

HIGHWAY SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS PROJECTS

GREEN ACRES MEETING NOTES

Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street Roger's Park Elementary School Cafeteria 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. September 18, 2008

There was an informal discussion prior to the meeting regarding the crash rates at Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue. There was a concern brought up about the accessibility to 36th Avenue from Cottonwood Street or Locarno Drive if a median was installed. Steve Noble (DOWL Engineers) explained that a signal at MacInnes Street was being looked at and would alleviate the problem of not being able to turn left off of Locarno Drive to 36th Avenue.

Brad Doggett (DOWL) began the meeting by presenting the updates that had been made since the first public meeting in May 2008 to the Cottonwood Street and Locarno Drive Highway Safety Improvements Project (HSIP). He explained that DOWL has created two additional traffic safety options since that meeting. The first additional option – Option 3 – is to install a northbound leg to the LaTouche Street/36th Avenue intersection and a full median at the intersection of Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street. The second additional option – Option 4 – is to improve the sight distance at 36th Avenue by adjusting the grade of the hill.

Brad explained that DOWL's recommendation is to proceed with the updated version of Option 1, which is to install a signal at the intersection of MacInnes Street and 36th Avenue to improve neighborhood access and provide a protected pedestrian crossing, as well as a median at the intersection of Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue to limit turning movements to right-turn in and right-turn out. He then explained that the final traffic analysis and recommendation is expected to be complete this fall with the final design to be completed soon after. Construction is currently scheduled to begin in 2009. Below is a summary of the questions and comments from the meeting. Staff responses are bolded.

Why did this project come about?

The HSIP came about due to an elevated rate of traffic accidents at the intersection of Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue.

When designing for this project, did you ever think to include noise mitigation?

Brad stated that a noise study has not been done in this area as a part of this project.

In the selection process, how will you be making your decision?

A cost-benefit analysis was done with the intent of lowering the cost of the project while reducing the number of collisions occurring at the intersection.

Where does this intersection rank in accidents?

The Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue intersection is among the top 20 intersections in the state with the highest vehicle crash rates. The State of Alaska measures accident rates at intersections throughout the state. Any intersection with an accident rate of more than one percent is considered high priority. The Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue intersection has a rate of 1.44 vehicle crashes per one million entering vehicles.

There is a much higher crash rate at 36th Avenue and LaTouche Street than at the Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street intersection.

When is construction expected to start?

Construction can begin as early as next summer. The traffic study will wrap up Fall/Winter 2008.

In Option 4, what kind of a grade is there on Rhone Circle?

The grade is between 6-8 feet.

If you re-route traffic, you have to understand that a lot of people travel eastbound from College Village and the options with a median prohibiting left-hand turns means that an alternative path would need to be taken and I think this has been overlooked.

Have you considered the unintended consequences with adjusting the grade of the hill? People would then be able to see the entire distance and would probably not slow down at all. Maybe you should consider adding signage or flashing lights. These things need to be considered.

If you close off Locarno Drive and 36th Avenue to left-hand turning traffic, are there statistics showing how many people actually make that turn and in turn would need to find an alternate route?

Brad explained that studies show an average of 35 cars would be added to the travel on Crescent Drive during the morning peak hour.

If you just installed a traffic light at the intersection of MacInnes Street and 36th Avenue, would that help mitigate some of the traffic problems?

Installing a traffic light could help create gaps in traffic making it easier to make left turns at that intersection, however a light would not necessarily alleviate traffic accidents. In fact, it may just lead to an increase in different types of accidents such as rear-end collisions.

The traffic light at 36th Avenue and MacInnes Street should be put in now and see if it helps before doing anything to the intersection at Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street.

Bob Kniefel (MOA) stated that there was a gap study done recently at the intersection of 36th Avenue and MacInnes Street. He said the average person waited eight seconds to turn left. He said adding a traffic light to the intersection would increase the wait time as it would take 50-60 seconds for a traffic light to cycle to green indicating that it was okay to turn left. He also indicated that this light would need to coordinate with the traffic light that is currently at LaTouche Street.

Did you consider going forward with any of the proposed options that would divert traffic onto Rhone Circle instead of onto Crescent Drive as you had planned?

Brad stated that this option was considered, but that it would require right-of-way acquisition.

How will people that live in Geneva Woods be able to travel westbound on 36th Avenue if left-hand turns from Locarno Drive are prohibited?

The traffic would be redirected through Crescent Drive to MacInnes Street where, if a signal was installed, a protected left-hand turn would be possible.

In order to lower speed limits at the Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue intersection, you should install either a traffic sign or a flashing signal at MacInnes Street. You should also consider removing the foliage from the trees in the ROW along 36th Avenue. The optimal solution would be to go with Option 4 and include a flashing signal and/or sensor at MacInnes Street and 36th Avenue.

