

TOD adjacent to the proposed Northstar commuter rail stations is already occurring and gaining momentum. Station area TOD plans range from medium to high density residential units above street level retail, to town homes and senior housing, as well as to commercial office space and include structured parking areas. The cities of Anoka and Elk River have adopted development plans for the Commuter Rail Transit Village and the Elk River station respectively, which include all of these components. The cities of Fridley and Coon Rapids have each developed three different plans that include various combinations of these components and are currently in the process of evaluating options. Proposed plans for land adjacent to the Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station include either a 1,000 condominium development alongside a professional baseball stadium, or a primarily residential project with 3,000 condominiums and no stadium. Appendix A.1 provides a summary of mix-use developments that are recently completed, under construction or proposed. TOD is occurring around the proposed station sites in response to market demand.

Each station area in the Northstar Corridor has unique character, displaying a wide range of cultural activities, office development, housing development, retail businesses, educational institutions, industrial employment, transit use, and parking.

A summary of station area planning activities for each of the stations included in the MOS is described in the following sections. This information is considered an update to the land use/economic development information presented in the DEIS and FEIS documents.

The area around the six stations is zoned for medium and high-density residential housing and office/retail. All six cities have a planned unit-zoning district, which would allow them to accomplish any and all transit supportive features.

### ***Downtown Minneapolis***

Master plans adopted by Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis include plans for mixed-use development, including high-density residential within a half-mile of the Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station. Both entities also support a proposal for a Minnesota Twins ballpark adjacent to the downtown station site. Hennepin County is in the process of conducting an intermodal study to develop transit station design concepts in downtown Minneapolis that preserve long-term opportunities to accommodate expanded commuter rail on long-distance passenger rail and ensure convenient intermodal connections to light rail and buses.

The Minneapolis Downtown Parking Overlay District encompasses the downtown station area and therefore restricts the establishment or expansion of surface parking lots. The City of Minneapolis has also adopted a Pedestrian-Oriented Overlay District that supports compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development.

### ***Fridley***

The City of Fridley is considering a plan for redevelopment of the 11-acre parcel adjacent to the proposed station. In addition, the Fridley Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) is moving forward on the Islands of Peace Redevelopment Project. The potential redevelopment area consists of 13 privately held parcels and city park land comprising approximately 12 acres. The Fridley HRA envisions a mixed-use, mixed-income, mixed housing type development, which is connected by a trail to the proposed Fridley station site.

### ***Coon Rapids***

The City of Coon Rapids is considering a plan for redevelopment of the 23-acre parcel adjacent to the proposed station. A current development plan being reviewed by the City includes medium- and high-density residential units, senior housing, and retail/office space.

### ***Anoka***

The City of Anoka adopted an approach for developing the North Central Business District (NCBD) in March 2003 and *Development/Redevelopment Standards, Guidelines, and Incentives Manual* for developers in October 2003. The City of Anoka completed the Commuter Rail Transit Village (CRTV) Plan in March 2004. The City updated and refined the CRTV Master Plan in the spring of 2005. Appendix A-1 includes a copy of a resolution adopted by the City of Anoka that expresses their intent to pursue a joint agreement with the NCDA concerning the Anoka Station. Phase I of the CRTV Station Area Refined Concept Plan is also included in Appendix A-1.

### ***Elk River***

The City of Elk River amended its comprehensive plan to change the land use designation near the station from light industrial and low density residential to community commercial and medium-density residential and approved final plats for the residential component of the Elk River Station development.

### ***Big Lake***

The City of Big Lake amended its comprehensive plan to include medium- and high-density residential development adjacent to the station. On June 8, 2005, the City of Big Lake adopted a resolution stating its support for the Northstar Commuter Rail Project, and relocation of the station. The City of Big Lake has expressed interest in partnering with the NCDA to explore options for TOD around the proposed new station location.

### ***Regional Policies/Planning***

Since the completion of the EIS process for the Northstar Corridor (December 2002), the Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities has adopted the 2030 Regional Framework, January 2004.

The 2030 Regional Framework provides the following policy directions to encourage the concentration of development around established activity centers and regional transit:

- Growth is accommodated by promoting higher density development overall, clustered mixed-use growth and development in activity centers and along transportation corridors, and reinvestment in the developed area and the core of the region. This makes the most cost-effective use of new and existing incentives, regional services, infrastructure investments, and services.
- Expanded choices in housing locations and types are encouraged, allowing market forces to respond to changing market needs, including meeting increased demand for multi-family, lifecycle, and affordable housing with better links to jobs, services, and amenities.
- Land use patterns are encouraged with cluster housing, businesses, retail and services in walkable, transit-oriented centers along transportation corridors.

- Reinvestment and revitalization in developed communities is encouraged by providing grants and other incentives to cities and businesses to reclaim infill and redevelop underutilized lands and structures.
- Regional policies recognize the growing market demand for multifamily housing with improved connections to work places, retail, services, and entertainment through mixed-use concepts and easily accessible transportation options.

### *Change of Impact Summary*

As previously discussed, each of the communities where station locations are proposed have taken action, are planning for transit supportive land use, or have already undergone development activities. The proposed shift in the location of the Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station would improve the development potential for either mixed-use or a professional baseball stadium. In short, the proposed land use next to the commuter rail station was a key factor in shifting the station approximately 400 feet to the north.

The Big Lake station evaluated in the FEIS would have been located on land which was originally undeveloped (industrial land use and zoning designation). However, as noted in the FEIS, the initial phase of the Northstar commuter coach facility (4.1 acres) was constructed at the Big Lake station located west of CR 43/north of the BNSF tracks. Under the revised location on the south side of the BNSF mainline and to the east of CR 43, the commuter rail station/maintenance facility and layover facility would be located on land currently under agricultural use.

In summary, the revised preferred alternative will continue to support TOD in the corridor. No significant changes from the FEIS would occur under the revised preferred alternative.

## **4.2 Community Facilities and Services**

### *General Background/Methodology*

Community facilities and public services contribute to the social fabric of each community. These facilities are visited both by necessity and choice and provide essential services. The way in which these facilities are used, accessed, and their ability to deliver services in the most beneficial manner can impact the well being of the community.

As part of the DEIS/FEIS, the following facilities were inventoried and evaluated:

- Government buildings
- Schools
- Churches
- Day Care Centers
- Hospitals
- Non Profit Activity Centers
- Parks/Recreation Facilities
- Existing and Proposed Trails and Bicycle Paths.

All community facilities within three blocks of proposed commuter rail stations and the maintenance facility were identified. The area of potential impact for the proposed track improvements is located adjacent to, or within a corridor that is used for the same activity. Only the facilities that are immediately adjacent to the areas and not separated by an existing physical barrier were identified.

For the analysis in the DEIS/FEIS, it was assumed that the following types of activities or actions would have the potential to impact community facilities:

- Physical changes that impact access;
- Connectivity and circulation patterns including pedestrian and bicycle access, traffic levels, and traffic pattern changes;
- Displacements that would have an impact on community character and cohesion;
- Improved mobility or access to transit services provided to the community; and
- Noise and vibration levels.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 of the FEIS (*page 3-40/41*), summarize the community facilities within the defined area of potential impact for the proposed stations and track improvements.

***Impacts***

**MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS**

The FEIS identified potential community facility impacts at the Downtown Minneapolis, Minneapolis Northeast, Anoka, and Big Lake station locations. The FEIS concluded that there would be no impacts to community facilities associated with the proposed LRT connection or the vehicle maintenance facility at the Elk River south site. A summary of the impacts is presented in Table 4.1

**Table 4.1 — Summary of Community Facility Impacts Disclosed in Northstar EIS**

Project Component	Impacts Disclosed in DEIS/FEIS	Mitigation Measures
Big Lake Station	Day-care facility is located near the station. People will experience improved transit accessibility. During construction dust, noise, and fumes may have a temporary impact. <i>See FEIS Table 3.2-4, page 3-44</i>	The contractor will coordinate with the day-care provider to minimize disruptions and maintain safety to their operations.
Anoka Station	Minor increase in risk to people parking along the road at the Grant Street Athletic Complex due to traffic going to/from the commuter rail. <i>See FEIS Table 3.2-4, page 3-44</i>	“Watch for Pedestrian” signs will be posted.
Minneapolis Northeast	Preferred Alternative will provide improved transit accessibility for the users of several public facilities located within walking distance of the proposed station.	
Downtown Minneapolis Station	Proposed extension of Cedar Lake Park Trail-Phase 3 impacted.	Trail could be moved 50 feet east between North 7 <sup>th</sup> Street and approximately 200 feet south of North 5 <sup>th</sup> Street.

### **Revised Preferred Alternative**

Under the revised preferred alternative, the improved transit accessibility in the vicinity of the Northeast Minneapolis station would be removed, as the station is not included in the alternative.

The planned Cedar Lake Trail (Phase 3) identified in the FEIS is not developed at this time, nor has land been purchased for the trail. Under the revised Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal station location, the planned Cedar Lake trail would be shifted to the east and south to accommodate the commuter rail platform. The trail would be parallel and southeast of the station and the existing BNSF track. Mn/DOT and the NCDA have been working closely with the City of Minneapolis in the development of a revised trail alignment through this area.

The day-care facility in proximity to the Big Lake station is no longer operating near the proposed site. Similar to the impacts and mitigation identified in the FEIS, the lead agency for the park-and-ride facility at Anoka should provide "Watch for Pedestrian" signs at appropriate locations near the Grant Street Athletic Complex.

At the Fridley Station, the Mississippi River Regional Bike Trail will be maintained through the west side of the station site. During construction, an 8-foot temporary trail (approximately 300 feet in length) will be constructed on the east side of East River Road to provide continual trail continuity through this area. Trail users would access the existing trail to the north of the station (See Figure 3.3).

In the vicinity of the proposed third mainline, the Rice Creek West Regional Bike Trail will be temporarily closed during the construction of the additional bridge structure to accommodate the third mainline over Rice Creek/Locke Lake. Additionally, up to 350 feet of the trail will be temporarily closed during construction of the third mainline. Construction activities in this location are anticipated to take six to eight weeks to complete. During construction, the trail crossing under the existing BNSF bridges will be closed. Trail closure signs will be posted on the trail in the City of Fridley Community Park and near the Locke Park entrance point to the trail. In addition, advance trail closure signs will be posted at University Avenue, Mississippi Street Northeast and along East River Road. The 4(f) evaluation presented in Section 6.0 provides additional information regarding the temporary trail impacts and mitigation measures.

