

FINAL

Lilac Way Legacy Project Award Recalling the history of a bygone era

In 1941, Lilac Way was more than a road for getting from here to there. It was a beautifully landscaped parkway that became a favored family route for leisurely Sunday drives and picnics along the way. This 12.5-mile segment of Mn/DOT's Highway 100 reconstruction project is the fourth AASHTO "Legacy Project" selected in cities that host the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Annual Meeting. Lilac Way was chosen for its place-sensitive design, strong historic and cultural preservation effort and extensive citizen involvement.

Legacy of Lilac Way

In 1934, construction began on Lilac Way, the first segment of a 66-mile, four-lane beltline highway around the Twin Cities, through the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to stimulate the local economy during our nation's worst depression. Lilac Way included state-of-the-art cloverleaf interchanges that set the stage for future freeways. The route was a four-lane divided "parkway" that was beautifully landscaped with thousands of lilacs, trees and shrubs. To stimulate local tourism, wayside parks were added with handcrafted limestone picnic tables, benches and beehive-shaped ovens.

In 2000, the Minnesota Department of Transportation began reconstructing the Lilac Way segment of Highway 100 into a six-lane divided freeway to accommodate growing travel demand. Care was taken during reconstruction to preserve the spirit, resources and memories of old Lilac Way.

A Context Sensitive Design

In order to preserve the character of the original Lilac Way during construction, Mn/DOT used a Context Sensitive Design approach that safely integrated the highway improvements with the surrounding natural and human environments. A community task force was formed to make decisions regarding design concepts and selection of landscaping features. When the project is completed in summer of 2004, the result will be a safer, more efficient roadway with design features that preserve the historic attributes of the route.

Preserving Living History

Many individuals and communities along Lilac Way worked hard before construction began to preserve the spirit and resources of this special roadway. As a result, the wayside parks in Robbinsdale and St. Louis Park will be revitalized after the roadway reconstruction is completed. During public meetings, many citizens expressed an interest in preserving the original lilacs along Highway 100. With the help of youth from the Mosaic Youth Center in the north Minneapolis suburbs, Mn/DOT transplanted over 500 lilacs to new Highway 100 locations in Brooklyn Center and Robbinsdale. The City of Brooklyn Center partnered with Mn/DOT to move and maintain many original lilacs along Highway 100 in their city. Hundreds more original lilacs have been protected in their original locations.

Memorializing Cultural Resources

A documentary film was produced and aired by Twin Cities Public Television to preserve the memory of the original Lilac Way. The film includes photos of the original structures, film of local events on the roadway and interviews with individuals who had relatives or friends that worked on the WPA project. Rather than a report that is filed and forgotten, the “Highway 100: Lilac Way” film is a living, memorable representation of the past that can be viewed and enjoyed by many for years to come. It is also a tribute to Mn/DOT’s partners, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Minnesota State Historical Society and the Federal Highway Administration, as well as local communities, residents and motorists who value this resource.

The partnerships that developed with communities, citizens and local organizations resulted in unique solutions, strengthened working relationships and paved the way to more pleasing, mutually acceptable facilities that will leave a lasting legacy.

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