Transportation Committee Staff Report for Projects

Committee date: April 17, 2023

Project Name: Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan

Geographic Scope:
The project area encompasses approximately a 5.4-mile corridor along Summit Avenue, Kellogg Boulevard, and Eagle Parkway, connecting the Mississippi Gorge Regional Park and Samuel H. Morgan Regional Trail in a direct east-west connection across the city along a scenic parkway. The proposed trail facility touches the Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRCCA) at the eastern and western most edges of its alignment. The proposed trail is also within two designated historic districts, and adjacent to several historic properties.

Project Contact:
Mary Norton – Landscape Architect | Project Manager

Project Webpage:
www.stpaul.gov/SummitAveRegionalTrail
www.engagestpaul.org/summit

Project Description:
Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan
A regional trail on Summit Avenue represents a unique opportunity to create a vision for future bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in this corridor that can be accessible to all. This separated facility would meet both recreation and transportation needs while providing a higher level of comfort and safety for trail users than the current on-street bike lanes.

Many portions of the Summit Avenue roadway have not been reconstructed in more than 100 years. This presents a unique and critical opportunity prior to street reconstruction to develop a plan that not only can meet Citywide policy actions but meets goals identified through extensive community engagement of tree preservation, safety and historic character of this very important parkway in Saint Paul.

Summit Avenue is a regional trail search corridor that is centrally located in the Regional Parks System west of downtown Saint Paul. The search corridor runs along Summit Avenue from Mississippi Gorge Regional Park to Kellogg Boulevard then onto Eagle Parkway where the trail connects to the Samuel Morgan Regional Trail at Shepard Road. The 4.7-mile Summit Avenue parkway segment dates back to the 1880s and consists of generous green areas with mature trees interwoven through a roadway with an existing on-street bicycle lane. The .75-mile Kellogg Boulevard/Eagle Parkway segment consists of urban streetscape and an existing multi-use trail along Eagle Parkway to Shepard.

The project has faced numerous complexities from technical issues like roadway geometry and transition areas, process and framework for historical context, and responding to engagement with many voices and experiences shared identifying issues and opportunities surrounding the

trail itself. The current recommendations from Federal and State traffic safety guidance is that the trail be separated due to traffic volumes that currently exist on Summit Ave. A bike lane is not recommended based on the amount of traffic and reconstructing the road back to its current configuration with an on-street bike lane would not meet recommended safety guidelines for Summit Ave. It is also important to recognize that the project team heard from many people during engagement that a trail separated from traffic would be more comfortable for people of all ages and abilities compared to an on-street bike lane.

The Summit Avenue Regional Trail plan proposes a one-way grade separated trail on both sides of the road from Mississippi River Blvd. to Kellogg Blvd. to balance community interests, provide for continuity in the user experience, and to limit impacts to greenspace. The segments along Kellogg Blvd. and Eagle Pkwy would follow plans developed for the Capital City Bikeway planning process and utilize the existing multi-use trail along Eagle Parkway.

The Plan outlines a vision that recognizes the significance of this designed public landscape for social engagement and recreation, a parkway space developed in the late 1800s, characterized by broad medians and greenspaces by which people move as they connect to places locally and regionally. This regional trail plan looks to the future of this space in the context of its current use and identifies a trail that would allow for more people to experience the linear parklike qualities of Summit Avenue through recreation for years to come.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS:

Community engagement on the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan was developed over the course of a 16-month period. Engagement efforts included a multi-faceted approach using both in-person events and online engagement methods to connect with local and regional stakeholders. During this process, more than 2,800 engaged participants have helped shape the regional trail plan. Project staff have worked hard to provide an open and responsive process working to ensure community members have access to information. The Regional Trail Plan develops an approach that sets a framework for future decision-making while balancing community interests.

