

To: David Bennett, Public Works Director

Cc: Northfield Transportation Advisory Committee (NTAC) members
Ben Martig, City Administrator

From: NTAC 246 Request for Proposal Subcommittee: Betsey Buckheit, Will Schroeer, Ron Sommer

Date: June 30, 2022

Subject: Input on RFP for Assistance on decision-making for possible TH 246 turnback

At its April 20, 2022 meeting, NTAC created a subcommittee to provide input on the RFP for consultant support that would help inform discussions about possible turnback of State Highway 246. The Subcommittee was assigned to develop:

1. Questions a consultant should help answer, and
2. Criteria staff should use to select a consultant.

1. Questions a consultant should help answer to inform discussion of possible 246 Turnback

These questions are drawn primarily, but not solely, from a review of previous conversations at the City Council and the NTAC.

Q1a: Which communities are served by the 246 corridor?

Minnesota Trunk Highway 246 is an 18.22-mile-long highway serving parts of Goodhue and Rice Counties, with its west end in Northfield and its east end near Kenyon. In addition to the cities, towns, and townships immediately served by 246, it is part of routes to other towns and destinations, including Dennison and Nerstrand-Big Woods State Park.

The answers to several following questions will be informed by the answer to this question.

Q1b: What are the goals of these communities for this corridor?

The consultant might help inform this question through a combination of:

1. Review of adopted plans and policies
2. Public engagement including with the school district, seniors, residents and commuters
3. Information from staff, NTAC, and relevant boards and commissions

Q2: What transportation needs exist now and what future needs can be identified in the 246 corridor?

Jurisdictions' plans and policies may not capture all the relevant needs. The consultant should identify other needs based on a review of the needs of current and future people and uses in the travel-shed.

In identifying needs, the consultant should:

1. Review relevant future land use and transportation plans. These include (but are clearly not limited to): New or redeveloped high school, additional residential development, and the Mill Towns State Trail.
2. Document trips to/from the various destinations on and near the corridor. For example, each school, 59 North, state, county, and local parks, etc.
3. Document the demographics of the people making these trips.
4. Do current vehicle counts and intersection analyses to document current conditions. [Detail provided, etc.]

Potential consultants should note:

- Some of the jurisdictions’ relevant land use and transportation plans are out of date and will be revised soon. Thus, while this work should be informed by existing plans, the Consultant will need to distinguish between older and newer plans and policies. For example, Northfield is beginning a process to revise its Comp Plan, which was adopted in 2008. The City declared a Climate Emergency in 2022.
- Current conditions should not be taken as normal or desirable. For example, modal counts will not find many children walking or biking to school. That is not the community’s goal or expectation.

Q3: What design/s for various parts of the 246 corridor should stakeholders consider to meet the goals and needs identified in Questions 1 and 2?

The needs developed in Q2 should then be the basis for a clear list of

1. Goals for the corridor
2. Likely future transportation needs.

The consultant should generate (forecast) a *range* of possible future use volumes for various modes, acknowledging that actual use will be determined in part by the chosen design.

The consultant should develop up to 3 plan-level options for meeting the needs identified in Q1 and Q2.

Highway 246 serves a diverse set of communities and needs. The right designs are likely to vary across the length of Highway 246. Every served jurisdiction should consider its needs. The design/s developed for the City of Northfield should

- Take into account the needs of the whole 246 corridor;
- Within Northfield, recognize the diverse transportation needs on and near the corridor.

These options should be clearly evaluated for how well they fulfill the goals and needs developed in Q2.

Q4: What financial costs and benefits would a 246 turnback produce?

The Northfield Comprehensive Plan establishes a duty “to provide a safe, convenient, multi-modal, and environmentally responsible transportation system for Northfield and the surrounding region.” (Chapter 7). What is the cost of doing so, in this case?

The Consultant should provide Northfield (and ideally other jurisdictions served by TH 246) with a clearly disaggregated and explained description of the costs and benefits, and to whom, of a possible turnback.

Those costs and benefits may include, but not be limited to:

Costs

1. Cost of implementing the options developed in Q3

Discuss options for who pays those costs (Would likely include: MnDOT implements before turnover; MnDOT conveys 246 together with a certain amount of funding to address future needs...)

2. Jurisdictions Northfield take over operation and maintenance of 246. That cost:

- includes both physical maintenance and operational costs such as plowing;
- is forecast to be *x* over *y* years.

3. *Etc.*

Benefits

Benefits may or may not be financially quantifiable in the same way as costs. Most transportation-related investments are not subject to cost-benefit analysis. The goal of the “Benefits” analysis is the same as the “Costs” analysis: to make clear the possible results as an input to decision-making. Not to establish a test. Possible benefits may include:

1. The ability to implement design solutions that would not necessarily be allowed under state highway standards. What are these?
2. Local control may lead to faster action in response to future needs.
3. Local control may allow actions in response to unforeseen future needs.
4. *Etc.*

Q5: What are the overall advantages and disadvantages of pursuing a turnback of Hwy 246?

The consultant will draw on Qs 1-4 to summarize the advantages and disadvantages to Northfield and other jurisdictions of working to MnDOT to pursue a turnback.

