

Mobility Enhancements for Regional Growth & Equity (MERGE) Project

Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Opportunity (MPDG) Grant Application May 2024

MERGE Project Highlights:

- To date, the project has received multiple “Highly Recommended” and “Medium-High” ratings from previous RAISE and MPDG pursuits.
- The 35th & 47th Avenue crossings in the project are used heavily by students and families walking, rolling, and biking.
- The 35th & 47th Avenue interchanges would realize immediate safety benefits by reducing approximately 40% of the crashes through the elimination of signals at the at-grade section.
- Given the asset lives of major elements of the project, approximately \$6M in discounted residual value benefits will be delivered.
- The 2050 population forecast for the state is 7.48M, with 6.3M along the Front Range (Greeley’s region), or 85% of the total population.
- The project will increase travel time reliability for freight movement through the City of Greeley.
- Construction will result in the creation of 1,000 job years.
- A reduction of 40% of air pollutants is expected as a result of the project.
- GHG emission reductions will result in a benefit of \$6,957,000 for a 7% discount rate over 20-years.
- School bus service is not provided within 3 miles of high schools or 2 miles of middle schools in the district, making walkability and the public transit heavily used by students.
- The entire micro-transit fleet will be 100% powered through solar arrays located at the mobility hub.
- The project is expected to have an Individual Categorical Exclusion (ICE).



Project Readiness



Project Readiness

The MERGE project is expected to have an Individual Categorical Exclusion (ICE).

The City of Greeley, in conjunction with the Colorado DOT and other project funding partners, is ready for obligation as soon as the necessary environmental documentation can be completed. The proposed project has been developed through extensive planning and environmental studies with public engagement, with preliminary engineering and design nearly complete on the major components; namely, the two proposed US 34 interchanges at 35th and 47th Avenues and the proposed new mobility hub between them.

Previous Studies

The Colorado DOT (CDOT) commissioned [the US 34 Planning and Environmental Linkages \(PEL\) Study](#) in January 2019 which represented collaboration between multiple local and regional agencies with the US 34 and evaluated the 35th Avenue interchange project as a priority project.

The components of the proposed project (two proposed interchanges at 35th and 47th Avenues) have been identified as priority projects in state and regional long-term planning, including the following:

[2045 Regional Transportation Plan \(NFRMPO\)](#)

[2040 Regional Transit Element \(NFRMPO\)](#)

[Greeley Evans Transit Plan \(GET\)](#)

[LINKNoCO Premium Transit Study](#)

A RAISE Grant Application, the [Greeley Regional Interchange Project \(GRIP\)](#) was submitted to the USDOT in July 2021 for the 35th Avenue interchange. The interchange will provide much needed improvements to mobility, significant congestion reduction, and substantial mobility and safety improvements for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians. A debrief with the USDOT indicated that this application was highly recommended for grant approval. In 2022 and 2023, the City of Greeley applied for the proposed MERGE project to obtain MPDG funding. The project was eligible for funding through INFRA, RURAL, and MEGA grants but was not selected. There were also additional requests for information from the MPDG review team during the review process which were addressed by the City. The City of Greeley obtained subsequent debriefs with FHWA to receive scoring from the application. The City has addressed all the comments received during the course of the MPDG review and the debrief notes can be found in the [Appendix A](#).

Environmental Risk

A thorough review of the baseline human and natural environment resources along the US 34 corridor in the project study area has been completed and GIS data and mapping has been developed. Land use in the vicinity of the US 34 and 47th Avenue intersection is generally commercial and largely developed. There are parcels of undeveloped land in all four quadrants consisting of previously dedicated or preserved right-of-way for a future interchange. The land use in the vicinity of the US 34 and 35th Avenue intersection is mixed and largely developed. There are pockets of undeveloped land in the southeast and northwest quadrants nearer to the intersection. The City of Greeley has initiated a long-term lease of the land required for the new mobility hub with local funds, the City of Greeley will follow all applicable State and Federal requirements for acquisition of additional ROW.

Upon review of the human and natural environmental resources, the project team anticipates no significant environmental risks or impacts and completion of the NEPA environmental document prior to right-of-way acquisition. An environmental screening table covering social, economic, and other environmental topics is presented in [Appendix E](#).

Preliminary discussions with CDOT indicates that the project will qualify for an Individual Categorical Exclusion under NEPA policies.

