



Item: 2014 Update to the Great Falls Long Range Transportation Plan

From: Andrew Finch, Senior Planner, Planning & Community Development

Initiated By: Great Falls Transportation Planning Process

Presented By: Craig Raymond, Director of Planning and Community Development

Action Requested: Approve Update to the Long Range Transportation Plan

Suggested Motion:

1. Commissioner moves:

“I move that the City Commission (approve /not approve) the 2014 Update to the Long Range Transportation Plan, and direct its representative on the Policy Coordinating Committee to vote accordingly.”

2. Mayor calls for a second, discussion, public comment, and calls the vote.

Staff Recommendation: Approve the 2014 Update to the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Background: The Great Falls Urban Area has a central city with a population greater than 50,000, and therefore has certain responsibilities for local transportation planning — one of which is to have a current, compliant long range transportation plan. The transportation plan must be updated at least every four years, and also must be compliant with air quality regulations and meet other relevant federal transportation planning requirements.

In early 2013, the consulting firm of Robert Peccia & Associates was hired to assist in the preparation of a full update, which included both extensive data-gathering/analysis and public outreach. The Draft Plan was finalized in January of 2014.

Plan Update

Three formal public meetings and 26 stakeholder meetings were held over the past year to inform the public and to provide opportunity for direct public input. The consultant maintained a Facebook page for disseminating information, as well as a project website at www.greatfallslrtp.com. Drafts and technical memoranda were available to the public on the website, as was notification of outreach and comment opportunities. For further information on the opportunities provided for public input and comment, the full Public Involvement Plan can be found at the following URL:

http://www.greatfallslrtp.com/files/Download/GreatFalls_PIP_FINAL.pdf

A rigorous data collection and analysis effort included, in part, the following:

- Review of Level of Service for 80 intersections
- Analysis of major roads for volume-to-capacity (i.e., congestion)
- Identification of intersection crash “hot spots”
- Assessment of non-motorized connectivity and infrastructure concerns
- Summarization of transit constraints and limitations

Level-of-service and roadway congestion were also projected into the future, identifying areas that should be targeted for improvement.

The consultant has worked closely with Planning staff, the Montana Department of Transportation and Federal agencies to ensure the Plan Update meets Federal requirements and guidance. Specifically, the fiscal constraint and air quality conformance elements of the Update have been reviewed and determined to be in compliance with Federal regulations.

The Draft Update was made available for a 30-day public review and comment period, ending February 21, 2014, with six comments received. The only substantive comment (a request to remove a conceptual trail from the Sun River Levee) has been incorporated into the Plan Update.

Summary of Major Recommendations

The analysis and modeling phase of the Update identified transportation facilities at the highest risk of deterioration in service over the 20-year life of the Plan. The public involvement process also pointed to the same top-priority areas, which are as follows (in no particular order):

- Highway 87/15th St NE/Old Havre Highway, and various associated roadway segments and connections – including Bootlegger Trail;
- 36th Avenue NE reconstruction (eastern segment);
- All four major interchanges, with priorities in descending order at the Airport Interchange, Emerson Junction (NW Bypass) Interchange, I-315 Interchange, and Central Avenue West Interchange. Public comment identified concern at the Airport (congestion and safety) and Emerson Junction (limited access) interchanges, while some operational deficiencies were noted at the other two; and,
- River Drive North from 15th Street North to 38th Street North (2-lane segment), including the intersection at 25th Street North.

While other areas of concern were noted and a number of projects identified, recommended projects are few due to the need to keep the Plan financially balanced. However, to make the Plan viable, other needs are listed as “illustrative projects”, with no funding source identified.

Other Plan Elements of Note

The Plan Update also includes a robust Non-Motorized element, to provide the Urban Area with guidance and suggestions for building a connected pedestrian and bicycle network. While not all of the recommendations may be feasible, they do provide a “blueprint” for working toward a connected system for the segment of the community that, by choice or by necessity, uses transportation methods other than the personal automobile.

Other important elements of the Plan include Safety, Transit, Security, Freight, Fiscal Constraint, and Air Quality Conformity.

An overview and report on the Plan Update was received by the City and County Commissions on March 24. The Plan itself, with appendices, is available for viewing on the Plan Updates website, found here: <http://www.greatfallsrtp.com/Page4Documents.html>.

Adoption Process

The various boards and bodies involved in adoption of the Plan Update will be considering doing so on the following dates:

- Technical Advisory Committee - March 20 (*TAC approved Plan Update*)
- Joint City-County Commission Informational Presentation - March 24
- Planning Advisory Board (as MPO) – March 25
- Great Falls City Commission – April 1
- Cascade County Commission – April 8
- Policy Coordinating Committee (Final Adoption) – April 9

After local approvals, the Plan will be sent to the Federal approving agencies for final consideration and concurrence, which is expected by April 23, 2014.

Concurrences: The Planning Advisory Board has approved the Plan Update, and has recommended approval by the City Commission. The Technical Advisory Committee for Transportation Planning also approved the Plan Update, at its meeting of March 20.

Fiscal Impact: Adoption of the Plan will allow the City, County and State to receive and expend Federal Transportation dollars within the Great Falls Urban Area. A compliant Long Range Transportation Plan must be adopted to expend these monies. Without an adopted Plan, the Great Falls area would lose millions of transportation dollars each year.

Alternatives: The City Commission could approve the Plan Update with conditions, or deny the Plan. However, denying the Plan would affect the ability to secure and expend Federal Transportation dollars.

Attachment: 2014 Long Range Transportation Plan Update
(Available on above referenced website. Also on file in City Clerk's Office.)

cc: Jim Rearden, Public Works Director