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CONNECTION
Vol 16 | Issue 2 | June 2017

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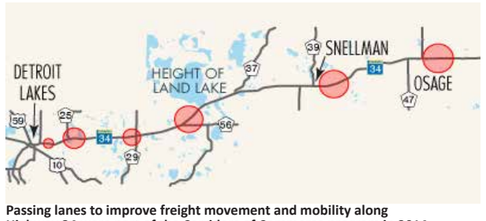
Legislative Update - Minnesota

Following a special session in the end of May, the Minnesota Legislature approved the passage of omnibus tax and budget bills. Included in this package were a number of transportation funding requests and other transportation-related items.



Passing lanes to improve freight movement and mobility along Highway 34 were part of the Corridors of Commerce program in 2014
Image by MnDOT

The Legislature passed a $5.9 billion, two-year transportation funding bill. It will shift $300 million from the state's general fund dollars to pay for transportation projects. It also calls for borrowing $940 million over four years, spending $640 million on general state road construction and $300 million on the Corridors of Commerce program. This program was created by the Legislature in 2013 as a mechanism to focus funding on improvements to key trunk highways in the state that support economic activity.


Depiction of railroad grade separation project looking southbound on Main Avenue in Moorhead
Image by City of Moorhead

House and Senate members also passed a $988 million bonding bill in the early hours of May 26. In addition to capital improvements to the state's colleges and universities, the bonding bill will fund approximately $255 million in road and bridge projects and railroad crossings. Included in this bill is $42.3 million for construction of a railroad grade separation at Main Avenue and 20th and 21st Street in Moorhead.

Bonding bills are typically passed during even-numbered years but the 2016 legislative session concluded before a formal bonding bill could be approved.

Metro COG is committed to ensuring all individuals regardless of race, color, sex, age, national origin, disability/handicap, sexual orientation, or income status have access to Metro COG's programs and services. Meeting facilities will be accessible to mobility impaired individuals. Metro COG will make a good faith effort to accommodate requests for translation services for meeting proceedings and related materials. Please contact Savanna Leach, Metro COG Executive Secretary at 701-232-3242 at least two days in advance of the meeting if any special accommodations are required for any member of the public to able to participate in the meeting.

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The FM Metropolitan Council of Governments
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StreetsAlive! 2017

The first of two StreetsAlive! events is happening Sunday, June 25 from noon until 5:00 pm. Broadway and other streets in Fargo will be closed to vehicle traffic to make way for walkers, bikers, runners, skaters, and all other forms of human-powered movement. A second event will occur on August 27.

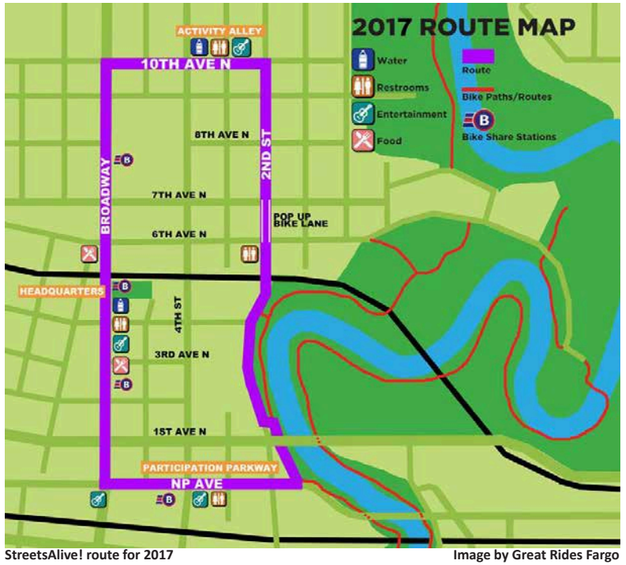

StreetsAlive! 2016 **Photo by Great Rides Fargo**

Since 2009, StreetsAlive! has brought the Fargo-Moorhead community together for a fun, interactive physical activity festival and has encouraged citizens and families to add non-motorized travel into their daily lives. People of all ages are able to partake in a variety of games, activities, and entertainment while safely enjoying streets and experiencing the city from a new perspective. Approximately 14,000 people participated in StreetsAlive! in 2016.


StreetsAlive! 2016 **Photo by Great Rides Fargo**

StreetsAlive! 2017 is led by the Dakota Medical Foundation's CassClayAlive! and Clay County Public Health's Partnership4Health, and is supported by 23 area businesses and organizations throughout Fargo-Moorhead.


