Project Readiness

St. Louis County began the CSAH 100 Corridor Study in March 2024, evaluating multimodal needs, traffic safety and operations, drainage, intersection geometry and control, and the at-grade railroad crossing. As part of this work, the County completed a detailed Feasibility Study confirming the constructability and cost feasibility of a grade-separated bridge at the CSAH 100 crossing. The study examined railroad clearance requirements, bridge approach geometry, bridge deck space accommodation for pedestrians/bicyclists and ATVs/snowmobiles, adjacent property impacts, drainage needs, utility conflicts, and construction staging feasibility.

Planning and Constructability

STIP / TIP / TTIP / TAM Plan

The Project is not yet programmed in the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP), however upon project award, the project will be placed in the 2027–2030 STIP.

The Project is included in the St. Louis County's 2026-2030 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The CIP is a five-year plan that identifies major capital needs. The County updates this plan each year as part of the annual budget process. The CIP identifies projects that have been designed to support existing or projected needs in the following areas: transportation infrastructure (road and bridges), facilities, land improvement/development/acquisition, equipment purchases and technology.

Consistency with Other Plan

The County completed a Railroad Crossing Safety Plan in 2024, in partnership with the MnDOT Rail Safety Office. The plan prioritized safety improvements across 122 at-grade crossings on the county road system. The CSAH 100 crossing was ranked #1 among 12 recommended grade separations, underscoring its critical importance for public safety, mobility, transportation resiliency and economic connectivity.

Property Acquisition / Right-of-Way (ROW)

The City/County owns the right-of-way north of the railroad tracks that will support construction. In preparation of this project, St. Louis County purchased a parcel on the north side of the railroad tracks in 2025 from the Wisconsin Central Railroad, Ltd. There is one private parcel on the south side of the railroad tracks that will require an easement or purchase to construct this project. The County has already initiated discussions with the affected landowner. ROW acquisition will proceed immediately upon approval of the NEPA document.

Construction Techniques and Phasing

No unique construction techniques are anticipated. Standard bridge construction, roadway reconstruction, and rail coordination procedures will be used. St. Louis County will utilize the design-bid-build project delivery process. To construct the Project, the County plans to utilize a temporary rail-grade crossing located approximately 400 ft west of the primary rail crossing that will be eliminated. The County utilized this temporary rail-grade crossing in 2018 in coordination with the CN Railroad to replace culverts at the primary rail crossing. The County purchased property on the north side of the railroad tracks in 2018 to secure future use of this temporary rail-grade crossing. The south side of the railroad tracks connects directly to City owned street right-of-way. The County will coordinate with the CN Railroad and MnDOT Rail Office on the appropriate control for this temporary rail-grade crossing.

Proposed Schedule

Milestone	Anticipated Completion
Notification of Award	June 2026
Procure Engineering Consultant for Design	July 2026 – December 2026
Project Added to STIP	October 2026
Complete NEPA & Environmental Permitting	January 2027 – March 2028
Preliminary and Final Design	January 2027 – October 2028
ROW Acquisition	March 2028 – October 2028
Grant Obligation and Authorization	August 2028 – January 2029
Construction Contract Letting	February 2029
Construction Start	May 2029
Construction Completion and Closeout*	December 2030

*Assume two construction seasons to account for potential geotechnical stabilization process for the approach embankments leading to the bridge and completing the surface finishes for the bridge and retaining wall.

The schedule accounts for all project tasks required for successful completion of the construction project. That includes NEPA, environmental permitting, final design/engineering, right-of-way acquisition, bidding, and construction. The Project has currently completed its feasibility analysis, including preliminary engineering and is ready to begin design. A Categorical Exclusion is expected for the project, and the County is committed to completing final design and NEPA prior to grant obligation and authorization. St. Louis County proposes that the project will begin construction in 2029 and be completed in 2030. Traffic is anticipated to be placed on the new bridge in fall of 2029. The requested BUILD funding will support eligible construction costs only. The County will be responsible for right-of-way acquisition, design and construction engineering.

NEPA and Permitting

NEPA Status and Class of Action

The Project has already begun exploration into the environmental permitting and NEPA actions required to perform construction activities. The County has determined the likely appropriate environmental process, utilizing the MnDOT Environmental Document Decision Tree to postulate the likely outcome of NEPA actions. Based on the surrounding environmental and land usage, including the lack of wetlands and protected areas, a Categorical Exclusion is the expected outcome which would utilize a Project Memorandum. The County is committed to a 15-month timeline for completing NEPA actions and environmental permitting, which will be concluded prior to grant funding obligation and authorization. No substantial environmental risks are anticipated. The County has incorporated NEPA activities into the Project schedule and does not foresee challenges in securing a CE.

Anticipated Permits and Project Approvals:

- NEPA document approval (assumed to be approved by the MnDOT State Aid Division under the programmatic agreement with FHWA)
- BUILD grant agreement between FHWA, MnDOT State Aid Division and St. Louis County (the County will act as a subrecipient in the grant agreement)
- Project agreement between the CN Railroad and St. Louis County
- Railroad crossing closure agreement between the MnDOT Rail Office and St. Louis County
- City of Aurora Municipal Consent
- MnDOT State Aid Division construction plan approval
- MPCA construction stormwater permit

Coordination with CN Railroad has been ongoing since project initiation. The CN Railroad has committed to entering into a project agreement to satisfy 49 U.S.C. 22905(C)(1), which will be signed and executed prior to the grant obligation and authorization. The commitment to that agreement can be found in the letter of support from CN Railroad.

