Hwy 65/East Main Street Virtual Open House Public Comments with Project Team Responses

A virtual open house was presented to the public for SP 2405-62 on Hwy 65 in Albert Lea from November 1st through November 29th. Comments received via the on-line forum have been transcribed below along with responses from the Hwy 65 Project Team.

West Segment (Newton Avenue to Shellrock River)

Comment 1

We own the business at 316 Main Court - Southern Lock & Glass, we have a lot of concerns and questions about this project. We would like someone to contact us. Thank you.

Response

Discussed concerns with Keith and Angie. We discussed that the Hwy 65 road-raise will not increase the flood inundation along Hwy 65 based on the modeling that was completed with the flood study. We also discussed placing additional fill along their east property line. Adding fill along this area would not be required with the Hwy project but would need to be done as deemed necessary by the City of Albert Lea.

Comment 2

I think raising the road is a must anything less is a band-aid, prone to failure and limited success.

Response

The road-raise will address the local heavy downpours that frequently cause the short-term closure of Hwy 65/East Main Street. Flooding of the roadway will not be completely eliminated - Local storm events greater than a 10-year storm event and regional storm events greater than 25-year storm event will produce flooding on the roadway.

Comment 3

Just curious as to how the 2in was decided. While this is going to be done, could it be 3in instead? Or would that cause too much other problems with the different buildings/parking lots in that area?

Response

Our understanding is that the commenter intended 2-feet and 3-feet rather than 2 and 3 inches. In 2018, in partnership with the City of Albert Lea, BARR engineering was hired to complete a Flood Mitigation Study for the area on East Main Street from approximately Lake Avenue to Katherine Street. The study had three main purposes:

- Determine the causes of flooding on US 65 within the study area.
- Identify engineering or management concepts that have the potential to mitigate flooding on US 65, and to quantify the potential flood reduction benefits of those concepts using hydrologic and hydraulic (H&H) models.
- Develop preliminary opinions of cost for alternatives that would likely provide significant flood reductions benefits for the study area.

Based on study results and impact to cost benefits, the project team, including City Engineering Department staff and MnDOT Engineering staff, defined the desired level of service for flood reduction. The term “level of service” refers to the capacity provided by the drainage system to remove runoff and prevent water from encroaching on driving lanes. City staff and MnDOT staff agreed that flood reduction measures for US 65 should be able to provide a 10-year level of service.

With the understanding that the goal of the flood mitigation project is to provide a 10-year level of service for the area the 2-foot road-raise was determined as being the most effective solution that will address the local heavy downpours that frequently cause the short-term closure of Hwy 65/East Main Street. A road-raise of 2-feet in combination with the two storm water ponds will accomplish the goal of providing a 10-year level of service without additional flood inundation of adjacent properties.

Comment 4

This seems like a reasonable solution. How was raising the road 2 feet settled upon? It might be helpful to directly link the 2 feet road raise to the 10-year flood mitigation in the "Improvements Proposed" breakdown.

Response

Please see response to Comment 3.

Comment 5

I think it is important to keep reminding the people in Albert Lea that the improvements will help with lower water events but that super large amounts of water will still result in some possible flooding. People here are "used" to the flooding and make accommodations. I'm sure that many believe that this project will fix everything and then will be cranky when on the rare storm there is water that you didn't do your job. (just being honest).

Response

The project management team agrees and is working to ensure public understanding of the goals of the project. The project is being designed to provide a 10-year level of service. Please see response to Comment 3 for additional information of the flood mitigation.

Comment 6

You have a photo of a typical 5 yr flood event. I would just note that several times throughout any given year, we have had to erect barricades during rain events as the water is approximately 6" deep or more. Vehicles are detoured and have become disabled in the accumulated water. Thanks, Lt. Jeff Strom Albert Lea PD.

Response

The project management team agrees. The project is being designed to provide a 10-year level of service which will eliminate the frequent closures due to the heavy local rain events. Please see response to Comment 3 above for additional information of the flood mitigation.

Comment 7

The flood mitigation is absolutely necessary.

Response

Thank you to the city of Albert Lea and Local legislators for securing the funding that makes flood mitigation with this project possible.

Middle Segment (Shellrock River to Ulstad Ave)

Comment 1

Please put in turn lanes from Hwy 65 to northbound Garfield. Frequently drivers use the shoulder and almost cause accidents with drivers who correctly use the right lane to turn into northbound Garfield Ave.

Response

The shoulder width is being reduced to 6 feet along Hwy 65, which will eliminate the perception that the shoulder can be used as a turn lane. In addition, the traffic signal is being replaced at the Garfield intersection which will provide for more efficient operation and performance at the intersection. The lanes will be better defined, and the existing left turn lanes will be extended.

The addition of a right turn lane was evaluated but will not be added due to costs and right-of-way impacts and insufficient justification. It has been determined that the westbound right turn movements are sufficiently accommodated by the two through lanes currently provided. The level-of-service analysis shows that a reasonable level-of-service is attained and maintained without the right turn lane being added.

