

**ADA TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETING  
MINUTES  
FEBRUARY 8, 2010**

Meeting was called to order by Supervisor Haga at 7:30 p.m. Members present: Supervisor Haga, Clerk Burton, Treasurer Rhoades, Trustee Smith, Trustee Westra, Trustee Proos, Trustee Sytsma (arrived at 7:37). Also present: Recording Secretary Johnson and one hundred eight community members. Members absent: None.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Supervisor Haga noted one change to the agenda. Under "III.B. – Special Presentation", the High Speed Internet Report was deleted, as the presenter was unable to attend the meeting. **Moved by Westra, supported by Proos, to approve the agenda as amended. Yes - 6, No - 0; Motion carried.**

Trustee Sytsma arrived at 7:37 pm.

**PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD: MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (M-DOT) – M-21 BRIDGE**

Mr. Art Green from the Michigan Department of Transportation (M-DOT) presented the M-21 bridge project to the Board. He briefly reviewed the background and the process that brought the project to this point. The M-21 bridge is aging and there are issues with deterioration of the bridge deck, railings, and beams as well as a susceptibility to scour due to the spread footing foundation. The existing bridge is in M-DOT's critical bridge inventory and the issues with the bridge need to be addressed. This project has been in discussion for several years and a great deal of research was done during this exploration of options for the bridge: underwater inspections, soil sampling, river survey, environmental evaluation, constructability analysis, etc. The research indicated challenges with maintaining stability of the existing structure during the construction process, which puts obstacles in the way of maintaining full or reduced traffic flow during the construction phase. As M-DOT considered the traffic flow challenges, they met with Kent County to discuss potential detour options. Mr. Green indicated this presentation to the Ada Township Board and the Ada residents was to provide an update on the M-21 bridge project findings and construction planning.

Mr. Green presented a digital slide show outlining the findings and options.

Existing Bridge Condition

The structure was built in 1957. The bridge deck, railings, and beams are rated in poor condition. The bridge is on spread footing, as opposed to pilings, which are inserted into the ground to provide support. Due to the current underwater support design, the water fluctuations are causing scour which leads to a reduction in the compaction level of the soil, which in turn causes reduced stability for the structure. The deteriorated driving surface, footings, and foundation need to be addressed in a permanent manner, as opposed to yearly repair. The parapet style railing is no longer used by M-DOT due to crash impact concerns. In addition, the existing bridge does not allow for pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Issues Impacting Design

One of the key concerns of the design was to maintain through traffic and minimize impact on residents and businesses. There are a limited number of river crossings; M-21 is a vital artery that is a national truck route, serves a larger commuter base, and allows access to many businesses. Full or partial closures would have significant effect.

Another issue was environmental impact. The fact the bridge is within the Grand River flood plain results in permit requirements and regulatory limits on material placed temporarily or permanently in the river beyond the existing footprint. Everything in that area beyond the existing footprint is considered wetlands so there are DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) issues governing the impact on the wetlands. The hydraulics (water fluctuation and flow) of the river effect the constructability of the bridge project, the ability to maintain traffic, and the stability of the existing bridge during the construction phase. There is an endangered purple warty-back mussel found in the general area; regulations require the work area be checked and monitored for the species. Legal protections of the fish habitat also come into play. May 1st to June 30th is the spawning season in the river; the bottom of the stream cannot be disturbed during this time; this severely restricts the scheduling time for the project. One of the four quadrants of the bridge area contains the DNR boat launch; state law prevents this property from being disturbed, even temporarily, due to its public utility.

The active scour affecting the center piers needs to be addressed. Removal of a portion of the footings and piers would cause instability and further degradation of the structure. Even the insertion of pilings would further consolidate the material by the footings, which could cause settling of the bridge itself. Active traffic on the bridge during this would be dangerous and unacceptable.

