



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

May 6, 2010

The Transportation & Infrastructure Committee of the City of Mesa met in the lower level meeting room of the Council Chambers, 57 East 1st Street, on May 6, 2010 at 10:14 a.m.

COMMITTEE PRESENT

Alex Finter, Chairman
Kyle Jones
Dave Richins

COMMITTEE ABSENT

None

STAFF PRESENT

Jack Friedline
Donna Bronski

1. Items from citizens present.

There were no items from citizens present.

2. Hear a presentation, discuss and make a recommendation on the Central Mesa Light Rail Transit Extension Project and Stakeholder Advisory Committee input.

Deputy Transportation Director Mike James advised that METRO representatives, Project Development Director Wulf Grote and Corridor Project Manager Marc Soronson, were present to answer questions as well as staff from each of the City departments involved in the project. He noted that a large map posted on the wall behind the Committee indicated station locations proposed by the Light Rail Stakeholder Advisory Committee. Mr. James offered to review the PowerPoint presentation (**see Attachment 1**) that was previously presented to the Council at the April 29th Study Session.

Committeemember Richins requested that the presentation begin with the slide titled "Central Mesa Project Schedule" (see page 3 of Attachment 1), which lists the completion dates for various phases of the project.

Mr. Grote addressed the Committee and stated that the project is scheduled for completion in 2016 with the design phase beginning this summer. He said that approval by the Federal Transit Administration is anticipated by June, after which the design contract can be awarded. Mr. Grote advised that in advance of awarding the design contract, many of the design elements (see page 4 of Attachment 1) have been addressed through the Stakeholder Advisory Committee

and with input from the community. He noted that the Stakeholder group was instrumental in developing proposed station locations and the street configuration. Mr. Grote advised that the four proposed station locations are: west of Alma School, east of Country Club, east of Center and east of Mesa Drive. He said that the street configuration leading into the Sycamore Station would continue east to Country Club with light rail in the middle, two traffic lanes in each direction, a bike lane and no parking along the street.

Committeemember Richins asked how difficult it would be to continue the street configuration that presently exists between Mesa Drive and Country Club west to Sycamore to include on-street parking, wider sidewalks, street furniture and trees.

Mr. James said that extending the sidewalk and streetscape would require additional funding. He advised that the West Main Street Plan calls for new development in the area to dedicate additional land that would enable two lanes of light rail, two lanes of traffic in each direction, a bike lane, on-street parking and a ten-foot sidewalk. He added that this is a plan for the future that will be implemented as redevelopment occurs.

Committeemember Jones noted that the intent now is to minimize the impact on property owners with regard to the alignment, but he added that the configuration between Longmore and Country Club could change in the future without causing a major impact on property owners.

Mr. Grote continued the presentation by stating that a key issue in the downtown area was to retain the environment that exists today, including the pedestrian environment, parking and the curbs. He advised that the configuration would place light rail in the median with a single lane of traffic in each direction and the existing left turn lanes would be maintained.

Discussion ensued relative to the fact that landscaping would be installed in those areas that do not presently have left turn lanes; and that the configuration would enable a future option to create a through lane by eliminating the dedicated left turn.

Mr. Grote stated that although the sites for three traction power stations are yet to be determined, the design engineers would make recommendations regarding the locations.

In response to a question from Chairman Finter, Mr. Grote said that the traction power station buildings would be approximately 20 by 40 feet and 12 feet high (see page 7 of Attachment 1). He added that additional space would be required around the building for access, landscaping and screening.

Chairman Finter expressed concern regarding potential problems that could arise in the process of acquiring property for the traction power stations.

Mr. Grote advised that more than one property would meet the requirements for the location of each traction power station building, and he said that identification of sites would be a part of the future design process. He added that the park and ride lot at Mesa Drive could also serve as a possible site.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that another possible site for a traction power station at the end of the line is property located east of Pioneer Park; that traction power

stations would be located approximately one mile apart; and that there are multiple property options at the end of the line.

Responding to comments by Committeemember Richins regarding Morris Street, Transportation Director Dan Cleavenger concurred that he was unaware of any reason that the street should continue to exist. He added that the site could accommodate a traction power station and provide additional parking.

