

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD OF THE
GRAND FORKS/EAST GRAND FORKS
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION**

Friday, October 1, 2004 – 12:00 Noon
East Grand Forks City Hall Council Chambers

CALL TO ORDER

Dick Grassel, Chairman, called the meeting to order with the following members present: Gary Malm, Warren Strandell, Dorette Kerian, Rob Kweit, Gary Sanders, Doug Christensen, and Steve Gander. Staff present were: Earl Haugen, GF/EGF MPO Executive Director; Ryan Brooks, GF/EGF MPO Planner, Senior; Mark Engel, GF/EGF MPO Intern; Peggy McNelis, GF/EGF MPO Administrative Specialist, Senior; Cindy Voigt, GF City Engineer; and Dennis Potter, GF City Planner.

A quorum was present.

INTRODUCTIONS

Haugen stated that no introductions were necessary today.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Moved by Kweit, seconded by Malm, to approve the August 20, 2004, minutes of the GF/EGF MPO Executive Policy Board, as read. Motion carried unanimously.

MATTER OF UPDATE ON MERRIFIELD BRIDGE STUDY

Haugen reported that on Tuesday, September 27th, the second of three public meetings on the Merrifield Bridge Study was held at the Grand Forks County Club. He pointed out that he did distribute copies of the full power point presentation that was given by the Consultants, HDR and CPS, at that meeting, and stated that he would be giving an abbreviated version of that presentation today. He then referred to the packets, and pointed out that copies of the staff report, and draft minutes from the Technical Advisory Committee meeting, were included.

Presentation ensued.

Haugen commented that, as part of this project, they did solicit views from the environmental review agencies to make sure we identify, as soon as possible, any environmental issues at this site. He stated that they did get responses back from these

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resources, and it appears that there aren't any real big issues that we need to be concerned about, with the biggest involving the Riparian (riverside) woodlands area near the river, which, if we cross it with a bridge, we would be impacting it and we would need to mitigate that impact.

Haugen reported that they also talked a little about hydraulics, that Minnesota and North Dakota do have different allowable stage increases, and that they have comprised to allow a $\frac{3}{4}$ -foot increase. He commented that our goal, however, with this study, is to not go past the $\frac{1}{2}$ -foot increase allowed by the MNDNR, even though we could go an additional $\frac{1}{4}$ -foot.

Haugen stated that in the past they did talk about this issue on the Red River, with the new hydraulic model, and the new proposed remapping, that there might be an issue with the floodway. He explained that although, in other regions of the Red River in our study area, this would not be an issue, it now appears that we will be able to not only accommodate the bridge structure at Merrifield, but at 32nd Avenue as well. He added that the thing we will need to ensure, as remapping comes through for both Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, is that they are accommodating our future plans for those two bridges.

Haugen then went over the stage/flow comparisons, pointing out that the 100-year stage elevation of 837.64 is one to keep in mind as we continue this presentation, specifically when we talk about the height of the bridge and roads.

Haugen then went over the Merrifield Road Alternatives, explaining that Alternative 1 connects the two highest points, and is the more costly alternative, and Alternative 2 is the least costly alternative. He added that Alternative 1 is the preferred alternative of the Polk County Engineer, Rich Sanders, as it gets the road to the section line, where there already is existing right-of-way, and there already is a road to build from. He said that this also ties into 225. Grassel asked if 225 comes out one or two miles north of the Bygland Church. Haugen responded he would think it would come out two miles north of the Bygland Church. He added that if you go two miles east on 225 you would connect with 220. Strandell commented that the one issue here would be the fact that 225 is a county road, versus a county state aid highway, which means that any work done on it would be the responsibility of Polk County, not by the gas tax monies we get from the State of Minnesota, so it would be quite a financial issue for Polk County, unless we can get it into the County State Aid Highway System. Sanders commented that he would think that once the bridge is built, that would occur.

Gander asked how far are we from Merrifield to the Thompson Bridge. Haugen responded it was either five or six miles. Gander stated that this would be an adequate separation. Haugen added that we would also be about five miles from the Point Bridge as well.

