

December 2021 Lowry Avenue virtual public workshop discussion summary

Project staff held a virtual public workshop on December 9, 2021. The following questions and answers summarize the virtual workshop participants' discussion topics and project staff's corresponding responses. Some questions have been edited for clarity.

Facilities for people using transit

Q: Are there plans for the light rail transit to go through Lowry Avenue?

A: The Blue Line Extension (Bottineau line) LRT may use a portion of Lowry Avenue west of the river, but the light rail would not run along this portion of Lowry.

Q: How do the buses fit in?

A: We're considering the existing transit service on the Lowry Avenue corridor. Current analysis assumes that buses would stop in lane at the stops depicted in the concepts. Bus Rapid Transit is a possibility along the corridor according to Metro Transit's long-range plans.

Lane configuration

Q: Is there a need for a turn lane west of Central? Couldn't you just have a bumpout on busy streets?

A: Based on our traffic analysis and modeling (the current configuration with a center turn lane and medians only in select locations west of Central) operates well with regards to travel time, vehicle delay and queuing at intersections.

Q: Have you considered closing access to some roads similar to how Fillmore is currently configured?

A: We are considering adding medians in select locations which would change some side road access to a right-in-right-out only, but we have not considered closing access to any side roads completely at this point.

Q: Why do you have a turn lane instead of the shared use path under the railroad bridge? The shared use path should be continuous.

A: There will not be a turn lane under the railroad bridge. The existing bridge piers form a de-facto median. Due to the limited space under the bridge, and the placement of the piers, there is not an easy way to fit a shared-use path under the bridge, but Hennepin County staff are looking at options to work around the existing piers.

Q: Why are lane widths so wide? 12 feet is highway widths, reduction to 10 feet would give more right of way to other more sustainable modes, greenery, etc.

A: Most lanes are shown in the concepts as 10.5 feet. The areas where the lane widths are shown at 14 feet are where there is one travel lane on either side of a median, rather than three lanes where the center lane is a shared turn lane. Additionally, the 14-foot width includes the width of the curb and gutter. This configuration is the minimum width suggested by county operations staff for snowplows and other services to operate effectively.

Q: Johnson Street did have some slight curves built into the design to get away from that straight line that Lowry also has. Could that be considered for Lowry as well?

A: Shifting traffic at the places where medians are currently proposed is a possibility; however, this creates challenges in redeveloping turn lanes at signalized intersections.

Q: Any plans to add additional traffic calming mechanisms for the large hill on Lowry from Buchanan to Johnson? Cars often speed going downhill from Johnson through Buchanan on Lowry

A: Narrowing the roadway to one travel lane in each direction, removing parking, and changing use of the boulevard space to include plantings and green infrastructure is anticipated to have a traffic-calming effect.

Q: How will emergency vehicles get through with 2 plus lanes? Would they go through the middle lane?

A: In a two-lane section, if vehicles can pull to each curb, an emergency vehicle should have space to pass through the center even with vehicles on either side. We will also coordinate with Fire and Emergency departments to ensure these designs are viable for emergency vehicles before the designs are finalized.

Q: There are some houses built with only parking available on Lowry. Will there be any plan to accommodate those houses, or will those cars need to be moved to a side street?

A: All on-street parking on Lowry Avenue is currently proposed to be removed. County staff are available to discuss this with property owners on any specific concerns to identify alternatives and talk through options.

Facilities for people biking

Q: Are on-street separated bike lanes being considered? If not, why not?

A: Lowry is designated as part of the City's All Ages and Abilities (AAA) bike network, which is intended for anyone between the ages of 8 and 80 to be able to bike safely and comfortably. On busy streets like Lowry, this means moving bicycle facilities off-street, in keeping with national best practices. The City of Minneapolis's Street Design Guide also recommends off-street bicycle facilities for full road reconstructions such as this one.

Q: Why was the south side of Lowry selected for the shared-use path in that concept, as opposed to the north side?

A: A shared-use path on the south side of Lowry would connect well to the newly constructed shared-use path on the west side of Johnson Street, and keeping it on the south side for the length of the project would provide consistency. Evaluating a shared-use path on the north side instead of the south side is possible.

Q: Is there a plan for vacating alleys and streets as part of this project to minimize vehicles crossing over a shared use path?

