

POLICY COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Virtual Video Conference

MINUTES –APRIL 20, 2021

DRAFT TO APPROVED BY A MOTION JUNE 15, 2021

NOTICE

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, April 20, 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: Parker Osterloh, MDT; Katie Potts, MDT; John Ostlund, Yellowstone County Commissioner; Bob Riehl, Lockwood Steering Committee

1. Call to Order: Commissioner Pitman called the meeting to order at 12:00 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 March 16, 2021

Motion

A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes of March 16, 2021. The motion carried with a unanimous voice vote.

4. Old Business: There is no Old Business.

5. New Business

5a. Questions and Discussion. Federal Highway Statutes. Citizen Kathy Aragon, 645 O'Malley, Billings, MT

Ms. Aragon provided a copy of the letter with signatories previously submitted to MDT. She pointed out she rode her bicycle to this meeting, which is less impact to the transportation structure. She said the I-90 bridge construction is scheduled to go out to bid without multi-modal transportation, and this ignores local plans and the Lockwood Pedestrian Safety District. Lockwood put the safety district into place and made it very apparent that they want bicycles and pedestrians to be safe since an incident when a boy died in their community after being struck by a motor vehicle. Ms. Aragon is questioning the legal obligation of the Department of the Transportation, as FHWA statutes require accommodation of bicycle-pedestrian paths in new or reconstruction projects where there is current or potential demand. She asked if MDT is following the legally required process with inclusion of all local plans and all modes. This project meets with MDT's internal criterion for shared use paths, except for the one that states a public sponsor or agency must be willing to accept ownership of long-term maintenance responsibilities for the shared use path. Ms. Aragon asked when the local MPO was notified of the 2017 "*Yellowstone River Bridge Pedestrian Pathway Feasibility Study*" and where in the process the public is included as directed by FHWA and MDT for public involvement. During the HDR presentation in February 2021, the public was informed of the lack of bike and pedestrian pieces in this project and that it is too late to make changes. Ms. Aragon stated, "If this is the process, then the process is flawed". She asked how we can work together to make the project right, and if emergent funds can be raised with the existing study in place, and engineers could put this on the project for bid. Ms. Aragon said she here today to question what the process is; what has happened with this public piece of infrastructure; and what can we do to make this project go out to bid with all modes of transportation included.

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Response

Rod Nelson, MDT, stated public involvement is important to MDT and all of the public is considered as their customers. He said he reviewed the project file. MDT has been involved in numerous meetings for this project since 2011 with public involvement. Presentations were given to Billings TrailNet in 2014. He has copies of letters and e-mails discussing the issue of a separated bike-pedestrian bridge over the Yellowstone River. These emails clarify that MDT is not funding this bridge but offered to work with this group if they would come up with the funding. In addition, MDT distributed press releases seeking public comment dated as early as 2015. This project has been discussed during PCC meetings. During 2016, MDT met with Big Sky Economic Development to discuss the concept of a bike-pedestrian bridge across the Yellowstone in addition to the Coulson Park and the Corett site. This project and the bike-pedestrian bridge has been discussed at Transportation Advisory Committee, meetings. There is no doubt MDT has involved the public and considered all comments received.

Unfortunately, since MDT made the decision not to fund a bike-pedestrian bridge at this specific location that connects a City park to a Federal recreation site, some claim MDT did not properly involve the public. Based on his research of the project documentation, he does not believe these accusations are true. Part of MDT's reasoning is they are providing the same connection between the two parks. In addition, the shared use path will connect Billings to Lockwood across and along US Highway 87 at the fairgrounds, across the Yellowstone River on the Dick Johnson Bridge, and across I-90 at the Lockwood Interchange. This connection is clearly identified with the "*Billings Bikeway & Trails Master Plan*". MDT is in the process in providing a connection for all users between Billings and Lockwood that also creates connections between Coulson Park and Four Dances Recreational Park, and Lockwood and Billings.

He asked for consideration that MDT serves a limited number of citizens, there is a limited amount of taxpayer money, and funds need to be spent as wisely as possible.

Ms. Aragon added that the study not only showed a bike-pedestrian bridge was not only feasible but also low cost at the time. She stressed the need to embrace the vision for both communities in the future.

