Working Paper

February 2001

Interregional Corridors: Opportunities and challenges for local land use planning

Purpose

This working paper was prepared by Minnesota Planning, Local Planning Assistance, to alert Minnesota's counties, cities and townships to the significant interrelationships between the Minnesota Department of Transportation's Interregional Corridor Management Program and their land use planning and management responsibilities.

Background

Interregional corridors are the highways in Minnesota that link the four trade centers of Duluth, Fargo-Moorhead, Rochester and St. Cloud with the seven-county Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and the 46 additional Level 2 and 3 trade centers.[1] The interregional corridors are the primary routes linking Minnesota's communities and linking Minnesota to its neighbors and beyond.

Concerns by the Legislature about traffic congestion and loss of mobility or increased travel time on state highways and interstates led the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) to conduct an interregional corridor study that was completed in September 2000 with release of *Inter- regional Corridors: A Guide In Plan Development and Corridor Management*. The study analyzed all the major state highways and identified a system of interregional corridors based on community use and traffic volumes. The identified 2,930 miles of highway tie our largest economic centers together but represent only 2 percent of all roadway miles in the state. This small percentage of highways accounts for one-third of all vehicle miles traveled, and the use of these highways is increasing. The goal of the study is to proactively manage the important connections between regional centers in a more cost-effective manner. This is consistent with Mn/DOT's goal to develop an Interregional Corridor System that enhances the economic vitality of the state by providing safe, timely and efficient movement of people and goods to, from and within the regional trade center network.

Minnesota's citizens and businesses expect quick, reliable and safe travel with a minimum of stops, especially on longer trips. Delays cost money, affect the ability of businesses to meet customer expectations and reduce the amount of time travelers have for other activities. Unfortunately, many key corridors are under increasing growth and development pressures that threaten their ability to meet user expectations and move goods and people between trade centers. Traffic volumes on the Interregional Corridor System have risen by 50 percent in the last 10 years and are expected to double by 2020.

The Interregional Corridor philosophy

Interregional corridors cross many jurisdictional boundaries and serve many different regions and interests. As a result, it has been difficult to define and provide consistent policies and strategies for these corridors. To achieve greater consistency, Mn/DOT's policy study began by defining its core transportation philosophy for the Interregional Corridor System. The philosophy is founded on the Governor's Smart Growth Initiative, which identifies land stewardship, efficiency, choice and accountability as its four main principles. The principles were adapted to make them directly applicable to issues related to transportation. Mn/DOT's four Smart Growth principles are:

Land Use Stewardship: Promote responsible and integrated environmental, land use, access and transportation planning decisions along transportation corridors. To work cooperatively with local units of government to ensure orderly development and to protect the safety, mobility and function of transportation corridors, while considering the context of corridors' cultural and environmental setting.

Efficiency: Maximize the use of existing transportation facilities and services. Focus resources to enhance the state's economic vitality and provide the greatest long-term benefits at the lowest long-term costs, while maintaining a commitment to the statewide transportation network.

Choice: Provide customers with transportation options and modal access choices. Maintain flexibility to account for variations in local conditions. Ensure early, continuous and meaningful involvement of citizens and stakeholders in the transportation decision-making process.

Accountability: Hold both the public and private sectors accountable for the impacts of their land use and access decisions. Link transportation investments to responsible land use and

[1] Trade centers are identified in *Trade Centers of the Upper Midwest, 1999 Update*, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, June 1999.

access planning. Encourage shared investments and responsibilities to achieve desired transportation outcomes that fit within the broad community and regional context.

The Smart Growth principles were a critical element in the interregional corridor study process because they provided a framework for defining subsequent policies, strategies and management plan guidance.

Interregional corridor policies

The Interregional Corridor Management Program adopted seven policies to guide development of individual corridor management plans. Two directly impact local community land use planning and controls. They are:

Policy 2: Land use planning

Goal: Encourage responsible land use, transportation and access decisions through local long-range plans that preserve mobility of Interregional Corridors between regional trade centers.

Policy: Mn/DOT will promote and encourage the integrated development of local land use, transportation and access plans that support mobility on interregional corridor routes. In the absence of an agreed-upon corridor management plan, Mn/DOT will review and approve access changes based on established access guidelines.

Policy 3: Right-of-way preservation

Goal: Pursue timely right-of-way preservation and acquisition activities to positively benefit long-term corridor mobility, and reduce cost and adverse community impacts.

