



Chapter 4. Identification of Issues

This chapter is intended to provide a summary of key issues and themes for the 2045 Street/Highway Plan Update identified as part of public engagement activities, stakeholder input, and in the Existing Conditions Chapter. The findings of this chapter served as the basis for developing Chapter 5. Range of Alternatives by considering both the technical analysis of the current street and highway network with the input received from Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) stakeholder meetings, public meetings, and on-line surveys and engagement.

Existing Conditions Summary

The Existing Conditions Chapter provides a summary of the Grand Forks-East Grand Forks Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) area street and highway system. Several topics were discussed including roadway functional classification and jurisdiction, pavement and bridge condition, traffic and safety patterns, and summaries of recent study recommendations. The following is a summary of key issues and themes identified in the chapter.

- Balancing the need to maintain existing pavement conditions with the need to expand roadways to support additional traffic continues to be an issue given current funding levels.
- Three east-west corridors (US 2/Gateway Drive, DeMers Avenue, and 32nd Avenue South) and two north-south corridors (Columbia Road and Washington Street) continue to experience the highest daily traffic volumes.
- Overall, the system's intersections generally operate within acceptable traffic Level of Service (LOS) A-C conditions. There are four intersections where a LOS D was recorded (South Columbia Road & 17th Avenue South, South Columbia Road & 32nd Avenue South, South Washington Street & DeMers Avenue, and North 42nd Street & University Avenue when trains are present). No intersections were recorded with a LOS E or F.
- The roadway segment traffic analysis identified three road segments experiencing LOS of D (South Columbia Road between 11th Avenue South and DeMers Avenue, South Columbia Road between 17th Avenue South and Knight Drive, and South Washington Street between 8th Avenue South and DeMers Avenue). There were no segments that were identified as a LOS E or F as part of this analysis.
- A total of 26 intersections were found to have crash rates above the expected crash rates. Three intersections experienced over 50 crashes during this timeframe. They were: S. 34th Street & 32nd Avenue S. (64), N. 42nd Street North & DeMers Avenue (60), and S. 31st Street & 32nd Avenue S (52).
- There were no fatal incidents reported in any of the high crash rate intersections from 2012-2015. 31 percent of the total crashes that occurred at the high crash rate intersections involved injury related crashes.
- Minimizing traffic delays at rail crossings is important, especially for truck freight movement. Two problematic at-grade rail crossings for truck traffic delays associated with unit train traffic and train blockages are the Glasston Subdivision crossing at US Highway 2 and the Grand Forks Subdivision crossing near the intersection of DeMers Avenue and North 42nd Street.
- The I-29 Traffic Operations Study (2017) found that without improvements, existing interchanges at Gateway Drive/US 2, DeMers Avenue, and 32nd Avenue South will experience significant delays and backups onto I-29 based on 2040 forecasts. New Red River crossings at 32nd Avenue South and Merrifield Road were found to provide great benefit to the region but did little to improve forecasted congestion on I-29. Grade separations (over/underpasses) were studied at 17th Avenue South, 47th Avenue South, and 62nd Avenue South; however, the cost of these improvements outweighed the benefits in the near term and were not carried forward.
- The Bygland Road Study (2016) includes a recommended transportation plan with near term improvements including: pedestrian, bicycle and school crossing improvements; reroute of "Route 11" to Bygland Road and Rhinehart Drive; roundabout construction at Bygland Road and 13th Street; and roundabout construction at Bygland Road and 5th Avenue.