The main cause of accidents along the corridor is because you cannot see to the east. I support the installation of a flashing light and posting a lower speed limit.

Brad stated that the issues along this traffic corridor encompass more than just sight distances. In addition, he said sight distance only seems to be a problem when drivers are traveling in one direction.

The ice on Locarno Drive is an issue. Some of the options in your plan include making a westbound one-way street out of 36th Avenue and Cottonwood Street, which is the only access to College Village.

If you turn north on LaTouche Street, the signal detection does not activate. You can only turn if you can find a gap in the westbound traffic.

What about the crash ratio at 36th Avenue and Randolph Street? I did not hear anything about that. Your plan should address the whole area because all neighborhoods are affected.

Brad stated that this HSIP project is intended to look at the intersection of Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue. A neighborhood traffic study is being conducted as part of a separate project and the circulation at Randolph Street can be looked at during this study.

If you divert traffic up Crescent Drive to MacInnes Street, you will find a steep hill east of Locarno Drive. This hill creates poor visibility and a hazardous situation. It is worse in the winter because the city does not remove the snow quickly.

What about emergency vehicle access onto 36th Avenue and Cottonwood Street if you cannot make a left-turn? The sight distance at Crescent Drive turning left onto MacInnes Street on the way to 36th Avenue is also poor. There is a green metal fence that is in the way.

Brad stated that DOWL looked at emergency vehicle access when it came up with its traffic calming options and determined that there would be no significant impact. He also stated that traffic signals would be installed with a system so that if emergency vehicles are approaching the intersection the traffic light would automatically turn green. Steve stated that if an emergency vehicle is going north to Cottonwood Street there is not a traffic signal problem. The only

potential issue would be getting into the south side. However, that being said, he stated emergency vehicle response time is not really affected.

If there is a median installed, emergency vehicles cannot come out of Cottonwood Street.

A previous project at 36th Avenue and Cottonwood Street was stopped because you could not lower the grade. How is this project going to be different?

What are the different consequences of going with Option 1 versus Option 2?

Option 1 reduces the number of more serious angle collisions at the intersection of Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue. The ROW is impacted in Option 2 because it would require making 36th Avenue significantly wider to complete. There would also be the continued potential for left-turn accidents under Option 2.

You cannot do 35 miles per hour coming down the hill from Lake Otis Parkway going towards Cottonwood Street unless you apply your brakes. This problem is compounded in the winter, providing a good chance to be rear-ended. Something should be done about that hill.

There is a major effort involved in adjusting the grade of the hill on 36th Avenue. Since 36th Avenue is a main road, there are major construction obstacles that have to be accepted if this option is chosen.

Under Option 2, would you increase the ROW or would you utilize the existing ROW?

DOWL has not begun the design for that option yet, so it is not known.

For the "fifth lane" that is to be installed under most of the options, does it have to be a left-turning lane only or could it be a continuous turning lane?

Brad said that this was a good suggestion and that DOWL will take the option of a continuous left-turn lane into consideration.

The Hanshew area had similar traffic problems at Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street. People eventually began to lower their speed when driving through the area. If you train people, in about 15 years they will know they have to slow down on 36th Avenue.

Brad stated that speed limit compliance is always an issue and at some point slowing down when driving on 36th Avenue becomes an enforcement issue instead of a design issue.

Could you enforce the area as a safety zone with double fines?

Safety zones are only applicable in construction zones.

How do these options take into account anticipated traffic increases in the future?

These design options did take future traffic flow into account. It was part of the mandate for this project that DOWL look at traffic volumes 10-20 years into the future. DOWL had to make sure that all of the design options will perform operationally when making these forecasts.

Did DOWL coordinate with UAA to discuss future university traffic when it came up with these options?

Brad stated that he did check with UAA, but that he has not heard anything about their plans for future use of the University Center. He also said UAA would be required to perform a traffic impact analysis that considered traffic volumes if they decided to build new buildings along the corridor.

DOWL should look at options to fix the 36th Avenue and New Seward Highway intersection.

DOWL is looking at what can be done to make traffic safer now with the funding that is available.

I do not think the Highway-to-Highway project will decrease traffic on 36th Avenue.

Everyone here should download the Municipal Traffic Report to see the accident statistics for the Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue intersection. For example, according to this report, during one day of traffic, approximately 21,000 cars travel on 36th Avenue.

How is money allocated for this project?

Under HSIP, DOWL had to do a cost-benefit analysis and come up with options where the decrease in collisions offset the construction costs.

DOWL should consider the pedestrian and bicyclists who use the Locarno Drive/Cottonwood Street and 36th Avenue intersection. MacInnes Street is the only intersection that has safe access for pedestrians and cyclists between the New Seward Highway and Lake Otis Parkway. Has DOWL considered adding a pedestrian or bike tunnel?

DOWL did take this into consideration when it came up with Option 3.