

## Recommended Action Outcomes of the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

In order for the *Thrive MSP 2040* plan to foster efficient and economic growth for a prosperous metropolitan region, three interrelated trail initiatives in Anoka County should be investigated to improve regional connectivity, access and sustainability.

### Central Anoka County Trail and connection to Mississippi West Regional Park

The approved Metropolitan Council plan for Mississippi West Regional Park shows an elevated pedestrian crossing of U.S. Hwy's #10 & #169 as one of the phased improvements to the park. Following the first phase of the park's development, the boat landing and river access in 2010; the Northstar rail station was completed in Ramsey and placed in service north of the regional park, but separated by the highway. The pedestrian bridge known as the 'Mississippi Skyway' should be the next phase of the parks development, and when complete, the Central Anoka County Trail may be realigned to within the pedestrian oriented development known as The COR, or Center of Ramsey - and effectively connected to the regional park. The exhibit below shows the proposed trail corridor in a red dashed line.



Considerable investments in regional improvements converge in this location, including the \$13 million dollar rail station, with \$1.1 million dollar pedestrian skyway over Veteran's Drive, \$8 million dollar covered transit and parking facility, as well as approximately one half million in boat landing and river access improvements. Additionally, the Mississippi River Regional Trail is under construction from the City of Anoka, through the City of Ramsey and into the park depicted below. The trail together with two bridges on the 80-acre King's Island represents over one million dollars in bike facilities that are also a key component of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area.



It is this inter-jurisdictional trail with multi-modal connections and host of retail services that make this pedestrian bridge the nexus of regional systems and destinations, and merits the concurrent alignment of the Central Anoka County Trail at such time the elevated highway crossing is in place. The following highlights outcomes of an aligned regional trail with a grade-separated pedestrian crossing of Hwy's #10 & #169 and railroad corridor.



*Mississippi River at the regional park*

## Stewardship

Mississippi West Regional Park possesses a bounty of natural resources, including woodland habitats, restored native prairie, and a segment of the Nation’s most prominent river with Wild and Scenic designation. Advancing multi-modal connections to the park for the region’s residents and visitors is a strategic investment that makes available these rich natural assets for those who choose not to travel by automobile. Broadening access to these regional amenities exposes people to the intrinsic beauty of the park and river, and thus builds support for on-going stewardship of natural resources and the environment.



*Workforce Housing in The COR, completed in 2013*

## Prosperity

Investment in the pedestrian overpass will make the commercial and retail areas on both sides of Hwy's #10 & #169 more attractive to quality business that are concerned with quality of life for their employees in terms of the ability to walk during break periods to and from the park. In addition, improved connection to the trail systems the bridge will provide for, allows a greater proportion of the workforce to commute without an automobile and expands transit access – both of which enhance economic competitiveness.



*Rail and bus service can provide access to the natural-resource based Mississippi West Regional Park from the urban cities*

## Equity

The transit-oriented development known as The COR includes a mix of residential housing choices for people of all incomes. Providing a ‘means’ to access Mississippi West Regional Park sans an automobile also means creating real choices in where residents may live, travel and recreate. The grade-separated pedestrian crossing of the highway and rail line creates the nexus between housing, transportation and recreation, and thus leverages multiple investments to build a more equitable region.



*Increasingly, people are using the Northstar Commuter Rail to expand recreational access to the region’s parks and trails*



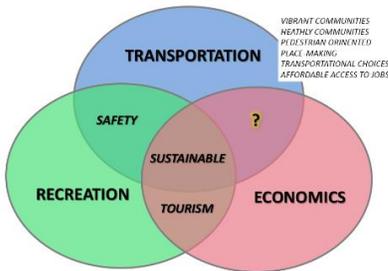
## Livability

U.S. Hwy's #10 & #169 can be a barrier to accessing Nature associated with the regional park and trail on the south side of the highway. Livability is enhanced by *one* connecting piece of infrastructure – the pedestrian crossing and bicycle facility. This will provide transportation choices, and access to Nature and outdoor experiences for a range of the region's demographic and economic make-up. The COR is by design, pedestrian-oriented as well as transit-oriented. Aligning resources (the pedestrian bridge), supports walkable places and promotes healthy communities and active living.



## Sustainability

The Mississippi Skyway exemplifies sustainability as bicycles will always be an efficient means of short trips – made more effective especially with the proposed bridge's physical connection to the commuter rail station. With a 100-plus year lifespan, the facility will help to ensure regional vitality for generations to come. This also adds and preserves capacity for all the public and private investments it connects to, thereby quite literally investing in the future.



## Integration

The pedestrian facility will be the embodiment of the intentional combining of related activities and infrastructure to achieve more effective results in coordinating the way people travel, commute, work and play. The bike and ped bridge will be an example of the Council effectively working with partners and stakeholders throughout the region to prioritize a project that will have multiple benefits.



## Collaboration

The Mississippi Skyway, with its direct connection to the National Mississippi River Trail and U.S. Bikeway #45 - when completed with a realigned Central Anoka County Trail, will be an unequalled example of collaboration in advancing the region most effectively towards shared outcomes. The pedestrian bridge is an expensive facility, no single entity has the capacity to fund it alone, and therefore a *shared* strategy is truly in the region's interest. Indeed, it is the Metropolitan Council's mission to foster these partnerships and reciprocal relationships to address regional opportunities and solutions.



