

MORGANTOWN MONONGALIA
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION POLICY BOARD
APRIL 23, 2014 MINUTES (DRAFT)

Members Present: Chairman Anthony Giambrone-Star City, Vice-Chairman Wesley Nugent-City of Morgantown, Mayor Patricia Lewis-Granville, Mayor Jennifer Selin-City of Morgantown, Mike Kelly-Board of Education, Dave Bruffy-Mountain Line, Joe Statler-Blacksville, Councilperson Marti Shamberger-City of Morgantown, Perry Keller-WVDOH, Commissioner Tom Bloom-Monongalia County, Councilperson Janice Goodwin-City of Westover, Commissioner Eldon Callen-Monongalia County.

Members Absent: None

MPO Director: Bill Austin

I. Call to Order

With a quorum present, Chairman Giambrone called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Chairman Giambrone noted that during the public comment session, each person or a group has five minutes to speak.

II. Public Comment

Mr. Bill Rice, the chairman of the MPO Citizen Advisory Committee, a member of the Morgantown Utility Board, and a member of the West Run Board of Zoning Appeals, stated that since the last meeting there were effective email communications between the CAC and the Policy Board, and that the MPO now possesses better information to make a recommendation on how to improve the Mileground. He also noted that the Mileground is currently not in the West Run Planning District and is, therefore, not subject to any planning or zoning control.

Mr. Rice further stated that people should be allowed to make left turns to access businesses on the Mileground and that the best solution is to build a four-lane highway with median openings at appropriate locations to allow vehicles to make left turn.

Mr. Statler asked if the comments made by Mr. Rice is a recommendation from the CAC or a personal opinion.

Mr. Rice responded that it was his personal opinion, as there was no report from the CAC.

Mr. Ron Justice, representing the Monongalia County Development Authority, stated that he opposes the divided highway on the Mileground and supports the five-lane alternative. He noted that it is best for the business owners on the Mileground and the development of the county as a whole.

Mr. Don Spenser, a former MPO Policy Board Member, pointed out the benefits of a divided four-lane cross section on the Mileground. The benefits include less right-of-way acquisition, much safer environment for both vehicles and pedestrians, better compatibility to the potential roundabout, and more continuous traffic flow.

Mr. Christiaan Abildso, a member of MPO Citizen Advisory Committee, former member of traffic commission of City of Morgantown, the chairman of the Morgantown Pedestrian Safety Board, and a member of Morgantown Bicycle Board, stated that he supports the alternative of four-lane highway with a raised median and roundabout at the intersection with Hartman Run Rd, as originally recommended by the Policy Board. He cited data and analysis from reports presented by the WV DOH and the MPO and concluded that a four-lane with a raised median on the Mileground is the most desirable alternative balancing safety and efficiency. He also suggested that consideration be given to potential signalized pedestrian crossings at appropriate locations on the Mileground.

Mr. Bryan Edwards, an attorney representing business owners at the Mileground, stated that he opposes the four-lane divided highway option because it will destroy businesses on the Mileground, and that he supports the five-lane option which allows vehicles to turn left to access business on the Mileground.

Mr. James Gianola, an attorney representing the business owners at the Mileground, stated that one of things that lawyers do is that they dig into details and dig into history. He further stated that Mr. Austin has provided a calculation based on study of expected crash rates and that we should to look at the history and development of the model that was used to calculate those crash rates. Mr. Gianola said that the program or model did not actually dealt with an area similar to the Mileground. He also said that the information provided by Mr. Gmeindl is not applicable to the situation at the Mileground on the grounds that the Iowa study cited by Mr. Gmeindl is not a valid source to assess the Mileground issue. He noted that the Mileground situation is unique and the uniqueness should be addressed.

Mr. Steve Solomon, a business owner at the Mileground, stated that a divided four-lane on the Mileground will put him out of business.

Mr. Frank Vitale, chair of Morgantown Area Chamber of Commerce, stated that a four-lane divided highway will make it difficult for the business owners at the Mileground to continue their business, and that the Chamber of Commerce requests that the MPO do not put a four-lane divided highway on the Mileground.

