

## I. INTRODUCTION

The St. Cloud metropolitan area has undergone significant changes since its origin as a rural stagecoach and rail center in the 1860s. Today the area is one of Minnesota's largest and fastest growing regional centers. According to area planning estimates, the St. Cloud area's population is expected to grow by 45,000 people and employment is estimated to grow by 28,000 jobs over the next 25 years<sup>1</sup>. While, part of this growth is due to its proximity to the Twin Cities and Minnesota's central lakes region, the area also has attracted new investment and visitors because of education, employment, shopping, and recreational opportunities.

This growth also brings new challenges including the need for additional housing and employment centers as well as transportation and other infrastructure. A significant portion of this growth is anticipated to occur in the southern and western portion of the metropolitan area. One of the primary concerns in this area is east-west mobility. For many years, communities in this area have shown the need for an east-west arterial; however, very little has been done to adequately plan for this facility. This study is intended to help communities plan in a long-term, thoughtful, responsible manner for this facility.

Communities and agencies, within the study area, have undertaken this effort before development and other changes occur that would make an arterial in this area impossible to construct or the impacts too severe to mitigate. The results of the study will be used as a tool to improve coordination between land use and transportation decisions, and finally to help preserve right-of-way (ROW) for a future corridor.

### **Study Area**

The study area was defined based on logical termini, spacing of arterial routes, physical constraints, and information obtained from previous plans adopted by communities involved in the study. It is located within the communities of St. Cloud, Waite Park, St. Joseph and St. Joseph Township and includes a band approximately one mile wide along the general east-west alignment of 33rd Street, and another band approximately two miles wide along a north-south alignment (Figure 1).

Land use along the corridor is primarily farmland, wetlands, and parkland; however, many areas have residential development pressures. Suburban residential developments currently exist in the eastern section of the corridor, both north and south of 33rd Street. There is a large Stearns County park (approximately 450 acres) in the central portion of the study area. This park, Quarry Park, has significant portions designated as scientific and natural areas. Additionally, Neenah Park, a City of St. Cloud park, is located within the study area east of CSAH 74 and south of 33rd Street.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Cloud Area Planning Organization's 2025 Transportation System Management (TSM) Plan.

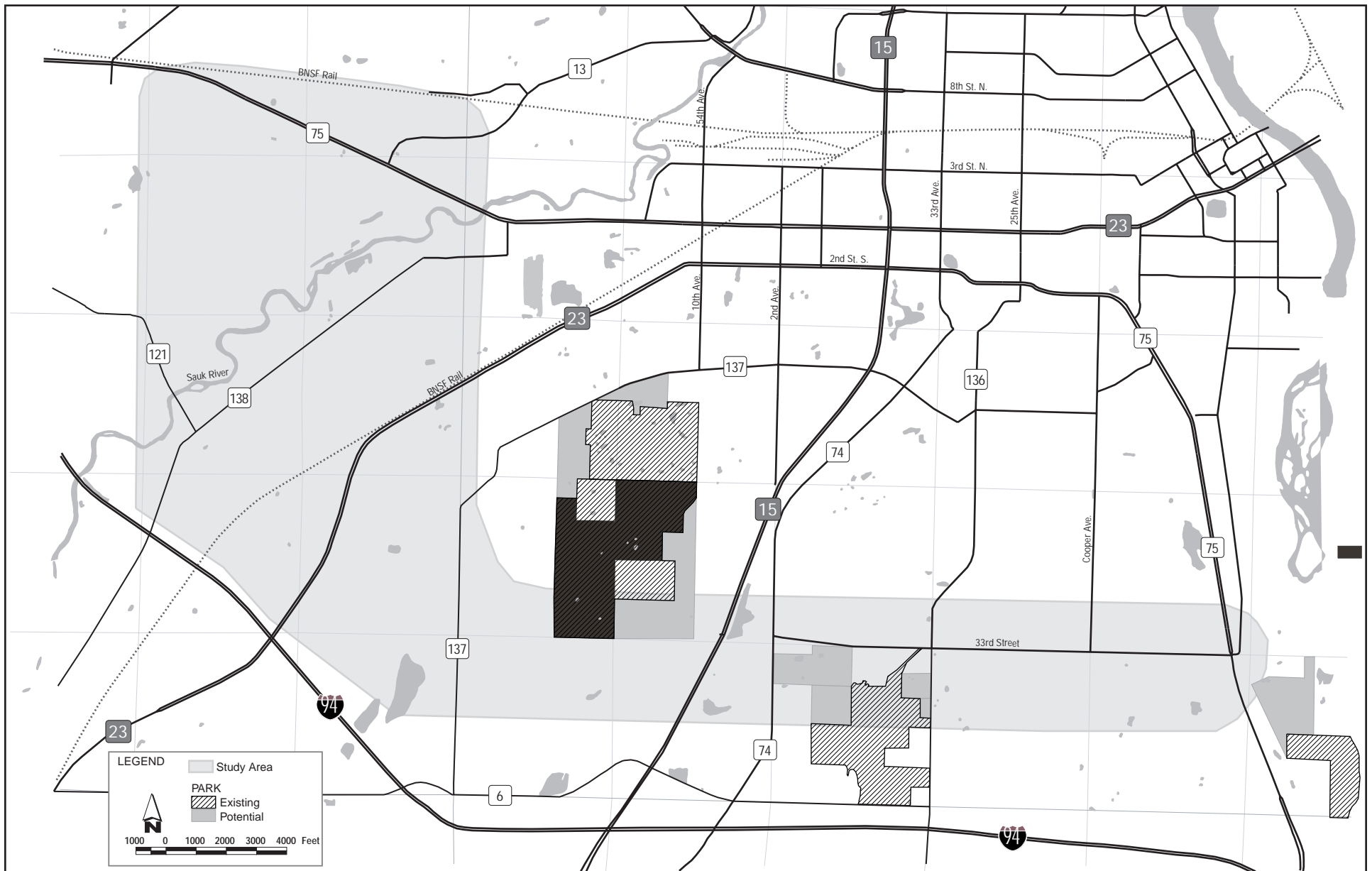


Figure 1  
**Study Area**

There is a large mobile home park east of TH 23 and west of Quarry Park. In addition to these land uses, there are several mining operations within or in the vicinity of the study area near the Sauk River.

Other physical elements that are in the corridor include, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad, which has two rail corridors in the study area. The first corridor bisects the project area running parallel to TH 23 and the second corridor borders CSAH 75 along the northern edge of the study area. These railroad corridors are active approximately two to three times per week. The study area also crosses TH 23 and TH 15, two main state highway corridors as well as the Sauk River in the northwestern section of the study area.

## **Study Methodology**

The methodology used for this study followed the practices of a "pre-NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) corridor Study". This methodology was chosen because there is no funding or active project development for this corridor planned in the near future; however, there is a need to make good planning decisions as the area develops. The pre-NEPA methodology is outlined in the National Cooperative Highway Research Program Report 435 (NCHRP 435) Guidebook for Transportation Corridor Studies (1999). Pre-NEPA studies need to take into account the legal requirements of NEPA so that future decision-making conforms to the procedural statute.

NCHRP 435 identifies several "location determining statutes" that need to be addressed when comparing potential alternatives in a pre-NEPA corridor study. These statutes include Section 4(f) of the DOT Act of 1966, the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and parts of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act dealing with wetlands. In addition to the "location determining statutes" identified in NCHRP 435, environmental data was collected for other potentially important issues, including: site contamination, state of Minnesota DNR Protected Waters, and unique plant and wildlife habitats.

As these areas were identified and mapped, preliminary alignment options were refined to avoid and/or minimize the impacts to these areas as well as impacts to existing properties, and major utilities. In addition, other transportation factors were also considered when defining alignments. This included spacing between routes, spacing between major intersections/interchanges, design standards, local transportation connections and consistency with local and regional plans.

## **Community, Agency and Public Involvement**

The study was a collaborative effort by all of the affected communities and agencies in the study area including Stearns County, City of Waite Park, City of St. Cloud, City of St. Joseph, St. Joseph Township, the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO), and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT). The effort was led by Stearns County because it was anticipated that this facility would be a county facility and the proposed study area was entirely within its jurisdiction. The public and agency involvement process used for the study is shown in Figure 2.

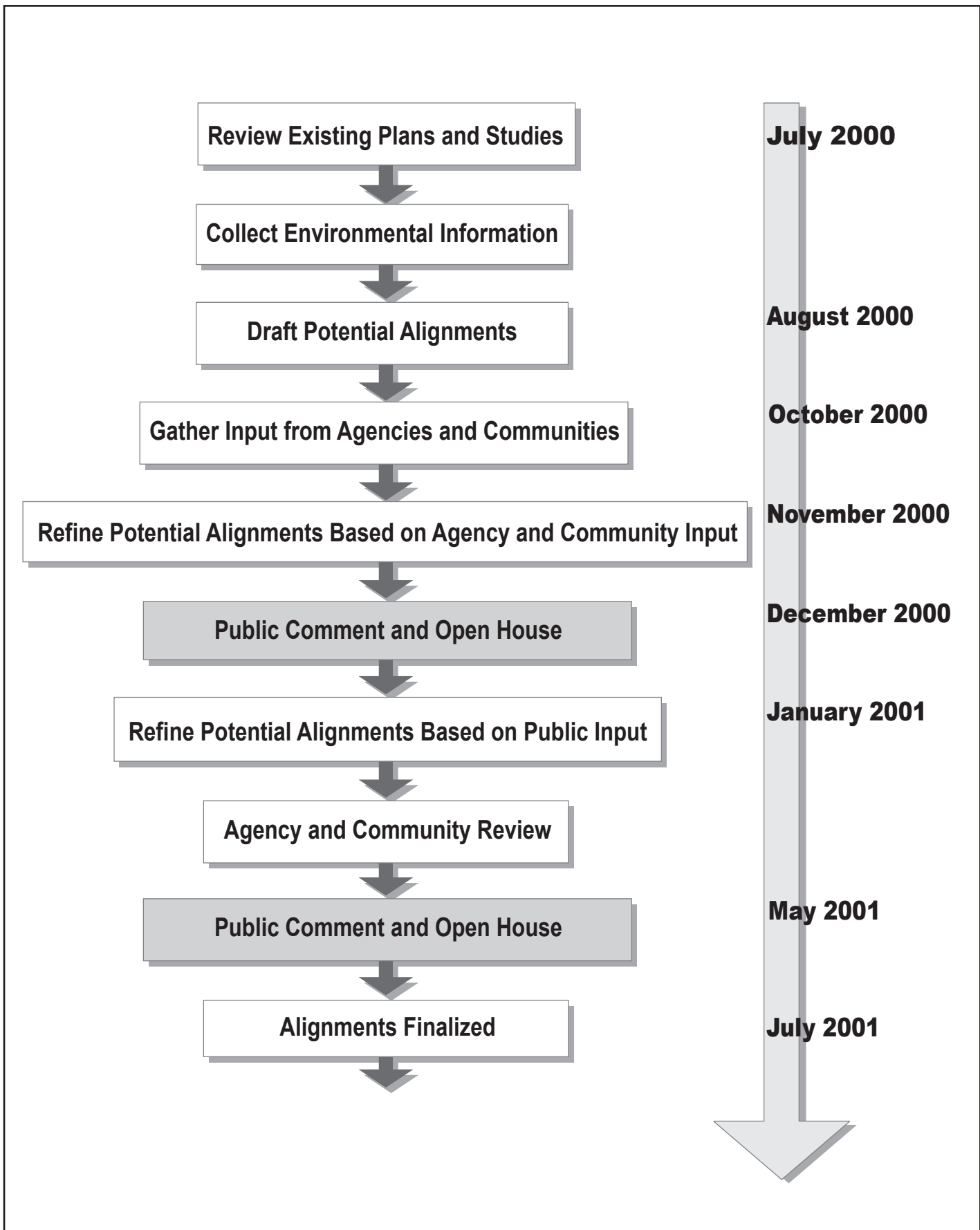


Figure 2

**Study Process**

*Saint Cloud Area Southwest Arterial Alignment Study*

The public involvement process provides for:

- Early coordination with regulatory and resource agencies
- Continuous involvement of communities through Technical Advisory Committee
- Opportunities for public input through open houses and comment forms
- Meetings with regulatory and resource agencies (March 2001)
- Refinement and evaluation of alternatives based on input

More detailed public involvement information is included in Appendix A of this document including comments from open houses and minutes from each Technical Advisory Committee Meeting.

## **II. TRANSPORTATION ASSESSMENT**

The transportation assessment focuses on describing the public's interest in providing an arterial type facility in the southwest portion of St. Cloud. The rationale is based on the need to provide a balanced transportation system that adequately serves and supports the identified growth in the area, while minimizing the potential impacts.

### **Regional Growth Trends**

One of the reasons for developing a future transportation facility in this area is to adequately serve the area and region as it grows. According to the St. Cloud Area Planning Organization's 2025 Transportation System Management (TSM) Plan, the St. Cloud area's population is expected to grow by 45 percent from a 1995 population of 100,254 to a 2025 population of 145,000. Additionally, the St. Cloud area will see a 51 percent increase in employment, from 54,000 in 1995 to 82,000 in 2025. The current urban-core area cannot reasonably accommodate all of or even a significant portion of this anticipated growth. As a result, much of this growth will occur in the suburban areas around the St. Cloud area.

As part of the APO's planning process, they have identified potential growth areas in the region through the year 2040. These areas are depicted in Figure 3 along with the current study area. As shown on this figure, the majority of the study area is anticipated to become urbanized and as a result facilities need to be planned to accommodate this growth. Therefore, the reasonable and responsible action is to plan for growth and guide this growth as it occurs.

### **Facility Spacing**

Facility spacing is another reason for locating an arterial corridor in this area. A reasonable distribution between small local streets that provide access to residences and businesses, and larger facilities that distribute traffic between communities and regions is needed. Inadequate spacing of facilities can result in poor access to regional facilities, poor operations and safety on these facilities and/or can cause other facilities to be overloaded.

To address this issue, planning agencies have developed spacing guidelines for different transportation facilities. These spacing guidelines suggest that minor arterial routes in a developing area should be spaced every 1 to 2 miles to provide the proper distribution and mobility for traffic demands. Arterials should primarily provide mobility and access to regional facilities. They usually are very continuous facilities that provide move traffic from one area to another. In the study area, there are few continuous east-west arterial facilities. Other facilities that are present don't provide essential connections to regional facilities.

