

NOTES



US-60/Grand Avenue COMPASS

Loop 303 to Interstate 10

Grand Avenue Coalition Meeting
December 5, 2013

Surprise City Hall
16000 N. Civic Center Plaza

THESE NOTES ARE NOT OFFICIAL MINUTES FROM THIS MEETING THAT WAS CALLED BY THE SURPRISE MAYOR AND ORGANIZED BY SURPRISE CITY STAFF. THEY ARE COMPILATION OF NOTES FROM THE MEETING ATTENDED BY MAG STAFF AND THE US-60/GRAND AVE COMPASS CONSULTANT.

ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Mayor Lana Mook – City of El Mirage
Mayor Jerry Weiers – City of Glendale
Councilman Gary Sherwood – City of Glendale
Supervisor Clint Hickman – Maricopa County
Mayor Bob Barrett – City of Peoria

Councilman Ron Aames – City of Peoria
Mayor Greg Stanton – City of Phoenix
Mayor Sharon Wolcott – City of Surprise
Mayor John Cook – Town of Wickenburg
Mayor Michael LeVault – Town of Youngtown

CITY MANAGEMENT REPRESENTATIVES

City Manager Spencer Isom – El Mirage
City Manager Carl Swenson – Peoria
Deputy City Manager Rick Naimark – Phoenix
City Manager Chris Hillman – Surprise
Town Manager Jeanne Blackman – Youngtown
Town Manager Josh Wright – Wickenburg
Jenna Goad for City Manager Brenda Fischer – Glendale

Other staff from the cities, including intergovernmental representatives and technical staff, was also present.

MAG STAFF REPRESENTATIVES

Dennis Smith – MAG
Eric Anderson – MAG

Bob Hazlett – MAG

CONSULTANT TEAM REPRESENTATIVE

Jason Pagnard – B&N

Mayor Wolcott welcomed everyone and gave an overview of the meeting purpose. She expressed the desire to make US-60/Grand Avenue “people friendly” and provide transit options. US-60/Grand Avenue needs to be a point of destination. The current commute time to the airport is one hour, which is not acceptable.

NOTES

US-60/GRAND AVENUE COMPASS UPDATE

Bob Hazlett provided a brief overview of the study's progress and the concepts identified earlier in the year. The concepts are:

- Red Alternative – Continue with planned improvements from the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) with no further action;
- Purple Alternative – Implement the US-60/Grand Avenue expressway option;
- Blue Alternative – Institute commuter rail and implement roadway improvements to a lesser scale than the Expressway; and
- Green Alternative – Focus on the mobility of people and goods through establishing a high capacity transit (HCT) envelope within the current ADOT right-of-way in conjunction with strategic, targeted roadway improvements at key locations.

Bob Hazlett indicated that the Purple and Green Alternatives, or the expressway and other HCT alternative concepts, respectively, have been eliminated as wholesale visions from consideration; however, certain elements from these concepts could be incorporated into the project's final recommendations. The Red and Blue Alternative concepts remain and the project team is working to combine the best elements of each concept. This includes development of an access management plan and addressing bottlenecks and congestion points along US-60/Grand Avenue. Commuter rail with operational improvements will be continued. A better signing plan will also be created.

Bob Hazlett noted that a funding shortfall exists to implement the improvements called for in the Red Alternative in that certain intersection improvements, between SR-101L and McDowell Road identified for Proposition 400, have been moved to the Regional Transportation Plan's fifth phase, and that Phoenix and Glendale are pursuing FTA funds for light rail projects linking the current system to Metro Center and downtown Glendale.

VISION AND CHALLENGES

Mayor Stanton suggested that this discussion may not reflect the charter he signed on to and stated the Access Management Plan is a priority for this corridor. He noted that MAG is a safe place to have the difficult discussion about the vision. He added that the project team needs to meet with elected officials as well as staff.

Dennis Smith stated that Phoenix and Glendale are approaching the federal government for funding first for light rail extensions and that commuter rail is a vision that is a little longer term. This creates an issue that we need to discuss as a group. He added that an access management plan will be done for ADOT.