The DEIS evaluated a third main track from MP 15.6 to 20.7, along with a siding from MP 18.8 to 20.7 (east/north side of mainline). The proposed track was originally located on the west (railroad south) side of the existing mainline. However, as presented in the alternatives section of the EA, based on more detailed design, the preferred alignment of the third mainline would be on the west side (railroad south) from MP 15.1 to 16.6, transition to the east side (railroad north) of the mainline at approximately MP 16.6, then stay on the east side (railroad north) from MP 16.6 to MP 21.1. Locating the proposed third main on the east side (railroad north) after crossing Mississippi Street, avoids direct impact to the Rice Creek West Trail previously documented in the DEIS. In addition, locating the third main on the east (railroad north) at the Locke Lake/Rice Creek crossing avoids potential impacts to Locke Park.

Two City of Fridley parks are located directly to the east of the BNSF right-of-way along with the Springbrook Nature Center. Facilities provided at Plaza Park include a basketball court, playground equipment, and sitting benches. Facilities provided at the City of Fridley Community Park include: picnic area and shelter, park building, playground equipment, walking/biking trail, baseball diamonds, and football field. Both the Springbrook Nature Center and Fridley

Community Park have received Land and Water Conservation Funds (LAWCON), and hence are defined as 6(f) resources. Based on current right-of-way limits, the third main would not encroach on these park facilities.

The DEIS included a 4(f)/6(f) draft evaluation associated with potential impacts to the Springbrook Nature Center in Fridley. Potential right-of-way impacts were identified based on the inclusion of both a siding and third main track, along with general right-of-way boundaries. Based on more detailed assessment of current BNSF right-of-way boundaries, along with the removal of the siding from MP 18.8 to 20.7, the proposed third main near the Springbrook Nature Center would be within existing BNSF right-of-way boundaries. Hence, there would not be impacts to the Springbrook Nature Center under the revised preferred alternative. The revised preferred alternative will therefore not impact previously identified 6(f) resources.

In summary, the revised preferred alternative would not result in significant adverse impacts to community facilities within the Corridor.

### ***Mitigation — General***

The FEIS included a section pertaining to corridor-wide mitigation measures. This section updates the information included in the FEIS.

Commuter rail stations have been designed to provide a variety of amenities for the storage and safe use of bicycles in station areas. Bicycle storage facilities will provide secure, sturdy, and convenient equipment for locking bicycles. The number of bicycle storage facilities varies by station, according to the anticipated ridership and space constraints. The minimum will be five lockers and ten bicycle rack spaces per station.

Several provisions are included in station design for the accessibility of pedestrians and bicyclists, including a network of paved paths. The paths will connect major on-site and off-site pedestrian origination points to the station and platform. All paths will be as short and direct as possible; with a clear line of site to the platform. Pedestrian paths will be visible from on-site access drives and parking areas, as well as from adjacent streets. Regular pedestrian paths have been designed to be six to eight feet wide. Crosswalks, walkways adjacent to parking and drop-off facilities, and pedestrian track crossings will be wider and have been designed in accordance with level-of-service capacity standards. Other site elements, such as ticket vending machines, have been strategically placed so their operation would not interfere with pedestrian flow but are readily accessible.

All stations will provide for the accessibility of commuter rail and light rail patrons with disabilities.

### 4.3 Displacements and Relocations

#### *MOS of Preferred Alternative*

The MOS of the preferred alternative defined and evaluated in the FEIS included the following property acquisitions (see Table 4.2):

**Table 4.2 — Potential Property Acquisitions Disclosed in the FEIS  
(MOS of Preferred Alternative)**

Acquisition Area	Number of Parcels to be Acquired	Land Use of Parcels	Residential Structures to be Displaced	Business Structures to be Displaced
Minneapolis Downtown Station and LRT Connection	1	Parking Lot	0	0
Minneapolis Northeast Station	7	Railroad right-of-way Developed commercial	0	1
Fridley Station	10	Undeveloped Residential/Commercial	0	0
Coon Rapids-Foley	4	Commercial/Residential	1	1
Coon Rapids – Riverdale*	0	Commuter Coach Facility Undeveloped commercial/industrial	0	0
Anoka Station	7	Undeveloped commercial/industrial	0	1
Elk River Station*	0	Commuter Coach Facility Agricultural	0	0
Big Lake Station and Layover Facility*	4	Commuter Coach Facility Undeveloped commercial	0	0
Elk River South Maintenance Facility	2	Agricultural/Commercial	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>

\* The Coon Rapids - Riverdale, Elk River, and Big Lake stations were assumed to be included under the no-build alternative in the FEIS, as the land had been purchased and programmed for development. The parcels identified for Big Lake reflect the proposed expansion area for the commuter rail alternative.

Based on the level of design at the time the DEIS was prepared, the proposed Coon Creek siding and third mainline were estimated to impact (partial and full take) up to 25 and 61 parcels, respectively.

#### *Revised Preferred Alternative*

The proposed project will require acquisition of property for stations, the maintenance facility, and other infrastructure necessary for the operation of commuter rail and the LRT connection in downtown Minneapolis. For the project, the BNSF will retain fee title to its right-of-way.

As of November 2005, the property acquisition for the proposed project is identified in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3 — Potential Property Acquisitions under the Revised Preferred Alternative**

Station	General Location	Current Use	Partial Take	Full Take	Fee	Easement
Downtown Minneapolis Intermodal Station	E Side of BNSF Tracks, S side of 5th Street	Commercial Parking Lot	2 parcels		X	
	NE Corner of 5th Street N and 2nd Avenue N	Vacant				
	419 5th Street North	County Property	1 parcel	1 parcel	X	
	East side of BNSF under 3rd/4th Street freeway ramps	Commercial parking/ Office building	2 parcels		X	Partial temporary/ Permanent easement
Fridley	West Side Station Site	Vacant		10 Parcels	X	
	East Side of Station Site	Vacant		3 Parcels	X	
Elk River	SW of Railroad Tracks	Commercial Parking Lot	1 Parcel			X
Big Lake	East of CR 43, South of Railroad Tracks	Agricultural	2 Parcels		X	
Maintenance Facility	East of CR 43, South of RR Tracks, East of Station	Agricultural	3 Parcels		X	
	West of 172 <sup>nd</sup> Street	Agricultural	1 Parcel		X	
Track Improvement	Construct Double Track Through Northtown Yard (43 <sup>rd</sup> Avenue to 35 <sup>th</sup> Avenue)	Industrial	To be determined based on current BNSF ROW limits		X	
<b>Total</b>			<b>12</b>	<b>14</b>		

The proposed LRT connection on 5<sup>th</sup> Street would require closing access to an alley off of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, located between 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North. Although this area is out of the Northstar Corridor study area (3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue North), the impact is being disclosed due to its proximity.

Under the revised preferred alternative, the proposed third mainline from MP 15.1 to 21.1 would be located within the existing BNSF right-of-way. No right-of-way impacts are anticipated in this area. If for some unforeseen reason the proposed track improvements require construction outside the existing BNSF right-of-way, Mn/DOT and its project partners will work with the affected property owner to restore the impacted site.

***Property Acquisition***

Mn/DOT and the county regional railroad authorities are authorized to acquire, own, manage, and dispose of real estate property for the project. Mn/DOT will have the responsibility for the acquisition of real estate for the project. Such property will be transferred to the owner of the



Northstar Corridor Rail Project prior to construction. Mn/DOT property acquisition staff will oversee property acquisition activities to ensure compliance with state and federal requirements.

### ***Relocation Assistance***

At the completion of the preliminary engineering and advanced design for the project, no relocations have been identified as necessary for the project. However, if any relocations are required, the Northstar Corridor real estate program will conform to the *Federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970*, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4601 et seq.) and 49 C.F.R. Part 24 promulgated pursuant thereto. The authority for this assurance is found in *Minnesota Statutes Sections 117.51 through 117.53 and 645.32(2)*. *FTA Circular 5010.1C*, dated October 1, 1998 will apply to any real estate acquisitions.

The Northstar Corridor project will comply with all laws and policies relating to relocation assistance.

### ***BNSF Property***

Northstar Corridor Commuter Rail service will operate on BNSF tracks, along with freight railroad service. BNSF will continue to own the railway. Rights for Mn/DOT to operate commuter rail service on BNSF property may be established by agreement or easement. Additionally, easements will be necessary for the commuter rail station platforms and walkways. All access rights and easements will be negotiated with the BNSF.

## **4.4 Archaeological and Historic Resources**

Federal legislation requires governmental agencies to consider their impacts to historic and archaeological resources before undertaking a project. *Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966* (NHPA 1992, as amended) mandates that federal agencies, or their designee, consider the effects of their actions on historic properties. A historic property is defined as any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure, or object included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The Section 106 process consists of steps for: 1) identifying and evaluating historic properties; 2) assessing the effects of an undertaking on historic properties; and 3) consultation for methods to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects.

### ***Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS***

#### **Archaeological Resources**

The preferred alternative defined and evaluated in the Northstar Corridor FEIS would not result in impacts to archeological resources. Hence, no further studies and/or mitigation were required.

#### **Architectural Resources**

Under the preferred alternative defined and evaluated in the FEIS, four station areas (Downtown Minneapolis, Minneapolis Northeast, Anoka, and Rice) having potentially eligible architectural resources were identified during historic research and/or field survey. The downtown Minneapolis LRT Connector and the Railroad Corridor alignment were also identified as having potentially eligible architectural resources, and were also evaluated. A summary of the findings is presented herein:

### *Downtown Minneapolis Station*

The proposed Downtown Minneapolis station is adjacent to the Minneapolis Warehouse Historic District, part of the NRHP. Adherence to the provisions set forth in the Programmatic Agreement is anticipated to result in no adverse effects on the district.

### *Minneapolis Northeast Station*

One property, the Northwestern Furniture mart (Bank's Building) at 601-615 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NE, has been determined eligible for the NRHP by State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) opinion. Located west of the proposed station, the Furniture Mart is one of the most prominent extant buildings representative of Minneapolis' early 20<sup>th</sup> century furniture manufacturing district.

Adherence to the provision of final design review of the station by SHPO should result in no adverse effect finding on the Northwestern Furniture Mart Building.

### *Anoka Station*

The Old Milk Factory building overlooking the Anoka station area has experienced extensive alternations that preclude its eligibility for the NRHP. Buildings at the Anoka Regional Treatment Facility, eligible for the NRHP, are somewhat removed from the station area site and buffered from it by a grove of deciduous trees on the treatment facility grounds.

### *Downtown Minneapolis LRT Connection*

The proposed LRT line would pass through and adjacent to the NRHP Minneapolis Warehouse Historic District on the 5<sup>th</sup> Street North alignment. The bulk of the large district is located to the northeast of 5<sup>th</sup> Street North. The proposed LRT line would pass through the Minneapolis Warehouse Preservation District at 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue North.

Adherence to the provisions set forth in the Programmatic Agreement is anticipated to result in no adverse effects on the district

### *Railroad Corridor Alignment*

The section of the BNSF in the Northstar Corridor from Minneapolis to Rice has been determined eligible for the NRHP by the SHPO. Because the track improvements would not change the location of the main line, and the increase in number of trains traveling along the line would not affect the track, there would be no adverse effect from the track improvements to this railroad corridor segment.