Policy: Refine the process for identifying right-of-way requirements to ensure timely preservation and acquisitions so as to protect interregional corridor performance. Provide adequate resources for right-of-way planning, preservation and acquisition to optimize investments and minimize impacts on communities, natural resources, the physical environment and private property.

Key corridor management concepts

Corridor management plans have ten essential concepts, half of which directly impact local community land use planning and land use controls.

Concept 1. Long-range corridor visions are a required element of the plan.

A corridor vision defines how a corridor will ultimately perform. The vision should reflect the principles and policies developed for the Interregional Corridor System. In addition, it should consider the facility's users and reflect the context of the corridor's cultural and environmental setting. Mn/DOT, the local partners, state and local agencies and stakeholders will define the corridor vision.

Concept 2. Creation of corridor management plans is expected to be a partnership effort.

Creation of corridor management plans will be a partnership effort between Mn/DOT, counties, cities, other state and local agencies, and corridor stakeholders. These partnerships will support the vision of the corridor by:

- Providing a context for ongoing decision-making.
- Providing a forum for communicating community values and other interests.
- Defining partners' roles and responsibilities.
- Maintaining relationships and being responsible for ensuring mutual accountability.

Concept 5. Land use, access and transportation will be integrated.

The individual corridor management plans support Mn/DOT's Land Use Stewardship Smart Growth principle through the integrated planning of land use, access, and transportation. The following approach will be used to deal with the connection between land use and the transportation system:

- While detailed land use plans will not be prepared as part of the corridor management plans, the plans will identify major local land use, zoning and transportation network issues that will need to be addressed by the local community in support of the corridor vision. Technical assistance may be provided to local communities during the process to help identify general concepts and strategies for addressing these issues. Additional state assistance may be available to communities after completion of the corridor management plan to develop the concepts and strategies more fully through updates to the local land use and transportation plans and ordinances.

- Corridors will extend beyond the traditional right-of-way (width may vary by corridor), and must incorporate the local supporting roadway system (parallel and connecting arterials and collectors), as well as consider existing and future land uses. The objectives of this supporting system are:

1. Encourage use of the local road system for short- to medium-length trips.
2. Support current and future land uses, whether or not they are located near the access nodes.
3. Promote an intensity of development that is in balance with the level of supporting roadway system and community goals, and discourage development that is not in balance (that is, does not have the supporting roadway network or is not consistent with community plans).
4. Define the frequency and type of access based on the corridor performance analysis and Mn/DOT access spacing guidelines.
5. Encourage orderly development along interregional corridors by making developments accountable for their land use, transportation, and environmental impacts.

Concept 7. Modal activities will be part of the corridor management plans.

Corridor management plans will include discussions of modal issues with providers and users, review statewide and/or regional modal plans and incorporate major elements in the corridor analysis, and identify modal access issues to the interregional corridor. In general, modal activities and facilities become more applicable in and around larger trade centers. Most corridors will need to address, to a greater or lesser extent, the following modal and access areas:

- Pedestrian and trail activities
- Truck and freight movements
- Rail and highway interaction and conflicts
- Access to transit facilities and services
- Access to air- and water-based facilities
- Communication facilities and linkages

Concept 10. It is expected that the partnership team would identify and develop an ongoing process for managing the corridor.

For the corridor management plan to be successful, Mn/DOT and its corridor partners must continue to monitor and manage the corridor, and refine the corridor management plan to reflect major changes in conditions. To ensure continued involvement in the corridor management plan, the following steps should be taken:

- All partners should endorse the corridor management plan.
- District plans, other agency plans, and local land use and transportation plans should incorporate the corridor management plan.
- An ongoing management team should be established. This team will discuss corridor changes, funding options, priorities, and provide an ongoing structure for making decisions in the corridor, including when the corridor management plan needs to be updated.
- When considering alternatives, corridor plans must consider other factors including the corridors' community, cultural and environmental context.

Where the local community fits in

Local communities should be prepared to discuss the role of the corridor serving their community, opportunities and constraints for shaping corridor impacts on the community and identification of other important community spaces, land use issues and access. This will help communities identify where the growth is going to occur and plan to accommodate growth.

Businesses groups should be prepared to define transportation issues that impact their businesses, such as economic efficiency, safety and convenience.