Comment 2

Quite a few cars, while traveling west on Hwy 65, use the left turn at St. Thomas to access Kwik Trip. I believe eliminating this access point will push that traffic into the southbound lane of Garfield and, due to congestion, into the intersection of these two roads, impeding traffic through this intersection. I watched this specific situation happen just a few days ago even with the presence of the left turn at St. Thomas, without it this will become commonplace.

Response

A traffic study was completed in preparation for this project. Based on the analysis of the operation of the intersections, including Garfield and St. Thomas, the proposed improvements with this project should improve the operation of the Garfield intersection from a current intersection Level of Service "D" to a Level of Service "B". Please see the project web site resources tab for the full traffic report including additional information on Level of Service. The project web site is available at: www.dot.state.mn.us/d6/projects/hwy65-albert-lea/. The analysis of the Garfield intersection shows that based on the projected 2040 Volumes and Synchro analysis the queue is calculated at 5 vehicles/cycle or approximately 125-feet. The city of Albert Lea and MnDOT will continue to monitor the operation of the signal and work with Kwik Trip on possible modifications to entrances to mitigate any adverse queueing at the Garfield intersection in the future should the need become apparent.

In addition to the improved intersection operation with the proposed improvement the medians at St. Thomas will provide a refugee for pedestrians crossing Hwy 65/East Main St. Pedestrian access and mobility are a significant safety problem within the existing corridor and the proposed improvements will provide a safer traveling experience for all Hwy 65/East Main St users.

Comment 3

What will be done to ensure residents who need egress and access to East Main from their driveways/garages on Pillsbury have the access they need?

Response

The proposed project will maintain a 32-foot access to Pillsbury Ave. During construction the Contractor is required to coordinate the construction staging sequence with residents at Pillsbury Ave so that access to the alleyway is maintained during construction.

Comment 4

Yes and please no happy peddle bike area... like the rest of wasted roads of Albert Lea make it a road no fancy crap like up town.

Response

There is a proposed shared use path located to the south of Hwy 65 that will provide designated bicycle access and pedestrian access from Garfield Ave to Syverson Ave where the path will connect to a path being constructed on East Main St/CSAH 46.

Comment 5

This seems reasonable, though I wonder how reduced direct access to side streets negatively impacts access to local business and residences? Are there statistics that would speak to those concerns?

Response

Traffic data was gathered at each intersection for both existing and future conditions. Please see the project web site resources tab for a detailed traffic report that examined the existing safety risks at each intersection and the impacts and improvements with the proposed improvements. The project web site is available at: www.dot.state.mn.us/d6/projects/hwy65-albert-lea/.

The traffic analysis shows that that there will be reasonable, adequate and safe options for drivers to get to businesses and the homes. Our experience has shown that safety improvements similar to these have been completed in other cities, with good results and without creating negative impacts to the businesses and residents. We acknowledge that change can be difficult and adjusting to new travel patterns can take time, the results of the safety improvements will result a safer and expeditious traveling experience for all Hwy 65/East Main St users.

Comment 6

The intersection of Garfield and Main is a tough one for pedestrians, it would be nice to see a pedestrian refuge at that point going north and south or allowing that light to stay green longer.

Response

The improved raised median to the East and West will provide pedestrian refuge, and the signal timing will be improved as part of the signal replacement at Garfield Ave. The pedestrian facilities will be improved to provide fully compliant access with pedestrian routes shortened and made as direct as possible.

The new traffic signal will fully provide for protected pedestrian crossings. Countdown pedestrian indication heads will be provided at all crossing locations. The countdown heads give the pedestrian the exact amount of time that remains for the crossing to be completed.

Comment 7

This will take some getting used to but once its in place I think it will be very nice. What is the stop light at Garfield and Main going to look like in terms of left turn signals? Will you have to wait for the cycle to turn or will there be a flashing turn so you yield to oncoming traffic but could turn if no one is coming. Lots of people in Albert Lea are getting used to the flashing left turn light.

Response

The proposed signal layout at Garfield Ave will include dedicated left turn lanes and flashing yellow left turn arrows at all four legs of the intersection.

Comment 8

So pleased this street will be re-surfaced. It does need to be done eventually, however, all the way to I-35 and to some extent on Hi 46 East. Thanks!

Response

Hwy 65 will be resurfaced to the Interstate Hwy 35 ramps and the City has a project to resurface County Road 46/East Main St.

Comment 9

These changes would help eliminate waits for turning cars, many try to turn without good dissonance due to cars backing up behind them.

Response

Agreed.

Comment 10

Your plans appear to ignore problems at the corner of Sibley St and Main. When trying to make left hand turns off Sibley onto main the wait time can be excessive. Also left turns off main onto Sibley can be dangerous.

