

Meeting Summary

South Lawrence Trafficway Input Group Meeting
Marriott Hotel
6th and New Hampshire
Lawrence, Kansas

September 6, 2001

After each meeting, the facilitators for the Advisory Group, Dennis Donald and John Huyler of the Osprey Group, will summarize the discussion for the benefit of participants and other interested parties. These summaries are not intended to be exhaustive in their coverage of the meeting, but to provide an overview with particular emphasis on key informational and action items. No attempt was made at the meeting to poll the group or build consensus. Thus, while points documented below are the views of some participants, they may or may not reflect the viewpoint of others around the table. The full transcript of the meeting will be available on the HNTB project website: www.southlawrencetrafficway.com. This summary will remain in draft form until the subsequent meeting at which time comments may be offered to improve its accuracy.

Stakeholder Representatives

Stakeholder representatives attending the meeting: Judy DeHose, Ron Durlinger, Linda Finger, Sue Hack, Bob Johnson, Stan Loeb, Becky Manley, Carey Maynard Moody, Larry Parkin, Debbie Peterson, Allison Reber, Stan Ross, Bill Sepic, Steve Sublette, Karen Swisher, Jim Terrentine, Andy Weseman.

Meeting Goals

The meeting goals were:

1. First, for the stakeholders and public to learn more about the South Lawrence Trafficway proposed alignments and options.
2. Second, for the stakeholders and public to have an opportunity to provide input to the Kansas Department of Transportation about the SLT and their issues and concerns.
3. Third, for KDOT to hear about areas in which the community would appreciate additional information or clarification.

Introductions

The meeting opened with introductions. One question the participants were asked to answer was what is their wildest hope for this process and what they considered the two most important issues. Responses included:

Wildest Hope

- My wildest hope is that we have an informed productive debate and discussion.
- My wildest hope for the process is that everybody will go away satisfied with the outcome.

- I hope to come away with necessary information to take back to these the neighborhood so that they can understand what's going to occur and what the conditions will be.
- My wildest hope for the process tonight is all of us leave with tint of our lenses slightly different, and I think the process can help us do that as we listen to each other.
- My wildest hope for this process is that we bring together the best information so that we can make the decision based on rational thought and appreciation of the diverse views that humans have for the environment and for survival of this community.
- I think in terms of my wildest hope, I hope we can each have an understanding of each others' positions and hope we can appreciate the differences that we all bring to the table.
- I too would hope through give and take propositions we can come to an agreement.
- My wildest hope of the process is that the viewpoints of those citizens of Douglas County who live south of the Wakarusa become part of this dialogue.
- I come to the table with expectation. And I also think as we sit here and talk, that each of us will try to hear what someone says, that we can agree with as opposed to searching for something that we don't agree with.
- My wildest hope is that I hope everyone will listen not only with their ears, but I hope they will listen with their hearts.
- I hope we can achieve a broad community support out of this process.
- My hope for this process will be that we reach a decision that we can all live with. The process has gone on so long that the community needs to have a resolution.
- I guess my wildest hope is that we get an understanding of each other today.
- My wildest hope is that we would make a decision in the relatively short period of time and that the transportation problems in Lawrence and Douglas County would be solved with the good sense that I'm sure the people of Lawrence and Douglas County do have.
- To look at the history and look at the transgressions, and it's my wildest hope to heal some of these wounds.

Important Issues

- My most important issues are the education of our kids in this community and kind of modeling we do for them as citizens.
- My two important issues are my responsibility as it relates to Haskell and the Indian Nation University and the stewardship that goes along with that. And for the environment.
- I hope that the trafficway is built in a manner that will be most beneficial to the neighborhood and hopefully no negative impacts to them.
- My issues are that I think our thinking is too narrow. The choices, even though they seem to be ample, are pretty narrow and that they are limited in the future orientation, and that there's too much rush.
- The two most important issues are that we take a fair amount of time to address all the alternatives, including the no build alternative and that we make the best judgment as to what is the benefit to the community and the people and the environment.
- I'm always concerned about whether as adults we can provide good role models for children. I hope we can do that in terms of being civil and appreciate each other's differences. I think another issue for me is just the education, not only of our kids, but of all the citizens in terms of this process of what we're going through and respect people's differences.
- As far as my two most important issues, there are my responsibilities to Baker University and to the Baker University wetlands future.
- I think the two important issues surrounding this trafficway issue are from the perspective I'm trying to represent certainly, human, environmental and historical and cultural impact to any trafficway built south of Wakarusa. I do not believe these concerns have been addressed

to the degree in any extent before. And another important issue is that a decision not be allowed to be made in haste without considering all of the impacts on the area.

