Projects

Create More than Great Streets

NATURAL BRIDGE ROAD began in the late 1800s as a natural stone bridge over a spring that fed Rocky Branch Creek that flowed to the Mississippi River. The road eventually led from Salisbury into Normandy and then branched off into Bridgeton and Florissant.

Natural Bridge Road was the original highway into North County.

Now that "highway" sees about 45 minutes to an hour total of congested traffic in a single day and an average of about 13,000 cars. This gradual decrease in traffic begs the question "Is there a better use of this land?" The answer is yes. A $2.1 million assessment of the corridor was taken and final plans for the redesign of Natural Bridge Road were submitted in December 2013. The project will be sent out for bid this March and will be awarded in April. Construction will begin this summer and should be completed by the fall of 2015.

The Natural Bridge Road Project is part of the St. Louis Great Streets Initiative—a program launched by East-West Gateway in 2006 to trigger economic and social benefits by focusing communities around interesting, lively and attractive streets that serve all modes of transportation. The Great Streets Projects provide grants that fund street improvement to redesign streets, making them more accessible and usable to their surrounding communities.

A couple other streets in the North County area are in the beginning stages of becoming Great Streets such as Dorsett Road in Maryland Heights and West Florissant Avenue in Ferguson. The most recently completed Great Streets Project is the Grand Center District in St. Louis.

The plan for the Natural Bridge project includes reducing the number of lanes on the road in Normandy near the University of Missouri—St. Louis (UMSL) by one in each direction; calming traffic; improving access to other modes of transportation such as cycling, walking, and public transit; improving the overall look and feel of the roadway; and creating a roundabout at the current "wedge" where Natural Bridge Road meets Florissant Road. The estimated cost for the project design, right of way acquisition, utility relocation, and construction is around $13 million.

Local community leaders have been very strong supporters of these projects, believing strongly that the projects will revitalize the area and are excited about the improvements that are coming. The three main entities involved in the Natural Bridge project are the City of Normandy, the University of Missouri—St. Louis, and North County, Inc. They have worked together over the last couple of years to get full funding from MoDOT for the project.

Ayer Patrick Green of Normandy says they are focusing on the details—everything from the landscaping and foliage and the colors they will bring to each season to the materials and sizes of the curbs and whether they will be able to withstand hits from large trucks and snow plows. "It's all about sustainability," he says. "What will stand the test of time? How will these materials hold up and look 30 to 40 years from now?"

Betty Van Um of UMSL said that she hopes "the revitalization will help stabilize and enhance the beautiful residential neighborhoods and return the area to the town center that it historically once was." The plans for increased safety measures for pedestrian traffic and the beautification of the area will create a more positive environment within the community.

North County, Inc. President and CEO Rebecca Zoll said that the plan, "once complete, will be multi-modal friendly, which is growing to be a key factor in successful communities throughout the country, when attracting and retaining people from all generations." As UMSL's campus expands and existing businesses such as Express Scripts continue to grow and new development along Natural Bridge Road occurs, the market will strengthen. Growing and strengthening the area and local economy is dependent on the project's success at making the area more accessible. The area is supported by multiple MetroLink stations, which will be updated with landscaping and better access points.

On April 17, the Community Development Corporation (CDC) and the 353 Redevelopment Corporation along with MetroLink will launch the "Kickoff" of the Natural Bridge Great Streets Project with a new statue at the UMSL South Metro station. The new statue will be a symbol of the overall project—it is more than just a street; it is an economic development project. All of the changes combined will help improve the community as a whole and give its citizens something they can take pride in.

The Dorsett Road Great Streets Project in Maryland Heights is in the beginning stages of the process. The study of the corridor was completed in July 2013. At this time they are still putting together the plans and working on getting funding, so it's difficult to say when construction on the project will begin. Project Manager Hillary Perkins said, "We're trying to do it right and be as fiscally responsible as we can. Existing businesses are very enthusiastic and we have full support from the business community. We hope the project will attract more businesses to the corridor and have a positive economic impact."

Some businesses along Dorsett Road have already begun making improvements. BEC Hardware recently did an expansion and did a lot of landscaping to make the building look more inviting and accessible to pedestrians. The McDonald's in the area has also done a lot of landscaping.
Much of the changes planned for the Dorset Road project are aesthetic—making the road more comfortable for walkers and cyclists, creating a nicer bus shelter for the Metro bus stop, creating unified street lighting and adding more trashcans. Additionally, there are plans to create a pedestrian crossing in the area between 270 and McElroy where many people attempt to cross the dangerous intersection between two apartment complexes.

The West Flossom Avenue project is still in the study phase—existing conditions are being analyzed and several community meetings about the project have been held in Ferguson and Dellwood to get a better grasp on what the community’s wants and needs are. Some of the problem areas that have surfaced during these initial meetings are how difficult it is to cross the street and the lack of sidewalks and bike lanes. The Master Plan for this project is due on June 30, 2014. The next step after the plan is submitted is to seek funding and recommendations for implementing the project.

Looking to the success of the completed South Grand project, it is hoped that these projects in-progress will give a boost to their local economies by bringing more businesses to the area and increasing pedestrian traffic. The South Grand project has been a great example of how transforming a street into a Great Street can have a positive impact on the community.

Several new businesses have popped up with the completion of the South Grand project including Bikram Hot Yoga, Flex Studio, Panimonia, Upcycle Exchange, Bali Cargo Company, Baida Restaurant, and Tree House Restaurant. The project also prompted existing businesses to expand and make updates. The Viné Café and Wei Hong Restaurant both added outdoor patio spaces to their establishments. The King and I Restaurant, Café Natasha’s and St. Louis Bread Co. all did total remodels of their buildings.

Pedestrian traffic on South Grand has increased since the project’s completion, which has helped in the district’s increase in revenue of 9 percent. South Grand is also Metro’s number-one bus route in the city with over 3 million riders a year. Construction will begin in March for a Pocket Park and event space that will take the place of the metered lot between Mangia and King and I Restaurant to attract more visitors. The district will be hosting movie nights, concerts, plays, festivals, and more. Rachel Witt, Executive Director of the South Grand Community Improvement District said, “This project has encouraged many businesses to open on South Grand, expand and rehab. The district would like to assist in the future. We are creating a Building Improvement Program grant to help business owners improve the interior of their spaces.”

Updating the areas surrounding streets such as Natural Bridge Road and making the land more usable as has been done with the South Grand project will attract new developers and investors. Additionally, it will make the areas an attraction for surrounding communities.

These Great Streets Projects do more than just repave roads and add sidewalks. The streets and their surrounding areas are researched and studied in great detail. The streets are then designed to reflect their neighborhoods’ rich histories and the current populations, all while lasting well into the future. Great Streets Projects breathe life back into these areas. They create attractions like new parks and plazas and make the environment safer for everyone. These projects strengthen the local economy by bringing new businesses to the area and giving existing businesses incentives to make improvements. And all of these factors strengthen the community as a whole. It’s not just Great Streets that are being created—great communities are being created as well. They give the local communities something they can rally around, something they can use to continue their growth. Great Streets are something communities can and should be proud of.