Mr. Randy Buggs pointed out that there are 54 homes and 96 businesses on the Mileground, and that a divided highway will not only be detrimental to the businesses and residences on the Mileground, but also encourages vehicles to travel at a higher speed, making the road more dangerous for pedestrians crossing the street.

III. Committee Reports:

Mr. Austin noted that no quorum was established for the committees and that comments made by committee members are submitted to the Policy Board for consideration.

Mayor Selin stated that it should be confirmed that there are only two alternatives provided to the Policy Board to consider.

IV. Consideration of Motion to Rescind the October 21,2010 recommendation to the West Virginia department of Transportation-Division of Highways on the reconstruction of Mileground.

Commissioner Callen moved for approval of the motion, second by Commissioner Bloom.

Mr. Bruffy made a motion to suspend the rules and to require three-quarter super majority being in place to overturn a decision made by the prior board. He stated that the merit of a decision made by a prior board should be recognized and weighed, and that prudence should be exercised in overturning that decision.

Commissioner Bloom requested that the chairman rule Mr. Bruffy out of order because a motion is being on the floor, which is moved by commissioner Callen.

Mr. Bruffy pointed out that according to Chapter 5 and Chapter 18 of Robert's rules, his motion is a procedural motion which has a higher ranking than the action motion currently on the floor.

Commissioner Callen agreed with Mr. Bruffy that the procedural motion is subject to a vote in the first place under this situation.

Chairman Giambrone stated that the procedural motion made by Mr. Bruffy is on the floor. The motion failed for lack of a second.

Chairman Giambrone then stated the motion to rescind the recommendation made on the October 21, 2010 to the WV DOH on the reconstruction of Mileground is on the floor. The motion was passed with Mr. Bruffy voting against it.

Mr. Bruffy pointed out that based on Robert's rules, before a motion be voted upon, a discussion period should be provided, during which individuals have the opportunity to comment on that motion.

Mr. Bruffy stated that he reviewed the report submitted by the WV DOH and that he made the following points concerning the report: 1) the report showed no significance difference in the time needed to travel through Mileground Rd between the two opinions presented to the Board; 2) the DOH did not create a safer environment by recommending the five-lane alternative, which, on contrary, decreases the safety for both vehicles and pedestrians on the Mileground; 3) the report did not address the difference in queuing status for the roundabout option versus the 5-lane and traffic signal option at the Hartman Run Rd intersection.

Mr. Bruffy also stated that once the prior decision is overturned, the WV DOH has no obligation to follow through the recommendations made thereafter, which means that there is no way that features recommended by the Board, such as middle block crosswalk and Pedestrian Refuge Island, have to be considered by the WV DOH. He further stated that the Board should be aware that when extended queues occur along a segment of a road, traffic lights proliferate in order to accommodate merging traffic from properties along that segment.

Mr. Bruffy finally noted that the City of Morgantown purchased the Armory National Guard building in 2010 when the decision concerning the Mileground reconstruction had already been made by the prior MPO board. Any detrimental impact to the economic value of that property should have been taken into account at that time. The decision to be made tonight should disregard that factor.

Commissioner Callen commented that he made a motion on the basis that this is a follow up meeting, and in previous meeting this issue has been thoroughly discussed. He further stated that the original recommendation will create a high speed ingress and egress into the hospital and Morgantown through a business area that will undoubtedly be harmed.

Commissioner Callen further suggested that it may be appropriate to locate the potential roundabout towards the airport to reduce its right-of-way impact to adjacent properties and to convert Hart Field Rd to a one-way street. He stated that the choice is simple, which is to not destroy the businesses on the Mileground by building a high-speed divided highway there. He further stated that it is unavoidable that Mileground will be developed like Pattern Dr, and that reconstructing the Mileground is not a long-term solution to solve the traffic issues in the area. Commissioner Callen stated that he expects that the MPO, local agencies, and business entities can work with the WV DOT to develop better options to improve the traffic conditions on the Mileground and throughout the northeast part of the Morgantown area.

