



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Updated February 1, 2010

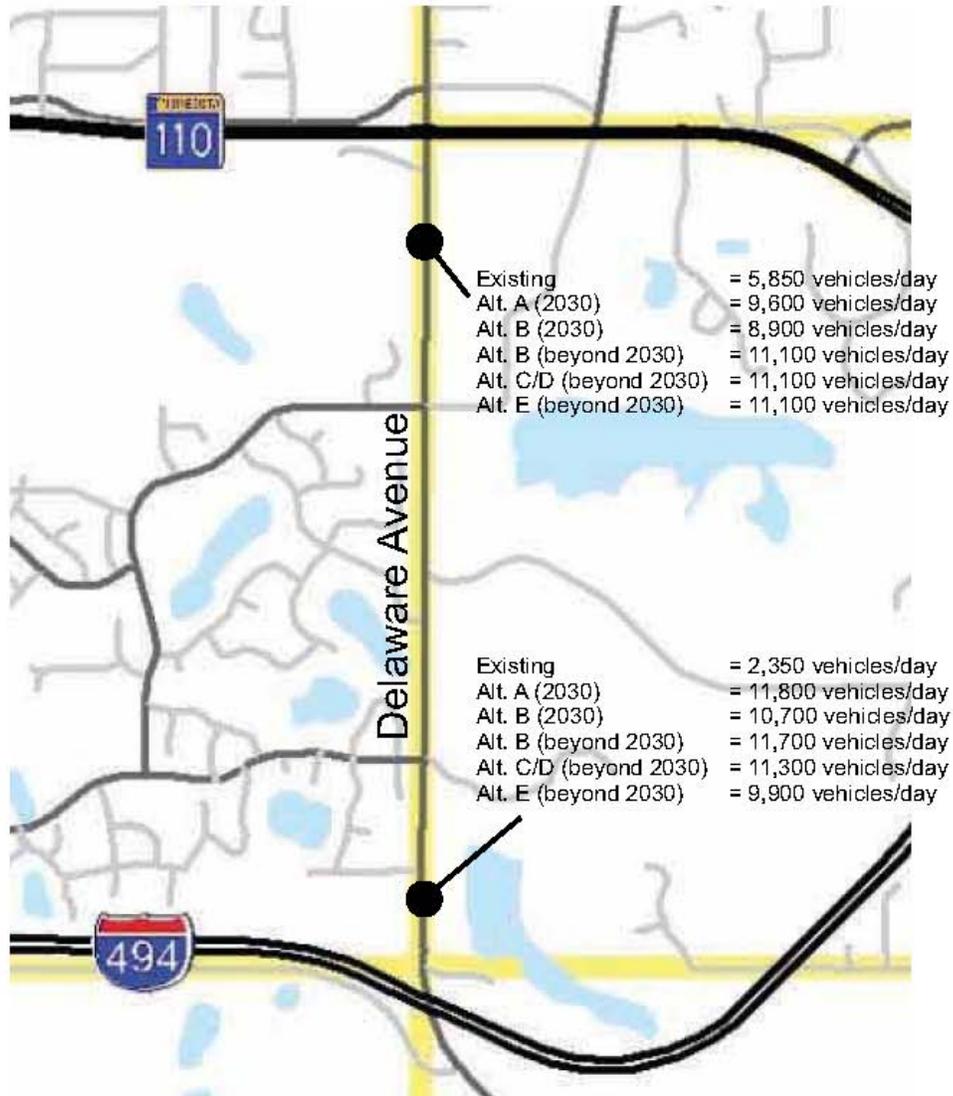
The following FAQs and responses are intended to help clarify issues and address some of the key concerns and comments made by the public throughout the course of the study.

- 1. How were the projected traffic volumes developed for each of the system improvement options?** – The Metropolitan Council’s regional model is being used for the study’s traffic modeling. This type of regional model is the industry standard for analyzing these types of transportation system and land use questions. This model incorporates the 2030 population and employment projections for all communities within the Twins Cities Metropolitan Area as well as travel behavior characteristics such as use of other modes, travel times, trip lengths and vehicle occupancy. It also takes into account the number of lanes and speeds of all major roadways, and future planned improvements within the regional system. Although the traffic forecast volumes are only shown for the study area, the modeling does take into account the change in travel patterns for motorists north (West St. Paul) and south of the study area, with and without a new interchange. The Study Committee is comfortable that the model is working appropriately because it does accurately reflect current traffic conditions by using current land use assumptions. That said, the projected traffic volumes produced by the model are only as good as the land use assumptions used. For more information regarding the future land use assumptions, see FAQ #10.
- 2. What are the traffic impacts to Delaware Avenue between I-494 and TH 110? Will this segment of Delaware Avenue need to be expanded?** – Traffic is expected to increase on Delaware Avenue between I-494 and TH 110 with or without an interchange. This is not unexpected given the limited number of freeway crossings, the proximity of growth in the area, and the function of the roadway in the overall system.

