



MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL CALLED MEETING ABILENE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION TRANSPORTATION POLICY BOARD

May 10, 2017

The Abilene MPO Transportation Policy Board met at 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, May 10, 2017, in the City Council Chambers, Abilene City Hall, 555 Walnut Street, Abilene, Texas.

Members Present:

Mayor Norm Archibald, City of Abilene Mayor and Policy Board Chairman
Judge Downing Bolls, Taylor County
Councilman Bruce Kreitler, City of Abilene
Judge Dale Spurgin, Jones County, and Policy Board Vice-Chairman
Mr. Stan Swiatek, P.E., TxDOT Abilene District Engineer

Members Absent:

None

MPO Staff in Attendance:

Ms. E'Lisa Smetana, Abilene MPO, Executive Director
Mr. Ed McRoy, Abilene MPO Transportation Planner II

1. Call to Order.

Chairman Archibald called the meeting of the Abilene MPO Policy Board to order at 1:30 p.m. He noted that a quorum was duly present.

2. Consideration, public hearing, and possible action on a project in the vicinity of Loop 322 from SH 36 to Oldham Lane consisting of possible ramp relocation, closure/removal/reconfiguration of frontage roads, and turn back of portions of roadway to the City of Abilene.

Chairman Archibald opened the meeting with a short tutorial on the MPO, its role, its funding and a description of the membership of the Policy Board (PB) and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). He then discussed the historic layouts of frontage roads in the community, recent efforts to convert them from two-way to one-way, and some of the reasons for this effort. He then noted that plans for a new TSTC campus at the airport have prompted this current plan.

Mayor Archibald introduced Mr. Michael Rice (Director of Public Works - Abilene). Mr. Rice proceeded to explain the most current plan and various optional elements included in the packet materials. He noted that the option to utilize one-way traffic along the entire east side would allow for the potential future installation of a Texas turn around at Oldham Ln. and at the intersection with Hwy 36.

Public Hearing Opened – Chair establishes a time limit of 5 minutes per speaker

A total of 17 individuals addressed the Board.

Speakers:

John Blakeney Expressed concern about increased response times for emergency responders.
 Stated he has seen no accidents on the west side.

- John Burnett (AFD) Stated he did not have response data. Stated that current technology in use will generate the fastest route for a response. Stated emergency responders can violate traffic laws when they need to. Stated current best route to Expo Center is the frontage road.
- Doug Kappel Expressed concerns about increased traffic inside the neighborhood. Expressed concerns about horse trailers and other large vehicles traversing narrow neighborhood streets. Expressed opinion that frontage road is a neighborhood street. Expressed concern for children and elderly
- Tom Milholland Expressed concerns with speeding traffic currently on Westminister Dr. Expressed support for a barrier. Expressed concerns about increased traffic inside the neighborhood. Expressed concerns about inconvenience for outbound neighborhood traffic. Expressed safety concerns for the intersection of Oldham Lane and S 27th St.
- Vance Cooksey Expressed concerns with changing character of neighborhood. Expressed concerns regarding the effect on property values.
- Jason Hudgins Expressed concern with increased vehicle conflicts with pedestrians on Lytle Trail due to narrow streets.
- Jim Gibson Expressed concerns for elderly pedestrians, children and vehicles on Lytle Trail and Shoreline . Stated outside drivers may not expect them and therefore not look out for them.
- Chuck Statler (Taylor County Commissioner) Expressed concerns about horse trailers and other large vehicles traversing narrow neighborhood streets. Expressed concern with the haste in moving forward. Expressed support for waiting until Expo Center construction is complete.
- Steve Savage (Abilene City Council member) Expressed support for new on ramp on east side to support TSTC. Expressed a lack of support for one-way roads generally. Expressed concern about increased traffic inside the neighborhood. Expressed concern with fire response times. Expressed desire that money be spent on mowing grass on state highways instead of proposed project. Stated he will not support it when it gets to the City Council.
- Rochelle Johnson (Abilene Expo Center) Stated one-way or two-way frontage road will not affect Expo Center. Expressed concern with horse trailers moving through the neighborhood. Expressed concern with increased traffic on east side frontage road and the presence of two-way traffic as a safety concern. Stated East side of project is the only side needed to be done.
- Cindy Blakeney Expressed a desire to extend the frontage road on the west as a one-way down to Oldham. Express concern with 75 m.p.h. speed on the loop.
- Mike Grissom Expressed concerns related to low hanging wires and tree branches on the neighborhood streets. Expressed concern that the existing narrow neighborhood

streets are blocked by service and delivery trucks on occasion.

- Rick Denbow Expressed support for a two-way frontage on the east side for the convenience and wayfinding of students attending the new TSTC campus.
- Richard Kennedy Stated if two-way is provided on the east side it should also be provided on the west side. Expressed support for providing an alternate entrance for the TSTC campus by using a previously abandoned road. Expressed concern with increased vehicle conflicts with pedestrians inside the neighborhood.
- Julie Napier Expressed support for TSTC development. Expressed concern with vehicle and pedestrian conflicts inside the neighborhood. Expressed concerns about horse trailers traversing narrow neighborhood streets. Expressed safety concerns at the intersection of Oldham Lane and S 27th St. Expressed support for tabling of the item.
- Joe Crawford Expressed concerns about increased traffic inside the neighborhood. Expressed support for extending the off ramp on the east side only.
- Ronnie Bryant Expressed concern with damage to neighborhood roads from heavy vehicles. Stated there has been no demonstration of a safety need justifying a change on the east side. Stated there is no need for a change on the east side.

