



Shop Superior. Get **5% back.** Spend it here again.

A shop-local cash-back program to keep customers crossing into Superior during the Blatnik Bridge closure, 2027 to 2031.

Every purchase helps build a stronger Superior.

PREPARED FOR

City of Superior · Douglas County
The Development Association · Superior Business
Improvement District

PREPARED BY

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STATUS

Discussion draft. All figures are planning estimates pending a vendor quote and partner input.

DECISION NEEDED

A funding commitment in the 2027 budget cycle this fall, so businesses can be onboarded before the March 2027 closure.

01 Executive summary

The Blatnik Bridge closes to all traffic in early 2027 and stays closed for four to five years while its \$1.8 billion replacement is built. Every Minnesota customer who used to drive five minutes across I-535 now faces a detour through the Bong Bridge.

The Development Association’s August 2026 surveys confirm what business owners already feel: a meaningful share of Superior revenue comes from across the bridge, many owners expect double-digit revenue losses, and most consumers expect to cross state lines less often.

MnDOT and WisDOT have been clear that compensating businesses is outside their role. That leaves the gap to local partners. Superior Rewards fills one piece of it: a city-sponsored cash-back program that pays shoppers 5 to 10% back for spending at independent Superior businesses, with rewards that can only be spent at other participating Superior businesses. Every reward dollar forces a second local transaction.

33,000+ vehicles a day cross the Blatnik today	Mar 2027 full closure begins	Oct 2031 new bridge targeted to open	\$1.8B replacement project
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The ask

Fund a 12-month pilot launching before the bridge closes, run on Open Rewards, an existing municipal platform already used by dozens of cities, and administered through the Bridge to Progress framework.

SCENARIO	YEAR-ONE INVESTMENT	PROJECTED TRACKED LOCAL SPEND	SPEND PER PROGRAM DOLLAR
Pilot	\$85,000	~\$830,000	~10x
Standard · recommended	\$175,000	~\$2.2 million	~12x
Full coverage	\$315,000	~\$4.2 million	~13x

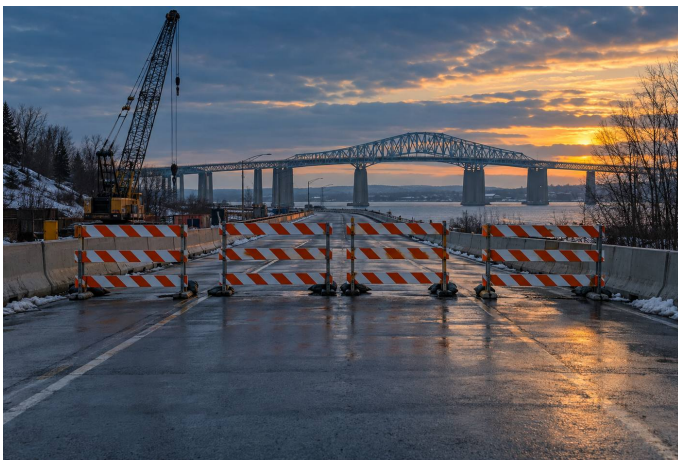
DECISION NEEDED

A funding commitment in the 2027 budget cycle this fall so businesses can be onboarded before the March 2027 closure. Recommended pilot budget: \$175,000, the Standard scenario. Projected tracked local spend: roughly \$2 million.

02 The problem

A five-year detour, not a short disruption

TIMELINE	Phased work is underway now. Full closure begins around March 2027. The new bridge is targeted to open in October 2031, with site work finishing in 2032.
TRAFFIC	The Blatnik carries 33,000+ vehicles a day. All of it reroutes to the Bong Bridge and Superior's local street grid.
EXPOSURE	Small retail, dining, entertainment, and construction-trade businesses are flagged as most vulnerable. The core risk is Minnesota customers building new habits with Duluth-side alternatives, habits that may not reverse when the bridge reopens.



The approach. Full closure around March 2027.



The detour. Every Minnesota trip reroutes over the Bong Bridge.

What already exists, and the gap

Local partners are already moving: The Development Association's Bridge to Progress program (Preserve, Promote, Prepare, Position), the Superior BID's marketing fairs, Hard Hat Happy Hours and ZIP-code sales tracking study with UW-Superior, and a recommended \$59,500 Douglas County allocation for small business support in 2027.

What is missing is a direct, measurable incentive that gives a customer a concrete reason to make the detour this week. Superior Rewards is designed to be that tool, plugged into the Promote pillar, not competing with it.

WHY IT MATTERS IN 2031

The question is not one slow quarter. It is who is still open on Tower Avenue when the new bridge opens, and whether four years of Duluth-side habits come back.

