



## LOWER PLATTE SOUTH natural resources district

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### MEMORANDUM

Date: September 10, 2024

To: Lower Platte South Natural Resources District Board of Directors

From: Will Inselman, Resources Coordinator *WI*

Subject: Minutes for MoPac East – Lied Connector Subcommittee Meeting

On Wednesday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024, at 5:31 p.m., the MoPac East – Lied Connector subcommittee met in the Large Conference Room. Subcommittee members present: Ray Stevens-Chair, Melissa Baker, Tom Green, Luke Peterson, Anthony Schutz, and Seth Hawkins. Director Bob Andersen was also present. LPSNRD staff in attendance were David Potter, Eric Zach, and Will Inselman. Andrea Gebhart and Lalit Jha (JEO Consulting Group), Alex DeGarmo (Cass County Commissioner), and five members of the public were in attendance.

First on the agenda was an overview of the July 30<sup>th</sup> public open houses. Andrea Gebhart from JEO provided an overview of the matrix presented to and scored by the public and discussed the public comments received on each alignment. She discussed the key strengths and weaknesses for each alignment that emerged from the written comments. Overall, the two open houses had 105 people attend in person, 100 people participated through online comment, and in total we received 164 comment forms.

Next, staff opened the floor up to the subcommittee Directors for thoughts and comments on their preferred routes to begin the discussion on trying to narrow in on a preferred alternative. The Directors had a clear, immediate interest in Alignments C and D. The Directors stated that Alignment C was the most cost-effective option and was the most direct route. However, there was some uncertainty with the route as Alex DeGarmo from Cass County shared that there would not likely be support from the County for a shared use trail that would close and gate the two, 1-mile minimum maintenance road sections for local traffic and trail traffic only. He also voiced the County's concern over liability of a designated shared use on the road. The sentiment was also mentioned by a couple Directors, stating that safety is a concern when sharing the road with farm equipment.

The conversation then shifted to exploring creative solutions to separate the trail from the road on these two stretches, and if something could be done at or under the 40% (~\$10,000,000 vs ~\$14,000,000) more expensive option of Alignment D. Andrea from JEO reached out to Nathan Boone from Toole Design Group, who conducted the trail design evaluation and asked him to explain why they recommended a shared use approach to the two minimum maintenance sections. Nathan explained that the steep slopes and topography of the existing ROW would not be feasible to separate the trail from the road unless additional ROW was acquired. Directors asked Alex DeGarmo if Cass County Commissioners would be supportive of attempting to purchase

additional ROW and Alex indicated that it would be extremely difficult to obtain additional ROW for these sections.

Despite its lower cost, safety risks, potential landowner resistance, and the need for Cass County's approval, Alignment C became a less feasible option. It was acknowledged by several Directors that these obstacles made it impractical to choose Alignment C at this time, especially at the risk of losing Cass County support.

The Directors then focused their attention on the next most favorable option, Alignment D. A few Directors indicated that while more expensive than Alignment C and less direct, Alignment D did make use of existing NRD property, was a less busy road, and impacted fewer driveways. It is also the current interim route being used by trail traffic so there was familiarity of this route with the local landowners and trail users. The concern of the estimated price difference between Alignment C and D remained a point of conversation for quite some time during the meeting. It was ultimately decided that the risk of delaying this project further and losing Cass County's support of a trail was not worth pursuing Alignment C and that Alignment D was seen as the more straightforward and achievable alignment at this time.

*It was moved by Schutz and seconded by Peterson that District staff present Alignment D as the preferred alignment at the September 25<sup>th</sup> public open house for the final round of public feedback.*

*Motion Passed: 4-2 (Schutz and Stevens voting NO)*

Meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

PC: MoPac East – Lied Connector subcommittee file



Since late 2023, the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District (LPSNRD) and Cass County have been working with Nebraska-based JEO Consulting Group and Toole Design Group to complete a study of potential routes that would connect the MoPac East recreational trail from the Elmwood/Wabash area to the Lied Platte River Bridge.

### STUDY PURPOSE

Evaluate a variety of potential route alternatives and identify a recommended route for the final segment of the MoPac East Trail.

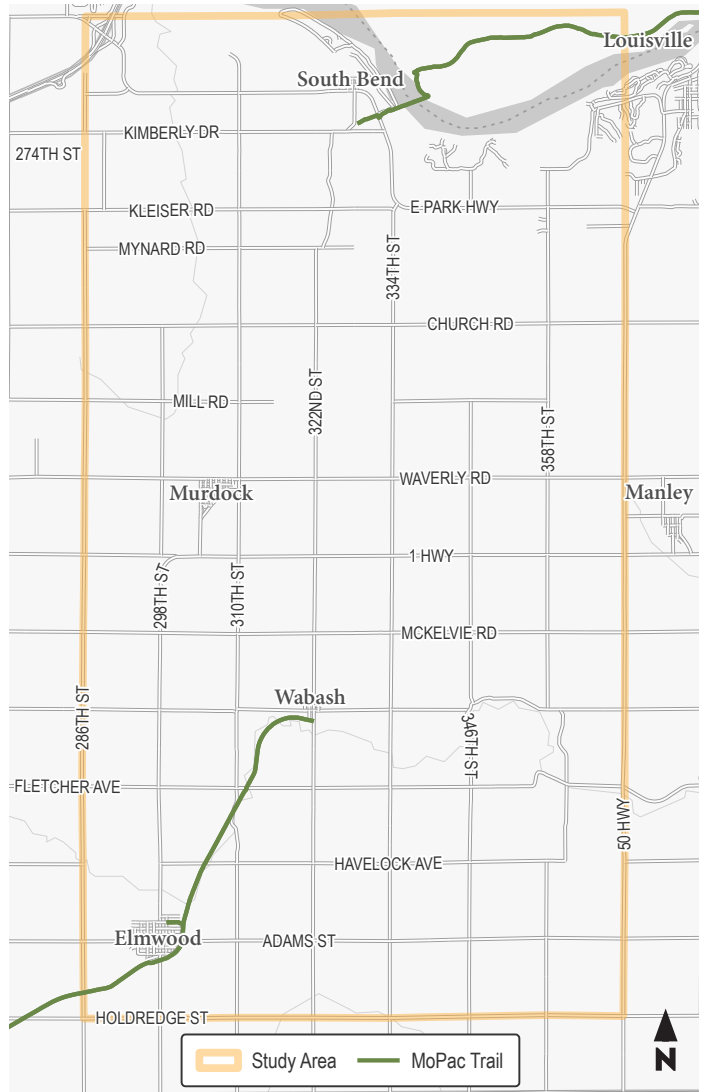
### CONDITIONS TO CONSIDER

Community needs and interests, construction cost, engineering complexity, and feasibility, among other considerations.