StreetsAlive! 2016 **Photo by Great Rides Fargo**



StreetsAlive! route for 2017 **Image by Great Rides Fargo**

StreetsAlive! is also asking for volunteers to help with reinforcing "road closed" signs and to assist with first aid and bicycle repairs along the route. Shifts are from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm and 2:00 to 5:00 pm.

For more information on Streets Alive! or to volunteer, please visit www.greatrides.org/streetsalive or visit their Facebook page.

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Drones - The Evolution of a New Transportation Mode

On May 31 and June 1, Emerging Prairie hosted the third annual Drone Focus Conference at the Fargo Civic Center. The conference included appearances by U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, Governor Doug Burgum, and Senator John Hoeven, along with a host of industry specialists and stakeholders. The conference focused on a number of issues ranging from the need to modernize air traffic control systems to regulations that address security, safety, and privacy.

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao David Samson/Forum Communications

North Dakota has been at the forefront of drone technology since the unmanned aerial systems (UAS) industry began in 2005. Since then, North Dakota has invested nearly $40 million to advance the industry in the state and has become a national leader with leading-edge research, development, training, and education (RDT&E) projects, including product development and commercial applications. North Dakota was the first state to get approval FAA for beyond-line-of-sight drone flights at high altitudes, which allows for drone operators to fly vehicles without spotting from the ground or utilizing chase planes. The state is currently working at getting approval to fly beyond-line-of-sight at low altitudes, which would better allow companies to develop services like drone delivery.

Drones are also beginning to be seen as a potential new autonomous vehicle option. While much of the focus of autonomous vehicles to date has been on cars, trucks, buses, and trains, transportation and industry experts, including the U.S. Department of Transportation, are beginning to look into the needs and impacts of autonomous aircraft and passenger drones.

Several companies are exploring the use of passenger drones as air-taxis and for air-ambulance services. Challenges that passenger drone developers are working to overcome including noise, small and useful loads, short flight times, airspace regulations, and scarce data on both safety and general operations.

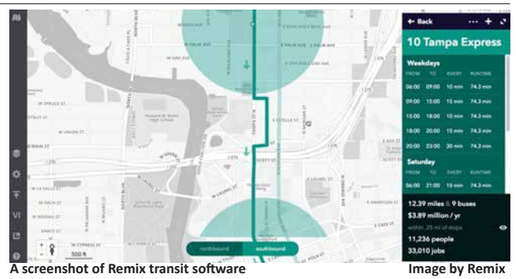
The first driverless passenger drone was introduced at the Computer Electronics Show (CES) 2016 in Las Vegas by Chinese entrepreneurs. This human-size drone, the Ehang 184, is able to carry a single passenger and fly short distances at 62 miles per hour with a fully-charged battery. Routes are able to be programmed by a ground control center through an encrypted 4G network which monitors all flights. Dubai's Road and Transportation Agency plans to begin using these drones as self-flying taxis in the summer of 2017.

An Ehang 184 flies over Dubai Photo by Ehang UAV

The future of passenger drones remains uncertain since this technology is so new. However, innovation in aerial drone technology, and in aerial traffic coordination, control, and collision-avoidance could result in the rapid proliferation of passenger drones for civilian travel.

Remix - A Planning Platform for Public Transit

A new and exciting transit planning tool is coming to MATBUS and Metro COG. Remix is a web-hosted application for planning public transit systems. It automates the process of route and schedule scenario testing, letting planners sketch out routes onto a map and immediately see information about potential ridership and fleet requirements. This can exponentially decrease the time costs of experimenting with different scenarios. As of October 2016, over 150 transit agencies across the world are using Remix.



A screenshot of Remix transit software Image by Remix

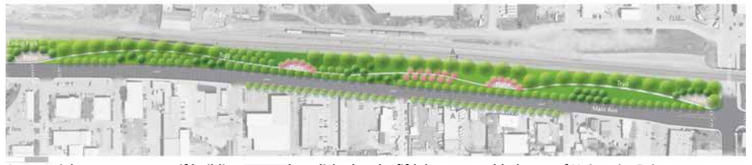
Planners can use this tool to quickly model scenarios and plan anything from a simple detour on a single route to an entirely new transit system. Remix also displays maps that show how far someone at any point can go using transit within 15, 30, or 60 minutes.

