



US 169 Rural Safety & Mobility Interchange Project

PROJECT READINESS

FY 2023/2024 Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant (MPDG) Program



Project Type: INFRA/Rural Capital Project

Eligible Project Costs: \$50,068,000

FY 2023/2024 MPDG Funds Requested: \$24,732,000

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Supporting Information can be found at:

<https://www.srfconsulting.com/sherburne-county-us-169/>





US 169 Rural Safety & Mobility Interchange Project

Submitted by Sherburne County

FY 2023/2024 MULTIMODAL PROJECT DISCRETIONARY GRANT (MPDG PROGRAM)

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Project Readiness

ENVIRONMENTAL RISK ASSESSMENT

Schedule

A project [schedule](#) identifying major project milestones is presented below. All planning agreements, permitting, review periods, public engagement activities, and approvals have been considered. Any awarded funds will meet the MPDG funding obligation deadline of September 30, 2026.

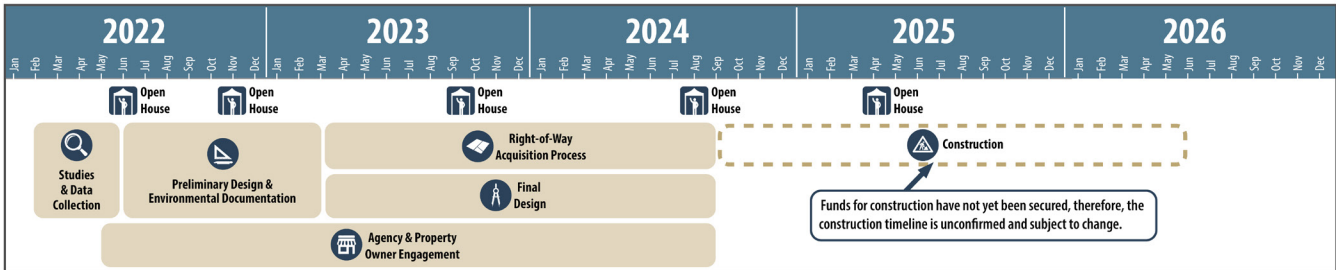


Figure 1 Project Schedule

Sherburne County is in the process of final design and the right-of-way acquisition process. These activities, along with continued agency and property engagement are anticipated to be completed by August 2024. All property and right-of-way acquisitions will be completed in accordance with 49 CFR Part 24 and other Federal regulations. The County has an experienced right-of-way acquisition staff that have been actively involved during the project development process and have worked with MnDOT on numerous state highway projects. An official map has been prepared and a right-of-way agreement with MnDOT is close to completion. As discussed in the following section, an Environmental Assessment was approved in 2010. The County is in the process of updating this environmental review document which was recently completed in 2023.

Public Involvement

Sherburne County has held two of five planned Open Houses to share information about the project with the public and receive feedback on project alternatives. In June 2022, the County held the first Open House, where they presented three alternatives and received feedback from attendees. In November 2022, the second Open House was held to share the preferred alternative, which is reflected in this application. Three additional Open Houses are planned in September/October 2023, and August/September 2024 as

the project advances and right-of-way acquisition, and final design are completed. The final Open House is planned for April 2025 at the midpoint of construction if federal funds are secured. The [project website](#) outlines the public engagement efforts.

Required Approvals

Environmental Permits and Reviews

To fulfill state and federal environmental review requirements for the US 169/CR 4 interchange project, an Environmental Assessment/Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EA/EAW), was prepared for planned improvements along US 169 in Sherburne County. The FHWA and MnDOT approved the document in fall 2010. The EA/EAW reviewed the planned reconstruction of US 169 from the City of Elk River to north of the City of Zimmerman to convert it into a freeway through the construction of a new system of interchanges, overpasses, and frontage/backage roads. Sherburne County will leverage this past study to expedite the review process.

Due to the age of the approved document, an updated environmental review needed to be completed. On April 12, 2022, FHWA determined that a Categorical Exclusion (CatEx) is the appropriate environmental document for this project and other environmental reviews are not needed. FHWA has indicated they do not need to be involved in

the project development process. Categorical Exclusions provide a simplified documentation process and provides greater flexibility without jeopardizing the NEPA process, which in-turn minimizes project risk and schedule delays due to review time. Final plan submittal is underway and expected by Spring 2024. As required, all remaining permits will be included in the final submittal.

Further, the selected alternative includes a smaller footprint that will minimize the need to acquire right-of-way, minimizing the project risks and reducing the likelihood of scheduling delays.

State and Local Approvals

The Minnesota Department of Transportation has a vested interest in improving safety and mobility along US 169 as a critical regional corridor. The US 169/CR 4 interchange project is consistent with MnDOT's long-term vision for the US 169 Corridor as demonstrated in the [Highway 169 Elk River to Zimmerman Study](#). This project has included close coordination between Sherburne County and MnDOT. MnDOT has provided a [letter of support](#) for the project and is committed to the long-term operation and maintenance of the interchange.

