



Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. When will the public vote on the viaducts be held?

The public vote on Phase 1 is January 15, 2008. Please see city officials if you need more information about voting.

Q2. How have the people who live here in Columbus had the opportunity to provide input into the viaducts plan or need for viaducts?

The current viaducts plan is directly derived from the residents of Columbus, and residents will continue to have input as the design and environmental analysis continue on the proposed viaducts. Today's viaduct plan originated in 2005 with the Columbus Viaduct Committee.

- Seventeen residents from across the city were appointed to represent the community as a whole. After more than seven months of evaluation and discussions, the committee presented its recommendations to the public through a series of five meetings in 2005. The committee then presented its recommendations to the City Council.
- The city then forwarded the recommendations to the Nebraska Department of Roads and Union Pacific Railroad.
- The city negotiated the current viaducts plan with the state of Nebraska and Union Pacific Railroad. The City Council approved the plan in January 2007.
- The former Viaduct Committee reconvened in July 2007. The committee overwhelmingly verified that the city negotiated its recommendations in good faith and that there is a clear link between its suggestions and the current proposal. The Viaduct Committee continues to remain engaged by offering advisement and ideas.

An Aesthetics Design Working Group made up of citizens of Columbus met with the design consultant to review options for aesthetic treatments. The group provided suggestions for how visual elements of the viaducts could be enhanced to ensure the viaducts fit with their surroundings. The suggestions of the group have been incorporated into the project design.

Q3. What will the viaducts look like?

The overall engineering goal is to minimize impacts to residents while designing viaducts that fit surroundings, meet requirements and stay within the budget. Please see the 'Engineering Considerations' fact sheet for general information about factors upon which engineering a viaduct are based. The artist renderings of the proposed viaducts and pedestrian overpass are posted on www.columbusviaduct.com. All fact sheets and public display information are also posted on this web site.

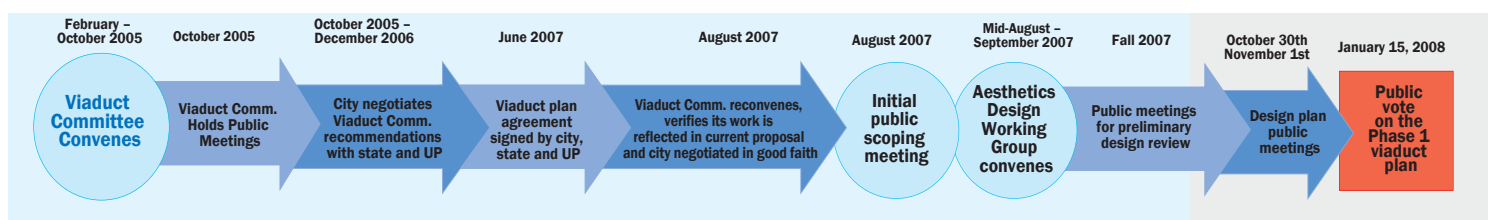
Q4. How much will traffic increase on each of the proposed viaduct streets? How much of that traffic will be trucks? What are the traffic impacts at locations away from the proposed viaducts?

Traffic patterns will vary until construction of the full viaducts plan is complete and all planned crossing closures have been completed. During construction of the 3rd Avenue viaduct, traffic on 12th Avenue is expected to increase as traffic shifts to an alternate route. Similarly, during construction of the 12th Avenue viaduct, traffic on 3rd Avenue is expected to increase as 12th Avenue traffic shifts to an alternate route.

To accommodate the increased traffic volumes during construction, left-turn lanes would be added at the following intersections: 3rd Avenue/8th Street, 12th Avenue/8th Street, 23rd Avenue/8th Street. Traffic signals may be provided in the future at the intersections of 12th Avenue/8th Street and 23rd Avenue/8th Street to provide better traffic operations because traffic volumes in Columbus are expected to gradually increase over time.

Once construction of the 3rd and 12th Avenue viaducts is completed, traffic patterns in Columbus will gradually redistribute as drivers determine the best routes to their destinations. Because most of the crossing closures occur closer to downtown Columbus, the majority of traffic from closures is expected to shift to 23rd or 33rd Avenue and traffic volumes on 3rd and 12th Avenues are expected to return to pre-viaduct levels with

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minimal impact. Truck traffic is not expected to change significantly on 12th or 3rd Avenue.