03 The solution

How it works

STEP	SHOPPER EXPERIENCE	BUSINESS EXPERIENCE
1. Join	Downloads the free Open Rewards app, selects Superior, links a debit or credit card.	Nothing. Eligible businesses are onboarded by the program. No equipment, no fees.
2. Shop	Pays normally at any participating Superior business.	Business as usual at the register. Full sale value kept.
3. Earn	Cash back posts automatically from the city-funded rewards pool.	Listed in the in-app directory. Included in program marketing.
4. Spend	Rewards redeemable only at other participating Superior businesses.	Receives a second, reward-funded visit from a local or returning customer.



Shop. Pay normally. Nothing to show at the register.



Spend. The reward goes back through the next Superior business.

Why Open Rewards instead of building an app

Building a custom app would cost more, take longer than the six-month runway before closure, and still need payments, fraud controls, and support. Open Rewards already handles card-linked tracking, receipt uploads, business onboarding, reward payouts, customer support, and real-time reporting. The vendor states it charges no transaction fees on sponsored rewards funds, so the rewards budget flows to shoppers and businesses. Comparable cities include Littleton and Englewood, Colorado; Arlington County, Virginia; El Paso, Texas; and Pasadena, California.

BRANDING NOTE

Shoppers download the shared Open Rewards app and choose Superior as their community. “Superior Rewards” is the campaign brand layered on top: marketing, signage, landing page. It is not a separately branded app store listing. Confirm white-label options with the vendor.

04 Program design

Reward structure

LEVER	RECOMMENDED SETTING	WHY
Base reward	5% cash back	Matches proven programs. Meaningful without draining the fund.
Per-transaction cap	\$25	Limits exposure on big-ticket purchases.
Annual cap per shopper	\$300	Spreads funds across more households. Revisit quarterly.
“Cross the Bong” bonus	10% for Minnesota shoppers	Targets the customers most likely to be lost, for the length of the closure. Confirm the vendor can segment by user ZIP.
Corridor boosts	10% nearest construction	Englewood ran 15% on its construction corridor. Puts money where impact is heaviest.
Event boosts	10% on event days	Small Business Saturday, Hard Hat Happy Hour Mondays, festivals. Short, promotable spikes that ride existing BID events.

Eligibility guardrails

Eligible: independently and locally owned, with a physical location in Superior, with an option to expand to Douglas County in year two. The program administrator approves each business, and the eligibility list is published so the process is transparent.

Excluded: national chains and franchises, vehicle sales, real estate, financial services, gift cards, cannabis, tobacco and vape, and gambling.

DECISION FOR PARTNERS

Whether home-services and trade contractors qualify. They are a flagged at-risk sector, but high-ticket jobs will hit the \$25 cap on nearly every transaction.

Governance

ROLE	ORGANIZATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Sponsor / funder	City of Superior, Douglas County	Funds rewards pool and platform. Sets eligibility policy.
Administrator	The Development Association (Bridge to Progress)	Vendor contract, approvals, budget monitoring, reporting to sponsors.
Business engagement	Superior BID	Onboarding support, window decals, tie-in to BID events and ZIP study.
Platform	Open Rewards (Bludot)	App, transaction tracking, payouts, support, dashboards.
Campaign and marketing	Marketing partner (see Implementation)	Brand, paid media, landing page, business toolkit, performance reporting.
Additional funders	Corporate and community sponsors	Fund bonus weeks and top up the rewards pool.

05 Budget and projected impact

Planning estimates for a 12-month pilot. Platform fee is based on public contracts from comparable cities, roughly \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year, and must be confirmed with a vendor quote. Tracked spend assumes a blended reward rate of 6% (base 5% plus targeted boosts) and full deployment of the rewards fund.

LINE ITEM	PILOT	STANDARD (RECOMMENDED)	FULL COVERAGE
Platform and administration	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$25,000
Rewards fund	\$50,000	\$130,000	\$250,000
Launch and campaign marketing	\$15,000	\$25,000	\$40,000
Total year-one investment	\$85,000	\$175,000	\$315,000
Projected tracked local spend	~\$830,000	~\$2.2 million	~\$4.2 million
Spend per program dollar	~10x	~12x	~13x

Benchmarks from live programs

~\$2M

Littleton, CO

Grew from a pilot to 3,000+ users and nearly \$2 million in stimulated economic activity.

~\$187K

Englewood, CO

About \$20,000 per year in platform cost and ~\$11,000 in rewards produced roughly \$187,000 in economic impact. The city raised rewards to 15% on a construction-impacted corridor.

\$122K

Pasadena, CA

A \$10,000 initial investment generated \$122,000 in impact. 85% of surveyed users said the program influenced where they shopped.

IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE FROM THE COLORADO AND CALIFORNIA PROGRAMS

Many sponsor cities recover part of their cost through local sales tax on the new spending. Superior has no municipal sales tax, so the return case here is different: preserving storefronts, jobs, and the property tax base through the closure, and avoiding a vacancy problem on Tower Avenue when the new bridge opens. The pitch should lead with business survival, not tax recapture.

