

DRAT TRAFFIC CONTROL MINUTES

Tuesday, December 11th, 2007

Angela Cimmino
Doug Kary ✓
Keith Lang ✓
Walt Willett ✓
Steve Zeier ✓

Capt Vladic ✓
Sondra Baker ✓
Judge Knisely

✓ = Present

Staff Support: Terry Smith, John Gibson, Lora Mattox, Debi Meling

Call to Order: At 12:14 pm by Doug Kary

Minutes: A motion for approval of minutes of the October meeting was made by Steve Zeier and seconded by Keith Lang. Motion carried on voice vote.

GUEST: Tina Volek, City Administrator

PUBLIC COMMENT: None.

STAFF REPORTS:

Zoo Drive & Gabel Traffic Signal: Terry reported the new traffic signal at Zoo & Gabel was placed in operation November 8th. Doug asked if there had been any accidents at the signal. Captain Vladic stated there have been no accidents since the signal was installed.

King Avenue West Construction: Construction has started on the project to widen King Avenue between 31st Street West and Shiloh Road. The intersection of King and 32nd Street West will remain closed until approximately December 17th. Construction on King Avenue west of 32nd Street will begin the first week of January, 2008. The segment between 32nd and Shiloh may be closed for up to six months, although the intersections at 32nd and at King will remain open. Captain Vladic stated that the Police Department is providing extra enforcement through the construction zone. He asked if there had been many complaints about the intersection closure. Debi responded that complaints had been minimal, with some complaints from businesses near Johnny Carino's about traffic cutting thru parking lots to avoid the intersection closure.

Rimrock Road, Shiloh to 54th Street West: Debi stated the design for this project is nearly complete. The latest cost estimates show project funding is about \$500,000 short of what is needed. If additional funding is not found, it may be necessary to shorten the length of the project to fit the available budget.

King Avenue East, South Billings Blvd to Orchard: Debi reported the City is getting ready to start design work on a project to widen and reconstruct King Avenue East between South Billings Boulevard and Orchard Lane. The street will be designed to handle traffic generated by the proposed Cabella's and associated retail development located on the vacant property east of the Burger King. Construction will start this summer. Funding for the project will be from the newly created Tax Increment District covering the area between State Avenue and King. Doug asked if it would be necessary to acquire right-of-way to widen King in this area. Debi reported that although detailed design has not been started yet, it appears there will be additional right-of-way needed in some areas along the north side of King. The project will include a traffic signal at the shopping center entrance opposite Calhoun Lane.

BOARD REPORTS:

Lora Mattox reported that subdivision and zoning activity has been slow this month. No new major subdivisions have been submitted.

NEW BUSINESS:

State Avenue Safety Project. Terry presented a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) for a recent neighborhood meeting. The South Side and Southwest Corridor Task Forces have been asking the City to install a traffic signal at State Avenue and Hallowell for several years. Past City reviews of the intersection found that the intersection did not meet MUTCD warrants for installation of a signal. Task Force representatives then asked the State to review the intersection. In reviewing the intersection, MDT determined there were accident issues throughout the State Avenue corridor, not just at the State & Hallowell intersection. MDT nominated a project for State wide safety funds and based on their analysis believes that converting State Avenue from a 4-lane roadway to a 3-lane roadway (one lane in each direction, plus a center two-way left turn lane) would reduce accidents throughout the corridor. Conversion to a 3-lane section is expected to reduce accidents because:

- Fewer conflict points for mid-block left turning vehicles
- Fewer conflict points for left turns and for vehicles crossing at intersections
- Left turning drivers have better visibility of on-coming vehicles.
- Pedestrian safety is improved because there are fewer lanes of traffic to cross—the center lane can be used as a refuge if necessary.

