

Council Communication

Office of the City Manager



Date

February 20, 2006

Agenda Item No. 61
Roll Call No. ~~06-~~
Communication No. 06-090

Department: City Manager's Office

AGENDA HEADING:

Court Avenue Two-Way Traffic Study--2nd Avenue to 5th Avenue: Approval of Final Report and Recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION:

Recommend approval of the "One-Way to Two-Way Traffic Study" final report, including the Steering Committee recommendations to convert Court Avenue to two-way traffic from 2nd Avenue to 5th Avenue and to convert 4th Street to two-way traffic from Walnut Street to Court Avenue, but to leave both 2nd Avenue and 3rd Street as one-way streets from Court Avenue to West Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway, and direct the City Manager to implement these changes in traffic flow as recommended in the report.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Amount: \$275,000 (\$25,000 for design and other engineering costs; \$250,000 construction costs)

Funding Source:

\$25,000 FY 2005-06; transfer from STR075 – Downtown Area Street Restoration

\$250,000 FY 2006-07; Tax Increment to be issued

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

On November 22, 2004, the City Council approved a contract with the Center for Transportation Education and Research (CTRE) at Iowa State University, to assist City staff in completing a review and analysis of three downtown roadways from one- to two-way control: Court Avenue from 2nd Avenue to 5th Avenue; 2nd Avenue from Court Avenue to Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway; and 3rd Street from Court Avenue to Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway. This study was done in partnership with the Downtown Community Alliance (DCA), and worked through a Steering Committee which included the following members:

Christine Hensley – Des Moines City Council
Rick Clark – City Manager
Kerty Levy – Downtown Community Alliance
Matt McCoy – Downtown Community Alliance
Scott Carlson – Court Avenue Brew Pub & Court Avenue Association
Mike Utley – Court Avenue Brew Pub & Court Avenue Association
Rick Tollakson – Hubbell Realty
Brian Waller – Science Center
Sally Dix – Science Center
Jeff Bruning – Full Court Press
Barbara Kirk – Downtown Neighborhood Association
Matt Anderson – Economic Development Office

The study team (CTRE, City staff, and Steering Committee) met over a 6-month period to consider a comprehensive range of issues, which are summarized in the final report. The study team conducted a public input meeting on this study on August 17, 2005. The Steering Committee developed the following recommendations, which were presented to and favorably received by the participants in the public meeting, and are included in the final report dated October 2005. The final report, including these recommendations, was presented to and approved by the Traffic Safety Committee at their February 14, 2006 meeting. A full copy of the report is available for public review at the City Clerk's office.

Recommendations

Convert Court Avenue to Two-Way Operations: This change significantly improves circulation to a wide variety of homes, businesses, and attractions in the area. It also reduces confusion in getting to and from the area while traveling on east-west roadways. Cherry Street and Mulberry Street are two-way to the west and Court Avenue will be converted to two-way from 2nd Avenue to E 7th Street. Conversion will provide continuity along this corridor. Along with the conversion of 4th Street to two-way (from Court Avenue to Walnut Street) this change significantly improves access to the Court Avenue business district and the new Science Center. The change is anticipated to discourage through traffic, add some congestion during peak operations, add more conflicts for pedestrians, and will have some impact to parking and operations at the intersections. The committee felt that in considering each of these issues the benefits far exceeded these negative impacts and that the recommended change better suited the character of the roadway and area.

Maintain 2nd Avenue and 3rd Street as One-Way Operations: The evaluation found that adding a lane in the opposite direction (contra-flow lane) had minimal improvements to circulation for the area and had very negative impacts to the backbone operations of these critical one-way pair roadways. They both carry high volumes of through traffic and are both one-way streets north of Court Avenue and south of Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway. Conversion would provide discontinuity along this corridor. With Court Avenue converted to two-way, the contra-flow lane (created in the opposite direction) on 2nd Avenue and 3rd Street was found to have minimal improvements to circulation and came at the cost of losing 50% of the parking on both roadways. It also limits reserve and event capacity, impacts daily operations at critical intersections, degrades through operations and complicates way finding to area attractions and business districts. The City of Des Moines recently invested heavily in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway corridor with future plans to extend this corridor further east to E. 14th Street. Both 2nd Avenue and 3rd Street play critical roles in linking existing and future traffic flow to this major east-west roadway and in serving the downtown area from both Martin Luther King, Jr. Parkway and I-235.

Planning Level Cost Estimate

The final report includes a planning level estimate of costs to convert Court Avenue to two-way traffic from Water Street to 5th Avenue, based on the preferred plan. The preferred plan includes new traffic signals at the intersection of 5th Avenue and Court Avenue, major revisions to the existing signals at Water Street, 2nd Avenue, 3rd Street and 4th Street with Court Avenue, revised signage and durable pavement markings. The total estimated construction costs for this plan is approximately \$500,000.

Staff has further reviewed the proposed conversion to two-way traffic, and believes that it can be done, at least initially, with significant less cost by minimizing existing curb and traffic signal modifications, including only a temporary signal at 5th Avenue and Court Avenue, and doing the signing and pavement markings with City crews. Durable pavement markings would only be included if the street is resurfaced with new asphalt, and would be done as part of the resurfacing project, similar to E. Court Avenue from E. 7th Street to E. 14th Street. Staff has included a project in the proposed Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for FY 2006-07 for conversion of Court Avenue from 5th Avenue to E. 7th Street and Walnut Street from 2nd Avenue east to Finkbine Drive near the State Capitol. The total estimated cost for this project is \$275,000, with \$25,000 for design and other engineering costs and \$250,000 for construction. If approved by Council, this phase of the project would complete the necessary modifications to convert Court Avenue and Walnut Street to two-way traffic by the end of 2006.

Future Modifications

The study team looked at several options for handling the various traffic movements at the intersection of 5th Avenue and Court Avenue, including traffic signals with minimal pavement modifications (recommended in the final report), construction of a new diagonal street to connect Court Avenue with Mulberry Street, and a roundabout centered on the intersection. The Steering Committee concurred with the recommendation to install a low-cost temporary signal at the intersection initially, but expressed interest in the possibility of a future roundabout for its traffic calming, safety and aesthetic potential. It was beyond the scope of the CTRE study to do any detailed analysis or design of a roundabout, but they did determine that a typical roundabout could fit this site, with some additional space from the parking garage site on the northeast corner, the development site on the southeast corner, and the Polk County Courthouse site on the west side of the intersection. Further study would need to be conducted by a firm with significant experience in the analysis and design of urban roundabouts, to determine how well a roundabout would work at this location, if the stakeholders desire a roundabout, and what it would cost to design and construct a roundabout to handle the complex traffic movements at this location. This study could be done in conjunction with the development of the site south of Court Avenue between 4th and 5th Streets, as part of the future Court Avenue Streetscape modifications, or later as a separate study.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: November 22, 2004

Roll Call Number: 04-2533

Action: Approved contract with CTRE for Two-Way Street Study in Court Avenue District

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S):

Date: September 20, 2005

Roll Call Number: N/A

Action: Traffic Safety Committee Approved Preliminary Recommendations

Date: February 14, 2006

Roll Call Number: N/A

Action: Traffic Safety Committee Approved Final Report and Recommendations

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS:

Approval of project in Capital Improvements Program; public hearing; receive and file bids; designate lowest bidder, approve contract and bond. Partial payments to contractor and final acceptance of work.