

Northtown Rail Yard Overpass

Fridley, Minnesota

In 2012 Anoka County prepared a Corridor Study for East River Road from US Interstate 694 to Trunk Highway 610. As a top priority, the study recommended extending 57th Avenue by constructing a bridge over the BNSF railroad tracks. The new bridge will provide long needed access between University Avenue and East River road.

Regional Significance

A new overpass at 57th Avenue brings several benefits both to the City of Fridley and to the region. First, it will provide a safe and convenient crossing for pedestrians and bicyclists from an area of concentrated poverty to grocery and other shopping outlets along with a direct connection to the regional trail network. Nearly 10%, of Fridley's 27,668 are considered "Persons in Poverty" according to the US Census Bureau. Fridley's median income is only 63% or the metro area median income (Fridley \$59,770 vs. Metro \$94,300). The US Census block located on the east side of the bridge is Fridley's poorest, with a median household income of \$39,871. The bridge would provide additional access to the many jobs located on the west side of the BNSF tracks.

Most importantly for the region, an overpass at 57th Ave would help reduce congestion on I-694, including the entrance ramps at University and East River Road by giving motorists another location to cross the tracks. In addition, the bridge would aid in the economic development of the area and allow for improved public safety response times for police and fire departments that currently experience delays due to the limited track crossings in Fridley.

The BNSF Northtown Yard is the largest rail yard in the state and important for commerce across the region. An extension at 57th Ave would span across the yard and provide a much-needed connection between Main Street NE (CSAH 102) and East River Road (CSAH 1). The project's concept and a feasibility study have been completed with input from BNSF personnel. This collaborative work produced the idea of an overpass as superior to a tunnel or at-grade crossing because of the regional infrastructure elements currently in place. This proposal has initial approval from BNSF. Once design and engineering are complete, the City can move forward with a detailed agreement with the railroad and construction can begin.

Project Cost & Local Contribution

The total estimated cost for the Northtown Rail Yard Overpass is currently \$25,000,000. The Fridley Housing Redevelopment Authority (HRA) has already acquired right-of-way on the west side of the tracks and started the appraisal process and negotiations with owners of parcels on the other side. In addition, the HRA authorized spending \$800,000 on project costs in 2020 and is funding all current work on the project. Within HF869/SF1117 the city requests \$3,000,000 to supplement local funds for predesign, design and engineering work. Once fully funded, construction could start shortly thereafter and could be completed within two years.

