

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD OF THE
GRAND FORKS/EAST GRAND FORKS
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009 – 12:00 Noon
Grand Forks County Commissioners Chambers**

CALL TO ORDER

Gary Malm, Chairman, called the October 21st, 2009, meeting of the MPO Executive Policy Board to order at 12:03 p.m.

CALL OF ROLL

On a Call of Roll the following members were present: Gary Malm, Punky Beauchamp), Dick Grassel, Steve Adams, Warren Strandell, and Doug Christensen.

Absent were: Art Bakken and Greg Leigh.

Guest(s) present were: Dean Rau, Assistant Grand Forks City Engineer.

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

DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM

Chairman Malm declared a quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 19TH, 2009, MINUTES OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD

MOVED BY GRASSEL, SECONDED BY STRANDELL, TO APPROVE THE AUGUST 19TH, 2009, MINUTES OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD, AS SUBMITTED.

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

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF FINAL APPROVAL OF BRIDGE CLOSURE PLAN UPDATE

Ellis reminded everyone that a Bridge Closure Traffic Management Plan was completed back in 2007, however, as a result of our 2009 flood event we found that we needed to do some additional modifications to the plan. She explained that some of those modifications involved more coordination with the elevations shown for the closure/opening of each of the bridges, development of signal timing plans, signing additions/changes, etc..

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

Ellis reported that after the 2009 flood event it was apparent that there were some things that we were not able to accomplish at all, and some that needed to be modified or changed. She added that one of the most important issues that came up involved the different media outlets, including both City's websites, the National Weather Service's website, etc., who all had different river elevations for the approximate time each bridge was scheduled to close, so there was a lot of confusion for not only the residents, but also for some of the agencies involved with the flood fight as to when these bridges would be closed. She stated that we wanted to make sure that these issues were addressed the best way possible so there would be less confusion during future events.

Christensen reported present.

Ellis referred to information included in the packets and went over it briefly, explaining that there were four main changes made:

- 1) Traffic Closure Action Elevations: Ellis pointed out that Page 7 of the plan shows that they didn't necessarily change the elevations, but they did add a note that referenced those action elevations. She stated that the reason for this was because last year the bridges were not closed at the elevations shown due to extenuating circumstances, mainly the availability, or lack of availability, of manpower. She explained that the Point Bridge was closed on the North Dakota Side at a slightly lesser elevation than is indicated it should be because it was just prior to the weekend, and they didn't want to have to call people back to work over the weekend to close it. She added that another issue was the weather, specifically the amount of snowfall that occurred, which caused each City to rethink when a bridge needed to be closed due to the speed in which the river was rising.

Ellis commented that both City's Engineering and Public Works Departments stated that they don't have a problem with the elevations being published, but requested that a note be added to let the public know that, while they will try to stay as close to the elevations shown, there will always be the possibility that extenuating circumstances such as the weather, manpower, emergencies, crest prediction, speed at which the river is rising, etc., may occur that could require that a bridge be closed earlier than expected, as well as how long it may remain closed.

Ellis stated that another thing that affected the elevations, specifically the Kennedy Bridge elevation, was that earthen berms were placed on the on and off ramps of Highway 2 to ensure that the bridge would remain open as long as possible. She explained that this is something that could conceivably occur during similar events, which, if done, would allow that the Kennedy Bridge elevation could be increased by two-feet or so.

Ellis referred to Page 8 of the plan, and pointed out that an additional note was included that states that, again, because of unforeseen circumstances such as weather, rate at which river recedes, the possibility of a second crest, etc., the reopening action elevations could change as well.

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

- 2) Bridge Closure Traffic Impacts: Ellis referred to Page 27 of the plan, and pointed out that some modifications were made to the Gateway Drive corridor between North 1st Street/9th Avenue North and North 3rd Street in Grand Forks. She explained that due to some traffic issues along this corridor during this past flood event it is now recommended that when the Point and Sorlie Bridges are both closed; road closed signs be added to the north entrance of 9th Avenue North and to the south entrance of North 1st Street, and that barricades be added to the center turn lane between North 1st Street and North 3rd Street.
- 3) Ellis referred to Page 29 of the plan and pointed out that it shows what happens when the Louie Murray Bridge closes as well. She explained that the changes included placing Type III barricades and flashers on the northwest left turn lane and the southeast right turn lane, using changeable message signs that flash “Stop Ahead”, and having law enforcement available during peak hours to relieve queues on US 2 and MN SH 220; and to have law enforcement available during peak morning hours to relieve queues on MN SH 220 and Polk County 72.
- 4) Bridge Closure Contact List: Ellis reported that the City of East Grand Forks’ Emergency Manager was not included on the contact list, however, it has now been added.