### OUTCOME

The LPSNRD Board of Directors and Cass County Commissioners will ultimately decide whether to accept the recommendation and proceed with the design of the preferred route.

### STUDY AREA MAP

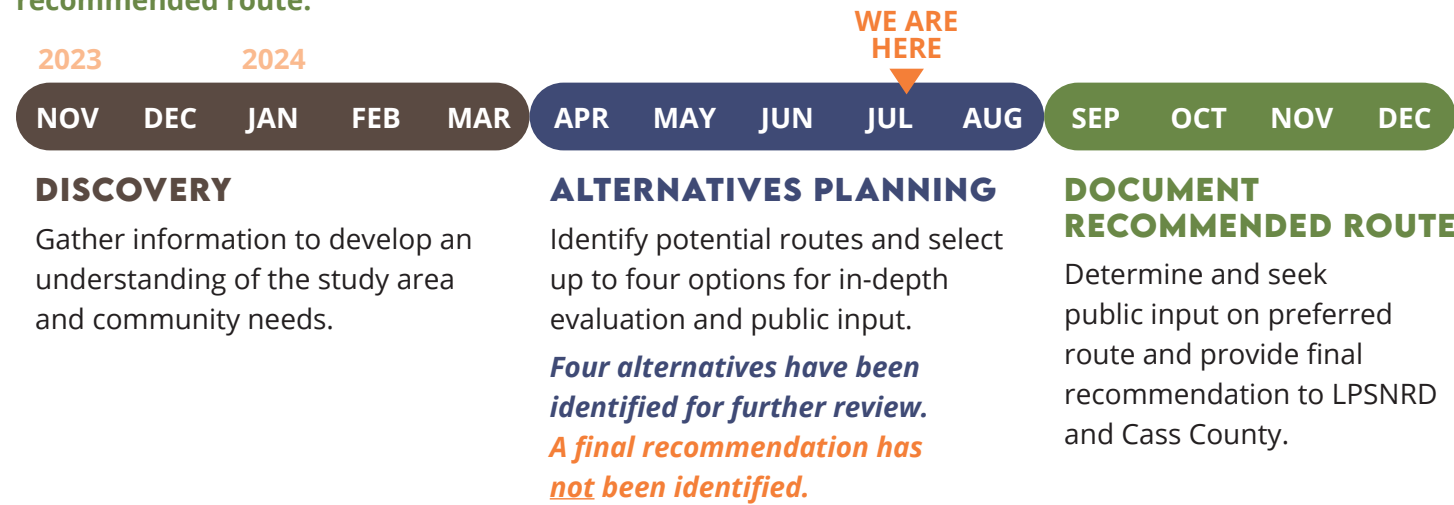


### DID YOU KNOW?

The State of Nebraska allocated **\$8.3M** to construct the trail connection. This study is the first step in the development process.

## PROJECT TIMELINE

The study will be conducted in three phases: **discovery**, **alternatives planning**, and **documenting the recommended route**.



### DISCOVERY PHASE

Through a series of five public workshops and an online survey in March 2024, Cass County residents and trail users shared their priorities for the MoPac East Connector Trail.

Input submitted showed a nearly equal split between those who identified as trail users and non-users.

#### WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

- 5 Workshops
- 73 Attendees
- 180 Input Station Comments
- 106 Comment Forms

### COMMUNITY PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

Input received in March revealed the following community priorities for the Connect MoPac study:

#### Community Identity

- » Preserve rural and small-town characteristics
- » Preserve natural landscape and community connections

#### Property Impacts

- » Negotiate fair terms with landowners instead of using eminent domain
- » Minimize property disruption

#### Safety, Maintenance and Amenities

- » Minimize trespassing/other unwanted activities
- » Ensure proper on-trail amenities for visitors

#### Trail Design

- » Use of existing roadways or state right-of-way preferred
- » Economic uplift from connecting larger city trails and hosting events

#### Community Involvement

- » Be transparent in engagement and ensure community involvement in planning
- » Consider funding and cost implications for residents

## PATH TO ALTERNATIVES

### STUDY GOALS FINALIZED

Feedback provided at community workshops helped inform a final list of study goals for any potential route connection.

#### STRATEGIC CONNECTIVITY

Identify a fiscally responsible route for connecting a gap in the MoPac East Trail, which is part of a local, regional, and national recreational trail network.

#### USER EXPERIENCE

Provide a safe, accessible, and reliable trail connection for many modes of transportation.

#### RURAL IDENTITY

Preserve the area's historic and rural identity by minimizing private property impacts and inviting area residents to participate in trail development.

#### ENVIRONMENT

Protect environmentally sensitive areas through best practices in construction and maintenance.

#### LOCAL CONNECTIVITY

Enhance local connections to regional businesses, recreational areas and cultural attractions.