Q5. Why does the alignment curve on 12th Avenue?

The 12th Avenue alignment is curved to the west to avoid impacts to the cemeteries, Loup Power District and utilities. The curved alignment also allows more gradual grades to be used to provide better access for pedestrians and bicyclists. A curved alignment would be easier to construct than a straight alignment because of the closeness of the cemeteries on the east and other buildings on the west. Due to these factors, a curved alignment would cost less than a straight alignment.

Q6. Why does the alignment curve on 3rd Avenue?

The 3rd Avenue alignment is curved to the east to avoid impacts to Ag Park and the commercial properties south of the UPRR tracks. Access to these properties could not be provided if the alignment went straight.

Q7. Will there be fence along the railroad?

The 18th Avenue pedestrian overpass will have a fence extending 500 feet in each direction from the street and on both sides of the right-of-way to discourage pedestrians from crossing at-grade.

Q8. How much will the aesthetic treatments add to the cost?

Aesthetic treatments for the viaducts would likely be less than 10 percent of the total cost of the project. The final level of aesthetic treatments will be determined with consideration of cost, ease of construction and other factors.

Q9. How will the cemeteries be affected?

Impacts to the cemeteries have been minimized with the curved alignment of the proposed 12th Avenue viaduct. No land would be purchased from the cemeteries and the visual impact of the viaduct is minimized because of the distance from the viaduct to the cemeteries, as well as the use of visual enhancements on the viaduct. There would be minor changes to access for the cemeteries – the existing entrances to the cemeteries would not be affected; however, the way the public accesses the entrances would change slightly due to the change in alignment on 12th Avenue.

Q10. How will the road closures be handled at non-viaduct locations?

An individual closure plan will be prepared for each of the crossings planned for closure. These plans would be developed by considering the characteristics of each location so the plan blends into the surrounding neighborhood to the greatest extent possible.

Q11. What portion would the city pay for these projects?

For the 3rd Avenue viaduct and 18th Avenue pedestrian overpass, the city would pay 10 percent, the state 77

percent and the railroad 13 percent. For the 12th Avenue viaduct, the city would pay 10 percent, the state 80 percent and the railroad 10 percent.

Q12. How will the city pay for these projects and will taxes be raised?

The city will pay for the projects out of its sales tax. No property taxes will be involved. The sales taxes will remain at current levels.

Q13. Was a downtown viaduct ever considered?

Yes it was. It is part of the Phase 2 plan.

Q14. Does Union Pacific want all of the crossings closed?

In reality, it is a combination of Union Pacific and the Nebraska Department of Roads. However, the Nebraska Department of Roads has the ability to set conditions, such as the number and location of at-grade crossing closures, in order for a city to qualify for state/federal funding to build structures. The state's efforts are backed by Federal Railroad Administration statistics which show that virtually all of Columbus' at-grade crossings are in the top 5 percent of the most potentially dangerous crossings in the state. Neither the railroad nor the state can force a viaduct to be built if it is not on a state or interstate highway.

Q15. Is switching railroad cars the real cause of our traffic problems?

Increased train traffic on the main line along with more vehicular traffic are the reasons for traffic problems along the rail line. However, switching of railcars also compounds the problem.

Q16. Was an underpass ever studied?

The committee carefully studied all options, including an underpass. Due to the high water table, continuous pumping would be required. Additionally, utility impacts would be greater and key streets such as 11th and 13th streets could not remain open. Because an underpass involves construction of a railroad bridge instead of a roadway bridge, a temporary track would need to be built to keep the UP mainline open during construction. This adds to the costs, impacts and time of construction. Overall, an underpass would be 25 to 30 percent more costly than an overpass.

Q17. What happens to contaminated soil at 23rd Avenue?

Any soil contamination is being addressed by 'superfund' efforts of the city under the direction of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Q18. Does the Union Pacific profit from these closures?

The biggest profit for both UP and the city of Columbus comes from improving safety for both cars and trains. Columbus reaps the biggest profit through improved safety and convenience from unimpeded traffic flows over the tracks.