

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

**Friday, October 12th, 2007 – 12:00 Noon
East Grand Forks City Hall Council Chambers**

CALL TO ORDER

Steve Gander, Chairman, called the October 12th, 2007, meeting of the MPO Executive Policy Board to order at 12:10 p.m.

CALL OF ROLL

On a Call of Roll the following members were present: Chairman Gander, Dick Grassel, Punky Beauchamp, Warren Strandell, and Steve Adams.

Staff present were: Earl Haugen, GF/EGF MPO Executive Director; Nancy Ellis, GF/EGF MPO Senior Planner; Teri Nelson, GF/EGF MPO Planner; and Peggy McNelis, GF/EGF Executive Assistant.

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Chairman Gander declared a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOVED BY BEAUCHAMP, SECONDED BY GRASSEL, TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 10TH, 2007; AND THE SEPTEMBER 6TH, 2007, MINUTES OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD, AS SUBMITTED.

Voting Aye: Gander, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, and Strandell.

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF CONSULTANT SELECTION FOR SCHOOL CROSSING TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICE STRATEGY STUDY

Haugen referred to the packets, and stated that it included copies of the two proposals that were submitted from those firms wishing to do the School Crossing Traffic Control Device Strategy Study. He stated that the selection committee met and interviewed both firms last Monday, and is recommending that we hire the firm of Ulteig Engineers. He pointed out that a copy of the entire proposal from Ulteig is available for review.

Haugen stated that he just wanted to give a brief overview as to why we are doing this study. He referred to a power point map, and explained that it shows all of the school crossings throughout

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the Grand Forks area. He said that, as you are aware, the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices controls, or creates the standards for what signage needs to be used, and where.

Haugen commented that an update has been in place for some time, and requires that the current yellow signs be changed to florescent green, and to make them reflective as well, which means that many will need to be replaced, thus the reason for this study. He added that another thing they will be looking at is all the new, and innovative technology available. He explained that East Grand Forks is already planning on installing one of those new devices, an in pavement light system, and other such devices will also be explored as well.

Haugen reported that they budgeted \$30,000 for this study, and Ulteig met that budget.

Grassel stated that it is his understanding that the Rhinehart/Bygland Road project will not be done until next year. Ellis responded that that is correct. Grassel said that he asks this because it appears there are still some concerns with the location of the sidewalks. Gander responded that we can listen to people's concerns, but the location of those sidewalks has already been determined.

Ellis reported that there is currently discussion going on regarding the HSIP project, the 13th Street Project. She said that Mr. Boppre is trying to work with Susan Moe of MNDOT to use the remainder of the money appropriated for the 13th St. project to continue the Safe Routes to School sidewalk from the south side of 13th St. S.E. out to the Middle School. She explained that not all of the funds appropriated for the 13th Street S.E. project will be used on the street project itself, and a sidewalk along Bygland Road from 13th Street S.E. to the Middle School should qualify for the remaining monies.

Gander asked if, when it comes to finalizing a plan, is there a funding mechanism available that, when the school asks for something clearly above what the law would mandate, and they have to pick up a share of the costs, would help with those costs. Haugen responded that that would be something that would need to be worked out, and with the Safe Routes To School Grants Program something like that would most likely be eligible for funding. He added that, as you may recall, the MPO has been kind of a financier for the Safe Kids Program to hire A.T.A.C. to look at specific on-site improvements at some of the schools throughout the area.

MOVED BY ADAMS, SECONDED BY STRANDELL, TO APPROVE THE SELECTION COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH ULTEIG ENGINEERS TO DO THE SCHOOL CROSSING TRAFFIC CONTROL DEVICE STRATEGY STUDY.

***Voting Aye: Gander, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, and Strandell.
Voting Nay: None.***

MATTER OF CENTRAL AVENUE (MN 220 NO.) STUDY UPDATE

Ellis stated that she thinks that everyone here is pretty familiar with this study, which involves the area between 9th to a mile north of the current City limits. She commented that one thing they

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were looking at with this study is to possibly make some improvements in terms of land use, aesthetics, functionality, and bike/pedestrian facilities. She said that they formed a steering committee that has met a number of times, and also conducted an open house on August 16th.