### WATCH AGAIN!

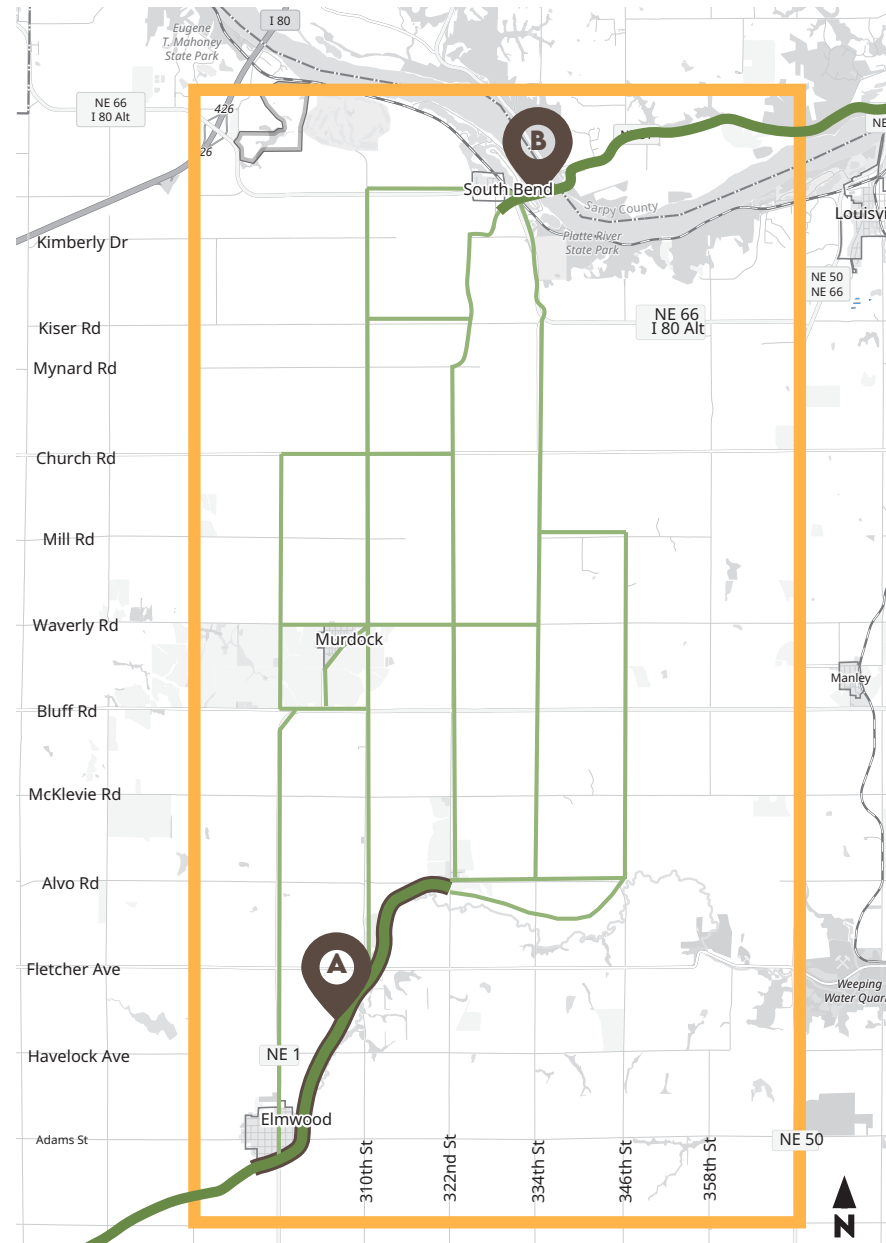
An animated map demonstrates how the Connect MoPac study team developed a focused list of corridors to investigate based on community-informed study goals.

## CORRIDORS OF INTEREST IDENTIFIED

With community feedback and study goals in hand, the Connect MoPac study team was able to identify a variety of feasible corridor options for route alternatives. These corridors were studied during visits to Cass County in late June.

Some corridors were eliminated early because they did not align with project goals. In general, these corridors:

1. were outside road right-of-way;
2. resulted in greater private property impacts;
3. had higher maintenance costs; or
4. were too indirect and would encourage off-trail travel



Five east-west and five north-south corridors made the study team's shortlist of corridors requiring onsite technical study in June 2024.

