

Minutes of the 17th Meeting of the Envision Jefferson 2020 Steering Committee
December 5, 2002 - 3:30 P.M.
Select Properties Building
2121 Airline Drive, Suite 600

Attendees:

Steering Committee Members

Lee Giorgio, Co-Chair	Wayne Sandoz	Lynn Parker
Cokie Rathborne, Co-Chair	Ava Guidry	Bruce O'Neil
Ross Liner	Donnie Wolfe	Buck Barkley
Joanne Mire	Shirley Edwards	

Jefferson Parish Officials

Ed Durabb, Planning Director
Dr. Terri Wilkinson, Senior Planner
Shannon Burke, Planner

Burk-Kleinpeter, Inc.

Ed Elam, Senior Planner

Urban Planning and Innovations

Monica Kelley

University of New Orleans

Wendel P. Dufour, Jr., Principal Planner
Roxanne Brock, Research Associate

Bechtel Infrastructure Corp.

Thomas Bordeaux

GCR & Associates, Inc.

Larry Ringel, Project Manager
Chris Emmer, Land Use Planner
Roy Smith, Land Use Planner

URS Corporation

Tom Hunter

Element Committee Member

Angelo Persica, Jr.

Regional Planning Commission

Jim Harvey, Director of Planning

Mr. Ringel began the meeting at 3:30 p.m. He explained that the focus of the meeting would be the transportation work that has been undertaken under the sponsorship of the Regional Planning Commission. Land use issues drive the transportation system that supports it and the Committee would be updated on that work today.

Mr. Ringel briefed the Committee on the work of the Element Committee at their November 16, 2002 meeting. The Element Committee reviewed the draft preferred scenario land use plan and made comments. The Planning Team is in the process of updating that plan and will bring it to public workshops in February and March of 2003 and public hearings in May and June of 2003. The Element Committee will no longer be meeting as a body, however will be regularly informed via mail of meetings and plan progress. The Steering Committee will continue to meet in 2003 in their capacity of guiding the direction of the process. The Steering Committee will continually review the evolution of the Plan so that a Plan is developed with the advice and consent of the Steering Committee.

The Committee discussed Ms. Duggar's letter to the Editor of the Times Picayune concerning development along the lakefront and agreed that the Chairman should respond to the newspaper with a formal letter representing the position of the Committee on lakefront development.

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The Committee asked the Planning Team to address the issue of including the levee system on the land use maps, citing that neither the Bucktown marina development nor the Bonnabel boat launch shows on the land use maps. Dr. Wilkinson indicated that the lake and river levee systems are not included in the Parish GIS data base. Mr. Ringel advised the Committee that the levee system would be added to the land use maps.

Mr. Elam was introduced to lead the discussion on transportation. Mr. Elam explained how the preferred land use scenario provided information that was used in transportation analysis. The transportation planners placed land use into three categories for their work: land that is currently developed and going to remain the same, areas that are going to be redeveloped, and areas of new development. They analyzed the existing major roadway system and determined that most of the system on the East Bank and several on the West Bank were operating at capacity. Their challenge was to determine if it was better to add traffic to existing congested roadways or look at a combination of alternatives (reconstruction, transit, etc.) to move people about the Parish. To a point, the answer was in the preferred land use scenario with its focus on transit-oriented development in some areas, linking development to infrastructure in place to be more efficient.

Mr. Harvey then discussed the status of the Huey P. Long Bridge widening project. Mr. Harvey stated that the project is expected to begin in 3 to 4 years with an estimated construction time of 8 years. A lot of work remains to be done related to environmental permitting and engineering before construction can begin. Construction will be protracted because the bridge will remain in use during construction. Funding for the project is in place, being part of the State TIMED program funded by a gasoline tax. That tax will stay in place for the duration of the project. The project includes widening of the bridge structure and associated ramps and roadways. The project includes an overpass over Jefferson Highway onto Clearview and ramps connecting to Jefferson Highway. On the West Bank, the project includes an overpass over the existing traffic circle, ramps, and improvements to Bridge City Avenue and Highway 90 to Nine Mile Point Road.

A discussion ensued regarding alternate river crossing sites and the constraints related thereto. Mr. Wolfe asked Mr. Harvey if it would be cheaper to construct a bridge in a different location. Mr. Harvey stated that the design engineer was the State and that the technical people actually wanted to do that. They thought a new bridge was the preferred alternative.

