

Wabash Bridge Meeting Questions/Comments **2/26/2008**

Councilwoman Peggy Lehmann welcomed approximately 150 attendees to the meeting. She introduced facilitator Elizabeth Suarez.

First Part: Representatives from the City and County of Denver provided an overview of the project including traffic study results. The representatives were Kelly Brough, Mayor Hickenlooper Chief of Staff; Bill Vidal, Manager of Public Works; and Brian Mitchell, Public Works Traffic Engineer.

Second Part: This was the longest part and it allowed the participants to ask questions and provide comments to the City representatives.

1st Half of the Meeting

Kelly Brough, Mayor's chief of staff, presented a brief history of the proposed Wabash Bridge which would connect Iliff to Yale Ave. over Cherry Creek via Wabash Street.

Key Points:

1. Arapahoe County owns the land on either side of the Creek but in 2003 Denver took over ownership of the water dept. land which is in the Creek area.
2. Arapahoe County has been looking at the possibility of this bridge for several years, but to date Denver has said that they do not want the bridge.
3. Arapahoe County approached Denver in 2007 to bring this up again and said they would consider taking the land through the condemnation process. As a result of this Denver would like to look at this again keeping in mind three important issues:
 - a. Concerns for the school (Hertzel/RMHA) which is on the north side of the creek
 - b. The impacts on the open space adjacent to the creek
 - c. Traffic Impacts to the nearby streets (in Denver)

Ms. Brough made it clear that Denver was not advocating for the bridge, but that since Arapahoe County is moving toward "taking" the bridge, the Mayor's office wants the group to consider three scenarios for handling this issue.

1. Do nothing and allow Arapahoe County to proceed with the condemnation process to see what might happen.
2. Denver fights this in court
3. Denver negotiates with Arapahoe County : Will Ok the bridge if Denver in return gets some of the following:
 - a. A route around the school which curves away from the school
 - b. The bridge is limited in width to 2 lanes
 - c. Traffic issues along Yale are addressed
 - d. Improvements to the Yale /Syracuse intersection are made

- e. There is clearance under the bridge to allow bikes and pedestrians to walk under the bridge at the creek.
4. Other vital concerns of the community are addressed – these vital concerns will be provided once all surveys are completed by participants and other neighbors are reviewed.

Brian Mitchell of Denver's Traffic Engineering Department passed out maps of the area showing traffic impacts and projected traffic volumes to 2030. This information was gained from several traffic studies conducted in recent years. Councilwoman Lehmann asked for a more recent traffic impacts study to be done as the last figures we had are from 2005.

It is interesting to note that recent studies conducted by consultants for Arapahoe county show less traffic currently in 2008 (25% drop) than in 2005 along Yale. This could be attributed to increased rider ship on the light rail, completion of the T-REX project. There seems to be no tremendous demand for people to get from Iliff to Yale via Wabash of the other way around.

2nd Half of the Meeting

During this time participants were very vocal expressing their disagreement and concerns for building the bridge. Questions addressed were focused on the bridge construction per se and others were focused on the traffic studies as well as the effect it will have in their daily lives. The following provides a highlight and summary of the questions asked and some comments made by participants.

Bridge Questions:

- How can the city require a two lane bridge?
- Is safety a red herring?
- Design capacities on bridge.

Traffic:

Councilwoman Lehmann asked for a more recent traffic impacts study to be done as the last figures we had is from 2005. Brian Mitchell of Denver's traffic engineering department passed out maps of the area. Showing traffic impacts and projected traffic volumes to 2030. These were recent studies along Yale by consultants to Arapahoe County.

The study shows less traffic currently in 2008 (25% drop) than in 2005 along Yale.

This could be attributed to increased ridership on the light rail, completion of the T-REX project

There seems to be no tremendous demand for people to get from Iliff to Yale via Wabash or the other way around.

Traffic Questions:

- There are concerns for Syracuse and Yale, needed improvements?
Comment: How can we control the change that is inevitable along our city streets?
- We can't stop increased traffic, but we should look at ways to slow traffic, add stoplights, improve intersections so that traffic is not so dangerous
- School is not happy with increased traffic –Dick
- Access north/south Yosemite traffic also will be addressed.
- Intersection safety
- Add stop lights to deter traffic on bridge.
- Consider making two lanes for fifty years.
- There are concerns about rush hour traffic on Yosemite/Syracuse
- Want to commit to traffic warrant study of 250K for the stop light

Improvements/Construction:

- Wish to widen Yale along Syracuse.
- Possibility of a decorative sound barrier wall?
Answer: This could come up in the study
Comment: There are plans on the part of Arapahoe County for a future development of a large number of condos/apts (as many as 300) to be built in that area including retail. This could heavily impact the amount of traffic in the area.
- Development options/plans –demand a fire station and new development.
- Highline trail improvements south of apartments
- Build and then dead end the bridge
- Proposed no turn on red light for Yosemite, Monaco, and Quebec
- Include new trailhead to the trail area that would require 10 feet clearance for the Cherry Creek Trail

Issues:

- Cunningham apartments
- Open space/lands
- Arapahoe residents don't support the bridge
- Feel the mayor's office is already in favor of the bridge
- A board member from the school (Hertzel) spoke: They have been meeting with Arapahoe County as they are expanding their campus. If the road is realigned so that it curves and is a two lane road, the school is supportive of the plan for the bridge. His assessment is that Arapahoe County is determined to move ahead with their plan.
- What is the political process? – Many participants weren't too aware of the political process on how issues like these are resolved. Bill Vidal provided a couple of explanations on how land condemnation could take place
- Denver's Attorney addressed the public and provided a brief overview of how negotiation out of court is a good thing to consider
- Estimated cost to fight Arapahoe County
- Feel like being bullied to make a decision
- There is a missing motive –more density/ building

Further Questions and Wrap Up:

Question: Are there any guarantees that Arapahoe County would agree to these conditions?

Answer: Denver would request an intergovernmental agreement to assure that the conditions that are agreed upon are honored.

Question: Would a one lane “safety” bridge be acceptable

Answer: Not likely

Dick Gannon of Denver Parks and Recreation: He was instrumental in buying the land from the water department for the parks department along Cherry Creek Trail. The bridge doesn't do anything to enhance the trail or the parks department.

Question: Does Arapahoe County really have the will to proceed with a “taking”?
Can't we build a pedestrian bridge that would be strong enough for a fire truck?

Answer: Arapahoe Country would probably not agree to a pedestrian bridge