

Meeting Minutes

City Council Connectivity Subcommittee Meeting

June 18, 2024 | 1:45 p.m.
City Hall 5th Floor Large Conference Room
175 S. Arizona Ave., Chandler, AZ



Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:50 p.m.

Roll Call

Subcommittee Attendance

Vice Mayor OD Harris
Councilmember Jane Poston
Councilmember Mark Stewart (virtual)

Staff Attendance

Tadd Wille, Assistant City Manager
Andy Bass, Deputy City Manager
Ryan Peters, Strategic Initiatives Director
Jason Crampton, Transportation Planning Manager
Alexis Apodaca, Mayor & Council Public Affairs Senior Manager
Dennis Aust, Telecommunications & Utility Franchise Manager
Sam Andrea, Planning Senior Analyst
Dan Haskins, Capital Projects Manager
Dana Alvidrez, City Transportation Engineer
Hezequias Rocha, Transportation Planning Program Coordinator
Sheri Passey, Management Assistant

Discussion

1. Frye Road Protected Bike Lanes

MR. RYAN PETERS, Strategic Initiatives Director, opened the meeting and welcomed attendees with an overview and purpose of the meeting. Mr. Peters introduced the Frye Road Protected Bike Lanes Project with an outline of the Council Strategic Framework and Transportation Master Plan.

MR. JASON CRAMPTON, Transportation Planning Manager, introduced the Frye Road Protected Bike Lanes and summarized the project area, providing background information on protected bike lanes. He encapsulated the project objectives and public outreach completed to date. He discussed and summarized the feedback received from the May 2021 Council Micro Retreat. A description of the proposed improvements included in this project and the funding sources coming from grants and CIP monies were provided.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked to verify the use of grant money for the project to mitigate the cost of repaving the roadway in the future.

MR. CRAMPTON responded Councilmember Poston is correct; it did not make sound economic sense to build the bike infrastructure and not incorporate repaving the traffic lanes, which would have required repaving very soon. The project will benefit bikes as well as cars.

MR. PETERS added that it also mitigated future construction impact on the area.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS asked if the project is expected to reduce traffic lanes or impact traffic flow.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that they are not expecting any reduction or removal of traffic lanes, turn lanes or through lanes and verified Vice Mayor was referring to automobile traffic.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS clarified his question by asking if consideration was made for 10-to-20-years in the future and the possibility of having more traffic that might impact bike lanes.

MS. ALVIDREZ, City Transportation Engineer, responded that projections for the future remain as-is with the infrastructure we currently have. She further stated that it is anticipated the project will act to calm traffic, rather than impede traffic flow.

MR. CRAMPTON continued his presentation and discussed materials being recommended for the project, which includes barriers and markings.

MR. PETERS stated that with the different barriers, driveways and cross traffic, creative methods were applied to ensure continuity for the bicyclists' safety and comfortable riding, while still accommodating driveway entry, as well as space for drivers to pull over to clear the path for public safety vehicles.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS asked whether Waymo has been consulted.

MR. PETERS responded that it is his understanding that it is a standard practice to program new road construction into autonomous vehicles to allow them to understand how the cars interact with the changes to environment.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if any of the referenced delineator posts or barriers cause less damage to cars if struck.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that those posts are made of a soft plastic, and although they resemble a concrete bollard, they are not intended to cause damage to a vehicle if struck.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if one was better than another.

MS. ALVIDREZ responded that the city's main concern is they are designed as "break-away" elements but they may cause superficial damage when struck, like paint.

MR. CRAMPTON continued his presentation by discussing the project from west to east and incorporating wayfinding and artwork panels into the project.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked for clarification on whether the project will use green paint or thermal paint.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that it is a thermoplastic type of paint used on roadways.

MR. CRAMPTON continued his presentation on maintenance, project funding and timeline. He discussed the intent to purchase a small sweeper through grant funds, as well as the reapplication of the paint every 8 – 10 years. He further stated the availability of a construction grant of \$13.5 million, with the award of a contract in the fall of 2024 and construction to begin in 2025.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if the sweeper could be used anywhere else or if it was specific for the bike lanes.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that it would be used specifically for bike lanes and available should the city look to develop other protected bike lanes in other areas in the city.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS asked if the project will use any existing infrastructure money and whether inflation would impact the project.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that construction costs have been much higher than initially expected at the beginning of the project planning process, requiring additional grant funding be acquired for the project to match inflation and rising construction costs. The additional grant funding does require a local share for the construction, especially with adding in that eastern end cul-de-sac. Initial funding for that was planned to be a CIP-funded improvement, but the grant can actually pay up to 94.3% of the construction costs, requiring only a 5.7% local match, but that percentage may go up to 10% depending on the construction bids received.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS verified that this project is predominantly grant funded, which saves the taxpayers money without requiring city funding.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that Vice Mayor Harris is correct.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if the street sweeper was already budgeted into the grant funding.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that it is.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked for verification on whether general fund dollars to cover our 5.7% match would be pulled from CIP funding.

