

Hennepin County
Complete Streets Task Force Minutes
August 29, 2012 2 – 3:30 PM
Hennepin County Government Center
Conference Room C2350
300 South 6th Street, Minneapolis MN 55487

Attendees: Commissioner Gail Dorfman, Commissioner Jan Callison, Commissioner Peter McLaughlin, Jill Boogren, Scott Bradley, Debra Brisk, Dave Carlson, Councilmember Steve Elkins, Ethan Fawley, Dave Fink, Mayor Kathi Hemken, Margot Imdieke Cross, Richard Johnson, Tom Johnson, Michael Larson, Prescott Morrill (guest), Karen Nikolai, Rose Ryan, Chris Sagsveen, Craig Twinem

1. Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Dorfman opened the meeting and attendees introduced themselves. She then emphasized that the agenda was focused on tools for implementation of Complete Streets, building on a previous and ongoing foundation of policy work at the state and local levels.

2. Complete Streets Budget Items

Deb Brisk provided an overview of the 5-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), which provides \$390 million for roadway-related projects. Most of this is related to roadway reconstruction/rehabilitation, with \$9 million for intersection projects and \$8.6 million for bridge replacement. Staff noted that integration of complete streets elements varies from project to project. Specific line items in the capital program (i.e., bikeway development, bikeway gap, sidewalk participation, and REPP) directly target the implementation of Complete Streets elements. Other related line items include pedestrian ramps, targeted safety improvements, signals, water management, and right-of-way acquisition.

County staff emphasized that they work with cities to design county roadways and bridges using principles of context sensitive design (e.g., recent meetings with Wayzata City Council on McGinty Road at County Road 101). The reconstruction of Lyndale Avenue was a project that incorporated elements of Complete Streets into its design, but was enhanced through the use of REPP funds.

Deb Brisk mentioned that the goal of creating a solicitation process for complete streets line items is to provide additional transparency in the county's process and to assess need and interest from cities for specific design elements. Staff are briefing the County Board on September 13th. Assuming concurrence from the Board, the first solicitation would occur in the fall.

Tom Johnson emphasized that the line-item solicitation process will help develop awareness of complete streets and the county's interest in partnering with communities around Complete Streets design. This process will help gauge the nature and extent of interest among Hennepin communities. Funding criteria address system connectivity, community support, safety, transportation purpose (not primarily recreational), and local context.

Bicycle Gap

Tom Johnson explained that the Bicycle Gap program targets relatively short sections of the bicycle network that are incomplete because of design challenges and greater costs. An original list of gaps identified approximately 100 gaps; and while about 50 have been addressed, about 20-30 additional gaps have been identified. Typical gaps include locations under bridges or across rivers. In order to be eligible, the project must be an identified gap; and the county encourages cities to contact county staff about additions to the gap list that may be warranted.

Bicycle Development

Commissioner Dorman inquired about project eligibility and the definition of the planned bicycle network. Tom Johnson clarified that the plan for the county bicycle system was first developed in the 1990's. Off-road and on-road facilities are both eligible for the bikeway development fund, but the cost for on-road bicycle accommodation can be incorporated into overall roadway project costs. Tom said that the County has not done separate trail projects along county roadways very often.

Commissioner Dorman asked about the potential for funding a city trail that connects two county trails, or trails that would connect to a regional trail such as the LRT trail. Commissioner McLaughlin emphasized the importance of encouraging and rewarding local initiatives and argued that the maps are not absolute. Nevertheless, he also supported identifying priorities and priority corridors, and rewarding local projects that could reap greater benefits, such as feeding connections to LRT stations. Commissioner Dorfman added that as detailed station area planning occurs, there is a need to identify what needs the project might pay for versus the county. Ethan Fawley mentioned the importance of connecting to the proposed "arterial BRT" system as well.

Tom Johnson concurred that staff had developed a map identifying critical connections but that these had not yet been added to the map. He further added that the system and its needs change over time, and that local communities need to participate in developing the broader system. In the case of LRT, that involves looking beyond the platform and identifying funding streams to support developing the system. As visions are developed and become more refined, it will help identify funding needs and roles.