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Haugen commented that some other decisions we need to make relate to the approach roads to the Merrifield Bridge. He explained that the bridge will be at the same elevation that Merrifield Road, as part of the flood-protection, will be at. He commented that we need to determine whether or not we want the approach roads at the same elevation, or not. He pointed out that the higher you make them, the higher the costs involved. He added that another thing we need to keep in mind is, that while it is doable with this project on the North Dakota side to get us up to an elevation of 845; on the Minnesota side, because Polk County 58 is not up for any reconstruction, you would have about three or so miles that would remain at its current height; so we would be at a flood design protection event, high and dry on the North Dakota side and wet on the Minnesota side, with protection to the 100-year flood event.

Kerian asked what is considered an “approach”. Haugen responded that an approach is the roadway leading to the bridge. Kerian asked, within what target area are you talking about, because Merrifield is a long way out. Haugen referred to a map and pointed out the target area involved. He pointed out that with a ring dike system, once outside the dike the roadways aren’t to the same flood protection levels either.

Haugen reported that another issue is when doing the diversion channel, heading to the Red River, there is a township road that would either have to be crossed, or cut-off from access, so in essence, you are moving the low crossing to a township road. He referred to Option 2, explaining that this is the cheapest option for this distance. He added that the landowner involved here is Dean Curran, who expressed a preference for the longer diversion option, which is also the most expensive option.

Haugen commented that there is actually a third option, which is not included on the slides, but consists of, instead of trying to continue the connection, allowing a cul-de-sac be created that would allow those residents from the south to have a connection of equal distance down Belmont one mile, so they would not have a change in the distance of travel they currently have. He added that by not providing a way across that structure we save costs.

Haugen stated that as far as Mr. Curran is concerned, we will have more fill than we will require for our projects, so as part of an agreement with him, we could sell back the fill at a reduced price, which would in turn allow him to be able to raise his property up as well.

Christensen asked what is meant by “cul-de-sac”. Haugen responded that, when we dig the channel the roadway will either have to be bridged, or we could take the option of not bridging it so that the roadway would not have a through movement. He added that if we were to choose the second option, we would place a cul-de-sac there so people could not cross the diversion. He pointed out that should we decide on the cul-de-sac, there is some land there that seems to have some potential for development with a bridge connecting it to Minnesota, but this does seem to have some merit as an option.

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Christensen asked if he was correct, that the Cole Creek Diversion Option 1, was the cheapest option. Haugen responded that this would be correct. Christensen stated, then, that the issue now is the land between the two options shown on the slide, so, aside from future development, what would it cost to purchase more land. Haugen asked if Mr. Christensen was talking about purchasing right-of-way, or the entire property. Christensen asked how much land there was. Haugen responded that Mr. Curran owns about 160 acres total. Christensen asked if we would be able to access that property from the bridge, if we gave Mr. Curran access off the bridge. Sanders responded that that would be possible. Christensen asked if the cul-de-sac was needed. Sanders responded that he feels the cul-de-sac would be the best option. Haugen stated that because the cul-de-sac option is a new component to this study, and to the properties to the south, we will have to meet with everyone affected to inform them should this option be chosen.

Haugen reported that the two other Township Road alternatives would be to match the existing roadway grade, which is at 840; or to match the existing Merrifield Road/Cole Creek crossing, which is at 820.5, with the shorter bridge, of course, being the cheaper alternative.

Haugen commented that we now get into the costs involved, and, referring to the slide, pointed out that these are figurative costs. He explained that, as stand alone projects, the diversion could be pricey, and that there are a couple of things that do influence the cost of the diversion. He reported that when they initially started the study, they had estimates provided by two different sources. He said that the Water Board had an estimate of \$1,000,000 to do the diversion, which is shown as Option 1, and that the difference in cost, that we have come up with, involves the cost of moving the fill, with the Water Board at less than a \$1.00 to move it, while we are using the Corps of Engineer's costs of close to \$3.00 to move it, which is why we have asked the consultants to look into this issue more closely to try to lower the costs, however, using those costs right now we would be looking at an estimated cost of \$5,000,000 to \$7,000,000, with the bridges being constructed, and the Township Road included; and then the Red River Bridge crossing has an estimated cost of \$10,000,000 to \$15,000,000, with the higher range occurring once we get into those options on the Polk County side. He pointed out that if the two projects were done at the same time, the costs would be less than if they are done as stand alone projects.

