



City of Grand Island

Tuesday, February 03, 2004

Study Session

Item -1

Discussion Concerning Use of 1/2 Cent Sales Tax for Overpass/Underpass on Broadwell at the Union Pacific Railroad Tracks

The sales tax survey results showed significant support for the construction of an underpass or overpass on Broadwell Avenue at the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Without a new funding source for an underpass such as sales tax, the Broadwell Avenue Underpass may never be built. The Broadwell Avenue crossing just north of 3rd Street is the heaviest used crossing in the city. The Nebraska Department of Roads uses a calculated exposure factor by multiplying the number of vehicles per day times the number of trains per day. If the number is over 500,000, it qualifies for a grade separation (over or underpass). The NDOR has railroad grade separation projects already on their list that will take over 50 years to complete at existing funding levels.

A comprehensive railroad corridor study should be conducted before the plan for how the community addresses issues such as this Broadwell Grade Separation can be finalized. The study should look at grade separations, crossing closures, directional horns, quiet zones, an east by-pass, replacement of the Sycamore and Eddy Underpasses, etc. Staff is working on an RFP where we will ask for proposals from consulting engineering firms to prepare a Railroad Corridor Plan for all railroads in and around Grand Island.

Olsson Associates is studying the proposal to construct a grade separation on Broadwell Avenue at the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Details regarding the study are attached. Tom Leikam will display the concepts that were studied, explain design details, discuss some of the pros and cons for each concept, touch on ROW impact, and present a budget estimate of costs for the project.

Staff Contact: Steve Riehle, Public Works Director/City Engineer

Broadwell Grade Separation

The Union Pacific Railroad tracks carries approximately 70 trains per day through the heart of Grand Island with peaks that may approach 100 trains per day. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad carries over 65 trains per day along the north and east edges of the community. Anyone that has driven the streets of Grand Island has experienced the impact the trains have on their trip. There are 25 at grade crossings where motorists may be delayed while waiting for a train to clear.

The 2003 traffic counts for selected crossings are as follows:

Union Pacific Railroad Crossings

Webb Road – 5,800 Vehicles Per Day (VPD)

Blaine Street/Custer Avenue – 8,462 VPD

Broadwell Avenue – 11,895 VPD

Lincoln Street – 2,105 VPD

Walnut Street – 4,359 VPD

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Crossings:

North Broadwell Avenue/Old US Hwy 281 – 6,136 VPD

Stuhr Road – 5,298 VPD

A meeting was held on December 16th, 2003 with property owners that would be adjacent to the construction. Olsson Associates prepared concepts for 2 overpasses and 2 underpasses that were overlaid onto aerial photos for exhibits at the meeting. A summary on the proposed construction was presented followed by discussions with individual property owners.

The concept that had the greatest support by those in attendance was an underpass that left Third Street open to Broadwell Avenue. Both of the overpass concepts and the remaining underpass concepts did not allow Third Street traffic to access Broadwell. City staff agrees that it is important that 3rd Street traffic be allowed to access Broadwell.

The project will have a significant impact on the properties along Broadwell Avenue. City staff and engineers will work with the affected properties as the project unfolds. We will do our best to minimize the impact to their business, accommodate requests for driveways, retaining walls, etc. Some

properties will have to be purchased in their entirety. Others will have their access changed or impacted, parking area reduced, visibility impacted, etc.

After the meeting we looked into the possibility of constructing an overpass on Madison Avenue. Olsson Associates prepared a concept and will present that concept at the City Council study session. Those in attendance also suggested that we consider an underpass on Custer Avenue / Blaine Street. Construction of a grade separation here would mean Third Street could no longer access Custer Avenue / Blaine Street. Staff feels this would have a very negative impact on traffic flows and therefore recommends against an underpass on Custer Avenue / Blaine Street.

If this project is constructed staff recommends that this project be scheduled for construction after the Nebraska Department of Roads project to widen Second Street from Grant Street to Greenwich Avenue is built in 2007. Second Street needs to be improved before the Broadwell Underpass is constructed so it can handle the increased traffic while Broadwell Avenue is closed for the construction of the underpass and roadway on Broadwell Avenue.

Tom Leikam of Olsson Associates discussed the project with the UPRR and also sent them a schematic of the preferred underpass alternative. The project will automatically qualify for some funding by the UPRR and NDOR if the Broadwell Avenue crossing is closed. Having a comprehensive RR corridor study completed will also increase the cities ability to negotiate for more RR monies.