Commissioner Dorfman asked if a community could apply for multiple funds at one time. Tom Johnson explained that there is interest in distributing the money broadly to support worthy projects that may be short on funding, reiterating that the applications require a match of local funding. Deb Brisk stated that board will get details on the applications and review staff recommendations for funding.

Commissioners Dorfman and McLaughlin brought up questions related to project readiness given the timeline of the solicitation and the newness of the programs. Commissioner Dorfman also asked for clarification about funding bicycle feasibility studies, while Commissioner McLaughlin expressed concern about too much money being spent on feasibility studies. Tom Johnson stated that county staff have been talking to city staff about this upcoming program and that there should be a number of potential projects in the pipeline. Rose Ryan added that the option for feasibility studies helps level the playing field for communities with smaller budgets and less expertise on staff. The Commissioners expressed an interest in seeing project readiness and connections to transit receive greater weight.

Steve Elkins stated that he is interested in the development and refinement of this program and evaluation criteria given his role on the Metropolitan Council's Transportation Advisory Board. The regional solicitation program will include revised criteria under the new federal MAP 21 transportation bill and our program and criteria might be tools they could work from for the regional program.

Roadside Enhancement Partnership Program (REPP)

Craig Twinem provided an overview of REPP, which was first introduced in 1999 to provide assistance to enhance corridors in urban areas. It targets improvements to enhance the aesthetics, character and multi-modal quality of the corridor. Burying utilities, pedestrian crossing improvements, and monument signs have been funded. This program allows for more lead time (3 years) than the other line items as they are typically part of larger, more complicated projects.

Steve Elkins asked about how potential road diets could be addressed with REPP, citing the example of Portland Avenue in Richfield. Craig Twinem stated that REPP was not intended for reconstruction or pavement rehabilitation. Road diets could occur through reconstruction or re-striping, and REPP could be used to enhance a project through utility burying.

Commissioner McLaughlin identified what he thought is an archetypal problem for developing complete streets on county roads, which is that they were designed to accommodate higher volumes. He noted that redesign is a particular problem in inner-ring suburbs.

County Mill and Overlay Program Discussion

Chris Sagsveen, manager of the County's road and bridges operations division, provided an overview of the program. Guided by surveys of roadway conditions, the division is charged with putting together an annual program for 100 lane-miles of county roads. This program lasts from May through mid- to late October. The County contracts for milling but County forces do the paving. They coordinate scheduling with local cities and utility companies. They are putting more and more information on the web and are working with public affairs and using social media to get the word out.

Commissioner Dorfman stated that the County is doing a better job at communicating but she still hears from cities about the desire for road diets and other ways to maximize these improvements. New Hope Mayor Kathi Hemken expressed a desire to have a 2-3 year plan so that paving could be better coordinated with their city. She added that it is also helpful for communities to understand what is not being done.

Jill Boogren stated that she appreciated information that is on the web site, but that it would be helpful to see a quick go-to map that identified the next 3-5 years of work.

Steve Elkins discussed the Alternative Transportation Plan that was developed in Bloomington. This plan hardly included any county roads because they were ahead of the County's work on Complete Streets. He mentioned that the next Metropolitan Council Transportation Policy Plan will include a section on bicycling. Cities, in developing their next comprehensive plans, will need to better understand how they include county roads in their bike plans.

Ethan Fawley mentioned that communities find it frustrating when they haven't heard about a project. Communication beyond the city staff would be helpful; and there may be ways to

enhance projects with other resources (e.g., stormwater management or bike improvements). This will require some additional coordination and lead time.

Margot Imdieke Cross inquired about how improvements to pedestrian ramps are addressed maintenance projects, specifically addressing the legal requirements of ADA. She was concerned that the County staff are not talking to one another and that there may be a “disconnect” regarding requirements when doing work in the right-of-way.

Commissioner Dorfman stated that because of scheduling practices, the department has typically approached mill/overlay projects with an approach that could be characterized as “get in, get out, don’t complicate”. However, the County has been getting pressure to look at these projects in a different way.