Coordination with DOT: The County has coordinated with and secured support from the MnDOT Rail Office for this Project. MnDOT is the statutory authority for all public rail-grade crossings in Minnesota. As part of the project development process, the County will enter into a railroad crossing closure agreement with the MnDOT Rail Office. This agreement will ensure all applicable FRA requirements are satisfied for the grade separation.

Project Support

Public and Agency Involvement

In 2024, St. Louis County conducted a corridor study on CSAH 100 through Aurora to evaluate traffic safety and operations, pedestrian/bike facilities, intersection improvements, enhance downtown streetscape, and address the at-grade railroad crossing. As part of the study, a robust public engagement strategy was utilized to gain input on all phases of the project. Input from partnering agencies, local businesses/organizations, and residents and corridor users were utilized to develop preliminary corridor concepts and identify priority areas. A Public Engagement Summary has been developed, detailing all components of the project's public outreach and engagement efforts. Engagement spanned three phases and included:

- Multiple public open houses and listening sessions
- Focus groups with agencies, businesses, and community organizations
- Three public meetings
- A virtual interactive map and online survey (336 responses)
- Social media, digital outreach, and printed postcards
- Project website
- ADA-accessible virtual and in-person participation options

Stakeholder feedback consistently emphasized safety, freight access, school access, pedestrian mobility, drainage, and community connectivity. These priorities were incorporated into concept refinement and the City Council-approved layout.

As part of the St. Louis County Railroad Crossing Safety Plan development, the County held a meeting with township officials representing communities containing recommended closures or grade separations. This meeting provided education on rail crossing safety and established a shared vision for addressing safety and accessibility concerns.

The Project has strong regional support, evidenced by:

- 6 resolutions of support from cities, townships, and ARDC
- 20 letters of support from businesses, elected officials, and key community stakeholders
- Coordination and support from CN Railroad, Mesabi East School District, East Range Police Department, St. Louis County Sheriff and emergency medical services

Risks and Mitigation

Environmental Compliance (LOW): The County has gone through the process of preliminarily identifying the anticipated NEPA activities as well as required environmental permitting. The County has utilized resources developed by MnDOT to help determine the likely environmental impact, utilizing their project development decision-tree to postulate the likely outcome of NEPA actions. No substantial environmental risks are anticipated. The County has incorporated NEPA activities into the Project schedule and does not foresee challenges in securing a CE.

Cost Increase (LOW): The County has accounted for the potential of cost increases due to the length of project schedule and conclusion date in 2030. The Project cost is based on 2025 material costs and includes a 20% contingency to account for inflation and other potential construction cost increases. The County maintains adequate reserves to cover additional overruns, ensuring the project will be fully delivered even if unforeseen construction changes arise. To demonstrate this, the County's CIP includes an additional $1 million in the project budget for unanticipated project overruns.

Schedule (LOW-MEDIUM): The County developed the project timeline to account for the typical northern Minnesota climate. Any considerable outdoor activities, including construction, will avoid working during the cold winter months. Construction of the project is planned for a two-year period which will ensure all ancillary tasks such as bridge painting and turf establishment are successfully completed.

Project Support/Public Engagement (LOW): A robust public engagement process has taken place and the community most impacted by the Project are aware of the need and are in support. Public engagement will continue throughout the Project. The Aurora city council approved the preliminary layout of the CSAH 100 corridor in October 2024 which includes the railroad crossing bridge overpass. This approval also commits the City to approve the future municipal consent needed for construction.

Applicant Capacity Assessment

Roles and Responsibilities

St. Louis County has a large staff of qualified and experienced professionals. This staff includes nine professional engineers, three professional land surveyors, a contract administration manager, an environmental project manager, four right-of-way agents, four construction project managers and 25 engineering technicians. This Project will be led by St. Louis County staff which includes Victor Lund, PE, PTOE, Traffic Engineer, Rachel Gregg, PE, Bridge Engineer and Eric Fallstrom, PE, Resident Engineer.

Experience with Federal Funding

St. Louis County has extensive resources to successfully deliver large projects that include federal funding. For the period of 2010 through 2024, St. Louis County completed 146 federally funded projects that totaled $170.9 million with a receipt of $109.9 million in federal funding. The County's 2024 construction program was $70.3 million which included $12.5 million in federal funded projects. The County's 2026 through 2029 construction program currently shows a total budget of $314.7 million of which $53.2 million is federal funds.

Ensure Federal Regulations

The grant agreement for this project will be with the MnDOT State Aid Division with St. Louis County as a sub-recipient. The MnDOT State Aid Division has the resources necessary to ensure all federal regulations are satisfied (Buy America, Davis-Bacon, DBE, URA, ADA). All federally funded construction projects for counties in Minnesota utilize the Delegated Contract Process (DCP) through the MnDOT State Aid Division. This process requires the use of MnDOT standard construction specifications. The County has included a federal wage certification in the letters of support.

Project Planning

The Project is included in the St. Louis County's 2026-2030 Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The CIP is a five-year plan that identifies major capital needs. The County updates this plan each year as part of the annual budget process. The CIP identifies projects that have been designed to support existing or projected needs in the following areas: transportation infrastructure (road and bridges), facilities, land improvement/development/acquisition, equipment purchases and technology.

Project Delivery of Similar Size and Scope

St. Louis County owns and manages over 600 bridges (over 10 ft in length) on its 3,000 miles of county road system. St. Louis County was awarded $10.2 million in federal funding through the FHWA Competitive Highway Bridge Program (CHBP) in 2018 to administer a "bridge bundling" project that replaced 21 bridges on county highways owned by St. Louis County and state trunk highways owned by MnDOT. The total cost of this project was $23.9 million, and it was successfully completed in 2024.