2016 BUSINESS CONSTRUCTION GUIDE

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Spring 2016

Dear Business Owner,

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) recognizes that businesses located in a work zone will be impacted by construction. We also know how critical it is that your customers have access to your business despite the inconvenience.

We have developed this guidebook to help you successfully navigate this project. We understand you are the experts of your business. Our goal is to provide you with some additional ideas to help you mitigate any impacts.

This guidebook is divided into three phases: Before, During and After construction. Each section outlines what will happen during each phase. We have also included tips we collected from businesses we have worked with previously.

We hope you find this guide helpful. If you need additional assistance please don't hesitate to speak to your construction contact at any time during the project.

Sincerely,

Scott McBride
District Engineer
Metro

PHASE ONE: BEFORE

The good news with construction projects is that the discussion, design and planning happens years in advance, which means there will be opportunities for you to have your voice heard. In fact, many projects have a design phase of five or more years. This work helps determine the needs of the project.

It is during this time that MnDOT engineers, in cooperation with local government officials, businesses, and residents do the following:

- Define the scope of what will be accomplished
- Design the plans that a contractor will need to finish the project
- Evaluate the impacts on the community and neighborhood
- Study the available alternatives

Throughout this design phase MnDOT will hold periodic meetings with business owners, citizens and local officials to listen to and consider their suggestions and concerns. By the time the construction crew begins all of the design decisions have been made. It is important for the business community to get involved early in the design phase and stay involved throughout construction.

GETTING ORGANIZED

A key to navigating construction projects is to start early and work to reduce the project impacts on your business. A local chamber of commerce or business association is a good resource, given that these organizations are a gathering place of ideas and contacts, including like-minded individuals in your industry and your community.

A smaller group or committee made up of area businesses can also be formed to specifically represent those who are most affected by the construction. Working as a group; instead of trying to do everything alone, is a good way to save time and money.

STAYING INFORMED

Our goal is to partner with you during the project. It's important for businesses, as well as citizens; to understand why a highway or bridge needs to be rebuilt, the alternative solutions that were evaluated, the efforts made to make sure that negative impacts are kept to a minimum, and why there may be some inconvenience during repairs.

Keeping the public informed about construction projects and the impacts on citizens' lives is key to public understanding. We use a variety of techniques to accomplish this.

Ways we share information include:

- Helping suppliers and their drivers identify alternate routes
- Holding public events
- Maintaining project specific websites
- Sending out alerts and weekly emails
- Sharing information on social media

All of the items above are also great tools to share information with your customers and vendors. This includes sharing our Facebook Posts with your fans, creating a link to the construction project page on your website and embedding project logos on your site.

PHASE TWO: DURING

While dust and noise are inevitable once construction begins, there are things to do and keep in mind to mitigate disruption during the project. In fact, the importance of your planning and communication will become evident during this phase. You have communicated with your customers, neighbors and suppliers to this point, which will make a tremendous difference now that the project has begun.

Please remember the individuals performing the work are not the project lead; they are simply following orders.

A contractor can repair or rebuild a road faster and with less cost if all traffic is removed during the work. But that is not feasible without complete disruption to businesses and the community. Customers and drivers who are informed tend to be more understanding despite the obvious inconvenience. They know about the construction before they leave home, which eliminates any surprises and decreases frustration.

HANDLING TRAFFIC

There's no denying that traffic and construction don't always go together. There are things you can do to minimize traffic impacts to your business and for your customers. This is particularly important for customers who are traveling a long way to reach you or are unfamiliar with the area.

One of the major impacts you face may be with deliveries, both incoming and outgoing.
We encourage you to consider, if at all possible, the routes of outgoing and incoming vehicles to avoid the work zone or to schedule shipments at nonpeak times. Sharing those routes through flyers, customer billings or paycheck stuffers is a good way to communicate with those impacted by these changes.

TIPS FROM BUSINESSES

We've worked with a number of businesses through the years and during that time we've collected their tips, along with other best practices from across the country, which you may find helpful during this construction project.

FINANCIAL TIPS

- Are there remodeling projects you've put off? Consider completing these projects during the construction work.
- Consider delivering your product to certain customers instead of having them come to your location.
- If possible, consider telecommuting or other strategies that allow employees to work at home. There are programs available, such as e-workplace that can assist you.
- Establish a company-sponsored carpool or vanpool program, or encourage employees to use existing programs.
- Flex your business hours or extend them to minimize the construction impact.
- Get together with your fellow businesses to create joint sales opportunities.
- Investigate flextime or four-day workweeks to reduce employee travel during the rush hours (7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays).
- Look into starting a company shuttle to take employees to and from park-and-ride lots at locations outside the construction area.
- Hold events prior to construction start-up to draw attention to the area and let everyone know that you will remain open.
- Hold special promotions such as free hot dogs and pop, or a one-day sign-up in a parking lot for a free service or product.
- Is there a local advertising firm that will be impacted?
- Look for grants for small businesses to help offset any costs of promotion.
- Place advertisements in area newspapers or on Facebook.
- Pool your advertising resources with your neighbors to create a neighborhood or business campaign.
- Sell hard-hat lunches to go.
- Take advantage of radio and local papers to get your message out.

