

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

**Friday, July 20th, 2007 – 12:00 Noon
East Grand Forks City Hall Council Chambers**

CALL TO ORDER

Steve Gander, Chairman, called the July 20th, 2007, meeting of the MPO Executive Policy Board to order at 12:19 p.m.

CALL OF ROLL

On a Call of Roll the following members were present: Chairman Gander, Gary Malm, Warren Strandell, Dick Grassel, Steve Adams, and Art Bakken.

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

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Chairman Gander declared a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 22ND, 2007, MINUTES

MOVED BY MALM, SECONDED BY GRASSEL, TO APPROVE THE JUNE 22ND, 2007, MINUTES OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD, AS SUBMITTED.

Voting Aye: Grassel, Strandell, Adams, Bakken, Malm, and Gander.

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF DRAFT RFP FOR UNSIGNALIZED CLASSIFIED ROADWAY INTERSECTIONS STUDY

Haugen reported that this is an activity that is listed in the MPO's Annual Work Program to be accomplished this year. He commented that this study has been attempted to be done the last four years, but for one reason or another it has been delayed, usually due to another project taking priority, but now things seem to be working out for us to get it done this year, thus the reason for the RFP.

Haugen referred to the RFP, a copy of which was included in the packets, and pointed out that the last page of the document is a map that indicates the proposed intersections to be studied. He stated that the Technical Advisory Committee met last week, and did request that three

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additional intersections be added to the study, and that they be allowed to further study the proposed locations in the event that there be more intersections added as well.

Haugen commented that because there were so many requests for additional intersections, staff met yesterday and scaled back the study considerably, so now the only intersections being proposed for study are those where collector streets intersect with collector streets. He explained that the reason for this is because the MPO is programmed to do a study to update the downtown plans that were developed for both Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, and part of that will include a traffic study that will include some of the intersections listed. He added that a lot of intersections such as those along Belmont, whereby a collector intersects with an arterial, probably won't change the result of this study as the arterial would still be the dominant movement of traffic at a "T" intersection, thus the reason for proposing we only look at collectors intersection with collectors.

Haugen referred, again, to the map and pointed out that they would be looking at 12 intersections, including 6th /University; 6th/20th; 11th/34th; 20th/13th, 24th/34th (roundabout being proposed for this location), Cherry/13th, Cherry/17th, Cherry/24th, Cherry/36th, to try to come up with traffic control strategies.

Grassel commented that at one time Mr. Christensen requested that the Minnesota/4th corridor be looked at again. Haugen responded that that project is included in the MPO's Annual Work Program to be done next year.

Bakken asked if those intersections that already have signals or stop signs would also be looked at as well. Haugen responded that it wasn't the intent of the study. He stated that the only places he is aware of where there are currently signals are located in the downtown area, and they are no longer meeting warrants, however, once again, this area is scheduled to be studied next year. Bakken commented that there are also some intersections with stop signs that are no longer necessary as well, and should be removed. Haugen responded that he would work with Jane Williams, Grand Forks Traffic Engineer, to determine which, if any intersections have stop signs that should be removed.

Gander asked, with the findings of this study, in terms of application, what intersections does the MPO have final authority for placement, and which intersections are left at the discretion of the City Council, and what is the board's role in this once it is completed. Haugen responded that they would work cooperatively with the City, particularly when there are federal funds involved. He added, however, that we are always asked to comment on what strategies may be implemented at those intersections. Gander asked, then, if the City Council would then decide whether or not any of the suggestions would be implemented. Haugen responded that that was correct, but added that we really haven't gotten into a huge difference in opinion on what should take place at intersections, and the intent of the study is for all of us to discuss and agree on which strategies should be implemented first, etc.. He commented that the MPO does have the final say, when dealing with federal monies, on what is included in our T.I.P..

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Bakken asked if a signal was proposed for 47th and Washington. Haugen responded that the warrants have been met at that intersection, but the issue is the funding. He explained that we had asked for funding from a certain program, but it wasn't awarded us, so we are still in the process of trying to find a funding source to help with the costs involved. Grassel asked if that intersection wouldn't qualify for state funds as it is located on Highway 81. Haugen responded that Highway 81, as a State Highway stops at 32nd, and 32nd becomes Business 81. He said that Business 81 at the North Washington Interchange, comes down along Washington to 32nd Avenue, and then at 32nd Avenue Business 81 goes west to the Interstate, and South of 32nd there is a city street, then becomes County 81.

Gander asked what the source of funds for this study is. Haugen responded it is a budgeted item, and will use MPO funds.

