

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
January 16, 2015

A special meeting of the City of Jackson Finance Committee was held in City Hall at 12:00 P.M. on January 16, 2015 with the following persons present: Finance Committee members Fred Bern, Brandon Finck and Dave Cushman, City Administrator Jennifer Bromeland, Chris Bower, Project Manager for the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Engineer Greg Mitchell with Bolton and Menk and Recording Secretary Dave Maschoff.

PROJECT ENGINEER CHRIS BOWER OF THE MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSED ROUNDABOUT ON HIGHWAY 71 IN MORE DETAIL

Bower reported he attended a meeting with businesses regarding the proposed roundabout on January 15, 2015 in the Council Chambers at the Jackson City Hall. Bower said businesses expressed concerns about access, enough room in the roundabout to accommodate large trucks and vehicles, and whether a roundabout would deter customers from patronizing their businesses. Bower said as people have become more accustomed with the roundabout on Highway 22 in Mankato, motorists are comfortable driving through it and it turns out to be “not such a big deal”. He said there is a period where motorists need to get use to a roundabout.

Bern suggested additional business signage for motorists exiting the Interstate and approaching the roundabout that would show them which lane to be in in order to get to a particular business.

Bower said additional signage was used for the roundabout on Highway 22 in Mankato.

Bern pointed out the signage at the roundabout in Worthington has been a bit confusing. He said temporary business signage posted one hundred or two hundred feet ahead of the roundabout would be beneficial for motorists looking to travel to a particular business.

Bower said the signage needs could be easily addressed. He said business owners feared that they may lose business by installing a roundabout. Bower noted that it will become increasingly difficult to travel to a business along Interstate 90 in the years ahead without travelling through a roundabout.

He said roundabouts are already located at Blue Earth, Worthington and Fairmont has been talking about adding one. Bower said if it's decided not to install a roundabout at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway, there is the potential that MnDOT may decide someday to add a roundabout at the Interstate 90 ramps because that has been a site of crashes in the past. Bower said if a good job is done with signage for a new roundabout, it will keep the impact to businesses at a minimum. He said half of the goal of the roundabout project is economic development. Bower said no one is being served if installing a roundabout hurts businesses. He noted so far, it hasn't been MnDOT's experience that roundabouts have hurt businesses. Bower said there is an initial drop in traffic as a roundabout is installed and people try to avoid it. But he said after motorists become accustomed to it, traffic on Highway 22 in Mankato, for example, rebounded after a couple months and there appears to be no negative impacts.

Cushman asked about the volumes of traffic through the roundabout on Highway 22 at the intersection of Madison and Adams in Mankato.

Bower said on Highway 22, there are 1,200 trucks a day and on Highway 71 in Jackson it's 1,100 trucks a day. He said there are 19,000 cars a day using the roundabout on Highway 22 in Mankato compared to 5,500 cars a day on Highway 71. Bower said there are almost four times the number of cars using Highway 22 compared to Highway 71 and a comparable number of trucks using both routes. He said there have been more fender benders at the roundabout on Highway 22 than MnDOT would like to see, however there have been no fatal, injury or serious injury accidents. Bower said there has been only one crash involving a truck so far in the Highway 22 roundabout and that occurred when a dump truck failed to yield on an approach and ran into another motorist. He pointed out that at a slower speed in a roundabout "that's not a big deal", but at an intersection, it would have been a more serious accident.

Finck asked what businesses were located at the four corners of the roundabout on Highway 22.

Bower said the businesses include Snell Motors, Mankato Ford, McDonalds', a gas station, Applebee's and quite a few more.

Finck said because he's a new Council member, he wanted to ask Bower to provide an overview of the entire Bridge and Highway 71 project up to the Interstate.

Bower presented a map and explained the proposed project including the Bridge replacement, improvements to Highway 71, installation of turn lanes, changes in speed limits, changes in the character of the roadway, installation of a “driver feedback speed sign” and HAWK pedestrian crossing.

Finck asked if MnDOT had considered moving the roundabout out of the truck traffic area, posting different speed limits at the Interstate off of the north junctions and slowing down traffic by moving the roundabout to the golf course intersection. Finck said the feedback he has received from businesses located near the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway is that their opinion has not changed. He said based on the feedback he’s receiving, nine to one he’s getting calls that the roundabout is “a huge negative” on the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway. Finck said it doesn’t mean he’s against it, but as an elected official, that’s the public feedback he’s been receiving. He said a suggestion has been to move the roundabout to the golf course corner and slowing traffic down from the north.