Beauchamp asked if any traffic counts were taken to determine how much additional traffic crossed the Kennedy Bridge during this past flood event. Haugen responded that counts were not taken during this past event. Beauchamp suggested that counts be taken during the next flood event.

Grassel stated that he doesn’t object to what has been done with the plan, but his question is whether or not these changes are the result of concerns voiced by NDDOT. He explained that they received a letter from NDDOT right after the 2009 flood regarding the issue of reopening the Sorlie Bridge. He said that he sat in on a telephone conference call prior to the reopening of the bridge in which NDDOT stated that whatever MNDOT’s inspector said about whether or not the Sorlie Bridge could be opened, they would agree with it, so once the water receded enough, Roger Hjelle, MNDOT Bridge Inspector, was called. He was actually in Alvarado at the time, so he turned around, came back, inspected the Sorlie, and gave it the okay to reopen. Now, everyone can point fingers at anyone they want, but a conference call was made between officials from East Grand Forks and Grand Forks discussing the fact that the bridge had been given the okay to be reopened, so it was reopened at 4:00 Wednesday afternoon rather than waiting until Thursday morning, but then all of a sudden nobody from NDDOT remembers agreeing to follow MNDOTs recommendations. Grassel added that as far as the berms are concerned, the City of East Grand Forks went ahead and put them in on Gateway so that they could protect their side of the Kennedy in order for it to remain open as long as possible, and we will continue to do those kinds of things without waiting for a meeting here or a meeting there, and then waiting for their response for a day or two, things need to be done as soon as possible during those types of events.

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

Ellis responded that the East Grand Forks City Administrator asked that the note regarding the berms be included, but in terms of the letter from the NDDOT, what really precipitated this update were the problems involved with getting the traffic control in place at Highway 220 and Highway 2 once the Louie Murray closed, and to allow both cities some leeway during major events.

Rau commented that the letter from the NDDOT, and Mr. Grassel is correct in that a conference call was held that Wednesday morning, and it was determined that the Sorlie Bridge should be able to be reopened Thursday morning, but then all of a sudden MNDOT was able to inspect it sooner, and allow for it to be reopened sooner, and there wasn't any communication with NDDOT regarding that decision, and that is really what they were concerned about, keeping the lines of communication running smoothly. Christensen asked why e-mails and computers aren't used for communication purposes rather than phone calls. Rau responded that he realizes that phone calls are somewhat antiquated, but sometimes mistakes are just made, and we need to make sure that all the right people are notified. Christensen commented that basically what needs to be done then is to have a contact list available. Ellis responded that a contract list is already available.

MOVED BY CHRISTENSEN, SECONDED BY ADAMS, TO GRANT FINAL APPROVAL OF THE AMENDED BRIDGE CLOSURE TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN.

Voting Aye: Strandell, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, Malm, and Christensen.

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF FINAL APPROVAL OF SIGN INVENTORY REPLACEMENT PLAN

Haugen reported that this is the final action required on the Sign Inventory Replacement Plan. He reminded the board that MUTCD rules require that every community develop a sign replacement plan, and the MPO agreed to develop one for Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. He explained that we accelerated the schedule to develop the plan primarily because Grand Forks was using some of its stimulus money. He stated that this plan has been approved by the City of East Grand Forks and the City of Grand Forks' Public Safety Committee.

Haugen stated that there are some preliminary estimates on the cost of sign replacement and maintenance for each community included in the plan. He commented that the only exception to the estimate for the City of Grand Forks is that they decided not to commit wholeheartedly to replacing parking signs. He pointed out that parking signs are optional in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices Retro-Reflectivity Update, however our plan suggests that they be incorporated and included, but Grand Forks decided not to automatically include that cost, and instead will deal with them on an as needed basis.

Malm asked if they were planning on purchasing one of the \$11,000 machines. Haugen responded that they were not. He added that the method we are using deals with a signs life expectancy. He explained that in addition to our setting up quadrants for both Grand Forks and

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

East Grand Forks to allow for easier tracking of signs in both communities, we will use a blanket replacement based on the inventory telling us when the retro-reflectivity signs were installed.

Malm commented that he attended a meeting in Bismarck recently where this issue was discussed, and it is his understanding that if you don't use a retroreflectometer you have to place a sticker on each sign indicating when it was last checked and/or replaced. Haugen responded that that has already been done with signs throughout both communities, as well as having each sign geo-coded as well.

***MOVED BY GRASSEL, SECONDED BY STRANDELL, TO GRANT FINAL APPROVAL
OF THE SIGN INVENTORY REPLACEMENT PLAN.***

Voting Aye: Strandell, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, Malm, and Christensen.