Working in the river creates unique construction challenges. Placing equipment and material in the river during the construction process causes backwater, which is the displacement of water volume upstream due to the restriction of the existing downstream flow. The law requires anything over 1/100th of a foot of backwater created in either a temporary or permanent condition must have sign-off from all upstream properties that are impacted. Due to the variances in this river and the amount of water carried, surveys would need to be conducted and approvals obtained from all parties effected. This adds to cost and schedule time. In addition, if any party declines to approve the backwater impact, the option causing the backwater is not legally allowable.

### Cost and Schedule

The schedule is strongly related to funding issues. The current schedule allows for construction to commence in spring of 2011; the goal would be to have the bridge back up the same year, but it may spread to longer. State funds will continue to decline for the next few years due to reduced revenues, as will the state's ability to make federal funds available for this project. This dramatic reduction in available funds will put at risk the ability to complete this project in the required timeline dictated by the condition of the bridge, and this project is scheduled to commence as part of the funded 2010 schedule of projects. If the project is delayed past this fall, the money will no longer be available and other funding will need to be obtained to make up the projected shortfall. The condition of the bridge places on the critical bridge list; the work must be done shortly, so it should be done while it can still be funded. In order to receive federal funding for the structure, the bridge must be replaced, not simply repaired. If the bridge repair or replacement is not in compliance with federal policy, it will not only need to be paid for without federal dollars, but the future maintenance and replacement costs of the bridge will not be eligible for federal funding.

The early design cost just over \$8 million dollars; changes required by the design issues have pushed the cost to approximately \$10.5 million. M-DOT will be contributing to both the construction project and the enhancement aspects.

The current schedule, based on a full-closure detour plan, allows for a September 2010 start. Working would continue through 2010 preparing the project detour areas. The bridge work would begin early 2011 with a planned completion late summer or early fall in 2011.

### Maintaining Traffic

One option considered is called part-width construction, wherein half of the bridge is built while half the existing bridge remains in place. This allows reduced traffic flow to be maintained in at least one direction throughout the construction process. The proposed design would have shifted from the existing six pier/seven span design to a five pier/six span plan. Although this met some of the design criteria, more investigation determined that the construction process for this model would cause constriction in the river, which would increase water speed, reduce flow, accelerate scour, and create a backwater condition. In addition, the partial removal of a pier as required during the construction process would create unacceptable instability in the bridge. Other plans based on part-width construction also ran into insoluble environmental and constructability obstacles.

Another option reviewed was the construction of a temporary bridge to maintain traffic during the new bridge construction. Due to the hydraulics of the river, the temporary bridge would have to be built with six piers aligned to either the north or the south of the existing piers. Due to the soil condition in the river, the vibration caused by the installation of the piers for the temporary bridge would create a condition for the existing bridge to settle. Therefore, traffic would need to be removed completely from the existing bridge during that construction phase of the temporary bridge. There are also significant challenges to handling the material, equipment, and the actual construction of the temporary bridge in close proximity to the existing bridge. Once the temporary bridge was in place, one lane of traffic could be handled throughout the construction of the new bridge, which would be necessarily slower, as the construction would need to accommodate the limited space with the temporary bridge and the traffic flow. This could result in approximately of 2.5 years or more of reduced traffic for the project. A temporary bridge also raises issues of environmental impact for the floodplain, wetlands, and endangered mussels, all of which have cost and legal implications. After the new bridge is completed, the temporary bridge would have to be dismantled and removed. A temporary bridge would increase costs 30 - 50% for the project.

The final option is the full closure of the M-21 bridge for a period of five to six months. The speaker acknowledged the impact full closure would have on the community. The primary detour route would be M-21 to Alden/Nash/Hutchins street out to 96 around and back to M-21 or the Beltline. This would be the route for trucks. An alternate route for passenger traffic would be M-21 Pettis, Knapp to M-44. M-DOT would offer incentives to the contractors to limit the time the bridge was closed and speed the return of at least one lane of traffic in each direction. The closure will cost increased time and gas for the detours and there will be an impact on emergency services, which will need to be coordinated with local dispatchers.

