

Highway 169 Completion Coalition –Scope of Work

Arrowhead Regional Development Commission



Background & Purpose

Itasca County is requesting that the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC), through a Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) In-Kind Planning Grant, facilitate a coalition of stakeholders that will work to move the Cross Range Expressway towards completion as a four-lane highway. ARDC proposes a five step process to create a line of communication with Mn/DOT and other officials, including Congressman Oberstar, and to develop a list of critical actions that can be implemented in order to move the highway closer to completion. ARDC will assist in implementing the actions. ARDC estimates the cost of this process to be \$10,000. Itasca County will provide \$2,000 towards the project and is asking the RTAC for \$8,000.

Trunk Highway (TH) 169 between Grand Rapids and Virginia, Minnesota is also known as the Cross Range Expressway. Serving Minnesota's Iron Range, TH 169 is also a major north to south route that connects the Range to the Twin Cities. It serves as a regional corridor in northeast Minnesota that transports people, supports industry, and enhances local, regional and state economies.

Just a few miles of the Cross Range Expressway between Grand Rapids and Virginia are not four-lane. The section between Bovey and Pengilly is a two-lane roadway that has poor pavement conditions and high traffic counts. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT) has plans in place to complete the four-lane highway, but has not designated any funding towards it and has not scheduled the project for a specific year. Many Iron Range citizens have expressed concerns about safety and traffic levels, and people are concerned that not having a complete four-lane places eastern Itasca County in an economic development disadvantage.

Community leaders met with Congressman Oberstar in February 2009 and held a discussion about the desired highway expansion. Mr. Oberstar stated he would like to organize a regional meeting to examine new ways for completing the expressway. In response, Itasca County is requesting ARDC's assistance.

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Participants

ARDC will work with the Western Mesabi Mine Planning Board (an existing joint powers board that covers the entire area of concern) to determine a list of priority stakeholders that should be a part of the Coalition. The list will likely include local government officials, state government officials, local business leaders and Chambers of Commerce, and interested citizens. ARDC will create an email address list and a mailing address list of the stakeholders.

Planning Process

The steps for the Highway 169 Completion Coalition process are as follows:

Step 1: Coalition Organization

ARDC will work with the existing citizens group to determine a list of priority stakeholders that should be a part of the Coalition. The list will likely include local government officials, state government officials, local business leaders and Chambers of Commerce, and interested citizens. ARDC will create an email address list and a mailing address list of the stakeholders.

A kickoff meeting date and location will be set, invitations will be created and sent out, and the first meeting (MEETING 1) will be held. ARDC will ask the attendees to elect a Chair and a Vice-Chair at this meeting. The Chair will run the meetings and be a voice for the group with the media. The Vice-Chair will fulfill those duties if the Chair is unavailable.

At the first meeting, ARDC will review the process with the Coalition, provide background information, seek feedback on the proposed next steps. ARDC will then ask the group to brainstorm a list of pertinent questions about the highway for Mn/DOT, Congressman Oberstar, or anyone else that needs to be contacted.

Step 2: Communication

After Meeting 1 ARDC will draft a formal letter to Mn/DOT that lists the questions developed by the Coalition and requests answers to them. Any other information being sought by the Coalition from people or organization (other than Mn/DOT) will also be put into letters.

ARDC will bring the letters to the next meeting (Meeting 2) of the Coalition for their review. Changes and/or additions will be made. ARDC will then ask the Coalition to allow the Chair to sign the letters and ARDC will send them out. The letters will request a response by a date just prior to the Coalition next meeting.

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Step 3: Action Planning

ARDC will collect the responses to the letter and organize them into a summary for the Coalition. ARDC will review the summary with the Coalition at their next meeting (MEETING 3). Based on what the Coalition learns from the responses, the group will begin developing action steps.

The list of action steps will have detailed tasks that list the responsible party for the action and a timeline to complete it. The action steps may include task such as developing petitions, contacting elected officials, meeting with Congressman Oberstar, and gathering support.

Step 4: Meeting with Congressman Oberstar

One of the first action steps for the Coalition will be to meet with Congressman Oberstar (MEETING 4). ARDC will work with the Coalition and the Congressman's office to find a date, time, and location for the meeting. At the end of Meeting 3, the Coalition will be asked to develop the agenda for the meeting. ARDC will facilitate the meeting and develop a meeting summary afterwards.

Step 5: Implementation

Another meeting of the Coalition will be held (MEETING 5) following the meeting with the Congressman. At this meeting the list of action steps will be updated with the advice provided by Mr. Oberstar. The actions will be reviewed again, and a process for tracking those actions will be created by the Coalition. Finally, the Coalition will discuss and determine its future role and its desired role for ARDC going forward.

Public Participation

The Coalition will offer an opportunity for citizens to participate in each of its meetings. Meetings will be advertized.

Timeline

ARDC proposes that this process begin in July 2009. The five meetings should occur about three weeks apart. This means the Coalition should be completing Step 5 in October 2009.

Plan Budget and Funding Sources

The cost of this planning process is \$10,000. Itasca County is requesting \$8,000 from the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (RTAC) In-kind Transportation Planning Grant Program. Itasca County will provide the remaining \$2,000.