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF SIGNAL COORDINATION STUDY UPDATE

Haugen reported that he is just updating the board on the Signal Coordination Plan. He stated that last week Columbia Road had different timing plans installed. He explained that the City of Grand Forks purchased and upgraded their traffic signal control equipment, and Alliant Engineering came up Wednesday, and spent Thursday, Friday, and a good portion of Saturday fine-tuning the plan. He stated that he hopes everyone has driven the corridor and experienced the improved traffic timing.

Haugen stated that an open house was held Wednesday, as part of our Public Participation Plan, and had a reporter from the Grand Forks Herald attend. He commented that we have completed the traffic counting requirements for the study.

Haugen said that as the City of Grand Forks receives its stimulus grant from the Department of Energy they can purchase and start installing upgrades to the traffic signal control equipment along the remaining corridors. He stated that once they are installed then we can go in and implement the timing plans for those corridors as well. He added that all the corridors are scheduled to have timing plans implemented by next year.

Information only.

**MATTER OF APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT FINANCIAL SUMMARY OF OPERATION
AND MAINTENANCE COSTS INTO T.I.P.**

Haugen reported that this is an annual requirement that our T.I.P. document include information on operation and maintenance costs. He explained that in the past we have been able to scrape by with some skimpy information, but we now have a new Federal Highway Division person who is asking us to beef up that information in our T.I.P..

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

Haugen distributed copies of updated information, including information from Minnesota that was received just yesterday. He explained that the purpose behind this is to ensure to the federal government that when they make investments, that we are maintaining and operating the system, and aren't using their federal funds to perform operation and maintenance activities.

Haugen explained that we simply use a pro-rata share of how many miles there are of federal aid streets, and federal aid streets for this purpose are essentially state highways, with the inclusion of interstates, so we aren't talking about all functionally classified federally eligible streets, but are just talking about this narrow definition of federal aid which are the state highways, so we took the pro-rata share of how many federal aid miles there are compared to the total street system, and used that as a pro-rata share of the City's budget for operation and maintenance. He said that the same thing was done for East Grand Forks, but at a much smaller scale, including the study area between city limits and the MPO study area boundaries.

Haugen stated that with all of this we do have a document that Federal Highways is pleased with, and are asking for approval of that document in order for it to be attached to our T.I.P. He added that in the future we insert it rather than attach it to the T.I.P. document.

MOVED BY ADAMS, SECONDED BY GRASSEL, TO GRANT APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT FINANCIAL SUMMARY OF OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE COSTS INTO THE T.I.P.

Voting Aye: Strandell, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, Malm, and Christensen.

Voting Nay: None.

MATTER OF T.I.P. PROJECT SOLICITATION

Haugen reported that this is essentially the start of our next T.I.P. process. He commented that we have identified, with the attached timelines, when projects are due for different programs on each side of the river. He pointed out that there are different deadlines on the North Dakota side than there are on the Minnesota side. He added that they also sent out a generic letter to elected officials on both sides of the river requesting that if they do have projects they would like to have included in our 2011-2014 T.I.P., they get them through their local jurisdiction approval process and submitted to us by the deadline.

Haugen commented that he also identified in the staff report, and subsequent information, that we have been working with the NDDOT on improving our T.I.P. development process. He explained that this really affects the other two MPOs as we have been following this process for some time.

Information only.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Railroad Crossing Study Update

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

Haugen reported that next week they will be visting the railroad crossings in town along with the diagnostic review team. He explained that part of that will involve looking at quiet zone status, and what may or may not need to be done to achieve that. He added that they will also be looking at the State Mill Spur to see what safety improvements could be done to those crossings to make them not only safer, but more quiet as well.

Haugen stated that they have tentatively scheduled a public meeting on November 19th to present the results of the diagnostic review and quiet zone calculations, and to start the public input process.

Christensen asked what kind of funding is available for this. He stated that, as he recalls, on our side of the river there is about \$100,000 available. Haugen responded that the most any one city can receive is \$125,000, but some of these crossings may not need any improvements made to them, and they may meet the eligibility requirements right now. Christensen asked what that means. Haugen responded that a crossing needs to have flashing lights, gates, a light-out/power-out indicator on the cabinet so the engineer knows there is power available for the flashing lights and gates to work, and an item called "constant warning time" so that there is a constant or set pattern of when trains approach that the gates come down and the lights flash in a regular manner. He said that all four of these things are required in order for a crossing to be eligible to be established as a quiet zone. He added that many of our crossings meet that eligibility, and from that we do a risk analysis in which we calculate what the risk is without the horn blaring, and if it is below the national risk threshold than that crossing is eligible to be quieted and no other improvements are necessary.

