



CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Richfield, Minnesota

City Council Work Session

February 14, 2023

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Supple called the work session to order at 5:50 p.m. in the Bartholomew Room.

Council Members Present: Mary Supple, Mayor; Simon Trautmann; Ben Whalen; and Sean Hayford O'leary

Council Members Absent: Sharon Christensen

Staff Present: Katie Rodriguez, City Manager; Joe Powers, City Engineer; Matt Hardegger, Transportation Engineer; Lance Bernard, Transportation Consultant; and Chris Swanson, Management Analyst

ITEM #1	CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON POLICY FRAMEWORK APPROACH FOR REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENT PROJECTS AND EVALUATE CITY SUPPORT FOR SEVERAL PROPOSED CORRIDORS OF COMMERCE PROJECT SUBMITTALS.
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City Manager Rodriguez introduced the topic. She reminded council this was to discuss funding options and was not the actual approval of the projects.

City Engineer Powers discussed how this item was introduced to council at the joint transportation commission meeting held earlier this year and provided a summary of the previous discussion. He talked about some of the changes proposed to the policy framework since the last meeting on February 1, 2023. These changes to the framework came from prior discussion at the joint work session. He spoke of how staff used feedback from the previous work session to modify the framework for evaluating future transportation projects. He also provided additional follow up on questions from the prior work session along with additional internal discussions that staff had to prepare for this work session.

City Engineer Powers talked about how, regardless of if the Corridors of Commerce (COC) projects are undertaken, the amount of traffic on I-494 is expected to continue to increase. He did note the traffic modelers for MnDOT do not expect this to generate more trips on 494 than would be expected, but the models show the same people will be taking the same trips. He also noted the 494 Project 1 would increase congestion on 494 east of 35W and MnDOT's response when questioned on this is that the full 494 Vision would address it. He then noted staff had applied the updated framework to the Hwy 62 project, but not to the 494 project due to time constraints.

City Engineer Powers provided an overview layout of the highway 62 layout. He talked about applying the the revised draft framework for these projects. He also outlined how the city had sought and received support from Minneapolis for the crosstown project. He noted that Richfield is the last city to review the COC projects.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked why Bloomington is included in the crosstown project. He doesn't feel they will be impacted by this work. City Engineer Powers said he agreed that they should not be included.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked what the pedestrian bridge would look like. City Engineer Powers provided more detail on the pedestrian bridge.

Council Member Whalen asked if the \$57 million was just for the railroad bridge or if it also included the full interchange work on Highway 62. City Engineer Powers said it included the entire project. Council Member Whalen asked if the railroad bridge had any additional ROW needs. City Engineer Powers said it should all fall within the existing ROW. He mentioned the city owns and is responsible to maintain the crossing. Mayor Supple asked staff to add more clarity to the meaning of "fair" condition when describing the bridge. City Engineer Powers said the rating of "fair" is recognizing the bridge is older and could use some work, but the condition is not currently hazardous.

City Engineer Powers welcomed any comments on the framework. He noted they planned to formally adopt this framework at a future council meeting. He said as there is a March 14 deadline to submit resolutions of support on the COC projects was the focus of the meeting tonight. Staff plans to go to council for approval of the COC projects at the February 28 meeting. He asked council for comments and concerns on the framework and the project.

Council Member Hayford Oleary thought staff was on the right track with the framework. He recognized there would be continued discussion on this matter.

Council Member Whalen felt this is a good base to build on and recognized this helps the city evaluate projects. Staff agreed it was helpful to have this criteria when looking at large abstract projects.

Mayor Supple appreciated that staff took the comments from the prior work session and integrated them in the framework.

Council Member Hayford Oleary had questions on the Highway 62 project. He specifically asked about the COC projects and wanted to know how removing the extra auxiliary lane would impact the funding and the project scoring. Staff said the project funding and scoring would be significantly impacted if the auxiliary lane was removed and noted the inclusion of the auxiliary lane is the biggest driver in terms of getting the new pedestrian bridge. Transportation Consultant Bernard discussed MNDOT's openness to packaging some of the city requested changes in these projects. Council Member Hayford Oleary asked if Minneapolis would support the project if it didn't include the interchange. Staff believed they would but would just want to see updated plans and would like to include modifications to the Edgewater Blvd/Nokomis Pkwy area before they fully commit.

Mayor Supple asked about the next steps in this process. City Engineer Powers said he wanted to give council the opportunity to review and provide input on the framework and proposed COC projects before staff presented for final approval on February 28.

Council Member Whalen said he liked all aspects of the project but still had some questions on the additional lane. He wanted to know the purpose of the lane if it is not expected to decrease traffic. City Engineer Powers discussed how the lane is intended to reduce the amount of congestion on that stretch. He noted that, from a local perspective, this would reduce the traffic on our local city streets.