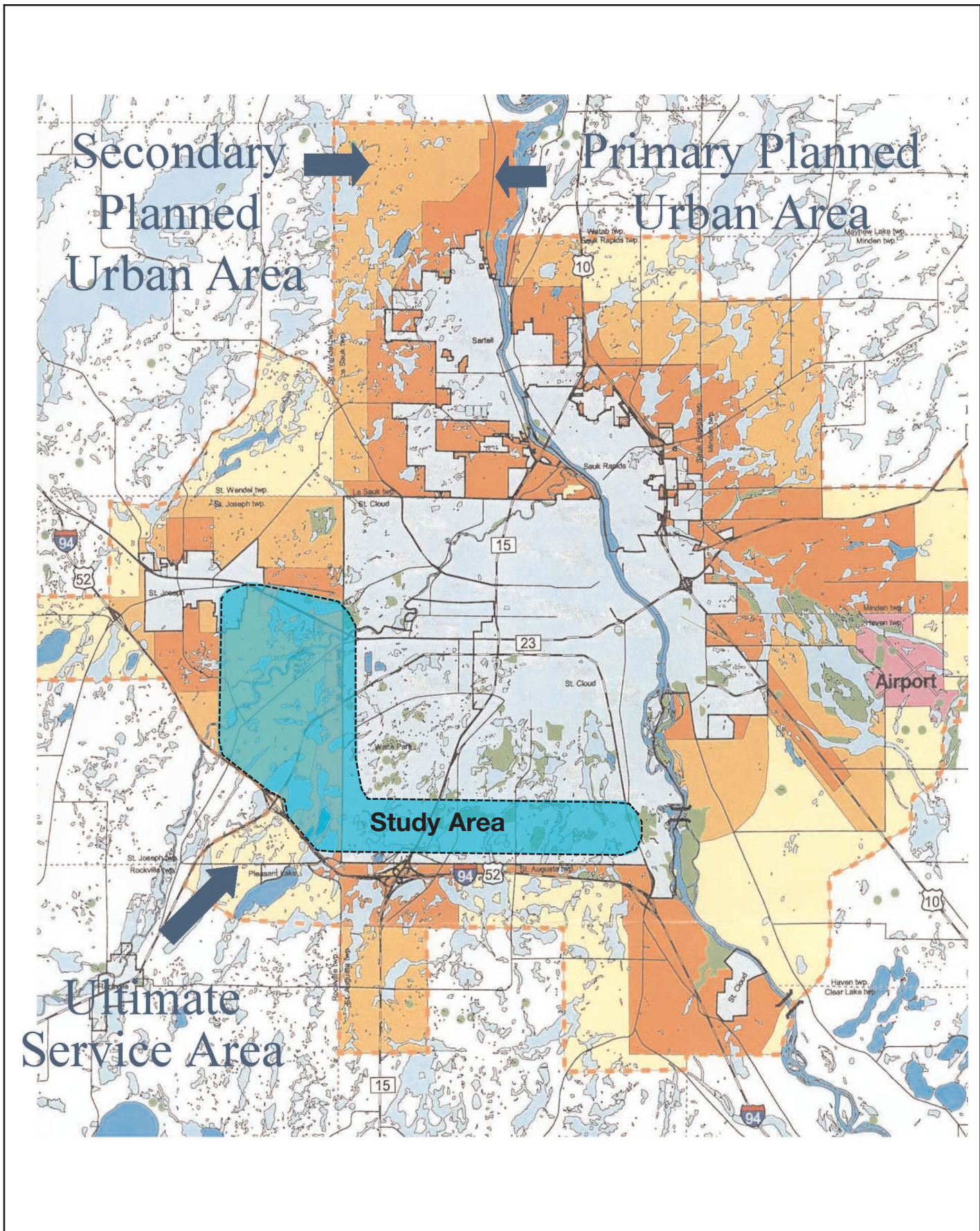


Figure 3

**APO Growth Areas**

*Saint Cloud Area Southwest Arterial Alignment Study*

For example, the distance between I-94, which is a controlled access interstate facility, and the next east-west facility (State Highway 23) is approximately 3.5 miles. County Highway 37 is slightly closer, approximately 3 miles; however, this facility can't provide connectivity to major regional facilities, such as, State Highway 15 and County Highway 75. The spacing of these facilities and access restrictions are shown in Figure 4.

### **Previous Planning Efforts**

An arterial facility in this area has been discussed, in concept, for some time. A review was made of existing comprehensive plans and/or transportation plans that have been adopted by adjacent communities, Stearns County and the APO. All these documents show the need for a future arterial transportation facility in this area based on general planning concepts such as growth trends, facility spacing, and access needs. These plans were developed and adopted by the respective agency and/or community with input from the public. The arterial concept for these plans is shown in Figures 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

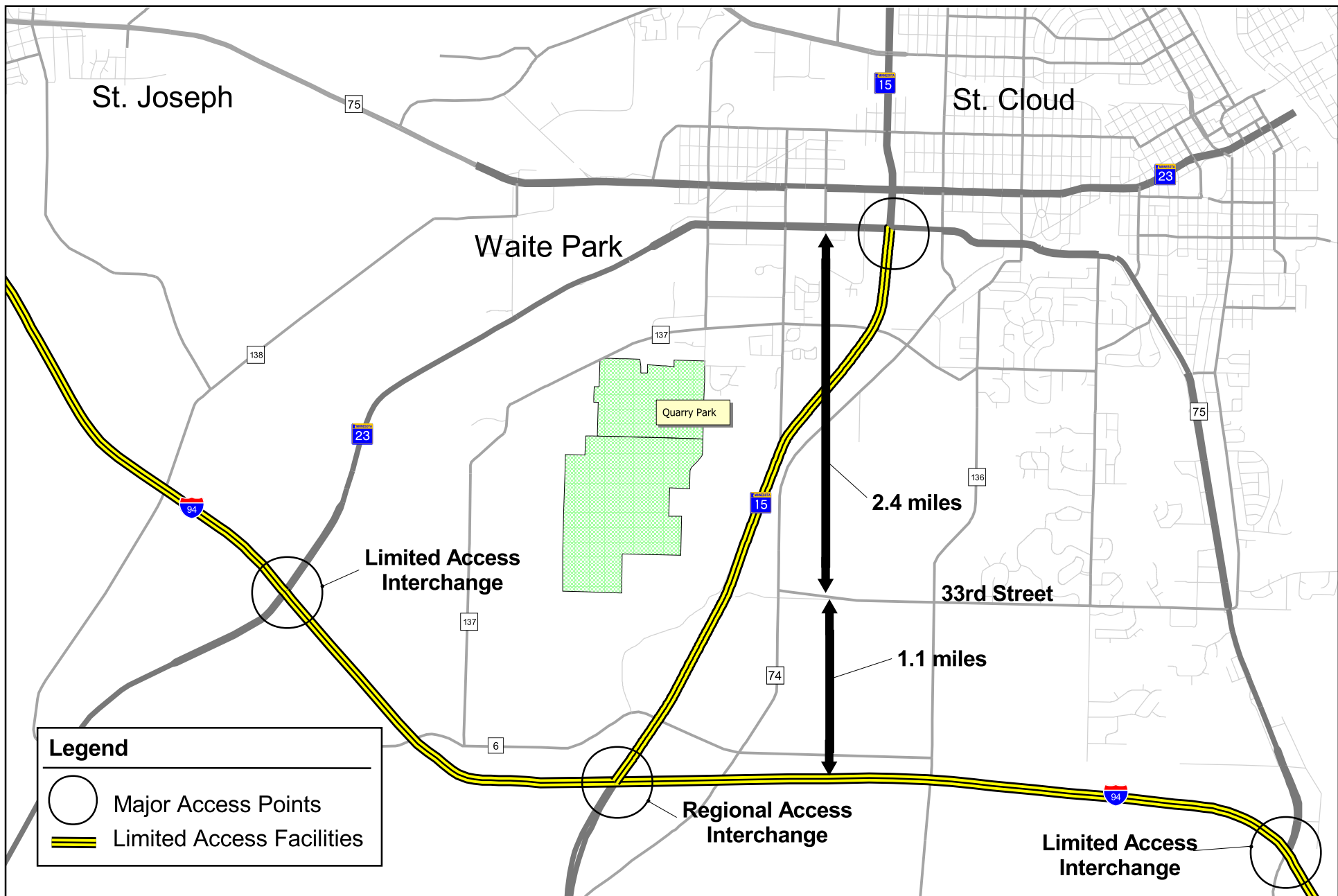
### **Future Traffic Demand**

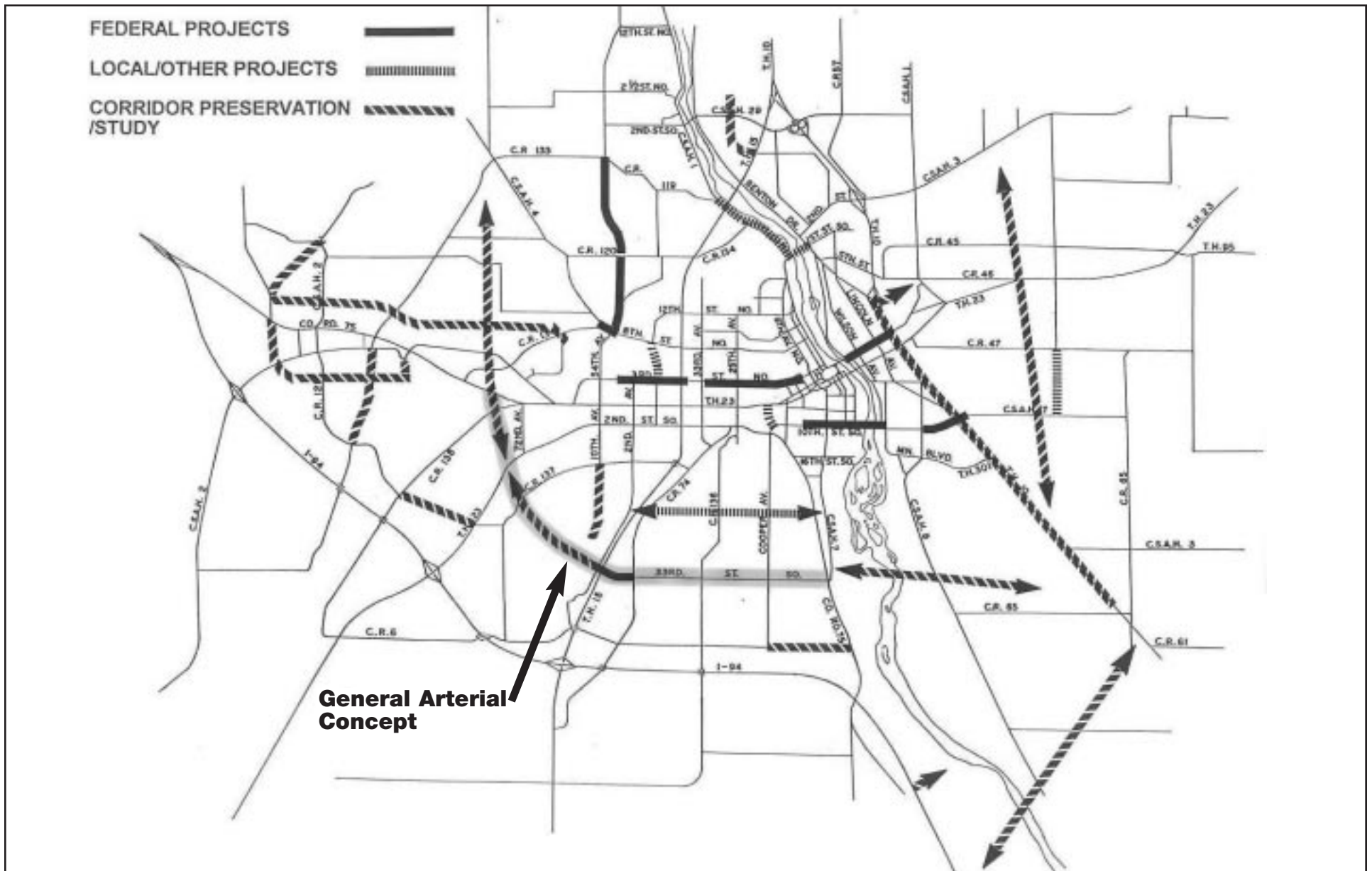
The APO has developed a regional traffic model, which is used to forecast traffic demands on facilities throughout the St. Cloud Metropolitan Area. The current model uses existing land use plans that have been developed by area communities with some balancing of the amount of growth so that it does not occur in all one community. Presently, this model does not look beyond the year 2025. It is anticipated that as the region grows and expands, land use plans would be adjusted to include these adjacent undeveloped areas within the study area.

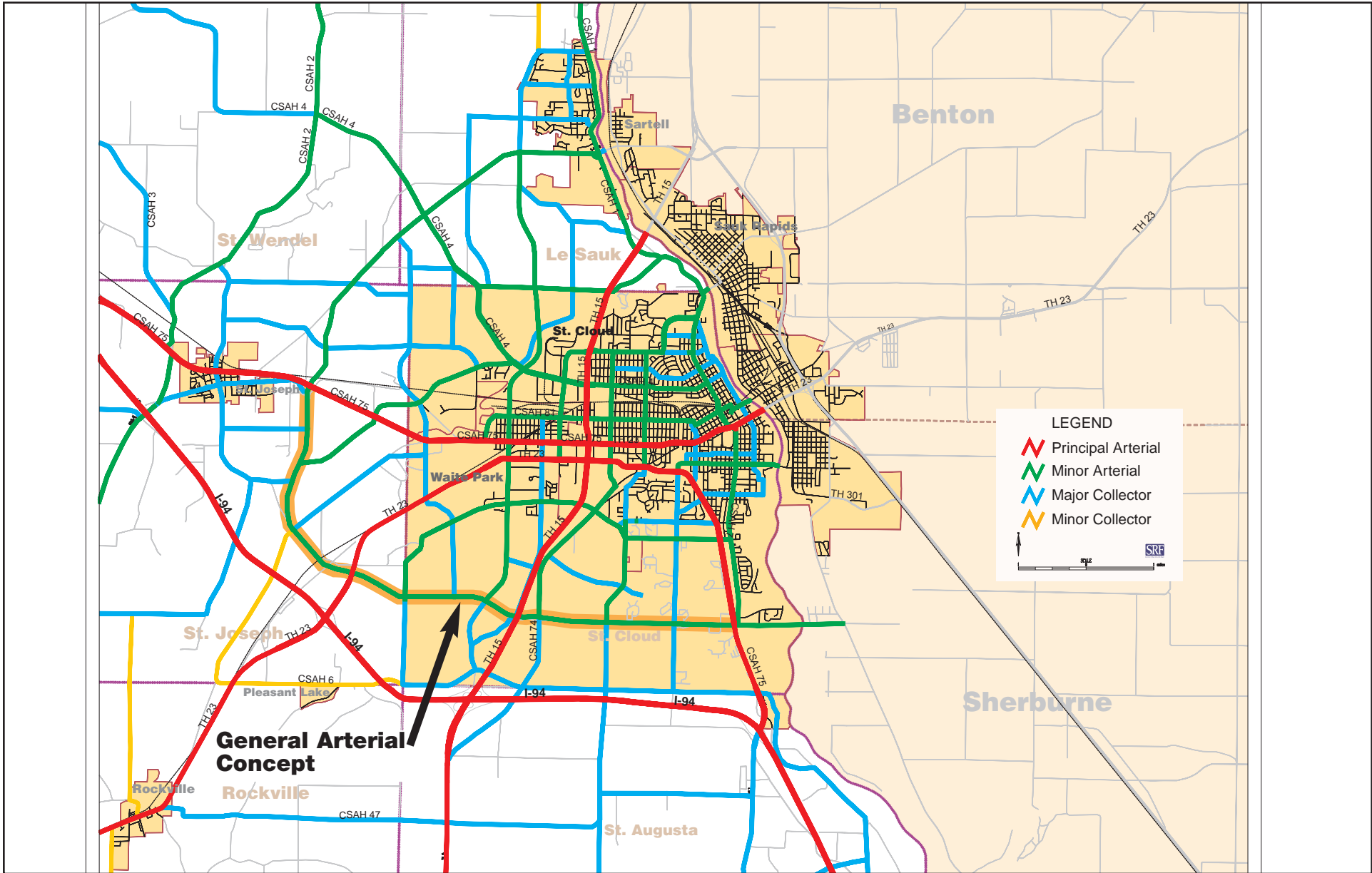
For the proposed arterial alignment, which uses a significant amount of existing roadway, the model shows the 2025 average daily traffic demand between 11,000 daily trips on the eastern end to 20,000 trips near the interchange with State Highway 15. West of State Highway 15 the daily volume drops off to approximately 6,000 vehicles per day. Because the model only looks at the next 20 to 25 years of growth, development of the area over the long-term will likely lead to additional traffic on this facility, especially in the western sections of the study area where land use plans currently show this as agricultural land.

