

Minutes Tempe South Corridor Study – Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee August 4, 2010

Minutes of the Tempe South Corridor Study Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee held on Wednesday, August 4, 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: Peter Bass, HDR; James Brown, HDR; Councilmember Shana Ellis; Hillary Foose, METRO; Wulf Grote, METRO; Michael Kubly, ASU; Ben Limmer, METRO; Catherine Mayorga; Jack E. Pisano, Veolia Transportation; Stephanie Shipp; HDR; Howard Steere, METRO; and Chris Upchurch, University of South Colorado

City Staff Present: Dawn M. Coomer, Jyme Sue McLaren, Decima Sever, Shauna Warner

Chair Huellmantel called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Agenda Item A1 – Consideration of July 14, 2010 meeting minutes

Ms. Hormann moved to approve the July 14, 2010 meeting minutes. Ms. Roach seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item B1 – Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue evaluation

Mr. Soronson addressed the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee and provided an overview of the Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue evaluation. Items addressed in the presentation included ridership, land use, economic development, comparative capital costs, traffic impacts and utilities. It was noted that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) evaluates projects based on the opening year, but that 2025 and beyond is important to consider to the community. FTA evaluates cost effectiveness, land use and economic development. Goals of the Tempe South project were reviewed, along with three alternatives in the downtown area: double-track along Ash Avenue north of University; double-track along Mill Avenue north of University; and a one-way loop along Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue. Opening year ridership and special event ridership was discussed. Land use information presented included zoning uses within one-half mile of the corridor, employment within one-quarter and one-half mile of the corridor, and major employers. Information on future economic development opportunities was presented including anticipated development by use, economic development within one-quarter mile, and economic development within one-half mile. Potential cross-sections were shown, and it was noted that a detailed cross-section will be developed at a future project phase. A parking assessment was provided of Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue on-street parking and potential impacts of the different options on special events was discussed. A listing of pros and cons for each of the three downtown alignment options was presented. The presentation concluded with anticipated next steps for the approval process, and items to address in design definition.

During the presentation, committee members discussed the data presented. With regard to ridership, Mr. Soronson stated that out-of-direction travel with the loop alternative may disadvantage some travelers. Chair Huellmantel noted that riders will still be closer to their final destination even with out-of-direction travel. Ms. Hormann asked if the loop could be reversed. Mr. Huellmantel noted that this would be more expensive due to infrastructure, and that this would be addressed in later portions of the presentation. Mr. Soronson noted that updated ridership information for a future year could be provided at the next Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee meeting.

Mr. Kent asked if the ridership was per day, and Mr. Soronson replied that it was estimated boardings per day. Chair Huellmantel asked if special events ridership would depend on the event characteristics. Mr. Soronson replied that it would, and that is why a range of ridership numbers is presented.

Ms. Hormann stated that the impact of special events will depend on the track location – median or curbside – as well as the alignment selected. Ms. Hormann added that there are only seven days when Mill is closed for special events. Chair Huellmantel asked if contra-flow operations would be possible on Ash during special events. Mr. Soronson replied this is possible, but there are some safety concerns and it needs some additional analysis on how it might operate in this scenario. It is also possible to stop modern streetcar operations at University during special events. Chair Huellmantel noted that Ash Avenue is very wide. Ms. Hormann noted that it may be possible to operate modern streetcar during special events even if the roadway is closed to other traffic, as done in many other communities, as long as the tracks are only on one side of the street.

Chair Huellmantel noted that it is important to consider future impacts even though the FTA only considers opening year. There was general agreement among Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee members that the one-way loop is probably the best option of the downtown alternatives. Mr. Kent asked if the loop could operate as a true loop and not operate south of University. Mr. Grote noted that this might add to the project's capital cost, but this option could be analyzed further and be presented at the next meeting. Ms. Hormann requested additional information on economic development between the three downtown options; there does not appear to be a significant difference between the options as currently presented and this does not seem logical. Mr. Soronson responded that there is overlap between the options due to the boundaries, location of anticipated development and proximity of the two alignments. Chair Huellmantel noted that the loop option is closer to established residential.