- The Glasston Railroad Crossing Study (2016) recommends rerouting the Mill Spur north of Grand Forks near 27th Avenue and continuing west to the Glasston Subdivision to remove thirteen existing at-grade railroad crossings just west of the downtown area. The study also recommends grade separation of Glasston Subdivision at Gateway Drive/US 2.
- NDDOT completed a safety audit review and signal coordination plan in 2016 for 32nd Avenue from I-29 to Washington Street. The study recommends a variety of turn lane, signal, and pedestrian related
- Improvements and signal timing and operational improvements. Improvements are currently programmed for 2019.
- A grade separation of the railroad at 42nd Street is recommended by the City of Grand Forks to address traffic issues. However, this project is currently beyond funding available over the long-term planning horizon.
- The US 2 Access Study (2015) highlighted several improvements to six major focus areas: Airport Drive intersection, I-29 interchange area, traffic control, access management, the proposed Northern Plains Nitrogen (NPN) Plant site, turn lanes, and bicyclist/pedestrian facilities. The corridor was divided into built-out urban, urbanizing, and rural areas for access management purposes. No access management improvements were recommended for the built-out urban area. A frontage and backage road system was developed for the urbanizing area. The urbanizing area also includes design plans for future ½ mile full access signalized intersections with intervening ¾ access intersections. The rural area did not include specific plans for a frontage/backage road system, but is envisioned to accommodate a similar access spacing plan to the urbanizing area once developed.

Summary of Public and Stakeholder Engagement

As part of the 2045 Street/Highway Plan Update, several outreach and engagement opportunities have been utilized to help the public learn about the plan and provide input regarding the street and highway system in the MPO area. Both in person and web-based opportunities were used to ensure that people could participate in ways that work best for their schedule and preferred communication style. The following list describes the various public engagement opportunities used through the planning process.

- Public meetings and open houses
- Project website (www.theforksstreets2045.org) combined with interactive online mapping, surveys, and comment forms. The project website was used as the primary resource for posting information related to the planning process.
- MPO Facebook updates and postings
- MPO website updates
- Agency and stakeholder meetings
- Local media press releases and interviews with MPO staff

Public Meetings

Four public meetings have been held to date. The materials presented at the meetings were also posted on the study website immediately following the meetings. More information is available in Appendix B.

Public Meeting #1

The first public meeting was held on August 30, 2017, at the Empire Arts Center in Grand Forks. A formal presentation was provided during a portion of the event, and the remainder of the event was set up in an open house format. The purpose of this public meeting was to introduce the Street and Highway Plan Update to the public, present the 2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) vision statement and draft goals, and provide information on existing conditions and planned land use in the MPO area. Attendees were also asked to provide feedback on the condition of streets and highways in the MPO area to help guide the process for prioritizing projects in the Street and Highway Plan Update. Display boards were available that provided an overview of the LRTP and Street and Highway Plan Update, the schedule, the 2045 LRTP vision statement and draft goals,



existing conditions, and planned land use. An interactive mapping activity was also available on a display board and as an interactive map on the project website.

Twenty-two attendees signed in at the open house. Two written comments were received. One was a safety concern at a specific location and the other comment noted a preference to keep performance measures to only those that are required. The project website was accessed by more than 130 users in the two weeks before and after the public meeting.

Public Meeting #2

The second public meeting was held on December 14, 2017, at the East Grand Forks City Hall. The meeting was set up in an open house format (no formal presentation provided). The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the existing plus future transportation network and the transportation issues that have been identified so far. Additionally, the meeting was meant to explore the concept of a financially constrained transportation plan; this discussion was aided by an interactive financial planning activity, which collected input on attendees' public investment preferences. Finally, more detailed information on goals, objectives, and performance measures for the Street and Highway Plan Update were presented.

Display boards were available that provided information on the LRTP and Street and Highway Plan Update, the draft universe of alternatives, existing traffic volumes, forecast traffic volumes, planned land use, issues identified through the last public meeting and interactive mapping activity, the 2045 LRTP vision statement and draft goals, performance-based planning, financial plans, and the project schedule.

For the financial planning activity, each attendee was given ten stickers and a worksheet. Participants were asked to place the stickers, representing public funds, on their worksheets to indicate their investment priorities. An online version of this activity was also available on the project website.

Some of the key issues that were presented at the public meeting included:

- Costs are rising faster than federal and state revenues
- Developing reasonably expected revenue estimates for new sources (ND HSIP, ND Main Street Program, Grand Forks sales tax)
- Identifying and positioning projects to successfully compete for grants
- Maintenance and operations costs are a significant part of overall costs
- Need for additional river crossing to improve local traffic and connectivity

Seven attendees signed in on the meeting sign-in sheets. Three written comments were received. One comment asked that all railroad tracks south of Gateway Drive, Grand Forks, be removed, and that new tracks be laid north of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. Another comment expressed that a new bridge and street improvements should be a first priority for public funding. A third comment expressed the desire for more bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. This comment explained that east and west flowing bike traffic is very difficult and dangerous, and asked that bike facilities on University Avenue be improved. The project website was accessed by more than 100 users in the two weeks before and after the public meeting.