Council Member Whalen asked what 50% effective safety means from MNDOT. Transportation Consultant Bernard said this demonstrates there will be less crashes and the ones that do occur will be less severe. He noted that this is part of the process MNDOT is currently going through as they are evaluating all of the 44 proposed COC projects.

Council Member Whalen asked how highway congestion is measured. He was interested in how this was evaluated and the impact in the future. Staff said they would need to do some more research on this question. Council Member Whalen was interested in examples of projects where the additional capacity hasn't been backfilled. He talked about how, in the metro, there is a certain level of traffic that people are comfortable with and this is what really impacts driving habits.

Council Member Trautmann asked about funding mechanisms and wanted to know if approval and construction of these projects would have long term financial implications. City Engineer Powers said there would be some continued costs in the future. He provided noise walls as an example and noted the cost and maintenance agreements have yet to be finalized. He talked about how MNDOT is moving towards more maintenance provided by cities. Council Member Trautmann stated that made him nervous. He said he is wary about committing more funding to these projects but is open to continued discussions.

Transportation Engineer Hardegger provided a summary of the grant process and the local match. Specifically, he talked about how COC is a direct funding mechanism, no local match required. Council Member Whalen asked if there was a version where the auxiliary lane would still be up for discussion. Staff noted the city would lose this funding opportunity if that change was made.

City Engineer Powers provided a summary I-494 project. Council Member Hayford Oleary talked about funding. He noted this one project would take a large portion of the total COC funding for the state and that would reduce the likelihood of the other projects in Richfield being successful. Staff agreed. Council Member Hayford Oleary said he is still not clear about the benefit to local systems. He agreed the city would like less traffic but does not think that will happen by pushing more people through I-494. City Engineer Powers discussed how our residents utilize the highway system and noted there is both a local and regional need. Staff does feel it's hard to quantify the benefits but recognized it's one of the most used stretches of road in the state. City Engineer Powers stated this project is one of many in addressing local issues.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked more about the induced demand. He would prefer if the work could be done within the current road footprint and does not support the increase in lanes. He felt the city would be stuck with this project, would see no benefit from the work, and residents would be subjected to an increase in noise and air pollution. Council Member Hayford Oleary noted he would still support the Bloomington project as the price tag is lower and thought there would be more benefits once complete.

City Manager Rodriguez went over how the PAC approved this vision years ago and how council should be mindful of that prior work. Council Member Trautmann talked about his experience with the PAC and how these projects were the result of compromise and conversation. He felt that Richfield did get some wins from the process and believed the city is in a better place with this work than 5 years ago but there are still a lot of challenges.

City Manager Rodriguez noted that although the first project will not reduce traffic, we should also recognize that Richfield residents travel out for business and our local businesses have staff come into Richfield. She talked about how this project would help them in their daily travel. Council Member Whalen said he is not convinced the congestion is solvable or that an extra lane will fix this. He noted many examples where you can see this occur. He doesn't see a scenario where I-494 is not crowded. Council Member Trautmann asked if this was in line with MNDOT's analysis. City Engineer Powers said these projects will never create a free flowing traffic condition. Transportation Engineer

Hardegger noted that all of MNDOT's scenarios, due to population increases in the future, expect congestion. He outlined how the auxiliary lane would allow at least one option for less congestion.

Council Member Whalen asked about what is funded with the EZ Pass charge. Staff said they would look into where the EZ Pass funds go. Mayor Supple asked about the projections. She wanted to know what was behind this increase. Transportation Engineer Hardegger said this is both an increase in population and traffic volumes shifting from local routes to 494, and that MnDOT expects no additional trips would be generated.

Council Member Hayford Oleary asked if MnDOT's modeling ever accounts for people making new trips that they would not make if a project was not constructed. Transportation Engineer Hardegger noted it was hard to analyze that type of scenario. Council Member Trautmann said he too had a question on the modeling. He wanted to know if traffic levels have returned to post pandemic levels and asked broadly about any trends that staff may be seeing. Transportation Engineer Hardegger said all the traffic modeling was done in 2019 and they are not sure how this has been impacted. Staff did note there is some data that suggests volume of traffic to downtown areas have not returned, but highway volumes overall are similar to historic levels.

Mayor Supple said she supported the Crosstown and 82nd Street project, including the railroad bridge. She was comfortable supporting the I-494 project.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Supple adjourned the work session at 6:57 p.m.

Date Approved: February 28, 2023



Chris Swanson
Management Analyst



Mary Supple
Mayor



Katie Rodriguez
City Manager