MR. CRAMPTON verified that there is money budgeted into the CIP specific to this project and that there are some general fund dollars associated with the cost of the project as well.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked what the total cost of the project is.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that there is \$13.5 million available for construction, which includes the construction and the construction management contracts, with an anticipated total cost of \$14 to \$15 million.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked to verify that our shared cost would be about \$700,000.

MR. CRAMPTON responded yes, that is correct, but potentially more due to the eastern end turnaround. We have incorporated this contingency into the project in the CIP funding.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART clarified that would be the CIP, not general fund dollars.

MR. CRAMPTON verified he is correct; CIP dollars are now tied to this project.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if that has been moved back four years.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that it has advanced it four years.

MR. PETERS asked Councilmember Poston if she is referring to bond funding versus CIP.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART again stated he heard 5.7% from the general fund, so about \$700,000. He again asked if there is more CIP besides the 5.7% discussed.

MR. PETERS responded we are anticipating a 5.7% match. He further stated the project we are talking about advancing was a CIP project and was a bond-funded project. We do finance our bonds, but no more than 5.7% of city dollars will be spent on this project.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked if that cost is built into the budget already.

MR. PETERS verified that it is.

MR. CRAMPTON added we do have a contingency in case the construction costs prove higher, which came from bond funding moved from another project.

MR. CRAMPTON concluded the presentation by stating the design phase of the project will be completed this month to fulfill deadlines associated with grant funding. Next will be to accept bids in the fall to award a construction contract, with construction to begin in early in 2025.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON congratulated the team on the work to secure the grant funding, as it is not common to hear of that dollar amount.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS stated the rest of the Council is going to be happy to hear this information and is excited for the project, especially that taxpayer dollars will not be used.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART wanted to verify again that no traffic lanes are being removed. He stated it appears to be two-lanes of traffic with some deceleration lanes in a couple of areas. He asked about whether easements will be required from properties located on both sides, as well as the required space from within any neighborhoods affected as well as the school within the project area.

MR. PETERS responded that no lanes are being removed, including turn lanes. The center lanes will also remain intact.

MR. CRAMPTON added that the project will not widen the road or remove curbing and there will be no impact made to the surrounding land use. He further stated that everything will be contained within the existing roadway, with a reduction to the width of the lanes.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked whether communication will be made with the residents who live in that area that so they are aware of the project.

MR. DAN HASKINS, Capital Projects Manager, stated that once the construction contract is awarded, a public meeting will be held which will include the contractor and the construction manager to discuss the project and the construction schedule. He further stated that a project hotline will be provided as part of the public outreach and residents can opt to receive project updates via e-mail on a bi-weekly basis.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART was concerned about residents being unaware of the shrinking traffic lanes once you get into the neighborhood east of McQueen.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that current lane width is 16 feet, with the city standard being 11 feet.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART made a recommendation that staff prepare a visual sketch of the lane width reduction that shows that no lanes or turn lanes are being removed as a way to communicate with the public, which will make it clearer to understand before Council votes to award a construction contract.

MR. PETERS responded that there will be opportunities for communication with the public and that proactive outreach was made to the area businesses, particularly those heavy industrial users, with no adverse comments received. He further stated those businesses may have to evaluate how they route their trucks and if other options will need to be identified. Additionally, he stated all interaction was positive with the businesses along the project corridor.

MR. PETERS reminded the subcommittee members of the feedback that was received for the need to enhance connectivity to the downtown area. He stated that Mr. Crampton highlighted some of those points being considered to create a sense of space. The public who live north and south of the proposed bike lanes were also in agreement with what they wanted to happen. Additionally, the team are exploring how to tie the project into options that can make a more pedestrian-oriented downtown with connectivity to the corridor.

MR. PETERS opened the floor for public comment, reminding them of the three-minute limit.

RESIDENT LES MINKUS, of 3372 E. Gemini Court, raised concerns about safety and if there are going to be any rules or regulations about nighttime bike riders to have reflectors or lights on their bikes. He further asked that due to the many elementary aged students during the day, were there going to be rules indicating they should wear an orange or yellow jacket for higher visibility? He thinks there are laws in Arizona where motorcyclists have to wear a helmet and he likes the idea of something special to keep cyclists safe. He stated he was not certain where the 95% grant money is coming from.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON responded that it is federal funding.

RESIDENT DAN RICKETTS, of 1610 E. Chicago Street, stated he has a few concerns. The focus is very much on the road and asked if there was any thought to adding shade structures, water stations, and rest areas along the route? His other concern is cars parked in front of schools to drop off and pick-up students as well as the school buses. How would you accommodate or handle all that traffic flow from the cars and buses?