### Construction

There are considerable challenges to the constructability of the new bridge. The existing bridge stability during construction, safely working adjacent to the existing spread foots, the issue of active scour impacting compaction of the soil, access to the river for the barge platform construction, and the fluctuating river elevations all contribute to the difficulty of the construction process.

The proposed new bridge will be a 4-span, 3-pier structure. There will be a 14-foot wide non-motorized lane and 4-foot shoulders. The design incorporates aesthetic and lighting enhancements. There are also safety upgrades. The structure will be supported by piles, which are resistant to scour.

### Conclusion

Mr. Green noted the proposal for the detour option is a result of running into obstacles on the other options. Cost and time are factors and the regulations governing backwater raise the possibility of an insurmountable barrier to moving forward with either part-width construction or a temporary bridge option. Part-width construction is simply unacceptable due to the safety concerns about stability issues. A temporary bridge would delay completion of the project, cause long-term restricted traffic flow, and raise the cost significantly. After M-DOT exhaustively explored all the options, the most viable option appears to be full closure of the bridge during construction.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT ON THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (M-DOT) – M-21 BRIDGE**

Al Mathews, 9741 Tip-Top Gravel, noted previous M-21 construction in a good economy had had a huge impact on the business. His company is currently taking every possible action to survive the economy. He felt strongly the bridge closure would cause his customers to go elsewhere and his business would close. He suggested supporting the existing bridge, reinforcing it, and reducing the allowable weight load in order to allow it to last.

Kirk Verkink, Ada Township resident and area manager for Rieth-Riley at 867 Egypt Valley Rd, said 75-80% of their trucks travel the bridge; the closure would have a big impact on their business. In addition, the proposed detour route would transfer high traffic to Pettis in front of their business on the corner of Egypt Valley and Pettis. There are 100-150 trucks moving in and out of their facility per day in the busiest season; the heavy detour traffic would slow business and the trucks pulling in and out would clog traffic. He requested all options be considered to maintain at least one lane of traffic.

Robert Young, 5899 2 Mile Road NE and owner of Big Steps Little Feet Preschool, commended the work and research M-DOT has expended on this project. However, he said everyone is struggling in this economy. He indicated well over 90% of his clients would not be able to get to his business due to the time delay caused by the detour; it would simply add too much time to their morning and evening commutes. Instead, his clients will seek other preschools. He has already had parents deciding against enrollment because of the proposed bridge shutdown; he noted there isn't good communication about the schedule of the shutdown, which is exacerbating the situation. He urged creativity in trying to find a workable plan.

Walter Jousma, Ada East Business Center, commented small businesses can't handle the closure. He said the answer was a new two-lane bridge beyond the boat launch was the answer. The construction delay and cost did not compare to the loss of the jobs, which would also erode the tax base. The new bridge could be given to Ada as a pedestrian part of the trails project. Funding can be augmented by the Township and residents. A closure of the M-21 bridge will mean all of the effort the entrepreneurs have been putting into their businesses will be lost.

The presenter, Mr. Green, said a separate structure would require approval by all upriver entities impacted by the backwater effect. He noted M-DOT has worked with public-private partnership a great deal, and encouraged working together. He reiterated the concerns for schedule, cost, and quality.

Mark Willis, AutoTech Service and Captain Hook Towing and member of Ada Business Association, said the impact of the bridge closure would be more than many businesses could bear. He indicated he had previously owned a business in Grand Rapids on 28th Street and Madison, and he lost 65% of his business when the Madison bridge was closed for about six months. There were several businesses that went under as a result, and that situation was in Grand Rapids, which had significantly better and shorter detour routes than the ones being proposed here. The clients simply take other routes and develop relationships with other businesses; they don't all return after the bridge is accessible again. He said it was critical to take the necessary time to consider the consequences. He encouraged the temporary bridge option; it was more important to pursue the best option than to just move forward quickly. He asked for clarification of the backwater issue; the fluctuations in the river lead to floods, so the standard of 1/100th of an inch doesn't seem rational. Finally, Mr. Ellis questioned if the DEQ would be as involved in this project, as many of the DEQ responsibilities have been turned over to the EPA.