Mayor Wolcott stated that some form of rapid transit would provide a unifying force along US-60/Grand Avenue. She is concerned that the corridor is not "people friendly." She noted that the corridor is evolving and that the municipalities do not want to turn their backs and ignore the changes. She added that the Mayor of Miami, Florida suggested implementing form-based code to her during a recent national Mayors' conference in New Orleans, and said it was suc-

NOTES

cessful in Miami. She continued that form-based code does not change land use, but changes the "feel." The corridor lacks and needs a sense of place or sense of destination.

Mayor Mook indicated that El Mirage's General Plan is founded on form-based code and has been for several years. They feel commuter rail is part of that plan. Spencer Isom added that access management is part of their plan, but that the group also needs to continue to pursue commuter rail. This would not require Phoenix or Glendale to change their vision. We do not want to challenge their priorities. Spencer Isom continued that everyone there can agree that the planned roadway improvements should continue; commuter rail should continue to be investigated as well. LRT should not be pitted against commuter rail.

Mayor Wolcott noted that developers have cited, in order to be business friendly, future developments need good access to Phoenix-Sky Harbor International Airport, and that Surprise should be within a one-hour transit trip with no more than one transfer.

Peoria stated the need for something big to occur in order to revitalize Peoria's downtown; they see commuter rail as that big thing. Peoria cautioned that they do not want to be left behind the curve as the region was initially to freeways in the 1980's.

Dennis Smith stated that MAG has listened, Commuter Rail studies have been completed including the US-60/Grand Avenue BNSF line as critical segment; however, implementation depends upon funding.

Mayor Wolcott stated that they do not want to wait their turn for funding and development, and they see no conflict between LRT and commuter rail. A look into other alternatives, such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), along US-60/Grand Avenue as an interim solution should be considered until commuter rail becomes a reality to develop the transit ridership within the corridor. She noted that Surprise is experiencing significant demand for their Dial-a-Ride service which has created budget issues. She believes this demand is indicative of a larger demand for transit services.

Mayor Wolcott suggested that they evaluate land uses and look for changes in the meantime. She added that Phoenix Sky Harbor access is important for their growth. As Surprise and the West Valley supported Luke Air Force Base as a continuing military facility, it eliminated the possibility of commercial air service in the West Valley. This necessitates the need for rapid connections to Sky Harbor Airport. In addition, there are very few higher educational options in the West Valley; again, rapid travel to educational facilities would benefit the West Valley.

Spencer Isom commented that if we try to tie a time frame to consensus, we may lose consensus. He suggested that MAG should support the commuter rail option and help municipalities overcome obstacles to its implementation. Dennis Smith reminded everyone that MAG is not a separate entity to the West Valley, but rather simply that they are MAG and can continue to influence regional decisions.

NOTES

Mayor Wolcott commented that the discussion is really focused around funding. There needs to be a seamless transition between commuter rail and LRT. In addition, any solution needs to keep individual municipality's plans whole.

Dennis Smith stated that BRT routes were cut by regional leaders through RPTA which could complicate such a route along US-60. He added that we need to focus on the next steps more than the end game at this point, which would mean having Phoenix and Glendale continue their plans to implement LRT and continue working toward commuter rail.

Peoria Councilman Ron Aames suggested we build around transit centers and create transit oriented development. Traffic signal timing along the corridor has improved, but more needs to be done.

Chris Hillman suggested the group evaluate US-60/Grand Avenue's form. As a group, we need to provide direction to MAG, whether we want to move people, provide a people friendly destination, or permit more curb cuts.

Carl Swenson stated that a vision statement is necessary to define long-term transportation goals along the corridor.

Mayor Barrett commented that we need to establish ridership first, and then redevelopment will come. Create a bus system that works. This could be established with BRT.

Mayor Wolcott agreed that we need to start BRT.

Mayor Stanton suggested examining 7th Avenue, from Indian School Road to Camelback Road, as an example with robust transit and redevelopment. Transit changed the identity of the area, the road is able to accommodate traffic, but also is home to eclectic shops and restaurants, which shows it is possible to accommodate traffic as well as small businesses. The transportation corridor functions differently at different times of the day. Phoenix brought attention to the area before the transformation occurred by holding festivals there.