Mr. Lee asked about future extensions along Rio Salado Parkway. Mr. Soronson noted that a future extension along Rio Salado would require future study and could be a future project phase. Mr. Lee asked about a loop on 3rd Street and Rio Salado, and Mr. Soronson noted that this would put too much rail on this street and would have traffic impacts.

Chair Huellmantel noted that reducing the speed of traffic in downtown is good for pedestrian mobility, and that if people walk a small distance from the station to their final destination allows people to experience downtown. Ms. Roach agreed, noting that pedestrians should be encouraged to walk about the downtown area, and that providing too many stops is not beneficial. Ms. Gitlis also agreed and voiced support for the loop alternative as it provides access to more places. Ms. Hormann stated that traffic calming is very important for downtown as is encouraging pedestrians to walk in downtown. Chair Huellmantel stated that the walk distance for the loop option should not be considered a con as shown in the presentation.

The potential location of tracks was discussed. Chair Huellmantel stated that the one-way loop worked well to minimize utility conflict. He added that tracks along the edge are preferred as this is closer to where pedestrians are located. Ms. Gitlis asked for factors to consider in track location and event staging. Ms. Hormann responded that having tracks located on one side of the roadway only is best; however, there could also be operations of the modern streetcar during special events and that special events are only one consideration in selecting a preferred alignment. Mr. Kent noted that most of the track is located south of University and voiced support for the loop alternative as presented. The committee agreed that the one-way loop with the direction presented was appropriate.

Chair Huellmantel asked for additional information that should be provided. Mr. Kent asked how bicyclists would be accommodated, and Chair Huellmantel noted that this design detail can be discussed at a future meeting. Ms. Roach added she would like to see more analysis of a full loop option, and committee members agreed. Ms. McLaren stated there could be ridership and operations impact of the full loop option and these can be presented at the next meeting. Mr. Lee noted that additional people will visit downtown because of the modern streetcar.

Mr. Kent stated that the double-track option on Ash does not appear to be a good option to move forward. Chair Huellmantel agreed that having modern streetcar on Mill Avenue is important. Mr. Kent stated that the Mill Avenue double-track appears to have significant utility impact and there is a potential for construction impact to merchants if utilities have to be moved. Committee members generally agreed that having the loop option will create a second high-quality street in the downtown. Ms. Hormann asked for additional information on which alignment would

provide more economic development opportunities. Chair Huellmantel stated that the loop can provide a way for neighborhoods downtown to access destinations further south such as grocery stores and the hospital. Ms. Gitlis stated that the loop will mitigate parking loss along Mill Avenue, avoid utility relocation impacts, minimize construction impacts, and expand the downtown area.

Ms. Gitlis asked for additional information on utility cost on Mill Avenue and how that compares with utility impacts on University Drive with the loop option. Mr. Soronson responded that there is a water utility line between Maple and Ash on University that shifts in location and would be impacted with a full loop operation; the impact would depend on the track location.

Agenda Item B2 – Future agenda items

- Additional analysis of Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue alignment options.
- Revisions to land use maps provided at the July 14 meeting.

Ms. Roach requested additional discussion of the terminus at Southern/Rural, and Chair Huellmantel suggested this item be deferred until there is a decision on a downtown alignment.

Agenda Item C1 – Call to the public

Michael Kuby addressed the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee, asking questions about the ridership numbers. What proportion of riders transfer to modern streetcar from the light rail? What proportion of riders are going to Tempe High School? Mr. Kuby added that riders to downtown would be most affected by the additional travel time of the loop option. Are the Mill Avenue ridership higher due to extra travel time for the loop option, and what is that travel time addition? Are the modelers confident in the ridership numbers? The cost per rider is lower with the Mill double-track option.

Chair Huellmantel stated that cost along is not the only issue, and that forecasting is complex due to the use of the regional model.

The meeting adjourned at 6:28 p.m.

Prepared by: Dawn M. Coomer
Reviewed by: Jyme Sue McLaren