



BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

City of Billings & Yellowstone County
MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, January 26, 2020 MEETING TIME: 11:30 am

Virtual Conference Format

Live Coverage was available here: <https://www.facebook.com/Billings-Planning-Community-Services-Department-1738982159659260/> Recording is also available on same Facebook page link.

DRAFT

Call to order: Ed Gulick, BPAC Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:32 am

Members present: Anna O'Donnell, City; Liana Susott, County; Kristi Drake, City; Dorothy Dupree, County; Scott Barber, City; Rose Cook, County.

Others present: Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner; Tammy Deines, Planning Clerk; Lisa Gray, HDR; Tim Erickson, HDR; Kurtis Schnieber, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT).

Public Comment Period:

- a. **Comments on items not on the agenda and request to add items to future agendas –**
None.
- b. **Online comments and comments received by the Active Transportation Planner –**
None.

Introductions: BPAC members introduced themselves as this was BPAC member Dorothy Dupree's first meeting.

Motion. Approval of the meeting minutes of December 1, 2020: Scott Barber, BPAC member, motioned to approve the minutes. Liana Susott, BPAC member, seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Old Business: None

New Business:

27th St. Railroad Crossing

Tim Erickson from HDR gave a presentation on the 27th St. Railroad study. Lisa Gray, Public Involvement Lead from HDR, and Kurtis Schnieber, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) also joined the call.

HDR, in addition to a number of sub-consultants, is working with MDT on the 27th St. RR Crossing study. There have been numerous studies of this issue over 50+ years. A statewide rail crossing study identified this as one of the top locations that could benefit from an improved crossing.

Currently, there are about 36 trains per day with 6 switching trains per day. 90% of crossing events last less than 6 minutes and weekday peak period (7-9 am and 4-6 pm) average times are just over 3 minutes each. Weekend crossing events during all times average 4 minutes and 15 seconds.

Short-term alternatives (defined as at-grade solutions)-

- Closure of 28th/29th Street crossing with the goal to move switching operations to those streets so 27th is not blocked as frequently. This alternative did not advance to the next phase of the study as it severed multi-modal connectivity and vehicular mobility.
- Signal modification – minor improvements for vehicular mobility and negligible improvements for bike/peds
 - Add a dedicated left-turn arrow at N 27th St./Montana Ave.
 - Allows SB left turning traffic onto Montana to access N 21st St. or N 13th St. underpasses – already installed during 2020
- Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)-moderate improvements for vehicular mobility and negligible for bike/peds
 - Variable messaging boards
 - Advanced warning signs
 - Encourage alternate routes
 - Other technology available to improve safety and mobility. Could use a camera to detect an approaching train, but MDT would not be able to use information directly from the railroad due to national security issues.

Long-term alternatives (defined as a grade separated solution)-

- 4 lane overpass/underpass-not advanced for consideration due to connectivity, multi-modal, and property impacts.
- 2 lane grade separation between Minnesota Ave. and Montana Ave. -not advanced as it does not meet current design standards due to steep slopes and limited vertical clearance.
- 2 lane overpass/underpass – idea that has moved forward. This would touch down somewhere between 2nd and 3rd Aves. N. and at 1st Ave. S.
 - Improves safety and mobility of crossing
 - Some property impacts
 - Less construction impacts
 - Opportunities for multi-modal improvements
 - Tunnel would allow sidewalk or landscaping to be expanded as less space would be needed for at grade motorized traffic.
 - With both the underpass or the overpass, one lane of traffic in each direction would remain at grade.
 - For the overpass HDR is talking with a group about aesthetics to improve the appearance.
 - With the tunnel option, Minnesota Ave. and 2nd Ave. N would have right in and right out access only.

Next steps

- Business and stakeholder outreach
- Aesthetics Committee
- Finalize study with next steps-Summer 2021
 - Incorporate feedback from stakeholders, public, and city council

Questions-

- What are the elements of further analysis for the two-lane overpass/underpass?
 - Improvements to safety and mobility
 - Business stakeholder outreach-impacts and possible improvements
- What are the safety improvements of a separated grade crossing? Ed Gulick, BPAC Chair, has not seen crashes in the area even though his office is nearby.
 - There is safety of direct users crossing the tracks, but the other major consideration is accessibility for emergency services who might experience delays going over the tracks.