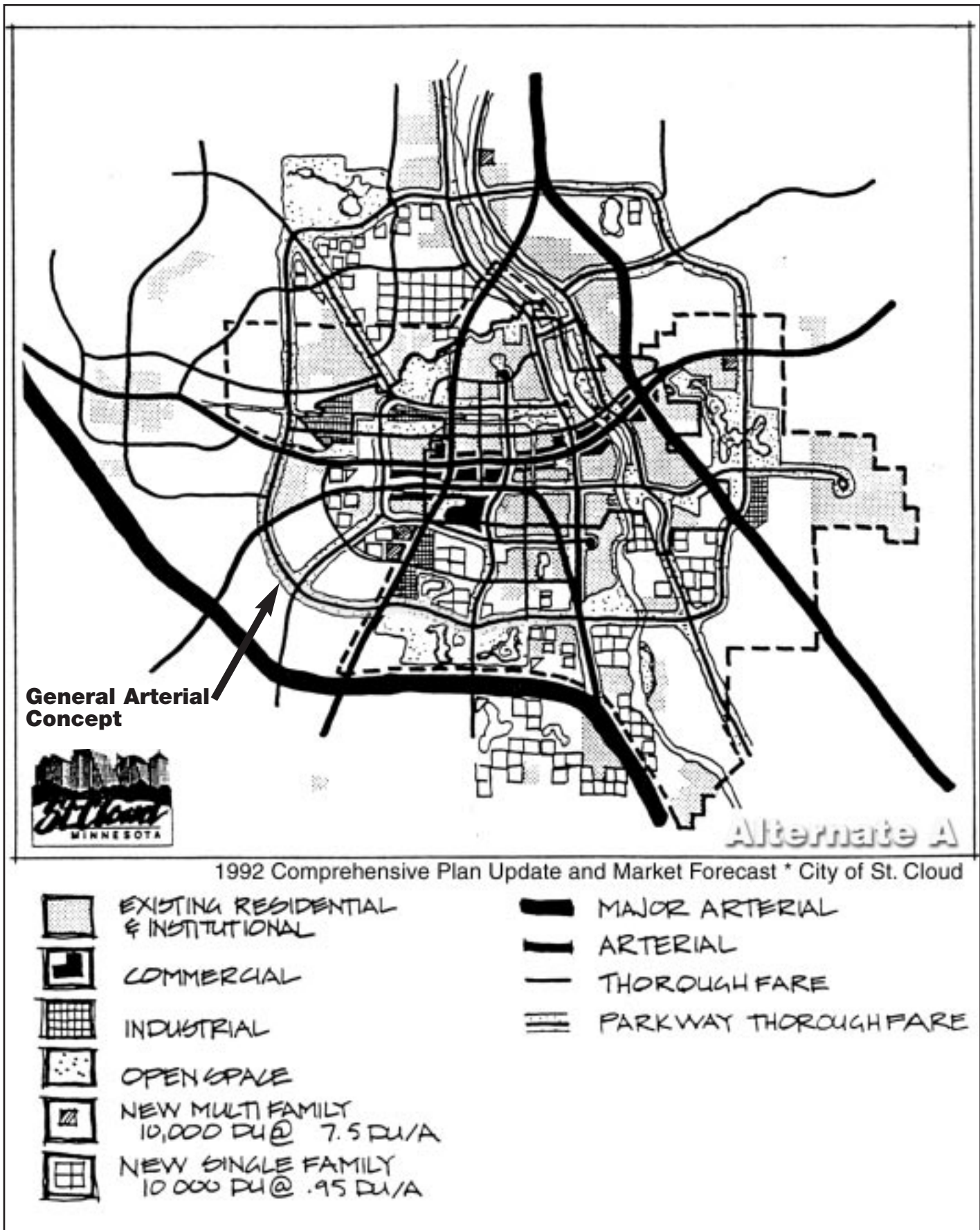
In addition, previous discussions have occurred with respect to extending 33rd Street east of the present study area, crossing the Mississippi River and linking State Highway 10. This scenario has been modeled by the APO and the results show that if a future river crossing is included as part of the long-term corridor vision, traffic volumes are primarily affected in the eastern part of the proposed corridor. For example, volumes on 33rd Street between State Highway 15 and County Highway 75 increase 2,000 to 6,000 daily trips. West of State Highway 15 the change in volume is minimal less than a 1,000 daily trips.

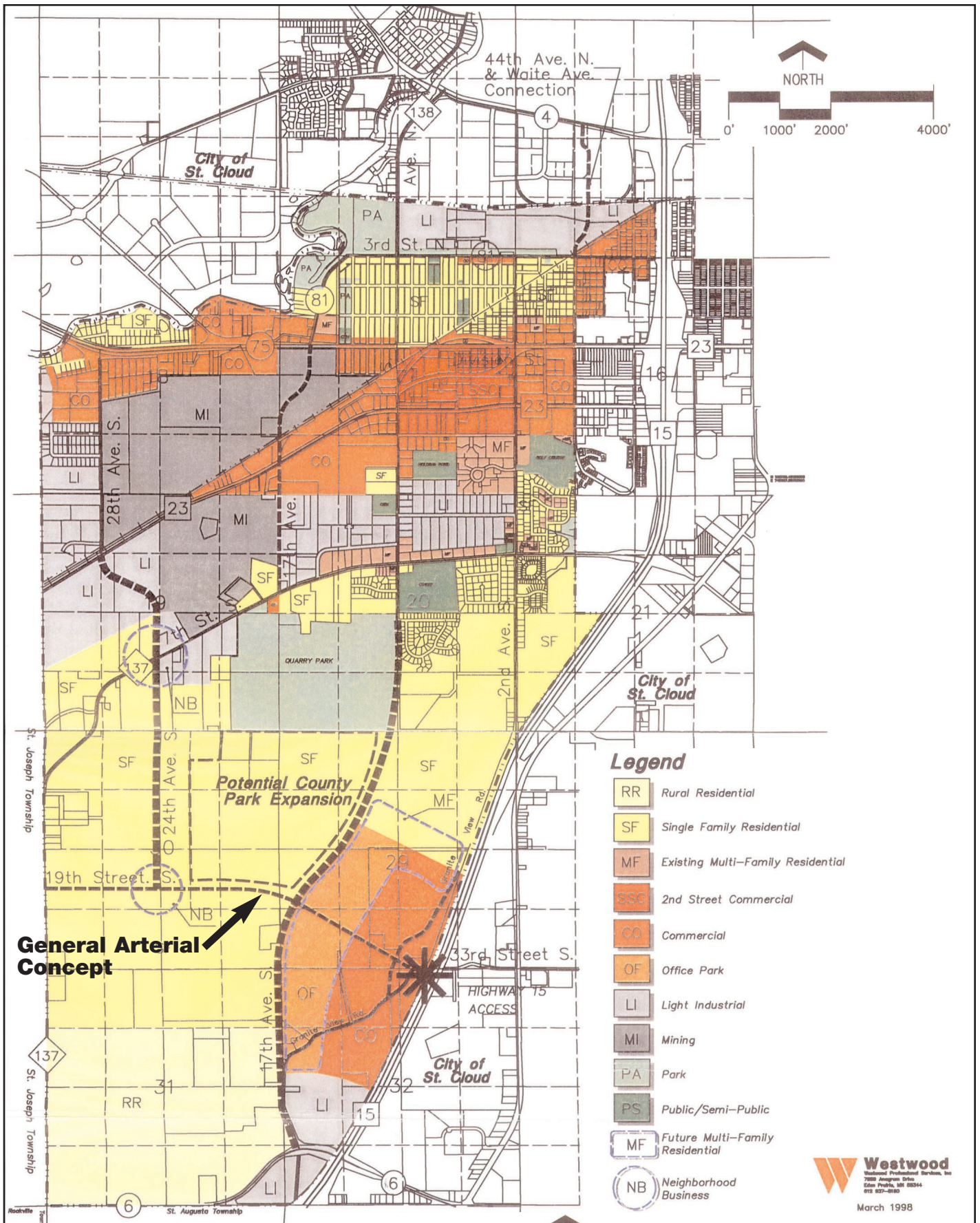












**Figure – 9**  
**City of St. Joseph plan**

### III. ALIGNMENT IDENTIFICATION

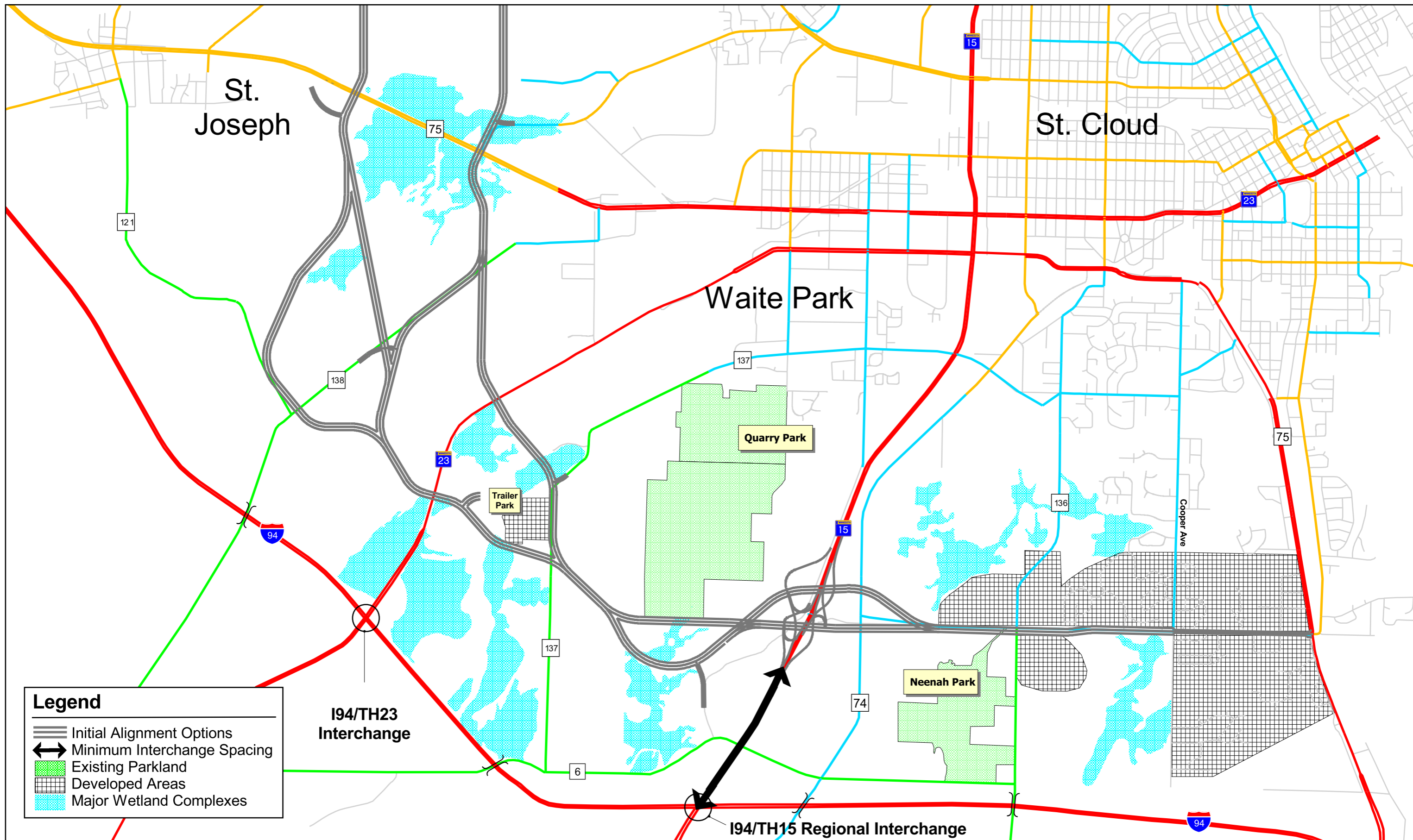
The alignment identification process was an iterative process. Initial alignments were determined based on major features and/or constraints and these initial alignments were then refined as additional environmental data became available and as input was received from the agencies and the public. The environmental data collected for the St. Cloud Area Southwest Arterial Alignment Study was designed to identify any potential “location determining statutes” and other important environmental issues within the project area. More detailed environmental information is summarized in Appendix B. This information includes:

- National Wetlands Inventory
- DNR protected waters
- File searches for hazardous sites
- File searches for endangered and threaten species
- Identification of park boundaries
- State Historic Preservation Office file search
- Identification of potential biological or unique plant communities
- MnModel analysis

Alignment alternatives were developed to avoid impacts to important environmental features wherever possible. Where impacts are unavoidable, minimization and mitigation measures will be taken as part of future design and NEPA documentation work. The NCHRP 435 report indicates that if the pre-NEPA corridor study is conducted analyzing reasonable alternatives per NEPA requirements and potential impacts are taken into account, any alternatives eliminated in the decision-making process should not have to be revisited. It is the intent of this corridor study to follow this process, including involvement of regulatory agencies as needed, to conform to pre-NEPA study standards.

The initial alignment alternatives were identified based on large known constraints. These constraints are shown in Figure 10 and described below:

- *Quarry Park:* Quarry Park was a significant factor in establishing the potential corridor alignments because of its size and location. In addition, the park’s importance (designation as a scientific and natural area) reinforces the decision to avoid any impacts to the current park boundaries; however, park officials indicated that there was flexibility with respect to impacting potential areas that were identified as potential park land. Because of the park’s orientation and location, any future corridor alignment would need to go south of the park. The southern border of the park is roughly on the same alignment of 33rd Street.
- *Neenah Park:* Neenah Park is located south of 33rd Street and east of Highway 15. The location of this park limited alignments that would diverge too far south of 33rd Street in the eastern part of the corridor.





