



Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

Meeting #3 Minutes

July 9, 2018

3-5 pm, 2nd Floor City Hall, Council Chambers Conference room

In Attendance:

Staff: Dave Taylor, Hilary Lindh, Craig Workman, Karin Hildner

Committee Members: John Middleton, Mark Pascoli, June Hanson, Roger Sherman, Marilyn Nelson, Lisa Post, John Muhlfeld (Justin Lawrence and Ryan Hennen absent)

Invited Speakers: James Freyholtz and Vicki Crnich, MDT; Bob Abelin, Abelin Traffic; Dave DeGrandpre, Land Solutions; Craig Workman, City of Whitefish Public Works Department

Public: Mark Mussman (Flathead County Planning), Tee Baur, Tom Thomas, Mayre Flowers, Rhonda Fitzgerald, Richard Turbiak

- A. Chair Middleton called the meeting to order at 3:00;**
- B. Introductions of invited speakers**
- C. Meeting minutes from May 30, 2018 were approved.**
- D. Public Works presentation**

Craig Workman reviewed the transportation plans that are relevant to the corridor including the South Whitefish Transportation Planning Project, the Southeast Whitefish Transportation Plan, the 2009 Whitefish Transportation Plan, and the 2010 Whitefish Urban Corridor Study of US 93. He also noted the recommendations in the Whitefish Downtown Business District Master Plan, which do not fully support the preferred alternatives described in the Urban Corridor Study.

Craig and Karin Hildner also discussed the status of the City's Capital Improvement Projects for streets in or near the corridor, as well as other priorities. These include paving Monegan Road between Voerman Road and JP Road; extending Whitefish Avenue, Baker Avenue, and Flathead Avenue; an eastward extension of either 13th Street or Greenwood over the Whitefish River, and the connections of existing segments of the river trail.

E. County Adopted Highway 93 South Corridor Plan

Dave DeGrandpre of Land Solutions, the author of the Highway 93 South Corridor Plan and Zoning Amendment that was adopted by Flathead County in 2017, provided a summary of the plan. He noted it is primarily a land use plan but that it does make some recommendations related to transportation such as location of frontage and backage roads, shared highway approaches and parking, and addition of a bike lane, among others. Staff provided a copy of the final plan dated April 2017 to the committee members to replace an October 2016 version that had been included in their resource binders.

F. Traffic Discussion

Bob Abelin of Abelin Traffic provided information on the existing transportation conditions in the corridor and facilitated a discussion with James Freyholtz and Vicki Crnich of Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

Bob discussed the carrying capacity of a 5-lane roadway and the factors that affect capacity. This highway can function well with up to about 30,000 vehicles per day. It currently has annual average daily traffic (AADT) near 25,000, and seasonal highs are expected to be close to 30,000. He noted the high number of existing highway approaches (driveways) between the Highway 40 intersection and the Whitefish River crossing: 42 on the west side and 26 on the east side of the highway. There is an average of one approach every 200 feet on the west side, with some located within less than 100 feet of each other. This high frequency of approaches and their spacing acts to reduce the capacity of the highway.

Regarding ways to reduce the traffic volume on the highway, Bob reviewed the traffic model from the 2009 Transportation Plan which looked at the reduction in volume that would be anticipated by the southward extension of Baker Avenue. A discussion about seasonal peaks and average annual traffic followed, with the take away message being that the AADT for Whitefish might be somewhat underestimated. Mark Pascoli asked whether the peak volume data could be used instead of the average; Bob replied that he could look at the raw data and would assume that the peak is at or near 30,000 vehicles/day. James Freyholtz also noted that, based on signal counts conducted in August and October it looks as though there is also a school peak hour that rivals the seasonal peak in the summer. Tee Baur asked whether chip and log truck traffic would be using the Baker Avenue extension once constructed; Craig replied that the couplet north of 13th Street would be designed for the trucks, but not the extension south of 19th Street.

Bob also provided a list of existing traffic data that is available for the corridor, and a list of needed data. Data needs include ADT for Baker Avenue, 18th, and 19th Streets; intersection traffic volumes at major intersections; traffic modeling and traffic simulation. The simulations would allow us to view how potential changes that we might recommend would help alleviate traffic issues. Data needed could be collected this summer to help inform the planning process.