Mayor Weiers agreed with most of the discussion in the room, but noted that Glendale still has its own priorities. The biggest issue is identifying a funding source. Once funds are available, we can determine how to spend them. We cannot hide from it.

Mayor Wolcott noted that only three cities in the region have a transit tax (Glendale, Phoenix, and Tempe), so the question is how to generate local funds.

Glendale Councilman Gary Sherwood noted that he does not see US-60/Grand Avenue as an area with a lot of development opportunities; adding transit will not change that perception. Glendale is generally not concerned with the additional investigation into rail alternatives, but is

NOTES

concerned about the potential operations and maintenance costs. He also suggested that a tax be passed by other municipalities to demonstrate their commitment.

Mayor Wolcott noted that voters typically will not support a new tax if they do not know what they are buying. Further, the goal is not to define the mode, but to move people and provide a sense of destination.

Councilman Sherwood stated that BRT is a good idea.

Councilman Aames commented that if we are going to pursue BRT, we need to focus on stations and provide multiple stops that could later become commuter rail stops. He then asked about ADOT's funding. Eric Anderson noted that rail funding is not currently available and that the federal government does not pay operations and maintenance costs.

Supervisor Hickman stated transit would help Wickenburg, so from that perspective BRT is a good idea. He continued that in Sun City and Sun City West, nobody discusses transportation needs besides golf carts and that many of those residents are afraid of US-60/Grand Avenue and coming into Phoenix, but that they do need access to health care centers. Many of these residents want to travel, but do not want to drive.

Dennis Smith summarized the following key points:

- We need to create a vision statement and circulate it to the involved agencies.
- Signal timing should be improved, with potential assistance from the Traffic Signal Optimization Program (TSOP).
- Access Management Plan to control curb cuts.
- Investigate transit systems including BRT and a feeder system.
- Identify funding opportunities.

FUNDING

Eric Anderson reiterated that funding needs to be identified.

Dennis Smith stated the municipalities could create an Intergovernmental Funding Agreement and then approach congress. He added Utah has a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and that Arizona should too. We all need to present it to the legislature.

Carl Swenson stated that we need to develop a complete toolbox of funding options. We need to coalesce around vision and then move forward with funding. We need to move forward and demonstrate local investment and commitment.

Mayor Wolcott asked the room what their council's sense was for approval of local funding. The responses follow:

NOTES

- *Peoria* – Split. May change if the goal is clearly defined. Reminded group of the failed TIME initiative.
- *El Mirage* – Support with a clearly defined project.
- *Glendale* – We have a permanent tax in place now that is topped out with no additional room.
- *Youngtown* – Fuel sales tax is already high and is volatile. A creative solution is preferred such as a TIF district. We should not give up on US-60/Grand Avenue as a transportation corridor.
- *Wickenburg* – Rail is supported and traffic is awful. Rail would get cars off of US-60/Grand Avenue.
- *Phoenix* – Reminded the group of a poll through MAG, and that questions need to be carefully crafted to not taint the results. The corridor could be both a means of transportation and a destination. There are adaptive reuse successes throughout Phoenix.
- *Surprise* – Sales tax in Arizona is overworked. Expressed concern regarding an additional sales tax and need to look at other sources.

Eric Anderson cautioned the difference of full BRT implementation for success as compared to BRT lite. Councilman Aames followed that traffic signal preemption will be necessary for BRT.

Mayor Wolcott suggested the group reconvene in March.

NEXT STEPS

The next steps in the process are as follows:

- Develop vision statement and gain concurrence.
- Improve traffic signal timing.
- Develop the Access Management Plan.
- Investigate funding opportunities and create a funding options toolbox.
- Continue with the Red and Blue Alternatives combining the best elements of each concept.
- Continue with commuter rail and investigate interim solutions, including BRT and a feeder system.
- Develop better signing plan.
- Reconvene in March.