- *Existing Neighborhoods:* Current residential areas are located both north and south of 33rd Street in the eastern part of the corridor. It did not seem feasible nor politically acceptable to significantly impact these areas when a current roadway, 33rd Street, seemed to provide the connection to County Highway 75. Therefore, these constraints limit the alignment to existing 33rd Street in this area.
- *Interchange Spacing:* Sufficient spacing between the I-94/State Highway 15 interchange and the future Highway 15/(new corridor) interchange is needed to provide for safe transitions between ramp movements. While an operations analysis was not conducted, the general rule that has been applied to interchange spacing is that interchanges should not be located closer than one mile. These criteria limited the crossing point on State Highway 15 to an area close to 33rd Street.
- *Major wetland complexes:* Major wetland complexes were identified using the NWI and aerial photos. The goal was to avoid significant impacts to major wetland complexes. For the most part, these complexes limited the corridor from diverging too far south (towards I-94). Another large wetland complex limited the connections to County Highway 75 on the north.

### **Alignment Identification and Modifications Process**

Based on the mapping of the constraints and a visual inspection of the corridor, initial alignments were developed (Figure 11). After initial mapping of the alignment alternatives, the alignments and the mapping of the issues and constraints underwent an iterative review process. This review process included input from the study's TAC, adjacent communities, potentially affected agencies and the public. This review process and alignment changes are summarized below:

#### September 21, 2000 TAC Meeting

The study's TAC reviewed the alignments at its September 21, 2000 meeting. Rationale for locations of alignments was discussed. At that meeting, committee members suggested the following alignment and mapping modifications:

- Alignments should continue north of County Highway 75. The easterly connection to County Highway 75 did not extend to the north.
- A cemetery should be shown on the east alignment, north of County Highway 138 and south of County Highway 75.
- Other mapping features were discussed including planned park improvements, granite outcroppings, and endangered species.

Committee members were asked to take the initial map back to their communities and other officials for further review and comments.

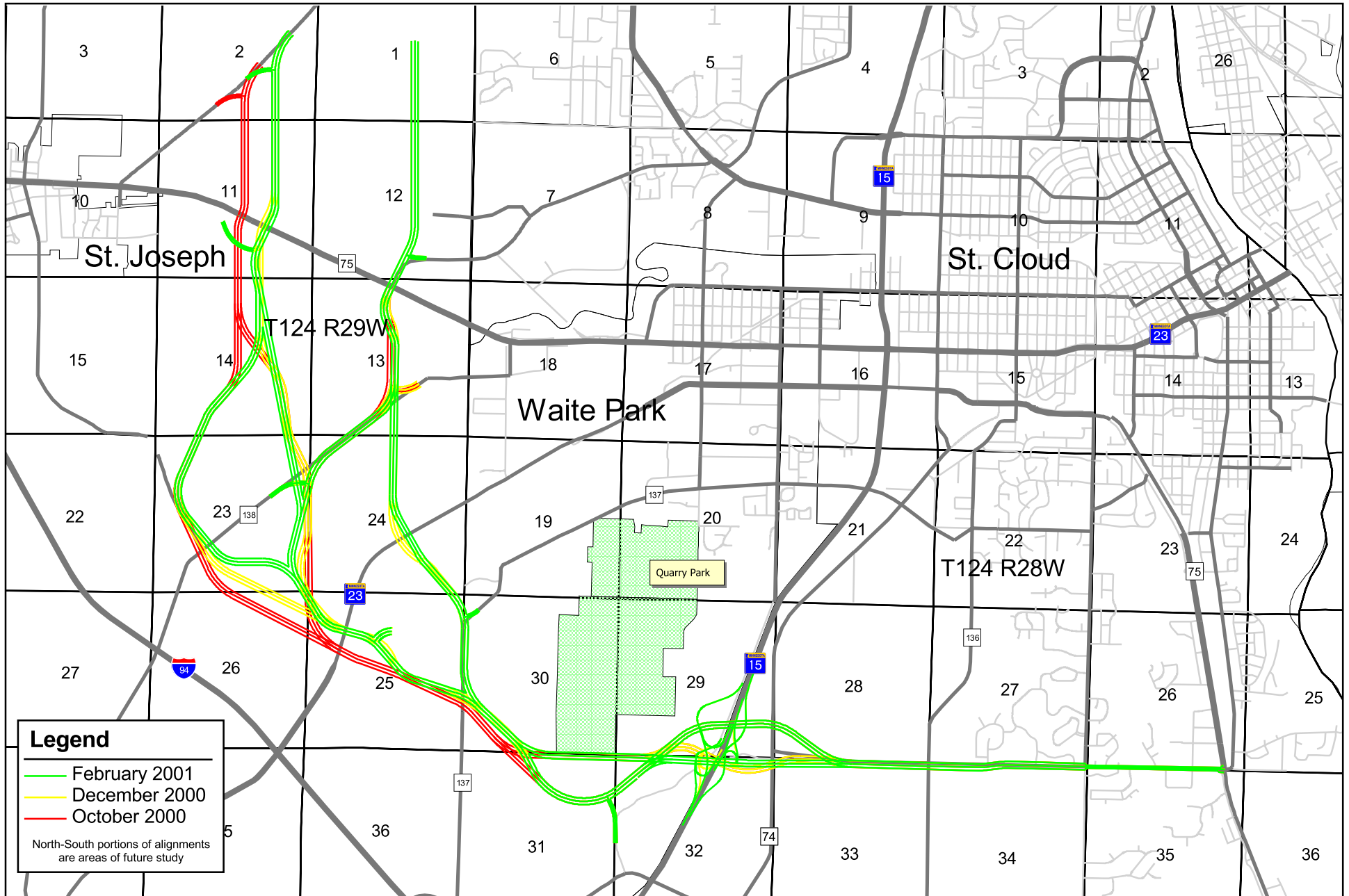


Figure 11

**Corridor Alignment History**



### October 19, 2000 TAC Meeting

On October 19, 2000, the TAC met again to share their comments on the alternatives and constraints identified at the September meeting. The TAC recommended the following refinements:

- An additional alignment should be added adjacent to the southern boundary of Quarry Park because it would limit access to the roadway and would provide a larger parcel of land for development to the south of alignment.
- An additional alignment was added along County Highway 37 adjacent to the mobile home park. This alignment would then reconnect to the current eastern alignment alternative near County Highway 138. The committee added this alignment to provide an alternative that was further east and more direct.
- The western most alignment that extends north of County Highway 75 should be adjusted to limit impacts to a developing industrial park area.
- The committee members agreed that environmental justice issues might need to be addressed if impacts to the mobile home park occur. Current alignments do not impact the mobile home park directly; however, they are in close proximity to the mobile home park.

### November 30, 2000 TAC Meeting

At the November 30, 2000 TAC meeting, interchange configurations were presented for the connection to State Highway 15, and materials presentation materials were reviewed and discussed for the December 6th open house meeting. In addition, the previous changes suggested by the committee were made, and additional environmental information that had been collected was shown on the maps. The additional environmental information in most instances confirmed the alignments that had been previously developed. Suggested refinements included:

- The committee suggested that the crossing on State Highway 23 be aligned with existing roadway alignments. However, this change would not be shown at the open house meeting. This alignment modification would also require careful review of curves to east near mobile home park.
- Alignments would be numbered or identified in some fashion so that people could provide comments regarding the alignments that were shown.

### December 6, 2000 Open House

The first public meeting for this study was held on December 6, 2000 to solicit comments from local property owners and the public. An open house format was used to convey the information and solicit input. An overall layout of the alignments presented at the public open house meeting is shown in Figure 12. Approximately 100 people attended this meeting.

Comments received from this meeting varied from construction and implementation issues to numbers of lanes, traffic, safety and potential impacts to properties. Some of the alignment modifications that were requested included:

- Request to shift westerly alignment (near County Highway 75) east, closer to major wetland complex. Currently the alignment is shown splitting farmland in this area.
- Request to shift alignment (just west of Quarry Park) further to north to avoid impacts to farmland (splitting of fields). Alignment would be along wetland and wooded areas.
- Requested that alignment be shifted to match existing crossing on State Highway 23. The study's TAC also mentioned this request on November 30, 2000.
- In addition, there were numerous comments about selecting or preferring one alignment over another because it would be further from their property.

Additional comment sheets were made available to all attendees. Twenty of these comment forms were returned and are included in Appendix A.

#### January 11, 2001 TAC Meeting

The study's TAC reviewed comments from the open house. In addition, the TAC reviewed an initial matrix of alignment impacts. As a result of the discussion, the following direction was taken:

- Stearns County will continue to respond to public comments and will address new comments as they come in.
- The TAC suggested some alignment shifts in the interchange area to improve approaches to interchange (alignment to curvilinear). SRF will adjust alignment to reduce curvature in this area.
- The TAC decided to focus alignment decisions east of County Highway 137 to accommodate the APO's desire to incorporate the north/south alignment into a broader arterial alignment study that would extend north to the Sartell area. A letter was sent to all residents and open house attendees thanking them for their input and notifying them of this change as well as the move of the next open house to March.
- The TAC suggested that SRF attend the Waite Park Council Meeting and the City of St. Cloud Planning Commission Meeting to review the project with the communities and answer questions. This effort is intended to get the elected officials to provide input into which alignment choices they support. This input would be considered when meeting with the environmental agencies and reviewing the alignment options and impacts.

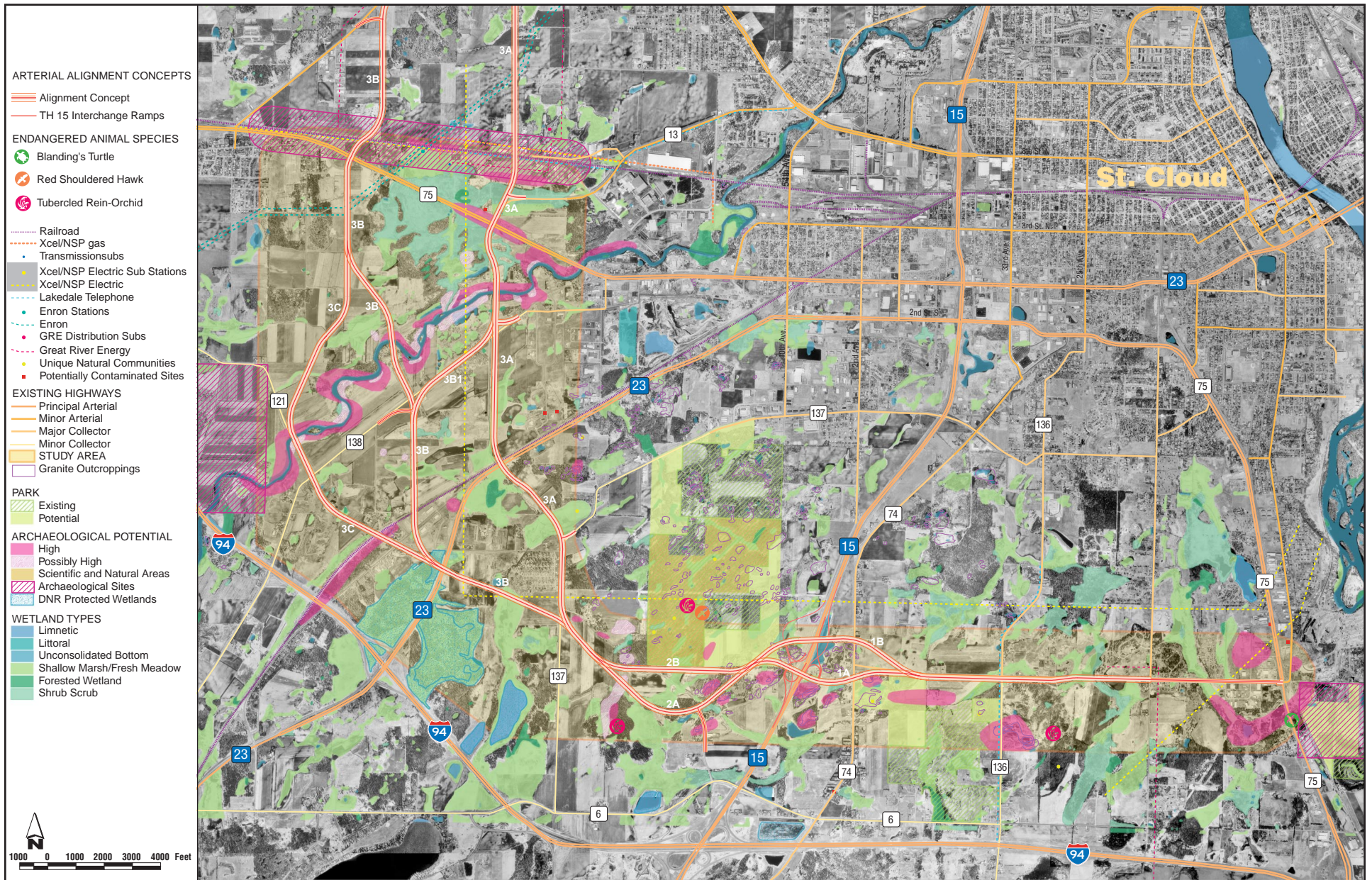


Figure 12

**December Open House Alignments**

*Saint Cloud Area Southwest Arterial Alignment Study*

### **February 13, 2001 Council /Planning Commission Meetings**

At the request of TAC members, SRF outlined the study and the alternatives identified during the study process. The purpose of the presentations was to provide background to members of the council/commission, and to obtain input from the council and commission on alignment considerations. The Waite Park City Council and the St. Cloud Planning Commission indicated a preference for the straighter alignment. These preferences would be taken into meetings with regulatory agencies.

### **March 26, 2001 Regulatory Agency Meeting**

Regulatory agencies met at SRF offices to discuss the project and provide input on issues and concerns. Issues ranged from identification of secondary impacts due to growth and development to considering options of using existing routes such as I-94. Other key issues identified included how this facility fit into the larger picture. Does it impact considerations of a future river crossing? Most of the agencies liked the advanced planning and coordination that has gone on, but indicated that this process is really an effort to reduce local agency risk in protecting a future alignment prior to a full environmental process.

### **April, 2001 TAC Meeting**

A TAC meeting was held to review sections of the draft report. SRF reviewed major findings and preliminary recommendations. SRF discussed comments and changes it was making based on FHWA's comments and comments from internal staff review.

### **July 11, 2001 Open House**

A second open house was held on July 11<sup>th</sup> to show a preferred alignment concept. The alignments had not changed significantly between the first open house and the second open house. Comments from this meeting are included in Appendix A. In general the comments from the open house were positive. Most thought that the facility is needed, however, the timing of it is uncertain.

#### **IV. EVALUATION OF ALIGNMENT ALTERNATIVES**

The evaluation of alignment alternatives was based on a number of factors including locational determining issues (parks, wetlands, threaten and endangered species, and cultural resources), other environmental issues such as unique natural communities, and transportation and other impacts. In addition, Stearns County sought input from adjacent communities and the public.