Committeemember Jones agreed that the Morris Street area would be a good option for the traction power station, and he suggested that the area could also be utilized as a transfer location for buses from Chandler that link to the Light Rail system.

In response to a question from Chairman Finter regarding the "tail track" section, Mr. Grote advised that a section of track is required at the end of the line to provide storage for a three-car train. He stated that an area immediately east of Hobson Street has been identified for that purpose.

Further discussion ensued relative to the fact that the City preferred to locate the "tail track" section east of Hobson rather than in front of Pioneer Park or the Temple; and that the station platform would be located approximately one and a half blocks east of Mesa Drive.

Mr. Grote continued the presentation by advising that ridership is expected to average 4,750 per day (see page 7 of Attachment 1). He noted that Regional Proposition 400 funds would cover approximately 40 percent of the project and 60 percent of the funding would come from Federal sources. He advised that the operating costs will be a City of Mesa responsibility, which after receipt of the City's share of fare box receipts will total approximately \$3.5 million annually.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the fact that the operating costs have been included in budget projections.

Mr. Grote stated that the environmental assessment is underway, and he reviewed the schedule of current and future activities (see page 8 of Attachment 1). He noted that land acquisition cannot begin until the environmental assessment has been completed. Mr. Grote added that although the City has pre-award authority to initiate the utility relocations required for the project, the Federal government would not provide funding until the grant is awarded. He advised that the current plan is to make a presentation to the full Council on May 17th regarding station locations, street configuration and operating funds.

Committeemember Richins commented on the proposed station locations and clarified that he was not proposing a fifth station. He inquired as to the reason for not locating one of the four stations between Country Club Drive and Alma School Road.

Mr. Grote stated that stations were typically located at arterial streets in order to interface with the bus system.

Councilmember Richins noted that a bus transfer station located at the Sycamore Light Rail station services the buses on the Alma School Road route.

Mr. James explained that the bus transit center at the Sycamore Light Rail station serves other routes in addition to the Alma School bus route and that a transfer station at Alma School Road would enable some buses to continue on rather than diverting to the Sycamore transit center.

Responding to Committeemember Richins' request for information on cost savings for the two-thirds mile each way between the transit center and Alma School Road, Mr. James advised that a bus typically costs \$5.57 per mile multiplied by the number of trips and the number of days of service. He offered to calculate the cost savings and provide the information to the Committee.

Committeemember Richins stated the opinion that the bus transit center at the Sycamore Station could handle the transfers for the Alma School Road route. He said that in driving the completed area along the Light Rail Transit (LRT) system, areas where stations are located are experiencing a greater amount of redevelopment compared to areas without stations. He noted that the most challenged section of Main Street is the area between Alma School Road and Country Club Drive, which is also densely populated. Committeemember Richins expressed concern that the opportunity for redevelopment of this area could be missed, and he added that his long-term vision would be to extend the downtown streetscape to the west.

Mr. James said that this area of Main Street was discussed with the stakeholders, and he noted that redevelopment potential exists on both sides of Alma School Road. He added that additional costs would be incurred because properties at Extension and Main are in close proximity to the street.

Committeemember Richins noted that the Light Rail was constructed in downtown Phoenix where many buildings are close to the street. He suggested that a location west of Alma School could become a successful community neighborhood station.

Mr. Grote stated that Alma School would be an important transit connection and that many passengers would prefer not to be diverted to the Sycamore Station.

Committeemember Richins expressed the opinion that the potential for redevelopment east of Alma School would be more important to the City than the transit connection.

Mr. Grote explained that stations are typically spaced approximately one mile or less apart based on research that indicates that passengers are willing to walk one-half mile to board the light rail system. He said that locating the station east of Alma School could create gaps in coverage.

Assistant to the City Manager Scott Butler noted that the discussion appears to center on if locating the station east of Alma School is worth the tradeoff of losing the transit connectivity at Alma School Road. He suggested that additional data was needed to evaluate the options.

Mr. Cleavenger said that another consideration is that an increasing number of passengers on the north/south Alma School bus route will want to travel east utilizing the light rail system.

