

**A Citizen Analysis of Transportation Issues
Affecting the City of Northfield
and Surrounding Area**

**A Recommendation
for Improvements in
Safety, Access and
Quality of Life Issues
for Northfield
Transportation**

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**Prepared by the Northfield Industrial Corporation
Transportation Task Force**

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Table of Contents

Preface	Page 2
Introduction	Pages 3-6
I. The Task Force	
II. A Growing Town / Need for Informed Policy	
III. Staying in Front of Development	
IV. Guidelines for the Common Good	
V. Means to an End: Transportation System Financing & Acquiring Right-of-Way	
VI. Our Common Goal	
VII. Members of the Northfield Industrial Corporation Transportation Task Force	
Executive Summary of Recommendations	Page 7
Identified Problem Areas	
Area #1 Future T.H. 19 Bypass	Pages 8-9
Area #2 & #6 Proposed Cedar Avenue Extension (320 th Street to North Avenue) (North Avenue to T.H. 19)	Pages 10-11
Area #3 & #5 North Avenue (T.H. 19 to Cedar Avenue) (Zanmiller Drive to T.H. 3)	Pages 12-13
Area #4 Thye Parkway (Cedar Avenue Extension to T.H. 3)	Pages 14-15
Area #7 & #8 Jefferson Parkway Extension (T.H. 19 to Armstrong Road) (Armstrong Road to T.H. 3)	Pages 16-18
Area #9 & #10 Jefferson Parkway Links (Between completed segment) and Jefferson Parkway Extension (Spring Creek Road to T.H. 19)	Page 19
Area #11 Spring Creek Road (Jefferson Parkway to T.H. 19)	Page 20
Area #12 T.H. 19 and T.H. 3 Common Roadway Segment	Pages 21-22
Bibliography	Page 23
Appendices	
Map of Problem Roads and Street Segments (used at Community Meeting)	
Area Map of Proposed Roadways	

Preface

This report was compiled with the support of the Northfield City Council. Recommendations found in this report reflect the varied opinions of the members of the Task Force. Also reflected are comments and direction from a community meeting held at Bridgewater Elementary School on April 18, 2000 and site tours of various parts of the city by Task Force Members and other concerned citizens.

The basic principles followed during all these discussions have emphasized the following:

- The needs of the few must not outweigh the GREATER GOOD of the many.
- ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES must be considered carefully at every step.
- PLANNING for the future must become a well-practiced habit.

As we have studied the proposals and reports made to the city regarding transportation issues over the last 35 years, the following concepts seem to rise above the rest, namely:

Thoughtful planning as a critical element in ongoing development strategies, and preservation of Northfield as an independently viable community have held true over those 35 years. However, when planning solutions are not implemented or the solutions are tinkered with until they become unrecognizable, significant problems result.

It is the nature of City government that as time passes, the leadership changes. For this reason, it is critically important that two elements remain constant. These two elements are:

- the continuity of City staff bridging elected leadership changes, to ensure "institutional memory";
- a long-range plan of which the City and its citizens have taken ownership, to maintain its basic goals

What is evident in our study of those 35 years of planning in Northfield is that (in most cases) solid long-range plans were brought forth and adopted by the City only to be underutilized or ignored. Further, over time the fundamental goals of those plans were dismantled and stripped of the context that made them effective. As subsequent leadership sets have come on board, the plans have increasingly diminished in the leadership's "institutional memory" until the basic concepts are forgotten, or remembered so inaccurately, that they no longer make sense and are discarded completely. In these two scenarios the City Council then commissions a new plan and the process begins all over again. This kind of "planning" results in wasted money and time.

We call on City leadership to break this chain of dysfunctional planning and establish procedures to ensure continuity of community-wide planning goals and implementation. This goes well beyond the placement of lines on a map. It goes well beyond shying away from controversy. It establishes a planning process that provides a framework for development, a plan for preservation of agricultural lands and natural areas and makes services accessible to the citizens of Northfield via a diverse set of transportation modes.