### *Mitigation*

A Programmatic Agreement (See Appendix A.1) has been developed to outline a process for further consideration of the design of project components within or adjacent to historic properties. Mitigation measures identified for the preferred alternative defined in the FEIS/ROD include the following:

- Final design review and concurrence by SHPO of Rice station and Minneapolis Northeast station to assure they will not result in an adverse effect to the Rice Mill & Grain and Northwestern Furniture Mart, respectively.
- The design of the Minneapolis Downtown Commuter Station will take into account its visual relationship to the Minneapolis warehouse district. In addition, programmatic aspects of the design, which influence the design of 5<sup>th</sup> Street North Bridge between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenues North will be considered.
- The design of the new 5<sup>th</sup> Street North bridge between 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue North will meet the Secretary of Interior's standards for new construction in historic places.

- The design of the new 5<sup>th</sup> Street North bridge between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues will meet the Secretary of Interior's standards for new construction in historic places.
- The potential relocation and reuse of the St. Cloud Northern Pacific Depot will meet the Secretary of Interior's standards and will ensure the continued eligibility of the depot on its new location.
- The design of all LRT system elements between the 5<sup>th</sup> Street North Bridge LRT station and the Hiawatha LRT project will address the Warehouse District. These elements include (but are not limited to) signage, track and traffic lanes, curbs and sidewalks, overhead cables and support posts, and landscaping.

### ***Revised Preferred Alternative***

As stated previously, a Programmatic Agreement (PA) has been executed between the Minnesota SHPO, Mn/DOT, and the FTA for the Northstar Corridor. The Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) and the St. Cloud HPC are consulting parties to the agreement. The PA calls for final design review and concurrence by the SHPO for the Rice and Minneapolis Northeast stations. As both of these stations are not included in the revised preferred alternative, this review requirement will not be needed. Additionally, the potential relocation and reuse of the St. Cloud Northern Pacific Depot is not included in the revised preferred alternative. Hence, this impact would be avoided.

In accordance with the requirements set forth in the Northstar PA, Mn/DOT and its partnering agencies have been in consultation with the SHPO and the Minneapolis HPC regarding the design of the LRT connection, the LRT station on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, and the Downtown Minneapolis commuter rail station. Specifically, six meetings with the aforementioned parties already have taken place from March to November 2005. Modifications to the LRT connector and commuter rail station design have occurred as a result of these meetings. Mn/DOT and its project partners will continue to consult with the SHPO and Minneapolis HPC as final design plans progress in the downtown Minneapolis area.

The Big Lake station and maintenance/layover facility includes land that was not previously surveyed during the EIS. An 18-acre site was evaluated during the DEIS, as a potential maintenance facility location. Mn/DOT has determined that the revised project will not impact any historic properties (See Appendix A.1 for letter). The SHPO concurred with this determination on December 19, 2005 (See Appendix A.1 for letter)

### ***Change of Impact Summary***

The proposed revised preferred alternative would minimize impacts to surrounding historic resources, as the previously identified and evaluated Minneapolis Northeast and Rice stations are not a part of the revised preferred alternative. Additionally, Mn/DOT, SHPO, and the Minneapolis HPC have been in ongoing consultation regarding the design elements of the LRT alignment, LRT station on 5<sup>th</sup> Street North, and commuter rail station, as specified in the Northstar PA.

No additional mitigation is required under the revised preferred alternative.

#### 4.5 Visual and Aesthetic Conditions

The visual impact assessment conducted for the Northstar EIS and this EA considers the following:

- Visual resources of the natural, cultural, or built environment that would be impacted by the proposed project
- Views that would be impacted by the proposed project
- Change in visual quality and viewer response that would result from the proposed project

Compatibility or contrast with the existing built environment and natural environmental context is assessed for the proposed revisions to the preferred alternative from two perspectives. First, the visibility of the project is evaluated from the perspective of the surrounding environment, and those sites considered particularly sensitive to changes in setting or view are reviewed. Second, the view afforded users of the proposed services is determined and evaluated. Unless otherwise noted, the existing conditions and impact evaluation (*Section 3.5.2 and 3.5.3, pages 3-73 through 3-85*) defined and evaluated in the Northstar FEIS remain unchanged and are incorporated by reference into this EA.

##### *Existing Conditions*

An update to existing conditions is presented below for the Downtown Minneapolis, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, and Elk River stations. New existing condition information is also presented for Big Lake facility area.

##### **Downtown Minneapolis Station**

The proposed Downtown Minneapolis station is located directly under and to the north of 5<sup>th</sup> Street North, parallel to the BNSF mainline tracks (east side). The station platform area would be located on approximately 0.7 acre of land, which is currently part of a large surface parking lot. Views to the east include: the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Garage and 4th Street parking ramp; the west view includes the Hennepin County Environmental Services building and the Ford Centre; the south view includes existing surface parking; and the north view includes the surface parking and bridge structures (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets North).

##### **Coon Rapids –Riverdale Station**

The proposed station is located on a 9.67 acre parcel of land, 7.01 acres of which was recently developed as a commuter coach facility (454 spaces). Views to the north include the back of the Riverdale Commons regional shopping center. Views to the west and east are of single-family homes.

##### **Elk River Station**

The proposed Elk River station is located along the northeast side of the railroad tracks and on the north side of Twin Lakes Boulevard. The site was recently developed as a commuter coach facility (311 parking spaces). Since the Northstar FEIS, high-density residential development activities have taken place to the northeast of the station (east side of Twin Lakes Boulevard). Views to the south of the station include primarily industrial land uses. TH 10 is not in the immediate viewshed. Views of the site would be primarily from the industrial park to the south and the new residential development to the northeast.

### **Big Lake Station and Maintenance Facility**

The proposed commuter rail station and vehicle maintenance/layover facility would be located on 37.5 acres of land to the south of the BNSF tracks and to the east of CR 43. The land is currently under agricultural use. To the west of CR 43, a park-and-ride facility was constructed in 2002 with 97 spaces. Viewsheds from the station and maintenance facility include a grain elevator, veterinary clinic, and industrial uses to the north, undeveloped land and residential development to the west of CR 43, and agricultural land to the south and to the east.

### ***Visual Impacts***

Visual impacts are changes in the existing conditions within the visual environment that may be brought about by construction of the proposed alternative. The changes that may result from the construction of the revised preferred alternative may detract from the visual environment, or they may enhance it. Since these are subjective criteria, this assessment will focus on those changes to the visual environment that may be measured in terms of high impact, moderate impact, or low impact. Enhancements and detracting factors are factors that may be impacted by subsequent design and mitigation considerations.

### **Visual Impacts Identified in the FEIS**

The MOS of the preferred alternative evaluated in the FEIS identified the Minneapolis Northeast Station at 7<sup>th</sup> Street NE and the Fridley Station as facilities that would result in “moderate” visual impacts. Additionally, the Section 106 Programmatic Agreement defined specific design considerations at the Minneapolis Downtown Station, Intermodal Connector, and Minneapolis Northeast Station.

The proposed stormwater pond that would serve the Anoka Station was located within the MnDNR scenic easement, and would therefore be within the viewshed of the Rum River.

### **Visual Impacts Under the Revised Preferred Alternative**

#### *Downtown Minneapolis Station and LRT Connection*

Views of the downtown station would be compatible with the surrounding uses in the area providing additional transportation options in this transportation corridor. The shift in the commuter rail station to the north increases the view of the facility from the Ford Centre building. As specified in the Programmatic Agreement between the FTA and SHPO, the design of the station will take into account its visual relationship to the Minneapolis Warehouse District. Additionally, the design of the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge between 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues will meet the Secretary of Interior’s standards for new construction in historic areas. The design of the LRT system elements between the 5<sup>th</sup> Street bridge LRT station and the Hiawatha LRT project will also consider effects to the Minneapolis Historic Warehouse District.

As documented in Section 4.4 of this EA, over the past several months Mn/DOT and its project partners have been in consultation with the SHPO and the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) regarding the specific requirements of the Programmatic Agreement as it pertains to the design of the downtown station and LRT connection/station.

#### *Fridley Station*

Views of the station area from the surrounding residential areas would change from open grassy areas to a station facility and park-and-ride lot. As documented in the FEIS, this would result in a moderate visual impact as the station would be compatible with the adjacent industrial land uses and surface parking lots. The current station plan calls for a shift to the north of the park-and-ride

facility (east side of tracks) to provide improved accessibility to the station platform. The station platform has also shifted approximately 200 feet to the north. The park-and-ride lot still stays a sufficient distance away from the local residents to minimize visual impacts. This shift in location would result in negligible visual impacts.

#### *Coon Rapids – Foley Station*

This station is not a part of the revised preferred alternative.

#### *Coon Rapids-Riverdale Station*

The station would have a low visual impact as a commuter coach facility (454 spaces) and is compatible with the regional shopping land use adjacent the site. The FEIS included a pedestrian overpass at the west end of the station platforms. The current plans call for an overpass structure at the east end of the station platforms. The shift in the overpass location will actually reduce the visual impact, as it will be buffered by existing trees immediately to the south of the site (and north of the residential neighborhood).

#### *Anoka Station*

Since the preparation of the EIS, additional design pertaining to the proposed stormwater pond has occurred. The current design significantly minimizes encroachment into the Rum River scenic easement boundaries (See Figure 3.5). Mn/DOT and the NCDA will continue to work closely with the City of Anoka and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MnDNR) regarding the final design the treatment pond, particularly as it relates to the visual impacts to the Rum River.

As noted in Table 3.2 and Figure 3.5, the City of Anoka proposes to construct a parking structure to accommodate up to 450 parking spaces at the Anoka station. The proposed structure would be two levels. The structure is part of an overall CRTV plan being developed by the City of Anoka. The structure would not be within the Rum River scenic easement, and would be considered consistent with the existing and proposed land use in the area. The proposed facility is anticipated to have low visual impacts.

#### *Elk River Maintenance Facility*

The Elk River Maintenance Facility (south of tracks) is no longer part of the preferred alternative. Hence, the potential change in land use from agricultural to industrial at this location is no longer an impact.

#### *Elk River Station*

This station would continue to experience a low visual impact as it was constructed as a commuter coach facility prior to the construction of the residential development to the northeast.

#### *Big Lake Station and Maintenance Facility*

There would be moderate visual impact at this station as it is located to the south of the BNSF mainline and industrial/commercial land uses. The proposed station would change the existing land use (currently agricultural). Land uses to the north and northeast of the site are consistent with the proposed station and maintenance facility.