A: We will work with the city to look at the possibility of consolidating alley access points. Details related to residence and business access for garbage collection and other city services will be worked out in coordination with the city.

Q: Are there plans to put signals at 5th Street at the bike crossing/median? Putting one at Fillmore would be great too.

A: At this level of developing the design, we haven't considered the addition of enhanced crossing treatments, but options like this will be considered as the concept is being developed.

Q: If the shared use path does not extend west of Central, where are bikers supposed to go? In the streets that already have higher volumes of truck traffic? How is that safer?

A: In the option that does not include a shared use path west of Central Avenue, people biking and who want to use designated bike facilities can use the parallel bike boulevard on 22nd Street, a few blocks south of Lowry Avenue that extends the full east-west length of this project area. North of Lowry Avenue, the closest bike facility is St. Anthony Parkway. Where bike facilities are not provided, people on bikes are legally allowed to use standard travel lanes.

Facilities for people walking

Q: There are long stretches of Lowry without protected/safe pedestrian crossings. Are there any plans to add signals or stop signs to support pedestrian movements across Lowry?

A: Once a concept is selected, we will work through the details of looking more closely at the pedestrian and bike crossings and what if any enhancements we can provide.

Q: Can you speak more to lighting plans for the corridor? Will pedestrian lighting be installed along the corridor?

A: Details of pedestrian-scale lighting will be evaluated during the detailed design phase for the concept that is selected. Lowry Avenue is identified as a pedestrian street lighting corridor on the City of Minneapolis Pedestrian-Level Street Lighting Program Map: [Pedestrian Street Lighting Resources - City of Minneapolis \(minneapolismn.gov\)](#)

Q: Can you please share an example of where a raised crosswalk might be used? Raised crosswalks were considered in Johnson but seemed to have been scrapped without a significant opportunity for public comment. How can we advocate for that, and can we use them across Lowry as a form of speed control (i.e., mild speed bump or rumble strip to stop 50+ MPH drivers)?

A: Raised crosswalks are being considered where the shared-use path crosses a non-signalized side street, except on side streets that are Municipal State Aid (MSA) truck routes. Please leave any comments related to this or other topics on our interactive map (<https://asakurarobinson.mysocialpinpoint.com/livable-lowry#/sidebar/tab/instructions>) or by emailing livablelowry@hennepin.us

Utilities

Q: Will overhead utilities currently on poles be buried?

A: Utilities will remain above-ground, but some utilities may be moved so as not to obstruct the sidewalk or shared use path.

Q: Will below-grade infrastructure such as sewer and water be improved as well?

A: Hennepin County project staff will be in coordination with City of Minneapolis Public Works, who owns the sewer and water lines, to coordinate any needed sewer and water improvements with this project.

Q: I have complained of unfinished work in my boulevard and digging up of my boulevard from sewer and internet construction. Will any of my concerns not be addressed due to this upcoming work?

A: This recent work is unrelated to the Lowry Avenue reconstruction project and concerns should be addressed to the City of Minneapolis 311 service line.

Traffic modeling

Q: What is the expected change in travel time for automobiles along the corridor?

A: Based on Hennepin County's traffic analysis and modeling, there will not be a noticeable change in travel time for automobiles.

Q: Can you share the mathematical model that you will be using for the traffic counts?

A: A traffic modeling report is being completed for the project and is currently in draft form and can be made available when it has been finalized.

Q: What growth rate is being used?

A: A zero percent growth rate is being used for the purposes of traffic modeling and analysis. Initially half a percent growth rate was used.

Q: When were traffic counts and turning movements that the analysis based on conducted? Have traffic reductions from COVID-19 been considered? If the goal in Minneapolis is to reduce traffic counts, why are you projecting growth?

A: Traffic counts are from before the pandemic began, and certainly traffic patterns have changed. To account for the changes and compare to pre-pandemic traffic

counts, we are also looking at traffic count estimates using mobile device data, as well as selecting a growth rate that we feel reflects how traffic may return closer to pre-pandemic levels. We have tried to select a growth rate that will reflect a balance between ideal and actual conditions.

Boulevards and green space

Q: Are there plans for advanced best practices for stormwater runoff infiltration and native low-impact plantings that help slow traffic? The Holland Neighborhood (west of central) has advocated for curb cuts on major roadways to allow for stormwater infiltration as much as possible as our area has issues with flooding. In the past, these BMPs have been met with resistance from Public Works. Do you see city departments cooperating with all the recommendations the residents ask for, that are deemed appropriate for the project?

