

Minutes of the Transportation Committee

The meeting of the Transportation Committee was held on April 1, 2003 at 8:00 a.m. at the Law and Justice Center, Room 700, 104 West Front Street, Bloomington, Illinois.

Members Present: Chairman Bass, Members Hoselton, Owens, Cavallini, Dean and Rodgers

Members Absent: None

Staff Members Present: Mr. Terry Lindberg, Assistant County Administrator; Ms. Lucretia Wherry, Human Resources Assistant, County Administrator's Office; Ms. Jennifer Sicks, Transportation Planner, Regional Planning; Mr. Jack Mitchell, Highway Engineer

Others Members Present: Members Gordon and Segobiano

Chairman Bass called the meeting to order at 8:08 a.m. Chairman Bass declared the Public Hearing opened. He introduced the Transportation Committee Members, other members of the County Board, the representative from McLean County Regional Planning and the Eastside Bypass Consultants from Bernardin, Lochmueller and Associates.

Mr. Phil Tegeler, Branch Manager, Illinois Office Project Manager, Bernardin, Lochmueller and Associates presented a summary of the Eastside Corridor Feasibility Study.

In the year 2025, serious transportation congestion problems will exist on the east side of Bloomington-Normal despite the programmed improvement to Towanda-Barnes Road, the widening of I-55/74 to six lanes around the west side of Bloomington-Normal and the widening of Veterans Parkway (Business I-55) to six lanes from the Conrail/Norfolk & Southern Railway around the east side of Bloomington-Normal to I-55.

Project goals were developed to serve as a foundation for the identification of alternate corridors for the proposed East Side Transportation Facility and for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the build alternates relative to each other and the no build alternate. The project goals were reviewed and refined by the project Steering Committee and presented at the first of three public information meetings. The project goals for an eastside bypass freeway of Bloomington-Normal connecting I-74 near Downs to I-55 near Towanda in McLean County are:

- Provide overall system connectivity and continuity by completing a freeway or expressway loop around the Bloomington-Normal Urbanized Area.

- Provide for traffic movement around the east side of the Bloomington-Normal Urbanized Area.
- Move traffic efficiently into the east side development areas.
- Provide improved access to major employment activity centers and major inter-modal transportation facilities (such as the Central Illinois Regional Airport).
- Strengthen the transportation network in McLean County by providing an acceptable capacity to meet forecasted travel demand.

Alternate C (West) is recommended as the preferred corridor for development of a freeway connection from I-74 to I-55 on the east side of Bloomington-Normal. Alternate C best fulfills the project goals. It provides the best access to major employment centers and the Airport, the best access to developing areas including Towanda and Downs, and the greatest relief to the most highly congested segments of Veterans Parkway. Alternate C is also comparable to Alternate D in diverting traffic from the interstate routes around Bloomington-Normal and from Veterans Parkway, and in attracting traffic along the corridor. Relative to environmental considerations, Alternate C falls in the middle relative to potential displacements, is most adjacent to forecasted future growth areas in adopted comprehensive plans, has no floodplain or stream crossings, affects the least wetland, and affects prime farmland that is undergoing conversion to urban uses. Alternate C falls in the middle relative to project costs and utility relocation costs, and is the shortest all freeway alternate.

The next steps in sequence following this feasibility study would include:

1. Perform a location study, including necessary environmental approvals and FHWA approval of the additional interchanges on I-74 and I-55.
2. Prepare construction plans with possibly 3 or more sections (based on funding availability). Logical construction sections could include: Alignment B from I-55 to
3. Towanda-Barnes Road, Alignment B from I-74 to Towanda- Barnes Road, and Alternate C between the Alternate B segments.
4. Prepare ROW documents and acquire property as needed for construction.
5. Relocate Utilities as needed prior to construction.
6. Construct all or a portion of the improvement as funding becomes available.