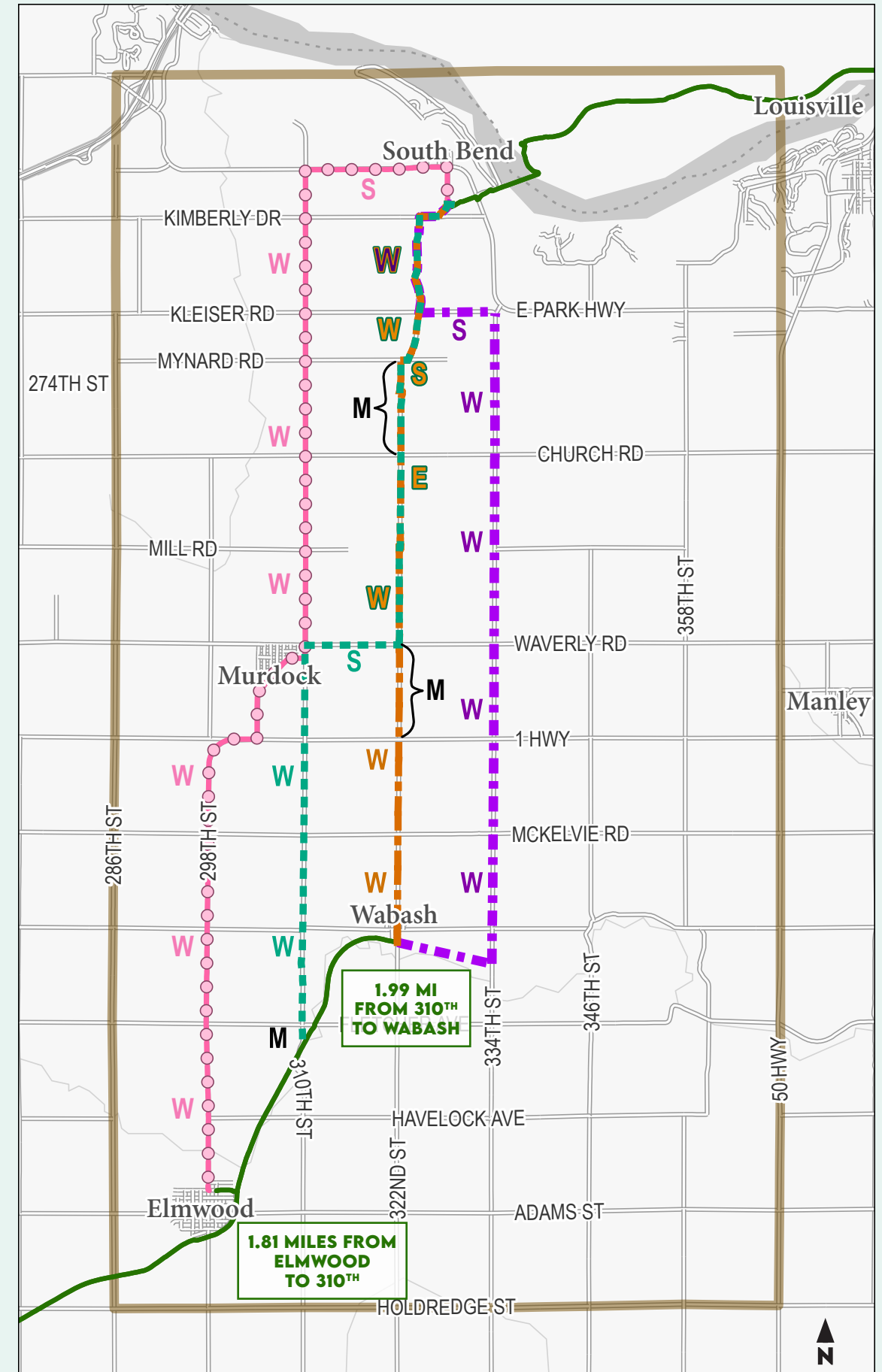
## ROUTE ALTERNATIVES AND TECHNICAL EVALUATION

AS OF JULY 30, 2024

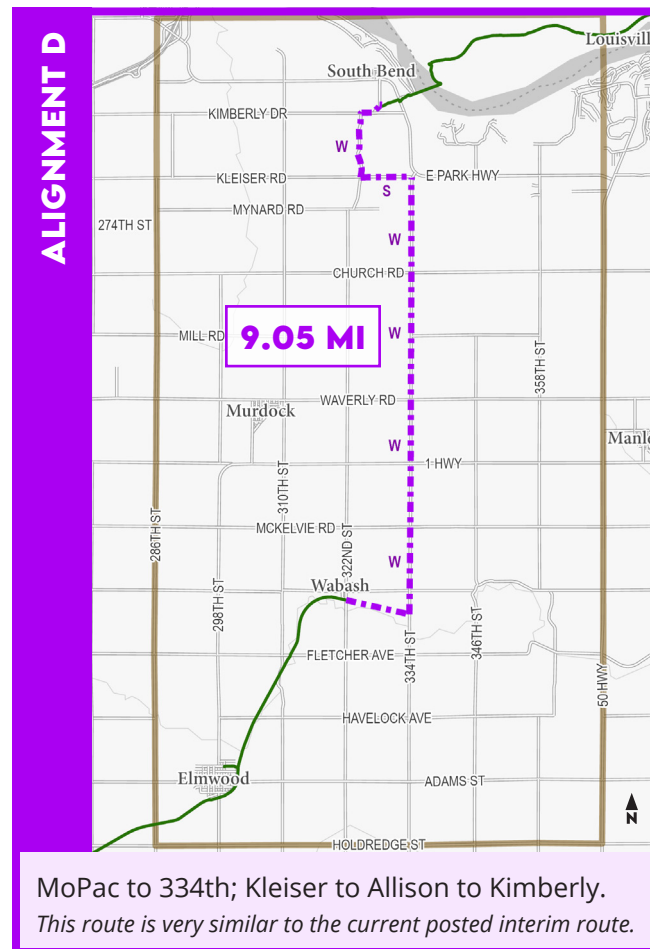
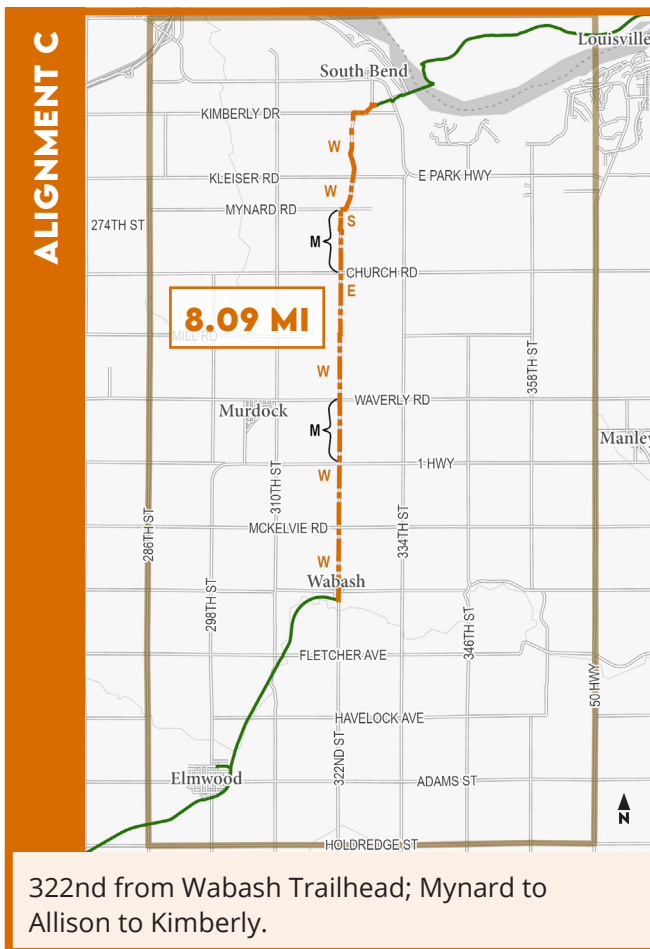
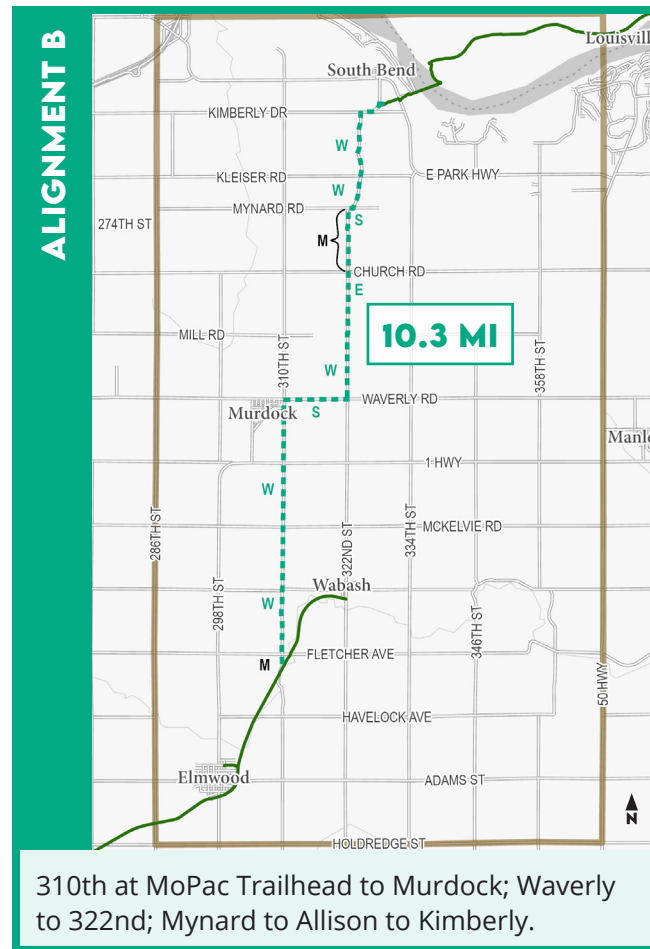
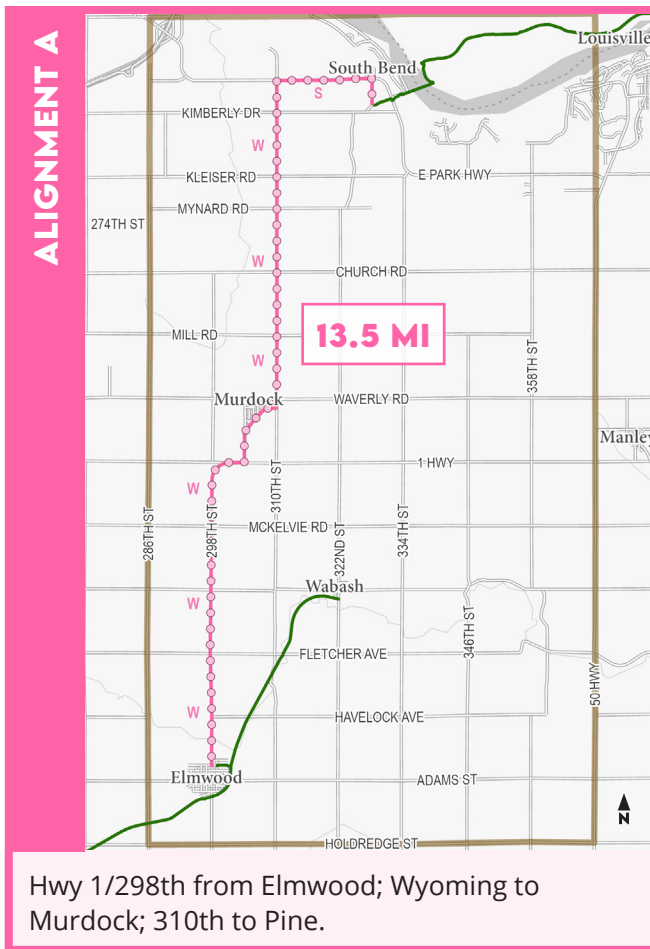
After a site visit in late June, the Connect MoPac study team narrowed the list of potential corridors to four route alternatives and evaluated each route's characteristics in relation to project goals.