- What does minimal impact to housing mean?
 - The study does not show impacts to housing besides visual impacts
 - There is some question about the impact to the building at the southwest quadrant of 2nd Ave. N and N 27th St. that needs to be further explored.
- Where would funding for the project come from?
 - MDT would look at allocating this funding through their 5-year plan. They get funding through federal transportation bills and grants.
- What would the timeline be for construction?
 - Construction could begin maybe in 10 years, but that timeline might still be optimistic.
- Why can't the railroad tracks be put underground?
 - MRL still has to serve the industries around downtown and a grade separation could cut off service to them. Cars can traverse a steeper grade than trains.

The study can be accessed at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/billings27thstreet/> and the recording of this presentation can be watched on the Planning and Community Services Department Facebook page.

Election of BPAC Chair and Vice-Chair for 2021

Scott Barber, BPAC member, nominated Anna O'Donnell, BPAC member, for Chair and Ed for Vice-Chair. Anna turned down the nomination for chair.

Scott said he could be Chair if he could get some guidance on how to run a meeting.

Anna said she can stay in her role as Vice-Chair.

Kristi moved to have Scott as Chair and Anna as Vice-Chair. The motion passed unanimously.

Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study

Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner, shared the results of the Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study.

The Billings-Yellowstone County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) hired Alta Planning + Design through a competitive process to conduct the Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study. The goal of the Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study is to define what a successful bike and scooter share program would look like for the Billings area. A bike and/or scooter share system is a network of shared bicycles or scooters available for short-term use, usually 15 to 45-minute trips. A user can check out a bicycle or scooter from locations around the city, ride to their destination, and then leave the bicycle or scooter for someone else to use.

Bike share and scooter share programs are designed to be a cost-effective, environmentally-friendly, convenient travel option for shorter trips. In a survey of 245 respondents completed as parts of this study, 53% of people said they are interested in seeing bike and scooter share in Billings, 24% are not interested, and 14% need more information. Of the remaining percentage that selected "other," many respondents reported liking the idea of bike share, but not scooter share. Top concerns related to bike and scooter share include safety, lack of bicycle infrastructure, and vandalism. Most Billings community members want to access downtown, parks, and restaurant/coffee shops by bike or scooter share.

The study recommends Billings implement a hybrid bike share system where the bike houses the transaction rather than at a station. Stations, also called hubs, consist of branded racks for parking bike share bikes. Though stations are available, the program does not require that a bike be left at a station and it is permitted to be parked anywhere within the service area. The study also recommends using electric-assist or e-bikes to make trips easier for people of all abilities. For a system governance model, the study recommends implementing a turnkey bike share

system or a publicly owned and privately-operated system. In a turnkey system, the City would hire an experienced company that owns and operates the system. The City would rent equipment and contract with the company for the full range of operations support, including installation, operations, sponsorship, customer service, and maintenance. Alternatively, Billings could purchase the bike share fleet and hub infrastructure and contract with a third party to operate the system. During the system launch, the study suggests launching an initial service area including downtown and MSU Billings, creating an equity program, and establishing strategic partnerships to ensure the success of the system.

Questions:

- Could a bike share station at 1st Ave. N and Division be paired with an improvement of the area for people biking?
 - Maybe, there would have to be further investigation and staff is always working to get more bike infrastructure.
- Have there been studies of similar sized cities that have done this? Is Billings big enough for bike share to be profitable?
 - Consultants put together a memo with a study of bike share in similar sized cities and it is generally expected that there will be some public funding for bike/scooter share.

BPAC discussed submitting a letter of recommendation to City Council about bike/scooter share, and thought sending a conditional letter of support that encourages adopting bike share when certain conditions are met would be a good idea.

Complete Streets Progress Report Update – postponed until March meeting

Future agenda items:

Discuss HDR presentation

Discuss bike and scooter share

Compete streets presentation

Presentation from Ed on walkability/27th St. crossing

Other business:

HB184 – there are some problems and some good parts of the bill. Is this something BPAC would want to send a letter to the legislature? The group discussed that BPAC's role would be to advise the City Council on their position on bills.

Adjournment

Anna moved to adjourn, Rose seconded. The motion passed unanimously.