#### *Rail Improvements*

In general, the proposed track capacity improvements would have minimal impact on visual quality because commuter rail would be located on existing BNSF tracks already used by freight traffic. The addition of up to 18 trains per day would have a low visual impact.

### *Mitigation Measures*

Measures of mitigation will mainly be implemented at the station locations. Station area landscaping will be designed to complement the character of the surrounding community.

### *Change of Impact Summary*

Visual impacts documented in the FEIS for the MOS have been reduced with the proposed revisions to the preferred alternative. Specifically, potential visual impacts at the Minneapolis Northeast station have been eliminated, as well as potential visual impacts to the Rum River.

## **4.6 Environmental Justice**

Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice requires that federal agencies consider and address disproportionate adverse environmental effects of proposed federal projects on minority and low-income communities. The intent of the Department of Transportation Final Order on Environmental Justice (DOT Order 5608.1, Environmental Justice (February 15, 1997) is to integrate the goals of Executive Order 12899 into DOT operations. In addition, Mn/DOT has developed *Guidance for Environmental Justice* that provides steps and procedures when addressing environmental justice.

The *Northstar Corridor EIS Environmental Justice* impact analysis was prepared in accordance with both Executive Order 12898 and Mn/DOT's guidance. As documented in the FEIS (*page 3-87*), the census block groups in the Northstar Corridor (full system) did not exhibit high percentages of either low-income or minority populations. Additionally, the preferred alternative defined and evaluated in the FEIS was determined to not disproportionately impact populations addressed in the environmental justice analysis.

The overall conclusion regarding environmental justice impacts documented in the FEIS for the original preferred alternative would be consistent for the revised preferred alternative. A summary of the findings is presented herein.

Benefits and adverse impacts to minority and low-income areas in the corridor are representative of the areas served by the revised preferred alternative. The revised preferred alternative would have several positive impacts on minority and low-income populations at proposed station sites throughout the corridor. These positive impacts include increased mobility and access to system linkages, improved access to educational and business facilities, better access to jobs, improved bicycle and pedestrian connectors, and visual enhancements at station areas. The revised preferred alternative is also expected to encourage redevelopment opportunities in station areas, which could potentially improve and revitalize adjacent communities. Additionally, the revised preferred alternative would provide an additional transit mode for residents in the central city to access job concentrations in the outlying areas (reverse commute).

## **4.7 Safety and Security**

Section 3.7 of the FEIS (*pages 3-92/93*) identifies safety and security measures that will be incorporated into the design of the Northstar Corridor project. Section 3.7 is incorporated into this EA by reference.

The referenced Fire/Life Safety Committee, which will oversee applicable components of the project to ensure that a safe transit system is designed and constructed, began meeting in September 2005. Specific design recommendations and provisions have been and will continue to

be incorporated into the design of the system. Additionally, the proposed shift of the Big Lake Station and Maintenance Facility to the east of CR 43 will eliminate the previously required at-grade crossing of CR 43.

The revised preferred alternative will not significantly change the previously documented safety and security impacts/mitigation measures identified in the FEIS.

#### **4.8 Farmlands**

The Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) was signed into law in 1981 and is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The FPPA requires that farmland impacts be taken into consideration in federally funded projects. Specifically, prime, unique, and statewide or locally important farmland should be evaluated.

Prime farmland is defined as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, oilseed, and other agricultural crops with minimum external inputs such as fertilizer or excessive labor. Prime farmland does not include land already in or committed to urban development or water storage (7 USC 4201).

Unique farmland is land other than prime farmland that is used for production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, as determined by the USDA. Farmland of statewide or local importance is determined by the appropriate state or unit of local government.

##### ***MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS***

Prime and statewide important farmlands are identified based on soil type, as mapped in the County Soil Survey. The list of designated prime and statewide important soil types was obtained from each county NRCS office. Soil types identified as prime or statewide important were highlighted on the soil survey, and overlaid on the potential commuter rail track improvements, proposed commuter rail station, and maintenance and layover facilities.

In the FEIS, only a small percentage of the mapped soil units in the Downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake segment of the Northstar Corridor were identified as prime or statewide important. Most of the sandy soils in the area are too droughty to meet these classifications. The FEIS stated that the Downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake portion of the preferred alternative would not impact prime or statewide important farmlands, as none of the applicable soils met the definition as set forth by the FPPA.

##### ***Revised Preferred Alternative***

The revised Big Lake station site, Big Lake Maintenance Facility site, and a third mainline track between MPs 15.1 and 21.1 were evaluated for farmland impacts under the revised preferred alternative.

Soil survey mapping was reviewed in the corridor, including new impact areas. There is only one area of prime farmland in the corridor, and it was present in an area where Northstar Corridor operations would occur within existing BNSF right-of-way. Therefore, no prime farmland would be affected by the revised preferred alternative.

There are two areas of statewide important farmland that would be intersected by the third main starting near Foley Boulevard. However, this area is zoned urban and is in urban use; therefore it



does not meet the criteria of the FPPA for prime/statewide important farmland. No soil types in the corridor were identified as unique or locally important.

#### 4.9 Wetlands

Federal wetland regulations are administered by the COE under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. The COE has permitting authority on all activities that require fill in wetlands. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MnPCA) has certification authority for all COE permits under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act, which requires that the project comply with Minnesota state water quality standards. The MnDNR has regulatory authority over activities within selected wetland and waters, as identified on the public waters maps.

In 1991, the state of Minnesota enacted the Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). This legislation authorized Local Government Units (LGUs) to administer state wetland regulations. The WCA requires that activities resulting in the draining or filling of wetlands must be avoided or minimized. Impacts that are unavoidable must be replaced at a ratio of at least two acres of wetland creation/restoration for every acre of wetland impact. The WCA is administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and LGUs.

##### *Preferred Alternative Evaluated in DEIS and FEIS*

Potential wetland basins were identified through the use of USFWS National Wetland Inventory maps, MnDNR Protected Waters and Wetlands maps, current aerial photography, topographic maps, and County Soil Surveys. An on-site review was conducted in October and November 1999 to verify the presence of wetland sites and establish boundaries. The field investigation analyzed a 200-foot wide corridor along the potential track improvement segments. The stations site and maintenance facility site reviews included the proposed site area and immediate vicinity, approximately 100-feet from the edge of site.

For purposes of the DEIS, ten wetlands were identified and delineated in the vicinity of the proposed commuter rail stations, maintenance facility, Transportation System Management (TSM) park-and-ride facilities, and potential track improvements throughout the original corridor from Minneapolis to Rice. The DEIS also provided wetland delineation maps for each site in Appendix 7.4. Wetland impacts are listed in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4 — Wetland Impacts Identified in DEIS**

Wetland ID	Facility	Wetland Impact (Acres)
1	St. Cloud East Station	4.45
2	Elk River Station	0.07
3	Elk River North Maintenance Facility	0.25
5	Access Road (south of Twp 177)	0.49
10 – 13	Siding & Track (south of TH 610)	0.88
16	Siding & Track (at Springbrook Nature Center)	1.05
17	Siding & Track (at Rice Creek)	0.04
<b>Total</b>		<b>7.23</b>

The FEIS defined a preferred alternative that did not include a third main and siding, and incorporated design modifications to other track improvements to avoid area wetlands. It also identified a MOS from downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake (40.1 miles). Therefore, the wetland impacts of the MOS from Minneapolis to Big Lake were reduced from those identified in the

DEIS. The one remaining wetland identified at the Elk River Station site was reviewed under a separate environmental document for the Northstar commuter-coach bus facility, and was not included in the FEIS under the preferred alternative (assumed under no-build alternative). As documented in the FEIS, the MOS would not directly impact any wetland areas.

### ***Updated Information***

Since the FEIS, the preferred alternative has been revised to include a maintenance facility at Big Lake instead of Elk River. A maintenance facility in Big Lake was evaluated in the DEIS; however, the revised facility includes a larger section of land. In addition, the Big Lake station has been shifted to the south side of the BNSF mainline and a third mainline is proposed between MPs 15.1 and 21.1, primarily on the east side of the existing mainline in Fridley. Each of these areas was evaluated for wetland impacts. Impacts associated with potential track improvements were assumed to extend 75 feet east from the centerline of the western most existing mainline. This impact limit is 5 feet narrower than was evaluated in the DEIS for the potential track improvements on the east side of the existing tracks.

Wetland boundaries identified in 1999 were reviewed for changes. Wetlands 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17 were reviewed and verified in the field on October 19, 2005 (See Figures in Appendix A.2). A supplemental wetland delineation was also conducted to determine the location and boundary of the Rice Creek wetland basin (extension of Wetland 17). The original delineation did not cover the Rice Creek area east of the rail line in this location. The area at the Big Lake maintenance facility was delineated for wetlands (Wetland 19) on June 13, 2005. Field review included the evaluation of vegetation, soils, and hydrology in accordance with the *COE Wetlands Delineation* manual (January 1987). All wetlands were classified in accordance with the guidelines in the *Classification of Wetlands and Deep Water Habitats of the United States* and in *Circular 39*, published by the USFWS.

### ***Revised Preferred Alternative***

The revised Big Lake station site, Big Lake maintenance facility site, and a third mainline between MPs 15.1 and 21.1 were evaluated for wetland impacts. Moving the Big Lake station site to the south side of the BNSF mainline would not impact any wetland areas. Therefore, the wetland evaluation addresses impacts associated with the Big Lake maintenance facility and third mainline improvements. The analysis has been conducted in accordance with *Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, Executive Order 11990 and U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Order 5660.1A* regarding protection of wetlands.

### **Big Lake Maintenance Facility**

Wetland 19 is a large wetland basin located on the east edge of the proposed facility location and extends to the south (See Figure 4.1). The majority of the area on the north end of the wetland consists of plowed cropland with remnants of corn, cattail, and soft stem bulrush. Soils observed in the basin were dark gray, faintly mottled loamy sand to 16 inches, underlain by black loamy sand to 24 inches in depth. Hydrology was determined through secondary indicators of mapped hydric soils and topographic position. Farm Service Agency aerial slides showed wetland signatures that corresponded to the delineated boundary in five of nine normal precipitation years. The basin was defined by the adjacent upland plowed cropland, absence of hydrologic indicators, and topography. This wetland is identified as MnDNR Protected Water Wetland 65W. The MnDNR has been requested to and is currently field verifying the Ordinary High Water (OHW)

mark (MnDNR jurisdictional boundary). Based on the OHW, appropriate permitting agencies will be coordinated with for the wetlands impacts/mitigation at this location.

The Big Lake maintenance facility includes construction of an east tail track that will impact 0.13 acre of Wetland 19 just south of the existing tracks. The maintenance facility itself will not impact any wetlands.

**MPs 15.1 to 21.1**

Track improvements will impact wetlands 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, and 17. These wetlands have not been changed in size or character from those described in the DEIS. A summary of the wetlands is provided below for reference.

