



Meeting Notes

SUBJECT: Spenard Road Reconstruction

PROJECT NO.: MOA Project No. 03-21
ADOT&PF Project No. HRO-001(172)/53986

GROUP: Citizens' Advisory Group

DATE: June 20, 2006

TIME: 11 am – 1 pm

LOCATION: CIRI Building, 4th Floor Conference Room,
2525 C Street, Anchorage, AK

MEETING OUTREACH: Agenda Packet mailed to CAG Members on 6/13/06;
E-mail with draft agenda sent to CAG Members on 6/13/06;
Phone call reminder to each member on 6/19/06.

MEETING ATTENDANCE: 24

MEETING MATERIALS: Agenda; Aerial photo with preliminary layout overlay

STAFF PRESENT: *ADOT&PF:* Judy Dougherty
MOA: John Smith; Randy Gaynor
Lounsbury Associates: Jim Sawhill; Dave Krehmeier;
Patrick Hoffman; Charles Winkler
Travis Peterson Environmental Consultants: Noah Zogas
Tryck Nyman Hayes: Oona Martin; Randy Lyons
Brooks & Associates: Anne Brooks; Kathy Burgess;
Betty Caudle

MEETING INFORMATION:

Upon arrival, group members were directed to select a box lunch and take their places at a large table. While they ate their lunches, the meeting presentations began.

John Smith opened the meeting by welcoming the members.

Anne Brooks gave a brief orientation to the meeting format and agenda. Anne then introduced the first speaker, Jody Karcz, Senior Planner with the Municipality of Anchorage Public Transportation Department.

Public Transit Facilities

Jody Karcz of MOA People Mover spoke about public transportation on the project corridor.

Highlights:

- Pedestrian improvements on lower Spenard led to higher transit ridership almost immediately after the end of construction. This project could have the same effect for upper Spenard.
- There are 9 pairs of bus stops on the corridor; 8% of the system route miles are here; 20% of the total ridership uses the buses here. People Mover Route 7 covers the Spenard Road corridor.
- Bus pullouts make it hard for the buses to get back in traffic.
- All the buses are accessible (by wheelchairs) and have bike racks.
- Bus intervals on the corridor are half hours on weekdays; hourly on weekends.
- People Mover prefers to keep the on-street stops and to have good pedestrian access.
- Bus bulbs work well [as transit stops] on Cordova where there was insufficient right of way for pullouts.
- Bus passes and route maps were provided to CAG members. Jody encouraged them to ride the bus along the project corridor so they could look at the route and bus facilities from a bus riders perspective.

Discussion:

- Are there going to be quicker solutions to securing wheelchairs? Securing time is now about 3 – 4 minutes. Average dwell time at a stop is 30 seconds.
- How do buses make up time? Sometimes in the middle of a route, sometimes at the end of the route, before they begin another.
- Traffic backs up behind a bus stopped in a traffic lane. Usually it's not a long time or very often. We can also fix scheduling to avoid school bus congestion times. Pullouts create costs to the bus operator and delay to bus riders; we would like to have signal preemption for buses to speed things up. In cities where they have this, you find cars intentionally queuing behind buses to get through the traffic lights faster.
- What are public transportation's plans for 20 years from now—will intervals [between buses] get shorter? History is not very encouraging; it won't happen unless the community is willing to pay for it. Unless attitudes [and funding levels] change, we can expect to continue with our current plan of half hour intervals on this route.
- Look at bus stop at Spenard/Benson.

Pedestrian Facilities

Steve Schrader of MOA PM&E spoke about disabled access requirements.

Highlights:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law. There is no particular government agency to watch over it.
- Many ADA guidelines have been adopted as law.
- ADA guidelines for transportation rights of way are still in draft form.
- Curb ramps must have a maximum of 8% and minimum of 5% slope.

- Pedestrian facilities are necessary on a street for the ADA elements to work.
- Maximum 2% cross slope is an important restriction for driveways that cross sidewalks. Driveways can be reconstructed to be compliant or a pedestrian access route has to be constructed to get around it.
- 4 ft. is the minimum width for pedestrian access; it must be clear and unobstructed.
- The Municipality has developed some common ADA standards, but adaptations often have to be made depending on local conditions.