The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) is a world-class bicycling route that travels from the headwaters of the Mississippi River at Lake Itasca, Minnesota to the Delta at the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana.

## Accountability and Additional Directives

Identifying the proposed pedestrian bridge over U.S. Hwy's #10 & #169 as a priority for the regional partners to secure Federal funding; fulfills the Council's mission of an equitable return on investments across the geographic region. This positions the Council, the Metropolitan Parks and Open Space Commission, regional park agencies, municipalities, the National Park Service, and state partners to effectively collaborate on:



*Ramsey Station, October 2014:  
People use the rail and bus service for commuting, efficient access to the airport, as well a connection to the region's trail systems*

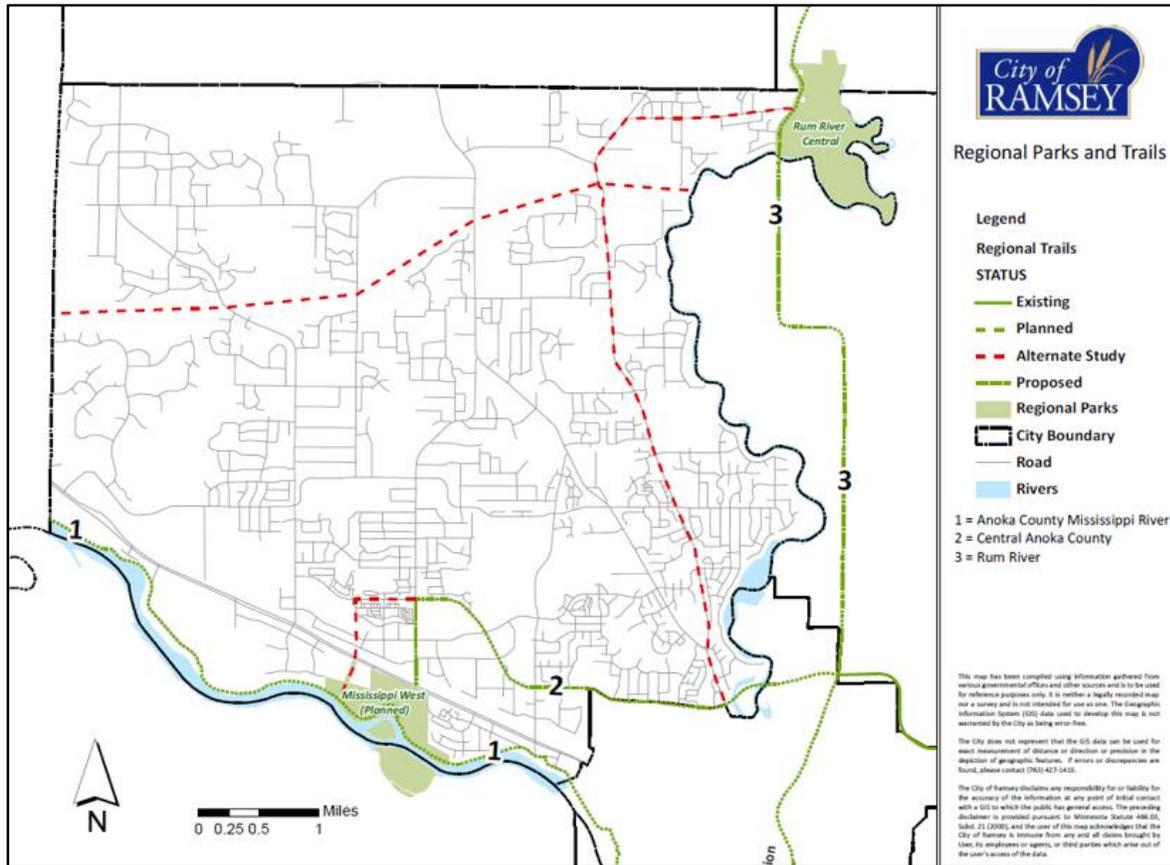
~ Expanding the Regional Parks System to conserve, maintain, and connect natural resources identified as being of high quality or having regional importance, as identified in the 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan

~ Provides a comprehensive regional park and trail system that preserves high quality natural resources, increases climate resiliency, fosters healthy outcomes, connects communities, and enhances quality of life in the region

~ Promotes expanded multimodal access to regional parks, regional trails, the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, and the transit network, and as such, strengthens equitable usage of regional parks and trails by all our region's residents - across age, race, ethnicity, income, national origin, and abilities



In concluding, the Alternate Alignment Study would explore moving this future connection/regional trail from Ramsey Boulevard to a connection point at the rail station (#2 from green to the red dashed line, bottom center, below).



The proposed 2040 Regional Parks Policy Plan, Chapter Four: Policy and Strategies, cites, “Bicycle and pedestrian facilities should be coordinated between the Regional Parks System and the transportation system”. The proposal above meets this objective, and addresses the multitude of meaningful *Thrive Outcomes and Principles*.

~ End of Excerpt ~