Main Community Concerns:

- Greenspace:
    - Impacts to trees
        - Trees are central to the parkway experience of Summit Avenue and as such maintaining them is a goal embedded in the project. The regional trail plan is a visionary document and recognizes that specific tree impacts will need to be identified at the time of design and engineering based on existing conditions at that time. The plan outlines an analysis for potential tree vulnerability relative to the trail within the roadway to gauge potential impacts. The plan sets forth typical sections that are primarily within the roadway footprint to utilize paved spaces to the extent possible to limit impacts. It also sets forth a process for a tree preservation framework to be utilized before, during, and after construction.

- Safety:

    - Proximity of vehicles to on-street bike lanes as a barrier to use and desire for separation
        - *The design of the trail would be an off-street facility, providing physical separation between users*
    - Crossings where bicyclists & pedestrians pass through intersections and driveways
        - *Trail plan introduces a toolkit of best practices that prioritize safety for pedestrians and bicyclists at crossings. Bicyclists and Pedestrians have the right-of-way at driveway crossings*

- Facility Conditions:
    - Pavement surface of existing conditions
        - *Public Works will implement surfacing treatments to the corridor in 2023 such that the roadway from Mississippi River Blvd. to Victoria Street will have improved surface conditions as a short-term solution prior to longer-term street reconstruction.*
    - Winter maintenance
        - *Saint Paul Parks and Recreation maintains Regional Trail Facilities in the winter.*

- No Change
    - Unnecessary and that the existing conditions are adequate
        - *Existing conditions do not meet current design standards for bicycle facilities given roadway volumes.*
    - Concerns about historical context and impacts
        - *Staff from the City's Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and the State of Minnesota's Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) have been involved through technical advisory roles to provide initial feedback on the plan. The plan recognizes that if and when there is federal funding, formal Section 106 historical review processes will be necessary during design and engineering.*
    - Interest that this should occur another roadway in the City
        - *This is a regional trail search corridor in both the City's comprehensive plan and Metropolitan Council's Regional Parks Policy Plans. The grades and parkway characteristics make Summit Avenue highly suitable for a regional trail amenity.*

Project Stage & General Timeline:
A number of factors wil linflucence phasing of the design and construction of a regional trail facility including funding, construction prioritieis, and coordinatin with other projects including the potential to pair trail implementation with roadway reconstruction projects. Trail would likely be completed as a long-term approach in phases by segment spanning 10-15 years. The Regional Solicitation process between application and award is a 6 year process typically.

Public Hearing Date & Location:
Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting
Agenda Item and Public Hearing

Thursday, April 13, 2023
6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
Palace Community Center
781 Palace Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102

Cost & Primary Funding Source(s):

Cost: Cost is estimated to be around $12M for the separated trail elements. An estimated cost of full street reconstruction for the corridor is $100 million. The preferred strategy is to build the trail with street reconstruction, where the incremental cost of the trail is less. The most cost-effective opportunities to add pedestrian and bicycle improvements come when roads are being fully redesigned.

Sources(s): Funding for construction of a regional trail is not currently available. The City would look to a phased approach for implementation and seek a combination of local, state, and federal funding options.

As a regional trail, options for funding construction include the regional solicitation process that allocates federal funds to meet local and regional transportation needs. Other potential sources include Parks and Trails Legacy Funding.

Street reconstruction is typically funded through a combination of local bonding, state, and federal funds, in addition to property assessments.

Staff Analysis of Comprehensive Plan Conformance:

Comprehensive Plan

Saint Paul's Comprehensive Plan is a document meant to guide development in Saint Paul for the next 20 years. It includes policies to address physical development, focusing on racial and social equity, aging in community, community/public health, economic development, sustainability/resiliency and urban design. Staff finds that the proposed Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan conforms to the Comprehensive Plan, including especially the key sections highlighted below from the Comprehensive Plan and its addenda.

Celebrating Parks is one of the core values shaping the comprehensive plan for the City. Summit Avenue with its wide vegetated medians is characterized by many as a linear park. The alignment and design elements of the regional trail will support this character and use.