Bower said the reason for the proposed roundabout at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway is due to the traffic study that was conducted. Bower outlined what the traffic study showed regarding what traffic volumes would be at the intersection. He said assuming that an interchange is not built; clearly the worst intersection for traffic will be at Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway.

Finck asked what kind of growth was built into the traffic model.

Bower said the traffic model assumes full development of the area near the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway in the next 20 years. He said the traffic study suggests there will be a higher traffic need at that intersection than there will be at the golf course intersection. Bower said the roundabout could be moved to the golf course intersection if it was felt that would achieve the improvements that are needed.

Finck noted the public’s support isn’t being shown for the roundabout at Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway.

Bromeland said moving the location of the roundabout would mean losing the County’s portion of the funding and it would mean the City paying 100% of the local share.

Bern said the traffic study was conducted to determine what the traffic problems were, how to address them and how to take care of the problem in the future and not just temporarily. He noted that's what the traffic study was all about. Bern said do "we look at how to address it now, or do we look at it for the long term growth of Jackson?" He said the driving force is the Industrial Park. Bern said AGCO has doubled in size since it was AG-Chem and said AGCO's growth will continue into the future. He said some may say Jackson's population hasn't changed dramatically over the years. Bern noted 35% to 40% of those that work in the Industrial Park are from Jackson, but those businesses also draw employees from Estherville, Fairmont, Sherburn, Windom, St. Peter, and an hour-and-half radius from Jackson. He said that's where the increased traffic comes from. Regarding truck traffic, Bern noted since AGCO has assumed the assembly of the wheeled tractors, it's the only plant where they are assembled and the tractors are trucked from Jackson nationwide. He said the wheeled tractor business has been growing and there will be more truck traffic.

Cushman said he's not opposed to the roundabout if it solves the traffic problems. He said his biggest concern is that the roundabout is designed correctly and will meet future needs. Cushman said the plans can look great on paper, and it's hoped the needs are addressed. But if the plans don't turn out like intended when it's actually constructed, Cushman said then there will be problems. He said that's his biggest concern. Cushman said the majority of the feedback he's been receiving has been similar as Finck's in opposition to it. He said he understands part of that may be because it's new and different, but when it's all said and done, the roundabout has to address the original concerns, safety and speed. He said if it addresses the safety, time will tell. Cushman asked if it will address the speed issue. Cushman said if a roundabout is the best way for the community to go, then let's go forward, but let's make sure it's designed properly. He asked if the circumference of the proposed roundabout will provide enough space to accommodate the needs of semi-tractor trailers.

Bower said part of the purpose of the roundabout is to accommodate economic development. He pointed out the roundabout constructed near New Ulm. Bower said input was received from Mathiowetz Construction of Sleepy Eye who needed a roundabout to accommodate a 115 foot low-boy trailer. He said the calculations were used in the computer to design the roundabout.

Bower said after it was constructed, Mathiowetz drove through the roundabout with their 115 foot low-boy trailer and it worked well with six feet to spare.

Finck asked as farm equipment continues to get bigger, will the roundabout be a “scalable plan” to be expanded to meet future needs.

Bower said if further engineering of the roundabout indicates installing a single lane for now, the roundabout could be engineered so the corners could be “pulled out” for future expansion.

Finck noted if the roundabout had to be expanded in the future, would the future costs be taken into account.

Bower said if the roundabout was expanded in the future, the costs for the circular portion of the roadway would be MnDOT’s. He noted the City would want to make sure the roadway approaches are built to accommodate future expansion of the roundabout because the costs for the approaches would be the City’s responsibility. Bower said the roundabout is not designed in a “vacuum”. He said it can be designed by gathering input from AGCO to accommodate what their future needs will be ten to twenty years from now. Bower said MnDOT doesn’t know what the future needs are either, but are dependent on the businesses sharing that information so MnDOT can account for that.

Responding to a question from Bern, Bower said the roundabout proposed at Jackson would be larger than the roundabout near New Ulm that Mathowitz Construction travels through. Bower said in extreme situations, a roundabout can be designed with a “cut-through” and a gate in the middle to accommodate unique loads.

