SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COMPLETE STREETS
April 6, 2017
Minutes

Members Present: Sebolt, Maiville (left at 6:43 p.m.), Koenig (arrived at 6:03 p.m.), McGrain (left at 7:07 p.m.), Banas, and Nolan (arrived at 6:04 p.m.)

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Bill Conklin, Tim Morgan, and Liz Kane

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Sebolt at 6:01 p.m. in Personnel Conference Room “D & E” of the Human Services Building, 5303 S. Cedar Street, Lansing, Michigan.

Additions to the Agenda

None.

Limited Public Comment

None.

1. Discussion with Road Department

Chairperson Sebolt introduced his philosophy of Complete Streets and his vision for the Committee. He stated that Complete Streets was a model for all types of road users, not just bikes, but pedestrians of all abilities, and public transit.

Chairperson Sebolt stated in the Michigan Legislature, he heard about people all over the state, including thousands in Ingham County, who were not able to access the economy because they did not have the financial means and lacked their own transportation, or they were unable to transport themselves. He further stated he would like the Committee to consider Complete Streets not just for recreation, but for economic access as well.

Chairperson Sebolt stated it was not the goal of the Committee to force Complete Streets on areas that did not want them, but rather to lay out a framework for the County and how the Board of Commissioners thinks about Complete Streets with the entities that did have them, and to encourage people who were at risk of being left out of the economy in rural areas to have access to transportation options.

Commissioner Koenig arrived at 6:03 p.m.

Commissioner Nolan arrived at 6:04 p.m.
Commissioner Maiville asked if there was an official County or Road Department policy.

Bill Conklin, Road Department Director, stated he believed, aside from the non-motorized trail comprehensive report, Ingham County did not have an official policy that the Board of Commissioners had passed. He further stated there were several townships that followed the state guideline per the state Complete Streets ordinances.

Mr. Conklin stated the townships’ ordinances took the effect of a policy, because they mandated coordinating with Road Departments and they evaluated the funding and need of each project. He further stated that the Road Department’s unofficial policy was to cooperate with townships and seek funding to accomplish their goals.

Commissioner McGrain echoed Chairperson Sebolt’s sentiments about inclusion in a Complete Streets plan. He further stated he would like to take the process one step further to think about streets or bridges in a sort of place-making context, and to think about elements to the transportation network that may not have been thought of before.

Commissioner Banas stated her community of Meridian Township thought Complete Streets was a very important issue and their board approved a Complete Streets resolution. She further stated that she was excited to see rural, suburban and urban areas come together, because Complete Streets could be implemented in all areas.

Commissioner Banas stated she would like to explore the examples provided by advocacy groups to implement Complete Streets in varying areas across the County. She further stated she would like to create a County-wide policy that would bring the ideas together and make streets work for everyone.

Commissioner Banas provided an example of seeing kids walking down Jolly Road in the rain where there were no sidewalks, and she stated that the County needed to be more attentive to the current and future needs of their citizens. She further stated that she thought people would support the concept and there was great information among the Michigan Legislature, advocacy groups, and urban planners to come up with their policy.

Commissioner Banas stated Complete Streets was more than planting trees along the roadways, and she was excited to have Mr. Conklin involved, because he knew how to create better design. She further stated Mr. Conklin had pushed for better sidewalk access to public facilities previously.

Commissioner Nolan explained her background with road planning when she opposed the widening of Okemos Road in 2005 and the fact that she realized how important public input was. She further stated it was time for a culture change and people needed to broaden their horizons about what Complete Streets looked like.

Commissioner Nolan asked if the Tri-County Bicycle Association was notified of the meeting.
Chairperson Sebolt stated he wanted to start with the County’s own departments, but he would like to have at least two additional meetings which would include townships and non-motorized road users coming to give the Committee feedback.
Commissioner Nolan stated she would like to see a bike lane that went from north of the County to the south so bikers could feel safe.

Discussion.

Chairperson Sebolt stated he invited Tim Morgan, Parks Director, because the Committee should also consider the County trails millage which, could become interconnected with Complete Streets in the future as they expand. He further stated he wanted to talk about ways the Parks Department and Roads Department could compare and plan to work smartly together, especially at street crossings on trails or to connect trails together.

Commissioner Banas asked what percentage of State road funding received could be used for Complete Streets.

Chairperson Sebolt asked how the County interacted with townships when they needed to approach a road project.