Deb Brisk stated that the County is looking at an improved approach that balances competing needs or desires that include a shared understanding of evolving ADA requirements, working efficiently together, adding value to projects, and minimizing community disruption. They are proposing three types of pavement maintenance projects: emergency maintenance, a typical pavement rehabilitation project, and “rehabilitation-plus”, the latter of which might include improvements such as bump-outs at pedestrian crossings.

Jill Boogren said that people in the community don’t necessarily understand or care about the source of funding for improvements. However, they will be angry if some obvious opportunity appears to have been missed when work is done.

Steve Clark said that in an era of limited funding it is important to work better with what we have, making improvements where we can for all users.

Hennepin County Bicycle Transportation Plan Update

Rose Ryan provided an update on the Bicycle Transportation Plan, which is being funded by a Community Transportation Grant (CTG) from the Centers for Disease Control, which is targeting public health issues through initiatives that address physical activity. The CTG funding is also supporting bicycle/pedestrian plans at the local level, targeting eight communities over a four year period. The targeted communities are those that have higher incidence of health disparities. The first of these communities is Hopkins, and a consultant is doing this work. Furthermore, the CTG funding is supporting a county-wide pedestrian plan. Public engagement meetings are occurring throughout the county to help identify community concerns about walking, particularly along or across county facilities.

The first phase of work of the Bicycle Transportation Plan is to establish typical sections guidelines for bicycle facility design as part of retrofit projects. These guidelines are currently being developed. A full update of the Bicycle Transportation Plan will begin in early 2013. The guidelines will be incorporated into the full update of the plan and will also be useful as work begins on the 2013 overlay program. The goals of the guidelines are to improve safety for all users, consider new types of bicycle facility designs, and create guidelines that better address retrofit projects.

The typical sections guidelines will include various types of bicycle design elements, including bike lanes, shoulders, buffered bike lanes, cycle tracks, sharrows, enhanced sharrows, and intersection treatments such as bike boxes. Guidance for each element will include design dimensions, the best context for use, advantages and disadvantages, and the results of any before and after experience.

Details about the work of each phase will be shared with the Bicycle Advisory Committee. Commissioner Jan Callison asked about the cost implications of various bicycle facilities. Rose Ryan stated that the typical sections guidelines highlight maintenance cost differences for different bicycle design elements.

Dave Carlson asked who is involved in this work and Rose Ryan said that it was primarily her and Bob Byers.

Commissioner Dorfman mentioned the idea of convening a Minneapolis-St. Paul bike summit. Deb Brisk added that there is frequent discussion of bicycle facilities and bicyclist needs, particularly in downtown and other built-up areas of Minneapolis. She thought it would be valuable to bring in experts from other cities to share their experience. The summit could also include a facilitated discussion with the various advocacy groups to discuss approaches to improving bicycling in Minneapolis and St. Paul. She suggested that the Complete Streets Task Force and/or a group of organizations could champion the summit.

Task Force members brought up different approaches and experiences with the bicycle facilities being considered in the typical sections guidelines. Steve Clark suggested that the typical sections guidelines include advisory bike lanes. Advisory bike lanes are used on streets that are too narrow for a conventional bike lane. Advisory bike lanes are marked with a dashed white line on the left side of the lane, to allow motorists to enter the bike lane if necessary to pass oncoming traffic. 14th Street in Minneapolis includes advisory bike lanes; and advisory lanes are planned for Wooddale and parts of 54th Street in Edina as well as Bloomington Avenue in Richfield. Commissioner Dorfman encouraged participants to think about opportunities for public education around these new treatments.

Complete Streets Task Force Staff Work Plan

Karen Nikolai handed out an overview of the Complete Streets Task Force staff work plan and reviewed work plan items including the solicitation guidelines and applications discussed today, improvements to the web site, and a pending progress report.

Commissioner Dorfman encouraged participants to identify agenda items for the next Task Force meeting in the fall.

Commissioner Dorfman closed the meeting.