travel patterns in the corridor have naturally changed over time. In light of these changes and the anticipated future demands on the corridor, it has become apparent that an updated corridor vision is needed – one that meets the needs of the people, businesses, and the surrounding area today and into the future.

To assist in the development of this vision, meetings with area residents and business owners were held in March and April 2009 to solicit feedback on the current Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road corridor. Three separate residential meetings were held, drawing approximately 100 attendees in total. Two business owner/operator meetings were also held in Coon Rapids, and one in Anoka. A separate corridor travelers meeting also drew a representative from the Anoka-Hennepin School District. Meeting attendees were broken into smaller groups and asked a set of questions that covered the areas of land use, traffic and safety, and overall corridor experience. Business owners/operators were asked additional questions related to access and impacts to their businesses. The participants also provided ideas about solutions that they thought should be considered as a part of the study. The purpose of this exercise was to develop an overall vision for the corridor, which would then guide the development of specific policy and physical concepts for the roadway. From the detailed list of the responses and ideas of the participants, a summary was prepared and is provided in the following sections.

1.4.1 Stakeholder Feedback

Land Use

Participants had mixed feelings about the potential for residential uses eventually replacing commercial uses along the corridor. Some thought they would like to see the roadway take on a more residential character. There were more comments favoring low density development. However, there also were favorable comments about senior housing, presumably higher density projects. The patio home project that replaced the Chrysler dealership near Arby's received several negative comments, largely because residents do not find it visually attractive and expressed that it is not in character with the remainder of the corridor.

Meeting participants expressed awareness that residential reuse immediately adjacent to the roadway may be difficult because of the amount of noise and traffic on the corridor. Participants expressed concern that more traffic lanes would deter residential development.

A community center in Coon Rapids was generally considered to be an asset to the corridor, and other government/institutional buildings would be a positive enhancement. The growth of the hospital and peripheral office uses near Round Lake Boulevard were considered bright spots on a business corridor that was otherwise perceived as tired and declining.

There were multiple comments in support of a return of the retail businesses that used to exist in the corridor, especially a major grocery store. However, participants also realized that it is extremely hard to compete with the Riverdale shopping area. That said, participants expressed that retention of CVS and Walgreens was highly desirable along with development of more restaurants and smaller service-oriented businesses (dry cleaner, barbershop, etc.).

Examples of stakeholder feedback:

“Would like to see residential, consistent with land use plan, some commercial (support residential, grocery, no big box).”

“Assisted living is a good idea.”

“Drug stores help the viability of the corridor.”

“Government buildings such as community center on the boulevard would be good.”

Traffic and Safety

Coon Rapids Boulevard/East River Road is a major commuter route. The residents commented that there are too many traffic lights, poor left turn lanes, traffic lights that seem uncoordinated, and that there is a dangerous merge required near Egret Boulevard where East River Road and Coon Rapids Boulevard come together. Pedestrians and bicyclists find the street difficult and dangerous to cross. They also expressed a desire for a continuous sidewalk and trail system along the corridor, instead of the current patchwork of sidewalk and trail segments.

Examples of stakeholder feedback:

“Junction of Coon Rapids Boulevard (CSAH 3) and East River Road (CSAH 1) at the southeast end of the corridor is dangerous.”

“Not much bike/walk activity due to safety concerns.”

“People avoid Coon Rapids Boulevard after 3PM. Scary during rush hour.”

“There is not enough time available for pedestrians to cross the street.”

Corridor Experience

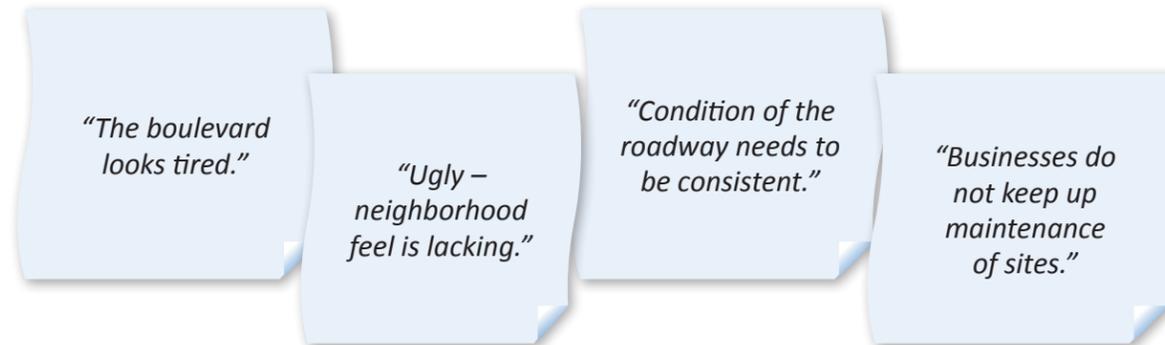
The general corridor impressions reported by participants in the visioning meetings were not positive. Residents and business owners/operators see the corridor as ugly, dreary, and uninviting. Vacant buildings do not seem to be maintained. There were a few bright spots noted, including landscaping implemented near Coon Creek. But overall, the opinion was that there is no consistent visual theme in the corridor.

