



Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

June 24, 2009

John W. Stevens Wetlands Education Center, Richmond Hill

3:00 – 4:00 pm

The second and final Bryan County Transportation Study Advisory Committee Meeting was held on June 24th from 3:00-4:00pm at the John W. Stevens Wetlands Education Center in Richmond Hill.

The following members of the Advisory Committee were in attendance:

- W. Phillip Jones, Bryan County Board of Commissioners
- Teresa Scott, GDOT District 5
- Mike Melton, City Manager of Richmond Hill
- Jan Bass, Community Planner - City of Richmond Hill
- Billy D. Reynolds, Chief of Richmond Hill Police Department
- Neil Smiley, Bryan County Engineering
- Kirk Croasmun, Bryan County Engineer
- Walter Shuman, Bryan County Public Works
- Matthew Fowler, GDOT Office of Planning
- Radney Simpson, GDOT Office of Planning
- Kyle Mote, GDOT Office of Planning
- Habte Kassa, GDOT
- Grady Smith, JIG
- Jenny Lee, JIG

The purpose of this meeting was to present the preliminary project recommendations and receive input from the committee to finalize these recommendations. The following bullets highlight discussion items from the meeting:

Presentation:

- Kyle Mote, GDOT Project Manager, opened the meeting by outlining the agenda items, which included a review of the work completed to date, an overview of the project identification process, preliminary project recommendations, summary of stakeholder activity to date, and next steps.

The presentation covered the following information:

- Mr. Mote reported that the following tasks have been completed:
 - Assessment of baseline conditions;
 - Development of study goals;
 - Travel Demand Model development;
 - Identification of potential improvements; and
 - Preliminary project evaluation and screening.
- With respect to the project identification process, Mr. Mote announced that the projects have been identified based on recommendations from previous studies, LOS analysis, safety

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

and design issues, and stakeholder input. He emphasized that for every identified project, a need and purpose as well as logical termini were determined and refined.

- Mr. Mote then highlighted a few key System Management project recommendations and discussed the overall benefits of the System Management projects. He pointed out that these potential projects are recommended for consideration because they are low-cost and maximize the effectiveness of the existing system.
- Teresa Scott (GDOT District 5) asked why the bridge on I-95 at CSX Railroad should be replaced considering that I-95 bridges were upgraded as part of the I-95 widening. Mr. Mote replied that the bridge replacements identified in the study have sufficiency rating below 50, which make them eligible for federal funding. However, this is not to say that this particular bridge is structurally unsafe. The sufficiency rating also takes into account metrics not related to the structural integrity. Some of these factors include its role in public use (e.g., frequent school bus trips), if a bridge is on the national highway system and bridge approaches. Matthew Flower reiterated the point by stating that sufficiency ratings are used as a guide to identifying potential issues, and does not suggest that this particular bridge is structurally unsafe. The total estimated construction cost for System Management projects is approximately \$41.2M.
- Mr. Mote explained that the cost estimations were performed using GDOT's cost estimation software (CES) and these costs are reported in today's dollars.
- With regards to Bicycle/Pedestrian recommendations, Mr. Mote stated that these projects were identified to enhance the multi-modal characteristics of the county. He then highlighted a few key sidewalk and multi-use path projects throughout the county. The total estimated construction cost for Bicycle/Pedestrian projects is approximately \$13.4M.
- Mr. Mote then discussed in detail the top five capacity improvement projects in terms of benefit-cost rating. These projects included:
 - I-95 Widening (6 to 8 lanes, 2-mile segment - SR 144 to Chatham County) - \$8.4M
 - SR 144 Widening (2 to 4 lanes, Timber Trail to Belfast Keller) - \$32.3M
 - SR 144 Widening (4 to 6 lanes, US 17 to Timber Trail) - \$32.3M
 - US 17 Widening (4 to 6 lanes, SR 196 to SR 144) – \$42.7M
 - Belfast Siding Road Widening (2 to 4 lanes, US 17 to Park Hill 20 Road) – \$24.8M
- Comments related to the capacity improvements are as follows:
 - Mike Melton stated that the widening of US 17 to SR 144 should terminate west of the I-95 interchange to direct commuter traffic from Liberty County to I-95 without having to go through the commercial district in Richmond Hill. Matthew Fowler indicated that there were operational reasons to have the logical terminus at SR 144, but the department will certainly take his suggestions into consideration.
 - Mr. Melton also commented on the impact of widening SR 144 to six lanes would have on the commercial district in central Richmond Hill. Jan Bass pointed out the apparent contradiction of widening SR 144 and recommending sidewalks at the

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

same time that will increase pedestrian and vehicular conflict. She stated that widening this segment of SR 144 is not in accordance with the city's plans to preserve its character. In response, Mr. Mote stated that when using federal dollars for capacity improvements, GDOT has a policy to incorporate sidewalks in an urban section of a roadway. Grady Smith pointed out that right-of way (ROW) cost estimates have not been determined, and thus, this project could be revisited once ROW costs are taken into account in calculating the benefit-cost ratio. Mr. Melton emphasized that the widening of SR 144 to four-lanes between Timber Trail and Belfast Keller Road needs to happen before the six lane section.

- With regards to the Belfast Siding Road Widening project, Mr. Melton commented that this project cannot be warranted based on today's traffic needs. He pointed out that there other pressing transportation issues that need immediate attention. Mr. Mote responded that these recommendations are based on a future land use scenario 25 years from now that reflects the county's aggressive growth policy, per the locally adopted land use plan, to develop the lands surrounding Belfast Siding Road.
 - Jan Bass indicated that Harris Trail Road functions as the most logical bypass to the city. She stated that improving this road will deflect traffic from SR 144 and preserve the character of downtown Richmond Hill. She further added that Transportation Enhancement (TE) grant has been spent on improving the streetscape along SR 144 and these should not be destroyed to make room for the widening. In response, Kyle emphasized the long-range nature of these project recommendations and that they were identified based on LOS needs of the future. Mr. Fowler added that the preliminary recommendations were purely based on a technical analysis using a "what if" scenario. He stated that the purpose of the Advisory Committee meeting was to gather input from the locals to refine the projects and reflect community values. Mr. Smith further commented that stakeholder input is necessary to finalize the project list.
 - Mr. Melton reiterated that widening the southern section of SR 144 to four lanes should be a priority based on safety as well. Phil Jones stated that this project was still a priority project in the county and programmed for 2011.
 - With regards to the Harris Trail Widening, Mr. Jones recommended applying three phases to the project. First phase should extend the existing four lane section south to Port Royal Road. Assuming that the paving of Harris Trail Extension is completed by this time, the second phase should entail widening the remaining two lane section from Port Royal Road to Belfast Keller Road to four lanes. The last phase should be widening the entire Harris Trail Road from US 17 to Belfast Keller Road to six lanes.
- Mr. Mote then discussed the evaluation process used for assessing capacity improvement projects, which involved both quantitative and qualitative metrics. He explained that some of the metrics such as delay reduction and travel time savings were evaluated using the Travel Demand Model.

Next Steps:

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

- Input regarding local values and comments from this meeting will be utilized to refine the project recommendations. The final task is identifying potential funding sources for these improvements.
- The next public meeting is anticipated to be in July or August. Locations and times of the public meetings will be identified and distributed to the Advisory Committee members.
- The Bryan County Transportation study has an anticipated completion date of September 2009.

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