Mr. Conklin stated that Meridian, Delhi and Lansing all had Complete Street ordinances based on the state model. He further stated that the Road Department interacted with them as laid out in the guidelines, which included talking to them about major projects coming up in their road plans, finding out what their priorities were for improving their streets, and learning which changes they wanted to make and if those were feasible cost-wise and plan-wise.

Mr. Conklin provided examples of upcoming projects (such as Lake Lansing Road, Hagadorn Road to Saginaw Highway), including road diets where four-lane roads were turned into single lanes each way and a central left turn lane, and the excess road would be turned into larger paved shoulders for non-motorized use. He further stated there was another project in which they were using Transportation Alternatives Program grant money to add paved shoulders to the road (Jolly Road, Dobie to Meridian Roads).

Mr. Conklin stated they were implementing Complete Streets projects where and when they were feasible and there was funding to pay for them. He further stated that some options were not expensive, like road diets, where it could be done with or without paving.

Mr. Conklin stated projects in which the road needed to be widened were much more expensive. He further stated that future projects could include new Transportation Improvement Project funding, or looking at Economic Development funding if or when jobs were created, at the former Lansing Township GM site.

Discussion.

Mr. Conklin stated there were projects in which road diets were not an option because the traffic volume was too high, for example, on Haslett and Mt. Hope Roads in Meridian Township. He
further stated the analyses of the roads were given to the Township Board and the Board had made the ultimate decision.

Mr. Conklin stated instead of doing road diets on those roads, they filled in gaps in the path system alongside the roadway to accommodate non-motorized users. He further stated that bicycle groups tended to prefer on-road options, because they would have to yield for every side street and use caution at every driveway.

Mr. Conklin stated on Park Lake Road, they provided Complete Streets treatments where it was feasible, and then put up Share the Road signs along other stretches to indicate the use by non-motorized users.

Discussion.

Commissioner Banas stated she heard pedestrian deaths across the country had increased. She asked what could be done with a Complete Streets philosophy and in terms of better road plan practices to make things safer for pedestrians.

Mr. Conklin stated that the goal of Complete Streets was to provide those non-motorized facilities, although there were concerns about how to fund projects. He further stated that he preferred separated facilities, because he thought they were safer.

Mr. Conklin stated sidewalks and separated trails were the responsibility of the townships. He further stated that the road department would evaluate requests for changes to roads and consider costs, like road dieting is nearly free.

Commissioner Banas acknowledged that speed was also a cause of fatalities for pedestrians and drivers. She asked what could be done about reducing the speed.

Mr. Conklin stated that the Michigan State Police was in charge of setting the speed limits, and the Road Department simply made the signs for them. He further stated the Road Department was able to put 15mph speed reductions within 1000 feet of schools for ingress and egress times at the request of the superintendent.

Mr. Conklin brought up the speed limit change on Jolly Road by Okemos High School. He stated that he was not sure it met the exact definition of the law it was done under.

Mr. Conklin stated the provision of the law the change was done under required a mile of residential frontage of no more than 300 feet across per lot to be considered. He further stated under that provision of the law, Meridian Township came to the governing road agency at the time, the former Road Commission which became the Road Department, and asked for the change.

Mr. Conklin stated the former Road Commission agreed to the speed limit change. He further stated the problem was the definition of residential frontage, because the mile stretch of road was backyards, not front yards, and their driveways and front walks did not come out to Jolly Road.
Mr. Conklin stated if someone got a ticket in the area where the speed limit was changed, it would be up to the courts to adjudicate that. He further stated the Michigan State Police was opposed to the speed limit change.

Commissioner Koenig clarified there was a student that got killed on that road that caused the speed limit change.

Mr. Conklin stated that in order for a speed limit to change without the Michigan State Police being involved, there had to be a certain number of driveways, or one mile of residential frontage. He further stated he had been asked if there were other ways to change the speed limit, and after speaking with County attorneys, involving the Michigan State Police or establishing the speed limit as provided in Michigan Law was the only way to make sure tickets were held up in court.

Commissioner McGrain stated the elephant in the room was the Cornell Road project, and he questioned if they were making the roads safer by making them straighter and wider and increasing sightlines, or if that invited folks to speed more. He further stated he was curious about the Committee’s philosophy on flattening and widening roads, because he thought it was not always the right decision to make.

Commissioner McGrain stated he was glad to hear Mr. Conklin’s examples of how he worked with communities to find alternatives ways to implement Complete Streets. He asked how they should judge, when looking at traffic counts in a location, if the road should be widened or if there should be additional pedestrian capacity.