Ellis referred to a power point presentation, included in the packet, and reported that it is a review on what types of material and comments they received from the open house, as well as from the businesses owners along the corridor. She reported that most of the comments discussed issues such as too much pavement, too many empty buildings, doesn't look like it used to, etc., but the biggest concern is that it needs to be more pedestrian/bike friendly. She added that some of the other concerns were how to make the building fronts look better, how we can get business owners to move their storage to the rear of their property, adding some landscaping, and how can we fill the spaces to make it a more vibrant corridor. She stated that the consultants looked at a couple of different concepts; one was to provide us with some ideas on how to make the desired improvements to the corridor, and the other was how to deal with traffic operation issues such as stop lights, access control, and crosswalks.

Ellis reported that, from a traffic standpoint, SRF developed more of an access management plan for the area because as we grow we will continue to see traffic increase on this corridor. She referred to a power point slide, and pointed out the areas in which SRF is suggesting consideration of right-in/right-out only movements, one is at the intersection of 15th and one at the intersection of 20th. She added that they also looked at signalization of some intersections as well. She stated that this is basically dealing with ways in which we can make the corridor both look and operate better. She added that SRF will also be looking at what kind of traffic volumes we need to reach before we would begin implementing the various ideas and we hope to have that information soon.

Ellis commented that the other portion of this study involves aesthetics; and how we want the corridor to look. She referred to the power point and reported that JLG presented two ideas to the steering committee. She explained that the first idea is a backage road concept that would involve closing off the frontage roads totally and putting in some landscaping and pedestrian/bike paths instead; this moving the traffic to the rear of the properties. She stated, however, that this option posed a problem for many of the business owners on the west side, in terms of access, but added that it doesn't pose quite as much of a problem on the east side as the right-of-way is already there and there is already a road in place, therefore it may not be a bad idea.

Ellis reported that while the intial backage road concept was not something the steering committee wanted to keep in the plans, they did say that they would like to see a kind of hybrid plan developed in which the frontage road would remain on the west side, and the backage road would be put in place on the east side to see if that might be a viable option. Grassel stated that he sees one problem with the hybrid plan. He pointed out that as you turn in front of the county building, that building is actually right up against the street, so there might be a problem with that. Ellis agreed, adding that there would have to be some additional right-of-way purchased, but we have to remember that this is a plan, and it isn't something that they are telling us we have to do.

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Ellis stated that the second idea, the reduced width frontage road plan is one that more people seemed interested in. She referred to a drawing of the plan and explained that it basically reduces the size of the frontage road which does a few things for us; it gives us a pedestrian and bike trail, it creates some green space between the roadway and the businesses, and it removes the ability for people to store and park their equipment along the frontage road.

Ellis reported that it was brought to their attention that Xcel Energy has some issues with trees in their easement, or in MNDOT's right-of-way, which she will bring up when she meets with the Utility Department. She stated that although she did give plans that show where our utilities are located, and where we don't want to see plantings to the consultants, we may have to drive that home again, so if the consultants meet with the Utilities and Xcel, we may be able to do just that. She added that there were also some issues with lighting, and although the main focus is getting more of a walkable path around the area, we would be getting more green space, some lower lighting, and reduced pavement.

Ellis stated that we will be taking all of this information to the public at another open house to try to get some feedback, then take that feedback and put a main plan together. She said that the steering committee told the consultants to focus on some short-term, mid-range, and long-term ideas to incorporate into this main plan, including something that is not too costly that could be incorporated right away.

Ellis reported that in terms of landscaping, there are some programs out there that MNDOT sponsors, one being the Transportation Enhancement Program, which is an 80/20 match, that could possibly be used to do some improvements such as putting in pedestrian/bike paths; and another being a landscaping program with which they provide all the materials as long as volunteer or business groups plant and maintain what is provided.

Gander commented that this is a good effort, and like everything else we will have to find funding if we want to go back and change anything. He added that it is especially important for the new developments going in to the north, which we may as well do according to the plan, and then chip away little by little at these other things, according to the priorities set by this group.

Gander asked if any thought had been given to leaving the frontage road, and improving the backage road. He stated that certain businesses feel that the more traffic by their doors the better, so they would love that exposure from all directions. He said that he does know that this wouldn't accomplish the creation of more green space, but it sure does a great job of raising the visibility of some of those businesses. Ellis agreed, adding that it may also help expand the corridor as well, and we might get some businesses on the backside, so it is certainly something to think about.