A: We are working with City staff on identifying BMP (best management practice) alternatives. There are many options provided in the City of Minneapolis Street Design Guide as well. We are also working with the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) to consider innovative uses for boulevard space that can capture stormwater and mitigate or reduce flooding, as well as plantings that support pollinator habitat.

Q: Would the boulevards help with reducing ice buildup on the sidewalks by giving stormwater a place to go?

A: Yes, boulevard space has the potential to be designed in a way to help minimize ice buildup by capturing stormwater and runoff from the roadway and sidewalks or a shared use path.

Q: Do residents get to choose the trees [and other plants] planted in nearby boulevards? Can we plant the boulevards? Who would mow these new green spaces? Government or private citizens?

A: Plantings will follow city standards and best practices, but we may be able to take public input on the types of plantings selected. Plantings will also be compliant with the new city stormwater ordinance and be designed to capture stormwater in the right of way. Best practices are moving away from grass boulevards and towards native plantings. Additionally, the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has requirements regarding tree species in certain areas. Planting details will be finalized later in the detailed design process along with clarifying who is responsible to maintain them.

Vision Zero and other plans

Q: Can you speak to the relationship between the Vision Zero Plan, The Street Design Guide, & the Lowry Avenue Plan? How much has the Lowry Avenue Plan informed the Vision Zero Plan, The Street Design Guide and vice-versa?

A: The policies and plans mentioned above have informed the new concepts proposed for Lowry Avenue, which have been updated from 2015 with these new plans considered. The proposed 4- to 3-lane conversion is directly informed by crash statistics that can be found in the Vision Zero plan indicating that four-lane undivided roadways are less safe. Items including wide sidewalks with a boulevard, adequate space for transit and future BRT facilities, and shifting modes away from private motor vehicle use and shifting street use away from private motor vehicle parking and towards transit, biking and walking, are all informed by these plans.

Q: Can you explain why this plan, and other plans the city has recently implemented, tend to favor raising the bicycle path to the same level as the sidewalk, rather than separating but keeping the bicycle path at the same level as the roadway? Does data show raised paths are safer?

A: Yes, data shows that grade-separated bike facilities are safer, especially on busy roads. Additionally, because Lowry Avenue is part of the proposed All Ages and Abilities (AAA) Bike Network, any bicycle facility on Lowry Avenue will prioritize comfortable and safe riding for people ages 8 through 80. The Minneapolis Street Design Guidelines also do not support on-street bicycle facilities for full road reconstruction projects, in keeping with national best practices.

Speed

Q: Is Hennepin County considering a 25 MPH speed limit for county roads? I would certainly support that.

A: Speeds on county roads are set by State Statute (Minn. Statute 169.14) and by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). Hennepin County will discuss the possibility of a speed reduction on Lowry Avenue with MnDOT and the City of Minneapolis. More information is available through MnDOT about speed limits in Minnesota: [Speed Limits in Minnesota - MnDOT \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.mn.gov/transportation/speed-limits)

Q: What is the engineered design speed for each layout (different from the posted speed)? How does that support the Vision Zero plan? Those are different concepts and the first is more important for safety and, hopefully, in control of the County through this design process.

A: Because Lowry Avenue within the project area is a fairly straight alignment from east to west with no large curves and a posted speed of 30 MPH, the design speed currently uses 30 MPH. There are limited options to change the street alignment, but proposed changes including the 4- to 3-lane conversion, adding medians in select locations and introducing boulevard plantings and street trees, are options that have been shown to provide traffic calming.

Truck routes

Q: What type of truck routes are designated along different segments of Lowry? Is the plan for the intersection of Lowry and Central responsive to these truck route statuses or is the intersection being designed to accommodate truck traffic from a higher designation? Is Lowry Avenue east of University Avenue a designated truck route, and if so, when was it designated as such?