Councilman Nugent suggested to reaffirm the vote previously made to rescind the original recommendation on the reconstruction of Mileground. He also noted that efforts should be made to explore long-term solutions to address current and future traffic issues in this area.

Mr. Statler concurred with Councilman Nugent's opinion that the vote be recounted.

Chairman Giambrone stated that the Policy Board will re-vote on the motion moved by commissioner Callen and second by commissioner Bloom. The motion was passed with Mr. Bruffy voting no.

V. Consideration of a recommendation to the West Virginia Department of Transportation-Division of Highways on alternatives for the Mileground reconstruction.

Commissioner Callen stated that he does not have a solution and that the two options being presented by the WV DOH are not totally acceptable. He noted that a four-lane divided highway will destroy the businesses on the Mileground.

Commissioner Callen moved a motion that the Policy Board does not support building a continuously divided highway on Mileground Rd from WV705 to the intersection with Hartman Run Rd/Airport Blvd. The motion second by Commissioner Bloom.

Mr. Statler commented that the Board should specifically advise against building a continuous center turn lane on Mileground Rd, so that pedestrian islands or other configurations improving the safety on the Mileground can be constructed at strategically selected locations with minimum interference to the business on the Mileground.

Mr. Bruffy concurred with Mr. Statler's opinion. He further stated that a four-lane with a median and dedicated turn legs can create a safer environment on the Mileground and provide a better access management on the corridor to enhance operational efficiency for merging traffic from abutting properties, but such an option has never been provided. He also noted that given the improvements on Mileground Rd, there will be an increase in traffic volume and travel speed as this area continues to grow.

Mayor Lewis inquired if the Board is voting for a project including the treatment for the intersection on Mileground Rd with Hartman Run Rd/Airport Blvd.

Commissioner Callen commented that the reconstruction on that intersection is part of the project referred to by the motion on the floor. He reiterated that he does not find any of the plans presented by the WV DOH appropriate for the Mileground area. He further stated that efforts should be made to study the feasibility of building a roundabout at the intersection with Hartman Run Rd/Airport Blvd and to develop a better plan addressing transportation issues along the Mileground.

Mr. Statler commented that compared with a signal traffic, the potential roundabout may create a more continuous traffic flow on Mileground Rd, which reduces the gaps in traffic that can be used by vehicles to make left turns from the center-left-turn-lane being recommended under the motion on the floor, and subsequently, harms the businesses on the Mileground. He also noted that he expects the WV DOH to quickly accomplish relevant studies and analyses needed to move this project forward.

Mr. Keller noted that the project itself is called the Mileground Plus One that runs from the intersection of WV 705 with Stewartstown Rd to the intersection of Mileground Rd with Point Marion Rd and suggested that the motion to be made in this meeting only refer to the a portion of Mileground Rd that runs from the intersection with WV 705 to the intersection with Hartman Run Rd/Airport Blvd.

Mayor Selin stated that as for Mileground Rd. from the intersection with WV 705 to the intersection with Hartman Run Rd, a four-lane with median breaks and left-turn bays at strategically selected locations is preferred to a continuous center turn lane similar to Patterson Dr as it is. She reasoned that it will enhance pedestrian safety and reduce vehicle crashes, as well as provide access to the business on the Mileground. She also noted that a potential roundabout at the intersection with Hartman Run Rd should be seriously considered by the WV DOH.

Mr. Keller noted that the proposed five-lane cross section continues downhill until it reaches the Northpointe Plaza.

Mr. Kelly inquired how the timeline of this project is affected by recommendations from the MPO.

Mr. Keller responded that the project consists of three phases; phase I is already built; phase II is on Mileground Rd. from the intersection of WV 705 to the intersection of Hartman Run Rd; and phase III is on Mileground Rd. from the intersection of Harman Run Rd. to the intersection of Point Marion Rd. He further noted that phase II and phase III were previously combined into one environmental document, but the DOH is try to separate these two phases so that the phase III can move forward without delay while phase II is presented to the Board with other options.