Community/Public Health is listed as a focus area of the comprehensive plan. The existing corridor serves as both an active transportation and recreation corridor enabling people to meet their daily physical activity needs. Enhancing this aspect with the regional trail will expand this function of the corridor and the geographic reach of the recreational user. Implementation of the bike and pedestrian plans (outlined below) are included with the draft policy (policy # T-24 and T-25) to support community health for all.

Summit Avenue is identified as a major collector with an existing on-road bikeway. Additionally, it has been identified as a Regional Bicycle Transportation Network (RBTN) Tier 2 Corridor.

Respecting our History and Culture is an additional value listed in the Comprehensive Plan. Along with creating a safe and accessible regional trail facility, the implementation of this regional trail plan offers the opportunity to preserve, rehabilitate, and reveal historic and cultural features within the corridor that reflect the multi-layered history of Summit Avenue and the region. The Heritage and Cultural Preservation chapter of the Plan recommends that City activities regarding historic preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction should be "sustainable and equitable; improve the quality of life for all residents and visitors; guide public and private investment; express a sense of place and pride; celebrate the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the community; and be embraced in all facets of the City's work"[1].

The Transportation chapter identifies the following goals. Notes on the subsequent policies which are applicable to this Planning process are included.

1. Investment that reflects the City's priorities.
   » T-3: Design per the following model hierarchy: pedestrians, bicyclists, transit, other vehicles.
2. Safety and accessibility for all users.
   » T-7: Implement intersection safety improvements including pedestrian countdown times, leading pedestrian signal intervals, and other elements to lower motor vehicle speeds.
   » T-10: Design sidewalks, trails, and transit stops for personal safety (real and perceived).
   » T-13: When street design changes involve the potential loss of on-street parking spaces, prioritize safety for all transportation modes. Explore mitigation of lost spaces where feasible and practical.
3. A transportation system that supports access to employment and economic opportunity.
4. True transportation choice throughout the city, with a shift from single-occupant vehicles toward other modes.
   » T-21 Reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 40% by 2040
   » T-24: Implement the Bicycle Plan
   » T-25 Implement the pedestrian plan
5. Sustainable and equitable maintenance models.
6. Environmentally-sustainable design.
7. Functional and attractive Parkways.
   » T-41: Maximize space for recreation and landscaping uses with Parkway rights-of-way, and prioritize recreation and landscaping in Parkway design in order to maintain a park-like feel, particularly on the Grand Round.
8. A system that responds to technology and shapes its implementation.

The Land Use chapter identifies the following goals. Notes on the subsequent policies which are applicable to this Planning process are included.

1. City-wide Land Use Goals
   » LU-13: Support strategies, as context and technology allow, to improve off-street parking efficiency, such as shared parking agreements, district ramps, car sharing, electric vehicle charging and reduced parking overall.
   » LU-15: Ensure that stand-alone parking uses are limited, and that structured parking is mixed-use and/or convertible to other uses.
2. Civic and Institutional Land Use Goals

» LU-54: Ensure institutional campuses are compatible with their surrounding neighborhoods by managing parking demand and supply, maintaining institution-owned housing stock, minimizing traffic congestion, and providing for safe pedestrian and bicycle access.

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space chapter identifies the following goals. Notes on the subsequent policies which are applicable to this Planning process are included.

1. Equitable allocation of programs, resources and amenities.
2. People, programming and spaces responsive to changing needs.
   » PR-9: Use customer and resident feedback on needs, satisfaction and trends to improve park experience, advance equity and bring in new users.
3. Environmental and economic sustainability.
   » PR-19: Improve the environmental sustainability and resiliency of parks through strategies such as shared, stacked-function green infrastructure; best management practices in
   stormwater management; increased tree canopy; increased plant diversity and pollinator-friendly plantings.
4. A healthy network of community partnerships.
5. Strong and accessible connections.
   » PR-35: Prioritize safety and equity when filling gaps in the trail and bikeway system to ensure seamless connections throughout the city for pedestrians and bicyclists of all ages and abilities.
   » PR-36: Integrate parkways and trails with the city's broader transportation network to provide convenient and safe access to the park system.
   » PR-38: Improve and encourage pedestrian and bicycle connections between park facilities and other significant destinations, such as lakes and rivers, schools, transit facilities and Neighborhood Nodes.
   » PR-39: Emphasize safety, convenience and comfort when designing new trails or rebuilding those that already exist.
   » PR-40: Provide interpretive elements to educate users about unique aspects of the park system.
   » PR-41: Provide consistent wayfinding signage in each project or park so that it is recognizable as part of the broader City system.
   » PR-44: Support facility improvements that better connect neighborhoods to the Mississippi River.

