

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE  
EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD OF THE  
GRAND FORKS/EAST GRAND FORKS  
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION  
Wednesday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010 – 12:00 Noon  
Grand Forks County Commissioners Chambers**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Gary Malm, Chairman, called the March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2010, meeting of the MPO Executive Policy Board to order at 12:08 p.m.

**CALL OF ROLL**

On a Call of Roll the following members were present: Gary Malm, Steve Adams, Art Bakken, Mike Powers, and Doug Christensen.

Absent were: Dick Grassel and Greg Leigh.

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

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

**SUSPEND AGENDA**

Haugen stated that, until Mr. Christensen arrives we do not have a quorum, therefore he would like to request that we suspend the agenda to discuss those agenda items not requiring action.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

a. Merrifield Interchange Update

Haugen reported that some erroneous information was given at the last MPO Executive Policy Board meeting concerning what is in the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan. He referred to a slide of a graphic from the Long Range Transportation Plan that illustrates all the projects that are in the plan, and pointed out that it does include the status of the 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue project discussed at the meeting. He added that he did talk to the NDDOT, and did eliminate their confusion as to the status of 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Haugen referred to the graphic and pointed out that the 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue project (illustrative projects are shown in blue), actually consists of right-of-way preservation in the event that sometime after 2035, if desired, we would have the ability to more easily construct an interchange at 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He added that it isn't so much a financial issue as to why 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue is not in, but

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rather because of our having decided that some other projects, such as the Merrifield Interchange, modification of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue Interchange, and doing an overpass at 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue were needed more.

Haugen commented that, as mentioned last month, we are just beginning the process of updating our Long Range Transportation Plan, so during that process we will be revisiting 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue and will see how it shakes out at the end.

Malm asked where Merrifield fits in the timeline. Haugen responded that it fits into the mid-term portion of the timeline. He explained that our short-term projects were basically those projects covering the T.I.P. cycle, and the mid-term projects begin in 2013 and goes to about 2022, and that is the timeframe in which we were looking for the Merrifield Bridge project to be constructed.

Information only.

b. Invitation to NDDOT/UGPTI Public Input Meeting

Haugen referred to a copy of the invitation and letter, included in the packet, and explained that the website shown in the invitation gives us a little more information as to what the NDDOT is doing with these meetings. He said that the thing that caught his eye is the fact that they are suggesting, or they are going to try to push local governments (i.e. the county and the city) to consider a classification system similar to their highway performance classification system. He stated that they have been using this system in the rural area, and it is their hope, through their statewide regional workshops is to see if they can pass this system down to the county and other local entities.

Haugen reported that a meeting will be held in Grand Forks on April 9<sup>th</sup>, and they are requesting that anyone planning on attending please pre-register by March 26<sup>th</sup>. He added that after these regional meetings have concluded, a statewide conference will be held on May 17<sup>th</sup> in Bismarck, at which all the regional findings will be presented, and a consensus reached as to how to move forward with those findings.

Haugen commented that staff will be attending the April 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, and if anyone is interested in attending as well, please let staff know and we can get you registered, or go on to the website and register yourself by March 26<sup>th</sup>.

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Christensen reported present.

c. 2010 Flood Coordination

Haugen referred to Page 65 of the packet, and reminded everyone that as part of our Traffic Incident Bridge Closure Management Plan the MPO agreed to annually add a Flood

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Coordination Discussion item to the Technical Advisory Committee and MPO Executive Policy Board Agendas.

Haugen reported that discussion was held at the Technical Advisory Committee meeting last week, with most of that discussion focusing on the information contained on Page 69 of the packet; that being what would happen in the event the Point Bridge, the Sorlie Bridge, and the Louis Murray Bridge all close during a flood event. He explained that what is shown is what was done after last year's flooding event, however, since then MNDOT has changed their District Traffic Engineers and they are currently working with Polk County Engineers to determine what, if any revisions might be made for future such events.

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**RESUME AGENDA**

**DETERMINATION OF A QUORUM**

Chairman Malm declared a quorum was now present.