This roadway has limited shoulders, steep slopes and intersections with limited sight distance as it traverses hilly terrain in this area. The average daily traffic along Delaware Avenue today varies from 2,350 vehicles per day north of I-494 to 5,850 vehicles per day south of TH 110.

Without a new interchange (see attached figure), volumes on Delaware Avenue are expected to grow to 8,900 (by TH 110) and 10,700 (by I-494) vehicles per day by the year 2030, due to planned growth in the area (based on proposed land uses shown in updated 2030 Comp Plans). Beyond 2030, volumes on Delaware Avenue are expected to grow to 11,100 (by TH 110) and 11,700 (by I-494) vehicles per day.

With a new interchange (see attached figure), volumes on Delaware Avenue are expected to be 11,100 (by TH 110) and 11,300 (by I-494) vehicles per day for Alternative C/D. For Alternative E, volumes on Delaware Avenue are expected to be 11,100 (by TH 110) and 9,900 (by I-494) vehicles per day. These volumes represent planned growth in the area beyond 2030. Dakota County typically considers improving roadways to four lanes when volumes reach the 15,000 to 18,000 vehicles per day range. The conclusions we can draw from this information include:



- Traffic volumes will increase on Delaware Avenue due to future development with or without a new interchange.
- Even with the growth in traffic due to future development, there is not a need to widen Delaware Avenue to four lanes, with or without a new interchange.
- With or without a new interchange planned, growth in traffic volumes may require the County and the Cities to consider improving Delaware Avenue by adding left and right turn lanes at intersections where they do not currently exist to minimize intersection conflicts and crashes.

- While the roadway may not need to expand to four lanes, concerns have also been raised regarding pedestrian and bicycle accommodation along Delaware Avenue. This suggests that improving the roadway to include shoulders and trails would benefit the public even under existing traffic conditions.

3. Why don't the volumes on Delaware Avenue increase more under the interchange options?

Additional forecasting work was conducted to confirm the previous forecasts for the build out land use conditions. There are three primary reasons why more volume did not show up under the interchange options. These are as follows:

- Land uses along and north of TH 110 have good access to the regional system via TH 110 to the east to I-494 and TH 52 or TH 110 to the west to I-35E and TH 62/5/55. Consequently, a new interchange at Delaware Avenue/Argenta Trail attracts only a modest amount of new traffic (there are other attractive routes to get to areas north of I-494). The model estimates approximately 1,000 vehicles per day would be new through traffic on Delaware Avenue (trips attracted to the new interchange), predominately from the areas along Delaware Avenue and Charlton Street north of TH 110. These trips are off-set by an equal number of intercepted trips from south of I-494 (see following bullet).
- Under Alternative B (a no-interchange scenario), both the TH 149 and TH 3 interchanges would experience congestion by 2030. This would result in more traffic using Argenta Trail/Delaware Avenue to avoid delays associated with TH 55, TH 149 and TH 3 (primary routes used to access the other adjacent interchanges). With a new interchange (Alternatives C, D and E), traffic can access the regional system more conveniently at I-494 because the existing interchanges at TH 149 and TH 3 would be less congested and it would also serve to intercept previous through trips from south of I-494.
- The area north of I-494 that is most likely to use the new interchange is not projected to generate significant amounts of traffic. Most of the land uses along Delaware Avenue that would contribute to new cut-through traffic are existing, low-density traffic generators. These include the Dodge Nature Center tracts north and south of TH 110, Somerset Golf Course and large lot low-density residential areas (all of Sunfish Lake). While Sibley High School generates a significant amount of traffic overall, only a small portion of its service area is located in residential areas south of I-494.

4. Why don't you expand other roadways and interchanges instead of adding a new interchange?

– Expanding other roadways and interchanges is being considered under all of the alternatives. Alternative A (no build with minimal improvements) includes the expansion of Lone Oak Road to a four-lane roadway. Alternative B, without a new I-494 interchange, includes major improvements (expansion) to Lone Oak Road (4-lanes), TH 149 (6-lanes), TH 3 (4-lanes), and TH 55 (6-lanes). Even with these expansions in roadway capacity, congestion and operational problems are still expected to occur on TH 55, TH 149 and in the TH 149 interchange area (assuming 2030 land uses). Alternatives C, D and E also include the expansion of local arterial roadways to provide increased capacity. In addition, the land use assumptions beyond 2030 will result in greater congestion problems in these same areas. Although Alternative B does a much better job than Alternative A, it still leaves some segments and intersections significantly over loaded¹.

¹ Overloaded—term given to a roadway segment where daily volumes projected are in excess of what the facility can reasonably accommodate. An overloaded segment can result in long queues at intersections, no gaps for side-street traffic, and more cut-through traffic on alternative routes during the morning and evening peak periods.

- 5. Is the TH 149 (Dodd Road) interchange being closed?** – This study will not recommend closure of the TH 149 ramps to/from I-494. The Dodd Road interchange is in close proximity to the I-35E system interchange which transfers regional movements between I-494 and I-35E. The short distance between ramps at Dodd Road and I-35E along with high volumes using these ramps causes operational and safety concerns (requires vehicles to cross or weave through traffic stream to the adjacent lane). While Mn/DOT has done some work on the I-35E ramps, which has improved overall flow in the system interchange area, operational issues will continue to worsen over time in the weave area between TH 149 and I-35E. In addition, peak hour volumes on the Dodd Road to westbound I-494 loop ramp are over 1,100 vehicles today. This peak hour volume is close to capacity for a loop ramp.