A: The entire Lowry Avenue NE corridor from Marshall Street NE to Stinson Boulevard NE is designated as a City of Minneapolis truck route. In addition, Lowry Avenue NE also carries the Federal Highway Administration's National Highway System Intermodal Freight Connector Route designation from University Avenue NE through Marshall Street NE (this designation continues west of Marshall Street NE to 2nd Street N, west of the river). Lowry Avenue NE is part of the route that links the Canadian Pacific CP/Shoreham Intermodal Rail Yard and Port of Minneapolis to Interstate 94. The route uses 30th Avenue NE, 4th Street NE, 32nd Avenue NE, University Avenue (TH 47), Lowry Avenue NE, 2nd Street N and Dowling Avenue. This service to the CP/Shoreham Intermodal Yard is part of the Regional Commercial Freight System of the Metropolitan Council's 2030 Transportation Policy Plan and recognized in the Metropolitan Council 2030 Framework and the 2030 Transportation Policy Plan.

Q: Which intersections [cross-streets] are major truck routes?

A: Marshall Street NE, University Avenue NE (TH 47), and Central Avenue NE (TH 65) are designated truck routes north and south of Lowry Avenue NE. Johnson Street NE is a designated truck route south of Lowry Avenue NE. See Minneapolis's 2002

Truck Route Map: [https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/media/content-assets/www2-documents/departments/Truck-Route-Map-\(pdf\).pdf](https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/media/content-assets/www2-documents/departments/Truck-Route-Map-(pdf).pdf)

Construction

Q: Are there any ideas on how residents who live north of Lowry on 4th and 5th streets will be able to cross Lowry during the construction of Phase Two? Or have emergency services access to those blocks as there is no alternate access?

A: Our construction staff will work closely with residents, emergency services and businesses in all areas of the project to make sure that adequate access is always provided, especially in the case of streets whose only access point is Lowry Avenue. Project staff will be evaluating these details closer to the time of construction.

Q: Will you block side streets to block cut-through traffic during construction? While the Johnson Street construction was going on, there were a lot of people speeding down side streets.

A: This and other items related to construction will be worked out in detail closer to the time of construction. We will work with the City of Minneapolis to make changes to traffic control on side roads to minimize cut-through traffic during construction. We are also able to address and minimize any problems that arise quickly during construction.

Q: What should we expect for existing retaining walls along Lowry? Are those generally paid for by the project or the adjacent property owners?

A: Generally retaining walls are part of the project construction costs. If a wall is constructed entirely on private property project staff will coordinate this work with the property owner regarding aesthetics and ongoing maintenance on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Can you speak to the decision to stop the scope at Johnson Street? A male pedestrian was killed trying to cross Lowry at Lowry and Arthur Street.

A: The portions of Lowry for which we have funding currently in Hennepin County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) have an eastern limit at Johnson Street. The study done in 2015 did extend as far as Stinson Boulevard and Hennepin County Transportation Planning staff look at applying for funding and programming

projects in our CIP, but at this time the funding available for corridor improvements has an eastern limit at Johnson Street.

Moving forward

Q: What is the best way for residents to advocate that our voices are heard (and bicycle infrastructure is planned) going forward?

A: Comment on the interactive map (<https://asakurarobinson.mysocialpinpoint.com/livable-lowry#/sidebar/tab/instructions>) and send additional comments to the project email: livablelowry@hennepin.us

Q: What/who will determine the concept selection? Resident input? Business input? Do the concepts differ at all in cost?

A: The cost differs slightly between the current two concepts. Selection between the two concepts will be based on resident and business input, engineering design and analysis and coordination with agency partners including the City of Minneapolis. The selected concept will need to receive municipal consent from the City of Minneapolis to move forward.

Other questions

Q: Who would submit grant proposals for Johnson to Stinson rework?

A: Hennepin County Transportation Planning staff determines and assembles funding applications to submit to Metropolitan Council along with City of Minneapolis support; the Hennepin County Engineer is involved in the funding and programming of projects in coordination with Hennepin County Transportation Planning staff.

Q: On icy days, lots of cars get stuck going up the hill eastbound on Lowry from Lincoln to Johnson. Any plan to change the slope of this hill or other mitigations?

A: There are no plans to change the slope of the hill currently. Conforming to the current slope will mitigate potential affects to adjacent properties.

Q: Is there any possibility of reconstructing the railroad bridge?

A: This remains to be determined through communication and coordination between Hennepin County and BNSF on possibilities related to the railroad

bridge. Hennepin County is not aware of any plans BNSF has to reconstruct the bridge at this time.