MR. CRAMPTON responded that there are going to be occasions that generate high levels of traffic, however, parking within bike lanes is not legal, and the barriers that will be implemented will deter drivers from parking illegally.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked whether the city has been working with the schools on any traffic impacts that may occur.

MR. CRAMPTON responded affirmatively. He stated the team shared the plans with the school district and asked for their feedback early in the design phase with no concerns received.

MR. RICKETTS asked again about the other thoughts he shared and the water stations.

MR. CRAMPTON responded that there will be a few trees at the new path east of Frye Road when it connects to the canal, with the focus on curb-to-curb space. There are no plans to add water stations or anything additional behind the sidewalks.

2. Broadband and Digital Equity

MR. DENNIS AUST, Telecommunications & Utility Franchise Manager, is here to present the next topic. Mr. Aust stated this presentation comes from Council's Strategic Framework with guidance for forward-thinking transportation and technology networks with fiber and wireless technology to provide digital equity for all Chandler residents. He provided an assessment of the current state of Chandler's level of services from broadband providers, identified service provider gaps and recommended strategies for improved coverage. He outlined three goals and the role the city might play in meeting those goals, as well as the initiatives and policies related to broadband infrastructure and the city's role in regulating and providing broadband. Mr. Aust discussed the challenges the city faces with agreements and regulations and presented numerous maps showing broadband service, coverage, gaps and speed throughout the city.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON, referring to the maps, asked if there is any information as it relates to residents and businesses, as opposed to land mass.

MR. AUST responded that while we do have access to that data, it requires a lot of time to sift through. He stated that some of that analysis has been completed and will talk the group through that information later in the presentation. Mr. Aust provided an example with one of the maps looking at west Chandler, acknowledging the fiber companies have provided fiber service to Intel and other industrial businesses in that area. He also showed a map of ongoing construction projects currently, outlining the daily changes and challenges of those projects.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked what the requirements were for pavement restoration?

MR. AUST responded that we do have pavement cut restrictions in place, and from zero to two years of a new pavement project, contractors are not allowed to cut the pavement within that term. At two to six years, they can cut it, but there are additional fees when they pick up their permit. Engineering standards require pavement be restored to like or better condition.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS stated there are a lot of simultaneous projects ongoing that are impacting traffic. He asked how our team will be working with traffic and engineering to combat any residents' concerns.

MR. AUST responded that they network regularly with peers from traffic, CIP and the development team to ensure project coordination.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS stated he would like staff to prepare detailed maps and information on the impact before this is brought to Council for study session, as it relates to Councilmember Poston's question on residential and business coverage maps. He also would like more information on how we are working construction with our partners and making sure our fiber optics are increasing speed.

MR. AUST continued his presentation, providing background on the CCC Permit Class system with high-level maps on construction plans received from a number of providers for 2024 and 2025, but noted these areas may be adjusted. He stated that overall, there are three primary wireless broadband providers in Chandler. He also reviewed site types and provided site maps.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART thought the heat map was very interesting and was inclined to think that some of the more economically challenged areas of the city were underserved, but the map shows some of the more affluent areas in southeast Chandler also struggle with connectivity.

MR. AUST responded that he gets calls of concern from residents in the southern parts of Chandler. He noted in the past that some cell companies have requested to install cell towers and stated as an example, one location would be at Veterans Oasis Park. A macro tower is not acceptable in that location due to the migratory bird patterns. He acknowledged the issue with connectivity in that area.

MR. AUST continued the presentation and addressed service gaps and why they are occurring, offering information on how to fill those gaps in service. He stated that in terms of fiber infrastructure, broadband within the city is well served. He touched on some issues with reliability or competition and discussed low "take rates" in some areas, especially around low-to-moderate income areas and public housing areas. Mr. Aust touched briefly on what role the city may play in supporting digital equity and some initiatives the city has been working on through HIVES with ASU's Digital Equity Institute and local school district initiatives.

MR. TADD WILLE, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER, stated that Niki Tapia, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer, worked with the Digital Equity Institute from ASU, which received some grant funds to place what they refer to as "Hives" throughout the valley, with Chandler as one of the cities selected for the program.

A Hive is a location where underserved residents can go for broadband connectivity services. Visitors can check out devices, with some of the digital navigators providing training for users. Mr. Wille stated they have been coordinating with AZCEND and the Chandler Unified School District as possible locations for this Hive.

MR. AUST continued his presentation, stating that in an effort to support digital equity, the city proposes initiatives such as public Wi-Fi at public housing sites, with options and costs provided for equipment for service and by bringing the city fiber network into those areas identified. Mr. Aust emphasized the importance of continued efforts to close the digital divide and ensure all residents have access to WIFI and broadband services.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked for clarification for helping residents with connectivity. Would we be using federal dollars to build out these target areas, or are you asking for general fund dollars for the third-party to provide services to these areas? Why isn't a third-party providing service to these groups and then those groups coming to us to find ways to help and subsidize that private company?

