



Minutes Tempe South Corridor Study – Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee August 18, 2010

Minutes of the Tempe South Corridor Study Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee held on Wednesday, August 18, 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; Nancy Hormann, Downtown Tempe Community; Paul Kent, University Park; Charles Lee, resident; and Lisa Roach, Clark Park

Members Absent: Karyn Gitlis, Maple Ash

Guests: Councilmember Shana Ellis; Wulf Grote, METRO; Carla Kahn, METRO; Stephanie Shipp; HDR/METRO; Marc Soronson, HDR/METRO; Howard Steere, METRO; and David Strang, Tempe Transportation Commission

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

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

Agenda Item A1 – Consideration of August 4, 2010 meeting minutes

This agenda item was postponed.

Agenda Item B1 – Updated maps

Ms. Coomer noted that the maps have been updated as described in the cover memorandum. Ms. Coomer noted that not all neighborhoods are shown on the revised maps: Edgewater and Bridgeview homeowner associations at Hayden Ferry; Regatta Pointe near Ash and Rio Salado Parkway; Maple Ash property owners; and the Riverside neighborhood association. Mr. Huellmantel noted that the 525 association is also not shown on the maps.

Agenda Item B2 – Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue evaluation, including Mill Avenue-Ash Avenue loop alternative

Marc Soronson reviewed a PowerPoint with the committee. Information requested at the August 4 committee meeting was provided, including possible service plans for a full-loop option on Mill and Ash, streetcar track placement and special events, development adjacent to each downtown alternative, ridership, and impact of the loop configuration on future extensions. Mr. Soronson also summarized the Mill and Ash Avenue alternatives and presented a draft recommendation.

Mr. Soronson showed a map of the Mill Avenue-Ash Avenue loop and described three possible service scenarios and vehicle requirements for each scenario. The capital cost difference between the full loop and the one-way loop is less than one million dollars. Providing a wye at University and Mill would allow for future flexibility in operating the modern streetcar either as a one-way loop or a full loop.

Mr. Soronson provided additional information on possible track placement options to best serve special events and showed development maps for the Mill double-track option, the Ash Avenue double-track option, and the Mill Avenue-Ash Avenue loop option. Mr. Soronson noted that ridership information is being updated with a new background bus network that integrates recent service adjustments and summarized the federal evaluation process for modern streetcar projects. Mr. Soronson also provided information on the community ridership request for the two double-track options voiced at a prior meeting, including the transfers to light rail, trips with a destination to downtown and trips with a destination near Tempe High.

Chair Huellmantel asked for additional clarification of the ridership numbers provided, and Mr. Soronson stated that the analysis uses a travel demand model that identifies both linked and unlinked passenger trips.

Mr. Soronson summarized the alternatives analyzed. South of University, all options terminate at Southern Avenue. North of University, three options were considered: (1) Mill Avenue double-track; (2) Ash Avenue double-track; and (3) Mill-Ash loop with a downtown loop design alternative. Maps were shown of the options. Mr. Kent asked how the loop could help with future extension east or west along Rio Salado Parkway. Mr. Soronson replied that the loop could operate through part of downtown while also using Rio Salado Parkway. Mr. Grote added that modern streetcar operations could change so integrating flexibility into the construction of the modern streetcar by adding a wye at University/Mill is beneficial.

Mr. Soronson stated that the evaluation criteria for the downtown options included ridership, land use, economic development, capital and operating costs, traffic impacts and utilities. Mr. Soronson presented results of the evaluation using each criterion. Mr. Soronson noted that operating and maintenance costs were being analyzed and may be refined. Critical traffic concerns include eastbound University during the afternoon peak period and potential traffic diversion into neighborhoods. The estimated relocation cost of two waterlines along the west side of Mill Avenue would be approximately \$2.23 million, and would add eight to ten months of construction. This cost does not include planning or engineering, but only the estimated relocation cost. Mr. Soronson also provided an assessment of on-street parking and special event operating considerations.

Mr. Soronson stated that the draft locally preferred alternative (LPA) recommendation to advance to the Federal Transit Administration is the Mill and Ash loop and summarized reasons to support the recommendation. Other recommendations from the alternatives analysis include unfunded recommendations: potential extensions of modern streetcar; bus rapid transit on Rural Road; and further study of and coordination with the region on commuter rail. Mr. Soronson added that after selection of the LPA, design refinement will determine track location, traffic lane configuration, on-street parking, bicycle lane location, left turn requirements, pedestrian access points, station location and station design. Chair Huellmantel asked for a definition of a pedestrian access point, and Mr. Soronson replied that pedestrians may need to cross the street to access stations.