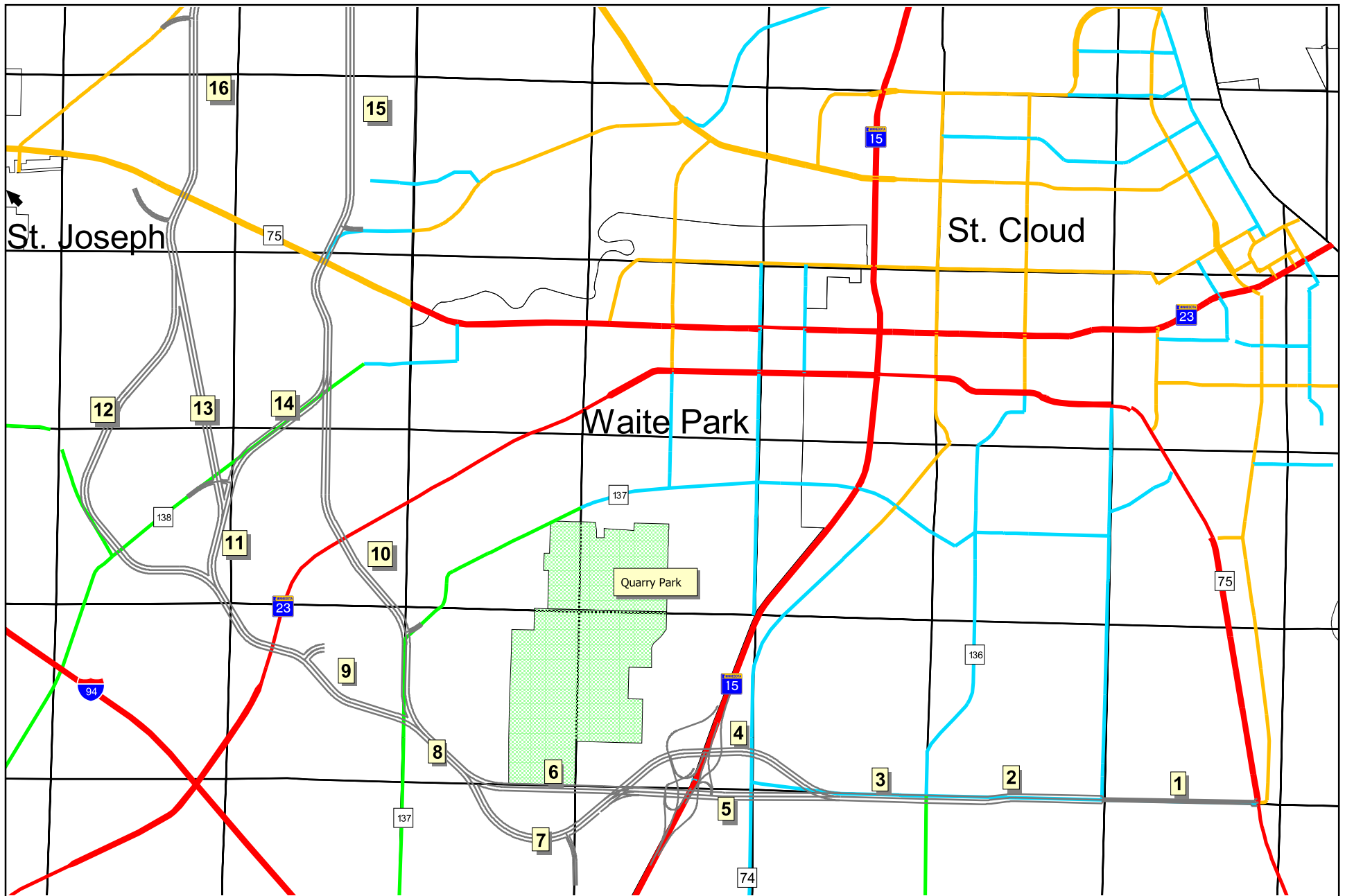
In order to compare alternatives, both environmental information and alignment information were combined to determine impacts. The information gathered in the pre-NEPA environmental review was used as a basis for the environmental locations, while alignment information was obtained from the design files. This information was then compiled into a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) format. The alignments were then broken into 16 segments to allow for better comparisons between alignment alternatives (Figure 13). A proposed width was assumed, 220 feet (110 feet each side of centerline) for the rural undeveloped areas of the corridor and 100 feet (50 feet each side of centerline) in the developed portions of the corridor. In the interchange area, ramp areas were assumed to have a variable width that ranged from a footprint of 60 feet to 160 feet.

Our initial attempt was to try and avoid as many impacts as possible. Where it was not possible to avoid impact, the GIS system quantified the areas and size of the impact. These areas were then tallied by segment and summarized in Table 1. This information was presented to the TAC and to the communities to assist them in providing input into the study process. These impacts as well as potential risks of impacts for sites that were not directly impacted but were nearby were also considered.

Table 1 shows impacts for segments one to eight; at this time alignment decisions will only be made for these segments. West and north of segment eight all of the other alignment options are still possible (Figure 14). There are two alignment decisions needed for segments one through eight. These include the State Highway 15 interchange area, segments four or five, and the alignment immediately south of the Quarry Park, segments six or seven.

#### **Preferred Alignment**

The preferred alignment follows 33rd Street and crosses TH 15 near the southern border of Quarry Park. The alignment was selected because it uses an existing roadway corridor, it is more direct (straighter alignment preferred over curvilinear alignment), and it minimizes wetland and other impacts. This alignment was the preferred alignment by both the Cities of St. Cloud and Waite Park (Figure 15).





**TABLE 1**  
**IMPACT MATRIX - ST CLOUD SOUTHWEST ARTERIAL ALTERNATIVES**

| Decisions Needed to be Made to Develop Preferred Alignment | Alignment Identifiers         | Segment Identifiers | Possible Environmental Impacts           |  |   |   | Other Environmental Issues (in vicinity) | Transportation & Other Issues/Impacts   |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|--|--|---|---|--|---|
|  |                               |                     | Location Determining Issues <sup>3</sup> |  |   |   |  |   |
|  |                               |                     | Section 4(f) Parks (acres)               | Threatened & Endangered Species (in vicinity)              | Section 106 Cultural Resources (acres)            | Section 404 Wetlands (acres)                        |  |   |
| Eastern Alignment  | St. Cloud East-West Alignment | 1,2,3               | .4 existing                              | Blanding's Turtle  |   | 5.6   | Unique Natural Community                 | Utility substation, close proximity to residential area.                      |
| Highway 15 Interchange Choices                             | North                         | 4                   | 8.6 Potential <sup>(7)</sup>             | Tuberclcd Rein-Orchid & Red Shouldered Hawk <sup>(4)</sup> |   | Mainline 4.6 <sup>5</sup><br>Ramps 5.7 <sup>5</sup> | Unique Natural Community                 | Granite Outcroppings, 7 residential properties                                |
|  | South                         | 5                   | 6.3 Potential                            | Tuberclcd Rein-Orchid & Red Shouldered Hawk <sup>(4)</sup> | 3.0 High Potential                                | Mainline 3.5<br>Ramps 2.3 <sup>6</sup>              | Unique Natural Community                 | Granite Outcroppings, 7-9 residences and 2 business properties                |
| Quarry Park Alignment Choices                              | North                         | 6 & 8               |  | Tuberclcd Rein-Orchid & Red Shouldered Hawk <sup>(4)</sup> | 1.0 Possibly High Potential                       | 2.4   | Unique Natural Community                 | Granite Outcroppings  |
|  | South                         | 7 & 8               |  | Tuberclcd Rein-Orchid & Red Shouldered Hawk <sup>(4)</sup> | 0.1 High Potential<br>1.4 Possibly High Potential | 1.3   | Unique Natural Community                 | Granite Outcroppings in vicinity, One residential property in close proximity |

[1] All data is approximate. A detailed field survey of the preferred alternative must be conducted to determine actual impacts.

[2] Length does not include feet associated with ramps and other road connections.

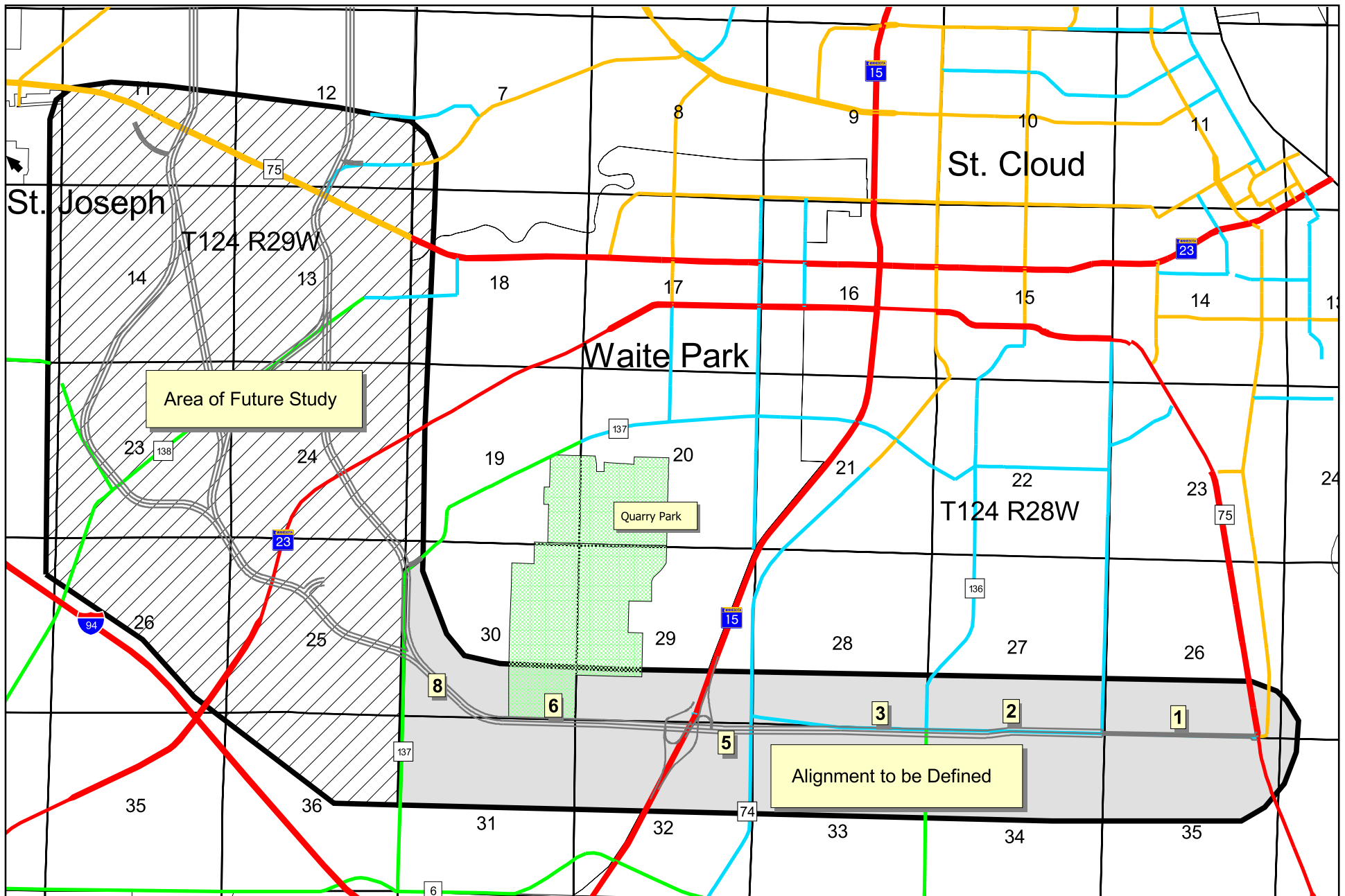
[3] NCHRP 435 identifies several "location determining statutes" that need to be addressed when comparing potential alternatives in a pre-NEPA corridor study.

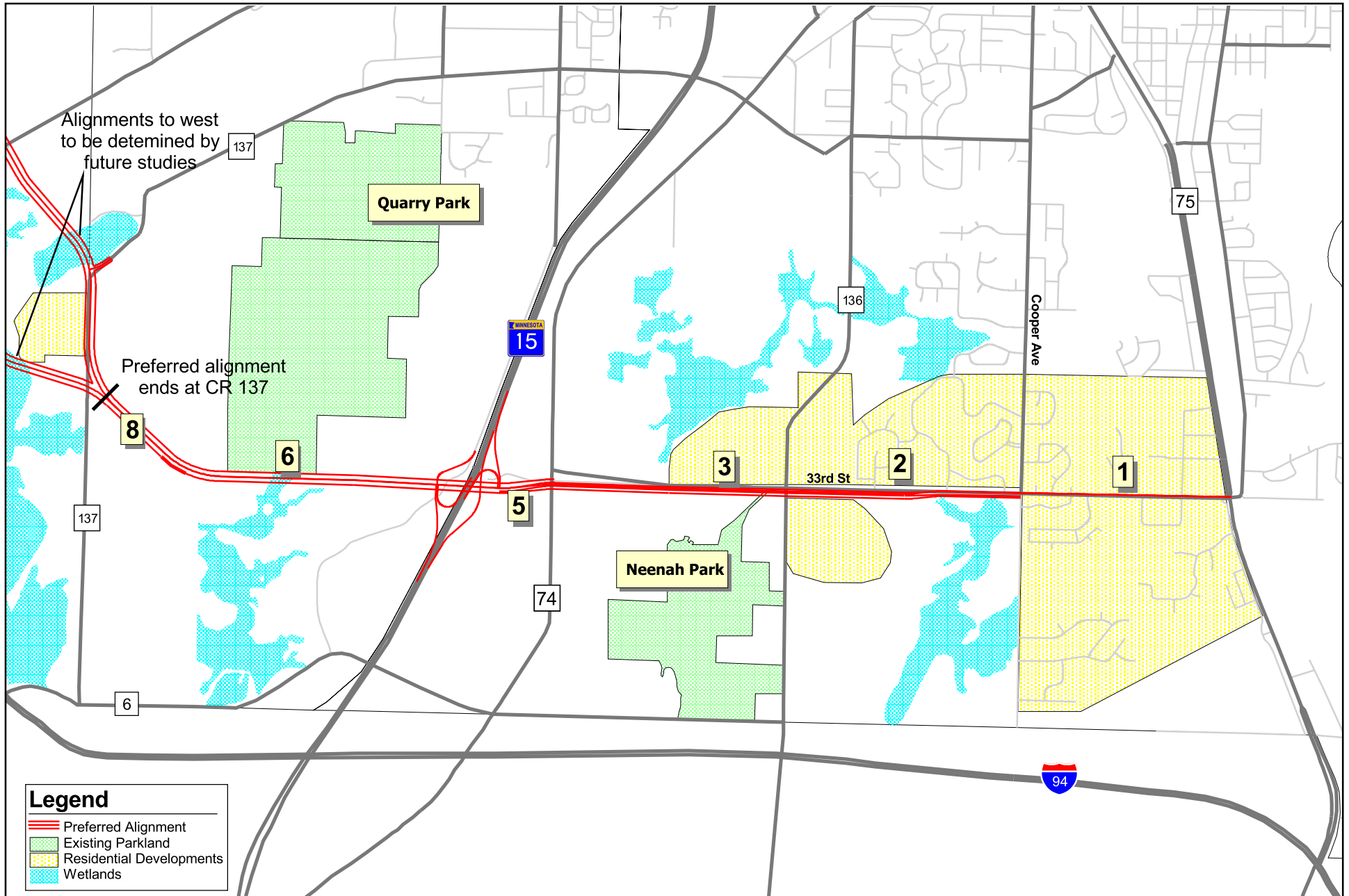
[4] Red Shouldered Hawk is prevalent throughout the study area. Tuberclcd rein Orchid has been found in the vicinity of the study area. Even though some of the sites are not directly impacted by an alignment, there could be other sites present.