MR. AUST responded that we have ideas, such as through CDBG grant funding, or there could potentially be a NTIA grant available. Regarding the third-party providers, they do provide the service to the area, but individuals living in the areas aren't necessarily purchasing the services offered. We do offset some of their utility bills in terms of electric and water for these locations, so this would be one of those types of subsidies provided.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked who would manage the program.

MR. AUST responded that there are a couple of options, such as the way the "day room" is done at 71 S. Hamilton through our library network or through the IT department.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked if there would be any additional costs to us to provide that type of service.

MR. AUST stated that it would be considered a best effort service in terms of our city network. If our network is down, they would be down. If it is up, they would have access to use it.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked if this would be like sharing cable with a neighbor.

MR. AUST stated that it could be viewed that way.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART stated that we want individuals to have connectivity, and generally, our third-party partners provide service throughout the city. He asked if we could find \$163,000 to provide service

for all these families for the next decade. Further, he understands the need to add to our infrastructure, but he does not want us to be in the internet management business.

MR. AUST responded that this is certainly something we can consider.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART asked if a solution for some of the underserved communities would be addressed, such as those identified dead spots in the southeast and the central part of the city.

MR. AUST responded that in terms of fiber to home broadband services, there are new builds to address that issue. In terms of wireless broadband improvements, that would require different solutions.

COUNCILMEMBER STEWART, referring to one of the slides in presentation, stated that during COVID we supplied every student within about a five-mile radius of the Chandler Unified School District with a wireless internet access card for approximately a year at a cost of around \$24,000. He further stated that there may be more cost-effective ways to fix the issues.

VICE MAYOR HARRIS shared that we are looking to upgrade some public housing and if this community is going to be impacted by the upgraded new housing maybe the infrastructure could be incorporated. We can subsidize or work with our partners to help lower costs if this is part of our strategic plan for 5-10 years. If this is the targeted area with the new development, there will be more things built into the infrastructure. Vice Mayor further stated he liked the idea of having that as an option and save money in the long term.

MR. AUST responded in the affirmative.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if the costs would be one-time costs or on-going. Further, she stated that if looking at subsidizing, that would be on-going costs that could potentially be taken away. She requested that the costs be explored further and options for managing this type of program. Other options would be to offer public WIFI in city hall, as well as offering it in a couple other public buildings. Will the program require additional staffing and additional costs we need to identify, or could it be managed using current staffing?

MR. AUST responded that the costs would be one-time build cost and would require replacement every ten years for a similar cost, but inflation may increase costs. Regarding technical support, that's where it's a best effort installation, as there would not be a need to add staff to maintain customer service. When our own network goes down, we have our internal IT staff working to fix the issue.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON verified that our IT department currently manages the network and will continue to manage it, stating that we would be improving city sites, which makes the most sense to her. She suggested we work with school districts to find out what they are providing. Further, both the city and the school district are investing an enormous amount of money in the Galveston area, which seems to be

the area with the gap. Councilmember Poston would be interested in whether that area is being considered for the Hive program.

MR. WILLE confirmed that Galveston is one of the areas, as well as the San Marcos/Pueblo Viejo neighborhood.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked whether those two areas are included as part of the known gap in services.

MR. WILLE stated that they recognize these are some of our Section 8 or public housing residents in those areas and they currently pay for their own internet service. They would like to serve this area with the Hive program as a means of assisting residents further.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked if the Hive is still in the exploratory phase of the program.

MR. WILLE responded that conversations are ongoing and wanted to remind the subcommittee that this program is at zero cost to the city.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON stated that there may be some ways to work in a complementary fashion with the school district, but without the need to have a high functioning role in managing the program, but we would need to know where service will be provided in our community.

MR. WILLE agreed.

MR. AUST continued his presentation, stating that another idea is for council to issue a broadband digital equity resolution, with the purpose of reducing the digital divide while fostering competition amongst broadband companies, reducing the construction impact to neighborhoods, and reducing the need for companies to overbuild. He suggested they put in place key points such as setting a one-year moratorium on overbuilding neighborhoods; the installation within alleyways; and, offering low-costs internet service packages, which many already offer for individuals who qualify for other government subsidies. He further suggested fee transparency such as a broadband nutrition label as an example, which the FCC will be requiring in October. Chandler can put this in place sooner than later instead of participation in terms of revenue modeling incentives, allowing for micro trenching, and expediting plan review for a suggested period of six-months, among other things. Providers already participate in most of these where they are available. If it is in place at the direction of Council and city manager's office, this would formalize these practices into a single cohesive strategy.

COUNCILMEMBER POSTON asked Mr. Aust to expand on setting the one-year moratorium on overbuilding, as that suggestion raises some concerns for her.