

POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Virtual Video Conference

MINUTES –FEBRUARY 16, 2021

APPROVED BY A MOTION MARCH 16, 2021

NOTICE

Due to COVID-19, the meeting will held through a virtual platform. Public comment will be taken only during the Public Comment periods as indicated on the agenda. Comments may be sent to Board via email before 10:00 AM on Tuesday, February 16, 2021. All e-mails received prior to this time will be read into the record for the public hearing.

Member Participants: Chairman Bill Cole, Mayor, City of Billings; Denis Pitman, Vice Chairman, Board of County Commissioners; Mike Taylor, MDT District Office; Planning Board President Woody Woods, Yellowstone County Planning Board

Staff Participants: Wyeth Friday, Director, Planning and Community Services; Manager; Scott Walker, Transportation Coordinator, Planning & Community Services Department; Lora Mattox, Transportation Planner; Jeannette Vieg, Planning Assistant;

Other Participants: John Ostlund, Yellowstone County Commissioner; Lisa Olmstad, DOWL Consulting; Debi Meling, City Public Works Director; Mike Black, YC Public Works

1. Call to Order: Chairman Bill Cole called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance. Chairman Cole asked Commissioner Pitman to chair this meeting as Mayor Cole is participating remotely.

2. Public Comment/Communication from the Audience

The Public may call in during specific Public Comment periods at (406) 237-8694. All callers will be in a queued system and are asked to remain on hold and be patient. Calls will be taken in the order in which they are received. Callers will be restricted to 3 minutes of testimony as is customary. Live coverage can be viewed:

<https://www.facebook.com/Billings-Planning-Community-Services-Department-1738982159659260/?ref=bookmarks>

A. Comments on items not on the agenda and requests to add items to future agendas.

B. Comments on items on the Non-public and Public Agenda Items

Planning Assistant Jeannette Vieg received no calls from the public. There was no communication from the audience regarding agenda items or future agenda items.

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3. Minutes of November 17, 2020. (The December 15, 2020 and January 19, 2021 meetings were canceled due to a lack of agenda items).

Motion

Commissioner Pitman made a motion and it was seconded by Planning Board President Woods to approve the minutes of November 17, 2020. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

4. Old Business:

4a. Motion/Recommendation. Downtown Billings Traffic Study: Alternative Prioritization and Public Preference Plan. Lora Mattox, Transportation Planner, presenting.

Planner Lora Mattox opened this agenda item with presentation of the staff report below.

BACKGROUND

The Billings Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) requested proposals from qualified firms to develop a Downtown Billings Traffic Study: Alternative Prioritization and Public Preference Plan (Preference Plan). The goal of this project was to take the identified transportation network alternatives completed in the Downtown Traffic Study, completed by the City of Billings Engineering Division, and execute a robust and creative public outreach process to develop an implementation and project prioritization strategy. The MPO through a competitive process hired Dowl to develop a Downtown Billings Traffic Study: Alternative Prioritization and Public Preference Plan (Preference Plan). The Preference Plan project was prompted by the Downtown Billings Traffic Study (DBTS) completed for the City of Billings Engineering Division by Kittelson and Associates and DOWL in 2019. The Preference Plan solicited public feedback and prioritization preference of the feasible transportation network alternatives vetted in the DBTS. The vetted alternatives presented to the public are:

- a. One-Way to Two-Way Conversions: North and South
- b. One-Way to Two-Way Conversion: East and West being (1st Avenue N and 2nd Avenue N)
- c. Road Diet: Montana Avenue (Division Street to 18th Street)
- d. Road Diet: 6th Avenue N (Main Street to North 13th Street)
- e. Road Diet: 13th Street (Between 6th Avenue North and 1st Avenue North
Seasonal Closure: Broadway Avenue

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Overall, members of the public and stakeholder groups who were engaged with the project provided passionate, thoughtful opinions. Citizens are deeply engaged in the Community and downtown; hopeful that improvements would increase economic vitality and spur development; and concerned about accessibility, walkability and bike-ability.

STAKEHOLDERS

This study has been reviewed by the City-County Planning Board, Board of County Commission, and Billings City Council. The Planning Board held a public hearing prior to its recommendation of approval. Each governing body is forwarding recommendation of approval to the PCC. The Board of County Commissioners voted to approve the Plan with the following condition attached to its approval: The BOCC voted to move the study forward with a recommendation not to reduce any traffic lanes to accommodate bike lanes. The BOCC provided further reasoning on its recommendation. Specifically, it was stated restricting vehicle traffic movements to accommodate bike lanes makes no sense, is counterproductive, and increases gas use instead of decreasing it. Additionally, it increases time at stoplights, it increases wait time for everyone, and reduces services provided.

FISCAL EFFECTS

The contract for the Downtown Billings Traffic Study: Alternative Prioritization and Public Preference Plan with DOWL was budgeted at \$50,000. The majority of the funding is through the MPO's Federal PL (planning) funds. PL funds for this project required 40% local match, which was provided through the Planning Division's approved budget. Although this study does not provide exact costs associated with preferred alternatives, the Downtown Billings Traffic Study completed by Kittelson & Associates in 2019 provided planning level cost estimates for selected elements. Further decisions about what conversions might be done first, timing and allocations of funds, are all elements that may happen next using this Preference Plan's findings.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) approve the Downtown Billings Traffic Study: Alternative Prioritization and Public Preference Plan (Preference Plan) on the recommendations forwarded by the City-County Planning Board, City Council and Board of County Commissioners. The Board of County Commissioners recommended conditional approval.

DOWL Consultant Lisa Olmstead followed with a PowerPoint presentation and gave a brief overview of this project.

Public Comment: There were no incoming calls for public comment on this agenda item.