Public Meeting #3

The third public meeting was held on April 18, 2018, at Choice Health & Fitness in Grand Forks. The purpose of this meeting was to present the range of alternatives, discuss how the alternatives will be evaluated, and share the public input received on funding priorities. Display boards were available that provided information on the LRTP and Street and Highway Plan Update, the project schedule, forecast average daily traffic, forecast volume to capacity ratios, issues identified through the first public meeting and interactive mapping activity, the 2045 LRTP vision statement and draft goals, performance-based planning, the financial plan, input received from the second public meeting and an interactive activity on funding priorities, the range of alternatives, the alternatives evaluation framework, and the river crossing analysis. This information was also presented through a formal presentation during the public meeting.



Fourteen attendees signed in on the meeting sign-in sheets. No written comment forms were submitted at the public meeting. The project website was accessed by nearly 80 users in the two weeks before and after the public meeting.

Public Meeting #4

The fourth public meeting was held on September 12, 2018, at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks. The purpose of this meeting was to present information about available street/highway funding and share the street/highway projects that match the funding available. Results from the analysis of new river crossing options were also shared. Display boards were available that provided information on the LRTP and Street and Highway Plan Update; the project schedule; the 2045 LRTP vision statement, goals, and performance measures and targets; performance goals, measures, and targets for safety, system preservation, and accessibility and mobility; the financial plan; input issues areas and investment priorities; the alternatives evaluation framework; the proposed investment scenario; and potential discretionary projects. Display boards were also available on the river crossing analysis, including information on the scope of work, traffic analysis, and benefit-cost analysis. This information was also presented through a formal presentation during the public meeting.

Eighteen attendees signed in on the meeting sign-in sheets. One written comment was received. It noted the commenter's opposition to the 24th Avenue S river crossing option due to the impact to the historical society's grounds and recommended pursuing a crossing further south. The project website was accessed by more than 250 users in the two weeks before and after the public meeting.