The presenter, Mr. Green, agreed many of the elements of the DEQ have been transferred to the EPA, but indicated the transportation functions remain in the DEQ jurisdiction. He said M-DOT has tried many ideas and is willing to continue trying, but the clock was still ticking.

Marlene Kenneway, Ada Resident, President of Ada Arts Council, and owner of Ada Dance Academy, spoke about the importance of the Ada community. She noted teenagers would need to take the detour routes, which increases risk, particularly in bad weather. She pointed out school buses on the detour route would cause safety concerns and very long bus rides for the children. She said the impact on safety and small businesses should outweigh the cost issue. The closure may not be only six months; projects often overrun estimates. She supported the second bridge option, particularly one that could be kept afterwards as a pedestrian bridge.

Steve Cooper, Ada resident, agreed the bridge needed to be replaced. He indicated in Indiana culverts were installed, packed with gravel, and covered with asphalt, and that created an inexpensive and easy, yet functional temporary crossing.

Heather Carpenter, Inspirations Dance Studio, just opened her studio last fall. She selected her convenient and family-oriented location to optimize her business success. She said her business would close as a result of the bridge closure; her clients would not take the detour to reach her. She emphasized the safety concerns for the delay for emergency services, particularly as the children in her studio are doing physical activity. She urged the second bridge option; it will be the best result for the community and addresses the safety issues.

Debbie Start, resident of Cascade, has a four-year old child in Big Steps Little Feet Preschool. She said she would not be able to enroll him there for safety and convenience concerns if the bridge project includes full closure, even though it is her preferred choice. She commended the presentation, but said another way must be found.

Rodger Timmer, 342 Greentree Lane NE, noted the military can put up a bridge for heavy military equipment in a matter of days. If there is enough focus and people working together, an alternative solution can be found.

The presenter, Mr. Green, commented the military doesn't have to abide by the same restrictions as the M-DOT. He agreed if people prioritize solving a problem, it can happen. However, the M-DOT is at the end of their options for addressing funding and

environmental impact. M-DOT wants the best possible solution for the project, but must address issues of quality, risk analysis, environment impact, funding, and schedule.

Steve Hall, Bailey, felt it was inevitable that the bridge closure would harm businesses, cause business failures and subsequently decrease tax revenue. He noted schools are not built on highways because of traffic concerns. The detour routes go through two school zones; it is not safe. Although the presentation outlined the bridge closure as an option, the level of detail provided and the pros and cons stacked against the other options seem to indicate this is an option that has already been selected.

Jim Ippel, Ada Bike Shop, commended the presenter and M-DOT for the significant time and effort already put into the project planning. He noted there were various environmental evaluations performed as part of the planning process. He inquired if an economic impact study had been and strongly suggested it should be commissioned before moving ahead and putting the businesses at risk that have been working so hard to grow and develop in Ada.

The presenter, Mr. Green, indicated economic effect is part of the overall environmental impact statement as well as evaluating mobility of the traffic. However, an actual economic impact study has not been done. At this point, M-DOT is providing an update on the available options and the obstacles to the project planning decision. He stated the project plan is not finalized, but M-DOT has tried to analyze the criteria and propose the best solution. He recommended M-DOT partnering with Ada Township to try to examine the options and start making the difficult decision.

Steve Matthew, reminded the audience M-DOT had previously been considering putting a second bridge across the river between Lowell and Ada. He said the second bridge should have been built before to allow minimized impact when it came time to replace the current bridge.

Jamie Ireland, general manager of the Victory Club, noted a great deal of detail had been presented and inquired if the information would be available after the meeting [NOTE: the meeting was audio-recorded as well as summarized in the meeting minutes]. He commented that Michigan has the worst unemployment rate in the nation and said it could not afford to lose the jobs. He urged the second bridge option be chosen.