Preventive strategies should focus on land use planning, zoning and local supporting transportation systems, which are typically controlled by local units of government (cities, counties and townships). While the development of detailed local plans will not be part of the typical corridor management plan, major local land use, zoning and transportation network issues will need to be addressed by local communities in support of the corridor vision and management plan. These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Access spacing that is inconsistent with corridor management plans
- Development areas with lack of local supporting street networks
- Zoning ordinances that permit uses inconsistent with desired access spacing and identified local street networks
- Planned growth areas that are unreasonable, given projected population growth and market demands for housing

Confirming the problems and issues in the corridor begins with **collecting, organizing, and analyzing data**.

General background information should be gathered for individual growth areas including, but not limited to:

- The local transportation system
- Population and development trends
- General land use and zoning regulations
- Modal access (pedestrian, bicycle, air, rail, transit)
- Geographic/environmental context (wetlands, sensitive areas, protected and endangered species)

Community opportunities

Access to transportation is crucial to all communities: county, city or township. Many Minnesota townsites have disappeared or never prospered because the railroad went elsewhere or the road remained a backroad.

For communities that are proactive, identify opportunities and take initiative, the Interregional Corridor System offers opportunities:

- Community growth – economic, social, cultural, physical
- Community diversification
- Improved community identity
- A sense of place
- Connecting with neighboring communities, the region and beyond to further common interests and priorities, share services and maximize public investment benefits and efficiencies

The opportunities are limited only by the community imagination.

Community challenges

The Interregional Corridor System will present a variety of challenges to communities including:

Community transportation systems – vehicular, pedestrian and alternatives such as bicycles

- Identifying and providing a proper mix for the cost effective and efficient movement of goods, services and people within the community
- Integrating the community's transportation network with those of its neighboring communities, its region and with the Interregional Corridor System for a mutually supporting whole
- Anticipating future community growth and change

The community downtown (central) business district

- Retaining strategies
- Revitalizing strategies
- Re-inventing strategies

Conservation of sensitive natural and ecological resources

- Identifying and prioritizing
- Implementing appropriate land uses and controls to sustain

Community amenities – parks, playgrounds, libraries, schools

- Identifying future needs and locations
- Integrating with surrounding communities' amenities

Community sense of place and identity

- Establishing a long term community vision
- Differentiating the community, making it a unique place
- Establishing the rationales for the community's presence

Urban growth

- Identifying infrastructure needs, integrating growth into existing infrastructure and cost-effective infrastructure management
- Creating policies and programs which address the community's affordable and lifestyle housing needs
- Fostering good community design and good neighborhood design
- Partnering with neighboring communities

Economic development

- Identifying how the Interregional Corridor System and its supporting local transportation systems support the local economic base
- Identifying new opportunities for the local economy
- Addressing the challenges posed by the Interregional Corridor System

Public education

- Creating ways to involve the community in the Interregional Corridor systems evolutionary process
- Encouraging and creating cross-communication between involved parties and stakeholders

Protecting of the Interregional Corridor Systems integrity and integrating it into the local community

- Reviewing and amending local land use plans as well as the local land use map and existing zoning ordinances and rules to protect Interregional Corridor visions but to as well adjust the community to its impacts
- Preparing or revising land use plan and supporting maps and ordinances

Local Solutions Alliance offers help

The Interregional Corridor System will present a variety of opportunities and challenges for local communities, many of which have few or limited resources to meet their challenges, but assistance is available. The **Local Solutions Alliance** is a consortium of state agencies that will work with local governments on land use and other issues on a case-by-case basis. Its steering committee is comprised of Minnesota Planning, the departments of Trade and Economic Development, Transportation, Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Finance, the Pollution Control Agency and the Office of Environmental Assistance. Other state agencies involved are the Metropolitan Council, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Minnesota Historical Society, and departments of Public Safety, Health, Human Services, Administration, Commerce and Children, Families and Learning.

Task force working groups with the necessary specific expertise will be created to address the essentials of the task(s) and the community need(s).

This concept has been applied successfully in community-based planning efforts including Carlton, Meeker, and Nobles counties and the St. Cloud area.

Communities may contact **Minnesota Planning, Local Planning Assistance** for Local Solutions Alliance assistance in coordinating and integrating their land use planning with their Interregional Corridor.

Additionally, **Minnesota Planning** provides demographic information through the State Demographic Center and geographic information systems and support through the Land Management Information Center and Local Planning Assistance.

Local Planning Assistance is further prepared to address a community's specific request for assistance with case history information, best practice studies, sample ordinances, and more on a diversity of subjects ranging from revitalizing downtown, neighborhood design, infrastructure planning and financing, flood plain management, community-based planning and more.

For assistance, write or call:

PLANNING

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