There was a discussion about the volume of traffic at which MDT would install or consider installing raised medians on the highway. James clarified the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this section of the highway stated a median would be appropriate, when warranted. The statement was based on an Urban Median Policy from the 1980s which references a traffic volume threshold of 30,000 vehicles/day. John Muhlfeld asked for clarification whether there is a specific volume of traffic that compels the installation of a median; James indicated there is not a definitive threshold because there are many other factors considered than just volume. Marilyn Nelson asked how medians help with traffic volume, and James replied that they reduce the number of movements into and out of the driving lanes because there are less turning options. James also discussed that the spacing of traffic signals could be improved to help traffic flows. Ideally there should be 0.25 miles between signals; this is important when considering a new light at Akers Lane, for example – it might be better to move the light from Commercial north to Greenwood to provide sufficient space between it and Akers.

Other questions regarding roundabouts, driving lane width, and crash data followed. James stated that MDT analyzes whether roundabouts would be appropriate when they improve intersections; many aspects are considered and one of them is the amount of right-of-way (ROW) that would need to be acquired – which can dramatically increase a project's cost and timeline. Lane widths also depend on



Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

Meeting #3 Minutes

July 9, 2018

3-5 pm, 2nd Floor City Hall, Council Chambers Conference room

several factors including design speed, design vehicle (trucks, buses, etc.), and traffic volume. Crash data is available on the highway through the State Troopers.

James explained that new traffic signals are usually development driven and funded while modifications or upgrades to existing signals are financed with a combination of state and federal funding. Vicki also clarified that for bridge projects, existing bridges have priority over constructing new bridges due to limited funding sources. It's not that MDT isn't interested in a project to build a new bridge over Whitefish River at 7th Street, it's that there are limited resources available for new bridges. She also described two MDT policies: Shared Use Path Policy and the Highway State Special Revenue Account (HSSRA) Policy. The Shared Use Path policy requires a local government to look outside the road ROW and exhaust all possible options for locating a new path before requesting an exemption from the policy for a shared use path within the ROW. The community would be responsible for maintenance of the path. The HSSRA policy requires local governments be responsible for maintenance of all shared use paths, transit stops, sidewalks, landscaping/irrigation, lighting, etc. in the MDT ROW.

James gave an overview of upcoming MDT projects in/near the corridor. These include

- improvements to the 13th Street intersection (lane alignment, left turn lanes, ADA upgrades, new crosswalk on north side, add south bound lane from 500 feet north of intersection to accommodate more volume);
- roadway improvements on Spokane Ave between 13th and 2nd Streets (typical cross sections to be determined in discussions with City);
- improvements to Highway 40 between the Conn/Dillon intersection and Highway 93 (add center turn lane); and
- reconstruction of the Highway 40 bridge over Whitefish River this year.

A brief discussion followed about the timing of Spokane Avenue improvements and whether the Baker Avenue contra-flow improvements would be included as part of the project. The widening of Baker Avenue that is required to add a southbound lane will necessitate acquisition of ROW, which could slow the project; for that reason, it may not happen before the Spokane upgrades or as part of that project.

G. Public Open House

John Middleton offered, and the committee agreed to hold the public kick-off meeting in the National Parks Realty office at the corner of 6th Street and Spokane Avenue; other locations that could be considered for subsequent public meetings include the Hampton Inn and Suites and the Rocky Mountain Lodge. A date for the meeting was set for Wednesday, September 5 from 5-7 pm.

H. Next meeting

Next steering committee meeting is set for Monday, August 6 from 2:30-4:30 in the Council Conference Room. Topics will be 1) a discussion of how/why strip development occurs, and tools and methods other communities have used to restructure corridors and 2) preparation for the public kick-off meeting on September 5.

I. **Public comment** - none

J. **Adjournment**

John Muhlfeld moved to adjourn, and Roger Sherman seconded the motion; the meeting was adjourned at 5:05 pm



Highway 93S Corridor Steering Committee

Meeting #3 Minutes

July 9, 2018

3-5 pm, 2nd Floor City Hall, Council Chambers Conference room