Finck asked if the transport of wind turbine blades could travel through a roundabout.

Bower said they would have no difficulty.

Finck said he anticipates there will be continued growth of the wind energy industry in this area.

Bower said the whole point of designing the roundabout is to accommodate future industrial development. He said MnDOT wants to account for that.

Bern noted that a designated right hand turn lane would benefit traffic coming off Industrial Parkway turning north.

Bower said more detailed engineering would determine if there is room to accommodate such a lane.

Finck asked in what year does MnDOT's model show that a roundabout is actually needed.

Referring to the study, Bower said assuming there would be no more future development in the area, the intersection would warrant improvements to meet "service level D" by 2026.

Finck said assuming there was no growth and with today's traffic, what would be done with the intersection.

Bower said there would be nothing done.

Finck asked what would warrant traffic lights.

Bower said MnDOT doesn't install traffic signals unless it meet warrants and the warrants for installing traffic lights or a roundabout are the same, so it would be 2026 before MnDOT would consider doing anything. He said the same guideline would apply regarding the installation stop signs at the intersection.

Finck asked what determines MnDOT's decision between installing a roundabout, traffic signal or stop signs.

Bower said the decision is particular to each intersection. He explained in the case of the Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway intersection, the traffic study pointed out in comparing different options, "under the proposed mitigation plan for the U.S. Highway 71 corridor, a traffic signal at this intersection would operate at level service "F" during the peak AM and PM hours due to the inability to service the high volume of southbound left turn and U-turn traffic". Bower explained there is so much traffic coming off of Interstate 90 making a left turn that traffic signals struggle to process left-turns and roundabouts are way more efficient in processing left turns. He said roundabouts would actually operate at a level service "C" and reduce the average delay by about three minutes. Bower said roundabouts will reduce delays by three minutes during the peak hour and will reduce fatal and serious injury crashes by about 85%. He said there might be a slight increase in property damage crashes. Bower said as far as MnDOT is concerned, they are looking at the reduction in fatal and serious injury crashes. He went on to say MnDOT views the roundabout as having benefits for safety and less delays. Bower said that's how MnDOT arrived at the decision that a roundabout is the best alternative at that location.

Cushman said the matter will go to the City Council for a vote. He said if they vote "yes" we move forward with the project. Cushman asked what will happen if the Council votes "no" against the roundabout.

Bower said the TED project will then be dead because he doesn't think there are any other viable alternatives other than doing a roundabout.

Cushman asked about the bridge project and the rest of the Highway 71 project up to the golf course.

Bower said the bridge project and the rest of the Highway 71 project would still move forward.

Cushman asked if according to MnDOT, the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway is deemed unsafe.

Bower said reviewing the crash data and ranking the intersections, the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway is ranked approximately at number 200 in MnDOT's District 7. He said there are about 200 intersections that have more crashes. Bower said if safety is the only reason to make intersection improvements, then there are about 200 intersections that would come before it with a higher priority. He said there might not be an opportunity to provide funding to improve the Highway 71/Industrial Parkway intersection again. He said there are more crashes at the intersection with Highway 71 and Interstate 90 than there is at Industrial Parkway.

Cushman noted the heavy volume of traffic at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway between 7:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. and again around 3 p.m. and wondered if traffic would back up regardless of a roundabout.

Bower said he observed traffic through the roundabouts on Highway 22 in Mankato on "Black Friday" to see if there would be gridlock and said the roundabouts worked well with traffic volumes of 20,000 vehicles a day.

Cushman said he appreciated that, but each intersection is different and it makes it difficult to make a decision on the roundabout because they are still new, are designed differently and there are so few of them.

Bower said the engineering study for the roundabouts in Mankato was the same for the proposed roundabout in Jackson. He said in practice; the roundabouts have worked as the engineering studies indicated.

Cushman asked if the Jackson County Commission has approved participating in the project.

Bower said the issue has not been formally considered by the County Commission.

Cushman said that needs to be clarified.

Bower noted the TED grant was awarded to the City and not the County, so first the City has to give approval to the project, or there will be no project.

Cushman asked what if the City approves moving forward with the project, but the County doesn't.