Remix can also be used as an outreach tool at public meetings by allowing presenters to give live demonstrations on possible changes to a system. These real-time cost adjustments give a clear representation of how feasible a plan is and help people better visualize transit systems and transit design.

Main Avenue Reconstruction Project

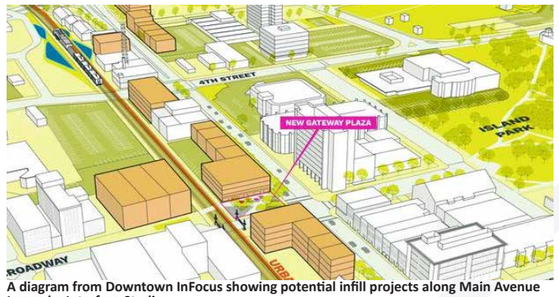
Back in May 2013, Metro COG approved the Fargo Main Avenue Corridor Study. This study looked at the nearly two-mile segment of Main Avenue that extends from 25th Street to the Red River. One of the main objectives of the study was to identify and define future multimodal improvement needs for the corridor, along with design guidance and other optional considerations. These options included mid-block pedestrian crossings, sidewalk widening and parking removal in certain sections, a potential skyway linking Main Avenue with the rest of downtown, and a new greenspace along the northern tier of the corridor west of University Drive.

The City of Fargo is now planning on moving forward with reconstruction of one of the oldest roadways in the city, with construction from University Drive to 2nd Street occurring in 2018 or 2019, and from 25th Street to University Drive in 2020. The combined costs for both segments, excluding land acquisition costs and other optional improvements, are approximately $12 million.



A potential new greenspace if buildings were demolished and a fifth lane was added west of University Drive Image by Metro COG

One of the issues the Fargo Main Avenue Corridor Study didn't address was the possibility of downscaling portions of Main Avenue near Broadway from a primarily five-lane roadway ,with two lanes in each direction and a center left-turn lane, to a three-lane section with expanded street parking and wider sidewalks. This proposal has been advocated by local area urbanists, including the Urban Learning Circle, as well as the consultant team working on Downtown InFocus - the comprehensive plan for downtown Fargo. The benefits of a reduced roadway include improved pedestrian safety, better connectivity, and potential urban infill possibilities. However, state and city transportation officials caution that any capacity reductions would adversely impact current average daily traffic (ADT) volumes on Main Avenue, which approach 20,000 vehicles per day in some areas. Planners and engineers working on the project have stated they will reevaluate roadway alternatives in an environmental document and an economic analysis before making a final determination.



A diagram from Downtown InFocus showing potential infill projects along Main Avenue Image by Interface Studio

Further public input opportunities for the Main Avenue reconstruction project are planned in the coming months. For further information on this project, please contact SRF Consulting Group at 701.237.0010.

Traffic Incident Management

Traffic incident management (TIM) is a planned and coordinated program to detect and clear traffic incidents and incident-related debris as safely and quickly as possible. For more than 20 years, transportation, public safety, and private sector professionals have worked cooperatively on TIM programs that restore traffic capacity through a range of technological and procedural strategies. As TIM programs have matured, program managers and field-level practitioners alike have benefited from state and federal efforts to collect, document, and distribute good practices, lessons learned, and the necessary steps for implementing, improving, and expanding TIM program components.

Traffic incident management programs start by coordinating with the traditional responders (law enforcement, towing and recovery, fire and rescue, and EMS) responsible with incident response efforts. This forms the basis of a multi-agency team and a cornerstone for a TIM program. This coordination has already begun as part of Metro COG's Alternate Routes/Traffic Incident Management Guidebook.

In May, a number of regional safety partners met for the first of three stakeholder meetings to discuss the TIM background in Fargo-Moorhead and touch upon task-specific challenges and strategies related to TIM programs. Challenges include obtaining accurate information from motorists, accessing incident scenes, and condemning a spilled load, as well as interagency coordination and communication, technology procurement and deployment, and performance measurement. These challenges are part of a broader discussion on five overlapping functional areas in TIM programs such as: incident detection and verification, traveler information, incident response, scene management and traffic control, and quick clearance and recovery.

Stakeholders meet for the first TIM meeting at the West Fargo Police Station Image by HDR

For more information on this project, please contact Bill Christian at christian@fmmetrocog.org.