Potential funding sources

- Douglas County 2027 small business support allocation, currently recommended at \$59,500.
- City of Superior economic development budget.
- The Development Association's Bridge to Progress program and any state funding it secures.
- Corporate sponsors with a stake in the Twin Ports economy (major employers, regional banks, health systems, the bridge contractor team) funding named bonus weeks.
- Tourism-promotion dollars for visitor-facing boosts around events and the new bridge's pedestrian path.

06 Marketing and launch plan

PHASE	TIMING	FOCUS
1. Approve and contract	Oct – Nov 2026	Funding commitments, vendor agreement, eligibility policy, brand finalized.
2. Business recruitment	Nov 2026 – Jan 2027	Target 100+ participating businesses. Decal and QR toolkit. BID event sign-ups.
3. Soft launch	Nov 28, 2026	Small Business Saturday. Local residents first. Test tracking, payouts, support volume.
4. Closure launch	Feb – Mar 2027	“The bridge is closed. Superior is open.” Cross the Bong bonus live. Heavy Duluth-targeted media.
5. Sustain and optimize	Apr 2027 onward	Monthly boosts tied to events. Quarterly rate and cap review. Sponsor-funded bonus weeks.



Event boosts ride the BID calendar: Hard Hat Happy Hours, Small Business Saturday, festivals.



Point of sale: window decal and counter QR at every participating business.

Channels

Paid social and search	Geo-targeted to Duluth, Hermantown, and Proctor ZIP codes with a detour-friendly message: a real reason to make the trip.
Point of sale	Window decals, counter QR cards, and receipt inserts so every existing customer becomes a user.
Earned media and partners	Local TV, radio, and print. Hard Hat Happy Hours. Coffee with the DOT. Chamber and BID newsletters.
Out-of-home	Placements along the Bong Bridge detour routes where Minnesota drivers will see them daily.
Landing page	One Superior Rewards page with a searchable directory, how-it-works, and live community-impact counter.

Same great community. A brighter tomorrow.

07 Measurement, risks and mitigation

Year-one targets, Standard scenario

KPI	TARGET	SOURCE
Participating businesses	100+	Open Rewards admin
Active shoppers	4,000+	Open Rewards admin
Share of shoppers with Minnesota ZIP	25%+	Open Rewards user data
Tracked spend at participating businesses	\$2M+	Open Rewards dashboard
Reward redemption rate	60%+	Open Rewards dashboard
Repeat-visit rate (2+ visits per quarter)	40%+	Open Rewards dashboard
Sales trend vs. non-participants	Directional lift	BID / UW-Superior ZIP-code study

Monthly one-page impact report to sponsors. Quarterly public update. Pairing program data with the BID's longitudinal ZIP-code study gives Superior something few construction-mitigation efforts have: proof of what worked.

Risks and mitigation

RISK	MITIGATION
Rewards fund runs out early	Monthly budget pacing. Lower boosts or annual caps before pausing. Sponsor top-ups.
Paying for spend that would happen anyway	Target boosts at Minnesota shoppers, impacted corridors, and slow periods rather than raising the base rate.
Fraud or gaming	Card-linked tracking as default. Receipt uploads reviewed. Per-transaction and annual caps.
Low business participation	Program handles onboarding. Zero cost. BID-led door-to-door signup in first 60 days.
Low shopper adoption	Launch with a signup bonus. Point-of-sale QR at every participating business. Duluth-targeted media.
Vendor or procurement delays	Start procurement conversation in October. Use a pilot contract to launch before closure.
Perceived favoritism in eligibility	Published criteria, administrator approval, open application for any qualifying business.

08 Implementation partner options and next 30 days

Bear North Digital is a Superior-based agency and is proposing this program as a community member first. Partners can choose the level of involvement that fits their procurement process.

A

Advisor

Share this plan, help shape program design, connect partners. No compensation.

BEST IF

Partners want to run marketing in-house or through an existing vendor.

B

Campaign partner

Brand, landing page, paid media, business toolkit, monthly performance reporting. Funded from the marketing line.

BEST IF

Partners want a local team accountable for adoption and results.

C

Full launch support

Option B plus business recruitment operations, onboarding tracking, and sponsor reporting.

BEST IF

Administrator capacity is limited ahead of the March closure.

Next 30 days

- 1 Present this plan to The Development Association and Superior BID. Confirm fit within Bridge to Progress.
- 2 Request an Open Rewards quote and demo. Confirm ZIP-based boosts, white-label options, and reporting exports.
- 3 Brief City and County staff before 2027 budgets are finalized.
- 4 Identify three to five corporate sponsor prospects for a founding rewards pool.
- 5 Draft eligibility policy and a one-page business FAQ.



Built for the businesses that make Superior, Superior.



Tower Avenue. The question is who is still open in 2031.

CONTACT

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