City leadership must act to formalize a planning process that is both inclusive and comprehensive. Development pressures will clearly not decrease. To maintain Northfield's strong identity as a unique and special place, careful thought must be given, and critical decisions must be made, to ensure that uniqueness well into the future. Those critical choices will shape the "preferred future" of who we are and where we live. We must model new ways of moving beyond "status quo" thinking, striving for the best, and not settling for compromised mediocrity.

The Task Force started out looking for a means to move in and around the city. We ended up focusing on ways to move in a new direction.

Introduction

"To avoid criticism do nothing, say nothing, be nothing." *Elbert Hubbard*

I. *The Task Force*

A. The Northfield Industrial Corporation Transportation Task Force is an ad hoc group whose goal is to help promote action on specific community transportation needs. The group is made up of business owners, developers, college personnel, an architect, retirees, and received assistance from the Northfield Public Works Department (Randy Peterson), the Northfield Economic Development Authority (Dixon Bond), and the Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce (Kathy Feldbrugge).

B. The following means were used to gather information and historical perspective of transportation issues and concerns in and around Northfield:

1. All city transportation studies from as far back as 35 years ago were reviewed in order to evaluate these needs.
2. Site visits, video presentation, and anecdotal data were included in the process.
3. The Task Force also invited the public to submit their ideas and input at a Community Meeting held on April 18, 2000. Comments from the Community Meeting are included in each identified problem area.

II. *A Growing Town / Need for Informed Policy*

A. The City of Northfield is currently experiencing growth in many areas: residential, commercial, institutional and at both college campuses. Several of the growth areas (some being planned, others already under construction) are too recent to have been included in any of the previous transportation studies on record. These developments will result in significant traffic increases along certain routes and will drive development in the future if the City does not follow through with the process of long-range planning and associated policy decisions. This is a critical point in time which will impact the planned growth (or sprawl, if unplanned) of Northfield for generations to come.

B. It is said that if you don't plan for the future, any road will get you there. It is time to establish goals for a "preferred future" This future is the one of which all would prefer to be a part. We shape that future, still being formed, as we make decisions on these important matters. The marriage of thoughtful, long-range planning and associated, incremental decision-making can form that preferred future. It is not a sprint. Instead it is a measured process of fact gathering and consensus building; open policy discussion and informed leadership; and finally, the political will to do what is best for the many.

C. In addition to newly developing commercial projects, there are new neighborhoods being planned that will also affect traffic flow around and through the community. New traffic patterns, based on residents' access to schools, churches, retail areas, and workplaces, will need to interconnect with existing ones. This future development will also result in increased pedestrian and bicycle movement in the downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. Transportation issues are not limited to motor vehicles; all modes must be included specifically public transportation and bike and pedestrian paths.

D. All roads planned or constructed attract development. The Task Force is concerned about the impact of consequential development and its effects on Northfield's quality of life and small town feel. We caution the City's political leaders and planning staff to carefully ensure that land uses designated adjacent to planned roads do not negatively impact environmentally sensitive areas or the Central Business District of Northfield. It is important to mention in addition the potential for disjointed development that by-passes historically create when they are super imposed over community transportation systems. The tendency is for development to follow the traffic and create satellite development areas away from the traditional city center. The effect is to marginalize the traditional center and create new problems in attempting to solve congestion issues. The City must carefully consider safeguards to prevent this type of satellite development from proliferating. To do otherwise creates a confusing urban framework of pocket developments only effectively accessed by vehicular (non-bicycle or pedestrian) transportation.

III. *Staying in Front of Development*

A. Much of the residential growth was anticipated in preceding transportation studies. Plans for addressing residential growth were recommended. However, implementation of those recommendations did not always keep up with the community's growth. As a result, problem areas arose.

B. When the expected impacts of future residential and commercial developments are added to the current transportation picture, it becomes obvious that corrective action will be urgently needed to address problems previously left unsolved or unaddressed. Furthermore, future transportation planning and its subsequent implementation must be considered as a whole, so that such problems are not allowed to recur.

