

Appendix L

Environmental Review Process Scenarios

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 1, 2007
To: Dennis Luebbe, Rice County Engineer
From: Ron Roetzel, P.E.
Chris Chromy, P.E., P.T.O.E.
RE: CSAH 1 Corridor Preservation Study
Environmental Review Process Scenarios
BMI Proj. No. T42.21955

The purpose of this document is to identify the potential environmental review processes and scenarios that would be the next step in the implementation of a new highway corridor for CSAH 1 in Dundas and Northfield in Rice County. Environmental reviews are monitored and regulated by the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB). There are several potential environmental review studies, such as Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW), Environmental Assessment (EA), Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR). These studies are defined as follows:

- An Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW)/Scoping EAW is a “brief document”, which is designed to set out the basic facts necessary to determine if an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required for the proposed project. Its primary, legal purpose is to provide the information needed to determine whether the project has the potential for significant environmental effects; it also provides permit information, informs the public about a project and helps identify ways to protect the environment. An EAW is required for highway projects in Minnesota that includes:
 - One mile or more of new alignment
 - Additional travel lanes of one mile or more on an existing roadway
 - A new, grade-separated interchange
- An Environmental Assessment (EA) is a concise public document, similar to an EAW, that is prepared by a federal agency when a proposed action is not covered by a categorical exclusion or otherwise except from NEPA. Federal Agencies use the EA to determine whether the proposed action has potential to cause significant environmental effects. An EA is required for federally funded highway projects in Minnesota that meet the requirements for a mandatory EAW. Often times, an EAW with Federal Questions can be used to meet the requirements of an EA.
- An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) provides information about the extent of significant environmental impacts stated in the EAW. The EIS reviews the extent of these impacts and how they may be avoided or minimized. Intended primarily for government decision-makers who must approve the project, the information is used by the proposer and the general public as well. The EIS is not a means to approve or disapprove a project, but is simply a source of information to guide approval decisions. Occasionally, the information results in an alternative site or design being selected. More commonly, the information suggests changes or mitigative measures to minimize potential impacts that can later be imposed via governmental approvals. The EIS

process has additional requirements when the project is considered a federal undertaking. An EIS is required for highway project in Minnesota that includes:

- Four or more lanes in width and Two or more miles in length
 - Or, as determined by the completion of an EAW or EA
- An Alternative Urban Areawide Review (AUAR) is a hybrid of the EAW and EIS review process, following State of Minnesota environmental guidelines. This review's key feature is that its subject is a developmental scenario or several scenarios for a large geographical area rather than a specific project, including necessary infrastructure expansion necessary to serve the area. The local unit establishes development scenarios based upon the comprehensive plan, zoning ordinances, developer's plans, and other relevant information. More than one scenario can be reviewed, providing at least one is consistent with the adopted comprehensive plan. A maximum development "worst case" scenario is usually included. Development scenarios chosen by the local unit serve as the project description for the environmental impacts analysis. The AUAR uses a standard list of questions adapted from the EAW, providing a level of analysis for typical urban area impacts comparable to an EIS. A draft and final document is prepared and distributed in a manner similar to an EIS to ensure adequate review.

CSAH 1 Environmental Review Scenarios:

As has been discussed at the Project Advisory Committee meetings, there are two scenarios to consider in proceeding to a formal environmental review for the preferred planning alignment concept. Variations of these scenarios are possible. The two scenarios under consideration at this time include:

Scenario 1 – Preparation of an EAW Scoping Document and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for CSAH 1 between Baldwin Avenue and TH 246:

The preferred planning alignment concept is approximately 5.15 miles in total length and includes approximately 3.5 miles of new roadway alignment. The intent is to preserve this corridor for a future 4-lane urban highway though a 2-lane highway would likely be initially constructed. Under this scenario, the preferred planning alignment concept of CSAH 1 and ultimate expansion to a 4-lane divided highway would be evaluated as one project. Due to its overall size, an EAW Scoping Document and an EIS would be required and recommended to be completed prior to construction of any one segment of the CSAH 1 project. The EAW Scoping Document would be used to define the key project environmental impacts and would also identify those areas that are not impacted, and would not require further analysis. Rice County would be the Responsible Government Unit (RGU).

Under a typical highway department lead initiative to create a new highway; this would be the typical environmental review process. Since the CSAH 1 project has multiple factors initiating the need for the new corridor, an additional scenario was developed for consideration.

Scenario 2 – Preparation of 4 Separate, but Connected Environmental Reviews for each segment of CSAH 1 as described below:

Segment 1 EAW: Baldwin Avenue to Cates Avenue, this portion of the corridor is approximately 1.1 miles (5800') in length and is located outside the orderly annexation agreement area between Dundas and Bridgewater Township. Safety concerns with existing horizontal curvature is the primary impetus for improvements. Under this scenario, an EAW would be required and is recommended for the realignment of this segment. Rice County would be the Responsible Government Unit (RGU).