Required State and local approvals were identified as part of the approved EA/EAW review. As part of the CatEx, required agency reviews will be reassessed. Sherburne County will coordinate with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and other agency liaisons to obtain all agency approvals and permits as the final design is advanced.

Ongoing support for the Project is well documented. There is a broad base of support for the project, as shown by the [letters of support](#) submitted for this application. These include Letters of Support from MnDOT, the City of Elk River, Zimmerman Chamber of Commerce, County Sheriff and Fire Departments, and US Senate and Representatives from the state of Minnesota. The Minnesota Statewide Freight System and Investment Plan designates US 169 within Sherburne County as a Critical Rural Freight Corridor and a high priority Statewide [Interregional Corridor \(IRC\)](#) in the Central Minnesota Freight Plan. The US 169/CR 4 interchange was specifically identified by Sherburne County as the top legislative priority. Sherburne County

has secured \$7 million in Federal Congressionally Directed Spending and has committed \$5 million in Local Option Sales Tax funds as well as [other state funding](#) to help deliver the Project. Upon award of FY 2023/2024 MPDG funds, the Transportation Improvement Plan and STIP would be amended to incorporate the full project scope.

Federal Transportation Requirements Affecting State and Local Planning

As mentioned above, FHWA has given authority to MnDOT to proceed with a [Categorical Exclusion](#) environmental document. This authorization will expedite the environmental review process. The document is anticipated to be approved in spring 2023.

Assessment of Project Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Potential risks, constraints, and recommended mitigation measures have been identified as part of the previously approved EA/EAW. Sherburne County and MnDOT have investigated potential constraints such as adjacent contaminated sites, right of way acquisition, and natural resources.

A [Preferred Interchange Design Layout](#) and [project cost estimate](#) has been prepared. Given the extent of previous studies completed by MnDOT and Sherburne County, the County is confident that environmental uncertainties will not be encountered as the final design is advanced. The Sherburne County Board of Commissioners has demonstrated the County's commitment to provide the local match as documented in the adopted [resolution](#) and MnDOT's has provided a letter of support committing to the long-term maintenance and operation of the Project.

TECHNICAL CAPACITY

Sherburne County, in partnership with MnDOT have successfully advanced multiple similarly sized projects in the past. Projects have included the procurement of funding to construct the nearby freeway conversion and interchange projects along the section of US 169 south of the Project in the City of Elk River. Sherburne County will utilize this experience to accelerate the project development for the US 169/CR 4 interchange. Sherburne County is prepared to deliver the Project in accordance with the project schedule.

Sherburne County assesses minimal project delivery risk for the following reasons:

- **Preliminary engineering on the project has been completed** and Sherburne County will complete final design in summer 2024.
- As discussed above, **environmental documentation for the project has been completed**. An EW/EAW for the US 169 corridor in Sherburne County was completed in 2010 and the County has 52% completed a Categorical Exclusion (CatEx) to update necessary environmental documentation.
- **The preferred alternative has been selected and the project limits have been established**. The majority of the project footprint falls within the existing public right-of-way and negotiations with impacted landowners is occurring now and expected to be completed in summer 2024.
- **The project is supported by project partners and the community**. Sherburne County has worked with area partners in project development and has hosted multiple Open Houses to solicit feedback from the community.
- **Sherburne County has experience delivering transportation improvement projects of this scale in partnership with MnDOT**. Those projects have included: 1) \$160 million to the state funded Corridor of Commerce project through Elk River, which removed five signals and constructed four grade separated interchanges; 2) the Restricted Crossing U-Turn (RCUT) project south of Zimmerman; and 3) \$80 million in improvements along US Highway 10 just east of Elk River which remove signals and convert the existing expressway to a grade separated facility.
- **As a recipient of Federal funds, Sherburne County and the project will comply with all federal regulations and standards**, including but not limited to Buy America, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations, Civil Rights requirements, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS), the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSR), and other related statutes and regulations.
- **Sherburne County has secured funding sufficient to cover 57% of project costs**. Sherburne County has extensive experience delivering large-scale projects completed

through National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process. The preferred alternative selected went through the Purpose and Need and Alternatives Screening process with numerous **public engagement throughout the planning, preliminary design and final design process**.

- **The Project is noncontroversial and supported by Project partners**. Sherburne County has maintained ongoing coordination with FHWA, the City of Zimmerman, and other Project partners. The project team has been collaborating with local agencies to develop a project that meets the needs of all involved partners.

Financial Readiness/Commitment

Sherburne County and the City of Zimmerman have reserves of State Aid funds for the County State Aid Highway and Municipal State Aid Routes that are a portion of the project. For the remaining portion, Sherburne County has \$10.48 million in Local Option Sales Tax fund reserves for transportation purposes related to the interchange project. Financial reports are available upon request, if needed.