C. Of particular importance, the proposed Menards in Dundas and grocery store with Target, along with additional development sure to come as well, will add substantial traffic to T.H. 3 in addition to that already foreseen. This will require the development of reliever routes to minimize the impact of traffic on the T.H. 3/Fifth Street intersection and the T.H. 3/T.H. 19 jointly used section. For example, this makes recommendations in this report for Jefferson Parkway, both to the east and west of TH 3 more critical to pursue. It also suggests the importance of completing Jefferson Road to CR 1, and the future upgrades of CR 1, CR 81, CR 78, and Decker Avenue, not specifically covered in the detail section of the Task Force's report.

D. The Task Force's efforts have been directed primarily at reviewing and prioritizing twelve (12) problem areas in our highway and street circulation patterns. Many, but not all, of these areas have been addressed in the past by the City Council and the Planning Commission. The recently approved Transportation Plan, to be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, is the most recent example of that discussion. The Task Force wishes this document to also become part of the Comprehensive Plan Process and a kick-off point for Council action to address deficiencies in the existing transportation system. Each identified problem area has been addressed in this report with a description of the problem area, a discussion of the standards of Safety, Access and Quality of Life, followed by conclusions.

IV. *Guidelines for the Common Good*

A. During its review of these problem areas, the Task Force agreed that certain principles must always be kept in mind when addressing transportation issues, and indeed urban planning in general. These principles are:

1. The needs of the few must not outweigh the greater good of the many.
2. Environmental issues must be carefully considered at every step.
3. Planning for the future must become a well-practiced habit.

B. The group also settled on three standards against which each transportation proposal should be evaluated. These standards are **Safety, Access, and Quality of Life**. These standards were also given to the attendees of the community meeting as guidelines for their suggestions. As the problem areas were each discussed, it became readily apparent that all 12 were problem areas due to issues which fit into these standards. Whether the topic was bike paths, railroad traffic, internal circulation patterns, or moving through and around town - using these standards helped cut to the heart of the problem and helped focus our efforts. Each of the problem areas that follow is discussed as it relates to these three standards.

V. *Means to an End: Transportation System Financing & Acquiring Right-of-Way*

A. The Task Force recognizes that funding sources are required for the recommendations made in this report. Some of the recommendations made by this report will likely require significant funding from the City of Northfield. Most routes should be funded in accordance with the City's policies; meaning at least 50% of the cost will be assessed to a local development. The remaining 50%, as is typical, would be funded through a general tax levy or excess construction funds. However, beyond limited State Aid dollars and City maintenance funds, no dedicated funding program exists for roadway improvements. Consequently, some routes will require special funding.

B. We recommend that the City begin to develop a Transportation Fund, beyond its street maintenance and infrastructure replacement funding sources. This Fund would be dedicated to the construction of major collector or arterial roadways for routes falling outside of the City's State Aid network or other MnDOT and county funding sources. We suggest a funding program with sufficient annual funding for each year of a 20-year period to provide for completion of the road system proposed in this report. The total cost for the roadway systems shown in this report is estimated to be \$15 to \$20 million in today's dollars.

C. For major projects such as the Jefferson Parkway West bridge over the Cannon River, we recommend the City Council direct City staff to pursue Federal funding sources, grants, and low interest loans through the State of Minnesota. It can take several years to be eligible for these types of funds. Federal funds are available to projects included in the State Transportation Improvement Projects (STIP) list developed by MnDOT. This is a 3-year STIP list, meaning that projects applying for funds in 2000 would be eligible no earlier than 2003. Other possible funding mechanisms include use of a State Program offering low interest loans labeled the Transportation Revolving Loan Fund (TRLF). By use of TRLF dollars a major project could be funded with the intention of repaying the loan through a combination of several different funding sources.

D. The development and maintenance of a functional road system for the community of Northfield requires:

1. *The establishment and placement of most of the roadway corridors by City Council Action.*

The establishment and placement of roadway corridors will require that some preliminary engineering and environmental studies be conducted to ensure that the proper corridor is selected and recommended to City Council. This selection could be accomplished by the City Council ordering the preparation of feasibility reports for the identified roadway corridors.