[5] There are 2.5 acres of the 4.6 acres of wetland impact are due to mainline impacts to holding pond. There are 2.9 acres of the 5.7 acres impacted by ramps to holding pond.

[6] Assumes folded diamond type ramps on east side of TH 15. Of the total 2.3 acres of wetland impact, 1.6 acres are due to impacts to holding pond along State Highway 15. If standard diamond ramps are constructed on east side of TH 15 wetland impacts are 1.6 acres total and with no impacts to holding pond.

[7] In addition to the direct impact of 8.6 acres, the alignment isolates approximately 14 acres of future parkland from the main body of Quarry Park





## **V. STUDY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Study Findings**

1. The St. Cloud metropolitan area is anticipated to have significant growth over the next 25 years. Much of this growth will occur in the suburban areas surrounding the core metropolitan area.
2. An arterial facility has been shown in the southern part of the St. Cloud metropolitan area for numerous years; however, a specific alignment for this facility has not been designated.
3. Based on facility spacing guidelines, the current transportation system lacks a continuous east-west arterial facility in this area.
4. There is a lack of access to the regional system in this area due to access restrictions to I-94, State Highway 15 and other major routes. For example, to access I-94 in the study area, one has to either go to TH 23, TH 75 or travel up to TH 23/15 to get TH 15.
5. There are significant physical constraints to potential transportation facilities in this area including existing developments, parks, wetlands, granite outcroppings, potential archeological sites, railroads and the Sauk River.
6. Based on an Mn/Model evaluation, high potential for archeological sites exist in areas around granite outcroppings and in areas adjacent to Sauk River.
7. The APO transportation model indicates that the 2025 daily traffic volumes for the proposed facility range from 6,000 to 20,000. If 33rd Street is ever extended to the east to include a new river crossing and as a connection to TH 10, the volumes on the eastern part of the corridor (east of TH 15) increase between 2,000 and 6,000 vehicles per day.
8. Designating a continuous minor arterial in this area would provide a well-spaced transportation system for the area that will serve future growth of the area.
9. The use of existing 33rd Street for a majority of the alignment in the eastern portion of the study area minimizes the impacts to both the environment and existing developed areas.

### **Study Recommendations**

1. In order to achieve the objectives of the Southwest Arterial Alignment Study and to ensure that implementation is pursued in a uniform coordinated manner, it is recommended that all jurisdictions in the study area adopt the Southwest Arterial Alignment Study. It is also recommended that key elements of the study, such as potential alignments and access guidelines are included in updates to their comprehensive and/or transportation plans.

2. Based on the study, segments 1,2,3, 5, 6, and 8 are recommended as the alignment east of County Highway 137. The alignment west of County Highway 137 will be determined as part of a future north/south arterial alignment study that is being developed by the APO. The detailed location for this concept-level alignment (eastern section) are in Appendix D.
3. Local agencies should protect a 220 feet of right-of-way for a rural designed corridor or 150 feet of right-of-way for an urban parkway corridor. The desired facility characteristics and typical sections of these concepts are shown in Appendix C.
4. Connectivity to area parks is an important element of the facility. It is recommended that the facility provide room for an off-street trail along the facility. Crossing points and the TH 15 interchange should also be designed to safely accommodate these trails and trail crossings.
5. Access in the corridor should be managed using the following principals and policies:
  - A. Major crossings of controlled access facilities (free-flow facilities) should be developed to minimize conflicts and impact to major traffic flows.

***Policy:*** *The intersection with State Highway 15 should be grade-separated.*
  - B. Signalized access should be managed to ensure that corridor mobility is maintained.

***Policy:*** *Signalized intersections should be promoted first with non-freeway principal arterial routes, then with minor arterial routes, then with collector routes. The minimum spacing of these intersections should be ¼ to ½ mile. Local communities should plan arterial and collector routes to accommodate this spacing guideline.*
  - C. Other access should be minimized so as to reduce the number of conflicts in the corridor.

***Policy:*** *Intermediate access points (other than at 1/4 mile) may be permitted provided a minimum spacing of 880 feet (1/6 mile) exists with other intersections. These access points should not be signalized and should be limited to right-in/right-out.*
  - D. Public access intersections should be designed so that turning traffic is separated from through traffic to reduce the number of conflicts.

***Policy:*** *Turn lanes should be provided at all public access points and at major traffic generators.*

- E. Private access should be minimized or eliminated, whenever possible, for safety reasons and to protect the integrity of the corridor.

**Policy:** *No additional direct private access and business access should be permitted; existing private residences that have access should be limited to one access point; residences next to a side street (corner lot) should be accessed from the side street. Finally, access restriction should be considered (right-in/right-out) for access points that cannot be served by a public street*

- F. Agencies need to control parcel splits along the proposed corridor. The ability to control access to maintain safety and mobility can be lost when parcels are divided and split to create new parcels. This can result in agencies having to provide access to each additional parcel to the detriment of the whole corridor. Other access should be minimized so as to reduce the number of conflicts in the corridor.

**Policy:** *No additional parcel splits should be permitted unless the resulting new parcels are served by an access point that won't affect the future corridor. If additional parcel splits occur, access should be provided from an adjacent public street.*

- G. Agencies need to focus development efforts towards providing access at designated full-access intersections (intersections that are consistent with identified spacing guidelines).

**Policy:** *Proposed subdivisions adjacent to the corridor must be consistent with the access policies and spacing guidelines that have been developed. Subdivisions must provide access to adjacent parcels and provide reasonable frontage and/or backage roads to achieve the overall access goals. In addition, existing access locations that are adjacent to the new subdivisions should be reviewed for incorporation into the proposed plats.*

6. Local agencies should review their land use plans and subdivision ordinances and make appropriate changes to preserve the development of a future minor arterial corridor. It is recommended that municipalities continue to zone property in the area as agricultural land until such time as it is ready to be developed and platting of the property occurs. This will increase the communities' ability to guide development and/or preserve right-of-way for a future corridor.
7. It is recommended that the City of St. Cloud and Stearns County more thoroughly evaluate the eastern (urbanized) end of the corridor to determine how access and right of way issues may be addressed. This will require a more detailed analysis at a preliminary design level.
8. It is recommended that Stearns County pursue State Aid designation of the arterial alignment in accordance with State Aid mileage rules.
9. The implementing agency (agency that develops construction/improvement projects) will be required to prepare environmental reports for each phase of the project. It is

recommended that the County and/or Cities consider the following as they move into the environmental impacts of each phase:

- *Wetlands:* As implementation occurs, agencies should continue to make efforts to avoid, minimize and finally to mitigate wetland impacts. Near State Highway 23, basin 594W has been identified as a Mn/DNR-protected waterway. The Mn/DNR and the Army Corps of Engineers would regulate any impacts on this wetland resulting from the construction of the arterial. If this wetland were impacted, a final delineation, wetland determination and permit application would be required once the construction limits have been determined.
- *Cultural Resources:* As stated previously, the SHPO file search determined that the east-west section of the BNSF railroad has potential historical significance. Any rail crossing would therefore need to minimize any potential impacts. Cultural resources fieldwork should be performed in any area potentially impacted by the arterial alignment that has been identified by MnModel as having high probability for archaeological resources.
- *Endangered Species:* If any of the tubercled rein orchid populations or natural communities within the project area are potentially impacted by the arterial alignment, further information should be gathered to determine their exact extent and how the potential impacts can be minimized. Specific information can be obtained from the DNR, but field verification would be required.
- *Section 4(f):* As previously stated, there are plans to extend existing bicycle trails into the project area; this should be kept in mind in the planning process. As plans for these trails become more specific, efforts to maintain potential for trailway connections within the corridor should be made.
- *Water Resources:* Efforts should be made to minimize impacts to floodplains within the project area. Using existing bridges where possible should be evaluated; when new crossings are unavoidable, design should minimize bank fill and impacts to flow.
- *Contaminated Sites:* If an alignment connecting with existing CR 138 and crossing CSAH 75 is used, the contaminated site north of CSAH 75 should be further evaluated for its potential to be impacted by construction and/or to be acquired as right-of-way. This property would be sampled, if necessary, to determine the extent and magnitude of contaminated soil and/or groundwater in the areas of concern. The results of this investigation would be used to determine if the contaminated materials can be avoided or if the project's impacts to the properties can be minimized. If necessary, a plan would be developed for properly handling and treating contaminated soil and/or groundwater during construction. Any soil and groundwater remediation activities should be coordinated with appropriate regulatory agencies.

- *Coordination with Agencies:* As the preferred alignment alternative moves towards construction, meetings with representatives from agencies with potential concerns (DNR, Mn/DOT, SHPO, MPCA) should be set up. These meetings can be used to discuss the agencies' concerns regarding any potentially impacted resources. Any decisions reached in these discussions should be documented for future reference in the environmental documentation process.



# **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A – Public Involvement Information**

**Appendix B – Environmental Findings**

**Appendix C – Facility Characteristics and Alignment Information**

The information in this appendix provides additional details of the public involvement effort and the decision-making process that occurred throughout the study. This appendix includes information on initial planning sessions, TAC meeting minutes and comments from public as part of the open houses.

The approach to the study was an initial concern because alignment decisions needed to be based on sound analysis of the potential environmental impacts and/or risks. As a result, Stearns County and SRF Consulting Group, Inc. met with the Minnesota Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on July 5, 2000 to discuss how to proceed in a pre-NEPA corridor study. The purpose of the meeting was to review the proposed process for the study, the information that would be collected and the involvement of agencies and the public. The coordination and public involvement efforts are outlined in more detail as follows:

### **Regulatory and Resource Agencies**

Agencies with potential concerns within the project area were contacted as part of early coordination. The contacted agencies included the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and Mn/DOT. Information gathered from this coordination covered a wide range of topics including cultural resources, federal and state threatened and endangered species, historical/archaeological sites, water resources, habitat concerns, contaminated sites and parklands. The contacted agencies and the issues addressed by each are listed in Table B-1 of Appendix B. A sample early coordination letter is also located in Appendix B as well as responses received.

Additionally, local Park Departments were contacted to gather information of concern to area parklands. Those contacted include Stearns County, the City of St. Cloud and the City of Waite Park.

Mn/DOT has been a critical partner in the development of this study as a member of the TAC. They have also provided key information on environmental alignment considerations such as federal threatened and endangered species and cultural resources.

### **Community and Public Involvement**

In order for the study to be successful the communities in and surrounding the study area must develop a consensus for a single alignment alternative. This must occur before future constraints are developed in the study area such as new residential and business development. To develop this consensus on a single alignment a Technical Advisory Committee was formed with representatives of Stearns County, the Cities of St. Cloud, Waite Park, and St. Joseph, St. Joseph Township, the

Mn/DOT, and the St. Cloud APO. The proposed arterial alignments were presented to the TAC for review and comment. It was also requested that they take information back to their jurisdictions for further review and comment.

Additionally, a series of open houses were held to gather public input. The open houses were publicized to adjacent property owners via a letter sent by the county and to the general public with notices posted in the paper and at city and township halls.

Community and public input and consensus is critical in developing and choosing a preferred arterial alignment. The information presented, input obtained and decisions made at each TAC and public meeting is included in the Alignment Development section below.

## **TAC Minutes**

### **Meeting 1: Thursday, September 21, 2000, 2:00 pm - Stearns County Public Works**

#### **1. Introductions**

Mitch Anderson had everyone introduce themselves.

#### **2. Background**

Mitch Anderson and Dave Montebello presented background information on the study. Dave Montebello highlighted information on the handout that was distributed prior to the meeting.

The group discussed growth trends in the area and their impact on the transportation network.

Committee members discussed the history of beltway proposals at the city, county and regional levels.

#### **3. Study Goals and Objective**

Dave Montebello outlined the goals and objectives of the study. The committee members agreed that it was important to begin the process of defining and preserving a corridor for future use. Committee members indicated that preserving the proper amount of right-of-way was key in implementing any plan.

Dave Montebello presented the proposed alignments. Committee members suggested that the City of St. Joseph be included in the study given how close the alignment was to their border. Committee members also expressed an interest in an alignment that could continue north of TH 75.

#### **4. Study Status**

Jacqueline Corkle presented cultural, historical and environmental information on the two proposed alignments. Information for the map was gathered from the Department of Natural Resources, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and the Stearns County Parks Department. Committee members reviewed the map and identified a few additions (a recently discovered cemetery, turtles in Quarry Park, planned park improvements in the City of St. Cloud).

Terry Humbert explained why Mn/DOT's model included granite outcroppings as a potentially sensitive area. Granite outcroppings usually have a unique and diverse plant population in their immediate vicinity. Areas near the outcroppings are generally undisturbed because the land was of little use for farming or other purposes. Steve Gaetz indicated that St. Cloud has rules on protecting granite outcroppings. He promised to deliver a copy of those rules.

Dave Montebello asked committee members to take a copy of the map back to their communities and review it for any additional comments.

Committee members expressed interest in including proposed trail alignments in the study area. The APO indicated that they could provide a bike plan.

## **5. Next Steps**

Dave Montebello suggested that the next step in the process is to bring the public into the discussion. He indicated that it was appropriate to hold an open house on the proposed alignments. The committee discussed the best way to inform individuals that had potential to be impacted by the study. It was decided that the County should be the agency assigned to send out a letter to residents.

## **Meeting 2: Thursday, October 19, 2000, 2:00 pm - Stearns County Public Works**

### **1. Review Maps and Layouts – Discuss Changes**

Because there were new committee members present, Mitch Anderson had everyone introduce themselves.

David Montebello began the meeting by asking for comments on the maps showing the study area that were distributed at the previous meeting.

Steve Gaetz from the City of St. Cloud indicated that the additions to the map (parks in the City of St. Cloud) looked good. He indicated that Jerry Hengel was the person at the city to contact about any of the environmental ordinances. Steve also indicated a preference for the alignment adjacent to Quarry Park because it limits access to the roadway and it would provide a larger parcel to work with for development.

Dean Hakamp from the City of Waite Park stated that his community was concerned about the location and type of interchange that would be proposed for crossing TH 15. SRF will work on an interchange design to show to the committee.

Chuck Wocken from the County Park's Department felt that the map accurately portrayed the County's interests for parkland. He suggested that the corner of the property proposed to be incorporated into Quarry Park was of lesser importance than the area marked as a scientific study area. He forwarded the Park Board's recommendation that a bike trail or hiking trail be developed adjacent to the roadway.

Jennifer Buckentine from the County Environmental Services' Department stated that wetland replacement was their biggest concern. She iterated the County's wetland mitigation policy of a one to one ratio. She also indicated support for the southerly alignment at the TH 15 interchange.

Chad Carlson from the City of St. Joseph asked if it was possible to modify the alignment north of CSAH 75. He indicated that part of the north/south portion of the alignment was going through a proposed industrial park, and that one factory has already been built in that area. SRF agreed to shift the alignment in this area. The committee also agreed to add another potential north/south alignment on the east side of the trailer park (this alignment may have greater building and wetland impacts).

Scott Mereck from the APO stated that they would make a recommendation regarding the need for a beltway facility at their November meeting. At this point, staff indicated that they feel there is not a need for a beltway system. If such a need exists in the future, staff felt they would prefer to use the existing Interstate system. The APO representative distributed a map showing their interpretation of a supporting transportation network.