- The two most important issues first is that we build the trafficway with a minimum negative impact on the wetlands, and that in the process we create an environment where we can have an expanded and improved wetlands for our community and for the regional area. Second issue is that we do this in such a fashion so that it satisfies the needs for KDOT. But more importantly, it satisfies the needs of Lawrence and Douglas County.
- The two most important issues, and again two is a very limited number, protection of the sacred site, the lands. As Native Americans, there's no separation between our land and ourselves. Also, the protection of the little piece of land left for the education of the children of our American Indian country.
- Couple of issues that are most important to us are a creation of a prosperous community and the completion of K10 bypass.
- My two most important issues are that any decision reached is a community decision and it involves all of the stakeholders. I'm not naïve enough to think we're all going to come to the table with 100 percent consensus. But I think we can all value the opinions of the stakeholders and see that we don't abuse that value. And my second one is that I'd like to see that no compromises are made for expediency's sake.
- The two most important issues: One is wetlands preservation, not just here but all over the country. One other issue is that we get to the real issue and that's why there's such a need for this road.
- My neighborhood wants to protect the wetlands while alleviating the traffic in and out of our neighborhood and keeping the trafficway most economical.
- The two most important issues for the township are transportation and transportation. The road should be done now.
- We are interested in preserving habitat and also interested in preserving education, which includes the land.

Update on the South Lawrence Trafficway

Following the introductions, Mr. Terry Flanagan from HNTB, the engineering and planning firm supporting KDOT's development of SLT alignments and alternatives, provided a brief overview about the SLT. HNTB is involved in helping prepare the environmental impact documentation working with KDOT and the Corps of Engineers.

There are five corridors plus a no build alternative under consideration, two of which – 32nd and 42nd – are new options. Mr. Flanagan indicated that it is their goal to study each of the alternatives equally. Ultimately, HNTB will present to KDOT and to the public an assessment of all of the issues related to each one of those alternatives.

Mr. Flanagan also described some of the process and procedures they are addressing as they move forward. An important role for the firm is to help get public input and share information with the public. He indicated that his hope in having a group like this convened is that the group can provide input to the firm and they can share information about the alternatives. Ultimately it is their hope to come to an alignment that will address as many issues as possible and provide a facility that is safe for the public.

Mr. Flanagan described the various corridors in general using a series of maps. He cited the areas designating the floodplain and areas subject to a 100-year storm event. The charts highlighted each of the corridor options as well.

He mentioned that one of the nuances is how the traffic is handled locally, particularly between Louisiana and Haskell. Right now people use either 23rd Street or 31st Street or go farther south. He indicated that any one of the alignments provides for maintenance of local roadways. They have provided access of the trafficway in one location typically on Haskell Avenue to allow for internal or local travel. If 31st is not available, access off the highway would be provided at both Louisiana and Haskell.

Mr. Flanagan said that HNTB has developed additional cost data. These are preliminary cost estimates based on the preliminary planning of the alignments. More detailed numbers will be developed as the alignment planning is refined. The cost estimates are for a four-lane roadway, similar to K-10 between Lawrence and Kansas City. He did cite that interim construction might be for two lanes with traffic traveling in both directions on two lanes. Cost estimates included:

- 31st Street -- \$90 to \$100 million
- 32nd Street -- \$80 to \$100 million
- 35th Street -- \$105 to \$190 million
- 38th Street -- \$110 million
- 42nd Street -- \$135 to \$155 million

The estimates may vary considerably depending on the assumptions inherent to a particular alignment. For example, the \$190 million estimate for 35th Street assumes almost two and a half miles of bridges. The estimates do not include mitigation costs. Mr. Flanagan noted that each of the alignments would impact wetlands, including the 42nd Street option.