The map to the right shows the four route alternatives.

The charts on pages 7-11 show the results of the technical evaluation for each route.







## PRELIMINARY TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

In July, Connect MoPac study partner Toole Design Group performed a technical review of four route alternatives, based on their expertise in trail design. The technical review included analysis of the following criteria.

### RATING SCALE

- ★★★★★ Great
- ★★★★☆ Good
- ★★★☆☆ Fair
- ★★☆☆☆ Poor



### USER EXPERIENCE

#### Connectivity to Recreation, Services, Points of Interest

*Based on number of and/or proximity to destinations.*

ALIGNMENT A	ALIGNMENT B	ALIGNMENT C	ALIGNMENT D
★★★★★ Elmwood (direct), Murdock (direct), South Bend (direct), Round the Bend Steakhouse	★★★★☆ Murdock (direct), Elmwood (direct), Wabash (nearby), Grandpa's Woods	★★★☆☆ Wabash (direct), restrooms at Wabash trailhead	★★☆☆☆ Wabash (direct), restrooms at Wabash trailhead

#### Dust/Air Quality

*Based on trail length adjacent to unpaved road (dust).*

ALIGNMENT A	ALIGNMENT B	ALIGNMENT C	ALIGNMENT D
★★★★★ Entirety of trail (13.5 mi) would be adjacent to full paved roads	★★★☆☆ Majority of trail (9.3 mi) adjacent to unpaved/gravel Paved segment: Hwy 1 to Waverly Rd (1 mi)	★★☆☆☆ Majority of trail (~6 mi) would be placed adjacent to gravel road Minimum maintenance segments (~2mi) may have improved dust conditions/air quality due to no motor vehicle traffic	★★★☆☆ Majority of trail (7.6 mi) would be placed adjacent to gravel road Paved segment: Church to Kleiser segment (1.5 mi)

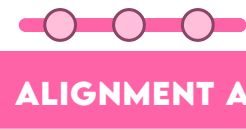
#### Grade/Slope along Route

*Based on length of trail segments above a grade of 5% from a GIS analysis.*

ALIGNMENT A	ALIGNMENT B	ALIGNMENT C	ALIGNMENT D
★★★★★ • NB: 1 segment, max slope 6.5% • SB: 2 segments, max slope 6% • Total NB/SB: 0.05 mi	★★★★☆ • NB: 4 segments, 0.2 mi total, max slope 6.8% • SB: 9 segments, .42 mi total, max slope 9%, SB slope the highest N and S of Church Rd	★★★★☆ • NB: 4 segments, 0.2 mi total, max slope 6.8% • SB: 6 segments, 0.26 mi total, max slope 10%. SB slope the highest on the minimum maintenance segment	★★★☆☆ • NB: 4 segments, 0.14 mi total, max slope 6% • SB: 5 segments, .2 mi total. Kleiser EB past the bridge increases to 12.6% slope