Mr. Keller further commented that the MPO has the ability to make recommendations to the DOH, and that the DOH will evaluate those recommendations based on the rules made by the FHWA and standards provided by AASHTO. He noted that a wide variety of ways to improve the traffic on the Mileground will be investigated.

Commissioner Callen suggested that by the basis of the motion, WV DOH should be able to obtain right-of-way for the five-lanes on Mileground Rd.

Mr. Keller noted that before the right-of-way acquisition, the environmental study needs to be accomplished and exact footprint of this project needs to be decided.

Councilperson Shamberger stated that she does not support building a continuous center left turn on Mileground Rd and the interest of residents living along the Mileground corridor should not be overlooked. She further stated that the importance of pedestrian facility, such as sidewalk, on the Mileground should be identified and emphasized in this project.

Mayor Selin noted that sidewalks and wide shoulders should have been developed during the construction of phase I in this project, to accommodate potential pedestrians on that segment of the road.

Councilperson Shamberger noted that emergency vehicles were not provided with adequate road way to proceed under congested conditions on the WV 705 between in the intersection with Stewartstown Rd and the intersection with Mileground Rd, which is a four-lane undivided highway with no shoulder available in both directions.

Mr. Statler commented that wider shoulder is worthwhile, as it allows vehicles to pull over to yield the right-of-way to emergency vehicles on duty.

Commissioner Bloom stated that based on an opinion from the prosecute attorney of Monongalia county, the MPO is an advisory group, and that MPO is able to make recommendations, as articulated in MPO's By-laws.

Mr. Statler concurred with Commissioner Bloom's opinion, and added that a decision from the MPO is required for any transportation project involving Federal funding in this area, and that while a recommendation on a project made by the MPO is not mandatory for the WV DOH to follow, it plays a role in shaping the final plan for that project.

Mr. Bruffy stated that he expects the best result for the Mileground project.

Mr. Austin noted that a letter capturing the spirit of this meeting will be written and forwarded to the Chair.

Mayor Selin stated that when available, the design work of this project should be presented to the Board for further review.

Mr. Statler stated that the Board is sending out a clear message that five-lane configuration is preferred and structures improving the safety on the Mileground needs to be considered.

Commissioner Callen commented that the motion is simple, which states that there is no continuously divided highway on the Mileground, and that five-lane or other opinions should be investigated by the WV DOH.

Commissioner Callen further stated that based on his understanding, the WV DOH is required to bring this project back to the Board for further approvals, since Federal funding is involved. He asked Mr. Austin if it is an opinion for the Board to not vote for anything at this time.

Mr. Austin responded that the MPO and the state have to be in a substantial agreement with regard to how the Mileground should be reconstructed. He noted that given the lack of dynamic communication between project designers and the local community in past projects, the WV DOH coming back with a cross-section design that meets the concerns expressed by the Board will be appropriate at this time, although it is not a normal design process for the WV DOH.

Mr. Keller commented that the spending of Federal finding has already been approved for this project, and the next step is to cooperate the desires from the community and to use the best engineering judgment to make a final design for this project. He noted that without a clear consensus amid stakeholders, which is required in the environmental process, significant delay of this project may occur.

He also noted that it is prudent for the Board to request that as proceeding forward to the design stage, this project be presented to the Board for further comments and recommendations.

Commissioner Callen re-stated the motion, which, with respect to the segment on Mileground Rd from the intersection with WV 705 to the intersection with Hartman Run Rd/Airport Blvd, articulates that there will be no continuous median, that the five-lane configuration is preferred, that further studies on the use of a roundabout and on the changing of the road patterns are encouraged, and that at the design stage, the Board expects to review how this segment works on the basis of interests of businesses and residents on the Mileground.

The motion was passed unanimously.

VI. Other Business

No other business discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 7:21 PM.