MOVED BY BAKKEN, SECONDED BY ADAMS, TO APPROVE THE DRAFT RFP FOR THE UNSIGNALIZED CLASSIFIED ROADWAY INTERSECTIONS STUDY.

Voting Aye: Grassel, Strandell, Adams, Bakken, Malm, and Gander.

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF PRESENTATION ON STREET AND HIGHWAY PLAN UPDATE

Haugen referred to Page 13 of the June 22nd, 2007, minutes, and reminded the board that discussion was held regarding financial planning, and the fact that part of our requirement is to produce a fiscally constrained plan that includes both revenues and expenditures.

Haugen reported that one of the issues he has been dealing with is the new requirement concerning the year of expenditure, and what cost adjustments should be made. He stated that in the past, however, they have been so focused on the year of expenditures issue that they didn't give due credit to the year of revenue estimates in the same manner, so they are now looking at how to do this. He commented that their first inclination was to look at escalating or increasing all of the costs, but, because they hadn't addressed what to do on the revenue side, they are fearful that our purchasing power will be greatly reduced. He added that, while we don't have a final resolution to this issue, the latest information is that revenue is estimated to almost keep pace with the cost adjustments, so we are basically back to keeping pace with revenues and costs so that our purchasing power isn't as impacted as much as we first feared, and, in-fact, we might end up using 2007 cost estimates with 2007 revenue estimates, and what we think we have for costs today, and what we think we have for revenues will be adjusted simultaneously out to 2035.

Haugen stated that they haven't gotten final approval from the DOTs or Federal Highway, but explained that they got the revenue adjustment idea directly from the North Dakota Draft S.T.I.P., where it states that on the North Dakota side, the Urban Roads program, which funds the majority of the projects in Grand Forks, shows an estimated increase, averaging the three years of 2009, 2010, and 2011, of 5.4%. He said that their working cost adjustment was 4%, so, although we know that the increase won't be 5%, you can make an argument that North Dakota

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thinks it will be more than 4%, so they are trying to argue that the costs and revenues will be maintaining the same adjustment in the future.

Haugen referred to Page 9 of the June 22nd, 2007, minutes, and stated that one of their controlling criteria, which they use to try to determine improvements to the intersection, has been reaching a level-of-service "C". He explained that in the minutes he alludes to the fact that while they can do a project that offers a substantial improvement, but we might not be able to do a project that will get us to a level-of-service "C", so they are trying to approach the DOT to see if they might agree to allow us to follow Minnesota's boundary of a level-of-service "D" or "E" at this intersection. He stated that there have been several discussions held on this issue, with their first response being yes, that they would accept a level-of-service less than "C", but they have since talked internally with the DOT and are backing away from that response, and are going back to the requirement that it be improved to a level-of-service "C". He explained that one of the justifications they made for that argument is the fact that they believe that federal aid is not eligible for any improvement that doesn't improve to a level-of-service "C". Haugen said that one of the benefits we have for being a bi-state MPO is knowing how another state does things, and federal aid flows through fairly easily in Minnesota for that "E" boundary, so we are still asking NDDOT to work with FHWA to reach a determination as to whether or not federal aid is really the justification, or is it the threat of the loss of federal aid if we don't achieve a level-of-service "C". He added that the reason this is so important is because in order to achieve a level-of-service "C", basically we would be looking at interchange type concepts, which comes with a very high cost estimate.

Haugen commented that if NDDOT should accept our request for a lower level-of-service at this intersection, then we would get into the concept that achieves our goal of a level-of-service "D", and it has a lower cost, but, as you can see this is still a pretty large intersection, and it will still impact properties to accomplish. He stated that they are still playing with the concept of trying to maintain at-grade improvements before we have to go an at-grade, and still leaves us with the question as to whether or not they will accept a level-of-serve "D" or not. He added that the current level-of-service is "F", and has been for a couple of years, however they haven't really seen a huge clamor of people requesting that we make improvements, we do know that at some point an improvement will be necessary no matter what, as the pavement will begin to fail, etc. .

Christensen stated that he agrees with one comment, that there isn't a clamor for improvement at this intersection. He added that as he looks at this, you have a great intersection design, but it still goes to nowhere, so you spend \$15,000,000 to \$20,000,000 and what have you accomplished, nothing to be quite candid. He commented that he doesn't know how many of those here today travel this intersection, but there is a little congestion at 8:00 in the morning, a little at noon, and a little at 5:00, but that is it, and basically, that is nothing unusual compared to other places such as Fargo, Minneapolis, etc., so he doesn't know why we would keep spending our time and resources on this design because we have bigger problems than this.

