

POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Virtual Video Conference

MINUTES –MARCH 16, 2021

DRAFT- TO BE APPROVED BY A MOTION APRIL 20, 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, March 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; Michael Taylor, MDT District Office; Rod Nelson, 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; Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner; Tammy Deines, Planning Clerk

Other Participants: Ryan Hammon, MDT; Katie Potts, MDT; John Ostlund, Yellowstone County Commissioner; Debi Meling, City Public Works Director; Mike Black, YC Public Works; Parker Osterloh, Alta Planning and Design

1. Call to Order: Chairman Cole asked Commissioner Pitman to chair this meeting as Mayor Cole is participating remotely. Commissioner Pitman called the meeting to order at 12:07 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Public Comment/Communication from the Audience

The Public may call in during specific Public Comment periods at (406) 237-6165. 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 Clerk Tammy Deines 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 February 16, 2021

Motion

Mayor Code made a motion and it was seconded by Planning Board President to approve the minutes of February 16, 2021 with a correction to Page 4. Discussion, line 6, remove the duplicate word, “that”. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

4. Old Business: There is no Old Business.

5. New Business

5a. Motion/Recommendation. Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study. Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner, presenting.

Active Transportation Planner Elyse Monat opened this agenda item with presentation of the staff report below. Parker Osterloh, Alta Planning and Design is participating.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) approve the Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study on the recommendations forwarded by the City-County Planning Board, City Council, and the Board of County Commissioners.

BACKGROUND

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, and 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

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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/scooter houses the transaction rather than at a station. During they system launch, the study suggests launching an in initial service area including downtown and MSU Billings, creating an equity program, and establishing strategic partnerships to ensure the success of the system.

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

Discussion

Commissioner Pitman called for questions and discussion. Planning Board President Woods asked regarding the potential for grant opportunities. Elyse Monat said the Federal Transit Administration has funding available for Bike Share Programs. Mayor Cole asked if there is more information on possible companies as there are limited numbers of people who are experienced with running these types of programs. Elyse Monat replied that there are several motivated companies wanting to start a program in Billings.

Mayor Cole asked how many members have used a bike-share system. Planning Board President Woods stated he has not used them but has been in areas with bike share programs. He feels bicycles may be a better use than scooters in Billings. Mayor Cole shared his experience with e-bikes and bike share systems. Rod Nelson, MDT, asked if there have been contemplation of modifications to the infrastructure in the downtown area to accommodate an e-bikes/bike share program. Elyse Monat said general improvement of the bicycle-pedestrian infrastructure would be needed. Mayor Cole said City Council communicated that approval of the study would mean accepting the study but not accepting responsibility to implement the recommendations in the study. Commissioner Pitman said the Commissioners would acknowledge the recommendations of the study without implementation. Woody Woods said the City/Planning Board forwarded a recommendation of approval of the study. Mayor Cole said the study contemplated a reduced size study area and asked about initially focusing on a specific site such as the rims. Commissioner Pitman said the Board of County Commissioners is hoping this would go forward with private development as well. Woody Woods commented it would be nice to avoid letting the study “set on the shelf and see implementation at some point depending on the size of the entities. Elyse Monat said an interested Bike-Share Scooter company has contacted her.

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Motion

Planning Board President Woods made a motion and Mayor Cole seconded the motion to approve the Billings Area Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study 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.

6. Other Business:

6a. Discussion. Project Updates

1. Billings Bypass Project Update Michael Taylor, MDT; Rod Nelson, MDT District Office Administrator

Michael Taylor opened this discussion with the project website www.mdt.mt.gov Phase 1 is complete and Phase 2 is under construction. The bulk of construction is projected for completion in 2022. Phase 3 is the Johnson Lane Interchange, followed with the divergent diamond improvements during 2022.

Planning Board President Woods asked for the link to the Project camera website containing a live feed and additional images. Mayor Cole asked when any portion on the east end of the project would be useable. Michael Taylor said MDT is hoping to have overlapping construction but Phase 4 will need to be completed to have vehicular traffic. Phase 4 will go to construction in 2023. The project is projected for completion during 2025. Commissioner Pitman asked about Main Street project updates. Michael Taylor said they are starting the Main Street project in the Heights, which will be completed before the Johnson Lane project. The Lockwood Interchange is in the study phase and anticipated to be a diverging diamond configuration.

2. Discussion. Project Updates. 1st Avenue North Project.

Michael Taylor, MDT; Rod Nelson, MDT District Office Administrator

This project is split into three segments, with the first segment scheduled for 2024. Commissioner Pitman asked if there are new funding sources to accelerate this project. Michael Taylor said he is unsure at this point. Rod Nelson commented the funds are pointed towards the rail system. Mayor Cole commented on an infrastructure bill in progress that would apply to more traditional transportation projects. Rod Nelson stated projects are highly dependent on funding from the federal government. Commissioner Pitman suggested reaching out to State representatives to request consideration of acceleration of this project.

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3. Discussion. I-90 Bridge Bike/Pedestrian Path. Scott Walker, Transportation Coordinator

Scott Walker explained that this item was added to the agenda per request of Mayor Cole. This project is part of the overall I-90 system. The opportunity is past for a bike/pedestrian addition to the I-90 bridge project. Mayor Cole said in a perfect world there would be bike/pedestrian access across the Yellowstone River. He said he received input from the community and contacted MDT Director Malcom “Mack” Long. MDT cited safety reasons with implementing bike/pedestrian facilities on federal highways. Mayor Cole asked if there is an alternative such as an attachment underneath the bridge or something added to the second bridge. He noted the need for a connection to I-90 and Four Dances Park.

Rod Nelson thanked Mayor Cole for his input and suggested using CMAQ dollars to put toward a separate project. As far as connections, the shared use path is located by the METRA and continues across the Lockwood Interchange area. He said there is a study proposing a shared used path going through the proposed diverging diamond Lockwood intersection. He stressed the importance of staying involved and in contact as the Lockwood intersection project moves forward. He said MDT is interested in developing an agreement for funding the maintenance of the bike path as it moves into Jim Dutcher Trail, (possibly a partnership with MDT to develop the path and the City to maintain it).

Planning and Community Services Director Wyeth Friday stressed the need to work on improving communications between MDT and the MPO to avoid missing opportunities. He stressed initial project discussions should be clear and other options should be discussed. He pointed out that this project will be built and now we are looking at a separate facility. He encouraged all parties to be aware of this need.

Planning Board President Woods commented on the upcoming March 25, 2021 Lockwood Interchange meeting. He said the Lockwood Pedestrian Safety District has expressed concern on how to move people to the METRA Park area. He said this is the time to bring all of the projects together and encouraged attending this meeting.

Mayor Cole asked if it is possible to hang a pedestrian pathway under the I-90 Bridge. Rod Nelson said MDT contracted with HDR to conduct a feasibility study to analyze the options. The interstate bridges would have to be designed to handle a pedestrian path. Today’s bridge project is not designed to accommodate this. A separate bridge for a bike/pedestrian facility is recommended. Commissioner Pitman said there is no north-south connection so he is unsure of

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The benefit of the bridge. Woody Woods said an option would be to come from the existing bridge under the new Yellowstone Bridge to the bike path to get to Coulson Park is an option.

Discussion continued on acceleration of the 1st Ave North project and the need to work through the access and funding issues. Mayor Cole commented on the need for a pathway on the south side of Exposition Drive.

7. Future Agenda Items

ADJOURNMENT: 1:08 PM

DRAFT-To be approved be approved by a motion on April 20, 2021

Tamara L. Deines, Planning Clerk