Dresbach Bridge

Bicycle/Pedestrian Accommodation

Feasibility Study

Interim Summary of Findings

November 16, 2011

Based on all information aggregated to-date, the following observations are made:

I. Accommodation Law/Policy, Highway Easement, and Planning document review:

- Current Federal and State laws regarding bicycle/pedestrian accommodations do not require a trail facility to be constructed on the Dresbach Bridge. However, current law and policy indicates that facilities shall be considered for the project and support an examination of possibilities for the Dresbach Project.

- It is important to note that bicycle/pedestrian accommodations are included in the project for the North-South direction in Minnesota for continuity of the MRT Trail. Project sponsors have accommodated these modes where practicable and where existing or current planning efforts have detailed these facilities and connections.

- The portion of I-90 from the Dresbach Bridge through the French Slough exists within a highway easement granted by the Department of Interior in 1964. According to Stipulation 3 of the final agreement, the easement is granted under the condition that,

  > "...the right-of-way shall be used for the construction, maintenance, and development of a highway only and that no other facilities of any nature whatsoever shall be placed or permitted to be placed within such right-of-way, except under such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife [USFWS]".

  This statement suggests that the current easement may prohibit a bike/pedestrian facility without further clarification from USFWS. MnDOT has requested USFWS provide legal clarification. A response has not yet been received.

- The current 2035 Coulee Regional Bicycle Plan recommends designing the capacity for bicycle and pedestrians within the I-90 corridor, including the Dresbach Bridge and interchange.

- The current 2035 Coulee Regional Bicycle Plan maps (e.g. Maps 4-1, 4-4, 4-7) do not indicate a bicycle/pedestrian facility between USH14/61 on the Minnesota side and USH53/STH35 on the Wisconsin side along the I-90 corridor.

- No bicycle/pedestrian accommodations for the I-90 corridor in the study area are included in WisDOT's Connections 2030: Wisconsin's long-range transportation plan. Based on information gathered to-date, no other local funding sources have been identified supporting the possibility of a trail project.

II. Alternatives

- Bike counts and modeling projections are becoming more advanced every year, but are still evolving. There is not an accepted methodology for anticipating the non-motorized use of the alternatives studied. Recent data provided by LAPC for the Cass Street/Cameron Street crossing counted 127 bikes and 43 pedestrians in a 12-hour period. While the counts are in the near vicinity of the Dresbach area, they may not be comparable to a potential Dresbach Bridge crossing. The Cass Street/Cameron Street crossing directly links the cores of two population centers. For the Dresbach Bridge project, the Minnesota side is not within a population center or city limits.

- Cost estimates for the entire (ultimate) trail system alternatives range from $24.6 to $37.4 million (2011 dollars), and do not include costs for right-of-way acquisition, engineering, or mitigation.

- Wetland impacts have been estimated at 1.5 – 6.4 acres for the alternatives considered.

- New right-of-way acquisition is estimated at 0.2 – 2.7 acres, and does not include the potential for additional Refuge acquisition needed to construct the WB river bridge accommodation option.

- The WB River bridge widening option is problematic due to the potential need for additional USFWS refuge taking on Island 98; the uncertainty with redesigning the west bridge abutment and I-90 embankment due to global stability challenges; and that the trail from the WB side may not as readily connect to the French Slough Rest Area in Wisconsin when compared to other alternatives.

- EB River bridge widening is not preferred from a structural design or constructability perspective. The EB river bridge is already wider than the WB bridge before considering widening. The resulting width of the eastbound river bridge, after considering widening, would likely require a 3-web box girder section. The wider eastbound bridge would require a different form traveler system to construct than the westbound bridge, which requires a significant increase in cost and inefficiencies in construction. The additional load associated with the wider box section would likely require larger footings, which impacts cofferdam sizes and temporary navigation clearances.

- The middle (suspended) trail option provides the most benefit/flexibility in terms of phasing, design and future trail development; however, it may present some concerns with operations and maintenance for the bridge section.

- Suspending a trail from the outside (underwing) of either bridge was also considered. However, adequate wing length does not exist at all locations in the box-girder section (Unit 1) to accommodate the suspended trail width. The remaining pre-stressed girder section of the bridge (Unit 2) does not include enough deck overhang to allow for a suspended facility. Furthermore, overhead clearance from the trail may be restricted at locations along the box-girder section.

III. Regulatory (Refuge and wetlands)

- Avoidance alternatives for potential wetland impacts must be considered. Trail alternatives studied have attempted to reduce impacts, but likely cannot avoid impacts entirely. Based on information from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the likely impacts to wetlands along the I-90 corridor suggest a high wetland function impact and would result in a similarly high consideration of avoidance options if other practicable alternatives exist.

- Correspondence from USFWS asks, "....Are there feasible alternative locations for a bike path that would meet identified needs and avoid impacts to Refuge resources?"

- A potential alternative bike path location that would avoid impacts, such as the Cass St./Cameron St. crossing, may need to be considered as part of future trail development based on feedback noted above.

IV. Other

- Feedback received from various sources suggests that the potential I-90 corridor trail could promote recreational activities, opportunities to view the river and surrounding Refuge and tourism. It is unclear, however, why an I-90 trail-only option is required to provide these opportunities . Several other features included in the project, such as the North-South MRT Trail accommodation and existing Travel Information Center in Minnesota, amongst others, may serve the identified goals without requiring impacts to wetlands and the Refuge at a significant cost.

- WisDOT will require a local entity/agency to be the maintaining authority for the trail system on the Wisconsin side. This local agency/entity would be required to sign a maintenance agreement before any accommodation or construction.

- WisDOT Cost Share Policy

Next Steps

- Comment/Feedback
- EA – 60 day comment period

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