Christensen asked, if it is eligible to be quieted, what does that mean. Haugen responded that the train horn would not have to blare as it goes through that crossing. Christensen asked if there was any kind of guess as to how many crossings would be eligible. Haugen responded that on the North Dakota side the three crossings out by the Amtrak Station do not have constant warning, so they would need to have that installed prior to them becoming eligible for quiet zone status, so that would be a cost, or improvement that would need to be done. He stated that the cost of adding constant warning to an individual crossing would be about \$40,000, but with three crossing so close together there may be discount for a bulk purchase, but that is part of what they will be doing next week, identifying things like this. Christensen asked, if that got done, and those crossings were now eligible, what else would need to be done, and where would the money come from, the \$40,000 plus. Haugen responded that the first pot of monies we would attempt to secure would be the state legislated pot of funds. Haugen added that there is only one more crossing on the North Dakota side that does not have constant warning and that is 6th Avenue North, along 42nd Street, but the ones in the downtown will have that added with their pending upgrades, and the one on 5th is already done, and then 3rd and 4th already have funds set aside for them.

Haugen reported that on the Minnesota side there are four crossings being looked at, with two not even having gates on them, so they would need to be upgraded to include gates as well, but of those two, the Central Avenue crossing is already scheduled to have gates added, so then we have just one other that wouldn't have the minimum eligibility to be given quiet zone status.

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

Haugen reiterated that once a crossing has quiet zone eligibility, we would do the risk calculation, and if the risk calculation is below the nationally allowed threshold we would not have to do anything else and a quiet zone can be established at that crossing. Haugen added that they also asked the consultant to tell us that if it is below that threshold, how much more traffic volume, or train volume would it take to get us above that threshold, or how long can we rely on that being below the national risk, because if it seems like we have a lot of cushion, then we wouldn't recommend any further improvements, but if there isn't much cushion then we might want to go ahead and identify what additional things might be done to ensure that it is a quiet zone for a longer period of time.

Malm said that his one question, then, is if we are working on the three downtown crossings, could the quiet zones be implemented next year if everything goes well. Haugen responded that if the risk calculation comes out, and we are comfortable that it is just below the threshold, then yes it could. He added that part of the diagnostic review involves ironing out some preferences that each agency has to establish the quiet zone. He said that BNSF has some strong preferences of additional things they want to see done, although Federal Railroad may not necessarily require that they be done, so that is something that would need to be worked out. Malm commented that it is very difficult to work things out with BNSF.

Christensen stated, then, that if BNSF has things they want done, who pays for that. Haugen responded that that is part of the issue of whether we have to agree to have those things installed for the quiet zone status is what we will be working on with the diagnostic review team, and if we do have to include them then we would need to work out the funding arrangement at that time. Christensen said, then, that there are regulations. Haugen responded there were. Christensen asked if staff couldn't review the regulations with the diagnostic review team. Haugen responded that they can review the regulations, but they don't have the experience our consultants have working with the railroad and federal railroad administration as to how to implement the quiet zone requirements. It is a very expertise skill set.

Christensen commented that what he is seeing developing is that you can tell BNSF that this is a quiet zone, but if you haven't met their requirements they are going to blow the horn anyway because they don't want to be sued. Haugen responded that he doesn't know if that is a conclusion you would reach yet. Christensen stated that he was just following up with our Chairman's observations, having been in lawsuits with BNSF before.

Christensen said, here is the risk, you are going to go through all of this, no money has been identified except for a buck and a quarter from North Dakota, and East Grand Forks isn't even near being eligible for quiet zones, so even if it is quiet here, once they cross the river it isn't, and, while it may not be as noisy at the Metropolitan Opera House, they will still hear the whistle, so once again we are going to do these studies, and there will be expectation that something will happen, but until such time as we identify the money, and it will most likely be on our side of the river since East Grand Forks doesn't even have funds to hire a cop or a fireman, so he is real curious as to the source of the money because \$125,000 buys a few whistles. Haugen responded that, again, it is possible that on the Grand Forks side you will only

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
GF/EGF MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD
Wednesday, October 21st, 2009**

need to invest in these constant warning times at four locations, and those four locations probably wouldn't reach the maximum threshold to do that. He added that on the Minnesota side there are funds set aside to improve one of the two crossings not having the minimum requirements, and he knows that they have already met with MNDOT and BNSF at that location, and one of the things they talked about was in order to establish quiet zone sooner is possible closure of one of those two crossings, so those are some of the things that could possibly be done in order to be able to quiet both sides, so the study will flesh those things out.

Information only.

ADJOURNMENT

MOVED BY STRANDELL, SECONDED BY ADAMS, TO ADJOURN THE OCTOBER 21ST, 2009, MEETING OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD AT 12:40 P.M.

Voting Aye: Strandell, Adams, Beauchamp, Grassel, Malm, and Christensen.

Voting Nay: None.

Respectfully submitted by,

Peggy McNelis
Executive Assistant