Mr. Wolfe asked about a Williams Boulevard crossing.

Mr. Harvey responded that from a technical standpoint, they thought that building at a different location was a better alternative because you are doing nothing to increase the capacity of Clearview Parkway other than fixing the intersection at Jefferson Highway.

Mr. Harvey stated that there were two issues: The first is that it is more than an engineering problem. You have the issue that as soon as you go to a new location to build the bridge, you

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are displacing something else. For example, he said, if you go upstream and build in the Hickory alignment, and do something in Harahan, immediately you are talking about going over or through or around people's homes and businesses. The second issue is that the TIMED program, being a constitutional amendment, was very specifically worded- we cannot spend TIMED money to build anything that is not on the Huey P. Long Bridge. Mr. Harvey stated that these were the two issues that pushed the State away from building at a different location. It would actually take a change to the constitutional amendment to do anything other than expanding the Huey P. Long Bridge.

Mr. Wolfe asked Mr. Harvey if he was saying that the cost of a new bridge at a different location might even be cheaper than the improvements to the Huey P. Long Bridge and additional overpasses.

Mr. Harvey explained that the actual cost of the infrastructure, the bridge itself, is probably about equal, but he did not know what we would be get into with other related costs. Mr. Wolfe pointed out that all we'll have is actually a bridge with wider lanes and better access. He stated that Mr. Harvey mentioned a Hickory crossing, but perhaps a location further upriver on undeveloped land, say around Williams Boulevard, might work better. Mr. Wolfe said that certainly from a balance standpoint, you would have bridges located in such a way that intra-Parish travel would be more beneficial. In the long-run, he said, you are not improving the Clearview corridor at all. He said that he could not imagine doing all the improvements while traffic is still moving.

Mr. Harvey agreed that performing the improvements with traffic moving would be a very difficult thing. He said that "The basic issue is the cost of the new " and Mr. Wolfe interjected " It is wasteful." Mr. Harvey responded "Well, I'm not sure it is wasting. The cost of a new bridge would be comparable to the cost of upgrading this bridge. But that doesn't take into account things like land acquisition and other things that would go along with a new bridge."

Mr. Wolfe said "There is no way that would compare with the cost of widening the existing bridge."

Mr. Harvey said that he understood. He stated that his agency has either sponsored or been involved with four major studies looking at new bridge crossings. One study looked at a Chalmette to Algiers crossing or something coming from St. Bernard into either Orleans or Plaquemines Parish. His agency helped in looking at a Harahan crossing and the Huey P. Long widening. They were a major player in the new Mississippi River crossing. He pointed out that in every single case, as soon as we started talking about a new bridge that was not in one of the existing alignments, the political pressure to kill the project was just overwhelming.

Mr. Giorgio stated that he has attended a series of monthly meetings encouraging a fast-track of the Huey P. Long widening project.

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Mr. Elam then explained that the transportation system includes four elements: roads, transit, pedestrians, and bikeways. He will address each in turn:

The roadway system includes many projects already under development or study, including the Huey P. Long bridge, I-49, the East-West Corridor study, I-10 improvements, and West Napoleon improvements. These are major on-going projects of which people should be aware. These projects are included in the plan.

New East Bank road projects are necessitated in response to the land use plan to include:

- Metairie CBD transportation system improvements
- Severn Avenue over I-10
- Improve terminus of West Esplanade at Parish line
- Veterans Blvd improvements at Pontchartrain Blvd in Orleans
- Metairie Road at the railroad crossing
- Earhart Expressway at Deckbar, David, and Cleary
- David Drive relocation and improvements

New West Bank road projects are necessitated in response to the land use plan to include:

- Improvements on Donner Blvd to alleviate Belle Chasse Highway traffic
- Improvements in the Manhattan Blvd corridor including widening of Manhattan Blvd and intersection improvements along it.
- As the South New Orleans tract special area study progresses, include circulation roads and pay attention to connections with Manhattan Blvd.
- 4th Street extension
- Collector streets in the area of the new golf course
- Widening of Lapalco
- New Harvey Blvd canal crossing and a new crossing south of that

Mr. Barkley and Mr. Rathborne encouraged additional canal crossings as a means of encouraging development in the area and providing for evacuation.

Mr. Elam then addressed the transit system.