- Wetlands 10 and 11 are bisected by the existing rail corridor. These wetlands are dominated by reed canary grass. Wetland hydrology was not present at the time of the delineation; however, at the review in 2005, the hydrology was observed with some inundation.
- Wetlands 12 and 13 are located just south of wetlands 10 and 11. These wetlands are wide ditches that are dominated by reed canary grass and willows. The soils had hydric characteristics in the upper portion of the profile. Saturated soils were present with some inundation at the time of the 2005 review.
- Wetland 16 is located just south of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue Northwest in Fridley. The existing rail corridor bisects this wetland. The eastern portion of this wetland is on the Springbrook Nature Center property. Vegetation in the basin is varied, and includes cattails, sedges, reed canary grass, and willows. The soils were saturated near the surface. Strong hydric indicators were identified in the upper portion of the profiles evaluated. This wetland is identified as MnDNR 688P.
- Wetland 17 is located at the inlet to Locke Lake in Fridley (See Figure 4.2). The rail corridor crosses Rice Creek at this location. The wetland area is limited to a narrow fringe along the lake and the creek. Rice Creek and Locke Lake are MnDNR Protected Waters. The lake is identified as MnDNR 77P.

The potential track improvements from MP 15.1 to 21.1 will impact six wetlands for a total of 1.96 acres. Most of these wetlands are concentrated either north of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue (Wetlands 10 through 13) or south of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the vicinity of the Springbrook Nature Center (Wetland 16). Wetland 17 is at Rice Creek (MP 16.9), which is approximately 2 miles south of 85<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

**Table 4.5 — Wetland Impacts of Revised Preferred Alternative**

Wetland ID	Facility	Wetland Impact (Acres)
10 – 13	Third Main (south of TH 610)	0.86
16	Third Main (near Springbrook Nature Center)	1.03
17	Third Main (at Rice Creek)	0.07
19	Big Lake Maintenance Facility	0.13
<b>Total</b>		<b>2.09</b>

### ***Wetland Mitigation***

Federal and state regulations require that drain, fill, and certain types of excavation impacts to wetlands be avoided and minimized to the extent practical. Several mitigation techniques are commonly used to avoid or reduce wetland impacts associated with transportation projects. Examples include shifting the location of construction for track improvement, increasing side slopes to narrow the construction limits, minor shifts in the access road, shifting station locations, and bridging. The feasibility of avoiding area wetlands and minimization techniques is presented below. Mn/DOT will create wetland mitigation on-site to the extent possible. Any off-site mitigation will be taken from the Mn/DOT wetland bank.

### **Big Lake Maintenance Facility**

Wetland 19 will be impacted by construction of an east tail track. The railroad corridor is currently in place so realignment is not a practical avoidance measure. Furthermore, reducing the width of the construction limits by increasing the side slopes is not a feasible option to avoid wetlands in this location, given existing slopes and elevations.

### **MP 15.1 to 21.1**

Wetlands 10 through 13, 16, and 17 will be impacted by construction of the proposed third main. The railroad corridor is currently in place so realignment is not a practical avoidance measure. Reducing the width of the construction limits by increasing the side slopes will be evaluated to minimize wetland impacts adjacent to track improvements. Impacts to wetland 17 will be minimized by the construction of a new bridge along the east side of the tracks crossing between Rice Creek and the inlet to Locke Lake. This area of the wetland is narrow and has been previously disturbed.

### **Mitigation for Stormwater Impacts**

In addition to direct avoidance of wetland impacts, the proposed project will incorporate permanent stormwater management controls and Best Management Practice (BMP) measures to minimize water quality impacts. All station facilities will be designed so that surface runoff is treated through National Urban Runoff Program (NURP) ponds. BMPs such as silt fence and temporary sediment basins will be installed prior to site grading and will be maintained through the duration of the construction activities. To the extent feasible, graded areas will be seeded in a timely manner when construction is complete.

### **Wetland Replacement/Wetland Mitigation Plan**

Wetland impacts that cannot be avoided must be replaced at a minimum ratio, as specified in the state regulations (WCA). Provided that the wetland can be replaced in-kind (within the county, within the watershed, or replacing with the same wetland type), the replacement ratio is anticipated to be 2:1. The first 1:1 must be new wetland credit (restored or created wetland); the second half of the replacement can be public value credit (potentially stormwater ponds and upland buffers).

There is one location within the project corridor that has high potential for providing the wetland replacement requirements for the project. Land that is acquired for the Big Lake maintenance facility appears large enough and will be pursued as an option to provide on-site wetland mitigation adjacent to existing wetland 19 in conjunction with a proposed stormwater pond. If the site cannot accommodate the total amount of replacement required, Mn/DOT will pursue utilization of wetland bank credits for the remaining mitigation need. A final wetland mitigation plan will be in place prior to the issuance of a final environmental determination by FTA.

## 4.10 Floodplains

State and local governments regulate floodplain impacts in accordance with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regulations and mapping. FEMA regulations require that facilities constructed within the 100-year floodplain must have at least one foot of freeboard over the flood elevation and must not increase upstream flooding by more than one foot from existing conditions. Fill impacts to the 100-year floodplain must be replaced.

### *MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS*

Analysis of potential floodplain impacts was conducted in accordance with Executive Order 11988 and U.S. DOT Order 5650.2 regarding the protection of floodplains. National Flood Insurance Rate Maps were evaluated to determine the location of the 100-year floodplain. The documented floodplain areas are associated with rivers, ditches, or large wetlands. The existing rail corridor crosses many areas mapped as 100-year floodplains. The FEIS evaluated the two floodplain areas where actual construction activities were proposed.

The first floodplain area is located in Coon Rapids, just south of TH 610. The main channel is identified as a DNR protected watercourse (see Figure in Appendix A.2). Most of the 100-year floodplain located south of TH 610 is located to the east of the existing rail corridor. A large portion of this floodplain was excavated as part of the TH 610 construction. According to the COE, the 100-year flood elevation on the east side of the rail corridor is 872 feet. According to the Coon Rapids city engineer, the 100-year flood elevation on the ponds is 868 feet. The city has requested that the COE revise the 100-year flood elevation, but to date this has not been completed.

The second floodplain area in the corridor is in the city of Fridley, in the area associated with Rice Creek and Locke Lake (see Figure in Appendix A.2). The documented 100-year flood elevations are 825 feet on the downstream side (west) of the railroad bridge and 827 feet on the upstream side (east) of the railroad bridge.

The preferred alternative evaluated in the FEIS avoided both of these floodplain areas by not including a third main track from MPs 15.6 to 20.7 or a siding from MPs 18.8 to 20.7.

### *Revised Preferred Alternative*

The revised Big Lake station site, Big Lake maintenance facility site, and a third mainline track between MPs 15.1 and 21.1 were evaluated for floodplain impacts. Analysis of potential floodplain impacts was conducted in accordance with Executive Order 11988 and U.S. DOT Order 5650.2 regarding the protection of floodplains.

The Big Lake maintenance facility and associated track is not located within the 100-year floodplain, and therefore would not incur floodplain impacts. The two areas of 100-year floodplain that were evaluated in the FEIS were reevaluated under the revised preferred alternative. Each of these impact areas is described below.

### **Floodplain South of TH 610**

Similar to the DEIS and based on the current FEMA mapping, the track improvements south of TH 610 may impact up to 2,800 linear feet of floodplain adjacent to the tracks. For purposes of calculating floodplain impacts, a footprint of 75 feet east from the centerline of the west track and presence of the 100-year floodplain at the toe of the slope is assumed. In addition, the COE elevation of 872 feet is assumed. Based on these assumptions, the volume of floodplain fill would total 318 cubic yards. This represents a worst-case scenario. If the City's requested elevation of 868 feet is found to be accurate, the floodplain fill impact would be reduced to approximately 118 cubic yards.

### **Rice Creek/Locke Lake Floodplain**

The BNSF main line tracks currently bridge Rice Creek. The proposed design for the track improvements plans for a new bridge to be constructed, on the upstream side (east) of the existing bridges. Floodplain impacts would result from fill for the bridge abutments and pilings.

Bridge construction may also require the shifting of a regional/paved trail (Rice Creek West Regional Trail) that crosses under the current bridge. The trail may have to be realigned to the north, toward Rice Creek. Reconstruction of the trail may result in fill impacts within the 100-year floodplain.

The addition of track adjacent to Locke Lake may result in a small amount of floodplain fill. Preliminary review of aerial photos indicates that the floodplain is close to the existing tracks at one location, approximately 1,000 feet north of the Rice Creek Bridge.

The precise volume of floodplain fill requires detailed survey information and preliminary bridge design. Based on very preliminary estimates and an east side flood elevation of 825 feet, the estimated floodplain fill volume is 100 cubic yards.

### ***Mitigation Measures***

Bridge and culvert crossings will be designed to accommodate 100-year flood flows and to minimize backwater conditions. Rail profiles will be designed to minimize overtopping. Site specific flood impacts and mitigation will be prepared during final design, as required by local regulations. The volume of floodplain fill will be restored on-site, to the extent feasible.

## **4.11 Wild and Scenic Rivers and Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area/Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA)**

The FEIS identifies and evaluates the original preferred alternative's impacts to Wild and Scenic Rivers the Mississippi River Critical Area, and the MNRRA. The evaluation of impacts remains unchanged from the FEIS, with the exception of the proposed revised stormwater detention pond at the Anoka Station site. Specifically, the FEIS identified a stormwater pond for the Anoka Station that was partly located within the MnDNR scenic easement for the Rum River. As part of the FEIS process, Mn/DOT and the City of Anoka met with representatives from the MnDNR to discuss the pond design. The FEIS noted that Mn/DOT would continue to work with the MnDNR to design ponding that adheres to easement covenants and limits impacts to the viewshed of the Rum River.

As engineering analysis progressed on the Northstar Corridor, a revised ponding design has been proposed that reduces the encroachment of the scenic easement (see Figure 3.5). As noted above,

Mn/DOT will continue to work with the MnDNR on the final design of the pond to ensure it is designed to minimize impacts to the Rum River.

#### **4.12 Vegetation and Wildlife**

Section 4.3 of the FEIS (*page 44-11 through 4-16*) documented the affected environment, impacts and proposed mitigation measures for the full system (80.1 miles from downtown Minneapolis to Rice), and the MOS of the preferred alternative (40.1 miles from downtown Minneapolis to Big Lake).