Commissioner McGrain provided an example, the Jolly Road interchange and I-96, where he thought these judgements could be made.

Mr. Conklin explained alignment and profiles of roads, as was considered when a hill was lowered on Cornell Road. He further stated it was every engineer’s conundrum to design or improve a road to improve sight distance for the safety of people, but then in so doing, make people feel more comfortable driving faster.

Mr. Conklin stated there were cases, like the hill on Cornell Road, where there had been fatalities because of speed and the lack of visibility. He further stated there were decisions that had to be made about incorporating pedestrians and vehicles into road design, which usually ended in compromise.

Mr. Conklin stated they had involved the community with the Cornell Road project and had a walk about where they viewed the proposed design plans. He further stated not everyone was on the same page, but in the end, the process allowed them to have a best-fit situation.

Discussion.
Mr. Conklin stated in terms of road widening, they needed to practice context-sensitive design, where they incorporated safety with environment.

Mr. Conklin explained more projects in which road traffic improvements took place. He stated the County was not adding any more through-lanes throughout the County, but instead would add turn lanes where studies showed it would improve traffic flow and that qualified them for funding.

Mr. Conklin stated there were also non-motorized improvements being done on projects, especially the Jolly and Okemos Roads intersection, where they received funding to put in sidewalks to connect the Jackson National Life Building to Jolly Road. He further stated they would be adding pedestrian signals, push buttons, and other pedestrian improvements.

Commissioner McGain stated he would like to look at all of the aspects initially, rather than adding them as a grant. He further stated he would like the Committee to think about things comprehensively and he hoped to see more traffic displacement studies to get people out of cars and onto sidewalks or bikes.

A discussion ensued about previously completed projects and possible future projects.

Commissioner Nolan stated it was her wish that the Board of Commissioners could set the policy and philosophy and say this was what Commissioners wanted, but it was up to the local areas to ultimately decide.

Commissioner Banas stated she had read traffic fatalities were higher in rural versus urban areas, because people felt more comfortable driving at higher speeds in rural areas. She further stated that a Complete Streets advocacy group had recommendations for plans in rural areas so they could also be included.

Commissioner Maiville left at 6:43 p.m.

Commissioner Banas stated at the Tri-County Bicycle Association, they had conversations about what would happen with federal transportation funding for the Capital Area Transportation Agency’s Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. She further stated she was concerned about the current federal administration’s warmth toward funding public transportation projects, and there was a feeling they may have to restructure funding that was allocated to BRT in the County.

Commissioner Banas stated she would love to talk about how the County’s trails planning and road projects could dovetail and take advantage of funding options if or when public transit funding was not around.

Mr. Conklin stated the Road Department regularly communicated with the transit organizations to ensure their needs were being met. He clarified that Commissioner Banas meant to reallocate transit funds to fund other types of transportation projects.

Commissioner Banas stated she would like to have ideas on how off-road trails planning could segue with roadway improvements by intersections, to bring people to the trails.
A further discussion ensued about the completed Cornell Road project in which Mr. Conklin clarified the process in which the project was approved and implemented by the township.

Commissioner McGrain thanked Mr. Conklin for thinking about innovation on roadways, especially roundabouts, where possibly creating discomfort for drivers could cause safer roadways. He further stated he would ask the Committee to think about other tactics, like removing edge markings and center lane speed illusions, to make roadways safer.

Chairperson Sebolt asked Mr. Morgan if there was a complete map of the trails plan.

Mr. Morgan passed out a network map from the Trails and Parks Comprehensive Report. He stated Spicer Group was analyzing and making improvements on the map.

Chairperson Sebolt asked if the Roads Department was aware of potential trail crossings over roads.

Mr. Morgan stated the Roads Department was certainly involved in the mapping process, and Spicer Group would improve it and turn it into GIS format to work better together.

Mr. Conklin stated the existing and proposed paved shoulder map came from an old Road Department plan. He further stated they invited the master planning effort for the map to propose future paved shoulders, and he was not aware if any were changed.

Chairperson Sebolt asked aside from paved shoulders, if there were places where a crosswalk might be necessary or other things that could be done to make trail entrances more pedestrian-friendly, that the Road Department and other entities involved in the project worked together.

Mr. Conklin stated that was done already. He further stated when a trail crossed a road, the trail sponsor would come to the Road Department and request a permit to put in necessary signs, markings and flashing lights to meet safety standards around the trail crossing.