Mr. Flanagan thought that he would have projected traffic numbers for the group; however, they were not available at this time. He thought these numbers would be available next week. These numbers would project traffic volume under alternative scenarios in the year 2025. A key variable in the model is the expected land use and development over time.

Ms. Finger noted that the model relied upon the 2025 land use plan, which is not an adopted plan by the City Planning Commission. She also noted that there is a special Planning Commission subcommittee looking into the various SLT alignments.

Mr. Flanagan then mentioned some of the process and procedural issues. He noted that the restudy started back in May or June. An early goal was to get information out to the public. A brochure has been distributed. Several public meetings have been held, this session being one of them. Osprey conducted interviews in July. HNTB has a project website. Various other meetings have occurred, including a meeting yesterday with Haskell students. A telephone survey will be conducted over the next several weeks. A primary goal over the last several months was to visit with people and get issues right on the table so we can take their information into account.

Mr. Flanagan concluded by noting that the challenge is to come up with the preferred alternative. This recognizes that each alternative has its attributes and deficiencies. Ultimately, HNTB wants to define the best alternative for meeting the goals of this group, the community, and transportation as well as meeting the needs of the state. This type of assessment over time will be documented in a preliminary environmental impact statement. That document will be shared with the group and with the Federal agencies. A public hearing will be part of the review process. Mr. Flanagan said that typically there is a preferred alternative included in the

preliminary documentation; however, there does not have to be. After receiving public input, the document will move to the final environmental impact statement. A record of decision will be made and then the Corps of Engineers, if appropriate, will issue a permit that allows for the construction of the preferred alignment. Mr. Flanagan thought the earliest a decision could be anticipated would be the Spring of 2002.

Questions followed Mr. Flanagan's presentation (unless otherwise noted, the responses to the questions came from Mr. Flanagan):

Are there plans to look at other alignments? The alignments may be refined and there is an opportunity to look at others. As information becomes available (e.g., historical sites), some shifting of alignments may well occur to avoid these impacts.

A question was asked of Mr. Rees about the money being spent in Johnson County on Santa Fe Drive and the likely impact on Douglas County. What are the plans for that particular corridor, what we call 10100 Road? There was a corridor study that picked up north of Highway 24 and south of Highway 56. I believe that a southern route that would be south of Lawrence, south of Highway 56, turned out to be not a viable alternative at this time. So the route you're talking about, that would be in that area, would not be an answer. Mr. Rees also noted that this is not something on which he had worked and that all the traffic needs in the state are relevant to each other in some respect.

Do you know and can you tell us approximately how many acres of wetlands would be impacted in the construction of those alignments? Mr. Flanagan provided ballpark estimates. These numbers are basically for land within the Baker Wetlands.

- 31st Street is about 25 acres
- 32nd Street is about 25 to 40
- 35th Street is about 35 acres or so
- 38th Street is 10 to 20 acres
- At this point, 42nd Street is zero

The numbers take into consideration the Baker/Haskell wetlands. They also do not include some forms of mitigation such as if some sort of noise berms or trails might be added.

I would like to know how KDOT got information for the flood plain. Your information is not correct. It would only take a rain of 5 inches to push the flood plain probably a quarter of a mile closer to Haskell. What impact will the road and construction have on the Tonganoxie and the aquifer? There was a previous FEMA map that showed where the flood plain was. Every once in a while they come back and look at the development. There was an update done several years ago, and it is the one we have used. Concerns about impacts to the aquifer and the potential impact to drinking water can and will be taken into account. These are issues we can certainly address.

It sounds like it is strictly a study of the numbers, and my concern would be traffic safety and that most of the alignments that I've seen connect with Noria Road, which is an extremely dangerous connection. Is it possible to connect further east? A very good comment, and one we will take into account. In any design we do for the alignments, safety is one of the guidelines. The proposal is to make this intersection an interchange so there will not be the difficulty crossing when there is competition with a high speed of traffic.

What is the need for this project? The purpose and need statement is something that will be part of the environmental documentation. It is needed to basically to help address a critical piece of the state highway system, for the region as well as the community. The primary purpose is to help move people in and around the community and throughout the region. Mr. Rees added that 23rd Street currently serves as a connecting street to K-10 and it is not a satisfactory connecting street. Mr. Flanagan added that the traffic volume is projected to be in the 40,000 to 60,000 cars a day range in 20 to 25 years based upon anticipated growth in the corridor.

