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MEMORANDUM

Date: June 2, 2020
To: City of Baxter City Council/City of Baxter Utility Commission
From: Pete Lemke
Subject: 2021 Inglewood Drive Railway Crossing and Associated Roadway Improvements
City of Baxter
Municipal Project No.: 4121
BMI Project No. T42.120675

Background

On February 18, 2020, the City of Baxter selected Bolton & Menk to develop plans and implement the 2021 Inglewood Drive Railway Crossing and Associated Roadway Improvements (Inglewood Drive) project. The project is focused on the relocation of the Knollwood Drive traffic signal and railroad crossing to Inglewood Drive, pavement rehabilitation on Foley Road, public utility improvements, and an improved configuration for the Forthun Road and Isle Drive intersection. The schedule is agency coordination, design, and final plans in 2020 and construction in 2021. Bolton & Menk's role includes providing monthly update memorandums to the City Council, Utilities Commission, and staff.

Project Update as of ~~April-May 30~~31, 2020

Agency Coordination

On May 20, 2020, City of Baxter Public Works staff (Trevor Walter and Trevor Thompson) and the Bolton & Menk 2021 Inglewood Drive project team (Pete Lemke and Derek Arens) met with MnDOT District 3 staff (Kelvin Howieson and Luke Wehseler) to discuss progress on the 2021 Inglewood Drive project and coordination with MnDOT on their current TH 210 Corridor Study within the City of Baxter. Critical items discussed included:

- Available traffic counts for traffic signal warrants and justification
- Project Funding sources and timelines
- Geometric Layout options fitting existing project context and accommodating possible changes coming out of the TH 210 Corridor Study

Due to Covid19 restrictions and the effects on traffic levels (limited travel, working from home, and closing of the schools associated with the State's stay at home order), industry practice has been to not conduct traffic counts at this time. Given this, we have not been able to obtain accurate traffic counts meeting industry standards and acceptable to the State. MnDOT District 3 has advised that they would not allow non-traditional methods for determining traffic counts to be used for warranting and justifying traffic signal.

A potential alternate solution consists of combining Streetlight® data (a service that aggregates and processes cell phone data to provide traffic volumes) with existing traffic counts and past traffic studies

of the surrounding area to produce traffic data was not considered acceptable by MnDOT for traffic signal warrants albeit acceptable for higher level work such as the MnDOT TH 210 Corridor Study. Given this, MnDOT is likely not willing to approve a geometric layout without an approved Intersection Control Evaluation (ICE) Report, which could not be completed without accurate traffic data acceptable to the State.

At this meeting Bolton & Menk presented four geometric layout alternatives of the Inglewood Drive Railway crossing. The purpose of producing four layouts with varying options was to identify the right geometric components that would accommodate current traffic levels, anticipated traffic growth out to the design year for this project (2041), and also accommodate any changing travel and traffic patterns resulting from implementation of the TH 210 Corridor Study recommendations (e.g. a median closure and/or loss of frontage access would require additional traffic to use the Inglewood Drive intersection for local access off of TH 210). The consensus of the group was that certain options presented would do a better job of responding to traffic growth and would also accommodate future traffic and changing travel patterns due to any recommendations that we would anticipate from the TH 210 Corridor Study. The group also agreed that without current traffic counts accurately reflecting true traffic levels and without knowing recommendations from the TH 210 Corridor Study, it would be premature to make recommendations and develop a layout for the 2021 Inglewood Drive project.

Coming out of the May 20, 2020 meeting, it was the consensus of the group to request City Council consideration of our recommendation to delay construction of the 2021 Inglewood Drive project until 2022. A one-year delay would provide the opportunity to collect traffic counts for use in an ICE report and design of intersection geometry (with timely lifting of Covid19 restrictions), allow BNSF to start railroad coordination activities again, and we would know the recommendations and implementation timeline coming out of the TH 210 Corridor Study.

Kelvin Howieson, MnDOT State Aid, stated that he would work with the City of Baxter to ensure project funding is secure for 2022 construction based on City Council direction to move the project to 2022 by the first part of June 2020.

Bolton & Menk has a right of entry permit application in process for going on to BNSF property for topographic survey activities. We anticipate the field work will be completed within a week once the permit is approved. There is a potential for expanding the area needed within the railroad R/W pending the outcome of the project layout process and identification of the preferred alternative.

BNSF has stated that due to company policies and Covid19 meeting and travel restrictions at the state level, they would not be able to schedule or hold the on-site diagnostic meeting required for their coordination process. Bolton & Menk continues to keep in touch with BNSF and we are responsive to their need for coordination and we are pushing them to keep coordination and responsiveness moving forward on this project.

Bolton & Menk received a draft geotechnical report from Braun Intertec on April 29, 2020. The report was reviewed with comments provided by Bolton & Menk for consideration and incorporation.

Project Development

The project team recently assessed the state of the project in the context of Covid19 and the MnDOT TH 210 Corridor Study and how they would influence traffic data availability, BNSF coordination, and identifying the right design for the TH 210 at Inglewood Drive Intersection. We looked at work

completed to date and assessed risks with keeping critical project elements moving forward, and what has changed since early March 2020.