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Discussion

Mayor Cole asked for clarification on the motion. He said City Council has recommended approval to this body. He asked if the motion to approve constitutes approval of all of the projects. Scott Walker responded that the approval process is to approve the public participation document. All potential projects will have to go through the approval process. Formal approval is needed of the study to move forward with the process. Commissioner Pitman said the BOCC approved with the caveat that road diets should not reduce any traffic lanes to accommodate bike lanes. Lisa Olmstad said all of the proposed projects in the document were included are in conformance with the Transportation Plan. She stressed this document is a guidance document for civic leadership. Discussion followed on the Montana Avenue project. Commissioner Ostlund said the BOCC's recommendation is that no bike lanes displace car lanes. Mayor Cole commented on the goal to increase parking and slowing traffic speeds. He noted that City Council approved the conversion of 29th Street and 30th Street and asked about the next potential project. Debi Meling, Director, City Public Works, said the One-Way to Two-Way Conversion: East and West project being, (1st Avenue N and 2nd Avenue N), makes the most sense. They are working with MDT and are trying to dovetail with their work. Michael Taylor, MDT, said they are waiting for a record decision to move forward with this project.

Motion

Commissioner Pitman made a motion and Planning Board President Woods seconded the motion to accept the Downtown Plan as presented by staff with the Board of County Commissioners caveat that road diets should to reduce any traffic lanes to accommodate bike lanes.

4b. Motion/Recommendation. 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan Amendment. Scott Walker, Transportation Coordinator, presenting.

Transportation Coordinator Scott Walker opened this agenda item. He explained that the Billings Long Range Transportation Plan, (LRTP), is the document which lists our community's long and short-range transportation projects as well as bike/pedestrian and transit projects. He said that from time to time, amendments are needed to add or revise projects within the document.

List of Long Range Transportation Plan Amendments

- Cover page revised on October 9, 2020 for Plan Amendment No. 2
- Title page added column for LRTP Amendment No. 2 to the amendment table
- Chapter 5 page 58, Table 5.6 -Updated cost for Inner Belt Loop project
- Chapter 9 page 124, Table 9.10 –Updated cost and name for Skyline Trail project

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- Chapter 12 page 149, Table 12.1 -Updated cost, funding source for Inner Belt Loop project to Page 152, Table 12.1 -Updated total committed cost t page 156, Table 12.2 – Updated cost, funding source for Skyline Trail project to Page 157, Table 12.2 -Updated Total committed cost to Page 168, Table 12.4 –Updated total costs based on these two projects.
- Chapter 13 of Page 170, 2ndcolumn –Updated total investment costs for the plan to \$695 million to Page 175, Table 13.5 ▪Added BUILD funding source and amount based on the awarded grant
- Updated costs for Other (Private, Bonds, TIF, CDBG, etc.)
- Updated total costs

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) approve the 2929 Long Range Transportation Plan Amendment on the recommendations forwarded by the City-County Planning Board, City Council and Board of County Commissioners.

Discussion

Commissioner Pitman stated he feels this is an appropriate amendment due to the BUILD grant award to the community. Mayor Cole concurred.

Public Comment: No public calls were received on this agenda item.

Motion

Commissioner Pitman made a motion and Planning Board President Woods seconded motion that the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) approve the 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan Amendment as presented by staff and on the recommendations forwarded by the City-County Planning Board, City Council and Board of County Commissioners.

4c. Motion/Recommendation. 2020-2024 Transportation Improvement Program, (TIP), Amendment 1, Scott Walker, Transportation Coordinator, presenting.

Transportation Coordinator Scott Walker opened this agenda item. The 2020-2024 Transportation Improvement Program, (TIP), Amendment 1 was provided to this Committee with the staff report. He explained that Federal regulations require that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) review and update their Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) periodically. Given some timing and funding adjustments with several transportation projects, the current Billings 2020-24 TIP must be amended to maintain compliance with State and Federal requirements.

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2020-2024 TIP Amendment #1 Highlights

- Build Grant - Inner Belt Loop/Skyline Trail - New Project
- Montana Avenue Overpass: Study and Rehab – New Project
- Grand Avenue (24th to Zimmerman - Pavement Preservation) - New Project
- MET Transit - Funds Added to the Program (Aware)
- All of the other monetary adjustments to the document are at the request of the Montana Department of Transportation and the Federal Transit Administration

Discussion There was no comments or discussion from the Committee.

Motion

Planning Board President Woods made a motion and Commissioner Pitman seconded the motion that the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) approve the 2020-2024 Transportation Improvement Program, (TIP), Amendment 1 as presented by staff and on the recommendations forwarded by the City-County Planning Board, City Council, and the Board of County Commissioners. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

Public Comment: No public calls were received on this agenda item.

5. New Business: There is no New Business.

6. Other Business:

Commissioner Pitman suggested a future agenda item for MDT to give an update on the Billings Bypass project.

Mayor Cole informed the Committee members the City Council discussed the 27th Street Overpass Project. Council directed staff to move forward and encouraged MDOT to give attention to the 13th Street Underpass. There was concern on the part of Council to potential impacts to east-west traffic, mobility, aesthetic impacts, visual barriers created, and the lack of a pedestrian north-south passage.

Commissioner Pitman said the BOCC are considering METRA Park and the 1st Avenue project and looking for options for funding and facilitating this project potentially with BUILD grant funds.

Planning Board President Woods commented on the 5th Avenue Corridor project and the need to coordinate the various studies for this area.

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Future Agenda Items:

- MDT Project Updates: Billings Bypass; 1st Ave. North
- Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study

ADJOURNMENT: 1:20 PM

Approved by a motion on March 16, 2021

Tamara L. Deines, Planning Clerk