

Minutes Tempe South Corridor Study – Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee July 14, 2010

Minutes of the Tempe South Corridor Study Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee held on Wednesday, July 14, 2010 at 5:00 p.m. at the City of Tempe Harry E. Mitchell Government Center, City Council Chambers, Tempe City Hall, 31 East 5th Street, Tempe, Arizona.

Members Present: Charles Huellmantel, Chair; Karyn Gitlis, Maple Ash; Nancy Hormann, Downtown Tempe Community; Paul Kent, University Park; Charles Lee, resident; Lisa Roach, Clark Park

Guests: Daniel Christen, METRO; Angela Dye, A Dye Design/HDR; Councilmember Shana Ellis, Tempe; Hillary Foose, METRO; Wulf Grote, METRO; Carla Kahn, METRO; Stephanie Shipp, HDR; Marc Soronson, HDR; Howard Steere, METRO

City Staff Present: Dawn M. Coomer, Greg Jordan, Jyme Sue McLaren, Amanda Nelson, Decima Sever

Chair Huellmantel called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m.

Agenda Item A1 – Consideration of June 23, 2010 meeting minutes

Ms. Gitlis moved to approve the June 23, 2010 meeting minutes with two changes:

- Change meeting start time to 5:07 pm
- Page 2, 3rd full paragraph, second line: change “of” to “or”

Ms. Hormann seconded the motion. The motion passed with Mr. Kent abstaining.

Agenda Item B1 - Modern Streetcar Project Characteristics and Benefits

Mr. Grote provided an overview of modern streetcar, highlighting streetcar systems in the United States, types of streetcar systems and July 2010 FTA Urban Circulator grant awards. Mr. Grote provided information on Portland's modern streetcar, including ridership, operating characteristics, investment stimulated, and planning goals. Numerous photos were shown to provide land use context, demonstrate how modern streetcar fits into existing neighborhoods, identify the types of destinations connected, and links to other transit systems such as light rail. The presentation also included facts on construction impacts in Portland. Mr. Grote also provided information on Seattle's modern streetcar system, including a system map, project goals, operating characteristics, fare, and development spurred by the modern streetcar investment. Information on capital and operations funding was also provided on Seattle's system. A number of pictures were shown demonstrating both curbside and median stations, bicycle lane configuration at stations, and stop design. Mr. Grote also showed photos of vehicle interiors. Mr. Grote concluded his presentation by mentioning several reasons to advance a modern streetcar as part of the Tempe South Corridor Study.

Committee members discussed the presentation and asked questions. Chair Huellmantel asked when the next opportunity for urban circulator grants will occur. Mr. Grote stated that this category is new, and the future timing is uncertain although future grants are expected. Chair Huellmantel noted that modern streetcar can operate with tree canopies as shown in Portland and Seattle.

Mr. Kent noted a difference in information presented on operations cost in the agenda background materials and material being presented by Mr. Grote. Ms. Shipp stated that the agenda materials use 2008 data.

Chair Huellmantel asked if modern streetcar always shares travel lanes in Portland and Mr. Grote noted that in most cases this is true. In some limited locations, it travels for a short distance on a single-track between Downtown and the south waterfront district. Chair Huellmantel noted that the Tempe South project will connect neighborhoods to downtown in a manner similar to the Northwest District in Portland.

Chair Huellmantel asked for clarification of actual disruption caused by construction, and Mr. Grote noted that the actual construction is much quicker than light rail. Modern streetcar is simpler construction than light rail. Three to five weeks of actual disruption is typical even if the entire construction project takes several years. Ms. Hormann noted that median demolition and moving utilities would add more time to the construction schedule, but the actual disruption to businesses would be approximately five weeks.

Chair Huellmantel asked for clarification of the organization that operates modern streetcar and buses in Seattle, and Mr. Grote was uncertain. The city of Seattle is leading the construction effort for modern streetcar projects.

Ms. Hormann asked if Portland and Seattle have integrated fare structure for light rail and modern streetcar. Mr. Grote and Ms. Shipp confirmed that Portland has an integrated structure as does Seattle. Chair Huellmantel noted that these existing systems have no federal funding; there have been numerous changes at the federal level in how modern streetcar projects are evaluated.

Chair Huellmantel asked how the bicycle lane works with modern streetcar. Mr. Grote noted that there is no bike lane in some situations and the bicycle shares the lane with modern streetcar. Careful attention is needed to this issue to ensure that bicycles do not get caught in modern streetcar tracks. Ms. Roach asked if modern streetcar stops at every stop or if a bell is rung. Mr. Grote responded that the vehicle stops at all designated stops.