- Transit improvements include a series of Park-and-Ride passenger terminals near existing locations of major line crossings, hospitals, and along the East-West corridor.
- Park-and-Ride lots are scattered throughout the Parish with the idea that as the Parish develops, businesses and residential areas will be linked.
- Park-and-Ride opportunities in growth areas west of the Harvey Canal should include express buses linking downtown, Elmwood and new employment centers on the West Bank.
- Possible new/expanded transit maintenance facilities should be considered.

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- The existing route network should be extended to link to Park-and-Ride lots and better serve passenger terminals along the light rail line in the Airline Drive corridor.

Ms. Guidry encouraged extended transit service to the Avondale shipyard with its large employment base from both sides of the river.

Mr. Elam then addressed the bikeway system.

- The plan puts an emphasis on existing bike facilities on the West Bank, river and lake.
- It provides some path segments linking residential areas to parks.
- New bike path systems are proposed in new development areas along the hurricane protection levee and the South New Orleans tract.
- To encourage people to use bikes, including river-crossing trips, Jefferson buses have bike racks. The plan includes an improved interface at terminals for bike riders.

Mr. Rathborne expressed concern in areas where bike paths cross existing levee road accesses to the batture area.

Mr. Elam then addressed the pedestrian system.

- At a regional level, areas of dense development have many people walking. Crosswalks at intersections and access to bus stops should be a priority.
- At a community level, designated crosswalks for schools and neighborhood attractions should be considered.
- In all cases, raising the visibility of pedestrians as a safety issue is important to encourage pedestrian traffic.

Mr. Elam then mentioned two specific facilities of regional significance that impact the transportation system – the airport and the millennium port. Roadway access to the airport, especially along the East-West corridor, is a major issue and should receive high consideration. The millennium port project offers many unknowns. Once constructed, Jefferson Parish will become the gateway to the port and both roadway and rail access will be required. Extensions of Lapalco, I-49, and Peters road will have to be considered. Routing of rail lines to serve the port will require special planning.

Committee members asked about funding for transportation projects. Mr. Elam and Mr. Harvey explained that many of the projects would have to be funded by the Parish, but many would be eligible for State and Federal funding. As identified, they would be included in the BKI report. Mr. Harvey explained that “bundling” of projects would occur, such as combining a roadway improvement project with transit stops improvements and pedestrian access to elevate the priorities.

Ms. Parker asked Mr. Harvey if transportation priorities should better be set prior to being sent to the Council. Mr. Harvey answered that it is almost impossible to set priorities prior to

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Council action. He noted that everything happens in stages. The first stage is to provide the Council with project information. He explained that the way a comprehensive plan works is that in addition to project information, the plan should say how projects would be prioritized. For instance, the plan might call for a series of meeting with the public or Steering Committee to lay out the priorities. The strategy is to get the Council to approve the concepts and projects and the rules on how they are going to be prioritized. And then you go through the steps. Part of what the plan has to produce is a guideline on how the priorities will be set. That is why plans like this really are effective. Because you define what you want to do and define the rules by which you will achieve it. And then you follow those steps. But you don't have to do it all at once.

Mr. Tom Bordeaux of Bechtel then addressed the Committee relative to the light rail initiative along the Airline Drive corridor, the East-West Corridor Study. He gave an overview of the 12-mile link from the airport to downtown New Orleans with stations in Orleans, Jefferson and Kenner. The modern light rail system would take advantage of existing abandoned rail rights-of-way with intermodal connections to Jefferson transit and Park-and Ride lots. He pointed out that the system would stimulate new development and enhance job access. One intent of the project is to shape growth through infrastructure. Light rail should stimulate corridor development especially around sites like Zepher Stadium. Planners work on the premise that light rail stations offer a potential for development in an area of direct influence of approximately ½ mile.

Mr. Bordeaux further explained that the on-going DEIS will lead to a locally preferred alternative which will include alignment, station locations, and technology preference. It will include roadway improvements and feeder bus service. He pointed out that estimated travel time from the airport to the river, with eight stations stops, would be about 26 minutes.

Mr. Bordeaux then addressed the fiscal aspects of the light rail initiative. The total cost of construction would be about \$375 million. Of that amount, various State and Federal funds would provide for \$268 million, leaving \$107 million to be covered by State and local shareholders, including Jefferson Parish.

Jefferson Parish's share of the \$107 million would be about \$30 million. Treating the \$30 million share as a long-term indebtedness, bonds would be issued and Jefferson Parish would create an annual indebtedness of about \$2 million to cover capital costs.