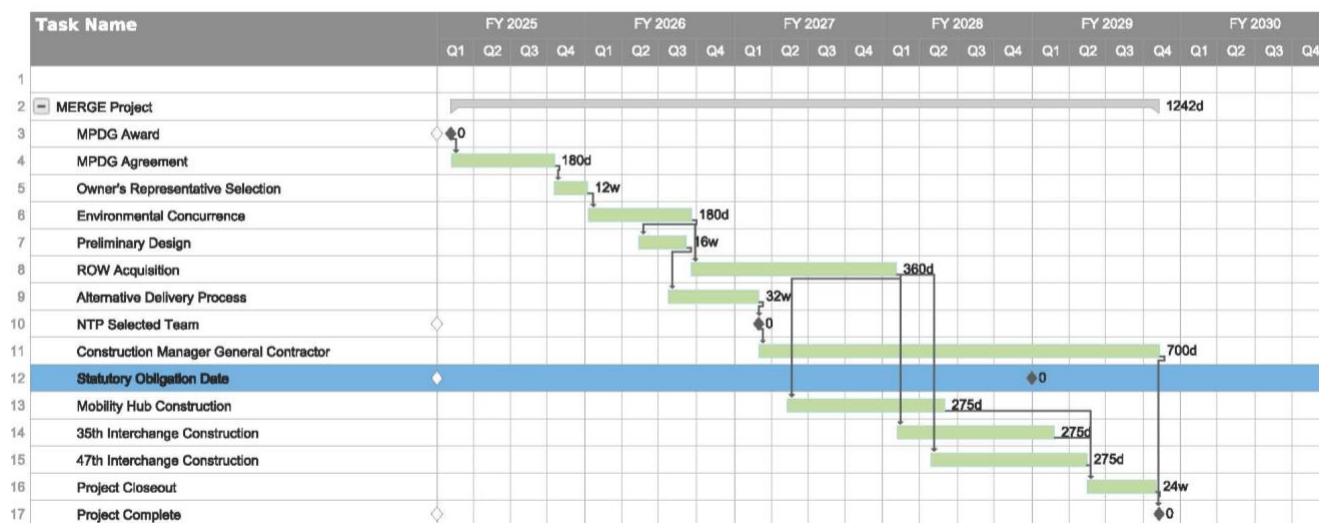
It is important to note that each element of the MERGE project, namely the two interchanges at 35th and 45th Avenue and the mobility hub/regional transit hub can be constructed independently and are treated as independent utility for environmental clearance purposes. However, to realize maximum environmental, cost, schedule, and impact to the traveling public, the projects may be delivered as concurrent packages in accordance with USDOT guidance.

Project Schedule

The proposed project schedule identifies all the major project milestones and assumes the MPDG Grant award as identified in **Figure 12** below. The proposed project schedule provides adequate time to meet the MPDG obligation and expenditure requirements as required by the Notice of Funding Opportunity. As seen from the project schedule, the City is confident that the work will be started before the statutory obligation date of September 30, 2026 and completed by FFY 2029. The Mobility Hub construction does not require right of way acquisition, so therefore can begin construction prior to the noted 360 days and before the statutory obligation date. The project schedule shows the independent utility nature of each of the project elements as each element can be constructed separately if needed based on ROW acquisition timeframes. As seen within the schedule, the CMGC is the critical path item which will determine the most efficient way to deliver the project.

Figure 12: Project Schedule

MERGE Proposed Schedule - MPDG 2024



Required Approvals

Environmental Permits and Reviews

The proposed project has permanent right-of-way acquisition for the 47th Avenue interchange as described in CDOT's [US 34 – 35th & 47th Avenues Interchange Selection Report](#). No permanent right-of-way (ROW) is anticipated to be required for the development of the 35th Avenue interchange. ROW will be needed for the mobility hub, areas along 35th Avenue north of the proposed interchange, and the construction of the 47th Avenue interchanges. The anticipated ROW areas can be seen on the [project website](#).

As part of CDOT's [US 34 – 35th & 47th Avenues Interchange Selection Report](#), two public involvement meetings were held, and no negative comments were received which demonstrated public acceptance and approval of the proposed interchanges at 35th (Tight Diamond with Parclo-Loop Interchange) and 47th Avenue (Diverging Diamond Interchange). Additional discussions are on-going with affected property owners. These initial discussions have been positive, and no significant delays are expected in ROW acquisition as soon as a FONSI is issued for the project.

The City of Greeley will follow all applicable State and Federal rules in ROW acquisitions.

The MERGE project has broad support from state and regional elected officials, and the community at-large including the US 34 Coalition. The US 34 Coalition is an existing group of elected officials along the corridor with adopted bylaws, standing meetings, and regional support. The existing US 34 Coalition includes (from west to east) Larimer County, Loveland, Johnstown, Weld County, Windsor, Greeley, Evans, and Kersey.

State and Local Approvals

This proposed project will require approval of an environmental document in compliance with NEPA by CDOT and FHWA. For this project inclusive of two proposed interchanges (35th and 47th Avenues) and a Mobility Hub between the proposed interchanges, an Individual Categorical Exclusion (ICE) is expected.

Federal Transportation Requirements Affecting State and Local Planning

The proposed project area located in Weld County is in a non-attainment area in 2023 for 2015 8-hour Ozone standard and the 2008 8-hour Ozone standard as per EPA's Green Book ([Colorado Nonattainment/Maintenance Status for Each County by Year for All Criteria Pollutants | Green Book | US EPA](#)). As such, the proposed project requires inclusion in a conformity transportation plan or State TIP. The NFRMPO has provided a support letter for the project. The project is also included in the State and Local Long-range plans and the mobility hub is included in the STIP.

The MERGE project is a priority project for the City of Greeley, under the unlikely circumstance that the TIFIA loan would not be fulfilled, the City is prepared to shift projects within their Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) as a contingency to fulfill the monetary and schedule obligations of the RAISE grant. This contingency plan would be a detriment to the ongoing maintenance and improvements for other infrastructure within the community, and only be a last-resort option to proceed forward.