Jamie Ladd, Conservation Road, inquired if the permanent bridge would have three piers, if that would allow the temporary bridge to be built with three piers without triggering the backwater issue.

The presenter, Mr. Green, said the backwater issue would come into play and the pier arrangement and constructability was also a challenge.

Dean Alger, 13401 3 Mile, inquired about handling emergency response services. The speaker indicated some preliminary conversations have been conducted about distribution of services with consideration of the detours. Mr. Alger noted there was tremendous traffic from Greenville, Belding, etc. into Ada; that would also need to be considered. Mr. Green said M-DOT has been working with county partners on determining the optimum detour routes to handle the capacity overflow.

Maggie Lane Castor, off Skydale, asked if the bridge was currently safe. She wanted to know if the project would need to be approved by the Ada Township Board.

Mr. Green assured the bridge is currently safe; the potential instability comes into play during the construction phase as a result of working on or adjacent to the bridge and removing portions of the existing bridge to build next to it. He responded there is an amount of partnering needed with Ada Township, but ultimately M-DOT is responsible for the safety of the bridge long-term. M-DOT seeks to find the best possible solution, but must meet their obligations.

Tom Taylor, Two Mile and Egypt Valley, inquired if temporary floating bridge options had been considered. He noted they have been used in Washington state. Mr. Green said they had not been explored. Mr. Taylor suggested investigating the possibility.

Bill Barnett, Ada Landings, Ada Attic, asked the speaker if danger to the footings was the primary reason for opting out of the original plan. Mr. Green agreed the original concept may not provide the soundness needed to maintain even reduced traffic on the bridge. Mr. Barnett suggested investigating executive order or eminent domain options to prevent the backwater issue from dictating the design. Mr. Green said the issue comes down to the law; if a legal premise to force the backwater approval were located, it would then become an issue for the courts, and fighting the issue would take the bridge far beyond the horizon for the replacement timeline.

Tom Durant, Ada resident, wanted to know if there was any way to extend the life of the existing bridge while a solution can be found for this problem.

Mr. Green said M-DOT has examined several options for extending the life of the existing bridge, such as underpinning, re-supporting the foundation, etc. However, it has been determined there is not enough existing footing to use these methods. There are limited technologies available that won't actually undermine the existing stability of the bridge.

Ada resident, inquired if a suspension bridge might help resolve the problem. Mr. Green said a suspension bridge would require additional room to build as a second bridge to maintain traffic; it would have the same issues as a standard second bridge.

### **BOARD COMMENT ON THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION (M-DOT) – M-21 BRIDGE**

Supervisor Haga noted he had originally been excited about the new bridge when the plan only called for closing two lanes. In light of the proposed full closure, he expressed deep concern about the traffic detours, safety issues, and the impact on businesses and residents. He emphasized the need to continue working with the Michigan Department of Transportation to consider alternatives.

Trustee Westra thanked Mr. Green for an informative presentation. He noted it was important to think outside the box in this situation; he noted the military has the ability to erect bridges in very short periods of time. He compared the pending bridge closure to an approaching economic disaster and called for everyone to mobilize to address the challenge.

Trustee Proos agreed with the residents a full closure of the bridge was totally unacceptable. He noted the full closure option would not move forward without a major fight by Ada Township Board and residents, including withholding funds for the project. He commented the bridge is not yet broken. He therefore suggested a new permanent bridge be constructed off Grand River to M-21; a second bridge is needed regardless of this project. He proposed a separate covered bridge with a walkway into the village to eliminate the need for a pedestrian bridge. He said a separate covered bridge would not only be aesthetically more pleasing, it would be safer and less expensive. Trustee Proos pointed out the importance of emergency services access outweighs the environmental concerns that are aligning with the option for full bridge closure. He said a longer time to completion is more acceptable than closing the bridge completely. He concluded the Township was far from conceding an intolerable full closure option; it would continue to push for other alternatives.

Trustee Smith expressed concern about the high potential for business failures, but emphasized fire and medical safety was the top critical issue. The Fire Department also serves as medical first responders for the community, and a plan to close the bridge is simply not an option.

