

I-35E MnPASS Extension Study

Steering Committee Meeting

Hugo City Hall, 14669 Fitzgerald Ave. N., Hugo, MN

December 16, 2014

1:00 – 3:30 PM

Minutes

Attendees: Brian Bear (Hugo); Lynne Bly (MnDOT); Ken Buckeye (MnDOT); Pat Bursaw (MnDOT); Heather Cole (Smart Trips); Bobbie Dahlke (MnDOT); Bill Dircks (Little Canada); Frank Douma (U of M); Mike Ericson (Centerville); Emeka Ezekwemba (FHWA); Jack Forslund (Anoka County); Dale Gade (MnDOT); Brad Larsen (MnDOT); Joe Loveland (U of M); Joe Lux (Ramsey County); Jim McCarthy (FHWA); Peter Meuhlbach (PB); Lee Munnich (U of M); Ann Pung-Terwedo (Washington County); Mike Robertson (North Oaks); Mike Rogers (Ramsey County Regional Rail); Bill Short (White Bear Township/Gem Lake); Michael Thompson (Maplewood); Nick Thompson (PB); Mary Vogel (U of M)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Study Recap

Following introductions, Brad provided an overview of the meeting agenda and provided a recap of the study's purpose, its organizational structure and the Concept Development component.

The concept development and evaluation began with three options for extending MnPASS on 35E between Little Canada Road and CR 96: (1) MnPASS "with a gap" through the 35E / 694 commons; (2) MnPASS "without a gap" through the commons; and (3) MnPASS "on the shoulder" through the commons. All three options included an additional MnPASS lane being built on the inside in each direction between CR E and CR 96.

Concept evaluation involved more than 20 measurement criteria, and key findings revealed that all three options performed worse than the "no build" option due to the congestion that would be caused by dropping the northbound MnPASS lane at CR 96.

The evaluation process and results led the study project management team to introduce a fourth, "hybrid" option that would leverage benefits of the original options without inducing unacceptable added congestion. See the PowerPoint presentation for a textual and visual explanation of the "hybrid" option. In sum, the hybrid option: fixes the northbound lane drop congestion problem that was presented by the three initial options; projects to increase use of

MnPASS lanes south of Little Canada Road by 20 – 30 percent; provides a faster, more reliable congestion-free option for buses, car/van pools, and other 35E commuters through most of the remaining congestion in the corridor; and takes advantage of the available 2016 construction and funding opportunity.

2. 35E MnPASS Extension Project Update

Dale provided more detail on the project scope and limits through use of conceptual maps and corridor cross-section analysis. He noted several project delivery milestones, including: start of the environmental review process in January 2015; a draft environmental assessment document available by June 2015; public comment in September 2015, and a “Finding of No Significant Impact” due in December 2015. He also reviewed the municipal consent process and timing of requesting municipal consent from the cities of Little Canada, Vadnais Heights, White Bear Lake and Lino Lakes. Project letting is anticipated in early 2016 and construction should be complete in November 2016.

The question was raised as to what effort is being taken to coordinate efforts with the Goose Lake bridge and pavement work, as well as the planned work on CR 96. Dale mentioned that the CR 96 bridge re-deck project is tied to the Goose Lake project and assured the Steering Committee that care is being taken to align the projects as closely as possible.

Another question focused on what, if any, progress had been made with respect to right-of-way acquisition. Dale noted that MnDOT has been in communication with private property owners for work on both the Goose Lake and 35E MnPASS Extension projects. He added that ROW acquisition is not expected to present serious hurdles for the project. There is right-of-way associated with a drainage pond near Goose Lake Rd. that will impact a private business owner and discussions are in progress. There will also be right-of-way needed for a drainage pond on the west side of 35E just south of CR J in White Bear Township. The Municipal Consent process does not apply to townships and MnDOT will be working directly with the property owner.

Several final questions explored issues related to the MnPASS “with a gap/without a gap” approach through the 694/35E commons area. The primary reason for trying the “with a gap” option northbound through the commons and the “without a gap” option southbound through the commons was because both options performed very similarly in the modeling and analysis. The “with a gap” option performed slightly better in terms of traffic flow in the adjacent general purpose lanes and public acceptability. The “without a gap” option performed slightly better in terms of lane continuity and user comprehension. Therefore, it was recommended to test both approaches under real traffic conditions for a 1-2 year period. Based on the evaluation, changes could be made to each approach.

The question was raised what criteria would be used to evaluate the two approaches through the commons. Brad said once the MnPASS lanes are in full operation on 35E, MnDOT will use existing technology in the corridor to measure and analyze traffic flow and safety through the commons. It will also seek corridor user feedback through the use of surveys and/focus groups to assess levels of understanding/confusion with the different approaches and determine whether there are other concerns or issues with the approaches that need to be addressed. Maintenance and enforcement criteria will also likely be evaluated.

3. Land Use & Transit Enhancement Review and Discussion

Mary provided an overview of her work on land use and transit. Her presentation touched upon: the goal and guiding principles of her work; research findings and drivers; opportunities and challenges related to the design approach and strategy; and project takeaways, feedback and questions.

The overarching goal of her aspect of the project is to use community sites within the 35E corridor as prototypes, demonstrate land uses that support, encourage, and enhance transit and car pool use and identify barriers to transforming auto-oriented communities into more transit-friendly and car pool-friendly communities.

She identified several guiding principles, including: encourage density of population and activity; design for pedestrian-friendly environments; encourage a mixed-use land use pattern; develop an interconnected street network that maximizes pedestrian and bicycle access and simple route design; support travel options that encourage or compliment use of transit; and plan for linear growth in nodes along the corridor.

She added that the concepts were for discussion and visioning purposes only; each respective community is free to consider these concepts and others as they consider how best to leverage investments in transportation infrastructure to improve transit options and enhance land use decisions.

Lynne added that Mary will be translating the concepts and ideas shared in the presentation into a report that will be available soon.

The group was particularly interested in carpool options, as well as non-traditional carpooling approaches that have arisen elsewhere. Ken considered aspects of Mary's work to be a "game changer" and encouraged that communities track the impacts of such planning implementation. Lee asked if the timing of such efforts might tie into introduction of MnPASS lanes to 35E corridor commuters; although he's not sure about current carpooling behavior along the corridor, he sees great opportunity in promoting it in concert with MnPASS.

4. Outreach & Education Review and Discussion

Lee provided an overview of the public engagement process, including the concluded community dialogue sessions, a planned study open house, and contributions to the final report drafting and review.

The community dialogues each spanned approximately 75 minutes and were intended to solicit input for a wide array of stakeholder perspectives. The goals of the community dialogues included an expectation to: (1) inform participants about MnPASS along 35E; (2) explain concept options; and (3) receive reactions and preferences from participants.

Importantly, the “hybrid” option had not yet been identified as an option when the community dialogues took place. Nonetheless, the outreach revealed some interesting results. For instance, participants viewed the MnPASS “without a gap” option as the most appealing; it appeared to be the safest and simplest approach. Alternatively, the MnPASS “shoulder” option had mixed reactions, with many participants expressing concerns about the loss of a shoulder lane in the event of vehicle breakdowns, etc. For its part, the MnPASS “with a gap” option appeared to create too many weaving risks. However, it was acknowledged this was a limited sample.

Lee added future outreach may include an open house in late January or early February 2015. The purpose of the open house is to offer the public an opportunity to learn about the study and offer feedback.

MnDOT will likely hold two open houses as part of the 35E MnPASS Extension project environmental process in late summer.

The draft final report is expected to be available for review in February 2015; it would be circulated to Steering Committee members for review and comment. The final report will be complete by March 31, 2015.