How far south of the river do they envision our county going? Do we see ourselves as a town that grows around two rivers? I wonder how the city is envisioning planning, whether they see us growing south? Mr. Purflinger, chairman of the Lawrence/Douglas County Planning Commission responded. We are already growing south of the river. And we really have a couple of choices. But the thing I need to preface this with is as a Planning Commission our job is to help plan but not just for tomorrow and the next day but way in the future. We need to start planning long-term down the road. Lawrence is going to be able to grow currently to the west only. We haven't got the ability to move. We have got a little bit to the northwest. This is for a lot of reasons, not only transportation. The prospect of going south of the river is something that certainly has been waiting in the wings for a long time. But there are infrastructure issues that have actually probably a greater effect on south of the river residential or commercial development than what this road would have. Because with the road you can restrict access. We can do a lot of things to control development.

Since 31st, 35th and 38th were rejected once, why are we still considering them? Mr. Rees responded. We are required to study all reasonable alternatives. There never was a determination that any of the routes were unacceptable. The earlier Federal highway decision was only that there would be no alternative chosen unless Haskell consented to do it. All alternatives are still reasonable from an engineering point of view and 42nd Street is also being analyzed because of the perception that the community wanted us to study it.

Alternative Alignments and Associated Issues

The Group proceeded to discuss in some depth the issues associated with a subset of the alignments. The focus of the discussion was, in order, on 42nd Street or a south of the Wakarusa River alignment, on 32nd Street, and on a no build option. The Group worked from a matrix that had these three alignments in the columns and four rows that cited advantages, disadvantages, biggest questions, and areas or ideas for improving the particular option. Comments are highlighted according to the alignments below.

42nd Street

General. The 42nd Street alignments are very near the Wakarusa River. There has not been a sufficiently rigorous analysis, similar to the evaluation of the impacts on the Baker Wetlands, of the environmental impacts of this alternative.

Planning for the future. One of the advantages noted is that with a south of the river alignment, the community has the opportunity to plan it. One of the big problems with the development that has occurred in Douglas County over the past 30 years is that we really did not follow good planning principles until a few efforts a little late in the game. That is why we have 23rd, and

that is why we have 31st Street, and Louisiana. It is a popular activity in this town to complain about planning. This is really a golden opportunity for good planning.

The alignment. Some thought that south of the river is the proper alignment, but that the ones shown are not far enough south. One individual stated that the Wells Overlook Road should be considered.

Wetlands. It was observed that the 42nd Street alignment will also have an impact on wetlands. While this alignment may avoid Baker wetlands, it impacts other wetlands. On the other hand, others indicated that this alignment did avoid an established environmental area and that was a plus. Some noted that their desire to protect the wetlands was so strong, there is no alternative north of the river that is acceptable.

Traffic. This alternative would do nothing in terms of alleviating congestion on 23rd Street or addressing other city traffic needs.

Vacation of 31st Street. Under this alignment, vacation of 31st Street was considered not possible.

Cost to the community. A 42nd Street alignment would by default impose an enormous cost to city and county for improvement of 31st Street.

Human impacts. Consideration of human impact of any route south of river in terms of not only displacement of homes, which find themselves in the actual right-of-way, but the effects of traffic noise in particular, loss of privacy, possible air quality issues. There is a significant human impact that has largely gone unnoticed in the sense that there are residents currently living in the area who have been there for generations compared with alignments that do not travel through the areas that are already populated.

Historical sites. The idea of the loss of sites of historical importance along the corridor really has not been discussed, but there are a number of important sites and areas south of the Wakarusa in sections 19 and 20. These sites relate to pre Civil War conflicts in the bleeding Kansas and underground railroad operations on the very soil the road will cross. There are graves of Poor Farm residents who may be in marked and unmarked graves in the path of the trafficway. These sites are known to KDOT, but the general public may not be aware of them.

32nd Street

Louisiana. There is concern that any interchange option recognize the desire to minimize Louisiana traffic.