Bower said the alternatives would be that the City could fund the County's share, or the City could "pull the plug" on the project. Bower said the County is a partner in this project and the County needs to be on board with the project just like the City.

Cushman asked Bower regarding the project, "it's a roundabout or nothing in MnDOT's eyes at this point".

Bower said to be blunt, "I think so".

Cushman and Finck asked if there were no other options.

Bower commented that MnDOT looked at options in the traffic study and they didn't find anything else that had the same benefits for safety or delays, "so I mean really I think it is a roundabout or nothing". Bower asked for help in finding another alternative that has the same benefits as a roundabout. He said no other alternatives have been found to have the same benefits.

Bern asked if the roundabout project does not occur, will the State keep Highway 71 a four lane?

Bower said if the roundabout project falls through, the rest of the Highway 71 project will take place whether the roundabout occurs or not.

Reviewing the proposed plans for Highway 71, Bern questioned the placement of the 30 mile per hour signs and suggested they be positioned at a different location to slow the speed down sooner for southbound traffic coming down the hill into Jackson. He pointed out the elderly and others trying to turn onto Highway 71.

Bower explained a speed study will be conducted when construction is completed on Highway 71. He said it's difficult to get people to slow down when they have been travelling at a higher rate of speed on the Interstate.

Cushman said it seems that over two years ago, the main focus of the whole project was to slow speed coming down the hill on Highway 71. He said a lot of money is going to be spent on the corner, and the issue of speed down the hill has still not been addressed.

Bower said he feels MnDOT is doing everything they can to address the concerns over speed other than going to extremes and installing speed bumps.

Finck said he disagreed with Bower.

Bern again mentioned moving the speed limit sign to a different location.

Bower noted that studies have been done following the relocation of speed limit signs and if there were no changes in the roadway, there was no change in the speeds, and in some cases speeds went up. He said the sign doesn't control the speed, it's the geometrics of the roadway that has an effect.

Bern noted that if a speed limit sign is posted and then the motorist also sees the flashing speed control sign, they will slow down.

Bower said for the first couple of months, the flashing speed control signs are effective, but after motorists don't get a ticket, the signs don't have a meaningful impact anymore. He mentioned that has occurred with the flashing speed control sign along Highway 60.

Bern said any efforts to slow the speed down would be appreciated. He said another issue would be to clear the sumac on the hill along the east side of Highway 71. He said it hampers the vision of motorists coming out of the Wedgewood apartments in the Spring and Summer.

Bower said plans are to cut the sumac down as part of the Highway 71 project, but will leave the roots to control erosion on the side of the hill.

Cushman asked about the trails as part of the project.

Bower pointed out plans for the trails on the maps being reviewed during the meeting.

Bern noted keeping in mind a safe crossing across Highway 71 for those using the trail.

Bower said one option would be to have the trail crossing across Highway 71 ahead of the yield sign outside the circle of the roundabout. He said there will be a trail leading up to the area where there may be future retail development.

Finck asked whether the TED funding was just for construction of a roundabout, or could it be funding for traffic control no matter what's decided to go there.

Bower explained the regional intent of the funding was to provide for infrastructure improvements to accommodate future growth in the area of the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway. He said the first go around was to install a second interchange on Interstate 90, but the traffic study suggested it wouldn't have the impact that was sought and would do anything to solve the traffic problems on Highway 71 and not that much traffic would use it.

Bower said that's why a roundabout was proposed. He said the intent of the TED funding is still to accommodate industrial and commercial development. Bower said the TED funding is to better transportation and has to provide for economic development.

Bromeland clarified that the TED grant would offset MnDOT's cost for the roundabout.

Bower noted the reason MnDOT is talking about making improvements at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway is because of the TED grant. He said there are roughly 200 other intersections that have more crashes than this intersection. Bower noted MnDOT has so many other needs right now and doesn't know when, or if, there would be another opportunity to do such a project at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway.

Finck said the only thing he was disappointed in is that "we're not ramping this intersection based on growth, that we're just doing all or none". He said he understands planning for the future, but is still "stuck on we're not just ramping this in phases, we're doing all or none. That's a tough pill to swallow". Finck said he's not against a roundabout, but is really struggling with the fact that stop lights could be tried because there's not a moratorium on traffic lights. He said he understands the study regarding safety and cutting delays. Finck said he's disappointed of not ramping up the intersection as the area grows and that it's all or none.

