



**Billings Technical Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes—September 1, 2011  
To be approved at the next scheduled meeting**



**Attendance:**

**Members Present:**

Rod Nelson, MDT-Billings; Vern Heisler, Deputy Public Works Director, City Public Works Department; Deb Meling, City Engineer/Public Works-Engineering Division; Terry Smith, City Traffic Engineer/Public Works-Engineering Division; Tim Miller, Director, Yellowstone County Public Works Department; Mike Black, Engineer, Yellowstone County Public Works Department; Ron Wenger, Transit Manager, MET Transit; Debra Hagel, Planner, MET Transit; Candi Beaudry, Planning Director; Scott Walker, City/County Transportation Planner

**Others Present:** Wyeth Friday, Planning Division Manager; Lora Mattox, Transportation Planner, Planning and Community Services; Billings Industrial Revitalization District Chairman, Marty Connell

**Conference Call:** Carol Strizich, Statewide and Urban Planning, MDT; Diane Burbank, Statewide and Urban Planning, MDT; Zia Kazimi, Special Studies Section, MDT; Stephanie Maize, MDT; and Doug McBroom, Multimodal Programs, MDT

**Call the meeting to order:** Scott Walker called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m., in the Parmly Library 4th Floor Large Conference Room. He called for introduction of the members.

**Public Comment:** Scott Walker opened the public comment portion of the meeting and asked if there was anyone wishing to make a comment at this time. No public comment was made.

**Minutes of August 18, 2011:** Scott Walker asked the members of the Committee for the approval of the August 18, 2011 minutes.

**Motion**

**Mike Black made a motion and it was seconded by Tim Miller to approve the minutes of August 18, 2011 as submitted.**

**Motion carried unanimously.**

## **4. New Business:**

### **4A: TIGER Grant III options for the intersection at Main Street & 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North/METRA Park, Scott Walker Transportation Planner**

#### **Introduction**

Scott Walker opened this agenda item. He noted a letter received by staff regarding the TIGER Grant III options for METRA Park. He said several discussions have been held regarding this opportunity and the applicants would be Yellowstone County through BSEDA, (Big Sky Economic Development Authority). He explained this meeting has been called per request of the Board of County Commissioners and Yellowstone County Public Works in consideration of the TIGER grant options and how the project would flow through the transportation process. Scott Walker asked Mike Black, Yellowstone County Public Works, for further input on what has transpired.

Mike Black said MDT has applied on two different occasions for TIGER grants for a separated intersection at Main Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North, and was not successful. Commissioner Kennedy has discussed preliminary concepts with MDT and a meeting was held Thursday of last week. He stated Commissioner Kennedy has asked this Committee to discuss who would write the grant application and what impacts it would have on the environmental documents. He said the application is due the first part of October. He noted MDT has refreshed the cost estimates and have looked at options for an overpass and an underpass.

#### **Discussion**

In response to a question by Candi Beaudry, Mike Black stated State funds will be used to provide the 20% matching funds and noted this is based on a revised cost estimate. Rod Nelson said the projected costs for the underpass are approximately double of the overpass; the concern is the relocation of utilities coupled with the traffic control needed for the intersection.

Vern Heisler asked for clarification of the State matching funds. Rod Nelson said it would not involve urban monies and would be strictly State funded. He pointed out specifics will not be available until all of the designs are completed. Candi Beaudry asked about the project status for submittal of the application. Mike Black said this was discussed at the initial meeting and he listed the participants. He said the environmental documents are a “Cat-X” (Categorical-Exclusion), and could be modified and used for either option. Vern Heisler voiced concern.

Marty Connell asked if the Morrison Maierle photographs and a depiction of the roundabout option were available, and they were distributed to the members of the committee. Scott Walker said he viewed a TIGER grant webinar presentation recently which stated grant applicants have to be innovative from the standpoint of funding or design. He said while the underpass can be construed as somewhat innovative, the project is fairly straightforward. He pointed out the TIGER II grant application included pedestrian and bicycling amenities. He commented they are looking for something different and matching funds are a considerable piece of this along with pedestrian and bicycle amenities. He asked this group to consider how this project will woo the grantors on the Federal level. Candi Beaudry said she heard successful applicants had in excess of 50% non-Federal match and asked how the innovation will be presented with this project.

