

TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MINUTES

June 6, 2002

The Transportation Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on June 6, 2002 at 9:30 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT	COUNCIL PRESENT	OFFICERS PRESENT
Mike Whalen, Chairman Rex Griswold Janie Thom	None	None

1. Discuss and consider the Mesa 2025 Transportation Plan.

Transportation Plan Coordinator Kevin Wallace addressed the Committee relative to this agenda item and introduced Dennis Davis, with the firm of Parsons Brinckerhoff. Mr. Wallace stated that Mr. Davis will provide an overview of the Transportation Plan.

Mr. Wallace stated that the plan before the Committee is the result of approximately two years of work and effort on the part of the citizens' committee and the public and expressed appreciation to everyone involved in this process. He commented on the fact that a large funding shortfall exists and said that as effort is expended to implement the plan, staff will be attempting to decide which elements of the plan should be accomplished first. He added the opinion that staff will continue to learn as they implement the plan over the next several years through further analysis, and added that public involvement will remain a crucial part of the project particularly when street projects are involved.

Mr. Davis addressed the members of the Committee and stated that the plan's objectives include reducing congestion, improving access and mobility, the coordination of land use and transportation and to provide for all modes of transportation. He added that the proposal represents a multi-modal plan, which deals with all aspects of transportation.

Mr. Davis provided a brief overview of the Street Plan, which was designed to address many of the capacity needs, provide system continuity, improve system maintenance, and support growth and economic development areas; the Transit Plan, which will play an increasingly important role in the City of Mesa transportation system and provides a full range of transit technologies including local bus, express bus/bus rapid transit (BRT), circulators, transit priority corridors, light rail transit, paratransit, and commuter rail. He noted that the plan also includes transit facilities such as Park & Ride lots, a

downtown transit center and an operations and maintenance facility.

Mr. Davis also discussed the Bicycle Plan and stressed the importance of providing a bicycle system that offers a continuous, integrated network of routes, lanes and shared-use paths spaced at no more than one mile apart. He noted that facilities are included in the future bicycle system that close gaps in the existing network and provide connections with neighboring jurisdictions. He added that the plan calls for the construction of 65 miles of shared-use paths along canal banks and freeway corridors, which will serve as vital links to the overall bicycle system. Mr. Davis also provided information on the Pedestrian Plan which provides an environment where walking is enjoyable and convenient for people of all ages. He said that recommendations for future pedestrian improvements focus on upgrading the accessibility and convenience of the overall pedestrian environment. He explained that this requires developing and implementing pedestrian-oriented design standards, both for capital roadway improvements and for the design of future development and redevelopment projects.

Mr. Davis provided the Committee with a brief overview of the Travel Demand Management (TDM) Plan and said that it can be defined as the application of various strategies to promote the more efficient use of existing transportation systems. He added that TDM measures affect the demand side of transportation as opposed to the capacity and the programs are designed to maximize the people-moving capability of the transportation system by increasing the number of persons in a vehicle or by influencing the time of or need to travel. He stated that TDM can provide multiple benefits, including reduced traffic congestion, road and parking facility cost savings, user financial savings, increased road safety, increased travel choice, increased equity, reduced pollution and energy savings.

Mr. Davis briefly commented on the Town Center Plan and explained that this has been developed to support the redevelopment of downtown and the implementation of the Town Center Concept. He added that the Town Center Plan includes a number of transportation improvements to enhance the streetscape and pedestrian linkages in the Town Center and to improve transit service. He noted that the plan includes a designation for traffic streets, pedestrian streets and transit streets.

Mr. Davis also discussed the Finance Plan and said that given projected growth trends and budget restraints, it will be difficult to provide for the community's need to widen and extend City streets, expand the transit system, as well as improve bicycle and pedestrian facilities. He reported that the Finance Plan includes a detailed evaluation of the estimated cost and projected revenue for the transportation system and briefly outlined estimated costs in 2002 dollars to implement, operate and maintain each of the plan components.