**APPROVAL OF THE FEBRUARY 19<sup>TH</sup>, 2010, MINUTES OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD**

***MOVED BY POWERS, SECONDED BY ADAMS TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 19<sup>TH</sup>, 2010 MINUTES OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD, AS SUBMITTED.***

***Voting Aye: Powers, Malm, Adams, Bakken, and Christensen.***

***Voting Nay: None.***

**MATTER OF 2010-2013 T.I.P. AMENDMENT**

Haugen reported that originally we had anticipated doing some T.I.P. amendments at this time, however, because the Senate has not yet formally acted on a second stimulus bill, any action we would have taken on that item will need to be held for at least another month. He added that we did notify our local agencies that the solicitation of projects has been extended for another month. He stated that they had scheduled a public hearing for today, however he would request that this body extend that to our April meeting.

Haugen stated, then, that this means that we do not have any amendments to process for the second stimulus, however, he would like to give a brief update on what is going on in Congress. He said that the Senate did pass a bill this morning, which the House had already approved, so it will now be submitted for the President's signature that extends SAFETEA-LU to the end of the year. He reported that this will give us full access to 2010 funds. He added that they also put funding back into the Highway Trust Fund, so there will be an opportunity for more funding becoming available for construction projects in FY2010 than were previously identified.

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Haugen commented that by extending SAFETEA-LU, rather than approving a reauthorization bill, each state is scheduled to get a certain portion of funds that would have been earmarked, but weren't in FY2010. He stated that we will work with both states to identify which projects would be appropriate to receive those funds.

Haugen reported that we do have a T.I.P. modification that needs to be acted on today. He explained that in our T.I.P. we had anticipated that Grand Forks Transit would receive two years of funding for both the JARC and the New Freedom programs, however, the NDDOT only funded one year of allocation, therefore we need to modify our T.I.P. to reflect that change. He referred to the tables, included in the packet, and pointed out that the projects are a continuation of Routes 12/13 in Grand Forks, which basically covers the area around the Alerus, through the Columbia Mall area, to South Middle School and the Aurora Complex, and back to the Alerus. He stated that the JARC funds would keep it operating for another year, and the New Freedom funds would be used to purchase demand response vehicles for the Dial-A-Ride and Senior Rider services.

***MOVED BY BAKKEN, SECONDED BY ADAMS TO APPROVE THE FY2010-2013 T.I.P. MODIFICATION, AS DISCUSSED.***

***Voting Aye: Powers, Malm, Adams, Bakken, and Christensen.***

***Voting Nay: None.***

**MATTER OF 2012-2015 T.I.P. PROCESS**

Haugen reported that, for the past year we have been working with the NDDOT on how to best meet the requirements for solicitation of T.I.P. projects. He referred to a memorandum, included in the packets, and pointed out that it outlines the proposed procedures we have developed for implementation of revised project solicitation and prioritization for development of the T.I.P.

Haugen referred to a map of the MPO Study area, included in the packet, and explained that all projects receiving federal funds, are regionally significant, and need federal approval, need to be included in our T.I.P. program, so there are a lot of rural type of funding programs for which we are still working on with the NDDOT to determine how best to solicit and prioritize those projects. He added that most of the information in the packet covers those programs that occur within the shaded area, the Federal Urban Aid Boundary.

Haugen reported that in the past the NDDOT would send a direct letter to the City of Grand Forks soliciting projects, however, beginning with our next T.I.P. cycle it will be the MPO that will send the City, and other local entities, the letter soliciting projects for all the different programs, which include: 1) Local Urban Roads Program – Grand Forks receives about \$3 to \$3.5 million dollars annually towards work on local roadways; 2) State Urban Roads Program – Statewide selection with no allocated amount dedicated; 3) Transportation Enhancement Program; and 4) Safe Routes to School Program.