Christensen commented that with a \$20,000,000 price tag, put a bridge on his end of town, but don't do it here. Haugen responded, again, that this is two State Highways that intersect, so it is

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the DOT that says there is a problem, and as the transportation planning organization, the first thing we have to try to do is to address where we have deficiencies now, and how to best solve them, and this is the biggest deficiency we have, according to our analysis. Christensen asked if we get an “F” here, and he isn’t being facetious, but who cares if it is a “D” or an “F”, he doesn’t care, nobody cares. Haugen responded that that is what they are trying to get at, that if we can get it to a level-of-service “D”, then we can make an improvement there, but the problem is that we can’t do anything to that intersection because the only way we can meet the DOT’s threshold of a level-of-service “C” is to spend a huge amount of money.

Christensen stated that we aren’t going to do it, so we’ll get it off your agenda so you don’t have to worry about it any longer, as long as it doesn’t impact us getting any money. He added that at one point or another we have to decide what we are going to do about a southend bridge. Haugen responded that, no matter what, at some point in time we will also have to address the concerns at this intersection as well. Christensen stated that in his opinion, he would like to do something in the southend first to try to improve the traffic to the north. Gander agreed, adding that what he thinks Mr. Christensen is saying is that maybe if we can funnel some of this traffic away from this bottleneck, it won’t have such a low grade anymore. Christensen said that that is exactly what he is saying. Haugen commented that what he is trying to relay to everyone is that even with those other things relieving traffic here, based on the technical analysis done, we still can’t achieve a level-of-service “C”, and the State is saying that until we can achieve a level-of-service “C” at this location, we have an issue that needs to be addressed. Christensen asked what would happen if we don’t address it, does it affect our funding. Haugen responded that we run the risk of whether or not they accept our Long Range Transportation Plan as addressing the needs of our community for twenty years. Christensen suggested that we run that risk and see what happens, and if they come to us and say that they won’t accept it, then we can deal with it. Haugen responded that he thinks we should first try to get them educated that we can reach a lower level-of-service, and once we achieve that then he thinks we have alternatives that we can implement that will improve the traffic flow between Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. He added that even with the pricey \$17,000,000 to \$20,000,000 cost for an interchange, the benefit/cost ratio is still above one because of the time and mileage savings you achieve.

Christensen reiterated that he would rather see the money spent on a bridge in the southend, which should help eliminate a lot of those people going through the downtown, and he would much rather make the argument, you give me the money for that and I won’t have this issue. Bakken stated that he doesn’t think these are the two options. Christensen disagreed, adding that until someone says that his plan isn’t acceptable, than it is acceptable.

Gander commented that he feels the same way, that if we are going to commission studies, and he knows that a beautiful point-to-point study was done in which cars were intercepted on the bridges and the occupant(s) were asked where they were coming from and where they were going, and that is the question we have to ask, but his gut says that we are pushing a whole lot of folks through this intersection that wouldn’t have to go through it because we don’t have a southend crossing. He added that the DeMers Avenue feeds into it, and the Minnesota/4th corridor also logically feeds into this intersection, so if you could pull that traffic to the south, on a clean path maybe to the mall, or to the hospital, he really thinks it could be cleaned up a ton.

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Haugen stated that what he is trying to tell everyone is that when we do have, in our transportation plan a 32nd Avenue Bridge, and a Merrifield Bridge, and the other improvements to the west, this intersection still does not achieve a level-of-service "C". Malm asked how they know this. He said that people go the line of least resistance, and he sees that all the time, including right now with Grand Forks having closed off Gateway Drive, Columbia Road/24th, Columbia Road overpass, all in the same week, down to one lane, and people are using alternate routes to avoid these locations. Haugen said that he thinks the answer is, that today's traffic, with those other facilities would have a level-of-service "C", but in twenty years, with twenty years of growth, while those facilities serve their purpose, when we have twenty-years of traffic out there this intersection will still be a very key intersection to the metropolitan area, and will still attract the traffic, so it will no longer be at a level-of-service "C" even with those other improvements. Christensen stated that that is Gander's and Christensen's sons problems, it isn't his problem, and lets focus on the fact that we know that the Merrifield Road Bridge and Overpass are a long way from ever getting built because there are tons of problems with that location, in-fact we may have to move it to 47th Avenue. He said that both locations are in his ward, but 47th Avenue is probably a pretty logical location for a bridge, although he doesn't know how it would impact East Grand Forks, but his guess is if he lived closer to this intersection, he wouldn't want to go through that traffic, and would drive a couple of miles and catch that bridge.