Discussion:

- We like to see as many parallel driveway cuts as possible rather than perpendicular. This means the ramp is in the direction of travel of the sidewalk. 15th Avenue at Ingra parallel cuts didn't work well for some reason. The two approaches to a driveway are depressed or terraced, and the choice is a matter of site constraints.
- My driveway is 14 inches higher than street level—what will be done? This is a situation to be resolved by the design team. Temporary construction permits allow us to make a transition from the driveway to the parking lot. It's normal to make these accommodations.
- What is the plan for keeping pedestrian access clear in the winter? Street Maintenance is acquiring equipment for keeping walkways clear. We know there is a buildup of snow and ice in the winter, but we are trying to deal with it.
- Are there standards or conditions for when bikes use the sidewalk? Would need to consult the trails plan on this.
- I'd like to see the maintenance component of the design as soon as possible so that the designs could be rated for ease and cost of maintenance. www.access-board.gov has the ADA access rules. The designers will have to work with individual properties to apply these rules.

Pedestrian Safety at Signalized Intersections

John Crapps of MOA Traffic Department spoke about pedestrian traffic signals.

Highlights:

- A major problem at signalized intersections with dual right turn lanes is vehicles' failure to yield to pedestrians.
- A recent study of use of countdown pedestrian lights didn't see any difference before and after. It was also learned that only 60% of pedestrians use the signal properly.
- Problems arise because people don't understand the meaning of signals, that they can cross during the flashing segment but not begin to cross when the signal is flashing.
- 4 ft per second is the pedestrian speed assumed in the timing of crosswalk signals, though this may be revised to a slower speed soon.
- Countdown timers are going in at various locations around town, but Traffic is watching them to assess maintenance needs, etc. before they are universally installed.
- 2 intersections in town have signals with audible beep sounds for the blind. Those are being observed to see how well they work.
- State projects have been using 2 pedestrian ramps rather than 1 and trying to make push buttons more accessible.

Discussion:

- You must be able to clear snow from around push buttons with conventional snow removal equipment. Hand shoveling just isn't feasible or cost effective.
- Is there anywhere that push buttons are on pedestals? Lake Otis and 88th, Lake Otis and Tudor. But they have a tendency to get taken out by vehicles. The destruction means a maintenance nightmare to get them back up functioning.

Design Alternatives Review

The project team developed preliminary 3-lane design alternatives. The drawings for the project corridor were broken down into four segments and a station was established for each segment in the meeting room. A project team member and a recorder manned each station.

The CAG members were then divided into four subgroups for a round-robin review of the preliminary drawings. They had 15-minutes at each station. They were given the opportunity to ask questions, comment, as well as to make suggestions on the design alternatives. Below are their comments/questions/suggestions as recorded.

Station 1 – Spenard/Minnesota Couplet

- 36th Avenue will need 3-eastbound through lanes west of the intersection for about 600'
- People on 36th E of Spenard will lose left turning capability
- Detached sidewalk and green improvements are possible in ROW at Minnesota & Spenard, NE Corner
- Make changes at Northern Lights instead of here
- There were some concerns about signal timing at the proposed 36th & Minnesota intersection
- Land use may change in "island", the area bounded by Spenard, 36th and Minnesota.
- Parking lot on NW corner of 36th/Spenard will have to be reconfigured; parking loss for CIHA
- Single EB lane at Spenard/Minnesota on west approach- not practicable, peak traffic would back up too much
- Businesses don't like idea – forced to use Minnesota
- May make Spenard worse

Station 2 – 36th to 31st (Benson)

- Sidewalk widths – 4' – 8'?
- Bus stops – pull outs? Do not write them off. Look for opportunities. How do these affect business parking? May require additional right-of-way
- Concern about turning lane becoming passing on curve south of Benson – 4 lane from 30th mid 31st to 32nd "sight issue"
- Would like to see separation between back of curb and edge of sidewalk
- Pedestrian crossing in other areas, besides at signalized intersections, look for other opportunities – bus stops, etc.
- Concerns about ROW acquisition
- Possible bike lane in roadway

- 31st intersection – concern about high accident potential; possible “right turn only” – median, etc.
- 32nd is also of concern – both intersections, 31st and 32nd between the curves, it’s hard to get on Spenard, accident concern
- Possible opportunity for bus pullout near 32nd Ave, ROW available and makes corner safer.

