

East gets the edge: Corps chooses diversion path closer to metro

By [HEIDI REISENAUER](#) on Jan 14, 2011 at 12:00 a.m.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will move forward with an eastern alignment of the proposed Fargo-Moorhead diversion, but a path 1½ miles to the west is not off the table.

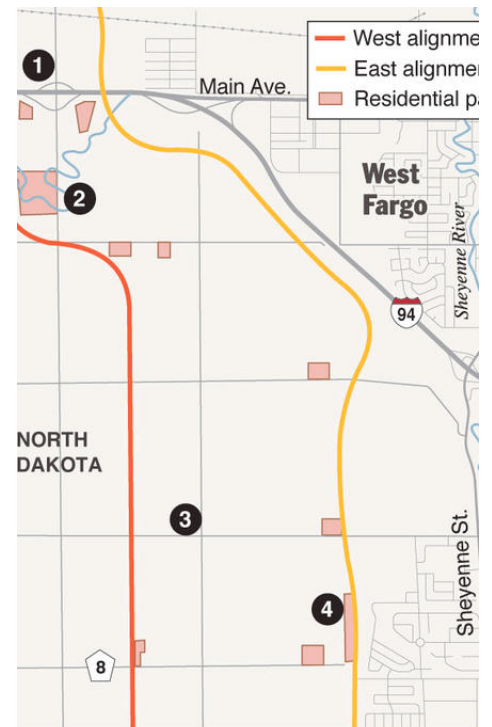
West Fargo Mayor Rich Mattern was left feeling disappointed by the earlier-than-expected decision from the corps, even though his preferred western option will receive future study.

"It's kind of like getting a runaround," Mattern said. "I handed in moments ago our material, and they turn around and say, 'Well, we've kind of already made this decision.' "

Local leaders on the Metro Flood Study Work Group have scrambled to argue the case for their preferred western alignment after the corps last month gave them a Jan. 31 deadline before that path would no longer be considered.

The eastern alignment, which runs along the West Fargo-Horace diversion, will be the option evaluated in the corps feasibility study slated for release April 27, and ultimately the plan up for congressional authorization, said Aaron Snyder, project manager for the corps.

But future consideration will be given to the areas protected by the western



path as the final alignment is addressed during the design phase, Snyder said.

Cass County and West Fargo officials presented a list of several areas and structures that should be protected by a channel farther to the west.

One of the most critical areas to protect is a power substation located on the wet side of the eastern alignment, said Brad Schmidt of Cass County Electric.

The station provides power to much of eastern North Dakota and areas in western Minnesota.

The Moorhead City Council and Moorhead Public Service both passed resolutions favoring the western alignment because the substation is the main power source to the city.

West Fargo is also looking to protect existing residential subdivisions that fall either in the path of or outside of the corps' chosen alignment.

Cass County Engineer Keith Berndt said a channel farther west would also impact fewer acres of wetlands, an environmental concern the corps is required to evaluate.

Those reasons are enough for the corps to keep the option open, but in the future, Snyder said.

"There's a lot of things that need to be considered," Snyder said. "If we were to do that today, it would definitely cause a delay in the project."

Right now, however, it's paramount to keep the project on track, said Tim Mahoney, Fargo city commissioner.

"It's critical to keep our timetable the same it's going right now so we can get this thing to the chief's report and get authorized by Congress," he said.

The diversion is likely at least a decade from completion and will be built from north to south. The disputed alignment wouldn't be constructed for at least four to seven years, Snyder said.

But the diversion, regardless of the alignment, will increase West Fargo's flood protection, Snyder said.

Mattern said West Fargo residents are confused about the process and wants the corps to explain the plan to his constituents.

"To me, the further we get down this timeline, the faster the door closes and the more the door is closed," he said. "We need to just get it done now."

Readers can reach Forum reporter Heidi Shaffer at (701) 241-5511