Segment 2 AUAR: Cates Avenue to CR 78, this portion of the corridor is approximately 1.9 miles (9970') in length and is located entirely within the orderly annexation agreement area between Dundas and Bridgewater Township. The lack of continuity on

the existing alignment and its inability to accommodate the anticipated growth of the area are the impetus for improvements. Since the preferred planning alignment concept is within the future growth area of the City, an AUAR is recommended for the realignment of this segment. The AUAR would satisfy the required environmental review for the anticipated urban development, expansion of City sewer and water services, storm water management, and the CSAH 1 highway corridor. The City of Dundas would be the RGU.

Segment 3 EA: CR 78 to Cannon Lane, this portion of the preferred planning alignment concept is approximately 0.4 of a mile (2230') is located partially in the City of Dundas and partially in the City of Northfield. It includes a new bridge over the Cannon River and Union Pacific Railroad. While this segment is the shortest in length, it is expected to be costly due to the bridge requirements. Outside funding, potentially federal funds, may be necessary to make this segment of the preferred planning alignment concept feasible. As a result, an EA is recommended to evaluate and compare environmental impacts of the new river crossing. Rice County would be the RGU.

Segment 4 EAW: Cannon Lane to TH 246, this portion of the preferred planning alignment concept is approximately 1.75 miles (9240'). It includes the existing CSAH 1 alignment east of TH 3 and approximately 800' on new alignment west of TH 3. Portions of this segment fall within the City of Dundas, City of Northfield, and Bridgewater Township. Safety concerns with the existing roadway design and increasing traffic volumes are the primary reason for these improvements. Under this scenario, an EAW would be required to be expanded this segment to 4-lanes. Rice County would be the Responsible Government Unit (RGU).

Since each segment of roadway described in Scenario 2 would ultimately result in one continuous roadway, the connected actions and cumulative effects of each would need to be recognized by each review. The intent of segmenting the preferred planning alignment concept is due to the different needs being addressed and the timing of each. As described above, several segments of the existing corridor have safety issues that the County would like to address in the near future, portions of the corridor would only be constructed when urban development occurs, and the Cannon River bridge is a long-term priority for communities and Rice County. This scenario was discussed with Jon Larsen at the EQB in December 2006 and found to be appropriate and sufficient to satisfy the EQB's environmental review requirements. Further discussion with the EQB is recommended as the types of document(s) are finalized.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these two scenarios dependant upon the partnering agencies' priorities and desired outcomes. Below is a summary of the perceived primary advantages and disadvantages of each:

Scenario 1 – Preparation of an EAW Scoping Document and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for CSAH 1 between Baldwin Avenue and TH 246:

Advantages of Scenario 1

- Comprehensive – The preferred planning alignment alternative's environmental impacts would be evaluated as a whole and at the same time. This may provide stronger justification that the preferred planning alignment concept has the least environmental impacts.
- Cannon River Bridge – A complete environmental review would be completed and the impacts to the Wild & Scenic River would be evaluated prior to implementation of any portion of the preferred planning alignment concept.

Disadvantages of Scenario One

- Timing – Since this review would be all all-inclusive, it would be a substantial effort and time commitment up front. The new alignment improvements identified in any of the

segments could not be implemented prior to investigation of all potential environmental impacts, even if unrelated to a particular improvement is desired.

- Up Front Commitment – An EIS is a substantial effort and time commitment. It will require a substantial financial commitment by the participating agencies up front, even though funding has not been identified for any of the improvements.
- Affect on Development – Urban development anticipated in Segment 2 would need to be delayed until the conclusion of the CSAH 1 EIS. Upon completion of the EIS, a separate environmental review document (EAW or AUAR) would need to be completed to address the anticipated urban development and expansion of municipal utilities.

Scenario 2 – Preparation of 4 Separate, but Connected Environmental Reviews for each segment of CSAH 1:

Advantages of Scenario Two

- Timing - Portions of the preferred planning alignment concept could be advanced sooner while environmental impacts of longer-term priorities are evaluated or post-poned.
- Up front Commitment – By addressing the environmental review in segments based on the individual needs and timing of those needs, financial commitments by participating agencies could be spread out based on the timing of improvements.
- Affect of Development – Urban development anticipated in Segment 2 could continue provided the recommended AUAR is completed and environmental impacts are adequately addressed. By allowing the development to move forward, portions of the corridor could be achieved through developer contributions.

Disadvantages of Scenario Two

- Cannon River Bridge – Portion of the preferred planning alignment concept could be advanced prior to a full evaluation of the impacts to the Wild & Scenic River. There are no guarantees on the possibility/approval of the Cannon River Bridge until an environmental review for this portion is completed.
- Potential for Duplicate Efforts – Since each of the environmental reviews would need to address Connected Actions and Cumulative Impacts, the potential for duplicate efforts exists. If managed and coordinated properly upfront, the amount of duplication would be minimal.