

TRAFFIC CONTROL BOARD MINUTES September 24th, 2013

MEMBERS PRESENT: Todd Cormier, Walt Willett, Gene Wade, Capt. R D Harper

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sondra Baker, Trina White

STAFF SUPPORT: Terry Smith, Erin Claunch, Zach Heid, Tyler Westrope

GUESTS: None

BUSINESS MEETING:

Call to order: Todd Cormier called the meeting to order at 12:15 pm in the conference room of the Public Works Building, 2224 Montana Avenue.

Minutes: Motion for approval of the August minutes by Gene Wade, seconded by Walt Willett. Motion carried on a voice vote.

OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT: None

STAFF REPORTS:

In light of recent major rainstorms, Terry asked Tyler Westrope to come in and discuss the design and function of the City's storm drain system. Tyler said that in major storm events the streets themselves are a primary conveyance system. Piped storm water systems are designed for smaller storms, not major storms. In major storms, the streets are designed to convey water in excess of what fits in the pipe. We have pipes in the area east of downtown that are as large as a 5' high x 9' wide that are still drastically overloaded in all but a minor storm. Our storm system can handle steady rains; however with the thunderstorms that we get here in Billings we are reliant on our streets to convey the water. It is simply cost prohibitive to construct pipes to handle every storm. Most of our outfalls to the river are already at or above capacity. The storm drain system in Billings is funded by assessments based on the size and zoning of your lot (commercial property pays a higher rate than residential, for example). The total annual assessment for storm drainage is approximately \$3.1 Million. Of that approximately \$2 Million goes to maintenance and paying off bonds. This leaves approximately \$1 Million per year for new projects. Over \$160 million in deficiencies and needed improvements have been identified. Terry mentioned that a 100 year storm doesn't mean that it can only happen once every 100 years; it means that there is a 1% chance that it can happen in any given year, but you could have it twice in one year or even two 100-year storms back to back. There are 7 permitted discharge points for the City of Billings' storm water system: Alkali Creek, Yegen Drain, Hilltop outfall, 5 Mile Creek, Hogan's Slough, City-County Drain and Canyon Creek.

BOARD REPORTS:

Planning Board: Erin informed the Board that there was a public meeting and open house on September 12th for the Transportation Plan update. There is a website for the Plan update. Todd mentioned the website includes an [interactive map](#) where people may post their concerns about transportation system needs for the future. Because available funding is already committed thru 2020, the plan update will focus on safety, alternative modes, and freight movement rather than new street construction projects.

OLD BUSINESS:

Short-term Downtown RR Crossing Options: The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) discussed options for the intersection of Montana Ave and N 27th St when the crossing is blocked by a train. Terry distributed a table showing the options TAC discussed. TAC supported the option of putting the signal back in normal operation immediately after motor vehicle traffic is cleared from the railroad tracks. Currently the signal alternates between serving eastbound traffic on Montana and stopping traffic on Montana to allow pedestrians to cross. No north-south vehicle traffic is allowed when the railroad crossing is occupied. By allowing “normal operation” southbound lefts could still take place, and pedestrians & traffic on Montana would still be provided for. The “normal operation” option was presented to the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) and the Department of Transportation said “No”. The State prefers to wait until they upgrade their traffic signals downtown area to make any changes in signal operation at Montana & 27th. When the State upgrades their signal controllers, the City of Billings will have to upgrade the City controllers in the downtown area in order to maintain communications between signals. Terry mentioned that the State signal upgrade project could go forward in 2 to 3 years.

NEW BUSINESS:

Billings Bypass: Todd Cormier gave an update on the Billings Bypass project. The project is nearing completion of the planning phase and the environmental impact statement. If the environmental report is approved, actual design will probably start next year. Originally, the Bypass route was to be a controlled access freeway type facility, connecting the Interstate corridor on the east side of Billings around the north of town over to Highway 3. In 2010, the project was re-defined due to fit with available funding. The project was re-scoped to be a local arterial route and de-emphasize the regional “bypass” aspect. The focus was shifted to the area between Highway 87 and the Interstate corridor. The road will now be an urban arterial with at-grade crossings, local connections and slower speeds. Multiple alignments were investigated in great detail including several river crossing points. By 2011 three alternatives were settled on and they are Mary St One, Mary St Two and 5 Mile alignments. Initially this will be a 2 lane roadway, but right-of-way will be acquired to expand to a 4-lane facility in a future “phase 2” project. Cost estimates are between \$78 and \$86 million to complete the first phase and an additional \$40 million to complete the final phase. Projections indicate most traffic will use Mary Street to access Main, even if the 5-Mile Creek alternative is constructed as the bypass route. Developing a separate but parallel roadway to Mary keeps the bypass traffic off Mary Street itself. This is known as “Mary Street, Option 2” alternative. From an environmental impact standpoint, all of the alternatives are relatively equal. Mary option 2 is the preferred alternative that will be recommend in the environmental impact statement. The earliest timeframe for the start of construction is 2017 or 2018. This project will use up all projected State & Local highway funding thru approximately 2020.

Traffic Signals and Public Art: Tyler Westrope gave a presentation about putting public art on traffic signal controller cabinets in the Downtown area. He got in touch with the Downtown Billings Association (DBA) and inquired if they were interested in a project similar to what other cities have done to “decorate” their signal controller cabinets. Several other cities in Montana already have controller cabinets with art—this includes Bozeman, Great Falls, and Missoula. DBA agreed to fund the project. The DBA received applications from 14 artists who were interested in displaying their art on the cabinets. Tyler was invited to a meeting where the 14 applicants’ art was shown and voted on. The DBA was able to procure funds to initially place artwork on 6 controller cabinets in the downtown area. The cabinets will be wrapped with printed “shrink wrap” rather than painting directly on the cabinet. Mid-October is the tentative date for installing the art and the first cabinet to be decorated will be the cabinet at N 28th St and 2nd Ave N, under Sky Point.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 1:27 pm.