	ALIGNMENT A	ALIGNMENT B	ALIGNMENT C	ALIGNMENT D
<b>SAFETY OF ALL MODES</b>				
<b>Separation of Trail Users from Vehicular Traffic</b> <i>Based on length of off-road segments and/or setback from roadway to trail.</i>	★★★★★ • Separated: 13.5 mi (all) • Shared/mixed: 0.0 mi (except bridges) Much of alignment is along higher speed, higher volume roads; however, the alignment is visually connected to the road	★★★★☆ • Separated: 8.4 mi • Shared/mixed: 1.3 mi Several segments along higher speed, higher volume roads; alignment follows some utility rights of way that do not have any visual connection to roads	★★★★☆ • Separated: 6.1 mi • Shared/mixed: 2.0 mi Much of alignment is along low-volume roads with clear visual connection to road. Minimum maintenance segments comprise 2 miles of this alignment (~25% of the route)	★★★★☆ • Separated: 9.05 mi (all) • Shared/mixed: 0.0 mi (except bridges) Much of alignment is along low-volume roads with clear visual connection to road
<b>Roadway Crossings</b> <i>Based on number of crossings and, somewhat qualitatively, the conditions of each crossing.</i>	★☆☆☆☆ No identified sight issues • Major (Rural) Crossings: 1 (Church Rd, uncontrolled) • Minor (In-Town) Crossings: 23 (21 controlled, 2 uncontrolled)	★★★★★ No identified sight issues • Major (Rural) Crossings: 3 (Hwy 1, Church Rd, 310th, uncontrolled) • Minor (In-Town) Crossings: 7 (3 controlled, 4 uncontrolled)	★★★★★ Limited sight distance at Hwy 1 looking east, Church Rd looking west • Major (Rural) Crossings: 2 (Hwy 1, Church Rd, uncontrolled) • Minor (In-Town) Crossings: 5 (1 controlled, 4 uncontrolled)	★★★★★ Limited sight distance at Hwy 1 looking east, Church Rd looking west • Major (Rural) Crossings: 2 (Hwy 1, Church Rd, uncontrolled) • Minor (In-Town) Crossings: 5 (3 controlled, 2 uncontrolled)

	ALIGNMENT A	ALIGNMENT B	ALIGNMENT C	ALIGNMENT D
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL</b>				
<b>Soil Erodibility</b> <i>Based on the USDA NRCS Soil Survey dataset and qualitative field observations of specific corridors.</i>	★★★★★ Soil erodibility factor between 0.41-0.50, on the higher end of the scale	★★★★★ Soil erodibility factor between 0.41-0.50, on the higher end of the scale	★★★★★ Soil erodibility factor between 0.41-0.50, on the higher end of the scale	★★★★★ Soil erodibility factor between 0.41-0.50, on the higher end of the scale
<b>Threatened &amp; Endangered Species</b> <i>Based on TE habitat desktop datasets in USFWS database.</i>	★★★★★ No critical habitat found	★★★★★ No critical habitat found	★★★★★ No critical habitat found	★★★★★ No critical habitat found
<b>Floodplain</b> <i>Based on length of trail within FEMA Floodplain.</i>	★★★★★ 0.6 miles (approx. 4% of alignment) in floodplain	★★★★★ 0.8 miles (approx. 8% of alignment) in floodplain	★★★★★ 0.4 miles (approx. 5% of alignment) in floodplain	★★★★★ 0.9 miles (approx. 10% of alignment) in floodplain, nearly all of which is located in NRD property between 322nd-334th
<b>Wetland</b> <i>Based on a desktop review of the National Wetland Inventory.</i>	★★★★★ • 5 x stream • 4 x marsh/swamp/bog/prairie Trail west side avoids conflict with other wetlands	★★★★★ • 6 x stream • 3 x marsh/swamp/bog/prairie Trail west side avoids conflict with other wetlands	★★★★★ • 6 x forested/shrub stream crossings • 3 x riverine crossings Placement of trail on west side would avoid encroachment on riverine habitat at the Allison/Kimberly bend as well as two ponds (one near Waverly, one near McElvie)	★★★★★ • 2 x freshwater emergent wetland crossings • 3 x forested/shrub stream crossings • 2 x riverine crossings Placement of trail on west side would avoid encroachment on riverine habitat at the Allison/Kimberly bend



ALIGNMENT A



ALIGNMENT B



ALIGNMENT C



ALIGNMENT D

IMPLEMENTATION

Trail Routing Efficiency

Based on the total length of trail. A shorter length is more efficient and potentially lower cost for construction and maintenance.

13.5 miles

10.3 miles

8.1 miles

9.1 miles

Constructibility & Maintenance

Based on number of structural issues and inspection inventory (# bridges, # culvert crossings, # steep bank/retaining walls).

- 4 x existing bridges
5 x culvert/river/marsh crossings
1 x grade/steep bank

Typical rural cross section with ditches. Route through Elmwood likely impacts on-street parking or conversion of sidewalk to mixed-use path. Further investigation required of trail in urban area. Amount of existing infrastructure and curb cuts in urban areas may increase maintenance responsibilities. No min. maintenance road segments

- 2 x existing bridge
7 x culvert/river/marsh crossings
2 x grade/steep bank

Typical rural cross section with ditches. Route from Kleiser to Lied Platte River Bridge Trailhead requires further investigation on trail proximity to existing utility poles and steep grade at culvert near Kimberly. 1.1 mi min. maintenance route (Church-Mynard)

- 0 existing bridges
12 x culvert/river/stream crossings
2 x grade/steep bank

Typical rural cross section with ditches. Route from Kleiser to Lied Platte River Bridge Trailhead requires further investigation on trail proximity to existing utility poles and steep grade at culvert near Kimberly. 2.1 mi min. maintenance route (Hwy 1- Waverly, Church-Mynard)

- 1 existing bridge
14 x culvert/river/stream crossings
3 x grade/steep bank

Typical rural cross section with ditches. Route from Kleiser to Lied Platte River Bridge Trailhead requires further investigation on trail proximity to existing utility poles and steep grade at culvert near Kimberly. No min. maintenance road segments

Roadway Ownership

Based on calculating total % of ROW on a given Alignment (State-owned, or County-owned)

- State-owned: 8.15 mi (60%)
County-owned: 5.35 mi (40%)
Local (Murdock Dr): 0.15 mi (1%)

- State-owned: 0.0 mi
County-owned: 10.3 mi

- State-owned: 0.0 mi
County-owned: 8.1 mi

- State-owned: 0.0 mi
County-owned: 9.1 mi



ALIGNMENT A



ALIGNMENT B



ALIGNMENT C



ALIGNMENT D

PROPERTY IMPACTS

Right of Way Considerations

Adjacent property considerations to investigate further where terrain presents complications.