Mr. David Ripple, Chief of Transportation and Land Use Planning Traffic Analysis, Bernardin, Lochmeuller and Associates, stated that in 1994, the *Long Range Transportation Plan for the Bloomington-Normal Urbanized Area* recommended:

- Improving Towanda-Barnes Road to accommodate future development on the east side of Bloomington and Normal, and
- Examining a parallel freeway or expressway between I-74 and I-55 to move traffic efficiently into the east side development areas as well as provide for traffic movement around the east side of the urban area.

These recommendations were carried forward into the *McLean County Regional Comprehensive Plan* (August, 2000) and the *2025 Long Range Transportation Plan*

(September, 1999) that called for the examination of an eastside bypass freeway as well as the improvement of Towanda-Barnes Road. Towanda-Barnes Road is currently be improved as a five-lane facility from US 150 to Fort Jesse Road, and the McLean County Highway Department is considering the extension of the improvement northward from Fort Jesse Road toward Towanda. The study assumed the completion of Veteran's Parkway to six lanes, as well as the expansion of Interstate 55.

At the second public meeting, a majority of those who submitted written comments favored Alternate C. It should be noted that Alternate C provides grade separations for all existing east-west roads without interchanges to maintain circulation between areas on either side of the freeway and that utility conduits can be placed under the freeway at strategic locations so that the freeway does not hamper the extension of sanitary sewer, waterlines and other utilities to the east side of the freeway. Alternate C involves a corridor of at 1000 feet in width in which significant flexibility exists to set the final alignment; thus, the final alignment may be located farther east to reduce displacements in interchange areas and to reduce impacts on proposed developments on the east side of Towanda-Downs Road. The cost of Alternative C is \$250 million.

Chairman Bass asked of any members of the audience would like to address the Committee or ask questions regarding the presentation.

Mr. Tim Bittner, East Oakland Avenue, stated that he has some concerns in building an Eastside Bypass. He asked:

1. Where the funding would come from?
2. Is the project really needed when Towanda Barnes Road and Veteran's Parkway are being expanded to handle more traffic?
3. What type of road would be built?
4. Would properties around the bypass be rezoned?

Mr. Ripple indicated that the Road would be grade separated. The study did not address if properties would be rezoned.

Mr. Tegeler stated that Federal Funds would pay for the bypass. The current Federal Transportation Act is set to expire in September 2003. The goal is to have the Eastside Bypass Feasibility Study approved in time to request funding under the current Federal Transportation Act. Local funding would be minimal, needed only to improve existing roads which would connect to the bypass.

Mr. Bittner stated that asked that farm properties not be land locked.

Mr. Hoselton stated that he and Mr. Cavallini represent District One, which is the district most effected by the proposed Eastside bypass. The Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington would most likely extend their City limits so that the farms would be landlocked. He stated that he had not heard much from his district and would appreciate

some feedback. Mr. Dick added that Building and Zoning would review all developments within 1-½ miles of the City limits.

Mr. Hoselton asked how much input did the Villages of Downs and Towanda have in the selection of the alternatives.

Mr. Bittner stated that he appreciated the meetings and being able to give his input during this process. His farmland has been farmed by four generations of his family. The proposed alternative C cuts through a corner of his farmland. He asked the consultants if it would be possible to use existing County Roads which already have right of way instead of dislocating farm properties. This would also save money since not as much right of way would have to be purchased.

Mr. Owens asked if zoning changes would be permitted on lands that may be effected by the proposed bypass. Mr. Dick replied that there are some areas where building permits are on hold. The decision needs to be made soon whether or not to protect these areas from development or to let them go.

Mr. Tegeler stated that the Villages of Downs and Towanda, Town of Normal, City of Bloomington, County and Illinois Department of Transportation have had equal input during this process.

Mr. Frank Wheatly, 320 S. Morissey Drive, Bloomington, Illinois, stated that his farm has been farmed by three generations of his family. The proposed alternate C would cut off the Southeast corner of his farm and could eliminate the houses that his son and daughter –in-law have recently built. This proposed bypass is going to take 950 acres of good farmland.

Mr. Segobiano asked if all of the alternatives would use as much farmland. Mr. Tegeler replied that all of the alternatives would use approximately 900 to 950 acres of farmland.