Clerk Burton pointed out the costs associated with preparing proposed detour roads to handle the additional traffic and transportation weight would be part of the cost savings if another option was chosen. She agreed with the residents and the Board that full closure of the bridge was not a viable solution for Ada; she urged finding another way.

Trustee Sytsma noted over 40 businesses were represented at the meeting. She acknowledged the real fear that the whole town could be devastated by the bridge closure. She said everyone had worked very hard to build a cohesive community and the bridge closure put it all at risk. She urged revisiting the option to build a second, permanent bridge across the river. She said finding an alternative was necessary.

Treasurer Rhoades suggested contacting civil engineers throughout the nation to see if another solution has been developed in a similar situation. The speaker, Mr. Green, said they do try to partner with others nationally to seek options, but this particular project has some unique circumstances and some challenging barriers. He said M-DOT would require assistance addressing these obstacles. He recommended a follow-up meeting with stakeholders to try to resolve some of the issues, but noted time is pressing.

Supervisor Haga said the message had been clearly communicated and reiterated that the Board is very serious about this matter. He stated the Ada Public Works Committee would work with representatives of the residents and local businesses in a dialogue with M-DOT to quickly begin to search and evaluate options. The businesses are crucial; they need to remain viable.

Trustee Proos recommended contacting his uncle, a world-renown engineer with a prestigious engineering firm that works on bridges, for possible ideas to address the limiting circumstances this project faces.

Trustee Smith noted this project would greatly impact the neighboring communities beyond Ada Township.

Supervisor Haga thanked Mr. Green for his presentation and called a short recess before moving on to remaining Township matters.

### **MEETING ADJOURNED AT 9:45 PM FOR A SHORT RECESS**

### **MEETING CALLED BACK TO ORDER AT 10:00 PM**

### **CONTINUATION OF MEETING PAST 10:00 PM**

Supervisor Haga noted a motion was necessary to continue the meeting past 10:00. **Moved by Westra, supported by Sytsma, to adjourn the meeting.**

Supervisor Haga urged the Board address the Warrant Report prior to adjournment. **Moved by Westra to amend the motion to suspend the termination of the meeting to address the Warrant Report first. Support by Sytsma. Yes - 7, No - 0; Amendment to the motion carried.**

Supervisor Haga asked for an amendment to the motion to adjourn all other remaining agenda items to a meeting of the Board, potentially on Monday, February 15th. The Board briefly discussed viability of a special Board meeting to address remaining agenda items.

**Yes - 7, No - 0; Motion as amended carried.**

### **APPROVAL OF WARRANTS AND RECEIPTS**

Treasurer Rhoades presented Warrants and Receipts in the following amounts: Hand Checks: #101 \$2,218.41; #205 \$2,064.69; #208 \$1,627.67; #213 \$745.58; #590 \$151.46; #591 \$151.46; #592 \$23.04; Total All Hand Checks \$6,982.31. Warrants: #101 \$6,968.49; #205 \$13,368.75; #208 \$1,752.10; #211 \$365.00; #213 \$46.00; #590 \$17,258.21; #591 \$2,206.41; #592 \$92.09; Total Warrants \$42,057.05. Total All Checks and Warrants \$49,039.36. **Moved by Trustee Proos, supported by Trustee Westra, to approve the Warrant Report for February 8, 2010, in the total amount of \$49,039.36.**

Trustee Westra noted the Mindshare Media web services charge (Line Item #35) and asked for a status update on the website search function, which is not fully operational. Clerk Burton indicated the charge was for work on the search functionality; this was not part of the original agreement with the vendor. The Board discussed who had initially authorized this aspect of the web services work and the appropriate channels for extending authorization to a vendor.

**Roll Call: Yes - Sytsma, Proos, Smith, Westra, Rhoades, Burton, Haga. No - 0. Absent - 0. Motion carried.**

### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,**

---

**Susan Burton  
Ada Township Clerk**

RS/kj