MATTER OF MINNESOTA SCHEDULE FOR 2008-2012 T.I.P.

Haugen reported that the last two pages of the packet are Minnesota's T.I.P. schedule. He stated that he did provide the board with the North Dakota schedule at last month's meeting, however the Minnesota schedule was not yet available.

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Haugen pointed out that the schedule indicates that East Grand Forks, MNDOT, and/or Polk County need to submit their project applications to the MPO by January 2nd, the board will then review and submit a project priority list the ATP, in February the ATP will establish their list of prioritized projects, and in April a Draft T.I.P. will be completed and approved, and the Final Draft T.I.P. will be completed and approved in July.

Haugen stated that the board will need to meet in November, December, and January to take care of T.I.P. issue. He reported that there is still one program in particular that both sides of the river are having a difficult time addressing, and that is the HSIP Program, or Highway Safety Improvement Program, which SAFETEA-LU created. He commented that there has been a real problem with how the money is being used as it is split between urban and rural. He added that SAFETEA-LU put a lot of emphasis on high risk rural roads, and railroad crossings, but did not eliminate the eligibility of a lot of urban projects either, so it is struggle to determine the best way to split the monies between the two.

Grassel asked if there has been anything decided about improvements to the railroad crossing on Central Avenue. Haugen responded that that project is scheduled to be done in 2011. He explained that the project will include the installation of a standard cross-arm and flashing light, and the reduction of pavement width at the crossing. Grassel asked if anything was scheduled for the railroad crossing on 3rd as well. Haugen responded that nothing has been scheduled for that crossing at this time. Grassel commented that there was some debate about possibly closing down one of those intersections, either the one at Central or the one at 3rd, if we were to go whistle free.

Haugen commented that before we could go whistle free, all of our crossings have to have the cross-arm and flashing light fixture and 2nd is the only one that has that at this time, however Central will have it in 2011. Grassel asked where the whistle free zone would start on the Grand Forks side. Haugen responded that that would be their decision, but the furthest out they could go would be 55th Street South. Grassel asked how far east we would go in East Grand Forks. Haugen responded that he would see any reason to go any further east than 2nd. Grassel asked if it wouldn't go out to the River Bend as well. Gander reported that BNSF subdivide crossings into public and private, and there is no mandate for them to sound a horn when they go through a private crossing, and they have it marked on their maps, so when they approach these crossings, the map indicates whether or not they have to sound the horn. He commented that in light of this, he would think that maybe some conversations could be held with BNSF, and in working with the Federal Transportation Commission, we couldn't get the signage cleaned up along the tracks so that they don't have to sound a horn at private crossings.

Further discussion on crossings ensued.

Beauchamp asked, with the collapse of 35W bridge in Minneapolis, there has been so much talk about state and federal monies, and which one needs to be spend first, but he still isn't sure what the correct answer is, what is it. Haugen responded that the problem with that particular case is that they have authorization for the federal monies, but they don't have the federal monies appropriated, so that is where the confusion is. He stated that the feds might say that they will give you the money, but until they actually hand it over, there is no guarantee that it will come.

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Strandell asked what the status is on the 13th Street project, whether or not they are going to pave it, and either way will it be opened up this year. Ellis responded that it will not be paved this year, but there has been some discussion on the possibility of opening it for the winter. Grassel stated that if they open it they better have the proper barricades placed along the sides as it has quite a drop.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Minnesota Avenue/4th Street Corridor Update

Grassel asked what the status is on the Minnesota Avenue/4th Street study update. Haugen responded that the MPO is programmed to perform that study in 2008.

Gander commented that if he were a resident on that corridor, you are pushing way too much traffic through there for the conditions of the surface and the width of the surface, and he would not be happy about that. He stated that the disservice you are doing to that neighborhood by doing this, by itself would argue for another neighborhood bridge to the south.

Beauchamp asked if there are still copies of the 1994 study available. Haugen responded there are, and that it will be posted on the MPOs website soon.

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED BY GRASSEL, SECONDED BY BEAUCHAMP, TO ADJOURN THE OCTOBER 12TH, 2007, MEETING OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD AT 12:50 P.M.

Voting Aye: Gander, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, and Strandell.

Voting Nay: None.

Respectfully submitted by,

Peggy McNelis,
Executive Assistant