

1960

Some Initial Impacts of The Highway Relocation in Mankato and North Mankato, Minnesota

Bert E. Burns
Mankato State College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas>



Part of the [Geography Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Burns, B. E. (1960). Some Initial Impacts of The Highway Relocation in Mankato and North Mankato, Minnesota. *Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science*, Vol. 28 No. 1, 142-145.
Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/jmas/vol28/iss1/22>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science by an authorized editor of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.

GEOGRAPHY

SOME INITIAL IMPACTS OF THE HIGHWAY RELOCATION IN MANKATO AND NORTH MANKATO, MINNESOTA

BERT E. BURNS

Mankato State College, Mankato

For decades, the residents of Mankato and North Mankato, Minnesota, as well as highway travelers through those cities, have endured traffic congestion. They have waited for poorly timed and inadequately placed traffic signals, have queued up for blocks as a train crossed the highway approach or exit to the bridge while inadequate parking space, pedestrian right of way and turn restriction compounded the burden. Recently adopted one way streets, additional traffic signals with coordinated timing and off street parking areas seem to have brought some order but for the most part, the basic problem remains—too many vehicles trying to move through too limited an area in too short a time.

The fundamentals of the problem revolve around these factors:

1. A regional position whereat several highways cross, a number of which follow the easy route of the Minnesota Valley. The same circumstance brings rail routes through the city.

2. A physical site in a deep, narrow valley at the bend of a river.

3. An historical occupancy of this site which first emphasized water transportation thus orienting later occupancy toward the river.

From these factors, a number of circumstances have developed which are related directly to the traffic problem. Chief among these are:

1. A street pattern oriented in four major tangents to the right angle bend of the river and constricted by the steep slope of the valley side.

2. Competition in the limited physical site of the valley bottom for the necessary functional parts of the city. Particular competition developed near the narrowest part of the valley bottom where space was demanded by highway routes, railway routes and the commercial and retail section of the city.

3. An emphasis on highway entrance into the valley at points of topographic advantage.

4. The location of a single bridge over the river at a narrowed part of the stream nearest the heart of the city.

5. Railroad crossing of three lines plus switch lines, across the Mankato approach of the highway bridge.

PROCEEDINGS, VOLUME TWENTY-EIGHT, 1960

6. A growing local and regional economy which has increased local traffic and brought ever greater regional traffic. Augmented interstate traffic is concentrated by the merging of two United States highways within the city limits. Railroad traffic is somewhat reduced in recent years but still remains an important factor in traffic congestion.

Highway traffic moves into the city along Minnesota Trunk Highways 22, 60, 83 and 256, in addition to United States routes 14 and 169 already mentioned. Nine county highways enter the city, as well, bringing to a total of eighteen the number of highways which enter the city limits. The traffic of the state and federal routes follows the main business street of the city, Front Street, for eight blocks, carrying the combined load of five routes. At the major intersection of the city, Front and Main, adjacent to the bridge, the average daily traffic, as counted by the Minnesota Department of Highways, is 17,000 vehicles with each of the high-use hours of the day averaging 2,000 vehicles within the intersection. During these hours, as at any time, the bridge entrance or exit may be blocked by a train. In addition, local traffic is forced onto Front Street because vehicles from many parts of the city must move into the main valley through tributary valleys and out of the main valley through another tributary valley in order to reach selected parts of the city.

Since 1959, both resident and traveler, once on his way from the downtown congestion see evidence of sweeping change. The activity results from the adoption of "Plan C" as set forth in the *Highway Planning Survey*, Minnesota Department of Highways — U. S. Bureau of Public Roads, February, 1954, in which two new bridges and connections thereto were developed with construction to proceed in three stages. Eventual completion involves the following developments:

1. Construction of a new highway connecting St. Peter with North Mankato, following the bottom of the west bluff except in North Mankato where it swings to the inside curve of the river, sweeping westward out of the valley along the present U. S. 14 approach.

2. A new entrance to the city of Mankato from the west which generally parallels the existing route from the Blue Earth River crossing.

3. Connection of the two new routes and tie-in with existing routes by two new bridges crossing river and railroad tracks alike, one to the north and the other to the west of the existing bridge. The west bridge, only is thus far authorized for construction.

4. Modification of the river channel which will confine the curve of the river to a clean arc, deepen the channel, establish uniform width and presumably afford some degree of flood protection by low level dikes and accelerated flow.