Given the weaving issue with I-35E and the capacity issue with the loop ramps, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) asked that the study investigate ways to address these issues including looking at modifications to TH 149 as well as new access to I-494 to the west. FHWA has been clear in letting the Study partners know that some modifications to the existing system will be necessary to address operational issues on I-494 and to mitigate any new interchange access. To further the overall understanding of who uses the TH 149 interchange, a traffic modeling exercise was conducted to identify the TH 149 west ramp users (as this is where the 2030 weaving and overloading will exist). Several scenarios were modeled to identify potential traffic shifts and the impacts of these shifts to the overall system, including adjacent interchanges and routes leading to those interchanges. While none of the study alternatives include closing the TH 149 ramps, it did report the findings of the modeling work.

The most likely solution to this weaving issue on I-494 would be to reconfigure the TH 149 ramps to/from westbound I-494 such that they only could access I-494 (and not connect with the I-35E ramps).

- 6. Why is there not more environmental information presented?** – The area has many natural features and wildlife habitat that are important to residents in the area. While we agree that it is important to address these concerns, the Visioning Study is a system-level planning study that will aid agencies in developing a transportation vision for the area to support planned land uses for local communities. It is not intended to be an official environmental study that can address the environmental issues to the level of detail needed for construction. In order to move forward on any of the roadway improvements, individual project environmental studies and processes will be required to identify, evaluate and mitigate potential environmental impacts.
- 7. What is the timing and funding for improvements?** – In general, funding for transportation improvements is limited and most of the improvements identified are not in current local, regional and/or state plans. The intent of the study is to identify a roadway system vision that could gain support from all jurisdictions and accommodate transportation needs of the area assuming planned growth over the next 20 to 30 years. The study will not identify a timeline for future projects or funding sources. Timing or phasing of improvements will depend on many factors including timing of development, completion of subsequent environmental processes, applicable modifications to comprehensive plans and funding sources. Most of these all require extensive public involvement and approval processes that will occur over many years.

8. **What was the notification process for the Open House meetings?** - There have been a number of methods used to provide notice of what is happening with the study. The study area includes over 10,000 parcels and therefore presents challenges in directly contacting property owners. Property owners directly adjacent to existing or potential future roadways that could be directly affected by decisions made through this study (totaling close to 1,000) were sent mailings prior to both open houses. Those attending the first open house in June were added to the mailing list if they were not on the list originally. Those who attended the second open house in November have also been added to the mailing list. Notices were sent to local newspapers prior to each open house and a number of stories have been written in the local and regional newspapers throughout the course of the study. Presentations have been made to the City Councils and to the County Board to create awareness and to ask for input. The County has also developed a page on its website to share the latest information on the study.
9. **How was the Study funded?** – The study was funded jointly by Dakota County, MnDOT, Inver Grove Heights and Eagan. Various separate efforts had been undertaken previously; however, it was felt that a more coordinated effort was needed because proposed changes in this area have broad system implications. Mendota Heights and Sunfish Lake are not financially participating because most of the future growth and development that this study is addressing is not occurring within their jurisdictions. However, Mendota Heights and Sunfish Lake were asked to be an equal partner throughout the study to provide input on alternatives analysis, findings and recommendations because this future growth will affect them regardless of what the roadway system vision ends up to be.
10. **What future land use assumptions are being used to project traffic? Are these future growth assumptions reasonable?** – This study uses land use information from local comprehensive plans that were updated in 2009. The Met Council has encouraged orderly and systematic growth in the region and has discouraged leap frog development where possible. Growth in this area, along the I-494 beltway, is consistent with orderly growth. In addition, minimum residential density that the Met Council will accept is 3.0 to 5.0 dwelling units per acre. Planned land use densities are at 3.25 dwelling units per acre in the Inver Grove Heights' northwest area. Given private property rights, agencies can direct and guide development and ensure that these developments meet applicable regulations and design standards, but they can't prevent them from occurring. Maps illustrating growth and development plans for the northeast Eagan and northwest Inver Grove Heights areas are included in the Growth and Development section of the Key Findings document.
11. **How does a new interchange redistribute volumes to the regional system?** – The following figure identifies where the new interchange trips at the I-494 location east of the existing Argenta Trail alignment would come from. For instance, 32 percent of the trips using the new interchange would come from the existing TH 149 interchange. Thirteen percent of the trips using the new interchange did not come from an existing interchange, but were attracted to this interchange from other arterials in the area. The redistribution of traffic provides a better balance of trips among the other regional access points and a new I-494 interchange access. Most importantly, it reduces the volume and congestion from the overloaded I-494 interchanges at TH 149 and TH 3. The redistribution of trips adds flexibility to the transportation system, while reducing the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and vehicle hours traveled (VHT).