Mayor Archibald suspended the public hearing to take a show of hands asking those in the audience to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the speakers who had addressed the Board thus far. He then indicated displeasure with how the design of the frontage road on the west side makes it a part of the neighborhood street system rather than a permanent frontage road. He expressed agreement with the need for a traffic signal at S 27th and Oldham Lane for safety reasons.

Mayor Archibald asked Mr. Swiatek to confirm if both sides (i.e. the loop) would be need to be addressed in order to meet TxDOT's need that the project address a safety issue? Mr. Swiatek responded emphasizing that TxDOT funds must be used for congestion, safety or connectivity problems. He stated that, "One-way frontage roads are safer than two-way frontage roads." He noted that besides one other small piece this was the last section of two-way frontage road. He expressed TxDOT's concern for the neighborhood but stated they must also be concerned for the 15,000 to 20,000 people a day who use the Loop. He stated they project this number will double in the next 15- 20 years. "If we don't do something now," he said, "we will never do it or it will be too late..." He noted that driver expectation is a factor they consider. He acknowledged congestion issues near the Expo Center and the benefit of coordinating on these roads now so they can include this in their plans. He added that one-way frontage roads simplify traffic signalization which allows the possibility of future turn-arounds and improves traffic flow. After a brief interruption, Mr. Swiatek went on to say options are not cast in stone. He said TxDOT wants to support the Board and get a clear direction on how to proceed. He reiterated this was a city initiated action that they were responding to and that a no build option is still on the table.

Mayor Archibald asked if it was possible to only relocate the ramp on the east side. Mr. Swiatek responded by noting that TSTC is a traffic generator similar to other uses. He explained that typically a new traffic generator will pay for ramp relocations themselves. He noted that TxDOT does not do economic development projects so there would need to be a congestion, safety or connectivity issue for them to participate. Reducing the project might limit their participation.

Mayor Archibald again asked if funding would be available if the only thing done is extending the ramp on the east side with two-way traffic north of Navajo. Mr. Swiatek answered that there would need to be a safety issue addressed. He stated that there is no accident history on this side and that the only projected traffic increase here is due to the TSTC campus. He indicated the traffic generator would therefore need to pay for this and not TxDOT. Mayor Archibald asked can you leave the west side alone and only proceed with the east side ramp relocation. Mr. Swiatek indicated that this was possible but there would be a lot less TxDOT money available. He reemphasized that including both sides as one-way facilities would be optimal. Speaking again about the east side, Mayor Archibald asked is it possible to relocate the ramp back and turn the section from Navajo to Hwy 36 into a one-way alone. Mr. Swiatek stated that it would be easier if both sides are one-way but he stated, "Yes, it's possible."

Councilman Kreitler indicated support for dropping the west side. He then noted that he did not wish to eliminate the possibility of having a two-way option north of Navajo yet. He indicated concern for access afforded to the FedEx facility and the fire apparatus repair facility.

Mr. Swiatek added that if we do improvements in multiple phases you are relying on money that may not be available in the future. He reiterated that the Board should consider how doing both sides now will optimize the project.

Judge Spurgin stated that he had driven the area. He stated he did not think there would be more than about a 90 second delay using other routes. He indicated he supports a one-way option on the east side. He stated more work is needed on the west but he agrees that one-way roads are safer. Judge Bolls noted all the emails he had received related to the west side. He indicated protecting the integrity of the neighborhood was his primary concern. He supported dropping the west side.

Mayor Archibald made a **motion** to move forward and provide direction to TxDOT to consider a ramp relocation on the east side of Loop 322 to set it back approximately a half mile and to consider the possibility of a one-way frontage road from Navajo up to Highway 36 and dropping any and all consideration at this time for the west side of Loop 322 with a **second** made by Councilman Kreitler.

On a point of order raised by Councilman Kreitler, Ms. Messer clarified that the effect of the motion would be to modify the proposed project scope and tabling action on the remaining portion to a future date. Ms. Messer also advised that the public hearing should be re-opened.

Public Hearing Re-Opened. Three individuals addressed the Board.

Speakers:

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| James Condry | Stated that one-way frontage roads are safer than two-way in an urban environment. Stated that Traffic signals operate more efficiently for frontage roads when both sides are one-way. Stated that a Texas U-turn is not possible at the intersections without one-way frontage roads. Expressed support for one-way frontage roads on both sides as being better for a system-wide improvement. |
| Edward Price | Express support for eliminating the on ramp south of Expo Dr. |
| Vicki Briggs | Expressed support for retaining west side as two-way traffic. Expressed concern with negative effects on the neighborhood if west frontage road is made one-way. |

Public Hearing Closed.

Mayor Archibald restated the motion and asked for any additional comments from members.

Mr. Swiatek acknowledged that some small traffic increase could result from making changes to both sides. He reiterated however that making both sides one-way would greatly improve the throughput of the intersection because of improved efficiency for traffic signals. This would make people less likely to go through the neighborhood. He noted that failing to achieve this efficiency would itself push more traffic into the neighborhoods.

Mayor Archibald called for a vote.

Motion carried. (4 In Favor Archibald, Bolls, Kreidler, Spurgin, 1 Opposed Swiatek)

In making his vote Mr. Swiatek stated, "In the interest of best expenditure of taxpayer dollars I'm going to say no."

3. Consideration and possible amendment to the MPO Ten-Year Project Plan.

No action taken.

4. Adjournment

The meeting was **adjourned** by Mayor Archibald at 3:34 pm.