

RATS

**Rockford Area Transportation Study
Metropolitan Planning Organization**

POLICY COMMITTEE

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District Engineer Gregory Mounts, Illinois Department
of Transportation, District 2*

Meeting Minutes RATS Technical Committee Loves Park City Hall – November 20, 2003

Members Present:

Adam Tegen; Belvidere-Boone County Planning;
Craig Lawler, Belvidere Public Works Dept.;
Rich Lundin, Boone County Highway;
Bob Martin, Loves Park Public Works;
Dan Jacobson; Loves Park;
Mark Painter, Village of Winnebago;
Rick Gualandi; IDOT-Dixon;
Bob Soltau, IDOT-Springfield;
Carlos Molina, Winnebago County Highway
Mary Abernathy; Village of Roscoe.

Others Present:

Charles Smith; Hanson Engineering
Gary McIntyre, RATS staff;
Thomas Unzteker; Rockford resident;
William Rush; Rockford resident
Art Okinski; Rockford resident
Jim Ryan, City of Rockford;
Arianne Clarke; City of Rockford.

Members Absent:

Village of Machesney Park;
Greater Rockford Airport Authority;
Rockford Mass Transit District;
Village of Cherry Valley;
City of Rockford Community Development Department-Planning Division
Winnebago County Planning & Economic Development.

1. CALL TO ORDER / APPROVAL OF MINUTES: At 10:15 am, with a quorum present, Jim Ryan made a motion to chair the committee for Steve Ernst. Motion was seconded by Dan Jacobson and approved unanimously. Jim Ryan called the meeting to order. Mr. Ryan moved to approve the minutes of the July 22, 2004. Motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

2. AGENCY REPORTS: Several of the members present gave reports on the status of the improvement projects under their respective jurisdictions. The members present discussed the status and progress of the projects and various issues under the responsibility of their respective jurisdictions. Those present updated the progress of

projects listed on their respective TIP Status Report sheets.

Carlos Molina noted that the County has recently received approval to use Federal Hazard Elimination and Safety (HES) funding in Year 2006 at Riverside and Mulford. They also received approval to use Major Bridge funding in Year 2008 on the Perryville Road bridge over the RR tracks south of Harrison Avenue. The ICC will also contribute to the bridge project.

David Noel and Bob Martin discussed roadway planning being conducted related to situations on or near Orth Road, Lyford Road, Riverside and East Drive, the widening of Riverside, and the Riverside Bridge over the creek east of North Second Street. More details will be presented to RATS at future meetings.

Wayne Dust discussed some of the planning being conducted with regard to the new Federal Courthouse in downtown Rockford.

Copies of the SLATS Work Program for next year are available.

3. CONTEXT SENSITIVE SOLUTIONS: Mike Moss, a representative of the Office of the Secretary of the Illinois Department of Transportation, discussed the new IDOT emphasis on Context Sensitive Solutions. He explained that the mission of IDOT has been changing from the concept of simply providing and maintaining transportation connectivity to a broader approach that also incorporates quality of life.

He said that the traditional method for designing a transportation project was for transportation officials to identify a problem, design a solution, and then offer the solution to the public for approval. In recent years, it has become clear that that approach often puts forth narrow-sighted engineering solution that solves a particular transportation problem but inadvertently and adversely affects the natural environment, other features that are important to the community for aesthetic or historic reasons, and/or overall quality of life.

To avoid or minimize these conflicts, IDOT is now advocating an approach that brings stakeholders and the entire community into the planning / problem-solving effort earlier in the process. By getting stakeholder input sooner, IDOT can then craft more “informed” and comprehensive solutions. A goal of IDOT is to find solutions that are a “consensus” between IDOT and all or most of the stakeholders, rather than merely an engineering or transportation solution.

As a matter of policy, through the Context Sensitive Solutions approach, IDOT now advocates a more distinctive process of stakeholder involvement: (1) that can be useful at all decision stages (planning, design, and construction); (2) that can be applied to more projects including many of the standard or smaller projects as well as the large projects; (3) that can be flexible and modular; and (4) that can be set up with a few “new rules” as possible.

To implement this new emphasis, IDOT personnel and contractors will be retrained in three ways: (1) general instruction regarding the public involvement guidelines, when to use them, and what they require; (2) training to help determine the appropriate stakeholders are, how to make contact with them, and when they should be brought into the process; and (3) training in the techniques that should be used to insure that the meetings between IDOT and the stakeholders are productive.

Additional information can be obtained by contacting Mike Moss at his office located at 310 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60604 and by phone at 312-793-2250. An informative Website on the topic is located at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/csd/> Other useful sites and publications available on the Web are noted in a brochure available from Mr. Moss.

4. ROCKFORD RAIL CONSOLIDATION STUDY: Brian Berquist presented the preliminary results of the Rockford

Railroad Consolidation Study. The study was funded with an Illinois Tomorrow grant and the consultant, Wilbur Smith Associates was hired to conduct it.