Flooding. The Naismith Creek tributary drains into the Wakarusa flood plain which is flat and drains very poorly. How will KDOT prevent the trafficway from backflooding in the Naismith Creek?

23rd Street. Realistically, with limited access points on the trafficway, any of the proposed alignments including 32nd Street will have minimal impact on the traffic on 23rd Street. It ought to not be considered an advantage of the 32nd Street alignment.

Vacation of 31st Street. It is both an advantage and disadvantage. Allowing the vacation of 31st might be viewed as a plus from Haskell's perspective. Haskell is concerned that this road could become a de facto trafficway. However, there are also significant neighborhoods to the east and the potential for more development that would find east-west travel difficult without having access to 31st Street. (Note: Mr. Johnson stated that the County Commission, as a body, has not discussed the issue of vacating 31st Street. He has indicated that he personally would be willing to consider it if the trafficway is built with an alignment so close to 31st Street that it would provide the services that 31st Street currently provides to the city.)

Wetlands. Concern was expressed about the loss of the boardwalk, which is primarily used by the public as a front door to the wetlands property. With a road at this alignment, there are also concerns about noise that need to be addressed given the use of this area for public education. Finally, there is concern about the viability of a meaningful mitigation plan being implemented by KDOT. And, as noted above, some adamantly oppose any alignment that impacts the wetlands.

Proximity to Haskell. Some expressed concern that while this alignment has been characterized as being significantly south of Haskell, it is footsteps from Haskell's southern boundary. Haskell has indicated the SLT trafficway needs to be sufficiently south of 31st Street to negate impacts on the campus. Haskell continues to believe that any alignment that has an adverse impact on Haskell and the Baker wetlands would not be acceptable.

31st Street

Note: there was limited discussion about a 31st Street alignment and its perceived pros and cons. Part of the discussion focused on how it would differ from the comments made about the 32nd Street alignment.

Haskell. While 32nd Street remains close to Haskell, 31st crosses through the property. The proximity to the college and the property makes 31st more of a concern than 32nd. One individual commented that looking at the numbers, logic would tell you to build on 31st Street. But this is more than looking at the numbers. "As a community, we ought to find a way to accomplish our objectives and respect the wishes of Haskell. Haskell is an absolutely critical neighbor of our community, an enormous resource and it seems to me to be a major issue, and Haskell has clearly expressed themselves. They don't want the trafficway or de facto trafficway, and we ought to do everything to accommodate that wish."

Modifications to 31st Street. Some thought that changes, such as raising the road or improving drainage, to the existing 31st Street could make it more acceptable. Others commented that they would like to see 31st stay exactly as it is as a road that serves traffic at modest speeds and allows Haskell students to travel back and forth to the wetland.

Failing to meet the need. If 31st were to become the trafficway, it would be altered substantially and would fail to meet local traffic needs. An example cited is that the trafficway would have limited or no access for local traffic. And, unlike the local road with more benign speeds, the trafficway would have traffic flowing at 65 to 75 miles per hour. These two issues, plus continued growth, make 31st a less logical choice from a planning perspective.

No Build

Consequences of no action. Some noted that no build brings with it increasing consequences to the community. None of us like the consequences, especially Haskell, because 31st would become an enormously heavily traveled city street. And, it would cost a lot of money, taxpayer money, to improve that street. No build is simply not an option.

Creative options. Some, however, see the no build alternative as an opportunity to take a step back and explore more creative options. It was mentioned that the governor of California placed a moratorium on paving. This type of thinking allows the exploration of options such as commuter rail.

East-west connection. One of the problems with no build is that we have an east-west disconnect. Planning efforts have tried to establish a research park corridor or office corridor on the western side, but it takes just as long to get to the city limits as it does to get from the city limits to the next city. And that has been a real stumbling block in the development of jobs that might be more attractive than what we currently have to help flesh out the economy and the job base. Likewise, we are not talking about building a interstate system here. We are talking about building a little piece of road that is done every day all over the world.

Ability to resolve an issue. One of the big disadvantages of no build is that it means we have been unable as a community to wrestle and come up with a palatable solution to a relatively simple problem.

Next Steps

The group agreed to meet again. The Osprey Group was tasked with sending out a meeting summary once it receives the transcript of the meeting and setting the date for the next meeting.