

## Corps: Minnesota flood diversion plan is best shot

By [Helmut Schmidt](#) on Feb 5, 2010 at 12:02 a.m.



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Project managers from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said in no uncertain terms Thursday that Fargo-Moorhead's best shot at getting federal funds for a Red River diversion channel is to choose a Minnesota diversion.

Comments from members of the Metro Flood Study Work Group indicate local officials got the message.

Choosing a North Dakota diversion would likely get the local plan dumped from consideration due to cost, engineering and environmental concerns, with little time to fix any problems in a tight timeline, the corps project co-managers said.

"There is a significant risk of not meeting this deadline if you go the North Dakota path," Craig Evans said.

The Minnesota diversion plans have the highest cost-benefit ratios, a factor that will come into play when competing for federal funds, added Aaron Snyder.

Fargo City Commissioner Tim Mahoney said to get the project approved, and to have it affordable for taxpayers, it looks like a Minnesota diversion should be the local choice.

"The time frame is extremely critical. ... We have to pick a plan, it has to be an NED plan," he said.

The National Economic Development plan is the one the corps determines is the one that gives the nation the best bang for its buck. That plan appears to be a 20,000-cubic-feet-per-second, \$871 million diversion in Minnesota.

That plan would qualify for a 65 percent federal cost share, meaning local taxpayers would pay \$305 million.

Snyder and Evans said the corps' policy would allow the agency to back a 35,000-cubic-feet-per-second di-ersion in Minnesota, and to request a 65 percent cost share.

"The local costs are critical," Mahoney said. "We have to decide on a plan that has the best chance of getting through. We're going to look real hard at putting it in Minnesota and see if that is the best option."

Clay County Commission Chairman Kevin Campbell said a Minnesota diversion is "not a sure thing," but the arguments are tilted heavily in that direction.

"We're looking at a local share difference of

\$350 million," between a Minnesota and a North Dakota diversion, Campbell said. "That's a significant amount of money for us not to be paying attention to."

The environmental risks tied to crossing five rivers in North Dakota are also too great to ignore, Campbell said.

Fargo City Administrator Pat Zavoral said even the smallest Minnesota diversion would have made a huge difference in last year's historic 40.84 foot crest on the Red River. With the diversion, the river would have flowed by at 33 feet, Zavoral said.

Zavoral said the \$700 million or more local share of a North Dakota diversion would be tough to pay for, even without overruns or downstream mitigation costs. Bonding would double the cost and take it out of reach, he said.

"We just don't think that if we put that burden on our citizens, (that) our community can continue to grow and prosper," Zavoral said.

Local officials need to submit a letter to the corps by April 15 giving their local choice for a diversion plan. If all approvals are made by December, the project can be included in the federal water projects bill.

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Helmut Schmidt was born in Germany, but grew up in the Twin Cities area, graduating from Park High School of Cottage Grove. After serving a tour in the U.S. Army, he attended the University of St. Thomas in St Paul, Minn., graduating in 1984 with a degree in journalism. He then worked at the Albert Lea (Minn.) Tribune and served as managing editor there for three years. He joined The Forum in October 1989, working as a copy editor until 2000. Since then, he has worked as a reporter on several beats, including education, Fargo city government, business and military affairs. He is currently The Forum's K-12 education reporter.

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