Marty Connell, BIRD, (Billings Industrial Revitalization District), said he feels there are four alternatives: doing nothing, construction of an overpass, construction of an underpass; or construction of a three or four lane roundabout with a pedestrian bike path underneath, as suggested by Public Works Director Dave Mumford. He stated he feels landowners can push this grant and mentioned the tornado event, and the desire for the vacant City and County lands to be used for hotels with access to a means of transport across Main Street to the fairgrounds. Mr. Connell said one of the obstacles to constructing an overpass is two major landowners and there is a meeting this afternoon at 4:00 p.m. to involve them in the preliminary discussions. He said there are many unknown obstacles to constructing an underpass including relocation of utilities. Mr. Connell said his preference is Dave Mumford's suggestion to build a three lane roundabout with a pedestrian bike path underneath, as there would be fewer problems with land owners with this proposal. He said EBURD may have funds to contribute to make the match more attractive. Candi Beaudry asked what process MDT and the Board of County Commissioners went through to come to the overpass idea. Mike Black explained MDT and Commissioner Kennedy had discussed this and the State had hired a consultant to consider an overpass along with discussions with MDT regarding the functionality of a triple roundabout. He stated the issue is mitigation of congestion and said all opportunities should be addressed. He said he did not know how this would affect the Cat-X documents. Candi Beaudry asked about the issues of adding onto an overpass and if the same issues would be faced should the overpass need to be widened. Mike Black said Bench Boulevard may be able to be modified. In response to a question by Vern Heisler, Mike Black said a meeting was held last week between the County and MDT. Vern Heisler stated he is struggling with the fact a City representative was not invited or attend the meeting. Mike Black said his point is well taken. Marty Connell said Commissioner Kennedy said he feels the time is right and wants to solve the problems. Mr. Connell commented it is hard to pull everyone together. Vern Heisler said getting a grant for improvements to this intersection is a good idea due to the volume of traffic. He said at this point, the City elected officials have assumed it would be an underpass and have not been presented with the roundabout idea. City Council will discuss this at their next work session. He stressed it has been a policy decision. Mike Black replied someone simply saw an opportunity for some funding and the intent was to address the problem. Vern Heisler pointed out the goal of Public Works is to try to get improvements. He said going forward, it is a policy decision as to what will happen at the intersection. Mike Black commented Commissioner Kennedy was uncertain which entity would drive this project. Vern Heisler said Public Works would support a Transportation Advisory Committee recommendation, but would be unable to vote today on a specific project. Scott Walker stated that this is process driven and starts with Transportation Advisory Committee. He asked for a recommendation to either support the grant application or support a specific project that has not run its course through the process. He stressed that corners cannot be cut in the review process as we have to be responsible to members of the community. He said the intent of the meeting today is to decide whether to support a grant moving forward broadly or change the original scope of an underpass to consider other options. Candi Beaudry asked what stage the project must be in to be presented for this grant. She pointed out if the criterion requires the project be "shovel ready", this body has to be approving the concept of an overpass. Mike Black asked if MDT would address these questions in paragraph form. Rod Nelson said the last TIGER Grant was a design/build project and this is the same concept. Marty Connell suggested if a roundabout is built and there are extra funds, a roundabout could be

placed at 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. Candi Beaudry stated the project will have to be identified at a constrained location, and we would be recommending action for an application for a grade-separated intersection treatment that will be design built. Doug McBroom, MDT, stated all phases of the project have to be obligated by September 30, 2013, and awarded funds have to be used specifically for the project applied for. Deb Meling pointed out that this will serve several concerned community groups and asked if there is a demonstrated track record for design/build projects. She noted the interest in the Beartooth Highway project. Rod Nelson said they have a demonstrated track record. He answered he is unsure of the grant notification timeline. Mike Black commented Stefan Streeter had thought this is a relatively short turn around. Rod Nelson concurred. Vern Heisler asked if a roundabout project would be considered as “grade-separated”. Mike Black and Marty Connell stated it is their recollection of the project costs at \$35,000 or under for a two lane roundabout. Vern Heisler asked if this is the best option for this intersection and stated all options should be considered. Scott Walker asked if the Transportation Advisory Committee would support a grade-separated intersection/ improvement type of project. Mike Black stated one of the issues is congestion mitigation at this intersection and asked if this would be broad enough. Scott Walker said this added verbiage takes it less out of contention. Candi Beaudry concurred and said she feels it is a difficult grant to nail down, especially when we don’t have a specific project. She said she is not convinced this is eligible at this point and may be a “long shot”. Rod Nelson said even so, he feels the application should be submitted. In response to a question by Deb Meling, Rod Nelson said the grant criteria is posted on the internet and isn’t different from the TIGER II grant. Candi Beaudry commented the grant writers will make the case. She said the Transportation Advisory Committee needs to make a recommendation so the project can go forward. Scott Walker stated this community has not had enough opportunity to flush out the type of project needed and other alternatives have not been considered. He asked if the committee could support a grade separated project and voiced concern about the traffic levels at the intersection. Marty Connell said the roundabout option is reasonable and should be considered as they move traffic. Deb Meling said she is concerned with this discussion as this option will only address one problem, and there are several issues including the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North intersection. Rod Nelson concurred and said it is possible to go over or under Main Street. Marty Connell commented the on the ongoing progress in this area including the activity with the Yegen and Pacific Steel properties. Mike Black said the malfunction is that there is no way for the traffic on Bench Boulevard to enter and have a free way through the intersection. Deb Meling reiterated she does not want to lose the potential to address 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North. Mike Black said he didn’t know if this could be included. Terry Smith said it is his understanding there were multiple projects around the State nominated during the first two iterations of grant applications. He asked if there is statewide competition for this grant and he wondered if we are specific enough to have a chance. Deb Meling said that we meet several of the criteria except for the innovation piece. Rod Nelson said the previous application depicted opportunities for pedestrians and bicycles to go over or under Main Street to the fair grounds. Terry Smith said we should keep all options open, include some reference to multi-modal amenities, and broaden the scope enough so that 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North can be addressed. Deb Meling noted this project would affect the livability standards of a good percentage of the community. Scott Walker asked if the Committee could make a recommendation for an application featuring a grade separated intersection, intersection improvements, multi-model amenities, and improvements to 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue

North. Ron Wenger asked if it is critical for the Committee to take action today as these types of items usually follow a City Council presentation or discussion. Scott Walker said City Council will need technical guidance prior to making a decision. Deb Meling said the technical people from the City were not involved in the discussion and the roundabout was not discussed. Terry Smith commented the overpass or underpass options will work. Doug McBroom clarified and said one of the easy deciding factors is that a roundabout is not considered in the environmental document and would be excluded as this is one of the criteria. Rod Nelson explained an underpass or overpass is considered a grade separation while a roundabout is not. He asked if the funds can be obligated for up to a year while the utilities are being relocated. Mike Black said this is a window of opportunity and he recognizes the difficulties expressed by all of the entities on how to support this. Scott Walker noted it is easier if the environmental document mentions "grade separated" and asked if the Committee feels comfortable asking for a grade separated intersection. Rod Nelson pointed out 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North are included in the environmental documents. Marty Connell asked about other means of funding. Candi Beaudry said the only funds available are Federal funds which do not qualify; the TIFD funds cannot be used outside of the district. She stated the only possible City funds would be arterial fees which are obligated for five years. She commended MDT for their proposed match contribution. Vern Heisler said the Policy Coordinating Committee will make the final recommendation as to how specific the project can be or refine it at that level. Mike Black suggested obtaining letters support from elected officials, the Transportation Advisory Committee, the MPO, the City/County Planning Board, City Council, the Policy Coordinating Committee, and BIRD, as it would improve the chances of an award. He said the only applicant options are the City or the County, or perhaps BSEDA. Candi Beaudry said local governments can submit.

Scott Walker asked for a recommendation. He said the public participation portion of this is important as we move forward as there has been a focus on an underpass for this project. He commented that some property owners may not like what is moving forward and suggested holding a public meeting. He stressed the public process must not be lost. Terry Smith pointed out he is unsure Transportation Advisory Committee is obligated to make a decision. Deb Meling said this Committee should make a recommendation based on technical merits.

### **Motion**

**Mike Black made a motion and it was seconded by Tim Miller to forward a recommendation to City Council and Board of County Commissioners to support the application of a TIGER grant based on addressing multi-model aspects; using and adhering the current environmental documents, and emphasizing public participation.**

### **Discussion**

Planning Clerk called for reiteration of the motion. Members of the Committee discussed the need to include the multi-model aspects in the motion. The motion and second was withdrawn by Mike Black and Tim Miller respectively. Chairman Walker called for a revised motion.

### **Motion**

**Terry Smith made a motion and it was seconded by Mike Black to support a TIGER III grant application that is consistent with prior environmental documents, preserves all improvement options, emphasizes public participation, and if possible, addresses congestion mitigation at both the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue North and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue North intersections.**

### **Discussion**

Deb Meling said she feels this motion speaks to the Transportation Advisory Committee's role as a technical committee. Committee members concurred.

**The motion carried unanimously.**

### **Other Business**

Deb Meling asked Staff has not received notification on the CTEP local allocation amount. Carol Strizech, MDT said no allocation is available at this time, but she will check on this.

## **6. Adjourn – Meeting adjourned at 10:53 AM**

**--Draft to be approved at the next meeting.**