Commissioner Koenig asked how much it cost to put in a pedestrian push button.

Mr. Conklin stated it depended on what was already in place.

Commissioner Koenig asked what the cost would be, assuming nothing was already in place.

Mr. Conklin stated that High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk Beacon (HAWK) signals were about $125,000.

Commissioner Koenig stated she wanted the Committee to be aware those projects were not cheap. She asked if there was anything the Board of Commissioners could do to help departments and entities coordinate, or for them to have projects coming from the Board of Commissioners that were shovel-ready if there was funding available.
Mr. Conklin stated, in terms of what the County wanted to guide the planning effort toward road projects, the map and non-motorized countywide plan were the most useful documents. He further stated when they were planning road projects, he looked at the map to see where paved shoulders were desired, proposed, or maintained, and worked with townships and cities to make changes to plans.

Commissioner Koenig clarified they had what they needed from the Board of Commissioners in the form of the non-motorized plan.

Mr. Morgan stated he had worked with Mr. Conklin during the initial application of the trails projects, and he would send him the most recent trails project plan to review again to make sure the language was clear.

Commissioner Koenig stated she wanted to give the Road Department to have a heads up about what projects were coming his way, so there was a coordinated effort.

Mr. Conklin stated they were familiar with the trails plan, and when they had road projects, they looked to see what non-motorized facilities were desired by the township or county-wide plan at those locations.

Commissioner Banas stated it isn't likely that they would miss something because Mr. Conklin also worked with the Parks Commission and the Tri-County Bicycle Association, but it was good to hear the Committee wanted everyone to work together. She asked if the County could do something to add more of a buffer between the motorist driving lane and the bicycle driving lane, to allow for safer travel.

Mr. Conklin stated they could make the roads wider.

Commissioner Banas stated she heard cyclists wanted wider bike lanes.

Mr. Conklin stated it could be done if there was funding.

Commissioner Banas stated it was a prioritization of the roadways, to save lives. She mentioned the tragedy in Kalamazoo where multiple cyclists were killed on a roadway, and asked what could be done policy-wise to prevent that from happening.

Mr. Conklin stated sometimes wider road widths made for greater speeds, even if it was the shoulder that was wider for cyclists, it still gave motorists a sense of security. He further stated they could do those projects, but they needed to be aware wider widths invited greater speed and prioritize what they wanted to pay for.

Commissioner Banas asked what a city like Seattle would do to make travel lanes for cyclists safer.

Mr. Conklin stated most communities follow the AASHTO Bike Development Guidelines. He further stated they just needed to weigh the costs of projects versus intended safety and
unintended consequences such as greater vehicle speeds and/or having to remove more trees for widening for bike lanes or paved shoulders.

A discussion ensued about buffers between bike lanes and motor lanes.

Mr. Conklin stated they would need to widen the road to accommodate for six feet of bike lane and buffer.

Mr. Morgan read from the guidelines that stated when speeds exceeded 40 miles per hour, shoulders must be 6 feet wide.

Chairperson Sebolt asked if there were ever times when a department would communicate with two townships who were proposing similar adjacent projects, to get them to join up.

Mr. Conklin stated two instances had already occurred, on Michigan Avenue and Willow Street, in which they communicated with adjacent communities to make more Complete Streets.

Chairperson Sebolt asked if that communication occurred between two communities in which one did not have a Complete Streets ordinance.

Mr. Conklin stated the rational approach would be to have the communities work together to have a reasonable transition take place.

Chairperson Sebolt asked, if a resolution was passed by the Board of Commissioners, would the Road Department want to see a policy where it explicitly laid out the request to work with adjacent communities to try to produce a seamless transition.

Mr. Conklin stated he would like to have a conversation at a later meeting where they discussed what the Committee’s role and product would be. He recommended to keep the policy higher up, to show deference to individual inputs of townships, and to codify what the County did already in coordinating with the needs of individual communities.

Discussion.

Commissioner Banas asked if another county in Michigan had a Complete Streets policy.

Mr. Conklin stated he was not sure.

Commissioner McGrain left at 7:07 p.m.

Discussion.

The next meetings were tentatively scheduled for April 26th and May 4th, but would be confirmed by Becky Bennett, Board of Commissioners Office Director.

Announcements
Commissioner Banas stated she would send copies of the recommendations from the Complete Streets to advocacy groups to get ideas about rural projects.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

BARB BYRUM, CLERK OF THE BOARD