Where we were in early-March:

- BNSF coordination is moving along and on schedule
- Discussions to delay the project was held due to MnDOT's specific request of analyzing a signalized reduced conflict intersection (RCI) and wait until the TH 210 Corridor Study is completed. A specific focus of that discussion was the pedestrian crossing design and safety. A decision was made to continue progress of the Inglewood Drive project because it was deemed that the signalized RCI would create an undesirable crossing condition for pedestrian and bicycle traffic and we felt there was too much uncertainty on how the signalized RCI would operate with an adjacent railroad.
- In early March, COVID-19 was known, but we did not anticipate the duration or magnitude of the Stay at Home order and its impacts on work, school, meetings, and travel. Schools were in session, most folks were still going to work, and the tourism industry was expected to kick-off in a couple months and we would see the anticipated traffic levels associated with that tourism.

Currently:

- Scheduling of the on-site diagnostic meeting with BNSF has been delayed due to Covid19 meeting and travel restrictions and concern for safety of participants. BNSF requirements include hiring Texas-based Benesch professional services firm to participate in the diagnostic meeting and provide engineering services related to the relocated railway crossing. This-The need for interstate travel has delayed ~~required~~ coordination efforts ~~needed~~ required to come to a consensus of the project layout and crossing equipment requirements.
- MnDOT has progressed on their TH 210 Corridor Study. Obtaining traffic counts has been an obstacle for them too but due to the nature of the project, only being a corridor study, there is a less stringent threshold of what is acceptable for traffic data and it is acceptable to use data from previous studies and traffic counts and merge that data with data from sources like current counts and Streetlight Data.
- Obtaining accurate traffic data to complete an approved ICE Report and finalize the geometric layout with MnDOT has been a challenge given MnDOT's approach to not allowing data from non-traditional sources to justify or warrant a traffic signal. We consider this a risk to the project schedule, and ultimately MnDOT funding the project.
- Open house meetings and other public involvement events and interaction with the residents for the project has been impacted from the COVID-19 situation. The time needed to inform the public may take longer and respecting any requirement for social distancing and the need of all individuals to feel safe during these events may take considerable effort and time. This critical task will need even more attention to achieve the desired outcome of an informed public that may have concerns but are ultimately supportive of the project.
- The project team has considered the timing of the assessment process. Currently, development of assessment computations is premature given where we're at with identifying the overall project and it's costs. there is more of a chance that the city assessments will be too much of a financial burden for certain residents. City staff has requested that Bolton & Menk analyze sewer and water service to parcels on Perch Lake by extending utilities through private property by easement instead of installation along Foley Road. The public engagement process required to fully vet this options would be difficult to carry out given current Covid19 meeting restrictions and likely public sentiment over public meetings.

- Amending the feasibility report has been a larger undertaking than originally scoped. The original report, ~~completed by Widseth Smith & Nolting (WSN), has certain components missing did not consider like~~ railroad crossing infrastructure and a traffic engineering review of the new intersection, costs for railroad design completed by BNSF, and implementation of the private utilities to the Perch Lake residents. In addition, ~~t~~the feasibility report does not provide a rigorous traffic data analysis of the TH 210 at Inglewood Drive intersection and associated geometry. Given this, we would need current and projected (2041 design-year) traffic counts and turning movement data to prove the recommended geometrics will be sufficient to handle future traffic growth, changing travel patterns based on area development, and operate in conjunction with the railroad crossing. In addition, considerations of any potential outcomes from the TH 210 Corridor Study were not evaluated. Bolton & Menk understands that they will be accountable and take ownership for all material within the feasibility report. The project team concluded that all influential components to the project should be included within this feasibility report.

In summary, the project team is recommending consideration of the City Council to delay project construction until 2022. The team wants to consider all options that need further evaluation along with making sure the final product is the right size and scale for the city and its residents. In addition, delaying the project leaves the door open for any potential MnDOT Cooperative Agreement funding money that may present itself from the TH 210 Study outcome. This potential opportunity would combine the city and MnDOT's vision of the corridor that could possibly be achieved sooner than anticipated.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

All the work to date will remain useable and beneficial to the project regardless of timing.

- Topographic survey remains in the project location. Additional survey may be justified if the project scope is adjusted to accommodate MnDOT TH 210 Corridor Study recommendations.
- Geotechnical field exploration remains in the project location and can be reapplied in 2022. Additional field exploration may be required depending on recommendations from the TH 210 Corridor Study
- Conceptual design will be carried through to the final feasibility report.

An amendment to the project scope and consultant budget is a possibility dependent on the influence from the TH 210 Corridor Study recommendations, geometric alternative selected, utility alternative selected, and extended project schedule.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the City Council delay the Inglewood Drive Railway Crossing and Associated Roadway Improvements Project one full year and move construction to 2022. Our recommendation includes delaying most work until we have the results of MnDOT's TH 210 Corridor Study and can obtain traffic satisfactory to MnDOT. We will continue to provide monthly status updates and anticipate project work would resume around October 1, 2020.

COUNCIL ACTION REQUESTED

Name: Trevor Walter

Date: 6/2/2020

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MOTION to: Delay the Inglewood Drive Railway Crossing and Associated Roadway Improvements Project one full year; construction would be 2022.