Gander commented that at the last meeting he made the statement that town planning has never been done perfectly, and there have been many squabbles between Grand Forks and East Grand Forks concerning bridges, even 100-years ago, but he thinks that if town planning were done logically, and this were one city, one state, you would put a bridge every mile, neighborhood bridges. He pointed out that this was how things seemed to have started because you have the Kennedy, the Sorlie, and the Point, and they are no more than a couple of miles apart, and that is how it should be because the cost of gas and wear and tear on the vehicles far exceeds the cost and maintenance of a bridge, so he totally agrees with Mr. Christensen's position that to focus on a southend bridge is an important thing for this body, and even though we don't always want to acknowledge that fact, it is a reality.

Christensen stated that, because this is a meeting at which minutes/records are taken, for the record the bridge isn't going to be on 32nd Avenue. He said that the reason for this is because of the school being located there, and 47th Avenue would be the more logical location. Grassel commented that he understands the issue of schools, but when you get to 47th Avenue, doesn't it run past the new middle school, and you are also looking at an exchange at 47th as well. Christensen agreed, but added that the other thing is you wouldn't have any homes backing onto it. Grassel stated, however, that 47th Avenue is too far out to benefit East Grand Forks.

Haugen reported that what he is trying to relay today is that they are attempting to get the DOT to allow us to do an improvement at Washington/DeMers that gets us to a level-of-service "D" which is an improvement for everybody, at a lower cost. Christensen asked what the cost of an improvement to that intersection that would get us to a level-of-service "D" would be. Haugen responded that it is around \$5,000,000 to \$6,000,000. Gander asked if any buildings would need

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to be removed to accomplish this improvement. Haugen responded that he couldn't give a definitive answer to that until we get into the design phase, but it appears by this drawing that there wouldn't be. Haugen added that another issue you have to remember is that the Washington Street Underpass is going to be replaced in the next ten years as well. Gander asked if that was correct. Christensen responded it wasn't, adding that it wouldn't be replaced until a bridge is built to the south.

Malm commented that the drawing doesn't indicate an expansion being made to the underpass. Haugen responded that it would when you look at the turn lanes that come from underneath. Malm stated that all you have to do is drive out there and you are backed up all the way to the other side of the underpass many times during the day, and if you don't widen the whole thing, and just wait until you get to the turn lanes, half the time the left turn lane is empty, but you need it so people that want to turn there can otherwise they would never get across the intersection. Gander asked if Mr. Malm was suggesting that they be stacked further to the north. Malm responded that the entire thing should be widened so that at least two through lanes of traffic are carried through all the way. Haugen pointed out that they are showing dual left turn lanes on the north side. Malm asked if they really need dual left turn lanes here. Haugen responded that, again, from the traffic data that they collected they do. Malm disagreed, adding that if you build a bridge, they will come. Christensen commented that, as some senator once said: "This is a bridge to nowhere", you have turn lanes here that go nowhere, so you need to have a plan to expand the underpass, and that is really spendy. Haugen stated that the added cost is negligible compared to the actual cost of replacement, which the DOT is saying has to occur.

Christensen stated that, until they tell us they don't accept our plan, just don't do it, and if they do say they won't accept it, then go back and amend it.

Haugen referred to a slide illustrating the 42nd Street/32nd Avenue Intersection, and reported that at the last meeting he talked about an alternative modification to this intersection. He explained that the current long range transportation plan shows a similar modification taking place at the interchange, but the difference between that one and this new one is that the current plan shows the off-ramp being it's own separate facility with two-way traffic at 42nd Street; and the new one combines the on-ramp, somewhere in the vicinity of 20th, which will reduce the need to build-out 38th and 32nd as much as we would otherwise. He stated that they are trying to accommodate the desire for a more direct access from 42nd Street to the Interstate or 32nd Avenue, and that is accomplished without having to widen 32nd Avenue to 6-lanes, and so the interchange itself it not impacted so the dollar costs are substantially less than what is shown in the current plan.

Haugen reported that, as he said at the last meeting, they are still working with American Crystal, and the DOT to resolve the traffic issues related to the plant. He stated that 5th Avenue N.E. in East Grand Forks is the main area of concern, with about 500 trucks going up and down that corridor every day, nine months of the year, and for the month of October we have essentially another 2,000 trucks a day entering and exiting the plant. He said that there have been many different alternatives explored for this issue in the past, but the one they are focusing on now is the addition of a roadway running parallel to the railroad tracks into the plant, and then coming off of either 11th, where a future traffic signal is planned, or 5th, where an existing traffic

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signal is located, but either of which will get the trucks away from the residential area to the south of 5th Avenue N.E..