Mr. Soronson stated that next steps include public input on the LPA and alternatives analysis recommendations, council direction, regional actions and preparation of the federal funding application. Chair Huellmantel noted that a recommendation would be discussed at future committee meetings to allow for community input on the preliminary recommendations. Ms. McLaren noted that a public meeting may occur in late September or early October. Mr. Grote added that the preliminary recommendations may be refined based on public input received, and that design refinement will be completed before the project enters engineering. Design refinement is expected to take approximately six to eight months following adoption of the LPA and other study recommendations.

Agenda Item C1 – Call to the public

This agenda item was taken out of order. Chair Huellmantel asked if any attendees wished to address the Committee. Mike Wasco, who lives in downtown, addressed the Committee. Mr. Wasco expressed support for the modern streetcar project. Mr. Wasco asked if raised platforms would be required for the modern streetcar. Mr. Wasco suggested that the system operating costs could be offset by the use of battery-powered vehicles that are potentially solar-powered. Mr. Wasco asked if adding a wye at the northwest corner of Rio Salado and Ash would allow future single-track modern streetcar operation to the Tempe Center for the Arts.

Chair Huellmantel stated that many of these issues will be addressed in future phases of the project. Modern streetcar has less expensive, simpler stations. Prototype systems that run on battery-power are a challenge here given high temperatures. This issue can be explored in the future. Chair Huellmantel added that trees can be provided with the overhead wires as they do in Portland. The wye can be studied in more detail and brought back for discussion at a future meeting.

Agenda Item B2 – Mill Avenue and Ash Avenue evaluation, including Mill Avenue-Ash Avenue loop alternative

Chair Huellmantel asked for committee discussion of the preliminary recommendations. Ms. Roach voiced support for the loop option, that it helps to expand downtown and complements Mill Avenue as the iconic street. Ms. Roach stated that a frequently asked questions document should be provided to the committee and specifically address why modern streetcar is better than a bus. The document should use simple terms to address issues that might

come up at public meetings. Chair Huellmantel stated that METRO is preparing this list of questions and that it can be provided to the Committee when available.

Mr. Kent stated that he preferred the Mill Avenue double-track option because Mill is iconic, but that he also likes the idea of expanding downtown with the loop option. He requested a better understanding of construction impacts. Chair Huellmantel stated that moving the waterline on Mill Avenue would add another eight to ten months of construction. Mr. Kent stated that this impact should be clearly explained to the public to justify the loop alternative recommendation. Chair Huellmantel stated that the construction impact of modern streetcar is less than light rail.

Ms. Hormann stated she preferred the loop option, and asked if Ash Avenue could operate in two directions during special events. Mr. Soronson stated that this was being analyzed and would depend on track location and whether the right-of-way was dedicated or shared on Ash Avenue. Ms. Hormann added that the Mill Avenue median would have to be removed in order to operate modern streetcar during special events on Mill Avenue, which would cause more construction impact to businesses. Ms. Hormann stated that stopping at University/Mill is a possibility with special events, but operating on Ash is preferable to stopping service at University/Mill. Mr. Grote added that removing the median would require additional project funding as this feature is not included in the cost estimate. However, working with designers on special events operations will continue as the project is engineered.

Mr. Huellmantel clarified that removing the median on Mill Avenue is not being considered or explored at this time.

Mr. Lee stated that he supports the modern streetcar project, and asked if there would be more traffic on Mill Avenue without a median. Mr. Huellmantel added that having more fast-moving traffic on Mill Avenue would not be beneficial to downtown.

Mr. Huellmantel asked if anyone else wished to address the Committee, and no one wished to address the committee.

Agenda Item B3 – Future agenda items

Ms. McLaren asked if any other issues from the community should be discussed at a future meeting. Chair Huellmantel responded that this should be on the agenda for the next meeting. Mr. Lee stated that Ash Avenue does have a number of utilities that could affect the Ash Avenue alignment.

The following future agenda items were noted:

- Frequently asked questions document
- Consideration of August 4, 2010 meeting minutes
- Utilities on Ash Avenue

Ms. Coomer stated that the next meeting is scheduled for September 29, 2010. Chair Huellmantel stated this date may change depending on the public hearing process.

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Prepared by: Dawn M. Coomer

Reviewed by: Jyme Sue McLaren