The committee discussed the comments from the various organizations. It was pointed out that the map distributed by the APO looked very similar to the proposed alignment that was put forth. The committee felt that there may be some difference in terminology, but that both plans were relatively similar. The APO indicated that they did not (at this time) support a smooth corridor; rather, they supported using a grid

system. The committee also discussed the potential alignment by the trailer park. The committee agreed that the social justice issue would have to be further explored.

## **2. Documentation of Alignment Decisions**

At the end of the meeting Dave Montebello distributed a write-up on the history of alignment decisions.

## **3. Public Open House**

The committee discussed the open house. It was decided that it would be held on Wednesday, December 6, 2000, from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm. The first location choice was Discovery Elementary School; the back-up location was the Basement of Waite Park City Hall.

The committee thought it would be a good idea to have a presentation and question and answer session at the open house. It was agreed that the open house would be divided into two parts. The first part would go from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm. During this time the presentation would focus on the area east of TH 15. During the second part (from 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm) the focus of the presentation would be on the area west of TH 15. Invitees can attend any or all of the sessions.

The committee agreed that the County should send out the letter informing adjacent property owners of the open house. Mitch Anderson also suggested that notices should be put in the paper or that there should be a story in the paper about the open house. Additionally, notices will be posted in city and township halls.

## **4. Next Steps**

SRF Consulting Group, Inc. will prepare a letter for the county to distribute to adjacent property owners. SRF will also start to prepare informational materials and presentation materials for the open house. The TAC will review these materials at their next meeting. The County will send invitations to adjacent property owners.

### **Meeting 3: Thursday, November 30, 2000, 2:00 pm - Stearns County Public Works**

#### **1. Review Traffic Information from APO**

Bill Hansen from the St. Cloud APO presented the 2025 area Master Plan. Information in this presentation focused on the growth of the area, the timing of growth in the area, and future transportation needs because of the growth.

#### **2. Review Changes in Concept Layouts**

Dave Montebello asked committee members to review the changes made to the layout since the last meeting.

Committee members made the following comments:

- Someone requested that the crossing on TH 23 be aligned with the existing alignment
- The committee asked Dave to explain how the interchange at TH 15 worked. They also asked for a larger picture for the open house.
- Chuck Wocken indicated that a piece of Quarry Park was inappropriately shaded – it was labeled existing park, it should be future park or blank.

#### **3. Review and Discuss Presentation Materials**

Committee members reviewed the posters and presentation materials for the open house. Committee members suggested the following:

- Change title of presentation to Southwest Arterial Alignment Study
- Change NSP to Xcel Energy
- Include committee member names on the comment form
- Ask the City of Waite Park if there is a development moratorium

#### **4. Next Steps**

The committee members were given a copy of the open house notice that was sent to property owners along the proposed alignments.

The next committee meeting was scheduled for January 11, 2001 at 2:00 pm.



## **Meeting 4: Thursday, January 11, 2001, 2:00 pm - Stearns County Public Works**

### **1. December 6, 2000 Open House**

Dave Montebello informed committee members that there was a large turnout for the open house. He indicated that committee members should have received a copy of the written comments submitted by property owners in their agenda packets. Dave indicated that, for the most part, all of the comments, questions and discussions have been constructive. Many of the written comments indicate a preference to avoid impacts to certain property parcels. Most of these conflict with one another. For example, one comment preferred alignment 3B and another wanted to avoid alignment 3B and utilize 3C. Dave asked committee members if they had received any additional comments. Scott Mereck indicated that the APO received one letter. Jodi Teich stated that the County had also received a letter from the same individual as the APO.

Most of the comments that were received dealt with property owners on or near the proposed alignments.

Dave Montebello distributed small copies of the study area with the proposed alignment to committee members so that they could review the comments that were submitted by residents.

Dave Montebello outlined a process for moving forward with selecting an alignment. This process includes getting input from the communities on alignment preferences, identifying inputs for each alternative, and obtaining input from regulatory agencies. SRF agreed to work with local agencies to assist them with explaining the options.

### **2. Revisions to Alignments**

Dave Montebello indicated the changes that were made to the proposed alignments based on community and agency input:

- Realignment at TH 23 to use existing crossing
- Realignment of western alignments south of CSAH 75 – move alignments closer to the wetlands
- Realignment just west of Quarry Park – move away from a farm

Some of the members expressed concerns over being too responsive to changes. The rationale for this is that development of the alignment would coincide with local developments and some flexibility should be maintained. Dave indicated that SRF will work on a set of policy statements that would tie down the corridor at critical points, but offer some flexibility to land owners to adjust the alignment between these areas.

Committee members asked if some reworking of the interchange at TH 15 could be done. Committee members thought that a straighter alignment could be created if the interchange was moved a bit to the south. Scott Mereck and Steve Gaetz indicated that more detailed aerials are available now. Scott offered SRF the use of the APO's copies.

### 3. Alignment Impacts

Dave Montebello presented committee members with a matrix that highlighted the environmental impacts of the proposed alternatives. Committee members had the following comments on the proposed alignments:

- Steve Gaetz indicated that environmental issues will be the “big deal” in St. Cloud. He requested that the County or SRF attend a planning commission meeting and a city council meeting to present the proposed alternatives.
- Steve Gaetz also asked about what happens to existing intersections on the eastern portion of the alignment. He suggested looking at expanding the right-of-way to accommodate a four- or five-lane urban corridor. Steve requested a possible addendum to the contract in order to evaluate additional right-of-way needs in developed areas along 33rd street. He was especially concerned with the existing 33rd street alignment if a river crossing was provided.
- A couple of committee members expressed interest in modifying the interchange at TH 15 to provide a straighter alignment towards Quarry Park.
- Scott Mereck suggested that some modeling be done to see if there was a preference among the north-south alignments.
- Several committee members indicated that the easternmost north-south alignment (eastern1) probably did not impact as much wetland as was indicated in the matrix. Apparently the wetlands indicated in the national inventory have already been disturbed, and a more detailed wetlands analysis done for a developer has indicated substantially less wetland in this area. SRF will obtain this information, or note the potential reduction if the size of this wetland is reduced.
- Significant discussion occurred on the north-south alignments. A number of committee members felt that the north-south alignment design needed to consider connections further to the north. The APO is planning to conduct a north-south arterial alignment study in the future. As a result, the TAC suggested focusing specific alignment discussions east of County Highway 137. The TAC agreed that some correspondence should be forwarded to property owners notifying them of this change and the delay in the second open house.

### 4. Next Steps

Dave Montebello indicated that a meeting with the environmental agencies would be set to talk about the study status and the proposed alternatives.

The next Technical Advisory Committee Meeting was scheduled for February 28, 2001, at 2:00 pm. This meeting was subsequently rescheduled for May 31, 2001.

## **Meeting 5: Thursday, May 31, 2001, 2:00 pm - Stearns County Public Works**

### **1. Project Update**

Dave Montebello provided the TAC members with an update of the work that has been completed since the January meeting. He indicated that the concepts for the east-west portion of the arterial alignment had been presented to the Cities of Waite Park and St. Cloud for their review. Dave stated that the two cities had indicated preference for the alternative that ran the “straightest” past Quarry Park and Highway 15.

Dave also informed the committee that federal and state agencies were given the opportunity to review a draft copy of the project document. He indicated that there were no major objections voiced by the agencies. He also stated that the agencies did not have a lot of comments because a complete environmental documentation had not yet been completed.

Dave indicated that based on the comments from the Cities of Waite Park and St. Cloud, along with the comments from state and federal agencies, a draft report with a preferred alternative was developed. TAC members were sent a copy of the draft report and preferred alternative prior to the meeting. They were asked to bring their comments to today’s meeting.

### **2. Comments**

TAC members made a few grammatical suggestions and provided SRF copies of their comments. Committee members did not suggest any significant changes for the document or for the preferred alternative. Dave indicated that a final report would be prepared following the second open house – comments from the second open house and alignment tweaks based on those comments would require the final document and final preferred alignment to wait until after the open house.

### **3. Open House**

Mitch Anderson reminded the committee that the preferred concept needed to be brought back to the public for review and comment. He suggested that the open house be held sometime in July. The committee agreed to hold the open house on July 11, 2001. The open house was to be scheduled from 6:30 to 8:30 pm at Waite Park City Hall. A brief presentation will be prepared for 7:00 pm.

### **4. Next Steps**

An open house was scheduled for July. A revised report will be prepared in August and distributed to the county in September.

## Open House Comments

Two open houses were conducted during this study. The comments are listed below.

### December 6, 2000 Open House Comments

#### St. Cloud Area

- How does the interchange at TH 15 work?
- Has a lot of thought gone into the design of the ramps? Do they fit?
- Will currently poor geometrics at 33rd Street and 74 be fixed?
- Would 33rd Street be made into a four-lane roadway?
- Do you (city or county) pay for the land that is taken?
- How much right-of-way can a city or county require when a plat is created? What options does a property owner have?
- What happens to wetlands?
- How long will it be before the road is built?
- Will there be traffic lights? Will there be stop signs?
- Will this project encourage growth? Will it promote growth outside of the downtown area?
- Are there plans for fencing?
- Is this road being pushed forward because developers want the land rezoned?
- How fast will the road be?
- How does Emanate Domain serve the public?

#### Area West of TH 15

- How does the city or county purchase land? What is the legal process?
- What happens if you want to develop your property? What happens if you only want to develop a small portion of your property?
- Are you getting pressure from developers to put forth the idea of this roadway?
- What type of access will be along the corridor?
- Will this road follow existing alignments?
- 220 feet is a large amount of land for right-of-way, it may split property. That could cause a loss. How will the loss of space be repaid/covered?
- What type of road will it be? A county, city, etc. road?
- Why should the roads stay away from wetlands? Why can't they go through them? They contribute nothing to the tax base.
- Alignments should be put closer to wetlands so that they do not split good farmland.

## **July 11, 2001 Open House Comments**

### Type of Facility

Residents asked what type of facility the planned arterial roadway would be. SRF Consulting Group, Inc. presented a couple of sections showing different options (parkway and non-parkway). All of the options included space for a separate trail alignment. Mitch Anderson indicated that it would be a two-lane facility, with the potential to expand to an ultimate four-lane roadway. This facility would be under the jurisdiction of Stearns County.

### Right-of-Way Purchases

Some residents were concerned about their property. They feared that the preferred alignment would require the taking of their property for right-of-way or for construction. It was explained that some properties would have to be taken for the construction of the project; there were no alternatives that avoided all existing residences and businesses. Dave Montebello of SRF Consulting Group, Inc. indicated that a more detailed alignment, with references to county coordinates, would be completed within the next couple of months. Once the alignment was depicted accurately, a better idea of actual impacts would be able to be determined. Dave also indicated that the preferred concept avoided as many existing residences and businesses as possible. Existing roadways were utilized where possible and heavily populated areas were avoided. Property that is impacted by the development of the roadway will either have to be purchased outright or property owners will be compensated for the taking of part of their land.

Residents expressed concern that wetlands and turtles appeared to receive a higher priority than homes built by people in the community. Dave Montebello and Mitch Anderson indicated that there are environmental regulations that must be followed in order for a project to move forward. Part of the environmental regulations require wetlands and threatened and/or endangered species be avoided unless there are no prudent and/or feasible alternatives.

### Traffic Projections

A question was asked by a member of the audience if the projected traffic numbers on the arterial route were based on the construction of a new river crossing just to the east of the project. Dave Montebello and Scott Mereck (from the St. Cloud APO) indicated that the numbers did not include a new river crossing.

### Timing of Construction

Residents in the audiences asked for an approximate timeline for the development of the arterial roadway. Mitch Anderson and Dave Montebello indicated that it was a long-term project that would be developed as growth occurred. As parcels are to be platted, developers will be required to set aside right-of-way for the road. Mitch indicated that funding would be sought after an environmental document was completed. The area that is most likely to get improvements first is the TH 15 interchange area. This could happen as soon as 2007 (within the next five years).

## **February 13, 2001 Presentations to the Cities of Waite Park and St. Cloud**

On the evening of February 13, 2001, SRF Consulting Group, Inc. and Stearns County made presentations to the Waite Park City Council and the St. Cloud Planning Commission. The presentations included figures of the proposed concepts along with a matrix that indicated impacts to businesses, residences, wetlands, and threatened and/or endangered species. The presentations also included background information on the study and highlighted the process that had been followed to date. Following the presentations, comments on preferred alternatives were collected. Both agencies indicated preference for the “straighter” alternative that extended west of existing 33rd Street.

## **March 26, 2001 Meeting with Federal and State Agencies**

Regulatory agencies met at SRF offices to discuss the project and provide input on issues and concerns. Issues ranged from identification of secondary impacts due to growth and development to considering options of using existing routes such as I-94. Other key issues identified included how this facility fit into the larger picture. Does it impact considerations of a future river crossing? Most of the agencies liked the advanced planning and coordination that has gone on, but indicated that this process is really an effort to reduce local agency risk in protecting a future alignment prior to a full environmental evaluation process.

A map showing cultural features and locations of potential environmental concerns along with the alignment alternatives within the study corridor is provided in Figure 4.

### **Location Determining Issues**

A pre-NEPA corridor study as described by NCHRP 435 still needs to take into account the legal requirements of NEPA. NCHRP 435 identifies several "location determining statutes" that need to be addressed when comparing potential alternatives in a pre-NEPA corridor study. These statutes include Section 4(f) of the DOT Act of 1966, the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and parts of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act dealing with wetlands. In addition to the "location determining statutes" identified in NCHRP 435, environmental data was also collected for other potentially important issues, including: site contamination, state of Minnesota DNR Protected Waters, and unique plant and wildlife habitats. The results concerning each location determining statute and additional data collected are as follows.

### **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

There are no wild and scenic rivers within the study area; however, the Mississippi River to the east of the study area is designated as a state wild and scenic river.

### **Section 404**

To identify any potential wetlands in the project area, the Mn/DNR Protected Waters and Wetlands Map of Stearns County (1996), the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps (St. Joseph and St. Cloud quadrangles, 1987), and aerial photographs (1991) of the area were reviewed.

There are many wetlands throughout the study area, including six designated as DNR Protected Waters. There is the potential for the northern tip of Protected Water 594, a type 6 wetland, to be impacted by the one of the north-south alignments. Part way through the study, the Technical Advisory Committee decided to limit the alignment discussions to the east-west portion of the corridor.

### **Section 4(f)**

Section 4(f) impacts would result if the proposed alignment impacted publicly owned parklands, waterfowl or wildlife refuges, recreational areas, historic sites or any other property determined to

be subject to the provisions of DOT Section 4(f). Information obtained from Minnesota DNR and local governments indicates the following potential Section 4(f) resources within the study area:

- Quarry Park lies within and to the north of the study area, just west of TH 15. Part of the park was recently acquired as a state SNA. As part of the SNA program, no building of roads or trails or change in topography is allowed within the protected parkland. None of the alignments is anticipated to directly impact Quarry Park.
- The Glacial Lakes State Trail is planned to expand from Richmond to St. Cloud; this future trail would likely be in the project area.
- The Wobegon Trail is also planned to link with St. Cloud, along a path parallel to the BNSF railroad along CSAH 75 at the northern edge of the project area.
- A small access strip extends north from Neenah Park to 33rd Street. A portion of this access strip would be impacted by any improvement in the 33rd Street corridor.