Plant communities were identified and general cover types determined in the FEIS using a combination of aerial photographs and on-site field surveys that were conducted by the MnDNR. The proposed facilities associated with the commuter rail alternative were field surveyed. The FEIS includes a discussion of the general cover types found within the corridor. While the general description of the habitat types has not changed, reference to the types has been incorporated herein. The importance of the cover type relates directly to the variety, quality, and quantity of wildlife habitats within the study area. The cover types documented in the FEIS included:

- Farmlands
- Grassland habitat
- Prairie remnant habitat
- Wetland habitat
- Woodland habitat
- Rural residential
- Wildlife Management/Nature Center and Park Reserve Areas

The FEIS analysis indicated that a small amount of farmland, grassland, and woodland habitats in the study area would be impacted. Considering the entire study area, the amount of impact to each habitat type represents a small fraction of the total amount of that habitat type available.

The FEIS indicated that a good quality prairie remnant (3.6 acres), located just north of the TH 10 crossing north of Elk River, would be impacted by the proposed track improvements. The National Heritage Program (NHP) verified this remnant during the railroad right-of-way study in 1998 (DNR Biological Report No. 61, 1999). This remnant is within BNSF right-of-way.

The mitigation measures presented in Section 4.3.5 (*page 4-15*) of the FEIS remain unchanged for the revised preferred alternative. They are incorporated herein by reference to the EA.

Sections 4.8 and 4.9 will address potential farmland and wetland impacts and mitigation documented in the FEIS, compared to the impacts and proposed mitigation under the revised preferred alternative.

#### ***Change in Impact Summary***

The revised preferred alternative would not result in a change in the impacts and mitigation measures described and evaluated in the FEIS.

#### 4.13 Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species

##### *MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS*

For the FEIS, information on rare, threatened, and endangered species (RTE) was taken from data provided by the MnDNR Natural Heritage Program (NHP). Information on habitat type was taken from the *Minnesota's Endangered Flora and Fauna (Coffin and Pfannmuller, 1998)* as well as information provided by the NHP. The MnDNR did an extensive review of potential RTE species along the existing BNSF rail corridor in 1998.

The Mn/DOT wildlife biologist was also contacted to obtain information on federally listed RTE species.

The FEIS identified the following impacts associated with the MOS of the preferred alternative.

##### *Plant Species and Communities*

The recorded dry prairie (central) sand-gravel subtype and the lakebed are within the Springbrook Nature Center. Both zones are east of the existing tracks, within the interior of the park. No impacts are anticipated as a result of project construction.

##### *Wildlife Species*

The Blanding's turtle has been observed west of Elk River in the Orono Lake wetland complex, in Big Lake, at Coon Creek, and at Springbrook Nature Center. Of these observations, two are located in proximity to the potential track improvements (west of Elk River and Big Lake). While the potential track improvements are not expected to affect nesting habitat for the turtle, they may inhibit turtle movement.

##### *Updated Information*

As part of the EA analysis, the MnDNR was contacted to provide updated Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) data for the revised preferred alternative study area. Additionally, the Mn/DOT wildlife biologist was contacted to provide updated information on the federally listed RTE species. Copies of the correspondence are included in Appendix A.1.

##### *Revised Preferred Alternative*

One species was identified on the request for federally listed threatened and endangered species, the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). As stated in the Mn/DOT letter dated November 30, 2005, according to the information provided by the Natural Heritage Database (updated October 13, 2005) maintained by the MnDNR, there is a bald eagle nest on an island in the Mississippi River approximately 750 meters west of the existing rail line. There are no other known occurrences of federally-listed threatened and endangered species within the immediate project area. The eagle nest is 0.46 mile from the proposed construction area, and there is no direct line of sight to the existing railroad tracks. Due to the location and nature of the proposed project, Mn/DOT has concluded that the project will have no effect on federally-listed threatened and endangered species.

According to the MnDNR NHIS, there are 28 known occurrences of rare species or native plant communities within the one-mile radius of the area searched for the Northstar Corridor project (see Appendix A-1). Several of the records are for the same species (e.g. eight for Blanding's turtle). Based on the proposed revised preferred alternative, potential impacts would be limited to the Blanding's turtle.



The NHIS report indicates the wetland complexes within the corridor are known to support the Blanding's turtle, which are listed as threatened in Minnesota. This species of turtle lives primarily in shallow, calm, well-vegetated bodies of water adjacent or close to areas of sandy uplands. Females nest in the sandy upland areas and may travel up to one mile from their home wetland to find adequate nesting sites.

Adhering to erosion and sediment control measures during construction will minimize the risk of impacts to the Blanding's turtle habitat. A silt fence will be installed at the construction limits of the track improvements to keep turtles out of the construction zone. Access roads will be kept to the minimal width required to meet capacity and safety standards. Project area water bodies and wetlands will be protected from direct road and development runoff via stormwater treatment ponds and naturally vegetated buffers.

#### **4.14 Water Quality and Utilities**

##### ***MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS***

Existing utility and water quality conditions were evaluated based on site visits and review of existing topographic and utility maps. Water quality impacts generally originate from the following:

- Erosion of exposed soils during construction
- Reduced infiltration and increased runoff from the construction of new impervious surfaces
- Pollutants from automobiles that collect on impervious surfaces and are washed off by stormwater runoff
- Increased stormwater runoff that overburdens existing drainage systems, causing flooding
- Fill or construction in floodplains, which affects flood levels in streams and rivers

Sanitary sewer service is required for the layover facility and the vehicle maintenance facility. The purpose of the layover facility is to provide for light cleaning and inspection. The vehicle maintenance facility will be a full-time operation.

Water service is required at the layover facility, vehicle maintenance facility, and at each of the proposed stations. The water service requirements at the layover facility and the vehicle maintenance facility are the same as described above for sanitary service. The proposed stations will use water service for wash-down of the platforms.

The affected environment section of the FEIS includes a description of the existing conditions of each of the stations and maintenance/layover facilities proposed under the original preferred alternative. The existing condition information remains valid for the components of the revised preferred alternative, with the exception of the Big Lake station/maintenance facility because it was not included in the original preferred alternative (see next section).

##### ***Impacts and Updated Information under Revised Preferred Alternative***

Updated information pertaining to the system components of the revised preferred alternative are presented on the following page.

### *General Discussion*

Platform drainage has changed at each site. In the FEIS, there were catch basins proposed to be placed on the platform. Based on refinement of the station design, the platforms are proposed to be sloped to drain away from the tracks. Additionally, each site will have ballast drain pipes that will drain the water that collects between the platform and the tracks, as well as water that the platform will block from draining downstream.

Each site will require coordination with the BNSF railroad to relocate their utilities in the BNSF right-of-way.

### *Downtown Minneapolis*

No changes have been made from the FEIS.

### *Fridley*

In the FEIS, the location of the pond on the east side was on the far south; upon further evaluation, in order to drain the platform it is proposed to move that pond to the far east side of the parking area with another smaller pond located nearer to the handicap parking and tunnel. The storm system on the east side will be modified, but the outlets will remain the same. The storm system on the west side has not changed.

### *Coon Rapids*

The existing storm drainage system has no significant changes from the FEIS. The station would utilize as much of the existing system as possible with a new proposed system in the platform area.

Both Coon Rapids and Elk River have an electrical transmission line that runs through them. Both sites have been designed to accommodate the large poles associated with the transmission line.

### *Anoka*

A change to the design of the stormwater treatment pond has been proposed.

The FEIS contemplated a stormwater treatment pond to the west of the station, on the opposite side of Fourth Street. This site was close to the Rum River in an undeveloped publicly-owned parcel, and was partly within a Conservation Easement held by the MnDNR. The original design would have required construction of a new outlet to the Rum River, within either a pipe or an improved channel. The basin was designed to intercept and treat flows from an urban watershed along Grant Street as well as station flows.

The City of Anoka is proposing zoning changes to increase development densities in the project area. City staff requested that the capacity of the stormwater basin be increased to accommodate somewhat larger future flows from the Grant Street basin. As a result, there was a need to slightly increase the size of the basin. The new design of the basin accommodates this increase in a different footprint within the same undeveloped parcel as the original concept.

The new design of the stormwater basin provides for a reduction of environmental impacts compared to the original design, including:

- Reduced construction impact within the conservation easement. Although there is still some need to encroach within the conservation easement, the extent of impact is reduced from 32,794 square feet (0.75 ac.) to 5,286 square feet (0.12ac.).
- Reduced utility impacts — the original design required relocation of an existing 18” sanitary trunk sewer. The new design avoids impacts to the sewer.

- No new outlet required to the Rum River – the revised design utilizes the existing culvert to discharge to the river, eliminating the need to trench or cut a new channel through existing vegetation to the water's edge.
- Increased water quality treatment capacity as discussed above.

#### *Elk River*

Based on further review, no significant change will be required from the FEIS.

#### *Big Lake*

This is a new site with a new storm drainage plan and stormwater treatment pond to serve the station and the maintenance facility. An existing water main is available at CR 43 immediately adjacent to the site. There is an existing sanitary sewer main in CR 43 adjacent to the site; however, the city is also planning near-term construction of a new trunk sewer in CR 43 that will probably serve as the point of connection for the maintenance facility. The station does not require sanitary sewer service. Gas, telephone, and electric service are also available from CR 43.

The new site is located on an existing agricultural field (with a center pivot irrigation system), which has few utilities on it. There is one underground fiber-optic line that will need to be relocated during construction.

The original location of the Big Lake station was in the northwest quadrant of CR 43 and the BNSF railway tracks. The new location is in the southeast quadrant. The new location eliminates the need for the station track to have a grade crossing at CR 43 because trains will now stop short of the highway. New roadways will be constructed as part of the project to connect both the station and maintenance facility to CR 43.

A single stormwater conveyance and treatment system will serve both the Big Lake station site and the maintenance facility. Flows will be collected in an underground pipe system within the station, and then discharged into an open vegetated channel at the east side of the station. This channel will convey the flows approximately 2,000 feet easterly to the maintenance facility site. There, another underground system will carry the station flows as well as flows from the maintenance facility under the employee parking lot, discharging to a stormwater treatment basin at the east edge of the site. This basin will be designed to provide treatment capacity for the entire combined area of the station and maintenance sites. The treatment basin will outlet toward an existing wetland area to the east, which replicates the existing natural drainage pattern of the site area.

#### ***Mitigation Measures***

Water quality degradation from erosion, sedimentation, and the release of pollutants during construction is not expected to be significant and will be minimized through the use of BMPs. Construction BMPs will include the use of silt fence, barrier berms, plastic coverings for exposed ground, sediment traps, hay bales, temporary sediment detention basins, and rock construction entrances to clean debris off truck tires. In addition, construction activities will be coordinated to minimize the amount and length of time the soil is exposed. To ensure the effectiveness of BMPs, regular maintenance will be performed as appropriate. Appropriate construction BMPs for the proposed facilities will be determined based on final engineering plans and will comply with appropriate regulatory requirements. This will include compliance with various city stormwater management ordinances or policies.

The proposed station sites will create new impervious surface. The increase in impervious surface area will increase stormwater runoff rates and volume, and impact stormwater runoff quality. All project-required ponds have been designed according to the EPA's National Urban Runoff Program criteria and applicable watershed district guidelines.