Discussion

Committee member Woods said he participated on the Lockwood Pedestrian Safety

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Committee and their primary purpose is safety. He commented on projects for rebuilding Johnson Lane, the bike and pedestrian facility project on Highway 87 and Exposition, the Dick Johnson Bridge project, and a connection to Jim Dutcher trail. He said there have been conversations with MDT regarding continuing the Highway 87 East sidewalk to go from Lockwood School to the fairgrounds. There will be connection points with the addition of the Lockwood Targeted Economic Development District.

He said this is a huge opportunity to land all of the projects together and this will be good for the Billings, Lockwood and Yellowstone County. He thinks MDT may be willing to consider additional sidewalk projects. In his mind, this is the most cost effective solutions.

Mayor Cole asked for clarification on MDOT's commitment to the Dick Johnson Bridge/Highway 87E project option for a bike-pedestrian bridge. Rod Nelson said the Master Plan shows the connection and MDT is committed to a bike-pedestrian crossing on the second bridge. He said this was presented during the public presentation for the Lockwood Interchange Study. He noted the intersection improvement project at Exposition Drive and the shared use path going to Jim Dutcher Trail. Mayor Cole asked about the feasibility of getting bikes and pedestrians across the Lockwood interchange. Rod Nelson reiterated the benefits of a connection at this location and said it is very feasible. Mayor Cole said public meetings are needed to help the bike pedestrian community understand the Highway 87 project. He asked if MDT could dedicate staff to meet with this group. Rod Nelson said this is a good idea and this is a clear demonstration of instances of a lack of communication. A meeting will bring all of the players together. Mayor Cole said the Planning Department staff could help coordinate the meeting.

Mayor Cole asked about the October 4, 2017 study referenced by Ms. Aragon. He said he did not remember seeing the 2017 study, which is a big deal as the project costs were highlighted. He asked if this study was distributed. Rod Nelson stated the study was sent to the City of Billings but it is possible that not everyone saw the plan.

Mayor Cole asked if there were public meetings and meetings with public interest groups such as Billings TrailNet. Rod Nelson said there were a number of presentations with Billings TrailNet. He has documentation of conversations that took place along with e-mails to Kathy Aragon concerning some of these conversations. He stated every attempt was made by MDT to have this "out on the table". Ms. Aragon said a public meeting is not sending an e-mail but performing the public meeting. She requested a better effort be made on the public meeting process. Rod Nelson clarified and said he was referring to presentations by the City and MDT to Billings TrailNet and there was a meeting that took place. There was a follow-up email clarifying MDT's position on the separated bridge.

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Commissioner Pitman said Rod Nelson laid out alternatives in this corridor for bike-pedestrian crossings at Johnson Lane and the METRA exit as well. He stated it is appropriate we are clear in the message. He pointed out that this is a traffic corridor and bike and pedestrians might not be wanted on a corridor where he is yet to see traffic slow under 65-70 mph. Rod Nelson stated the main point is that there is a better location to achieve the same thing. Commissioner Pitman said there has been a huge public effort to accommodate these services as much as possible.

Kathy Aragon commented that the beauty of the plan to connect Coulson Park across BLM land and across the river was that you are not crossing traffic that is getting on and off the highway. She explained a shared use path does not share use with vehicular traffic.

Committee member Woods this option will provide a lighted, safe divided pathway which is the safest option. He said this makes sense, will work for everybody, and be the most cost effective in the end will be a “win win”.

5b. Project updates. Scott Walker, Transportation Coordinator, presenting.

• **Downtown Billings Traffic Study – Completed February 2021** considered Downtown Traffic Patterns. The 29th Street and 30th Street, 4th Avenue intersection project is underway. Montana Avenue Road Diet project. Conversion of 2nd and 3rd Ave project.

Mayor Cole commented on raising construction costs and inflation. Scott Walker said the 20th Street and 30th Street projects have been bid. Rough costs of conversion is approximately \$1.8 million. Debi Meling, Public Works Director, will be attending PCC meetings in the future. In response to question by Committee member Woods, Scott Walker stated the bid fell within the estimates, and Downtown TIFD funding is helping as well.