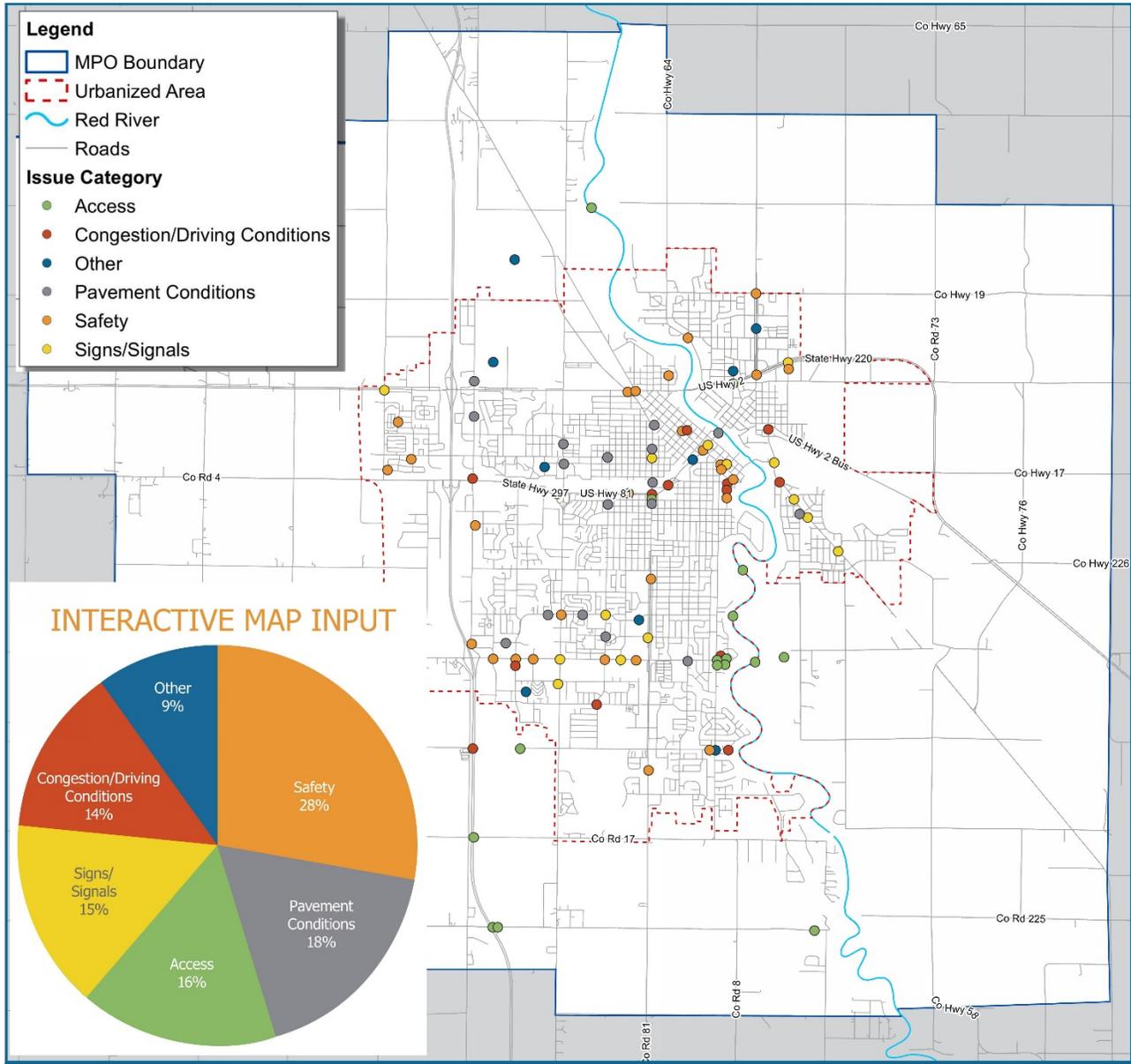
Online Engagement

A key public outreach component was the use of on-line resources to engage residents in the Street and Highway Plan Update process. The project website (www.theforksstreets2045.org) was used as the primary resource for posting information related to the study, announcements, and providing opportunities for on-line engagement activities. Between July 2017 and December 2018, the project website was accessed more than 2,000 times by more than 1,500 users. In addition, the MPO posted announcements on its Facebook page.

In coordination with Public Meeting #1, an on-line mapping activity was used to collect input on the existing street and highway network. Accessed through the project website, participants were able to post geographically specific comments related to access, congestion/driving conditions, pavement conditions, safety, signs/signals, and other. A total of 97 comments were posted. Figure 4-1 displays the related location for these comments and the general comment type.