COMMUNICATION TIPS

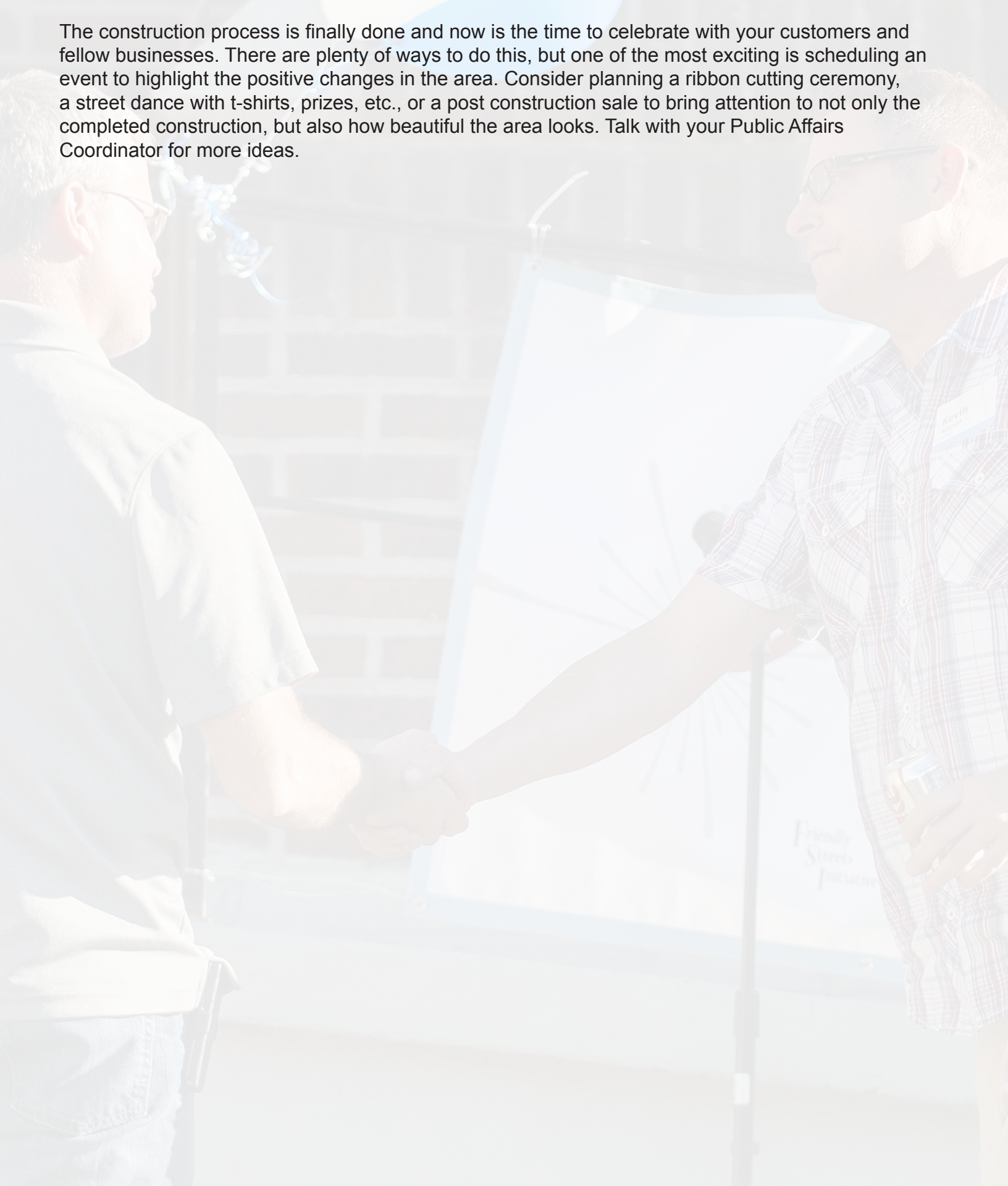
- Attend construction business meetings throughout the project.
- Construct roadside signs to guide customers to parking and business access.
- Develop a relationship with your key MnDOT contact. In the event that issues arise you will have a person to speak with that you trust.
- Develop a script with clear messages for your employees to use. All information going out to your customers should be accurate and consistent.
- Identify key business people to whom MnDOT can mail or fax news releases and project updates.
- Invite MnDOT representatives to discuss the project at your business association or group meetings.
- Meet the MnDOT project manager, who is responsible for construction, as well as the main contractor.
- Sign up for the email alerts and regularly check the project website—it's the fastest way to stay up-to-date.
- Stay in touch with your MnDOT contact once construction begins. Learn the project manager's name and phone number and where the project field office is located.

MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

- Create a Facebook group for your business and others in the area to share updates and ideas.
- Design a logo for use by all affected merchants during the construction period.
- Develop a marketing plan that specifically addresses your strategies throughout the project.
- Develop a weekly meeting with other businesses and neighbors to discuss your social media plans and updates the plan as needed.
- Join or form a business group and pool your resources and expertise.
- Use creative promotions to keep people connected to your business. We've heard of everything from a business hosting a construction worker who ate their lunch in front of the business while fielding questions from kids to unique prize drawings, giveaways and construction discounts.
- Work with neighborhood groups and/or associations to coordinate communication efforts.

PHASE THREE: AFTER

The construction process is finally done and now is the time to celebrate with your customers and fellow businesses. There are plenty of ways to do this, but one of the most exciting is scheduling an event to highlight the positive changes in the area. Consider planning a ribbon cutting ceremony, a street dance with t-shirts, prizes, etc., or a post construction sale to bring attention to not only the completed construction, but also how beautiful the area looks. Talk with your Public Affairs Coordinator for more ideas.



KEY CONTACTS

For business related questions and concerns, please call:

Kent Barnard, Public Affairs Coordinator

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651-234-7504

For up-to-date information on current and future construction projects check our construction website. For information on News Releases check the Metro Construction News Releases page and for updated statewide traffic construction, weather and travel information visit www.511mn.org.

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