Bower pointed out the cost of installing traffic signals would be roughly the same as installing a roundabout. He said he wants to make sure the Council members have the information they need.

(Cushman leaves)

Bern said he is aware of the future growth that is going to occur at AGCO and understands the need and value to do the project now. He pointed out the City's portion of the cost for the roundabout would be \$377,000 compared to the original estimate of \$877,000 for the interchange. Bern said to install traffic signals at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway would be a step backwards from what is currently there because traffic will be stopped and there won't be an even flow of traffic. Bern said he sees the purpose of the roundabout is to take care of congestion and not to add a stoplight and slow traffic down.

Bern said the roundabout is scaring people because they are not familiar with it. He said even with a roundabout, motorists will still pull off the Interstate to purchase fuel and eat.

Finck said he doesn't like the roundabout at Worthington and has heard complaints about it from an implement dealer.

Bower said MnDOT has learned a lot about designing roundabouts since the Worthington roundabouts were installed and learned some lessons since that time.

(Finck leaves)

Bromeland asked if traffic signals were installed, would the City be responsible for the entire cost.

Bower explained if the roundabout is rejected and instead, a proposal is made to install traffic signals, MnDOT will say "no". He explained a traffic signal would not meet warrants right now until 2026. Bower said the roundabout doesn't meet warrants right now either, but there are no detriments as far as MnDOT is concerned to install a roundabout because it's viewed as a betterment as far as safety. He said MnDOT doesn't mind installing a roundabout early because it will provide traffic calming and safety benefits. Bower said a traffic signal doesn't do anything for traffic calming and it's a safety risk. However, he said in 2026 when the traffic signal meets warrants, the cost split would be the same as a roundabout and actually the City's cost share may be slightly larger. Bower noted the traffic study also showed extra turn lanes were needed and the traffic pavement will need to be replaced in 2026. He said the City would still have their portion to pay to replace the pavement.

Bern said the costs would probably be higher in 2026 because of inflation.

Responding to a question from Bromeland, Bower said the City's share for the Highway 71 bridge replacement would be \$50,000 which is for half the cost of the Hawk Signal. The other share is being paid for by MnDOT.

Mitchell added the City will have additional cost due to the improvements to the water main.

Bower asked Mitchell if Bolton and Menk could provide more accurate cost numbers on the City's share for the Highway 71 bridge and highway project. Bower mentioned any special aesthetics to the bridge or lighting along Highway 71 would be at the City's cost. He said MnDOT has no special plans for aesthetics regarding the project. Bower said a decision on the roundabout needs to be made in the near future to allow time for designing. Bower said if it's decided to move forward with the roundabout, design work needs to begin to allow for construction to take place in 2016. Bower said the roundabout is an opportunity to make a safety improvement at the intersection of Highway 71 and Industrial Parkway. He noted that improvements to the intersection could also make it attractive to future development, such as a big box store. Although some additional engineering is still needed, Bower noted the proposed roundabout is anticipated to be two lanes for north and southbound traffic and a single lane for east and westbound traffic. He said if it's determined that only a single lane for north and southbound traffic was needed for now, the roundabout could be designed to be expanded to two lanes in the future.

Mitchell pointed out the City has an opportunity to get the roundabout built right now. He said even though the TED money doesn't benefit the City directly, it does benefit getting the project done a little bit sooner. Mitchell said it will be a betterment for the intersection. He went on to say if the City decides not to move forward with the roundabout now, then it becomes a matter of when the intersection becomes critical in 2026. He said the City's share will probably be the same in 2026, although inflated for increased costs. But then, Mitchell said, it's a factor of whether MnDOT has funding for it. Mitchell said if the intersection is ranked 200 on MnDOT's list of crash data intersections in 2026 and Jackson is in need of an intersection, but no ability to get it, it will be similar to the current situation in Windom who is waiting for intersection improvements on Highway 60.

Bower pointed out the year 2026 in the traffic study is based on no development occurring, but that date could actually be earlier depending on future development at occurs. He said MnDOT is so far behind on needs, that in five or six years, funding for the intersection in Jackson may not be available. Bower said he would attend the January 27, 2015 City Council meeting.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

David A. Maschoff, Recording Secretary

