



Denver City Council

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## Public Works Committee Summary

February 22, 2006

Location: Council Conference Room

**Committee Members Present:** Brown, Chair; Hancock, Lehmann, Robb

**Committee Members Absent:** Montero, Johnson

**Other Council Present:** Boigon, MacKenzie

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### 1) South Broadway NEPA update:

#### Committee Action

Approve an amendment to the Carter Burgess contract in the amount of \$750,000 to complete Phase II of the South Broadway National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to develop transportation alternatives for South Broadway between Exposition and Louisiana Streets.

#### Committee Discussion

Jason Longsdorf, Public Works, explained that NEPA is a Federal decision-making process that would help to create safe and efficient mobility for all types of transportation. He noted that NEPA provides the following benefits:

- Impartial assessment of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the proposed project;
- Analysis of a range of reasonable alternatives based on the applicants defined purpose and need for the project;
- Consideration of appropriate impact mitigation;
- Interagency participation; and
- Public involvement including opportunities to participate and comment.

Bill Vidal, Public Works, pointed out that NEPA decisions are based on a multitude of factors that include land use, people, and project plans. NEPA is not new and large successful transportation projects such as the I-70/Mouse Trap and the Glenwood Canyon incorporated NEPA review and standards. Incorporating NEPA into the South Broadway project helps this project to qualify for additional funding. Many issues have been identified for South Broadway that include: peak hour congestion that is expected to worsen, local and regional growth in the area would create increased demand on existing infrastructure, and increasing neighborhood concerns regarding increased traffic and safety. Mr. Vidal

indicated that the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) 2030 Build-out model was used to determine future volumes. The model considers screening criteria and transit alternatives such as bicycle overlays, pedestrian improvements, light rail and bus enhancements, southbound improvements at I-25 such as a wedge ramp or fly over ramp, and a multi-way boulevard enhancement. Councilmember Boigon commented that she supports the idea of a multi-way boulevard because it helps pedestrian crossings in areas where the streets are wide and high in traffic. Mr. Longsdorf explained that this type of enhancement incorporates a frontage road concept making the areas more pedestrian friendly. San Francisco has integrated this type of traffic planning. Most of the traffic in the South Broadway area would be generated by the Cherokee and Lionstone (east side of Broadway) developments and the goal would be to push some of the congestion to I-25 or Santa Fe Boulevard, areas that are also heavily congested.

Mr. Longsdorf stated that a consultant (Carter Burgess) was hired to assist with identifying transportation alternatives (Phase I). So far, scoping work has been conducted with agencies and the public, and a 30-member Consensus Committee was formed that is comprised of area neighborhood groups, business and property owners, developers and city agencies that identify problems, needs, and make suggestions. Public Works is requesting today approval to add \$750,000 to the existing contract with Carter Burgess to complete Phase II of the NEPA study for South Broadway. Phase II would complete the final analysis, stated Mr. Longsdorf. Councilmember Robb questioned the typical cost for NEPA studies. Bill Vidal, Public Works, explained that many factors are considered that contribute to NEPA costs – scope of project, corridor interchanges, traffic influence, and transit plans – so it is difficult to attest to what a typical cost would be. From experience, NEPA project costs range from \$1.5 million to \$30 million. NEPA incorporates a record of decision (ROD) process that requires a funding plan for a project before it can reach the final ROD. Amy Mueller, Public Works, explained that a NEPA assessment can have a five-year life providing that there is progress in the planning. Mr. Longsdorf pointed out that an environmental impact study once finalized cannot be re-done, whereas, an environmental assessment is less controversial and can be re-done. These studies help developers to determine how to build and help the City to tie in mitigation measures with its Strategic Transportation planning, stated Mr. Vidal. Councilmember MacKenzie noted that this NEPA study is a large investment in the area because of the Gates and Lionstone re-zoning and development and questioned how equity with various stakeholders would be achieved. Mr. Vidal responded that regional and statewide stakeholders have concerns, but the studies are correlated to federal guidelines and those guidelines must be adhered to. He added that I-25 funding for this area is anticipated from the Federal Government.

The Committee approved the amendment to the Carter Burgess contract to add \$750,000 for completion of the second phase for the South Broadway NEPA study.

## **2) Infrastructure Task Force:**

### Committee Discussion

Bill Vidal, Public Works, explained that Public Works' participation on the Infrastructure Task Force was to assess and develop strategies to balance current maintenance needs with new capital programs. The goal is to fund a certain level of maintenance so that the City could achieve an appropriate structural condition level. The transportation system

evaluated considered alleys, bridges, curb and gutter, curb ramps, sidewalks, streets, traffic signals, and traffic signs. Since 1995 the system has grown almost 6%.

Public Works identified the following steps to meet the desired maintenance conditions:

- ✓ Perform timely preventative maintenance;
- ✓ Approach all maintenance systems holistically – improve all street system elements at the same time to increase cost effectiveness and maximization of the asset life span;
- ✓ Changed pavement management from complaint driven to a managed program;
- ✓ Changed curb and gutter repairs from complaint driven to a strategic system; and
- ✓ Changed curb ramp construction from request driven to a strategic approach.

Public Works' current policy is based on 80% reactive and 20% proactive, stated Mr. Vidal. The goal is to reverse those percentages to be 80% proactive. Public Works is now managing its systems better, but the challenge is balancing capital maintenance with mobility needs. System mobility (capacity) was not included in the assessment, but engineering standards were applied to the models to determine optimum maintenance levels for future planning. Public Works has created a model to identify capacity needs developed by the Strategic Transportation Plan (STP). The formula is based on the ratio of person trips (by 2030) divided by existing capacity. Applying the capacity needs to this formula shows that current transportation systems either need improvement or significant study (see attachment). Public Works currently budgets \$10 million in annual funding for its pavement systems, but requires \$20 million annually to maintain its current conditions through the next decade. Traffic signals and traffic signage are the most distressed system areas; noted Mr. Roberts (see attachments).

Councilman Hancock asked how creative Public Works could be and questioned if count down signals could be utilized. Mr. Vidal indicated it would be difficult to commit to a new system and there would be many things to consider such as where the signals would be placed, what would be the expectations from other areas of the City, and where the funding would come from. Dennis Royer, Public Works, said in the past Public Works studied this option but found that size of a city dictates the program and success. Typically, this type of system is found in smaller jurisdictions and Denver has 1230 signals to maintain. Mr. Royer indicated that San Francisco incorporated the signaling system and found that it reduced accidents, but that more studies were being conducted regarding pedestrian safety and that Denver staff wanted to wait until more studies were completed before considering a change. Mr. Vidal reminded the Committee that over the past few years Public Works has cut its budget due to the failing economy and has developed the STP to help with pedestrian priorities and costs, but agreed that other options such as count down signals merit further discussion.

The Infrastructure Task Force – Public Works component – determined that to obtain optimum condition level for all needs would require an annual increase of \$20 million. A short term infusion in the amount of \$65.7 million would provide for “catch up” in the maintenance funding to bring conditions to sustainable levels. Councilmember Brown asked if an infusion were approved would annual funding still be needed. Marilyn Miller, Finance, said both were needed. Bonds (short term infusion) would be used for the capital capacity (growth) planning and the annual increase would get the City to a sustainable level. Mr. Vidal commented that no system lasts forever and at some point funding needs

to catch up to the investment. The intent is to organize projects and people – FasTracks, T-REX, utilities, Mayor, City Council, and management systems – to have a coordinated work effort and proposal. Ms. Miller reported that the Task Force is working on proposing policy and would assure that all factors are included in the final recommendations.

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