

## Sun shines on overpass groundbreaking

By Dawn Timbs  
Staples World reporter

The City of Staples will no longer be divided by railroad tracks, a reality celebrated April 20 at the groundbreaking for the Staples North/South Corridor with Railroad Overpass Project.

At least 50 people attended the event, held on the north side construction site adjacent to 2nd Ave. and after decades of being in the dark as to whether or not this project would ever become reality, it was only fitting that the sun would shine for the groundbreaking.

"Of all the groundbreaking events we've had in Staples, this one is the most historic," Staples Mayor Chris Etzler said.

It's a project that's long been in the works and one that came to fruition thanks to the hard work of representatives from the city, county and state levels of government.

Jerel Nelsen, Community Development Director for the City of Staples, served as emcee for the



### Dirt-throwing celebration

Speakers at the recent groundbreaking ceremony for the Staples North/South Corridor with Railroad Overpass Project donned hardhats and shoveled the first ceremonial dirt at the conclusion of the event. Pictured above, from left, are Mark Blessing, Todd County Commissioner; Jerel Nelsen, Community Development

groundbreaking event. He said that this project has been "a great partnership between the City of Staples and Todd County." He thanked Loren Fellbaum, Todd County Engineer, for his time and commitment to the overpass project.

Besides Nelsen, speakers at the April 20 event included:

- Collin Peterson, United States Representative for the 7th Congressional District;
- Lisa Fobbe, aide to United States Senator Al Franken;
- Chris Etzler, Staples Mayor;
- Derrell Turner, Division Administrator at Federal Highway Administration;
- Mark Blessing, Todd County Commissioner; and
- Dan Skogen, former State Senator.

Three former mayors were also in attendance. These included Jack Wilson, Mike Goff and Bruce Nelsen, each of

Director for the City of Staples; Collin Peterson, United States Representative; Derrell Turner, Division Administrator at Federal Highway Administration; Chris Etzler, Staples Mayor; Lisa Fobbe, aide to United States Senator Al Franken; and Dan Skogen, former State Senator. (Staples World photo by Dawn Timbs)

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## *Many people worked together*

whom had spent time during their terms working to make the overpass project a reality. Current and past city council members were also in attendance.

"I also see that Jack Giza is here," Jerel Nelsen said at the beginning of the ceremony. "Jack is here representing all of the people who have said, 'I'll never live to see the day we have an overpass,'" he joked.

Blessing, a Staples native, said that the overpass project is long overdue. "My dad, like Mr. Giza, talked about it 50 years ago. This is going to be a wonderful thing for Staples."

Turner noted that in addition to helping provide jobs, the overpass project will help provide transportation safety for both vehicles and pedestrians. "This project will be a blessing to all of you," Turner added.

Funding has been a key factor to this project becoming a reality.



## **A dream come true**

Jack Giza (center), longtime resident of Staples' south side, never thought he'd live to see the construction of the Staples North/South Corridor with Railroad Overpass. Giza was all smiles at the recent groundbreaking ceremony for the overpass, estimated to be completed in November, 2012. Also pictured are Bruce Nelsen, former Mayor of Staples, and Jerel Nelsen, Community Development Director for the City of Staples. (Staples World photo by Dawn Timbs)

In 2005, Congressman Collin Peterson helped with funds for the preliminary design of the overpass which later helped the city receive additional funding, Jerel Nelsen said. "Without that first infusion of funds, it wouldn't have happened," he went on. "You don't receive large grants unless you have the engineering (work) done."

Congressman Peterson said that the methods he used back then to secure funds would no longer be legal today. "Congress can no longer earmark projects," he explained.

"We had to work with the state and congress to find money (for this project) but we did it," Peterson said.

Dan Skogen was in the state senate in 2008, when the City of Staples went to him looking for state bonding money for the overpass project in addition to the state funds they'd received in 2006. "He's been a great advocate," Nelsen said of Skogen.

It was the first bonding project he had ever written, Skogen shared with the crowd, adding that it was a project he strongly supported. "Of course, it would have been great if the overpass project had already been completed when we came to Staples last night," he joked. "We live in Hewitt and we've had to wait for a lot of trains over the years."

Mayor Etzler noted that the city received a \$7.65 million federal TIGER II grant, thanks to the efforts of Jerel Nelsen. "Only 42 of these grants were awarded across the country and Staples was one of the recipients," Etzler said. "I think we all need to thank Jerel for that."

The North/South Corridor with Railroad Overpass Project will construct a two-lane north/south collector (urban and rural) roadway and a bridge over the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad and U.S. Highway 10 in Staples. The bridge and roadway will incorporate a 10 foot pedestrian/bicycle trail for the entire length of the project.

Construction began April 16 and is estimated to continue through November, 2012.

Etzler also said he wanted to thank all of the people who have ever lived on the south side of town; for everyone who's been late for work because of the trains. "You've been putting up with this for 100 years."

Jack Giza said he can hardly wait to drive over the new overpass. "I'm still alive. I'll get to see it."

# Overpass project need and timeline

## Three main project elements

Overpass of Railroad and U.S. Highway 10  
Roadway Connection to "New" and "Old" Hwy 10  
Regional North - South Collector Roadway

### Project need

#### Transportation

Currently, only two at-grade crossings  
Lack of continuous north-south corridor  
Delays - crossings closed in excess of 3.7 hours each day

#### Safety

Emergency services response  
Accident predication in Minnesota (185th out of 4,500)  
Vehicle and rail conflicts - 303,150 auto-train (2007) vehicles per day at the Highway 210 crossing. Ranks 32nd out of 4,500 exposures in state.

#### Pedestrians and Bicyclists

Lack of protected crossing  
Consistency with Comprehensive Trail Plan

### Timeline of project

- 1969 - MnDOT held a public meeting on a Hwy 210 Overpass at east end of town.
- 1988 - MnDOT completed an Environmental Impact Statement on east end overpass.
- 1990's - City of Staples began to explore other alternatives.
- 2001 - Staples EDA contracted with Sy Knapp to review Hwy 10 realignment, evaluate all previously proposed overpass alternatives and consider needs of pedestrians and bicyclists.
- 2005 - Awarded \$1.2 Million in SAFTEA-LU for preliminary design and engineering.
- 2006 - Awarded \$700,000 in state bonding bill.
- 2006 - Entered into cooperative agreement with Todd County for state aid administrative services.
- 2007 - Contracted with WSB & Associates, Inc. for design and engineering services.
- 2008 - City council approval of route and layout.
- 2009 - Awarded additional \$300,000 in state bonding bill.
- July, 2009 - Finding of No Significant Impact received from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).
- December, 2009 - Entered into new cooperative agreement for right-of-way acquisition phase of project.
- July, 2010 - Selected WSB & Associates, Inc. to perform right-of-way acquisition services.
- August, 2010 - Submitted \$7.65 Million TIGER II Grant application to FHWA.
- October, 2010 - \$7.65 Million TIGER II Grant awarded.
- November, 2011 - Awarded \$121,200 Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds.
- December, 2011 - MNDOT Right-of-Way Certificate awarded.
- December, 2011 - Final plans and specifications submitted for review.
- February, 2012 - Final plan approval by MnDOT and FHWA.
- February 2012 - Received \$1.25 million STP Funds from MnDOT.
- March 13, 2012 - Bid opening.
- April 3, 2012 - Todd County awards contract to Mathiowetz Construction, Sleepy Eye.
- April 20, 2012 - Groundbreaking Ceremony.
- Construction - April through November 2012.