Mr. Davis stated that the implementation of the Transportation Plan is expected to occur in phases over the next 25 years and added that actual implementation will depend on a number of factors including funding, cost sharing, joint projects, development patterns and public input. He noted that additional revenue sources to offset the shortfall must be identified in order for the plan to be implemented.

Discussion ensued relative to the following issues:

- T1 at Loop 202 and Mesa Drive and the inclusion of language in the report that states that the project is conditional based upon further analysis and public input.

It was the consensus of the Committee that this item remain in the plan and be the subject of additional future study.

- New T1 at U.S. 60 and Lindsay Road and the inclusion of language in the report that states that the project is conditional based upon further analysis and public input.

Committeemember Thom indicated opposition to this item and recommended that it be removed from the plan.

Committeemember Griswold commented that there is a huge backup at Gilbert Road due to the fact that two miles of traffic come from one exit. He added that although he is not saying it is a great idea, he is suggesting that this should be looked at for traffic flow reasons.

Chairman Whalen said that he would support allowing this to remain in the plan, but asked that the minutes reflect that this is not the unanimous decision of the Committee.

- Higley Parkway and the fact that the current language states that Higley would be converted to a parkway “only” if it is continued across the Indian community be retained.

Committeemember Thom stated that this item can remain in the plan as is.

Chairman Whalen concurred with Committeemember Thom’s comment and added that he tends to agree with staff that it is vital that the City gets the bridge across the Salt River and the connection with the Beeline Highway. The language “especially if the bridge is added” will be included in the document.

- LRT on Main Street and staff’s recommendation/support for the existing language in the plan which calls for a Main Street alignment through the Town Center.

Chairman Whalen said that he has concerns regarding a Main Street alignment and questioned the appropriateness of identifying this now before the City even knows whether it will proceed forward with a light rail system. He stated a preference for identifying the fact that the possibility exists that it could come to the Town Center rather than specifically identifying Main Street as the location. He recommended that the report indicate that the LRT will be brought to the Town Center area, but not identify a specific route.

Committeemember Thom recommended that staff talk to staff in the City of Chandler and follow their recommendations. She stated the opinion that a light rail system is too expensive and provides an inflexible route and added that business people in the downtown area are opposed to it because they feel it will negatively impact their business operations. She added the opinion that a light rail system would further hamper people from going to the downtown area and said that she is opposed to utilizing tax dollars for the purpose of even conducting research regarding this issue. She expressed the opinion that the proposal represents a waste of money and should be abandoned in its entirety.

Committeemember Griswold said that although there is a lot that the City wants to do, they still

have to determine how to get there. He said he would like to put down that they would like to pursue it, that it may work and that perhaps funding could be secured. He said he doesn't have a problem indicating in the report that the possibility of having an LRT system in the downtown area at some future point will be discussed.

Chairman Whalen stated that he fully supports identifying on the plan that the LRT will come to EVIT and to the Park & Ride. He added that what he is not comfortable with at this time is how they get from EVIT to the downtown area.

Committeemember Griswold clarified that conceptually he doesn't mind showing a light rail component going towards or in or through the downtown area. He said that he too is not comfortable saying exactly what the streets will be, what the stops will be and the exact location. He added that he believes the plan should include something regarding this issue, but added that how they actually get there will have to be determined.

Chairman Whalen summarized the discussion and said that at least two members of the Committee would like to see light rail reach the Town Center if it is feasibly fundable and that one member is adamantly in opposition to the concept. He said that for purposes of today's meeting, the two members in support agree with staff's recommendation that the system come to the edge of the Town Center along the Main Street corridor and that a decision be made in the future as to where it goes from there.

- Six-lane streets in the SE area and showing streets with six-lane cross sections in the plan and revisiting issue through a SE sub-area study.

Committeemember Thom said that she thinks the plan is a good one, but would like to offer two changes. She questioned whether taking Southern Avenue to six lanes makes sense in view of the fact that the freeway is being widened. She said that she would prefer a trade-off or something like that to widen Sossaman Road. Committeemember Thom added that she understands that there are plans in place for Sossaman Road to become a major entrance into the Williams Gateway Airport (WGA) facility and commented that she is already receiving numerous complaints from people regarding traffic problems on Sossaman Road and indicated that the widening of Sossaman should be a priority.