2. *The appropriation of funds and acquisition of necessary rights-of-way.*
3. *The appropriation of funds for the construction and maintenance of the roadway system.*

VI. *Our Common Goal*

Northfield is graced with an attractive historical urban center, a relatively healthy business sector, and well-maintained neighborhoods. Added to these amenities is a small town feel that attracts many people. As our town grows, the challenge will be to plan, and adhere to, the implementation of a transportation system that can effectively handle the hustle and bustle of a vibrant growing town, and still complement the attractive and livable qualities its residents currently enjoy. This Task Force has tried to honor that goal and has tried to present findings in a way to encourage the City Council to adopt and implement transportation decisions to benefit the entire community of Northfield.

VII. *Members of the Northfield Industrial Corporation Transportation Task Force*

John Klockeman, Chair	Blumentals/Architecture, Inc.
Suzannah Ciernia	Life Skills Education
Bill Lindstrom	Northfield Retirement Center
Alan Marks	Northfield Printing
Noel Stratmoen	Northfield School Board
Ray Cox	Northfield Construction Co.
Joe Hargis	Carleton College
Ken Madole	Retired Engineer
Pete Sandberg	St. Olaf College
John Stull	Malt-O- Meal
Don Pavek	College City Homes, Inc.

Ex-Officio Members:

Dixon Bond	Northfield Economic Development Authority
Kathy Feldbrugge	Northfield Area Chamber of Commerce
Randy Peterson	Northfield Director of Public Works

Executive Summary of Recommendations

The NIC Transportation Task Force has focused on twelve roadway segments as identified on the enclosed map, most of which have been considered in previous transportation studies. In many cases, the Task Force reached conclusions similar to those arrived at by previous studies. The additional discussion and rationale may prove helpful. In a few study areas, the Task Force recommendations are somewhat different from previous conclusions, and add new elements. All study areas have been evaluated based on standards of safety, access, and effect on quality of life in Northfield. The study area conclusions are summarized as follows:

Area #1 Future T.H. 19 Bypass – Agrees with current City Council approach asking MNDOT to prepare a corridor study. Supports 320th Street option if handled carefully in Waterford area.

Area #2 Proposed Cedar Avenue Extension (320th Street to North Avenue) – Supports currently planned direct extension of Cedar Avenue south from 320th Cedar west intersection.

Area #3 North Avenue (T.H. 19 to Cedar Avenue) – Supports currently planned upgrade.

Area #4 Thye Parkway (Cedar Avenue Extension to T.H. 3) – Supports currently planned development.

Area #5 North Avenue (Zanmiller Drive to T.H. 3) – Proposes extending North Avenue to T.H. 3 as originally conceived in 1965.

Area #6 Proposed Cedar Avenue Extension (North Avenue to T.H. 19) – Supports current plan. Suggests addition of sidewalks and bikeways.

Area #7 Jefferson Parkway Extension (T.H. 19 to Armstrong Road) – Supports and suggests two alternative routes.

Area #8 Jefferson Parkway Extension (Armstrong Road to T.H. 3 across Cannon River) – Supports strongly. Discussion of alternative crossing locations.

Area #9 Jefferson Parkway Link (Sibley View Lane to Lake Drive) and (Michigan Drive E. to Spring Creek Road) – Supports immediate completion of this missing link.

Area #10 Jefferson Parkway Extension (Spring Creek Road to T.H. 19) – Supports completion as part of ring road to help relieve center city congestion.

Area #11 Spring Creek Road (Jefferson Parkway to T.H. 19) – Supports full pavement to T.H. 19, sidewalks and future upgrade south as area develops.

Area #12 T.H. 19 and T.H. 3 Common Roadway Segment – Suggests reintroducing turning lanes eliminated at 2nd Street and 5th Street.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that the City Council immediately consider a 20 year plan to finance transportation needs and begin, in certain cases, early acquisition for future road rights-of-way.

The report also raises general concerns about control of development adjacent to new roadways, the development of reliever roads for south commercial development, the adequacy of pedestrian and bicycle transportation infrastructure and public transportation, and how transportation plans can become transportation reality.