Bicycle Plan

The Saint Paul Bicycle Plan (2015) is adopted as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan. Summit Avenue currently has in-road striped bike lanes from Mississippi River Boulevard to John Ireland Boulevard and, according to the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan, is a major bikeway. In the plan, Summit Avenue is categorized as an in-street separated lane which includes bike lanes, buffered bike lanes, one-way cycle tracks, or two-way cycle tracks.

Regional trail corridors are intended to provide for recreational travel along linear pathways for bicyclists, pedestrians, and other users throughout the metropolitan area. Regional trails must be designated by the Metropolitan Council and are intended to pass through or provide connections between components in the Regional Parks System. Regional trails are defined in

the Metropolitan Council's Regional Parks Policy Plan. Regional parks and trails identified in the Regional Parks Policy Plan are eligible for other funding sources.

In urban areas such as Saint Paul, the regional trail network also plays an important function for transportation bicycling and often forms the backbone of the bicycle transportation network. Regional trail facilities are often developed along natural or linear features, which can limit the number of intersections, greatly enhancing safety and comfort for trail users. As a Regional Linking trail in the Metropolitan Council's Parks Policy Plan, a primary function of the trail along Summit would be to connect to population, economic and social centers along its route.

The Saint Paul Bicycle Plan identifies the existing regional trail, other linear trails that pass through regional parks, planned regional trails, and regional trail search corridors. The regional trail search corridors include Summit Avenue. The Metropolitan Council requires implementing agencies to prepare a Plan document for all planned regional trails. Regional trail search corridors are defined by the Metropolitan Council in the Parks Policy Plan.

Pedestrian Plan

The Saint Paul Pedestrian Plan (2019) is adopted as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan. It addresses citywide walking needs such as connecting the sidewalk system, providing safer ways to cross streets and education and enforcement programs to support safe walking. It includes recommendations to achieve the plan's vision: Saint Paul is a walking city—we are more healthy, resilient and connected when walking is safe and appealing for all.

Saint Paul community members have identified three priorities for making walking safer and easier:

- Crossing busy streets
- Filling sidewalk gaps
- Improving snow and ice removal

Summit Avenue from Hamline Ave to Lexington Pkwy and from St Albans St to John Ireland Blvd are identified as medium priorities based on census tracts for sidewalk investment. There are no priority segments of Summit Avenue identified as sidewalk gaps.

The following actions are included in the Saint Paul Pedestrian Plan to improve pedestrian safety and comfort at busy street crossings.

1-1. Plan, design, build and maintain the city's transportation system in a way that prioritizes walking first, followed by bicycling and transit use and lastly other vehicles.

1-2. Advocate for a statewide reduction in urban speed limits as part of the city's legislative agenda. Complete - speed limit on Summit Avenue is 25 mph.

1-3. Follow best practices for marking crosswalks. Convert crosswalks marked with parallel bars to high-visibility crossings to improve visibility of crosswalks. Whenever possible, use durable crosswalk marking materials.

1-4. Ensure visibility of pedestrian crossings. Review street lighting, sign placement, street furniture, bus shelters, foliage growth, and parking restrictions at intersections as part of all reconstruction projects and requests for crossing improvements.