When MDT initially presented the three-lane concept to the neighborhood, area residents were skeptical because of the heavy truck traffic on State and they questioned how the transitions to & from the 3-lane section would be made at each end (at 1st Avenue South and at S. 27th). The slide show Terry presented was prepared for a follow-up neighborhood meeting held at Riverside Middle School on November 29th. It shows the proposed lane configuration at both ends of the project. It also shows that large trucks making a right turn onto State from side streets currently have to cross over the centerline to complete their turn. This creates a potential conflict with on-coming traffic. With a 3-lane section, they would encroach on the turn lane, but could simply wait until there was no traffic in the turn lane before starting their turn. MDT also provided a comparison to Cedar Street in Helena, which was converted from a 4-lane to a 3-lane.

- Traffic volumes on Cedar Street are about 2.5 times higher than on State Avenue
- Average speeds on State Avenue are 20% higher than on Cedar Street
- The number of trucks per day using Cedar is nearly the same as on State

City Administrator Tina Volek asked if parking would have to be removed to implement the proposed two-way left turn lane. Terry responded there is currently no on-street parking along State. Walt commented that he didn't feel Terry's reference to Rimrock Road as a successful 3-lane roadway in Billings was a good selling point for the project. He said it is too easy to get caught behind slow moving vehicles on Rimrock since you can't pass them, and predicted that the same thing would happen on State. With a 4-lane street you can pass slow moving traffic if necessary.

Terry noted that MDT expects to make a formal project proposal to the City sometime after the first of the year. Staff will take the 3-lane proposal to City Council for their concurrence before any final design on the project is started. If the project goes forward as nominated for the entire length of State Avenue, MDT Safety funds would pay for the entire project. No City funding would be required. It is

not possible to use those funds for a just signal at State & Hallowell by itself because that does not address accidents throughout the corridor. If the Council rejects the proposed Safety Project there is no guarantee the funding would be used in Billings, even if the City or the local MDT office nominated another local safety project. Safety projects are evaluated on a statewide basis and ranked based on their predicted benefit-cost ratio. The funds are not allocated to specific districts or cities the way general highway or gas tax funding is.

Board discussion with City Administrator Tina Volek. Tina noted she was attending the meeting as part of her goal to become more familiar with the activities of all City Boards and Commissions. She said that the various boards and commissions are an important component of local government. She noted based on recent news reports, it appears that Federal transportation funding could be reduced in the future. That will make it more difficult for Billings to keep up with major transportation projects. She asked for comments and questions from the Board. Doug noted that it has been frustrating in the past when the Council does not seek the Board's input on important issues. Walt commented that even though the Council does not have to accept the Board's recommendation on issues, Board members would feel more useful if they were at least asked for input. Terry asked if there was anything in the works on further changes to the City's special events policy. He said that the Board had previously expressed concerns that revisions needed to go beyond just the insurance and fee issues. Tina replied that she was unaware of any current discussions for further action. She said that the next likely step was to review event fees for use of City parks to make sure that the City was recovering their costs.

2008 Meeting Dates. Terry distributed a calendar showing proposed 2008 meeting dates, based on the current fourth Tuesday schedule. He asked if the Board wanted to continue with the 4th Tuesday of each month at Noon as their standard meeting time. No objection was expressed to continuing the current schedule.

QUESTIONS FROM THE BOARD:

Lewis Avenue. Capt. Vladic asked about the status of the Lewis Avenue Traffic Calming. Debi responded that Public Works expected to make a formal recommendation to the City Administrator soon.

West End Arterial Speed Limits. Walt asked what became of the recommendation for greater uniformity on arterial speed limits along major arterials in the area between the BBWA Canal and Shiloh. Terry responded he needs to finish preparing a formal report to the City Administrator on the issue before any changes are approved.

West Interchange. Walt expressed concern that there was little benefit from the time and money spent to add additional lanes to King Avenue through the West Interchange area. Doug responded that he drives this route everyday and the added lane in each direction has significantly reduced traffic congestion in the area, especially during peak traffic times.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 1:13 PM