Accompanied by a Power Point slide presentation he had developed, Mr. Berquist first discussed the origin and history of Rockford's railroads. The first trackage laid through Rockford was by the Galena and Chicago Union Railway en route to the lead mines in Galena. Interestingly, at about the time this trackage had been completed between Rockford and Chicago, there was a serious cholera epidemic in Chicago. Consequently, large numbers of Swedish immigrants of the time, originally bound for Chicago, were deterred from disembarking in Chicago and were instead forwarded westward to the end of the line, Rockford. These people settled in Rockford and formed a core around which further immigration / settlement rapidly continued. During the first century of Rockford's development, numerous furniture, fastener, and other heavy industries established themselves and flourished around this skilled and highly-motivated workforce – as did the railroads, to meet their supply and marketing needs.

Unfortunately, as Mr. Berquist explained, in the last 40-50 years, heavy manufacturing in the Rockford area has declined substantially. In its wake, however, much of the railroad infrastructure remains – now underutilized, poorly maintained, and partially abandoned. Obviously, this has created problems for both the remaining industries in need of rail service and the local governments and remaining rail companies responsible for maintaining trackage, rail crossings and bridges. Also of concern is the blighting effect of abandoned rail properties on adjacent properties.

These problems in mind, Rockford initiated the Rail Consolidation Study with the following objectives: (1) Consolidate multiple switching operations. (2) Eliminate abandoned / underutilized trackage. (3) Examine costs of alternatives. (4) Examine redevelopment possibilities. The Study consisted of three major components. First, we sought to thoroughly identify the needs and wants of the community, the railroads, and the local industries. Second, we proceeded to comprehensively inventorying the existing infrastructure. Third, we endeavored to develop consolidation alternatives and test these alternatives by reiterating the alternatives back through the first two components.

It was immediately recognized that productive results could only be accomplished through extensive communication and trust-building that would lead to the complete cooperation of the stakeholders. Therefore the first task was to meet with all the relevant stakeholders up front: the four railroad companies, the 30+ local industries or companies relying upon or potentially using rail services, and the area governments and commerce groups.

The major components of the existing railroad infrastructure involves four rail companies: the Union Pacific (UP); the Iowa, Chicago, and Eastern (ICE); the Illinois Railnet (IR) and the Canadian National (CN). The first three of these have "end of line" trackage in the Rockford area. Only the CN maintains a through line. Currently, there are three major rail bridges over the Rock River, all just south of downtown Rockford and maintained, from north to south, by the UP, the ICE, and the CN. Two parallel sidings enter Rockford from the east, the UP and the CN – they abut through most of their reach, running through what is often referred to as the Woodruff corridor or the Wallenburg Parkway corridor. The IR enters Rockford from the south in a corridor between Kishwaukee and 11th Streets and the ICE enters Rockford from the north on the west side of the Rock River. There are three switching yard locations. There are also several miles of abandoned access trackage throughout the urban area.

Mr. Berquist next discussed some of the main elements of the Study's conclusions. The first was the CN/IR Switch. Currently, the IR crosses the Rock River over the middle of the three railroad bridges and, from there, makes connection with the ICE. An alternate proposed/recommended is to have the IR cross to the CN just north of Buckbee Street, use the CN bridge (the south bridge) to cross the Rock River, and use the CN trackage to near Winnebago Street where it would then connect with the ICE. The advantages of this alternate are that it will eliminate two at-grade crossings of South Main Street, it would allow access to the IR yards, and it would free up the middle bridge for possible conversion to a pedestrian bridge.

Another alternate proposed / recommended is new storage and crossover trackage in the vicinity of Alpine Road. RR cars could be stored in this area to await switching, as needed. More important, this addition would allow UP

traffic east of Alpine to transfer to the CN mainline. This, in turn, would allow the UP trackage west of Alpine to be freed up for alternate uses (pedestrian or roadway). It would also eliminate eight at-grade crossings, eliminate three constrictive grade separated crossings (20th St., Broadway, and 9th St.). Farther west, it would free up the depressed RR ROW through Haight Village and, possibly, another RR bridge over the Rock River (the north bridge).

A third alternate proposed / recommended is a switch/crossover track just east of the Liebovich steel distribution company. This switch would connect the segment of UP rail now serving Liebovich with the CN (to the south) and would continue rail service to Liebovich but without use of the long stretch of UP line between Liebovich and Alpine Road. In addition to the advantages mentioned in the paragraph above, this addition also eliminates an at-grade crossing of Central Avenue.

A fourth alternate proposed / recommended is the K-D Spur Connection. This extension of IR trackage northward in the vicinity of Buckbee Street would serve to maintain service to the industries on the east side of the Rock River northward along the Kenosha-Davenport (K-D) Spur. This alternate will have to be investigated further to verify the physical feasibility. Note that this is not likely to affect the Register-Star expansion project.