Station 3 – 31st to 25th (Benson/N. Lights)

- Likes 5’ sidewalks
- Why 3 to 4-lanes at intersection? A: Greater intersection capacity
- How will folks turn onto property along Spenard at N.Lts/27th (Brown Jug)? With 5-lane and medians, it is blocked from Spenard. We will take a closer look at driveway locations and medians as the design progresses
- Snow plowing on sidewalks – how will this be accomplished? Previously discussed
- Wants a design that allows room for sidewalk plowing w/o triple the cost
- Think ahead and connect design with snow removal/maintenance
- How much wider will lanes be? A: 12’ through lanes, 14-foot center turn lane on 3-lane section
- Any idea of acquisition costs? A: Not at this time.
- Reminder: Federal highway dollars pay for building/improving the road; Municipal dollars pay to maintain it
- Access to Blaine’s. Will folks make a U-turn at Benson? A: if we widen slightly at the intersection.
- Left turn lane onto 27th for Bear’s Tooth traffic—is turn pocket long enough? I see a lot of cars turn onto that road. We are still trying to resolve issues at this location
- Can median be opened at 29th? A: If we do, we will be back to the same problems that we have now.
- I have seen lots of left turns at 29th.
- People will have trouble getting to businesses with 5-lane intersections and median.
- Likes 5-lane intersection better. It makes sense.
- Lots of cars turn at 27th. Very scary.
- 5-lane doesn’t help 27th a whole lot.
- Lots of commercial business in the area. Seems that good pedestrian amenities would help the businesses.
- Will 3-lane slow folks down at curve south of Benson near 31st? 3-lane roadways have been shown to slow traffic down
- Alternating bus turnouts. Can they be done? As the project progresses, we will work with Transit on bus stop locations and the type of bus stops.

Station 4 – 25th To Chester Creek (Minnesota On-ramp)

- Hillcrest to Westchester: 12’ roadway set 4’ from wall. 4’ of barrier (to be determined) outside of roadway. Then 8’ pathway. Could the pathway run through the park near the bottom of the hill? That is possible, will require working/coordinating with Parks Department since it would be outside of the roadway right-of-way. Could be design issues with the steep slopes.
- Barrier options:

- Jersey Barrier
- Raised Path
- Alaskan-themed fencing/barrier
- Bike lane between road and wall? Most likely not, as it would not provide for a safe outlet for the bike rider trapped between the wall and the travel lane.
- Snow creates a bottleneck for pedestrians at the Chester Creek bridge.
- A separate pedestrian bridge would increase pedestrian safety
- If trucks continue to park in the ROW outside the bakery, can the alignment be shifted away from the bakery? We will have to work with the bakery on their parking issue.
- Lots of children cross at Hillcrest: can a flashing signal be added? It's possible.
- A wider sidewalk at the 25th Avenue Texaco would assist pedestrians in winters; snow piles up and pedestrians are up against the roadway.
- Plentiful ROW allows for adequate pedestrian facilities; should be done where it is available.
- 8' sidewalks or bus turnouts would be nice where ROW allows
- Also: buffers between roadway/sidewalks; on-street bike lanes
- Left-turn sign on Spenard at Hillcrest: move closer to intersection

The CAG re-assembled to hear a report on the comments received at each station/segment. The recorders went through the notes taken as each discussion occurred. At the end of each station report, the CAG Members were given an opportunity to add to the comments or to clarify what was written down and reported. No one had anything to add or to change.

Everyone was reminded that the next CAG Meeting will be on Tuesday, August 8.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Related documents on file:

Agenda
 Sign-In Sheet
 Annotated aerial photos