Planned utility service disruptions will include an advance notice to affected property owners and the following mitigation measures:

- Formulate a detailed public utility relocation plan for all relocated utilities
- Avoid utility disruption by altering service
- Minimize extent of the utility disruptions
- Plan for utility service disruptions to occur, to the extent possible, during periods of no-usage or minimal usage
- Coordinate the relocation of private utilities to minimize impact to customers

#### **4.15 Hazardous Waste and Contaminated Material**

##### ***MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS***

The FEIS concluded that based on the findings of the preliminary site and field review, additional assessment was recommended at the following stations (MOS): Anoka, Coon Rapids-Foley, Fridley, Minneapolis Northeast, and Downtown Minneapolis. The work would include clarification of the locations of hazardous material releases with respect to the proposed project sites, and status of site cleanups for contaminated properties on or adjacent to the parcels to be acquired.

With regards to track improvements, it was concluded that since the proposed track improvements would require minimal excavation or earthwork, the potential for encountering hazardous materials would be low and hazardous materials are not expected to be significant. Capping or removing of contaminated material would occur if such materials are encountered. The FEIS indicated that with regards to railroad operation, the commuter rail project could result in a slight increase in the potential for hazardous material spills along the right-of-way because of the increase in rail traffic compared to existing conditions. In the event of a hazardous materials spill from a commuter rail train, BNSF environmental response procedures will be followed to minimize adverse impacts. BNSF also has programs in place that address proper containment and management of fuels, lubricants, and other potentially hazardous substances handled during rail operations, including train storage and maintenance.

Prior to the construction of corridor improvements, BNSF will develop and implement a construction contingency plan that addresses hazardous substance identification, notification, management, and disposal — in the unlikely event that hazardous substances are encountered during construction and operation.

##### ***Revised Preferred Alternative Updated Information***

Based on the preliminary impact assessment and mitigation measures defined in the Northstar Corridor FEIS, Phase I Environmental Site Assessments (ESA) were completed at the Fridley and Anoka station sites. A summary of the findings from the referenced ESAs is presented in the following paragraphs as updated information to the FEIS.

### *Fridley Station*

A Phase I ESA was completed for this site in July 2005 (Braun Intertec, July 2005). The site is currently grassy and undeveloped. The Phase I ESA found that the west site area was a former rail yard. Air photos from the 1930s and 1940s indicate a number of spur tracks in the area, but no buildings. The east site area has not been developed. The Phase I ESA included information from a 1999 report conducted for the City of Fridley HRA. The 1999 report described the results of the test pits and soil sampling completed on the property. The test pits identified an area of buried demolition debris containing brick, concrete, glass, steel, wood, plastic, shingles, and metal containers. Soil analytical testing indicated low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), diesel range organics (DRO), and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). The proposed station area is listed as a MnPCA Voluntary Investigation and Cleanup (VIC) site.

Based on the findings of the Phase I and a site visit conducted on August 11, 2005, mitigation at the site should include:

- Conduct extensive file review for the subject property
- Complete a Phase II/Drilling Investigation at the west site area prior to acquisition. Along with sampling for VOCs, PAHs, and DRO which have already been identified at the site; samples should also be analyzed for metals and asbestos.
- Develop a response action plan (RAP), and obtain approval from the VIC program for the RAP.
- Obtain liability assurances as applicable from the MnPCA VIC program to protect the new owner and subsequent owners from liability for the site's existing contaminants.

### *Anoka Station*

A Phase I ESA was completed on the site in July 2005 (Braun Intertec, July 2005). The site is currently primarily open space with a gravel and bare earth surface. There are gravel and crushed bituminous piles, demolition debris piles, a large pad mounted transformer on skids, and a four-stall garage on the site. The Phase I ESA found that the site was occupied by several fuel storage businesses in the 1950s through the 1970s. More recently, the site was used as a storage yard by the local municipal electrical utility. A number of petroleum release sites surround the property. Three of the petroleum release sites directly adjoin the property.

As the Anoka station parking facility will be developed by the City of Anoka, they will be the lead agency responsible for the required remedial actions at the parking structure site. For the Northstar Commuter Rail project, investigations will be completed to check for potential groundwater contamination in the proposed pond area. If contamination is found, a clean up plan will be developed and the required MnPCA approvals will be obtained.

Phase I ESAs have not been completed for the Downtown Minneapolis, Coon Rapids-Riverdale, Elk River, and the proposed revised Big Lake station and maintenance facility sites. A summary of recommendations for those sites is presented herein as updated information to the FEIS.

### *Downtown Minneapolis Station*

The Northstar FEIS recommended the preparation of a Phase I ESA at the Downtown Minneapolis station site. A Phase I ESA will be completed at the proposed station site prior to project letting. If the Phase I ESA indicates that known or potential contaminated properties exist on or adjacent to the station site, a Phase II/Drilling Investigation will be completed to check for possible soil and groundwater contamination. Additionally, if contamination is found, a clean-up plan will be prepared, required MnPCA approvals applied for, and special provisions included in the contract for properly handling any contaminated materials encountered during construction.

### *Coon Rapids – Riverdale Station*

The Coon Rapids Riverdale station is currently a bituminous park-and-ride lot. No contaminated materials were encountered when the site was developed as a park-and-ride facility (2002). Previously conducted geotechnical investigations (drilling) will be reviewed to confirm appropriate soil conditions (e.g. no contamination) in the area of the footings for the pedestrian crossing.

### *Elk River Station*

The site is primarily developed as an existing park-and-ride facility. During the development of the park-and-ride lot, no contaminated materials were encountered. Based on field review and work completed during the EIS, it is unlikely that this site has contaminated soil or groundwater based on its past and current use. No additional work is required on this site.

### *Big Lake Station and Vehicle Maintenance Facility*

Based on past and current land use, this site does not appear to have contaminated soil or groundwater. No further work on this site is recommended.

### ***Change of Impact Summary***

This section includes updated information along with an assessment of potential impacts associated with the proposed revisions to the preferred alternative (limited to Big Lake station area that was not included in the preferred alternative). Based on the findings presented above, the revised preferred alternative would not result in impacts significantly different than those documented in the FEIS. Removal of the Northeast Minneapolis and Coon Rapids-Foley stations from the preferred alternative MOS eliminates the impacts and potential clean up required at both of those proposed station locations.

## **4.16 Air Quality**

### ***MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS***

The Twin Cities metropolitan area of Minnesota is in current compliance with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for transportation-related pollutants, including ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and nitrogen oxides.

*Section 4.7* of the FEIS documents the potential air quality impacts associated with the defined no-build and commuter rail alternatives with regard to national and state ambient air quality standards.

Three intersection locations were selected for air quality analysis, as they represent worse case locations within the corridor in terms of traffic volume and vehicular delay. The three locations include:

- TH 65/Broadway Avenue
- TH 47/61<sup>st</sup> Avenue
- Coon Rapids Boulevard/Foley Boulevard

For each location, the highest predicted one-hour and eight-hour CO concentrations were calculated. No air quality violations were encountered under the preferred alternative evaluated in the FEIS.

***Revised Preferred Alternative***

As the proposed changes to the preferred alternative would not significantly increase the number of park-and-ride lot spaces proposed at each of the stations, the findings from the FEIS are considered valid for the revised preferred alternative and incorporated by reference in the EA.

**4.17 Noise and Vibration**

***MOS of Preferred Alternative Evaluated in FEIS***

The noise and vibration assessment conducted as part of the Northstar Corridor FEIS included a screening for sensitive noise and vibration sites, an investigation of the ambient noise conditions, the identification of potential noise and vibration impacts, and an overview of possible mitigation measures for adversely impacted locations (*See Section 4.8 of the FEIS*). The FTA’s *Transit Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment*, April 1995, guidelines were followed to conduct the noise and vibration screening and general assessments.

The general noise assessment included noise from all possible sources, including: commuter rail, freight service, bus service at transit stations, and automobile activity associated with park-and-ride facilities. The assessment included comparing the project related noise levels to the existing noise levels in order to determine human reaction to the amount of change. Consistent with the FTA guidance, there are three possible outcomes to the general noise assessment: no impact, impact, and severe impact.

The MOS of the preferred alternative evaluated in the FEIS indicated that up to 14 sensitive receiver locations could experience a noise impact (See Figures in Appendix A.2). The areas are summarized in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4 — Noise and Vibration Impact**

Area #	Noise Sensitive Area	Land Use Category	Measurement Location	Measured Ambient Noise (dBA)	Metric	Estimated Project Noise (dBA)	Range of Impact (dBA)	Potential Noise Impact	Distance to Centerline
R19	Oak Terrace Estates	2	Monitor 3	60	Ldn	58	58-63	Impact	100
R32	Main Street Northwest Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	58	57-62	Impact	100
R33	119 <sup>th</sup> Avenue NW Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	56	56-62	Impact	135
R40	Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	56	56-62	Impact	135
R41	CR 18 Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	58	56-62	Impact	100
R42	South Heights Drive Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	56	56-62	Impact	135
R43	CR 18 Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	56	56-62	Impact	135

*Continued*

Area #	Noise Sensitive Area	Land Use Category	Measurement Location	Measured Ambient Noise (dBA)	Metric	Estimated Project Noise (dBA)	Range of Impact (dBA)	Potential Noise Impact	Distance to Centerline
R44	Jay Street NW Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	58	56-62	Impact	100
R45	Egret Blvd. Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	56	56-62	Impact	135
R46	Residential cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	56	56-62	Impact	135
R47	Egret Blvd. Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	58	56-62	Impact	100
R52	East River Road Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	57	56-62	Impact	100
R54	East River Road Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	57	56-62	Impact	100
R55	79 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Residential Cluster	2	Monitor 2	56	Ldn	57	56-62	Impact	100

The FEIS identified two potential vibration sensitive areas within the potential impact assessment distance. One of the sites was located outside the MOS limits, and the other site (Area R6, Broadway Avenue South Residential cluster) would remain a potential impact area.

### *Revised Preferred Alternative Noise and Vibration Impacts*

The following change in noise impact would be experienced under the revised preferred alternative.

#### *Northeast Minneapolis Station*

Noise levels associated with idling trains and whistle blowing when entering and exiting the Northeast Minneapolis station was of particular concern to residents in proximity to the proposed station. The concerns expressed by the surrounding residents would be avoided as this station is not included in the revised preferred alternative.

#### *Big Lake Station and Vehicle Maintenance Facility*

The DEIS evaluated a maintenance facility on the south side of the BNSF and to the east of CR 43. Because there are no sensitive receivers in proximity to the proposed facilities, no noise impacts would occur.