A fifth alternate proposed for consideration is the consolidation of the switching yards west of the Rock River. The switching area just north and east of Kent Creek would be consolidated with the ICE switching yard between Kent Creek (west side) and Avon Street. The ICE yard is preferred because of its longer storage and switching tracks. This alternate would open the South Main area for recreational or commercial uses.

The above alternates are not the only possibilities. Several parts of the above could be revised slightly and mixed. For example, while the above scenarios assume the exclusive use of the CN bridge, other alternates could be developed that use the UP bridge exclusively, or use both bridges.

The preferred option is the use of the CN bridge because it is the newest of the three bridges and it has double track capacity. The CN RR is also the only through-line in town. This would allow the use of the IR and UP bridges for other uses.

Mr Berquist said that, overall, feedback thusfar has been generally positive. Recently, we have met with the IR to discuss the installation of the Behr switch and the transfer of their bridge. The IR has been tentatively receptive to the ideas and even expressed interest in becoming the local switching agent. We hope to receive the final report from Wilbur Smith early in FY 2004. At that time we will circulate it to the railroads and throughout the community. Given further positive feedback we hope to continue working with the railroads and the local industries to refine the study and develop agreements that will lead to implementation.

4.1 PROGRESS REPORT ON ROCKFORD PAVEMENT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM: Brian Berquist gave a detailed report on the City of Rockford's Pavement Management Program. This program has been in the works for the last 4 years. Largely funded through RATS and Federal PL funds, the initial inventory has recently been completed and will now move into its ongoing inventory maintenance phase. More important, it can now be used for its intended purpose – decision-making regarding cost-effective and equitable roadway maintenance programming. In total the effort inventoried the pavement of 6,988 blocks of pavement. This equates to 1427 lane miles or 638 centerline miles. Included in the data are the street widths, the shoulder types and widths, sidewalk conditions, the pavement type and the drainage characteristics. As part of the inventory, the surveyors assigned objective condition ratings according to a Pavement Condition Index and did more detailed inspection and rating on randomly sampled segments and areas.

All of the data has been entered into MicroPaver, a computer database program created initially by the Corp of Engineer specifically for storing, tracking and analyzing roadway and pavement data. The data will eventually be merged with the City's Geographic Information System. Mr. Berquist presented the Committee with several Power Point slides illustrating MicroPaver's data display and analysis capabilities.

5. RATS FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF HIGHWAYS/STREETS: Gary McIntyre said that we have received

IDOT's recent proposed revisions to the Functional Classification to our streets and highway but staff has not had time to review the documents.

6. PROGRESS REPORTS

6.1 Winnebago County Smart Growth (Phase 2) – Anybody remember what, if anything, was said here.

6.2 Roscoe-Rockton Public Transit Study – Gary, did you say something about this. Received a draft of the study perhaps? Also Rick McVinnie would like a copy if you did.

6.3 WinGIS – Steve ???

6.4 Winnebago/Boone Co. Transportation Planning Study – Gary ??.

6.5 RMTD Route and Schedule Study – RMTD is evaluating and reworking many of the route and scheduling proposals developed by the consultant. Several public meeting have been held to obtain input from the transit patrons and the general public. RMTD hopes bring a final system proposal together sometime in January and publish new route maps, schedules, and other service information. Education / information sessions will be conducted with the hope of implementing the new system sometime in early March.

6.6 RMTD East Side Transfer Center – This study is on hold until the Route and Schedule Study is completed and the new system is implemented.

6.7 Commuter Rail Study – Russ Petrotte said 14 submittals were received in response to the Request for Qualifications that was sent out for the study to determine the feasibility of extending commuted rail service between Rockford, Belvidere and Marengo and connecting with the Metra service of the Chicago region. He said the study steering committee, the NICRII Executive Committee, evaluated the submittals and narrow the field to seven firm/teams that will be asked to submit more detailed proposals. The Request for Proposals will likely go out this week. The steering committee is composed of officials or representatives from RATS, Rockford, Winnebago County, Boone County, Belvidere, Growth Dimensions, and IDOT.

7. COMMUNICATIONS: Steve you said something about the FHWA and PEA here? Also something brief about ITS Steve Ryan informed the Committee that the State of Illinois is implementing a “511 travelers information system.” There are 19 States accross the country that have implemented such a system. He distributed information on the system. He also talked briefly about the new Federal transportation bill that has been release by the US House of Representatives. Bob Soltau noted that the last round of the Illinois Tommorrow Program will be coming up soon. He urged area representative to make application. He also noted that our FY 2004 TIP has been approved by the Federal agencies.

8. OTHER BUSINESS: None??

9. ADJOURNMENT: With no further business to conduct, Mark Painter moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Rich Lundin and approved unanimously at 12 noon.