In 1960, the estimated cost of this program within the city limits of the two cities is \$11,000,000 which is the largest single development ever to have touched the city.

Within the general pattern of change and confusion, two groups of specifics are discernible. One group is directly concerned with the acquisition and consequent development of right of way. The other is

THE MINNESOTA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

concerned with relocation of buildings and/or firms displaced by the new right of way and the acquisition of property along the new right of way or oriented to it.

Acquisition of right of way is probably the biggest initial problem of any highway program, legal entanglements of which sometimes continue into construction dates. Twelve such problems are a part of the Mankato scene at this time, May, 1960, but appear on the way to settlement and no essential delay is expected.

The two major considerations resulting from relinquishment of urban area for right of way are the loss of taxable property and the loss of usable urban land.

In the two cities, a total of 336 buildings were condemned — 164 residential units, 88 garages, 43 miscellaneous sheds, 41 commercial buildings and a portion of one industrial plant. In Mankato, about 10% of the residences were demolished, about 2% were moved from the city and the remaining 88% were moved to new sites within the city. The assessor reports tax loss to be only for the year of transition. Collection of data on reestablishment of commercial firms within Mankato has not been completed at this time, but it seems safe to assume that most relocated within the city.

North Mankato has had a greater proportional tax loss than has Mankato. Only four houses were lost to the tax rolls of North Mankato. Two left the city limits and two were demolished but four commercial establishments failed to relocate within the city. Two were sizable firms and their loss reduced the largely residential tax base, at least temporarily. Ironically, lack of available ground space and high real estate costs were given as reasons for relocation across the river.

Mankato sacrificed an estimated 21 acres of urban land to right of way, all intensively developed. North Mankato gave an estimated 110 acres of area of which approximately 25 were devoted to sparse urban use and about 10 to intensive use. By far the greatest proportion of North Mankato right of way came from unused areas along the river.

In Mankato, there is little activity towards purchase of a land along the new right of way since the generally elevated position of the route serves little or no advantage and access is, of course, restricted. Access points are expected to show some activity although high cost is to be expected. There has been some movement of outlet stores and pick-up stations to existing highway routes away from the center of the city. In North Mankato, a few gasoline stations and one garage have purchased sites at favorable access points. A few bonafide transfers suggest a centripetal movement of the retail and commercial areas to the edges of the existing area but no firm trend is yet in evidence.

The most notable effect of the highway program in North Mankato came with the certainty of contracts for the first new bridge which crosses the river and tracks west of the present bridge. With this crossing assured, North Mankato moved out the valley, extending its city limits first in 1958 and again in 1959, onto the level upland along the scenic slopes of the valley edge. The city has nearly doubled

PROCEEDINGS, VOLUME TWENTY-EIGHT, 1960

its former area. Five new subdivisions, complete with city water and sewer have been developed, some as extensions of previously platted and built-up areas and some completely new. About 300 new lots have been added to the 100 already developed. Purchase has been brisk and building has proceeded at a rapid pace. The largest subdivision, which offered 118 lots, has sold all but three and construction of twelve homes is completed or under way. Including those existing previous to extension of the corporate limits, there are now built, or in process of building, about 65 homes in the new part of North Mankato. Many of the homes on the valley sides occupy choice building sites and are high value homes. The location of a television studio and beaming tower within the new limits of North Mankato, a new filling station, a drive-in and a shop along the highway to the west, but within the new limits of North Mankato, suggest that such new commercial property, plus the residential developments may in time offset the loss of taxable property removed by the highway in the valley.

Outside the city, there is considerable activity. In the open spaces well beyond the crowded valley, property is selling at trebled and quadrupled prices where location is favorable to access roads leading to the new highway. This increase in value tapers off within a mile of a most favored spot. Without access, value of property for commercial purposes decreases along the new route. To date, four oil companies and several speculators have established new property holdings along the new route to the west.

Secondary impacts within the city have revolved around the moving and resetting of homes and commercial buildings with resultant upsurge of employment in the building trades. Real estate men report a sizable proportion of the newly located houses to be rental units.

This brief appraisal of the initial impact of the highway relocation project in Mankato and North Mankato, Minnesota, is made at a time when only a fraction of the program has been completed. It is intended that the job so begun is to continue for the economic and social effects of such a project within the city are a real part of the changing urban geography of Minnesota.