#### *Third Mainline from MP 15.1 to 21.1*

The inclusion of a third mainline on the west side (railroad south) of the existing mainline from MP 15.1 to 16.6 and on the east side (railroad north) from MP 16.6 to 21.1 would improve potential noise impacts for the following areas previously identified as reaching the “impact” level of noise: from MP 15.1 to 21.1: #R52, #R54 and #R55. This reduction in noise impacts would be attributable to the fact that the third mainline is proposed on the east side (railroad north side) of the existing mainline. The analysis conducted during the EIS, reflected a third mainline on the west side (railroad south) of the existing mainlines. The three areas presented previously



are residential clusters (R52, R54, and R55) located on the west side (railroad south) of the mainline. By aligning the third mainline to the east side (railroad north), the distance from the centerline of the third mainline would increase by approximately 30 feet. Although not previously identified as experiencing an “impact” level of noise, residential clusters R59, R58, R57, R56, R55, R53, R52, R51, and R50 would experience a potential decrease in noise associated with the commuter rail train as the distance from the centerline of the third mainline would increase by approximately 30 feet from that originally evaluated in the EIS (noise analysis reflected a third mainline on the southwest side of the mainline). In contrast, Area 27 (City of Fridley Community Park) and Area 31 (Springbrook Nature Center) would experience noise levels associated with a 30-foot decrease in the distance from the centerline of the proposed third main. Both of these areas were identified in the no impact category in the EIS.

#### *LRT Alignment on South Side of 5<sup>th</sup> Street North*

Although the FEIS indicated that an LRT alignment on the north side of 5<sup>th</sup> Street North would not result in noise and vibration impacts to surrounding buildings (of particular concern was the historic Ford Centre building); the shifting of the LRT alignment to the south of 5<sup>th</sup> Street North would minimize potential noise and vibration impacts even further.

#### ***Change in Noise and Vibration Impact Summary***

The proposed revised preferred alternative would not significantly change the impacts and/or mitigation presented in the FEIS/ROD. The proposed revisions would reduce the potential noise and vibration impacts previously documented in the FEIS for the MOS of the preferred alternative.

Mitigation measures for the proposed changes to the preferred alternative are the same as in the FEIS.

## **4.18 Transportation**

### ***FEIS Evaluation***

#### **Transportation Impacts/Mitigation Evaluated for the MOS of the Preferred Alternative in the FEIS**

The transportation evaluation included in the FEIS (*Section 5.0*) focused on the operation of individual intersections near the proposed station location areas. *Table 5.1-4 of the FEIS presents the Level of Service (LOS) analysis for existing conditions, year 2020 No-Build and the preferred alternative (See Appendix A-1).* Under the MOS of the preferred alternative, the following locations were identified as having potential traffic impacts:

#### *Minneapolis Downtown Station and LRT Connection*

- The 5<sup>th</sup> Street North/6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North intersection is expected to operate at a LOS C and LOS B in the AM and PM hours, respectively. Although, the intersection LOS is not expected to be an issue during the PM peak hour, the north approach (southbound) queue length is expected to extend beyond the adjacent 5th Street access along 6th Avenue North. The west approach (eastbound left-turn movement) is expected to operate at LOS F during the AM peak hour.
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Street North/2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North intersection is expected to operate at LOS F during the AM and PM peak hours. During both time periods, the eastbound and westbound movements are expected to operate at LOS F, with substantial delays and queue lengths. The proximity of

the Third Avenue Distributor (TAD) Garage access contributes to congestion and to the existing poor operation of this intersection and 5th Street North.

*Minneapolis Northeast Station (7th Street NE)*

- Central Avenue/7th Street NE is forecast to operate at LOS F and LOS E during the AM and PM peak hours, respectively. The eastbound left-turn movement is forecast to operate at LOS F in both the AM and PM peak hours.
- Central Avenue/SE 8th Street would operate at LOS F in the AM peak hour and LOS F in the PM peak hour. The westbound left-turn movement is forecast to operate at LOS F in the AM peak hour. Left-turn movements from SE 8th Street/the proposed station driveway is forecast to operate at LOS F in the PM peak hour, with substantial delays.

*Fridley Station*

- East River Road/61st Avenue would operate at LOS D during the PM peak hour (*note*: the intersection would operate at LOS F during the AM peak hour under the no-build and commuter rail alternatives).

*Coon Rapids — Foley*

- East River Road/Foley Boulevard would operate at LOS B during the AM peak hour and LOS C during the PM peak hour.
- Although the north parking access from Foley Boulevard would operate at LOS B during the PM peak hour, the outbound left turn would operate at LOS E.

*Coon Rapids — Riverdale*

- Northdale Boulevard/Crooked Lake Boulevard would operate at LOS D during the AM peak hour (*note*: the intersection would operate at LOS F during the PM peak hour under the no-build alternative).

*Anoka Station*

- Fourth Avenue/Pleasant Street would operate at LOS F during the AM peak hours (*note*: the intersection would operate at LOS F in the PM peak hour under the no-build alternative).
- Seventh Avenue/Johnson Street would operate at LOS F during the AM and PM peak hours. For the AM peak hour, all left-turn movements would operate at LOS F, while during the PM peak hour, the left turn onto 7th Avenue would operate at LOS F.

The following mitigation measures for the MOS of the preferred alternative were presented in the FEIS:

*Downtown Minneapolis Station and LRT Connection  
(See Figure in Appendix A-2 of EA)*

- The 5<sup>th</sup> Street North/2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue North intersection – During final design, the signal phasing, and timing will be reviewed with the City of Minneapolis. Providing an actuated phase for the proposed exclusive LRT phase would help improve the operation. However, the intersection is expected to still operate below LOS D during both the AM and PM peak hours.
- The vehicle circulation east of 2nd Avenue North along 5th Street will be reviewed during final design. Changes to the downtown transportation system, including either lane geometry, directional flow on 5th Street, vehicle circulation throughout the nearby region of downtown, or a combination thereof will be evaluated during final design. The best of these mitigation measures will be implemented.

- The possibility of locating the LRT tracks on the south side of 5th Street North after 3rd Avenue will also be studied. This may improve mobility at the 5th Avenue North/5th Street North intersection.

#### *Minneapolis Northeast Station*

- Left-turn conditions are not expected to improve with implementation of a preferred alternative. Mn/DOT will continue to work with the City of Minneapolis regarding potential traffic control measures on Central Avenue NE to facilitate safe pedestrian access, vehicle safety, and appropriate LOS on surrounding roadways.

#### *Anoka Station*

- As a part of future planned TOD surrounding the Anoka station, the Mn/DOT will partner with the City of Anoka to improve traffic conditions at intersections surrounding the station area, with focus on the intersections at 4th Avenue/Pleasant Street and 7th Avenue/Johnson Street.

#### *Big Lake Station*

- To accommodate additional passengers driving to the Big Lake station with it becoming the northwest terminus of the Northstar commuter rail line, 400 parking spaces will be provided at the station. This is 76 more than would be built if the MOS were not adopted. A traffic signal is proposed as mitigation for the intersection of TH 10 and CR 43.

#### *Revised Preferred Alternative*

Under the revised preferred alternative, the potential traffic impacts identified at the Northeast Minneapolis and Coon Rapids-Foley stations would be avoided. The following section provides both updated and new impact/mitigation information pertaining to the Downtown Minneapolis station/LRT connection, the Anoka station, and the new Big Lake station location.

#### *Downtown Minneapolis Station/LRT Connection*

The FEIS identified the 5th Street LRT extension running along the northern half of 5th Street from 1st Avenue North westerly past 5th Avenue North and then traversing to the southerly side between 5th Avenue North and 6th Avenue North.

As the FEIS documented, the City of Minneapolis requested further review of the merits of the LRT along the southerly half of 5th Street, during the next level of design, to minimize impacts to the traffic operations causing the closure of 5th Avenue North at 5th Street.

The design team reviewed the traffic operations of the 5th Street North/ 2nd Avenue North/5th Street Garage, 5th Street North at 3rd Avenue North, and vertical clearance limitations over I-394 and the 5th Street roadway, west of the LRT Station. Meetings were held with the City of Minneapolis Department of Public Works, the Historic Preservation Commission, and the City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development staff.

Based on the design review, modeling the traffic/LRT operations, and meetings with Minneapolis staff, the LRT alignment has been shifted to a southerly alignment from 2nd Avenue North to the west.

This modification to the south side allows for the existing operation of the 5th Street Garage entry/exit rather than a costly reconstruction of the internal operation. The move also eliminated the need for vehicular traffic on 5th Street North from crossing the LRT at both 6th Avenue North

and 2nd Avenue North, as indicated in the FEIS. The need to close 5th Avenue North and the creation of a dead-end street/high retaining wall in front of the Ford Centre was also eliminated with the change to the southerly side.

#### *Anoka Station*

The City of Anoka is taking the lead in the development of the proposed parking facility near the proposed station. Their current conceptual plans call for up to 450 parking spaces. The City's overall Commuter Rail Transit Village (CRTV) plan includes reconfiguration of surrounding roads to provide improved safety and traffic flow conditions in the area. Mn/DOT and its partnering agencies will continue to work with the City to identify and implement appropriate mitigation measures to accommodate future traffic conditions at the proposed station.

#### *Big Lake Station*

The travel demand model used in the FEIS forecast 502 trips per day starting from the Big Lake station in year 2020, of which 380 arrived by car. (There was no differentiation between those who would drive alone or drive with others to the station nor between those who would park at the station or be dropped off.) There were 324 parking spaces in the Big Lake station plans at that time. Those figures were for a commuter rail line running through Big Lake to Rice. As noted above, under the MOS, it was expected that more people would use the Big Lake station when it became the northwest terminus and additional parking spaces would be necessary. A ridership forecast for the MOS was never run under that version of the travel demand model.

That travel demand model was later adjusted and FTA approved the use of the new version in 2003. The new version has been used to forecast ridership on the revised preferred alternative. In 2025, 620 trips per day are forecast to start from the Big Lake station. Of these, 490 are expected to arrive by car. Again, this figure includes people being dropped off or carpooling and parking at the Big Lake station. This is consistent with the approximate number expected under the MOS of the preferred alternative in the FEIS. Therefore, the mitigation measures specified in the FEIS for the MOS of building 400 parking spaces and providing a traffic signal at the intersection of TH 10 and CR 43 will be adequate. The traffic signal is currently in place and operating.

As noted in Figure 3.7, the proposed station site plan includes an access road which would be approximately 1, 200 feet long. The Northstar Corridor Rail project would construct this road as a new public street, connecting to an existing intersection at CR 43. An additional 2, 400 feet of paved road is being constructed by the project from the station to the maintenance facility site. To accommodate the flow of traffic into the Big Lake station, the addition of a striped turn lane from CR 43 into the Big Lake station is proposed.

#### ***Summary of Impact Changes***

The revised preferred alternative would result in fewer traffic impacts than those documented in the DEIS/FEIS for the Northstar Corridor.