



Minnesota Department of Transportation

District 1
1123 Mesaba Avenue
Duluth, MN 55811

October 10, 2024

Cindy Voigt, City Engineer
City Hall, Room 211
City of Duluth
411 West First Street
Duluth, MN 55802

RE: Request for City Approval (Municipal Consent) of the Final Layout for SP 6981-26

Dear Ms. Voigt:

MnDOT is proceeding with plans to complete State Project 6981-26, Blatnik Bridge Replacement. In accordance with Minnesota Statute 161.164, I am submitting for City approval the project's Final Layout, identified as Layout No. 1B, S.P. 6981-26.

The City's approval (municipal consent) is required for this project because it requires acquisition of permanent rights of way. The permanent right of way to be acquired includes:

- Seaway Port Authority (Permanent Easement for embankment)
- Allete (Fee Acquisition)
- Union Pacific Railroad (Fee Acquisition)
- Seaway Port Authority (Fee Acquisition and Relocation)
- Twin Ports Horse Market (Fee Acquisition)
- Western Land Association (Fee Acquisition)
- 1100 Garfield, LLC (Fee Acquisition and Relocation)
- Coon's Aggregate Supply (Fee Acquisition and Relocation)
- City of Duluth (NRW in road)

A map of these parcels is attached.

Municipal consent of MnDOT projects is described in Minnesota Statutes 161.162 through 161.167 (attached).

Approval or disapproval of the final layout is by resolution of the City Council. (A sample resolution is attached). However, if the city neither approves nor disapproves the final layout within 90 days of the public hearing, the layout is deemed approved (per MN Statute 161.164).

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The deadlines (per MN Statute 161.164) for the City's responsibilities regarding municipal consent of the attached layout are as follows, based on a submittal date of the final layout to the City of October 10, 2024:

- Within 15 days of receiving the final layout, schedule a public hearing (by October 25, 2024).
- Within 60 days of receiving the final layout, conduct the public hearing (by December 9, 2024).
- Provide at least 30-days' notice of the public hearing.
- Within 90 days of the public hearing, approve or disapprove the layout by resolution (by March 9, 2025).

MnDOT will attend the public hearing to present the final layout and answer questions, as required by statute.

Project Purpose

Provide an Interstate highway connection across the St. Louis Bay that does not restrict the movements for freight and provides local, regional, and international movement in a reliable and efficient manner.

Needs include:

- Poor condition of the bridge
- Bridge conditions hinder vehicle and freight mobility
- Design deficiencies impair traffic operations
- High crash rates on the bridge, approaches, and access interchanges
- No bicycle or pedestrian facilities on the existing bridge

Project Description

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), is proposing to replace the John A. Blatnik Bridge (Minnesota Bridge 9030, Wisconsin Bridge B-16-5, hereafter called the Blatnik Bridge). The Blatnik Bridge on Interstate 535 (I-535) connects the two communities of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin over the St. Louis Bay. The current Blatnik Bridge is 7,975 feet long (about 1.5 miles) and consists of a main truss unit (three span continuous truss) flanked by steel beam approach span units (referred to as the Minnesota and Wisconsin approach spans), with a total of 52 spans.

The Blatnik Bridge serves as a local, regional, and international connection for vehicle and freight traffic on I-535 / U.S. Highway 53 (US 53) between Minnesota and Wisconsin. The Blatnik Bridge sits at the epicenter of the Port of Duluth-Superior, which accommodates the maritime transportation needs of a wide range of industries including agriculture, forestry, mining and manufacturing, construction, power generation, and passenger cruising. It is also crucial to maintaining local mobility. Geometric deficiencies in the bridge design and access interchanges along with adverse weather conditions influence poor traffic operations during peak periods and

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contribute to a high critical crash history. The unique setting of I-535 terminating in a neighborhood in Wisconsin complicates the traffic operations in the nearby local road network.

This project is proposing the replacement of the Blatnik Bridge and reconstruction of an interchange in Superior that routes I-535 directly to US 53 with local connections to Hammond Avenue and WIS 35. Major components of bridge construction include demolition of the existing bridge and construction of the Minnesota approach, Wisconsin approach, and main navigation span. The new bridge would follow the same general alignment as the existing bridge between the Garfield Avenue/I-535 Interchange in Duluth and 1st Street in Superior. A shared use path (SUP) would be included on the new bridge, which would connect the existing sidewalk and bicycle lanes at the intersection of Garfield Avenue and Nelson Street in Duluth with the existing sidewalk and planned bicycle route on Grand Avenue in Superior.

Planned Project Schedule



City’s Estimated Project Costs

It is anticipated that there will be no cost to the City for this project unless the City chooses to provide any upgrades to local streets or add amenities.

The Department of Transportation current Total Project Cost Estimate for the project is \$1.8 billion.

City’s Maintenance Responsibilities

MnDOT will be responsible for the complete maintenance of I-535 including the ramps and bridges. The City of Duluth will be responsible for the complete maintenance on Port Terminal Drive.

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The City of Duluth, the City of Superior, and MnDOT will work out a partnership for the routine maintenance of the SUP on MnDOT and City of Duluth right-of way (snow plowing, snow blowing, snow hauling and sweeping). The City of Duluth will be responsible for non-routine maintenance (re-paving and/or re-grading) of the SUP (colored cyan on the attached layout) on City of Duluth right-of-way. Those details will be developed and included in a future Maintenance Agreement for the project.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this submittal.

Sincerely,

John Krysiak, PE
Project Manager
1123 Mesaba Ave
Duluth, MN 55811
Phone: 218-341-7595
Email: John.Krysiak@state.mn.us

Attachments:

Final Signed Layout for SP 6981-26, dated 05/13/2024
MN Statutes 161.162 – 161.167
Sample City Resolution

cc: Duane Hill, District Engineer
Pat Huston, Assistant District Engineer – Major Projects
Derek Frederickson, State Aid Engineer