Mr. Drake Zimmerman, Friends of the Kickapoo, stated that the Friends of the Kickapoo, is a conservation group interested in maintaining the green space around the Kickapoo area in order to preserve land and the animals of the Kickapoo Creek. The bypass is proposed to run along the Kickapoo Creek. The bypass would increase, noise, and round off to the creek, which currently is rated as a health body of water. This area enjoys a healthy population of muscues and wild Turkeys have recently returned to the area. Mr. Zimmerman asked the Committee to keep in mind ways to protect the Kickapoo Creek when planning the bypass.

Mr. Jim Arteman, Mayor of Towanda, asked why the proposed alternative C would bypass between Normal and Towanda. That area would become congested. Mr. Tegeler replied that the former Mayor of Towanda felt that the bypass would bring more developments to Towanda. Mr. Arteman asked what would become of the

historical home near the proposed bypass. Mr. Tegeler replied that the bypass would not impact the historical home, which is located ½ mile away.

Mr. Wes Craft stated that the proposed bypass is similar to the Interstate 55 bypass located on the West Side of Bloomington. He indicated that he attended several of the public hearings. At one of the public hearings, the state engineers said that the reason that the bypass is not further east is that developers would not stand for it. Due to growth, in five years, the bypass would be in the middle of subdivisions.

Mr. Hoselton stated that he would like to see the bypass further east. He noted that the proposed Alternative C aligns with Towanda Barnes that is maintained in part by the Town of Normal and the City of Bloomington. He asked if the bypass could run along County Road 165. There is already 60 feet of right of way and this would not cut through farmland. He asked what the right of way criteria is for an interstate. Mr. Tegeler replied that by the year 2025, Bloomington and Normal City limits would be 1 mile east of Towanda Barnes road.

Mr. Owens asked if Alternatives D or E would use less farmland. Mr. Ripple replied that Alternative C uses less farmland than D or E.

Ms. Mary Lee Young asked if the 950 acres include farmland that would not be accessible once the bypass is in place. She asked if all the involved parties have to sign off on the project in order for the pass. Mr. Tegeler replied that the public hearing for the County is the first. Bloomington and Normal will have hearings later this month. Each community should agree on the alternative for Federal funding, however, it is not mandatory. Ms. Young asked Mr. Mitchell to explain the timeline for the project. Mr. Mitchell explained that the current federal funding available for the bypass ends in September 2003. However, in order to get the funding for phase one of the project, the study needs to be accepted by the involved communities, so that the request for funding can be made prior to September.

Mr. Owens stated that he wants the public to understand that no local funding is needed for the bypass project. Local funding would only be used if connecting roads need to be upgraded. Mr. Mitchell agreed with Mr. Owens's statement.

Mr. Larry Reeser noted that the map presented today includes the bypass extending to the Shirley blacktop. He added that this information was not presented at past public hearings. Mr. Mitchell stated that the Shirley extension has recently been added to the plans. The Town of Normal and City of Bloomington requested the addition for better access to the airport. The extension would be studied during the next phase.

Mr. Chris Holland stated that his church just purchased 20 acres land near the Route 150 Interchange. He asked for a defined timeline, as it may not be wise for the church to build there if it would have to be torn down in a matter of years. Mr. Tegeler stated

that once this phase is completed the next phase would take a year or two to complete. It could take 7 to 10 years to purchase right of way. After that, it could be up to 2 years before construction would begin. Mr. Holland asked at what point will Building and Zoning put a hold on building permits. Mr. Tegeler replied that the corridor could move 1000 feet in either direction. The Interstate needs 300 feet of right of way. The next phase includes studying the minimal impact of the project on housing.

Mr. Bill Freidrich of south Bloomington stated that he agrees with Mr. Bittner and Mr. Wheatly. He asked if limited access to the corridor was studied so that farmland would not become land locked. Mr. Ripple replied that Alternative B was an option that would allow for limited access, however, Alternative B did not provide access to the airport or to the major areas of employment. Alternative B also could not carry as large of a volume of traffic as Alternatives A and C could carry. With limited access, federal funding may be lost. Mr. Tegeler added that the same amount of farmland would still be interrupted.