Figure 4-1: On-Line Mapping Results

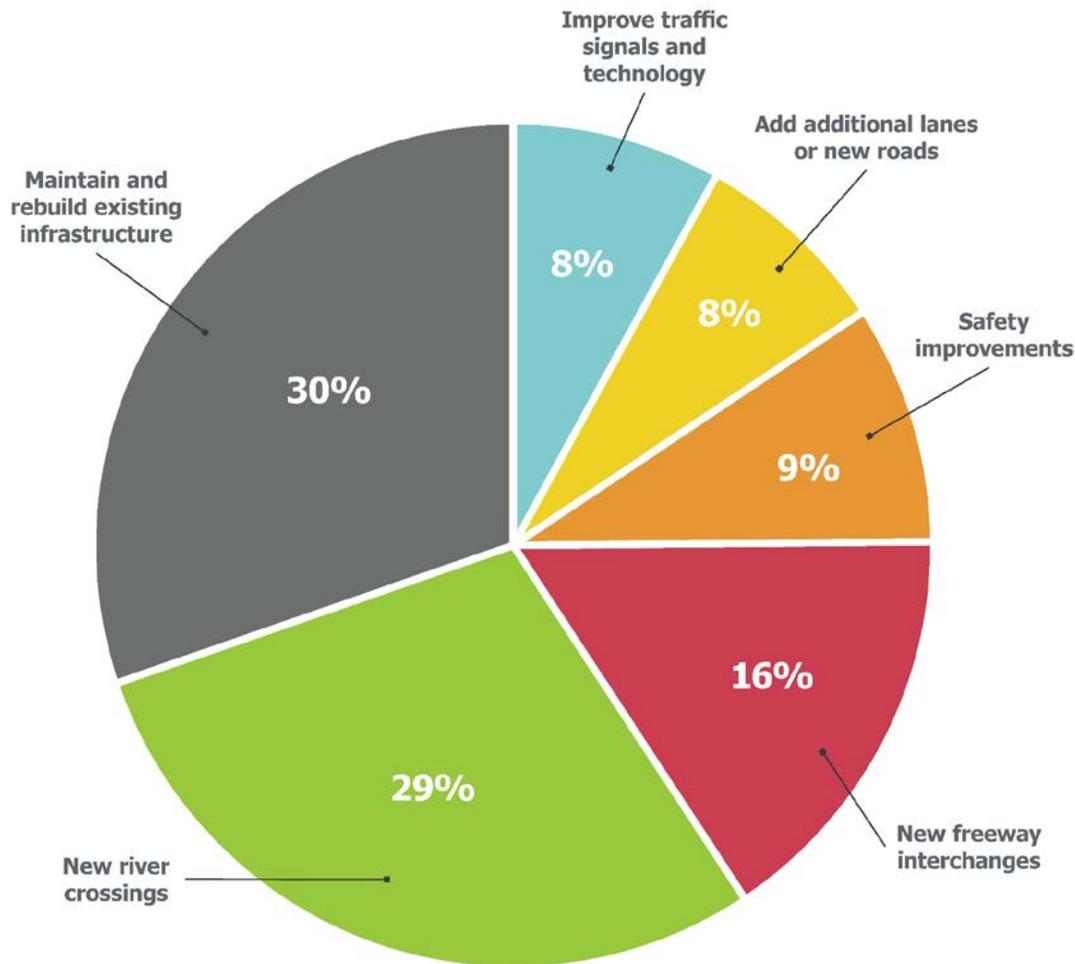


The second on-line engagement activity was coordinated with Public Meeting #2 to help identify investment priorities to inform the financial plan analysis. Via the project website, participants were asked how they would allocate \$100 between the six investment categories listed below. The more money allocated to a category indicates a higher priority for the participant. A total of 69 interactions were posted. The results of the exercise are illustrated in Figure 4-2 and included the following:

- Maintain and rebuild existing infrastructure: **30%**
- Safety improvements (ex: lighting): **9%**
- Improve traffic signals and technology: **8%**
- New freeway interchanges: **16%**
- New river crossings: **29%**
- Add additional lanes or new roads: **8%**



Figure 4-2: December 2017 Open House Results - How Would You Invest \$100?



Stakeholder Engagement

The following stakeholders have been identified in the Streets and Highway Plan Update planning process:

- North Dakota Department of Transportation
- Minnesota Department of Transportation
- City of Grand Forks
- City of East Grand Forks
- Grand Forks County
- Polk County
- Federal Highway Administration
- Federal Transit Administration
- Residents and other stakeholders

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) served as a primary group to collect input from the various partner agency stakeholders. The TAC is composed of various modal staff from the GF/EGF MPO's cities and counties, as well as technical staff from the North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT), the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Study meetings were held on approximately a monthly basis throughout the planning process.



One of the key issues discussed by the TAC included the need for an additional crossing over the Red River for the southern portion of the MPO area. TAC representatives noted that this issue has been discussed in previous Streets and Highway plans, and continues to be a need to address local traffic and connectivity for an expanding population.

Summary of Issues, Needs and Opportunities

A summary of issues and opportunities collected from the public and stakeholder engagement activities is provided in Figure 4-3. Some of the key issues include:

- Additional southern Red River crossing
- 32nd Avenue South
- Proposed interchange improvements along I-29
- Bygland Road
- Columbia Road
- Washington Avenue
- Belmont Road
- Proposed railroad grade separations at DeMers Avenue and US Highway 2
- US Highway 2
- Demers Avenue through the Grand Forks and East Grand Forks downtowns
- Minnesota TH 220



Figure 4-3: Issues Map