Mr. James added that although Mesa residents typically travel west to other destinations, the Light Rail System will enable Valley residents to travel east to destinations such as the Mesa Arts Center and the museums. He advised that negative comments were received from the

community regarding the half-mile stops along Apache Boulevard in Tempe that were considered to be too frequent and resulted in slower travel times.

Chairman Finter stated that there appears to be agreement on plans for the downtown area, and he suggested that additional information regarding the Alma School Road area be presented to the Committee prior to the May 17th Study Session.

Committeemember Jones, who served as Chairman of the stakeholders' group, stated that the slowest section of the Light Rail Transit System is in Tempe. He agreed that the area west of Alma School is densely populated and has properties with the potential for redevelopment.

In response to a question from Committeemember Jones, Mr. James advised that the Alma School bus currently travels north on Alma School from Chandler, turns west on Main to the transit center at the Sycamore Station, returns east on Main to Alma School, travels north to Riverview, travels south on Alma School, turns west on Main to the transit center at the Sycamore Station, travels east on Main to Alma School and then continues south on Alma School to Chandler.

Responding to a question from Committeemember Richins, Mr. James stated that the BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) Main Street link from the east would circulate on either First Street or First Avenue and terminate on Center Street in downtown Mesa and then return east to Power Road to Superstition Springs Mall. He stated that the northbound Arizona Avenue/Country Club Drive bus route would stop just south of Main Street, continue north to First Street, circulate east to Center Street, travel south on Center to the Center Street station and then circulate back to travel southward on Country Club Drive/Arizona Avenue.

Mr. Grote noted that a determination was made that the best location for the bus connection was in the downtown area rather than at the end of the line. He stated that some good points were raised regarding the station location, and he said that additional information could be gathered for presentation to the Committee regarding the site of the station and the impact on bus connections.

Additional discussion ensued relative to the fact that the Committee could hold another meeting prior to May 17th in order to provide two well-defined options to the full Council; that the May 17th date was chosen in order to have a Mesa Council action prior to METRO awarding the contract; and that the METRO Board plans to meet in early June to award the engineering contract, with the work scheduled to begin in July.

Mr. Butler suggested that the issue could be delayed until the first Council meeting in June. He said that the issues of bus connectivity and types of redevelopment need to be addressed prior to the Council taking action.

Committeemember Richins noted that bus routes can be changed but once constructed, light rail stations cannot be changed.

Chairman Finter advised that he would not be available from May 23rd to June 2nd.

In response to a question from Committeemember Jones, Mr. Grote estimated that a fifth station would cost in excess of \$5 million.

Deputy City Manager Jack Friedline said that staff would make an effort to provide additional information to the Council at the May 17th Study Session.

Mr. Soronson said that two options have been proposed for consideration: one is to move a station to the area of Extension and the other is to add a fifth station. He said that in addition to the engineering work, travel forecasting is required which involves developing two new networks, running the models for both, and then analyzing the data. Mr. Sorenson stated that additional work is required in order to address the questions that have been raised.

Mr. Butler advised the METRO Board is scheduled to meet on June 16th.

Committeemember Richins noted that this is a fifty-year decision, and he stated the opinion that the Council should take the time to base the decision on complete data.

Mr. Soronson explained that other complications exist that relate to the location of The Landmark and Laradas on the corners of Extension and Main in addition to several historic properties that are located west of that intersection. He noted that the track alignment at Extension has a "jog" to prevent a negative impact on The Landmark and that a station located further away from Extension would possibly require two additional pedestrian crossings.

Committeemember Richins agreed that additional pedestrian crossings would be important to the area.

Mr. Butler stated that staff would work with Mr. Friedline to determine when the data will be presented to Council.

Chairman Finter summarized that the next discussion regarding this issue would be at a future Study Session, and he thanked staff and the METRO representatives for the presentation.

3. Adjournment.

Without objection, the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

I hereby certify that the foregoing minutes are a true and correct copy of the minutes of the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee meeting of the City of Mesa, Arizona, held on the 6th day of May 2010. I further certify that the meeting was duly called and held and that a quorum was present.

LINDA CROCKER, CITY CLERK

baa

Attachment (1)