

NP and 1st Avenue Corridor Development Plan Project Overview

In the 1950s and 60s, one-way pairs were implemented in many cities across the U.S. (including Fargo) in an attempt to rid downtowns of traffic congestion. The relative efficiency of one-way streets in moving traffic and reducing congestion without street widening or the construction of new facilities was a common response to the shopping mall phenomenon and suburban migration.

During the 1990s, a trend around the U.S. began to convert some one-way streets back to two-way operations. It was not that the one-way street strategy failed, or that traffic volumes decreased. However, the prevailing wisdom was that two-way streets could enhance a neighborhood's environment; reduce speeds to levels more compatible with pedestrian traffic; and that a "busy" street could be an indicator of a healthy business environment. Some cities have reported improved business climate, higher retail sales, better neighborhoods, and increased property values following conversions. There are pros and cons for one-way streets and two-way streets, however conditions change with time and differ from one city or street to another.

The City of Fargo has taken strong positive steps to make Downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods more livable and more prosperous with programs and projects such as the Broadway Streetscape reconstruction, the BNSF Railroad Quiet Zone, the rental rehabilitation program, the Renaissance Zone program, the storefront rehabilitation program, the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, and more. There has been a sincere effort to improve the economic strength, structural quality, and social vitality of Downtown Fargo and nearby neighborhoods. Much has changed in recent years. During that time, numerous requests have been made by property and business owners for a return to two-way traffic on 1st Ave N and NP Ave. Following several years of discussion, it became apparent that one-way street operations was an important issue; however the effects of street operations on business activity and downtown vitality was the larger, more important issue. Rather than making decisions based on speculation and a narrowly-defined scope, the City needs to conduct a systematic study of the 1st and NP Avenue corridors and take into consideration the traffic operations issues, pedestrian and bicycle issues, transit issues, emergency responder issues, as well as economic impacts associated with a possible conversion.

This study also comes at a time when the City has realized the need to completely replace the underground municipal services (water, storm sewer, and sanitary sewer) that serve the downtown area. By knowing that the services will be replaced and construction will be occurring in the near future on City Streets, this also gives the City a chance to look at the existing configuration of the street from building front to building front. There are street functionality questions to be answered, as well as aesthetic questions to be answered. Should the sidewalks be widened? Should a bike lane be added on 1st and NP? What type of streetscape should be installed? Should we do nothing but remove and replace the current infrastructure? Should the street lighting be upgraded? Should the total width of the streets be reduced? In short, how should this street be designed to foster safe, multimodal traffic movement; viable commercial and residential development; access for emergency vehicles; and an aesthetically pleasing environment?