



US 169 Rural Safety & Mobility Interchange Project

PROJECT READINESS

FY 2023 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) Program



Rendering of Interchange project

Project Type: Rural Capital Project

Eligible Project Costs: \$49,680,000

2023 RAISE Funds Requested: \$25,000,000

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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 REBUILDING AMERICAN INFRASTRUCTURE WITH SUSTAINABILITY AND EQUITY (RAISE) 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 RAISE funding obligation deadline of September 30, 2027.

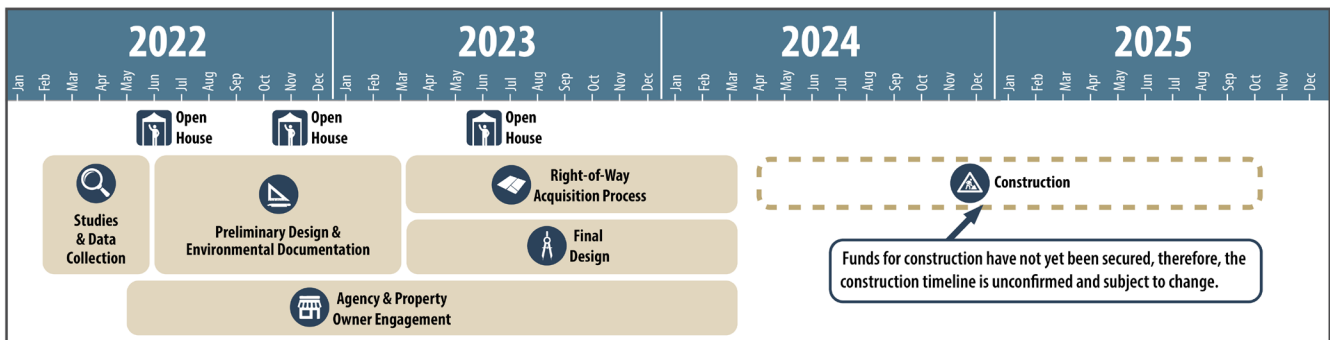


Figure 1 Project Schedule

Sherburne County anticipates that construction will begin by April 2024 and be completed in October 2025. 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 is anticipated Spring 2023.

Public Involvement

Sherburne County has held two of three 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. The final open house is planned in June 2023,

in advance of beginning construction in early 2024. 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 needs to be conducted. 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](#).¹ 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.

Support for the Project is provided for by several different levels. 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 MN. 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 to help deliver the Project. Upon award of RAISE funds, the Transportation Improvement Plan and STIP would be amended to incorporate the full project scope. The US 169/CR 4 interchange project is included in all relevant local, metropolitan, and state planning documents.

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 [project 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

¹ Hwy 169 Study. Minnesota Department of Transportation. <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/d3/projects/169elkriver/>

experience to accelerate the project development for the US 169/CR 4 interchange.

- **Preliminary engineering on the project has been completed** and Sherburne County will begin final design in spring 2023.
- 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 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 will begin in the near future.
- **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.

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.

Thru project development and design discussions with MnDOT District Staff, they are actively participating in the project development and design. Sherburne County and MnDOT have had multiple discussions directly related to their participation. MnDOT anticipates providing the soft costs for Construction project management of \$7.2 million. Should unforeseen circumstances arise and they are not be able to provide that service, Sherburne County is prepared and able to cover the anticipated \$7.2 million in construction administration costs.

All supporting documents and the RAISE grant application narrative are also available to view at the following webpage:

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