Haugen briefly went over some of the other concepts looked at, but which, for one reason or another, don't seem to be acceptable alternatives.

Gander asked who would pay for the construction of this new roadway. Haugen responded that discussion on that very issue is still in the works. He added that with the new transportation bill there is something called: "Intermodal Access Connectors to the NHS System", that involves monies coming in from each state to maintain the highway system. He said that Congress has recognized that we have major facilities that are off the NHS system that are vital to the nation, so they created the Intermodal Connector Routes to NHS, which we are trying to access for funding, however, if that does not occur then we will need to look at more traditional funding sources such as earmarks or through the A.T.P. process.

Haugen stated that in any event, through this process, they have alerted MNDOT to how much truck traffic is occurring to service this facility.

Grassel asked about the TranSystem Refueling Station shown on 5th. Haugen responded that this is something that American Crystal has alerted us to, and pointed out that it is located in that area between 5th Avenue and the hill. He added that this is one of the things they are considering for future land use. Gander stated that that wouldn't necessarily be consistent with residential and park, and added that they would rather see that area screened with trees.

Strandell referred to the map, and pointed out that County Road 17 is being rehabbed this year. He asked if rather than doing all this other stuff, wouldn't it be just as simple to run the traffic on Highway 2 to 17, and come in from that direction. Haugen responded that, once again, it comes down to the fact that TranSystems pay is based on mileage, and it would add to their costs to do this.

Discussion on alternative routes ensued.

Haugen reported that at the last meeting we discussed overall right-of-way impacts for the different alternatives along Columbia Road. He referred to a slide illustrating the alternative to widen Columbia Road to seven-lanes, and went over it briefly. He commented that what this all boils down to is the need to determine whether or not we want green space between the road and any sidewalk or trail facility adjacent to it. He stated that if we decide we don't, then 10-feet of right-of-way up and down the corridor would be sufficient, but if we do then 20-feet of right-of-way would be necessary, and the more right-of-way you need, the higher the impacts, and the higher the costs.

Haugen commented that if we don't widen Columbia to seven-lanes, we then go into intersections such as 13th, 17th, 24th, etc., and the issue then is if we have to widen any of those intersections in any manner, how much right-of-way will be required to taper off the turn lanes, and as you can see there isn't a continuous right-of-way taking between those intersections, so it

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kind of leans towards seven-laning Columbia Road, with all the associated right-of-way impacts isn't necessary, but some of the intersection improvements are, particularly 17th and Columbia Road.

Haugen referred to the memorandum from URS concerning this issue, and explained that the way it was written was a little confusing to some, and has caused the Engineering department in Grand Forks to say if you have a 20-foot berm, and you try to put your sidewalk in you actually need more right-of-way than your taking, so we are trying to clarify that.

Malm referred to the drawing, and suggested that they consider taking all of the necessary right-of-way off the west side of the corridor as you have the least impacts to everyone by doing that. Haugen commented, however, that what they are really saying is that seven-lanes is not all that necessary at this time, we can get by with just doing the TSMs.

Grassel asked about the issue of Altru expanding, and possibly removing the frontage road currently between the hospital and the clinic, which would entail traffic be dumped onto Columbia instead. Haugen responded that Altru has approached the City with a drawing that shows expansion of the hospital to the east, and in order to do that they would need to remove the frontage road and redirect traffic onto Columbia, but they were asked to hire traffic designers to try to come up with a different alternative in order to try to keep traffic moving internally.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Safe Routes To School Application Update

Haugen reported that the City of Grand Forks was recently notified that they received three of the five Safe Routes to School projects they applied for.

2. Bus Service

Haugen reported that they have concluded the bus service testing to the Industrial Park, and to the Southwestern part of Grand Forks, and will, on the next City Council agenda, recommend that we don't serve the Industrial Park area, but that we do provide service to the Alerus and Aurora Park Complex and schools.

3. MPO Senior Planner Position

Haugen reported that we did close our applications for the Senior Planner position on Monday, July 16th, and received two applications that he can pursue further.

ADJOURNMENT

***MOVED BY MALM, SECONDED BY GRASSEL, TO ADJOURN THE JULY 20TH, 2007,
MEETING OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD AT 1:15 P.M.***

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Voting Aye: Grassel, Strandell, Adams, Bakken, Malm, and Gander.

Voting Nay: None.

Respectfully submitted by,

Peggy McNelis
Executive Assistant