Haugen stated that in regard to the diversion, currently Cole Creek itself does not flood properties to the north of it, but as part of this study, concerns were brought up by property owners in the Burke Addition that if we divert Cole Creek, then their lake or coulee system would not recharge, refresh, or stay at a constant level, so the consultants were able to shoot the elevation of culverts through that system, and found that the elevations were such that the only time that water from Cole Creek would spill over into their system would be during a Red River flooding event, not a Cole Creek flooding event.

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Haugen commented that they have identified some of the benefits, to us, by doing this project. He stated that, for most traveling public it is a shorter route, takes less time, which equates to a savings of over 200 hours a day for passenger cars, at a cost of about \$775,000 a year; and, although we don't have the cost savings for all truck traffic, American Crystal did provide us with their savings projections, which would be about \$169,000 a year. He added that there is also the added safety benefit of not having those vehicles traveling through our urban areas.

Haugen reported that they have identified some funding sources, however, because this is a bi-state crossing, there really isn't just one source that can be used, so this is still a work in progress at this point.

Haugen commented that the audience, for the most part was receptive to having a bridge at this location, with the exception of a couple of property owners, including Mr. Curran, who doesn't want his property impacted, and one other gentleman who didn't feel there was a need for a bridge at this location.

Haugen reported that during October we will be sharpening our pencils to try to reduce the costs down to a more comfortable level, and also researching and communicating more on the funding options available. He added that they will also set up a meeting, now, with property owners concerning the new cul-de-sac option discussed.

Haugen stated that we are scheduled to hold the third public meeting in November, again at the Country Club.

Sanders said that one comment he would like to make is that he feels that the 841-foot elevation on the Merrifield and County Roads is an appropriate elevation, as we are basically building our dike systems to an elevation of 845-feet in that area, and you have about four feet of risk in that, so you are actually looking at a 500-year event to the top of that road, so he doesn't think trying to rebuild six or eight miles of County roads makes much sense at that point, therefore he doesn't see any problem with leaving them at the 841-foot elevation level. Haugen responded that, to reinforce that comment, if we make our road high, and the Polk County road high into East Grand Forks, we would still have an area that wouldn't be protected to that same height.

MATTER OF APPROVAL OF THE 2005-2006 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP)

Haugen referred to the packets, and pointed out that copies of the 2005-2006 Unified Planning Work Program, as approved by the Technical Advisory Committee, were included in them. He stated that, in essence, we have roughly \$500,000 a year programmed, for both 2005 and 2006, and currently we are showing estimates, which are probably on the low side, but because Congress has not re-authorized our transportation

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bill, nor have they fully appropriated our 2005 funds for transportation, we are actually working off our 2004 numbers.

Haugen commented that the MPO does have some requirements that they have to meet, which were actually identified at the last meeting. He explained that during the next two year period we will be working on an update to the Street and Highway section of the Long Range Transportation Plan so that by the end of 2006 we will be meeting the 20-year plan horizon we are required to have, so a lot of our activities are geared towards updating that Street and Highway Plan. He added that they have also asked our local agencies to submit to us some of their project requests, and he believes that we are able to fund all of those requests, in addition to fulfilling our requirements as well.

Haugen stated that the big item, in 2005, is geared more towards land use planning efforts in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks so that in 2006, when we start running traffic forecast scenarios, we have up-to-date data on where people will be living, where people will be working, etc.. He reminded the board that at the last meeting they asked that he set aside \$100,000 for this effort, however, you will notice that further in the narrative it indicates that, because we do have some oversight responsibilities of how these funds are used, etc., \$10,000 of that has been reserved for MPO staff, which leaves \$90,000 available in 2005 for this effort, and that can be spent any way this body determines. He stated that, assuming the UPWP is approved, we will need to work on a specific scope-of-work that identifies how we are going to move forward with this process.

Haugen commented that under Corridor Planning, a request was made to do a 42nd Street Traffic Event Management Study be done. He stated that they also have an on-going effort happening with the Advanced Traffic Analysis Center, who did our Washington Street Coordination Study, and, because they are a university institution, we can utilize them in a quicker fashion than going through our normal consultant process, and additionally, they have some funds available that they will share with us, so the cost would be a 50/50 split, so we are working on a scope of work with them to help with the traffic event management study, and, if all goes well, we could conceivably have them on-board in January, in order to get this study done as soon as possible. Grassel asked what the cost of this study might be. Haugen responded that we have budgeted \$15,000 for our share of the project, so with an additional \$15,000 from A.T.A.C., the project could cost up to \$30,000.