1-5. Establish a consistent process for reviewing, improving and prioritizing pedestrian crossings. Review and update policies as necessary to incorporate best practices and national guidelines. Apply these policies to all projects and requests that include crossing improvements.
1-6. Reduce pedestrians' exposure to motor vehicles and lower street design speeds. Pursue changes in street designs that lower design speeds and reduce roadway crossing widths.
1-7. Coordinate with transit providers and the Saint Paul Bicycle Plan to ensure pedestrian solutions complement bicycling and transit needs.
1-8. Develop a program to proactively implement infrastructure improvements in high crash risk locations. Conduct a Pedestrian Systemic Safety Analysis to identify the highest risk locations for pedestrian crashes. Develop a prioritized list of candidate pedestrian safety improvements on high-risk streets and a five-year plan for implementation.
1-9. Dedicate additional funding to improve pedestrian crossings in conformance with best practices and support on-going maintenance of these treatments.
1-10. Provide regular crossing opportunities on collector and arterial streets, prioritizing streets in High Priority Areas for Walking Investments.
1-11. Work with partners to support safe walking environments through initiatives like Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, lighting improvements, neighborhood walks, and trash cleanup.
1-12. Identify resources to improve on-going maintenance of existing crossing facilities, including snow and ice removal at crossings, crosswalk markings and replacement of flexible traffic posts in temporary crossing improvements.
2-1. Design streets in accordance with Saint Paul's Street Design Manual to promote a comfortable walking environment on all street types in Saint Paul.
3-1. Pursue opportunities to install and maintain interim pedestrian crossing improvements using low-cost materials.
3-2. Review and update the Saint Paul Department of Public Works Temporary Pedestrian Access Route (TPAR) policy (originally adopted 2014) to define requirements for TPAR implementation and mandate use of best practices identified by Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines. Proactively inspect TPARs and enforce contractor compliance with city policy.
3-3. Maximize impact of capital projects through coordination with partner jurisdictions such as Ramsey County, MnDOT and Metro Transit. Define internal structure for managing external partnerships and identifying opportunities to maximize use of resources during capital projects.

Saint Paul Climate Action & Resilience Plan:
Although not part of the Comprehensive Plan, the Climate Action & Resilience Plan is adopted by the Mayor and City Council. This plan outlines a series of strategies to achieve the City's ultimate goals of carbon neutrality by 2050 and a 50% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030. Transportation is noted in the document to be the largest source of carbon emissions, and that reducing carbon emissions is critical to meeting the City's resiliency goals. The plan highlights the need for improved and additional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to ensure that communities are connected by a diverse range of transportation modes. The plan states a specific goal of ensuring that "85% of Saint Paul residents have safe access to protected active transportation facilities", with a target of constructing 300 miles of new bikeways by 2050. Key

initiatives also recommend prioritizing protected bicycle facilities over unprotected or shared bicycle lanes.

Transportation Committee Role:

☐ Inform project scope & approach ☐ Inform design ☐ Inform implementation

☒ Make recommendation

Explanation

The committee will make a recommendation to the full Planning Commission, who will then make a recommendation to the City's Parks and Recreation Commission. Per the City's Administrative Code, the Planning Commission will make "its recommendation with respect to the relationship of the proposal to the overall comprehensive plan of the city and the city capital allocation policy, and its opinion and recommendation as to any other planning consideration which may be relevant to the proposal, with its recommendation of approval, rejection or modification of the proposal." Since there is not a capital allocation policy, per se, the committee's recommendation should focus on comprehensive plan conformance and any other planning consideration which may be relevant.

Attachments include:

☐ Complete Streets Checklist request ☒ Draft Final Regional Trail Plan Document ☐ CIB
☒ Executive Summary

Staff recommendation	*Recommend approval*
Action item requested of the Committee	*Finding consistency with the 2040 Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan, recommend approval of the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan*
Committee recommendation	***Finding consistency with the 2040 Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan and other adopted plans, recommend approval of the Summit Avenue Regional Trail Plan***
Committee vote	***8-1*** *(Syed)*