Committeemember Thom also stated that some areas along Sossaman Road are flood channels and asked staff to contact Maricopa County and see if there is a possibility that the widening of Sossaman Road could incorporate the flood control channel so the widening and a subsurface channel could be done similar to the one that was done between Higley Road and Power Road on Broadway. She said that she would like to have a lot of work done on Sossaman Road and to abandon Southern Avenue. She commented that the remainder of the plan looks great and commended staff for their efforts and hard work.

Committeemember Griswold said that he has been involved in this issue for over one year and he thinks the plan is a great one.

- Funding shortfall that must be addressed and the importance of clearly stating in the executive summary and the finance plan that there is a funding shortfall that must be addressed.

Committeemember Thom explained that she submitted a plan to reduce this year's budget by \$165 million and said that she believes with savings in other departments, money will be freed up to pay for transportation. She added that she is also participating in a study regarding the possibility of selling off some of the excess property that the City owns in order to provide additional money for this purpose. She stated that City streets and roads are capital investments and investments in the future. She emphasized that she does not believe that it is necessary to raise taxes at the present time. Committeemember Thom commented that she does not intend to fund the light rail component of the plan, but is very interested in street improvements, particularly in her district.

Committeemember Griswold said that he would like to look at different funding sources. He added that staff has developed a great build out plan to 2025, but how the City gets there, particularly when impact fees go down towards zero once you reach build out, is going to be the real challenge, in terms of running the City and financing infrastructure. He said that this is a very crucial component and effort will have to be expended to find a way to fund it.

Chairman Whalen stated that he is open to looking at various options, including a campaign for a transportation sales tax component, once the Quality of Life component reduces if the City had some dedicated projects that they needed to move forward with. He added the opinion that public support is available with reference to transportation issues, and said he is encouraged by the regional situation and believes if there were a regional transportation tax imposed, the City would receive its prorated share.

- Importance of maintaining the transportation system as a priority and the fact that the report discusses the importance of maintaining the transportation system as a priority.

Committeemember Griswold stated the opinion that prioritization will be the challenge for the Council over the next couple of years.

Committeemember Thom agreed with Committeemember Griswold's comment and added the opinion that the Quality of Life sales tax that was approved by the voters in May of 1988 was meant for police protection, fire protection, streets and roads, and parks. She said that she does not believe that the City should be spending more of the sales tax proceeds on transportation needs.

Mr. Davis and staff responded to additional questions from the members of the Committee relative to the handouts (See Attachments 1. and 2.).

In response to a question from Committeemember Thom, Mr. Davis advised that the City intends to lease property from EVIT until it is able to come to an agreement with the EVIT Board, and when the LRT is extended into the downtown area, the Park & Ride lot that would be initially built on the EVIT property would not have to be as large. He added that the lot could be shrunk and some of the land could be returned to EVIT for their use or they could do a commercial venture or a joint venture so that the size necessary for the initial Park & Ride lot could be much smaller, assuming you build something

in the downtown area.

Committeemember Thom said she would like to comment on the Mesa Quality of Life sales tax. She stated that staff's priorities, where they lined out previous language and inserted new language, originally the Arts & Entertainment, Cultural and Recreational items were 14, 15 and 16 on the list of things that would be financed by the funding. She said she just wanted to point out that this was not a priority in the past and that the Quality of Life sales tax should be used for transportation as far as building and maintaining streets as a priority equal to police and fire protection.

In response to a request from Committeemember Thom, staff provided an explanation regarding Community Facility Districts.

Staff advised that the Committee's comments and suggestions would be used to update the report that will be presented to the full Council for their review and consideration.

Chairman Whalen thanked staff for their presentation.

2. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Transportation Committee meeting adjourned at 12:09 p.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Transportation Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 6th day of June 2002. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

BARBARA JONES, CITY CLERK