Haugen stated that we have also programmed an East Grand Forks Gateway Drive Access Management Study, and an Unsignalized Intersection Study in Grand Forks.

Haugen explained that in 2006 our emphasis will, hopefully, shift from land use plans into more of the Street and Highway Plan update, and our funding will switch from having a lot in land use planning, to the Street and Highway section, although there will still be \$50,000 programmed for land use planning in the event more work is required.

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Haugen stated that we also have \$80,000 set aside for corridor study. He explained that one of the requests Grand Forks submitted was to do a corridor study of Columbia Road and/or 32nd Avenue. He stated that under the step identifying specific corridors, he left it open so that as we get into the Street and Highway Plan, looking at “what if” scenarios, at that time we would have a better idea of which one needs to be looked at in greater detail, so in 2006 we will be coming back to this body with a recommendation on a specific corridor.

Haugen commented that the last item is a request from the North Dakota Department of Transportation, asking us to prepare an incident management plan for the state highway system in Grand Forks.

Haugen stated that both staff and the Technical Advisory Committee recommend approval of the 2005-2006 Unified Planning Work Program.

Moved by Kerian, seconded by Kweit, to approve the 2005-2006 Unified Planning Work Program.

Christensen referred to Page 11, under Corridor Planning for 2006, and pointed out that Mr. Haugen had mentioned doing a Columbia Road and/or 32nd Avenue Corridor Study, and he doesn't see the 32nd Avenue Corridor Study listed, just Columbia Road, and he would like to know if the intention was to modify this to include it. Haugen responded that it certainly could be added, but by using the words “can include” he was just trying to imply, for example, these types of corridors, however, we could amend it to include 32nd Avenue. Christensen responded that he would like the study to be done to the 2-mile jurisdiction, west. He asked if anyone would have a problem with the inclusion of this study. He also asked if there would be any problem moving this particular study up to 2005 instead of waiting until 2006, as there are some issues occurring out there already. Kweit said that that would be his comment as well, because if we are looking at it in the land use plan, that would be a little late. Haugen responded that in order to move this project up, a project that is proposed for 2005 would most likely need to be moved back, and off the top of his head, he would think that the most logical would probably be the Unsignalized Intersection Study, which is a study that staff requested be done this year, but was moved to 2005.

Christensen asked Ms. Voigt how moving the Unsignalized Intersection Study back another year would affect the City. Potter responded, Councilman Christensen, in terms of conversations we have had about 32nd Avenue, and the land use going out there, we've got, right now, authority out there to recognize, before the corridor study is complete, and beyond what we currently have today, we can implement that through our city ordinances, and get right-of-way. Christensen commented that he isn't concerned about that, that he is concerned about moving back the Unsignalized Intersection Study to 2006, and whether or not that would affect the City. Potter responded that he doesn't think that would harm the City at all, as he believes that was more of a State issue, that they were

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asking to have done. Haugen reported that it was a City request, and that there would have been somewhere in the neighborhood of twenty intersections studied for better traffic control, however, we can delay this City-wide safety study to study 32nd Avenue, west of I-29 instead.

Moved by Christensen, seconded by Kweit, to delay the Unsignalized Intersection Study until 2006, and move the 32nd Avenue, West of Interstate 29, Study to 2005.

Kerian and Kweit accepted the amendment.

Motion, as amended, carried unanimously.

Haugen informed the Board that he would try to start the unsignlized study in 2005, if funding allows. Consensus was for this to occur.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. **PUBLIC NOTICE ON TRANSIT PLAN**

Haugen distributed copies of a public notice, informing the public of an open house, to be held on October 7th, from 6:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m. in the Grand Forks City Hall Council Chambers. He explained that the purpose of the open house is to gather public comment on recommended improvements to the public transportation services within the metropolitan area. He added that information regarding the recommended improvements to the Bike and Pedestrian Plan will also be given at this meeting as well.

2. **EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD MEETING DATES**

Haugen commented that he would like to schedule additional Executive Policy Board meetings, and would like to suggest the following dates: October 15th, November 12th, and December 10th, at noon. After some discussion it was determined that these dates would work for most members of the board.

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Malm, seconded by Kweit, to adjourn the October 1, 2004, MPO Executive Policy Board at 1:00 p.m.. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted by,

Peggy McNelis
Administrative Specialist, Senior