The physical condition of the roadway also was an issue. Although improvements have been made recently, people expressed frustration that the surface was not consistently smooth, improvements seemed to be piecemeal, and there were too many potholes on the road, making it unpleasant to drive, especially in the Anoka segment.



There are many empty storefronts along the roadway. Consequently, participants expressed that the corridor looks a bit like a ghost town. The vitality of the corridor was further affected when Coon Rapids City Hall and the post office left the area. However, it was recognized that the college and hospital bring a lot of activity to the area. Participants also believe that a community center would be a positive asset for the economic vitality of the whole corridor.

Examples of stakeholder feedback:



1.4.2 Agency Objectives

Meetings were also held with staff from Anoka County and each of the cities to capture their objectives and priorities for the corridor.

Anoka County objectives include:

1. Safety improvements are a priority.
2. A multimodal approach is important to accommodate a variety of corridor users, including: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, trucks/freight, and automobiles.
3. Capacity improvements are needed to mitigate current and anticipated (2030) congestion, particularly southeast of Hanson Boulevard.

The cities of Coon Rapids and Anoka had several specific objectives when considering the redesign of the corridor, including:

1. Make sure that the roadway does more than just move traffic. The concept of “context sensitive solutions” should be investigated. Focus on visual quality of the corridor, including consistency in design, landscaping, signage, and other visual aspects; possibly including a visual quality improvement demonstration on part of the corridor.
2. Higher activity around the Coon Rapids preservation or redevelopment tract (Port) areas (Evergreen, Riverwalk, Campus Square, Wellness) as identified in previous studies.
3. Project elements should facilitate/enhance economic viability of businesses within the corridor.

1.4.3 Creating a Vision

The project team considered all of the stakeholder feedback collectively and crafted it into a vision statement for the corridor, along with goals and objectives to support the overall vision.

VISION STATEMENT

Anoka County and the cities of Coon Rapids and Anoka will develop a safe, efficient, and visually appealing corridor that enhances economic vitality, provides connections for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users, and creates a regionally identifiable corridor with distinctive local places.

1.4.4 Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Improve safety in the corridor for all users (drivers, pedestrians, etc).

Objectives:

- Limit traffic conflict points by consolidating access.
- Designate crosswalks and pedestrian amenities.
- Connect sidewalks and trails to provide a more consistent system.
- Enhance corridor lighting where appropriate.

Goal 2: Allow for efficient local and regional movement of goods, people, and vehicles in the corridor.

Objectives:

- Achieve an acceptable Level of Service (LOS D which equates to a maximum 55 second average delay at an intersection) along corridor segments and intersections.
- Limit traffic signals and maintain signal synchronization.
- Support improvements to TH 10.
- Provide accommodations for transit integration and growth in the corridor.

Goal 3: Enhance the visual quality of the corridor.

Objectives:

- Develop an overall visual quality theme for the corridor that allows for distinctive local places.
- Focus on consistency in access, frontage, and boulevard standards.
- Integrate landscaping and other visual amenities as feasible.
- Develop design standards for storefronts.

Goal 4: Support and expand land uses in the corridor.**Objectives:**

- Integrate a mix of residential, business, and institutional uses which adhere to the Port principles previously established by the City of Coon Rapids.
- Provide access to businesses that is easy to navigate.
- Provide consistent business and institutional signage to increase driver comfort and expectation.

Goal 5: Enhance the economic vitality of the corridor.**Objectives:**

- Implement city land use plans.
- Evaluate unique and innovative elements/features that provide multi-modal transportation, including cars, transit vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles.
- Provide amenities and features along the corridor that reduce the scale of the corridor, facilitate commerce, and promote private investment.

The vision document was presented to the PAC and posted to the project website for stakeholder information. This visioning statement served as the touchstone and framework for the corridor study analysis and development.