

## NURSES

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Chris Rubesch, first vice president of MNA and a nurse at Essentia Health in Duluth, said the 1% difference between the two regions reflects different economic markets.

"As we've all been saying for the last nine months, and will continue to say, the focus of this was on staffing language," Rubesch said. "We're very proud that this agreement adds new language giving us a say in the creating and review of staffing grids, adds additional

liability protection for nurses who are working in conditions that can be judged to be unsafe in the nurses' clinical judgment, and it adds significant benefits that will help retain senior nurses who are going to be absolutely vital as we train the next generation of caregivers in Minnesota."

The MNA and hospitals have been negotiating for the new contracts since March. Nurses previously held several pickets, a three-day strike in September for unfair labor practices, and had planned another strike this

month before the tentative agreements were reached and the strike notice was withdrawn.

"At many of our bargaining tables, it wasn't until that second strike vote that (hospitals) started to discuss staffing," Turner said. "Because of our tenacity, we won unprecedented language to address staffing levels."

Andrea Rubesch, a St. Luke's nurse on the MNA negotiating team, said St. Luke's MNA members "overwhelmingly" voted in favor of ratifying the new contracts. She said they are standing in solidarity with

St. Luke's Lake View Hospital nurses, who are still in the negotiation process for new contracts. Lake View nurses also planned to strike this month but rescinded those plans last week. St. Luke's has so far had three negotiation sessions with Lake View MNA nurses.

The MNA said their next priority will be to pass the Keeping Nurses at the Bedside Act in state legislation. The act addresses short-staffing, nurse retention and recruitment, and support for healthcare workers. The Minnesota House of Represent-



Steve Kuchera / Duluth News Tribune file photo  
Chris Rubesch and other MNA members acknowledge a supporter's horn honk during their Duluth news conference Aug. 2.

tatives passed the act Human Services omnibus bill in May.

## BRIDGE

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Two potential alignments and one interchange were selected for consideration of traffic on the bridge, as the departments begin the environmental assessment required before preliminary design for the new bridge begins.

The options that remain would utilize the existing bridge's alignment for construction or would call for building the new bridge west of the existing bridge. The west-existing combination option would have landings in Duluth and Superior veering to where they land now.

"To sum it up, bridge alignments that reduced access or limited waterfront slip access ... were eliminated from further consideration," Huston said. He said it isn't reasonable or feasible to find additional working waterfront property with big industry on both sides of the existing bridge.

"The east alignment, I thought that was a winner from the start, but when we moved through the east side, it hit a lot of businesses on Connors Point and it didn't make it through," said Vince Gastoni, vice president of roads



Shelley Nelson / Superior Telegram

A board at the Superior Public Library shows the only interchange that will be considered for the environmental assessment of a project to replace the Blatnik Bridge. Pat Houston of MnDOT said while the interchange is shown with roundabouts, they were included because roundabouts have a big footprint and would show the broadest impact. No decision has been made on whether roundabouts would be used, he said.

and structures with Parsons, which is working with MnDOT and WisDOT on the project.

Huston said the advantage of using the existing alignment is the currently unfunded project could be done in phases and the construction would only take about five years, but it could still impact one business on Connors Point and once construction begins,

the bridge would be closed for the duration.

The west-existing alignment could take up to two more years to construct, but portions of it could be built while the Blatnik Bridge remains open to traffic, he said. The estimated closure time would be reduced by 1½ years, Huston said.

Both alignments will be

considered with and without a shared-use path for pedestrian and bicycle traffic, Huston said.

The advantage of the shared-use path, Huston said, is that it could be built wide enough to accommodate bridge inspection equipment and eliminate the need for lane closures or having people working in traffic lanes during inspections, as well as other flexibilities.

While either path for the new bridge would land at Garfield Avenue in Duluth, the interchange under consideration in Superior — an offset diamond interchange — would direct most traffic to U.S. Highway 53 and the interstate bridge would no longer end on Hammond Avenue.

A direct connection to Hammond Avenue was eliminated, Huston said, because it has limited ability to improve vehicle safety and mobility. Going that route would have had the most impacts and would have required residential relocations. It would have also caused a steeper grade to the bridge and a lower clearance over Howards Pocket, where Fraser Shipyards is located. But the interchange under consideration would still allow access to and from Hammond and Tower avenues and U.S. Highway 53.

Access to U.S. Highway 53 at Grand and Clough avenues would be eliminated, but no decisions have been made about the highway access at Catlin Avenue, Huston said.

The interchange makes sense from a driving perspective, but it also makes sense because it minimizes the potential impacts, Gastoni said. Officials have been in contact with the businesses between North 3rd Street and U.S. Highway 53 in the area of Grant Avenue where the project would require additional land for the right of way.

Only one interchange is being considered as the environmental assessment required by the National Environmental Policy Act will look at the social, economic and environmental impacts of the project.

The public can comment on the project through Jan. 6 at [dot.state.mn.us/d1/projects/blatnik-bridge](http://dot.state.mn.us/d1/projects/blatnik-bridge).

Huston said construction could begin as early as 2026, when the final design for the project is planned, but he said the goal currently is 2027. Transportation officials in both states have applied for a \$900 million competitive grant for the new bridge, which would cover about half the cost of the \$1.8 billion project if awarded.

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