There were no other potential Section 4(f) properties identified in the study area.

## **Section 106**

Potential properties subject to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act include: structures listed on or eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, structures greater than 50 years old that have unique or historical value, tribal lands or lands found to have tribal importance, lands with known archaeological resources, and areas with high potential for archaeological resources based on factors such as topography, soil type and water resource history. Information on the locations of potential Section 106 properties within the study area was obtained from the Mn/DOT Cultural Resources department and from SHPO.

The SHPO file search determined that there are two sites where archaeological artifacts have been found within the study area: one at the eastern end in St. Cloud Township, and the other in the northwestern portion in St. Joseph Township. Both of these are sites where lithic scatter was found. The SHPO file search also determined that the east-west section of the BNSF railroad, north of CSAH 75, is potentially of historical significance.

The Mn/DOT Cultural Resources staff provided information from their structures file search and from a MnModel evaluation of the likely potential for archaeological sites to be present within the study area. The structures search indicated that there are six potential Section 106 structures within the study area. All six are in the city of St. Joseph, to the west of any potential alignments.

The MnModel results indicated two major areas of suspected high probability areas for archaeological resources along the Mississippi and Sauk Rivers, with some smaller high potential areas between the rivers. The high probability areas should be avoided, if possible, by any proposed alignments; however, the true potential for impacts would not be known without further field investigations.



## **Endangered Species Act**

There are currently no reports of federally threatened or endangered species within the project area, as confirmed in a telephone conversation with the Mn/DOT wildlife biologist. However, it will be necessary to request a formal letter regarding the presence of federally listed endangered species as the project development/NEPA process continues in the future.

The Minnesota Natural Heritage database file search conducted by the Minnesota DNR determined that there are several sites within the project area with state threatened and endangered species and natural communities (see listing at the end of Appendix B). Of the 43 rare features within a one-mile radius of the project area, sixteen are actually in the area of concern. A specimen of the threatened Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) was found along CSAH 75 south of 33rd Street, not within the arterial's probable right of way. Red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) activity has been documented within the SNA parcel of Quarry Park between 1993 and 1997. Since the alignment will avoid Quarry Park, there should be no impacts to this species of special concern.

The endangered tubercled rein orchid (*Platanthera flava* variety *Herbiola*) has been identified in four sites within the study area. One population is within the SNA portion of Quarry Park, but should not be affected by the proposed alignment. A localized population occurs north of the proposed alignment within the maximum boundaries of Quarry Park in the St. Cloud Township. The other two orchid populations are located south of the proposed alignment in St. Cloud Township.

## **Additional Environmental Issues**

### Unique Natural Habitats

There are five sites identified as natural communities within the study area. Two are within the SNA portion of Quarry Park, so will not be affected by the proposed alignments. One site is located within a wetland along the eastern edge of the project area. The other two are associated with large granite outcroppings that would hinder roadway construction and therefore are unlikely to be affected by the proposed corridor.

The DNR Natural Heritage database search also indicated that there are several areas of biodiversity significance in the study area. These are areas with a high percentage of native species, and generally correspond with the natural communities. Although there is no regulatory protection for these areas unless they are found to contain threatened or endangered species, avoidance is the preferable approach from an environmental impacts standpoint.

### Water Resources

The DNR Environmental Review and Assistance Unit was solicited for any views on potential impacts to water resources under their jurisdiction within the study area. Their full reply is found at the end of Appendix B.

The proposed arterial will cross the Sauk River, with the potential to impact its floodplain and the high quality habitat for walleye and smallmouth bass contained in this section of the river. Use of the current river crossing, located in the western part of the study area, would have the least environmental impacts. One trout stream, five tributaries to the Sauk River (all unnamed except County Ditch 17) and one tributary to the Mississippi River - all DNR Protected Waters - are within the study area and could potentially be impacted. The Section 404 discussion above describes a potential impact to DNR Protected Wetland No. 594.

### Contaminated Sites

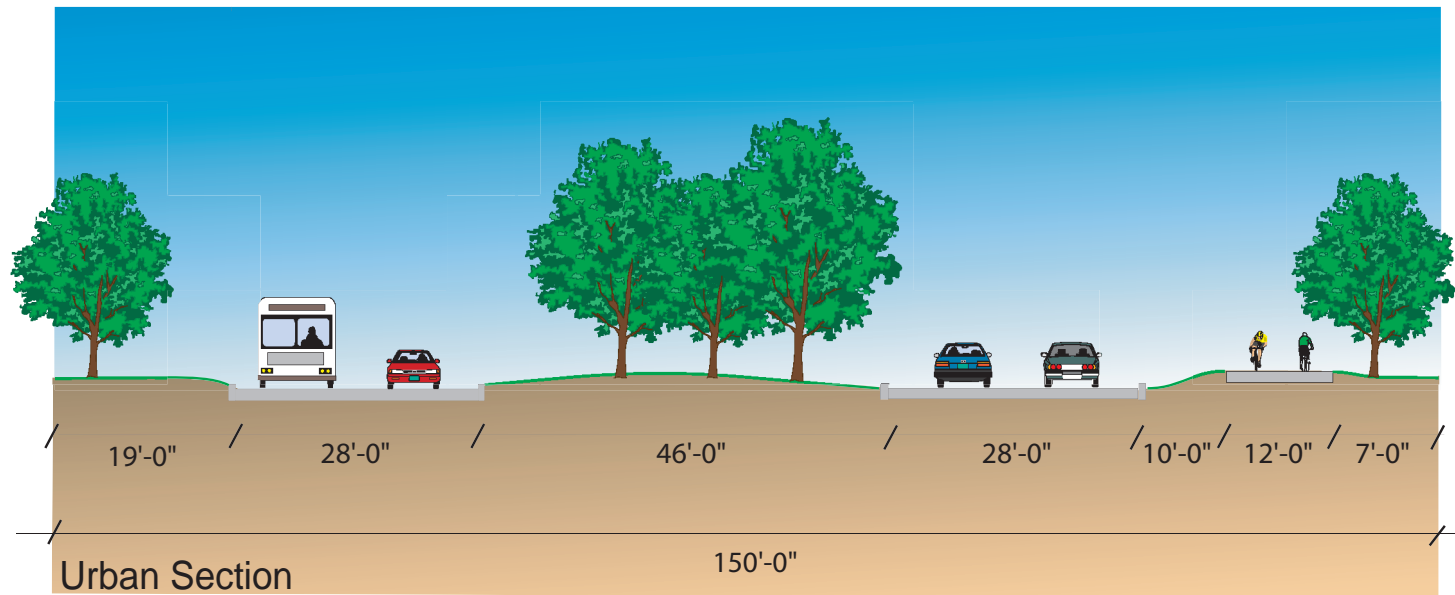
A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) search of their Permanent List of Priorities, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Priorities List and Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System determined that there are eight sites of potential environmental contamination within a one-mile radius of the study area. Of these, two are within the study area: one is located approximately two miles southeast of St. Joseph north of the BNSF railroad in St. Joseph Township; and the other is located on the east side of Clearwater Road, north of Montrose Road in St. Cloud. Both of these sites are unlikely to be affected by the arterial alignments, given their peripheral location.

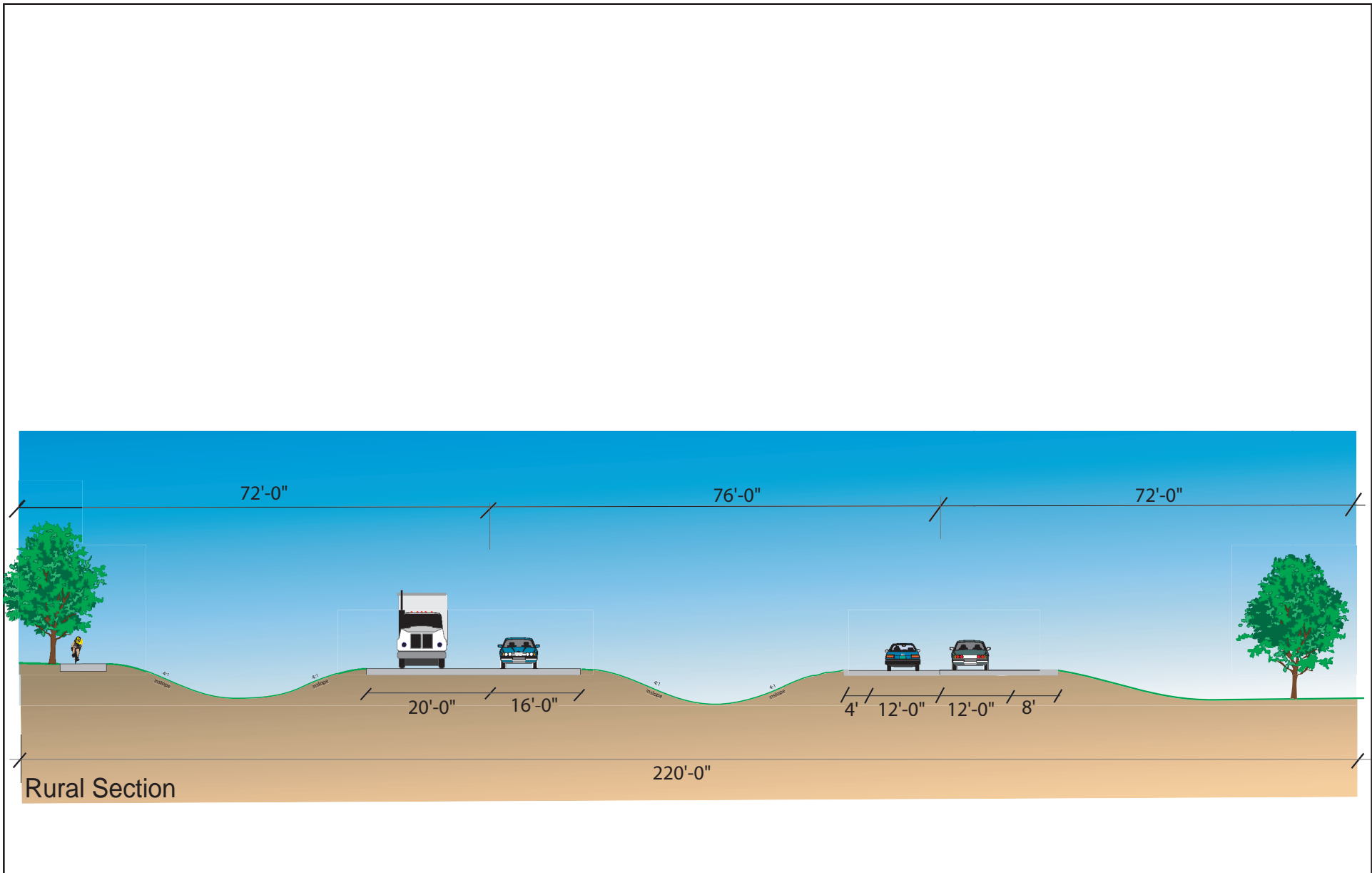
The file evaluation for Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) sites found ten such sites within a half-mile radius of the corridor. Of these, two are within the study area. The first site was discovered June 11, 1997 and "closed" by the MPCA (i.e. no further action or study is required on this site as of April 15, 1999). This site is unlikely to be impacted by the proposed corridor given its peripheral location. The second site was discovered January 22, 1999, and the MPCA investigation of this site is still open. The second site is located within a fourth of a mile of one of the possible alignments, north of CSAH 75.

### **Facility Characteristics**

The study partners agreed that the corridor is envisioned as a minor arterial that will connect adjacent communities in the region and facilitate the movement of traffic between business concentrations and residential areas. A typical cross-section is shown in Figure C-1. The minor arterial is expected to have the following key characteristics:

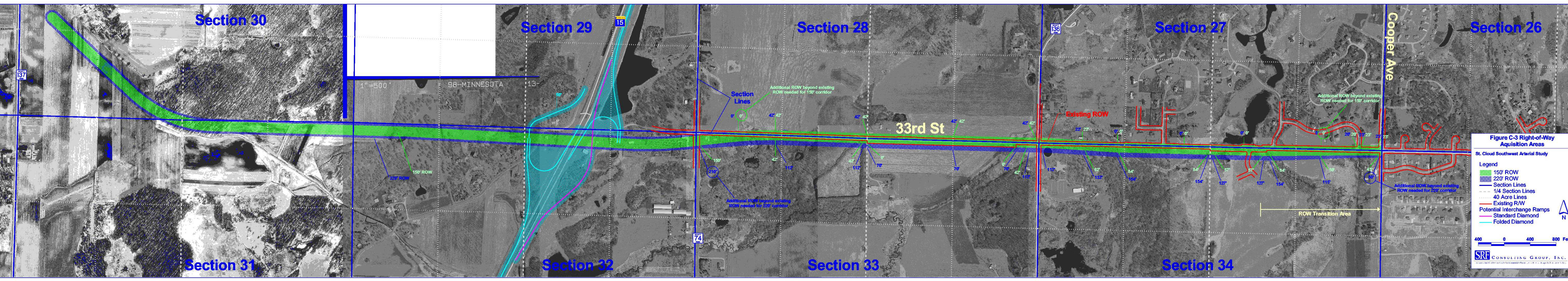
- Grade-separated interchange at junction of TH 15 and limited at-grade access in remaining sections of the corridor.
- At-grade intersections should have both left and right turn lanes provided to minimize conflicts with through vehicles.
- A posted speed of 40 to 50 mile per hour (mph) with minimum design speeds of 55 mph.
- Depending on the density of development, the corridor should be designed to ultimately accommodate up to 35,000 vehicles per day. This would suggest being able to expand the facility to a minimum of four through lanes and have full access intersection spacing not closer than ¼ to ½ mile.
- Off street trails that would connect residential, business, and park areas. There are two regional trail systems that are planned to connect into the study area. The Glacial Lakes State Trail is planned to expand from Richmond to St. Cloud; this future trail would enter the corridor along Highway 23 in the middle of the study area. The Lake Wobegon Trail is also planned to link with St. Cloud, along a path parallel to the BNSF railroad in the northern edge of the project area. Special treatments and potential trail heads should be considered when planning for interfaces between these different modes of travel.
- A minimum of 220 feet of right-of-way is recommended for a rural design and a minimum of 150 feet of right of way is recommended for an urban design (curb and gutter). These right-of-way widths will provide flexibility in accommodating the above characteristics.
- Adjacent transportation facilities that connect to this facility should provide the proper number of lanes to ensure efficient turning movements.





## **Alignment Information**

The study partners indicated that it was important to have a definitive alignment for planning and development purposes. The partners agreed to have specific alignment references for use by local and regional planning agencies. Figure C-3 shows the additional right-of-way width needed for both the urban and rural design options.



**Figure C-3 Right-of-Way Acquisition Areas**  
 St. Cloud Southwest Arterial Study

**Legend**

- 150' ROW
- 220' ROW
- Section Lines
- 1/4 Section Lines
- 40 Acre Lines
- Existing R/W
- Potential Interchange Ramps
- Standard Diamond
- Folded Diamond

400 0 400 800 Feet

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