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Haugen stated that we will also be prioritizing projects as well, so they have been working on a scoring system to help with the prioritization process. He referred to the scoring sheets, included in the packet, and explained that when developing this scoring system they used a national program called “Telus” to help identify the eight planning factors to be used for each project when going through the prioritization process. He pointed out that in addition to those eight factors, they added a ninth factor, which is more locally/regionally based, as well. He added that they have also established, as staff, different weighting criteria for each of the nine factors, using a basic 100-point system.

Haugen reported that this information was introduced to the Technical Advisory Committee last week for their review, and staff will continue working on this to fine-tune the process further. He added that they still have work to do on this on the Minnesota side. He stated that while the requirements are not different in Minnesota than in North Dakota, there is quite a difference in the way they fund their different programs. He explained that Minnesota puts all their monies in to one pot and then distribute it out to the ATPs, and then amongst the ATPs we have different subcategories that we work with, so we haven’t yet sat down as staff yet to work on the Minnesota side of the process, but ultimately we will have a similar ranking system as North Dakota.

Christensen asked if they had to have a computer generated selection process, and what precipitates this methodology as opposed to past processes. Haugen responded that they were federally mandated to develop a ranking system. He explained that in the past we were basically answering if something was consistent with our plan, and if it was then we just identified them as having a priority ranking with showing how we determined that. Christensen asked, then, if all projects are equal, how does a project get where you want it to be. Haugen responded that they will be working with City Staff to help them identify projects that would be consistent with our Long Range Transportation Plan, with yes and no questions. He added that, ultimately, what they receive from the city is what they will be ranking on these scoring sheets, so it will still go through the City’s processes for nomination. Christensen stated that what he was asking was, how will the MPO know which project the City wants to have ranked first, how does it get to be first when it is run through the model. Haugen responded that it should come out first because the City should already know how the MPO will run it through its model. He added that if there is a problem, such as a project that is outside the Long Range Transportation Plan, but the City wants it first, then we know there are problems, and we would have to do a plan amendment before it can actually become the first project in our T.I.P.. Christensen said, though, that the City will know that. Haugen responded that that is correct. He added that the City will be identifying their projects through the C.I.P. process, and will go through the City Council process well before they are required to submit the projects to the MPO.

Haugen referred to Page 22 of the packet, and pointed out that it is the month-by-month timeline of what will be coming before the board each month for the implementation of the revised T.I.P. development process and procedures.

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**MATTER OF LAND USE PLAN SCOPES OF WORK**

Haugen reported that in our work program we identified that we would be helping both Grand Forks and East Grand Forks update their land use plans. He stated that he did include both Scopes of Work in the packet, and explained that they are quite similar. He commented that prior to us developing Travel Demand Forecasting Models we need to know how each city plans to grow, and updating their Land Use Plans is a very good way to do that. He stated that this information was presented to the Technical Advisory Committee last week, and they, as well as staff, are recommending approval of the Scopes of Work for Grand Forks and East Grand Forks.

***MOVED BY CHRISTENSEN, SECONDED BY BAKKEN TO APPROVE THE DRAFT SCOPES OF WORK FOR THE GRAND FORKS AND EAST GRAND FORKS LAND USE PLAN UPDATES.***

***Voting Aye: Powers, Malm, Adams, Bakken, and Christensen.***

***Voting Nay: None.***

**MATTER OF RAILROAD CROSSING STUDY UPDATE**

Haugen reported that in terms of the quiet zone portion of the study, work was to begin on the two downtown crossings, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, this week to upgrade them to quiet zone status. He stated that the plan was to begin on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing, however, with the impending flood event, and the possibility that the railroad opening within the flood structure could be closed, they are trying to rework the schedule to begin on the 4<sup>th</sup> Street crossing first. He commented that once these two crossings are updated, then all three crossings in Grand Forks should be eligible for quiet zone status.

Christensen asked if they would be taking the parking lot by Widmans. Haugen responded that that would not have to happen for the crossings to be eligible for quiet zone status, but he thinks that, ultimately the City Council wanted more protection from increased traffic, whether it be vehicle or train traffic, by doing some medians on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

Haugen stated that another issue concerning quiet zones is that East Grand Forks took another consideration for their quiet zone stature, earlier than later, and decided not to close any of their crossings. He said that because of this there will be activity on Central, maybe late this year or early next year to make that crossing eligible, but they are still looking for funding for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Street crossing in order to be able to put up gates and add contact warning time, so it might be a while before the three East Grand Forks crossings can become quiet zone eligible.

