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COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Tuesday, May 6, 2008 – 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT: Alds. Walsh, Birschel, Donegan, Ewerdt, Hanson, Jay, Krol, Maher (6:55 p.m.),
McBride, Nikceovich, Stepaniak - 11

EXCUSED: Alds. Herzog, Meaux, Purins, Treis

ALSO
PRESENT: Donna Brown, DOT Project Director; Tracy Gilliam, Project Supervisor; Brad
Heimlich and Tim Anheuser, Forward 45

Ald. Krol in the Chair

Zoo Interchange Corridor Study. Donna Brown, Project Director, stated that the project study, still in its earliest stages, focuses on a corridor defined by I-94 at 70th Street on the east, I-94 at 124th Street on the west, I-894/US45 at Lincoln Avenue on the south, and US 45 at Burleigh Street on the north. The study will define the need to reconstruct the Zoo Interchange (ZI), as well as options and concepts for that reconstruction.

Community workshops were held in January to solicit comments from residents, businesses, and local officials. Several themes emerged from the workshops: the need to address left entrances/exits at the main interchange; concern about the service interchanges being close to the main interchange; congestion on local roads and the freeway; the need to protect homes and the environment; concern about traffic noise; concern about the need for better transit. To date, staff has met with 80 elected officials, railroad and utility representatives, neighborhood groups, local businesses, and representatives from colleges and schools.

An environmental impact statement (EIS) will be completed for the project, as will a traffic impact analysis (TIA). Work on the TIA began two years ago. The TIA initial findings and recommendations should be available in June 2008, with a final report due in October 2008. When the TIA began, there was approximately one million square feet of development within the study area; there is now four million square feet. The study area encompasses the Milwaukee County public works facility, the Research Park, the Regional Medical Center and the northeast quadrant of the Milwaukee County grounds.

Five key elements have been identified for the ZI: maintain a major transportation link, improve safety and traffic operations, replace bridges and pavement, address outdated design features, and accommodate future traffic volume (expected to increase by 18% by 2035).

Three project options are receiving close scrutiny: (1) Replace in-kind the bridges and pavement in their current configurations. No changes in alignment would be made, and only minimum safety improvements would be made. Capacity would not be increased. (2) Make spot improvements to

improve safety, correct some unsafe ramp movements, add service drives and auxiliary lanes. (3) Implement the modernization concept, addressing weaving lane maneuvers, relocating entrances/exits to the right, constructing dual lane ramps, creating collector roads and service drives. Modernization may include the same number of lanes as currently exist, or may include provision (within medians) for additional future lane construction in each direction. Additional right-of-way will be required. Additional lanes will be constructed under two caveats: that congestion increases and eight basic lanes are constructed beyond the project area (i.e., beyond Burleigh Street).

The environmental data, archeological/historical concerns, traffic trends, land uses, neighborhood impacts and financial constraints will all be used to determine which option to pursue. Two public information meetings will be held on May 21 and on May 29 as part of the on-going solicitation of comments.

Tracy Gilliam, Project Supervisor, stated that an initial set of concepts will be identified in June. Refinements will continue such that a second set of concepts will be presented in October. The refinement process will continue and a final set of preferred alternatives will be developed by April 2009.

Mitigation route construction is scheduled to begin in 2012. Construction on the interchange itself (between Burleigh Street and Blue Mound Road) will begin in 2013. Construction should be complete by 2016.

In response to a query, Ms. Brown stated that work will be done on Center Street at US45, and will taper north to Burleigh Street. Ald. Stepaniak strongly urged that the Burleigh Street/US45 intersection be included in the study area due to anticipated development at that location. He also inquired whether work on mitigation routes will be performed at state expense; Ms. Brown replied that that is undetermined at present. Work is underway to identify areas on mitigation routes in need of improvement. Once the information from the TIA is available in June, the picture will become clearer.

(Ald. Maher present 6:55 p.m.) - 11

Ald. Walsh opined that the projected growth in traffic seems low in light of potential growth in the Research Park and inquired about the source of the 18% figure mentioned earlier. Ms. Brown replied that the 18% applies just to the freeway and comes from the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Plan Commission (SEWRPC) regional plan. A different study deals with the question of projected growth on local streets.

In response to a question about the need for total reconstruction of bridges, Mr. Gilliam explained that the modernization option calls for bridge replacement, particularly if the footprint of the road is widened, thereby requiring the relocation of abutments. Vertical adjustments may also be necessary.

Ald. Birschel pointed out that the North Avenue interchange is very important, especially so during the holiday shopping season at Mayfair.

Ald. McBride questioned whether the projected traffic volume increase may be affected by the high price of oil. Ms. Brown replied that SEWRPC does an energy analysis and possible changes in traffic patterns as a result of high fuel prices is incorporated in the study.

The question of the use of 'smart freeways' was raised as a way to manage traffic flow and speeds. Ms. Brown stated that nothing specific indicates that the DOT will be considering an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS). Use would need to be agreed upon by the legislature. Neither are dedicated transit lanes being contemplated at this time. The effort is focused on remaining close to the footprint of the current freeway system.

Responding to a question about the need to acquire additional land to accomplish this project, Ms. Brown stated that since preliminary options are just being identified, it is too early to answer that question.

Mr. Heimlich, Forward 45, responded to a question about the projected 18% traffic increase by 2035, noting that the existing freeway was designed to handle 115,000 vehicles daily; the system is now at just under 350,000 per day. He noted that the average growth on surface streets is about 1 – 1 ½ % annually. The 18% growth figure over the next 30 years was thought to be aggressive; however in the period between 1995 and 2004, traffic in the study corridor has increased 12%.

Ald. Birschel observed that had the entire freeway system been built out as proposed many years ago, the region would likely not be confronted with the congestion problems it now faces.

Ald. Nikcevich queried whether the improved Marquette Interchange will be factored into data about the Zoo Interchange project. Ms. Brown replied affirmatively, stating that the Marquette Interchange improvements will be completed by the end of the year; it will be fully available to divert traffic. She added that the Mitchell Interchange will be improved prior to the Zoo Interchange project.

Ald. Donegan asked about the primary location of the 4 million square feet of development mentioned earlier. Ms. Brown explained that most is within the Milwaukee County grounds; there is some on Hwy. 100 near Quad Graphics. Staff is aware of the potential on Burleigh Street.

The question of implementing the modernization option, but without lane increases, was raised. Mr. Gilliam stated that it is anticipated that additional space in the medians will be created for future expansion, but the same number of lanes as currently exists will likely be constructed initially. Ms. Brown added that traffic data has not yet been applied to the three concepts/options discussed earlier.

Ald. Ewerdt inquired whether the 'dead space' in some interchange loops might be used for some purpose, as has been done elsewhere in the state. Ms. Brown replied that the city of Madison has a salt shed on a parcel such as Ald. Ewerdt described. Much depends on sight lines and other factors. It is also possible that reconfiguration of entrances/exits can result in excess land becoming available.

Responding to a query about continuing air quality concerns in the region, Mr. Heimlich stated that an air quality analysis will be performed, as well as a noise quality analysis.

The meeting adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Carla A. Ledesma, City Clerk

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