



A Message from the Mayor

County Rd. 21 Can Connect This Community

If you are like me, you have watched in amazement as miles of concrete have been poured to complete the extension of County Rd. 21 north to County Rd. 18 in Shakopee. Current estimates are that this road will open in August. According to Scott County, the entire project, including a new transit station, is scheduled for completion on July 20, 2012. Once that connection is made – from the Metro Area to the north and 35W to the east – traffic on County Rd. 21 in Prior Lake will increase dramatically over the coming years. The resulting increases will further impact traffic problems on County Rd. 21 through downtown Prior Lake, affecting the viability of the existing roadway in that area.

As a result, we are faced with one of the most important decisions for our community: How do we deal with the changes that must be made to County Rd. 21 as it passes through downtown? How do we embrace the traffic increase and use it to our advantage. The decision we make this summer will impact the shape of our community for the next 30 years.

The expected traffic increase could be of benefit to the City as we seek to build a vital downtown, provide for economic development and downtown redevelopment and encourage job growth in the community.

What Are We Trying to Accomplish?

The County Rd. 21 project will reveal some of our priorities:

Traffic Flow: Facilitate access to and through the community and particularly access to downtown businesses today and in the future.

Traffic Safety: The access and egress points must function harmoniously so accidents are avoided
Healthy, Vibrant Downtown: Current and future residents should enjoy a downtown that serves a variety of goods and service needs.

More Jobs: SCALE, Scott County and Prior Lake share the objective that 50% of our residents will work within the community. The only way this can be accomplished is adding new businesses and services which support the jobs needed to reach this goal.

Community Impact: Consider the impact on our residents and the most-affected businesses.

How Much Traffic?

Experts say traffic on County Rd. 21 can increase almost three fold – from 11,000 trips-per-day to 27,000. That won't happen overnight. It will happen over the next couple of decades. But decisions on roads must be made now.

Engineers foresee a corridor that would eventually cease to function at the busiest times of day. Gridlock would limit entry and egress to Main Ave., traffic would pour into the neighborhoods, pedestrians would find it dangerous to cross from north to south downtown and customers would be unable to access both the north and south downtown businesses, or would just avoid the area altogether.

We could wait for that traffic situation and then start thinking about options. And while we wait, important access to our downtown will be cut off, existing business will suffer and downtown will not be a desirable place to do business. None of us want that. So rather than be reactive, we are being proactive. But doing so is not easy.

What Are the Options?

Improvements to Arcadia Ave. and County Rd. 21 are a key element of any kind of traffic improvement project.

In the next two months I expect that the City Council will choose between one of two alternatives designed to alleviate this problem and make the additional vehicle trips through Prior Lake an advantage:

- 1. Base case: To convert Main Ave./County Rd. 21 intersection to right-in/right-out for traffic flow
- 2. County Rd. 21 realignment to the south (Pleasant St.)

A third option – a bridge over County Rd. 21 – was analyzed and eliminated both because of its extensive cost as well as limited ability to achieve desired objective.

To examine each of the alternatives in detail, visit the City of Prior Lake website at www.cityofpriorlake.com.

Where We Stand Now

Your council knows that this is an important issue. Your council knows that this is an emotional issue. It affects two things which are important to us all: our homes and our community. That is why we are approaching it with careful deliberation.

The City Council has had numerous work sessions on the topic. We have hosted two town meetings both of which were very well attended. Your councilmembers, for the most part, have stayed neutral and are waiting for all the information to be in.

The City hired engineering firm Bolton & Menk to examine three options that could make increased traffic a blessing for the city and local economy. The city asked Maxfield Research Inc. to tell us the long-term economic development implication of each option. Now we are asking the independent financial advisory firm Ehlers to tell us about the cost implications to our residents and businesses associated with each option.

Like so many things in local government, there is not one option which is unanimously supported. That means not everyone will be pleased once the final choice is made, but as with any momentous decision, it needs to be made with many interests in mind. For Prior Lake, the interests of today's businesses and residents, tomorrow businesses and residents, an effective transportation plan and the best opportunity for economic development and downtown redevelopment are paramount.

I see this problem as a very real opportunity for us to work together for the betterment of Prior Lake today and tomorrow, so please continue to share your thoughts. Staff and council will do the best we can to support the option with the greatest long-term benefit to Prior Lake as a whole: all 18.3 square miles and 23,000 people.

Sincerely,
Mayor Mike Myser