Response

During project development the project team reviewed the 10-year crash data history for the intersection of Sibley and Hwy 65 and found that five crashes have occurred at the Sibley intersection in the past 10-years. Three of the crashes are attributed to inattentive drivers colliding with eastbound vehicles turning left at Sibley Ave while the other two crashes were side swipes of vehicles crossing Sibley. The frequency and types of crashes do not support geometric alterations at the Sibley intersection.

East Segment (Ulstad Avenue to Sorenson Avenue)

Comment 1

Why not a roundabout for one or both intersections? They seem simpler and more efficient to navigate for crossings from side-streets. How well do semi tractor trailers navigate RCIs?

Response

A high-level analysis of these intersections has shown us that significant right of way acquisitions would be required for construction. The design of one or more roundabouts at these intersections is further complicated due to the traffic volumes on Hwy 65 only supporting a single lane roundabout but having 4-lanes of approaching traffic. This will require that major reconstruction of the approaches to the roundabout be completed with roundabouts. This further complicates operation and function with lanes being dropped and

added to the approaches and departure. Reduced conflict intersections provide the same safety benefits as a roundabout for these intersection improvements with a much better cost to benefit ratio. The truck turn movements are checked at each U-turn and intersection to ensure that the appropriate design vehicle can safely navigate the turns of the intersection.

A separate safety study has recently been initiated at the Prospect Avenue intersection that is looking at the benefits and costs of additional intersection alternatives, that include roundabout alternatives. This study as well as any roundabout alternatives requires resources in terms of time, dollars and right of way impacts that are outside the scope of this current Hwy 65 project.

Comment 2

I'm afraid people would go straight across still onto oncoming traffic (north and south).

Response

The existing median access at both Prospect and Fenton will be removed. This will prevent traffic from trying to cross at the existing intersections. The way the proposed median islands are constructed along with signage is engineered to deter traffic from driving the wrong way down the median at the Morningside intersection.

Comment 3

This is going to take a lot of explanation to the residents about having to do the U-turn to go the right way. They'll get used to it but lots of education is likely required.

Response

The project Team will work to provide additional information to citizens so that they are educated about the correct way to navigate an RCI prior to construction.

Outreach and education will be important. We will have a full-fledged plan for engaging the public on how to drive a reduced conflict intersection. Reduced Conflict Intersections will be new to this area and we will help educate and get people comfortable with its operation.

Comment 4

Prospect Ave is a bad intersection. Speeding is a problem at that intersection as people are leaving town and can see the 55 MPH sign a half mile ahead. Would a roundabout slow traffic and solve T-bone problems?

Response

A high-level analysis of the Prospect intersections has shown us that a roundabout would be feasible. However, the design of a roundabout at this intersection is complicated due to the traffic volumes on Hwy 65 supporting a single lane roundabout but having 4-lanes of approaching traffic. This will require that major reconstruction of the approaches to the roundabout be completed. Roundabout construction at this intersection is further complicated by the converging and diverging lanes of CSAH 46 just to the east of Prospect Ave. The proposed reduced conflict intersection provides the same safety benefits as a roundabout for these intersection

improvements with a much better cost to benefit ratio. The proposed reduced conflict intersection eliminates the possibility of a right angel (T-bone) crash.

A separate safety study has recently been initiated at the Prospect Avenue intersection that is looking at the benefits and costs of additional intersection alternatives, that include roundabout alternatives. This study as well as any roundabout alternatives requires resources in terms of time, dollars and right of way impacts that are outside the scope of this current Hwy 65 project.

Comment 5

I hate that you can't come up to an intersection and go through, you have to go a mile out of your way, and for people that aren't familiar with this stupid idea, how many will try and go across anyway? What is wrong with reduced speed and a caution light? This is not the Twin Cities, our population doesn't need all of these stupid changes.

Response

The project team acknowledges your concerns with the proposed changes at the intersections in this segment of the project. We do empathize that change can be difficult but the concerning factor with these intersections is the high number of right-angle crashes (T-bone crashes). 63 of the 87 crashes were right angle crashes. This is alarming as these are the most dangerous and severe crashes and the high number and frequency cannot be mitigated effectively by simply adding a flashing yellow light. The proposed reduced conflict intersection eliminates the possibility of a right-angle (T-bone) crash. The existing median access at both Prospect and Fenton will be removed. This will prevent traffic from trying to cross at the existing intersections. The way the proposed median islands are constructed along with signage is engineered to deter traffic from driving the wrong way down the median at the Morningside intersection.

Any highway solution needs to fit the context. The Reduced Conflict Intersection (RCI) is not just a “big city” type alternative. RCIs have been built on many MN roadways within or near smaller communities. The RCIs have been proven to be very effective at reducing the types of very serious crashes that can and do occur at right angle crossing locations. MnDOT is committed to safety and is a Toward Zero Deaths goal-oriented state.