Chair Huellmantel noted that rail systems attract new riders. Mr. Grote confirmed that investment decisions are made by developers near rail systems that are not made near bus systems. Mr. Kent asked for clarification of what happens to underlying bus routes when modern streetcar is implemented. Is bus service removed? Mr. Grote noted that routes are consolidated to minimize duplication. Chair Huellmantel noted that it may be possible to refocus resources to new areas, and that there has been no proposal to remove Orbit along Mill Avenue as part of the modern streetcar proposal. Mr. Grote added that some buses would still overlay the Mill Avenue corridor to minimize inconvenience caused by transfers to through-travelers. Ms. McLaren noted that reconfiguration would consider how local buses – route 65 and route 66 - would feed into a modern streetcar system. An operating plan would be defined in the next phase of study. Ms. Hormann noted that it may be possible to extend Orbit to other areas of the city. Ms. McLaren added that increasing ridership is the goal.

Mr. Kent asked about travel time of the Portland modern streetcar. Mr. Grote that the travel speed is similar to auto and Chair Huellmantel noted that modern streetcar is typically used for shorter trips and most users do not travel from one end of the line to the other. Chair Huellmantel added that modern streetcar also connects neighborhoods to the light rail system. Ms. Hormann added that in Portland, using the streetcar is faster than driving because no parking is required. Chair Huellmantel added that this committee will need to discuss various quality of life benefits in addition to ridership, including parking, community investment and environmental goals. Future meetings should focus on these benefits. Ms. Roach voiced support for projects that advance green initiatives and reduce carbon emissions.

Ms. Coomer and Ms. McLaren provided an overview of three meeting handouts: (1) map of projected residential density from the City of Tempe General Plan 2030; (2) map of Tempe South Corridor Study opportunities, neighborhood and density; (3) map and spreadsheet of investments along the Apache Blvd. portion of the light rail starter line. Ms. McLaren noted that the third attachment shows development that has occurred over the past five years. Private investment totals approximately \$780 million along the LRT corridor. Our investment in the LRT in this corridor was approximately \$360 million. The public investment totals approximately \$30 million. Chair Huellmantel requested a map of projected residential density for Apache Boulevard for a future meeting.

Agenda Item B2 – Ridership Productivity of Rail Investments

This agenda item was not discussed.

Agenda Item B3 – Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue Evaluation

Mr. Soronson addressed the committee, showing topics that will be addressed in the evaluation and different options on Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue. 2015 opening year information is required for a federal funding application submittal. Future land use beyond 2015 is an important consideration for the community. A loop concept, going north on Mill and south on Ash, has emerged as the result of recent technical analysis.

Chair Huellmantel asked for clarification of the section along 1st Street. Mr. Soronson noted that this will provide access to development along Rio Salado Parkway and potential future extensions. This issue can be explored further in engineering as design refinements are made. Chair Huellmantel suggested future exploration of the loop concept. Mr. Kent asked if there would be a station to integrate with light rail, and Mr. Soronson responded affirmatively. Ms. Hormann asked if the redevelopment potential of the different options would be considered, and Mr. Soronson responded affirmatively. A number of design refinements will also have to be addressed later in the process.

Chair Huellmantel noted that the following items would need to be discussed at the next meeting: benefits and drawbacks of Mill and Ash alignment options, as well as challenges and opportunities in the entire corridor.

Ms. McLaren added that meetings will be occurring with technical staff to ensure that all plans and concerns are fully vetted.

Ms. Gitlis asked for discussion of meeting dates and whether there could be a set meeting date to minimize conflicts. Chair Huellmantel noted that flexibility will be required to meet the pace of technical analysis. The loop concept has some merits to address utility conflicts.

Ms. Roach asked for a discussion of operating costs at a future meeting. Chair Huellmantel agreed, noting that operating issues are ultimately a council decision. This committee is focusing on benefits and drawbacks of potential alignments. Ms. Roach requested additional facts so she is prepared to discuss funding issues as they are raised in the media or community.

Ms. Gitlis asked a few questions about projected land use and Chair Huellmantel clarified that the map provided is in the 2030 General Plan.

Agenda Item B4 – Fact Analysis, Dissemination and Information Input

This agenda item was not discussed.

Agenda Item C1 – Call to the Public

There were no public appearances.

The meeting adjourned at 6:41 p.m.

Prepared by: Dawn M. Coomer