Consultant may draw on other turnback examples to help inform the discussion.

2. Criteria staff should use to select a consultant

a. Demonstrated expertise in:

- Designing for all ages and abilities
- Educating community stakeholders about what is possible. Community members are not experts on, say, national best practices in safe school crossings. They will be relying on consultants to help educate them.
- Educating community stakeholders about what is safe. Recent years have seen a spike in deaths and injuries to people walking and biking. The Community will need specific support in understanding what is possible and what works.

b. Demonstrated understanding of the project

At its most recent meeting, the NTAC discussed possible approaches that consultants might take to this assignment. The NTAC agreed that some approaches would be more helpful to NTAC jurisdictions than others. An overall understanding of the project is as important as a detailed listing of tasks. Consultants should describe their overall understanding of the need, and how they propose to meet that need.

5. Review of the draft RFP

The Subcommittee reviewed the staff RFP against the questions and criteria we were asked to develop, and finds that the current RFP would not give potential consultants enough information to submit a responsive proposal. We understand that staff are under time pressure. To help, therefore, we offer the following suggestions.

The Subcommittee strongly urges that the RFP be revised as follows:

- a. Use the Questions above as the body of the RFP.
- b. Include the following background material

1. Overall purpose

Minnesota Trunk Highway 246 is an 18.22-mile-long highway serving parts of Goodhue and Rice Counties, with its west end in Northfield and its east end near Kenyon. The City of Northfield is in need of support to prepare for and evaluate a possible turnback of this segment to Rice County and the City of Northfield. That assistance includes

- scoping and conceptual design assistance for an approximately 2-mile-long segment of TH 246 from TH 3 in the City of Northfield City Limits to CSAH 1; and
- support understanding the costs and benefits of pursuing those designs in the context of possible turnback.

Minnesota DOT (MnDOT) periodically reviews whether various state highways should be part of its core mission and works with relevant jurisdictions to decide whether to “turn back” those highways not serving state level goals to the jurisdiction which could more effectively operate the roadway. TH 246 was

[identified by MnDOT](#) as a candidate for jurisdictional transfer in 2014 and Northfield and other stakeholders have discussed whether their needs could be better served if the design and operation of TH 246 right-of-way is under local control. State ownership and operation of Hwy 246 provides multiple benefits to the communities that it serves, including right-of-way maintenance and plowing. The benefits of turnback include local jurisdictions’ ability to design a roadway that better serves the land uses along this segment, potentially helping Northfield and surrounding jurisdictions better meet their policy goals.

The City of Northfield formed the [Northfield Area Transportation Committee](#) (NTAC) in 2018 ([Resolution 2018-085](#)) to make recommendations to the Northfield City Council about several regional transportation issues including a possible turnback of TH 246. The Committee includes staff and elected and appointed leaders from the City of Northfield plus representatives from Rice and Dakota Counties, adjacent townships, and other stakeholders such as transit providers, business leaders, and college personnel.

The overall purpose of this work is to inform discussion about possible turnback of Highway 246 from the state.

2. Context for the Northfield segment of TH 246

This segment of roadway serves as an entrance into the center of Northfield from high-speed rural sections, connects to TH 3 and CSAH 28 (Woodley Street), and serves three of Northfield’s five schools.

TH 246 is an important route for Northfield for traffic to and from Faribault, Nerstrand, and Rochester as well as surrounding rural areas, as well as many other connections.

Closer to downtown Northfield, the segment turns to the west at Woodley & Division and terminates at TH 3. Along this segment of 246, the following land uses must be considered:

- a. **Schools:** Three of Northfield’s five schools (elementary, middle and high schools) are either on or directly adjacent to this segment. Travel to and from the schools generates a significant portion of the local vehicle traffic on this segment. At this time, it is difficult to walk or bike to the schools along and across TH 246 as safe, low stress connections at Woodley and 246, the high school, and the middle school do not yet exist.

The roundabout constructed in 2020 significantly improved and comfort for all users at the intersection of 246 and Jefferson Parkway, but connections for people walking and biking through the roundabout are incomplete. Northfield High School is currently planning an extensive remodeling or new construction, which will impact this segment.

- b. **Trails and greenways:** The Mill Towns Trail, a state multiuse trail, is planned to cross TH 246 at its terminus and connection to TH 3.

Further, the regional trail system includes a multiuse trail along CSAH 1 west of this segment which could connect in the future. With the Mill Towns Trail, Northfield wants to become a regional trail destination with substantially increased bike traffic near the study area. Future greenways have also been identified near the study area.

- c. **Residential development:** Disconnected residential development is found between CSAH 1 and Jefferson Parkway with new development taking place on the east side, including a new street connection. While classified by MnDOT as a minor arterial, 246 functions as a local street in

some places: single family homes and apartments fronting 246 depend on this route for direct property access and connections to other local streets.

- d. **Connections from rural to urban:** 246 becomes Division Street – Northfield’s “Main Street” – at Woodley Street and the transition to the grid street network begins within the study area. The segment from Division Street to TH 3 to the west is a transition from the grid network to Northfield’s highway commercial area. Managing the transition from rural roadway, past schools, and to both Northfield’s walkable downtown and TH3 is critically important.