Mr. Freidrich added that the public hearing were not very well advertised.

Mr. Mitchell stated that if the corridor where further east, the corridor would promote further urban sprawl. No lands would become land locked. Route 9 and Oakland Avenue will still be through roads. If access roads have to be built to avoid farmlands becoming land locked, the access roads would be built. In the next phase, the area would be studied in order to avoid homes and farmland as much as possible.

Mr. Bittner suggested the corridor be built along existing roads in order to avoid farmland.

Mr. Norm Hester, Towanda, stated that he has three properties likely to be effected by the corridor. He asked what the rate of growth east of town was based on. Mr. Ripple replied that the rate of growth was predicted in the McLean County Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Paul Russell, Director, Regional Planning Commission, replied that the completion of Towanda Barnes Road was included in the Comprehensive Plan. If with the completion of the Towanda Barnes Road, the bypass would be needed. Mr. Hester asked if the current rate of growth is still consistent with that predicted in the Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Russell replied that the Comprehensive Plan would be updated after the completion of the Corridor Study in order to see if the growth rate is still as predicted at the time the Comprehensive Plan was completed.

Ms. Rodgers asked if using current roads for the bypass was studied. Mr. Ripple stated that using current roads was not studied because these roads do not have enough right of way. The right of way needs to be 300 feet. The existing roads only have 60 feet of right of way. Mr. Ripple reminded everyone that this phase did not look at property lines, as the next phase would do.

Mr. Hester asked how the number of interchanges is determined and what type of interchanges is likely to be built. Mr. Ripple stated that in urban areas, interchanges are every 2 miles. The type of interchange is likely to be a diamond or folded diamond shape. The diamond shape allows for a high capacity with less right of way needed. However, this decision would not be made until construction plans are built.

Mr. Hester asked what costs were used for the purchase of land. Mr. Ripple replied that \$3,500-\$10,000 per acre was used to estimate costs. Mr. Hester stated that the cost estimate is low then, as farmland is more valuable.

Mr. Owens asked if the Village of Shirley needs to be a part of these discussions. Mr. Mitchell replied that since Shirley is on the other side of Interstate 55, the Village of Shirley does not need to be included in these discussions.

Mr. Mitchell stated that he hopes that this phase of the Corridor Study would move through this Committee and the other meetings scheduled this month so that funding for phase two could be obtained. This Community is experiencing the fastest downstate growth. The Community needs to be able to handle increased traffic and right of way needs to be reserved.

Mr. Hoselton requested that citizens of his District contact him or Mr. Cavallini with their opinions of the corridor study prior to the Board meeting on April 15, 2003. Mr. Hoselton also suggested that the resolution be amended to include the words "and/or as revised or modified". This would be the Committee some latitude.

Mr. Bittner stated that he would be contacting Mr. Hoselton, as would others.

Mr. Craft stated that the design of the bypass does not look like it is intended to bring people into the area. He suggested that local roads would be more suited for the purposes of the community. Mr. Mitchell said that the plans are not final, but when completed would facilitate the flow of traffic. The access roads are still being studied.

Mr. Mike Pool stated that notices of the meeting were not getting to the people that need them. He asked how future public hearings would be sent. Ms. Sicks replied that notices of public hearing are placed in the Pantagraph, and are posted on Regional Planning's website. The staff of Regional Planning is always available to answer question on the phone and by email. She also noted that past public hearings were heavily attended.

Motion by Hoselton/Rodgers to recommend approval of a Resolution for the East Side Corridor Feasibility.

Mr. Owens requested a roll call vote.

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Mr. Dean voted "yes". Mr. Cavallini voted "yes". Ms. Rodgers voted "yes". Mr. Owens voted "yes". Mr. Hoselton voted "yes".

Motion carried.

There being nothing further to come before the Committee at this time, the meeting was adjourned by Chairman Bass at 10:05 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lucretia Wherry
Recording Secretary