Haugen reported that they ran into an issue with quiet zone eligibility for the crossings out by the Amtrak station. He explained that we were told that in order to make that area eligible, we will need to install a Constant Warning Time System at all three crossings. He added that BNSF has also informed us that in order to be able to put in Constant Warning Time systems out there, we

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basically have to update all the equipment at each of those three crossings as well, so the price jumped considerably. He commented that they are asking the Federal Railroad to assist us in evaluating whether BNSF really needs to upgrade all the equipment there, and are trying to arrange a meeting to get Federal Railroad people in town at the same time BNSF people are in town so they can all visit those three crossings to make a final determination of what really needs to be done.

Haugen stated that in terms of the State Mill Spur portion of the update, they had a meeting yesterday with BNSF and State Mill personnel concerning the possible closure of Bacon Road, and as discussion ensues we have been made aware that it becoming more of a desire, or need for the State Mill to start receiving Unit Trains on the State Mill Spur. He added that the State Mill would like to see a minimum configuration of 8,000 linear feet of track available north of Gateway Drive to accommodate a Unit Train, which will consist of 110 cars, as well as a couple of locomotives.

Haugen referred to a graphic of the State Mill property, and pointed out that there is not currently 8,000 linear feet of track available there, so it will be a challenge for them to be able to accommodate a 110 car Unit Train. He explained that one issue that would need to be addressed is that BNSF would have to have their power, or locomotives on the front of the train, and they would need to detach them in order for the mill to be able to maneuver the cars to unload them, and then they would need to reconnect them to the train, there needs to be a spur, as well as additional track in excess of the required 8,000 linear feet just to land the train.

Haugen commented that in addition to their desire to close Bacon Road for the Unit Train, because the State Mill has three lines that cross their property, and because of a requirement that there be a site distance of 250-feet on each side of the roadway, which cuts their storage area in half, they would like to close it for more storage and maneuverability of railroad cars. He said that with this new information we will be reconvening with property owners up there to try to get their feedback and input as to the possible closure of Bacon Road.

Haugen reported that if a Unit Train is able to be accommodated on site, it would open up possible night operations on the State Mill Spur, and then we would have, essentially, close to a mile and a third train maneuvering up through that neighborhood to get to the mill, which they are identifying would occur once a week.

Christensen asked what this would do to traffic on Highway 2. Haugen responded that as long as the train is moving, however slowly, they can close traffic down. Christensen asked how long they can close it down. Haugen responded that as long as they are moving there is no limit to how long a crossing can be closed. He added that once the train has stopped, they have ten minutes until it has to be opened, but as long as the train is moving there really is no time limit. Christensen asked, approximately how long will it take for a Unit Train to get through a crossing. Haugen responded that they will need to do some calculations to determine the answer to that question, however it would depend on how fast, or slow, the train is moving, and it is likely that all the crossings from Gateway Drive to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue will be closed for a period of time.

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Christensen asked what would happen if the City says it doesn't want Unit Trains in the City. Haugen responded that we would need to work with the Public Service Commission, along with the State Mill, to go through the political process necessary to stop them from using Unit Trains. Christensen stated that it is important that Mr. Haugen get those figures to the City Council as soon as possible so we can be ready to deal with this if needed. He asked that a memorandum, with this information, be completed within two weeks.

Information only.

**ADJOURNMENT**

***MOVED BY BAKKEN, SECONDED BY CHRISTENSEN, TO ADJOURN THE MARCH  
17<sup>TH</sup>, 2010, MEETING OF THE MPO EXECUTIVE POLICY BOARD AT 12:54 P.M.***

***Voting Aye: Powers, Malm, Adams, Bakken, and Christensen.***

***Voting Nay: None.***

Respectfully submitted by,

Peggy McNelis,  
Office Manager