• **Bike and Scooter Share Feasibility Study** – Completed March 2021

• **BUILD Grant**

- Staff was notified September 2020 of success
- Activities
- Updating appraisals for the Inner Belt Loop
- Beginning Environmental/NEPA review for both the Inner Belt Loop and Skyline Trail
- Finalizing easements with MDT for the Skyline Trail on portions of the Hwy 3 ROW
- Finalizing Skyline Trail design
- Received draft agreement, BUT, will not finalize and send to FHWA for review and signatures until construction documents are developing, environmental documents are
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completed and R/W purchase completed – this will be probably minimum of 6-months out; and continue to develop progress reports that will be required

- Will develop a project website on the City website for information and place to post documents.
- Transportation Planner Lora Mattox added the timeline could be extended for an executed agreement until next year. Staff will bring updates. The timeline begins and funds become obligated when the agreement is signed. Staff is working with Federal Highways for a public press release and public meeting to explain the process. Mayor Cole noted the amenities along the trail way.

- **5th Avenue Corridor Study:** <https://sandersonstewart.com/projects/5thavenue/>
 Sanderson Stewart will hold a future public meeting regarding this corridor.

Project Area Map



- **Community Transportation Safety Plan Update**
 - The Request for Proposal is out now.
 - Completed by MDT in 2016
 - Identifies transportation safety emphasis areas to concentrate on locally – data heavy
 - 2016 identified: Unrestrained Occupants, Impaired Driving, Inattentive Driving/Speeding
 - Update will review crash data to evaluate success of plan and identified strategies
 - Revisit Vision: The Billings community will achieve zero fatalities and serious injuries through a culture of safety for all travelers. The goal established: Based on a 5-year rolling average, reduce fatalities and serious injuries by 20% from 70 in 2014 to 56 by 2020
- **Safe Routes to School Plan Update-(RFP within the next 30-days)**
 - Completed in 2010/2011 by City Engineering. School boundaries were updated since then creating the need to update plan. Will integrate existing work in the community.
 - Includes 22 Billings Public Schools elementary schools.
 - Tentative goals:
 - Enhance the safety of students traveling to and from school
 - Increase the number of students walking or bicycling to school

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- Identify challenges that prevent them from doing walking/biking safely
- Identifying solutions to these challenges.
- Update will include ranking of projects based on standardized criteria and planning level cost estimates

Bill Cole Council directed staff to provide details on expanding sidewalk construction and increase the street maintenance district for funding. There is support for an “opt in and opt out” option on utility bills. He said it is a huge challenge to fund separated sidewalks and trails.

- **“KIM” Kids In Motion**
 - KIM continues to serve students, even during the pandemic!
 - Modified schedule makes social distancing possible:
 - Students drop bikes off in the morning
 - Mechanics arrive at 9 am
 - Students pick bikes up after school
 - KIM will visit 5 schools this semester: Medicine Crow, Central Heights, Big Sky, Bench, and Orchard
 - Piloting new “lead mechanic” position
- **Commuter challenge**
 - June 2021: Encourage public to walk, bike, bus and roll to work, school, and errands. Log trips online for prizes and incentives!
 - New mobile friendly website coming soon at billingscommuterchallenge.com
 - Planning a pop-up bicycle boulevard where we will demonstrate several aspects of Bike Boulevard. Join us June 1 from 5-7 pm at Pioneer Park.
 - Sponsors so far: City of Billings, RiverStone Health, Yellowstone Public Radio, and the Heart and Sole Run.

6. Other Business

a. **Bob Riehl, Lockwood Steering Committee.** Mr. Riehl stated the I-90 Bridge was planned several years ago. The Lockwood Steering Committee contentiously did not focus on this project at the time, as their primary focus was safety in their area. The project planning was conducted in 2010 and implementation is in 2021. He commented that people tend to be more attentive and critical during implementation. The Lockwood Steering Committee has found good idea to invite MDT to attend local meetings and explain current projects. He said he understands Billings TrailNet’s position. In this case, a decision was made at the time with the information available.

7. Future Agenda Items

a. **Mayor Cole-Planning Department Coordination with MDT and Billings TrailNet** on the bike-pedestrian bridge option update and resolution of the history, especially the Highway 87 bridge option. Scott Walker said Planning, the District MDT Office and MDT Helena are holding joint meetings to promote communication between the entities. Staff will bring these

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updates forward to PCC. Rod Nelson stated there is justification for these meetings and he is looking forward to the conversations.

- b. Commissioner Pitman-1st Avenue and Exposition project update**
- c. Commissioner Pitman-Federal funds for road and bridge projects**

ADJOURNMENT: 1:10 PM

Approved be approved by a motion on June 15, 2021

Tamara L. Deines, Planning Clerk