- Impacts associated with:
- constrained right of way in urban areas
- areas with steep grading around streams where culverts and/or bridges are present
- possible conversion of sidewalk to mixed-use path in Elmwood

- Impacts associated with:
- areas near Fletcher Ave and Grandpa's Woods have constrained right of way at culverts and bridges
- limited right of way to sufficiently accommodate a trail separated from motor vehicle users

- Impacts associated with:
- areas with steep grading around streams where culverts and/or bridges are present
- limited right of way to sufficiently accommodate a trail separated from motor vehicle users

- Impacts associated with:
- areas with steep grading around streams where culverts and/or bridges are present
- limited right of way to sufficiently accommodate a trail separated from motor vehicle users

Driveways/ Access Point Crossings

Based on number of driveways and access points requiring a crossing.

Driveways: 36

Driveways: 13

Driveways: 15

Driveways: 9

YOUR QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK ARE VALUED.

Lower Platte South NRD and Cass County officials will review and finalize the evaluation matrix after public feedback and additional cost analysis.

From the beginning, public participation has been prioritized in the Connect MoPac Study. Here's a snapshot of how we're doing so far.

10,200 VISITS
Connect MoPac Website

280 SUBSCRIBERS
Monthly Email Updates

73 ATTENDEES
At Five Community Workshops

106 COMMENT FORMS
Through Discovery Phase

256 VIEWS
Corridor Selection Video



# FAST FACTS ABOUT THE 4 ALTERNATIVES

1. All are within existing, public road right of way.
2. If needed, all can be constructed and maintained without acquiring additional right of way.
3. A recommended route has **not been identified** yet. No alternative route is preferred over another.
4. **Public input** and **cost analysis** is needed before a preliminary route recommendation can be made.
5. The **preliminary recommended route** may be one of the four alternatives. It could also include segments of multiple route alternatives or even corridors not identified at this time.
6. The preliminary route recommendation will be **presented to the public** for feedback later this fall.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- 1 Review public feedback.  
**Comments to be collected through August 9.**
- 2 Conduct cost evaluation
- 3 Identify preliminary recommendation for connector route
- 4 Collect public feedback at open house in fall 2024
- 5 Finalize study and deliver recommendation to Lower Platte South NRD and Cass County leaders.

**THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING AND HELPING US GET THE ROUTE RIGHT!**

### LEARN MORE



Explore our website!  
[bit.ly/ConnectMoPac](https://bit.ly/ConnectMoPac)

### STAY INFORMED




Join our email list!  
[bit.ly/MoPacUpdates](https://bit.ly/MoPacUpdates)

## PROJECT CONTACT

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Connector Study Project Manager

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 402-474-8775





# PUBLIC COMMENT HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE ALTERNATIVES PLANNING PHASE

AUGUST 2024

On July 30, 2024, a second round of public meetings was held to provide a study update and gather community feedback on the potential four route alignments being evaluated for the MoPac East Connector Trail Study.

<b>MEETINGS BY THE NUMBERS</b>	<b>2</b> Number of Meetings	<b>105</b> Total Attendees	<b>64</b> Comment Forms Collected at Meeting	<b>100</b> Comment Forms Collected Online
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See page 2 for details on who the study team heard from!

## PUBLIC COMMENT HIGHLIGHTS

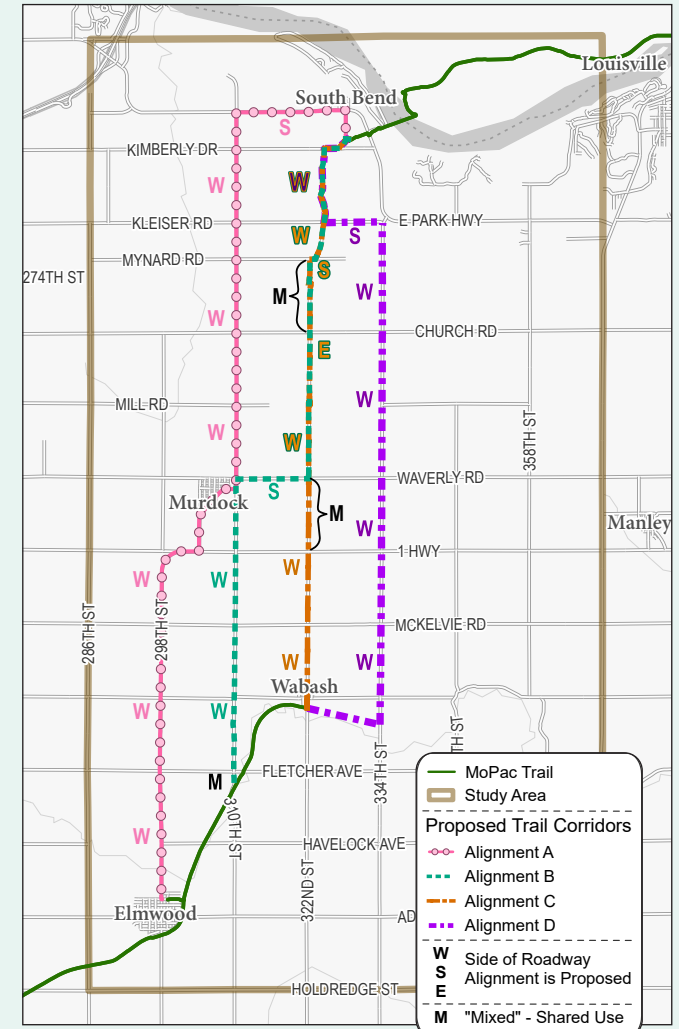
The comment form allowed members of the public to evaluate four alignments (A-D, illustrated to the right) against the study's community-informed goals: Strategic Connectivity, User Experience, Rural Identity, Environment, and Local Connectivity.

The table below summarizes how respondents and different groups—trail users, non-users, Cass County residents, and non-local participants—ranked each alignment.

EVALUATION RANKING	TOTAL (164)	RESPONDENT IDENTIFYING AS:		RESPONDENT IDENTIFYING AS:	
		MoPac East Trail User (124)	Non-User (40)	Cass County (64)	Non-Local (100)
Highest	C	C	A	C	C
Second	D	D	C	A	D
Third	A	B	D	D	B
Lowest	B	A	B	B	A

## ROUTE ALTERNATIVES AS OF JULY 30, 2024

All route alignments presented for public feedback were located within existing road right of way to minimize impact to private property.



## MOST PREFERRED ALTERNATIVES

- **Alignment C** tended to be the most preferred alternative, favored for its scenic value, perceived cost-effectiveness, and minimal traffic interaction.
- **Alignment D** also consistently garnered preference but was slightly less favored due to its longer distance and lack of connection to Murdock.

## STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Written comments also shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of each alignment.

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<b>ALIGNMENT A</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Includes connection to Murdock, benefiting local businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concerns about safety</li> <li>- Lack of scenic value</li> <li>- Does not utilize existing trail between Elmwood and Wabash</li> </ul>
<b>ALIGNMENT B</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Scenic route</li> <li>+ Potential connection to Murdock</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bypasses Wabash</li> <li>- Raises safety/ environmental concerns</li> </ul>
<b>ALIGNMENT C</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Scenic</li> <li>+ Safe</li> <li>+ Most direct connection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excludes Murdock</li> <li>- Potential environmental challenges</li> </ul>
<b>ALIGNMENT D</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ Uses existing infrastructure</li> <li>+ Safe with low traffic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excludes Murdock</li> <li>- Less direct</li> </ul>

## ADDITIONAL COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

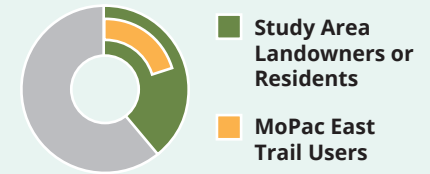
Other recurring comments shared with the study team related to:

- **Fiscal Responsibility:** Importance of cost being a critical factor in the final evaluation.
- **Property and Personal Impact:** Concerns over property access, potential trespassing, and impact on property values.
- **Support for Trail Completion:** Enthusiasm for completing the trail, highlighting benefits for safety, recreation, and community connection.
- **Process Speed:** Some concerns about the project being rushed, calling for careful consideration of all factors.

### Of the 164 comment forms received, there was...

#### Local Representation.

64 respondents identified as study area landowners or residents. *Of whom, 33 identified as MoPac East trail users.*



#### Broader Participation.

100 respondents were from outside the study area, citing nearby communities such as Lincoln and Omaha. *Of the 100, 88 identified as MoPac East trail users.*

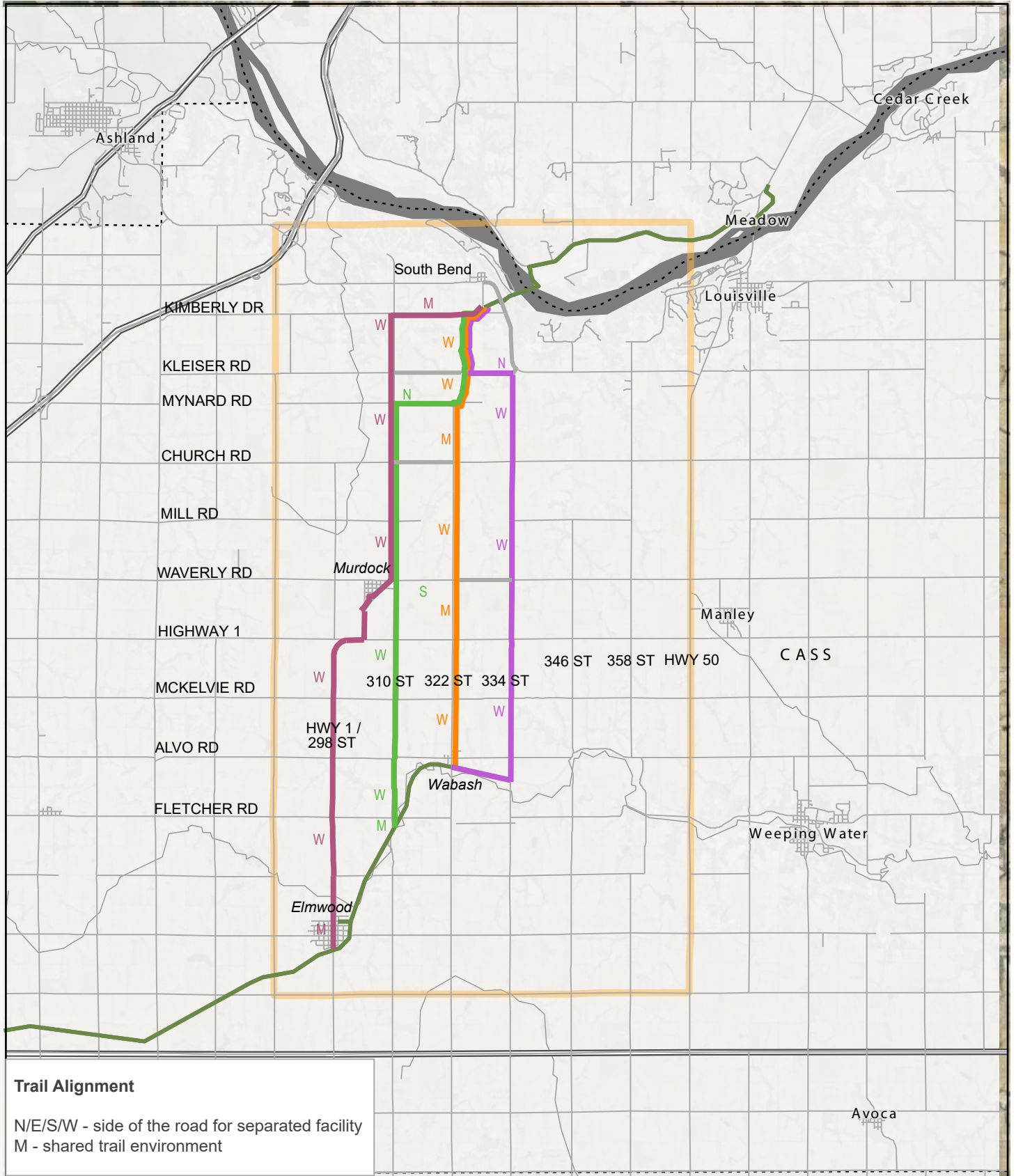


## STUDY PROCESS FEEDBACK

Community engagement is a priority of the study. The study team included some questions to solicit feedback on the engagement process. Feedback from respondents indicated:

- + **Positive Feedback:** Majority appreciated the transparent and thorough process.
- **Concerns:** Some felt the process was too focused on local residents, with insufficient involvement from broader trail users.

# Draft Trail Alignments



Iowa DNR, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS, Cass County, Nebraska, Earthstar Geographics