Jefferson Parish would also assume responsibility for a share of annual operating and maintenance costs. Net of fare box revenue, Federal subsidies and other revenue sources, Jefferson Parish should assume an annual O&M burden of \$1.2 million.

At this time in the project's definition, Jefferson Parish is looking at bearing about \$3.2 million per year as its share of capital and operating costs to participate in the light rail project.

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Mr. Bordeaux cautioned that the cost numbers he presented are preliminary in nature and include a large contingency. He stated that it might be possible for the State to increase its contribution to capital costs to \$100 million, in which case Jefferson Parish's share could reduce to about \$10 million. Under that scenario, Jefferson Parish could be looking at bearing about \$2 million per year as its share of capital and operating costs to participate in the light rail project.

Tom Hunter of URS then addressed the Committee. Tom explained that URS was in the process of preparing a draft environmental impact statement that includes alignments, technical alternatives and station area planning.

Mr. Hunter stated that the project was not a lineal project between the airport and the New Orleans CBD. It is a project to improve mobility and access to employment centers throughout the East Bank. Linked with existing and expanded bus service, expanded service would be offered along Williams to the lakefront, Pontchartrain Center, and the river. The project would serve the Metairie CBD, Elmwood area, and possibly the Avondale area on the West Bank. The project is designed to improve access to major employment centers throughout the Region.

He pointed out that from a land use perspective, the project promotes long-term sustainable development with improvements to quality-of-life. The project requires no relocations and has minimal adverse impact. If you want to redevelop the existing urban area, specifically the Airline Drive corridor, and maintain employment and population in Jefferson Parish, this is the type of project to do it.

Mr. Hunter said that "new start" monies would be additional funds to the area over and above recurring Federal transit and roadway monies. These "new start" funds depend on local jurisdictions and municipalities committing to transit-oriented development. He cautioned that such a commitment had to more than just a statement. It has to be incorporated into the land use plans and zoning policies in the municipalities.

Mr. Barkley noted that transit-oriented development did not get a good reception at the Element Committee meetings reviewing alternative scenarios. He felt that TOD didn't support the life-style found in Jefferson Parish, with its emphasis on the automobile. He was concerned that the preferred scenario might be swayed toward TOD for the purpose of securing Federal dollars.

Mr. Harvey observed that Mr. Barkley's comments on the reception of the TOD concept were, to an extent, true. In developing a comprehensive plan for the parish as a whole, TOD as a primary plan is not a good choice. The parish doesn't function along those lines. From a Federal funding perspective, the FTA is looking for TOD in the corridor, along the alignment, and at station locations. The preferred scenario as it is being developed allows for innovative TOD concepts to take place. Not in the entire parish, but in the corridor.

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Mr. Barkley noted that the Airline corridor is already developed. Mr. Harvey responded that the Airline corridor is a primary target for redevelopment and infill development by JEDCO and the parish. He saw nothing inconsistent with neighborhood multiple use development and doing specific TOD developments. He noted that there is a big difference between doing specific TOD developments within a neighborhood mixed use scenario and having your whole land use policy based on TOD. Mr. Barkley stated that he didn't want the focus of the plan to be driven by \$200 million in Federal funds.

Tom Hunter stated that the primary emphasis of the light rail project is not \$200 million. That is not the case. The biggest benefit of this type of project is that it promotes sustainable long-term development, quality of life, and offers long-term help to retain and improve employment and population within East Bank Jefferson Parish.

Tom Bordeaux added that the all-encompassing term "Transit-Oriented Development" is a little misleading in that there are various flavors to it that have to fit the context of the corridor and the communities within it. The main focus of TOD is to stabilize, revitalize and stimulate, on the fringe, some additional development that is appropriate to the scale and mass of the corridor. He said that the community has an opportunity and it is important for the plan to give some vision of possibilities such as a transit corridor.

Ms. Parker advised that when we go to the citizens of the Parish for their support, that we "sell" long-term development, not the chance to get Federal dollars. We must tell them what we are getting other than Federal funds.

Mr. Harvey added that the fiscal message that is sent should be that the Parish does not have to bear the entire burden. There are other partners available to help.

The next meeting of the Steering Committee was set for Thursday, February 6, 2003 at the Select Properties Building. The meeting was then adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Footnote: This version is revised from an earlier version to address comments received from Mr. Wolfe at the February 6, 2003 Steering Committee meeting.