



Memo

To: Saugatuck City Council
From: Kirk Harrier—City Manager
Date: February 11, 2019
Re: Blue Star Trail

The City Council met on January 24, 2019 in a workshop session to review renderings of proposed trail routes on the west side and east side of the Blue Star Highway in the City of Saugatuck's jurisdiction. The Friends of the Blue Star Trail (FOTBST) developed these renderings through a contract with Fleis & Vandenbrink engineering. Also during that meeting a potential third route was discussed called the "City Route" which involved using parts of Lake Street, State Street and Maple Street in order to connect to the section of trail that Saugatuck Township completed that terminated at Allegan Street.

A conference call was organized with MDOT grant coordinator, Amy Matisoff, on Monday, February 4 2019 to discuss this potential third route as well as other matters pertaining to MDOT's TAP (Transportation Alternative Program) Grant process and requirements. Saugatuck City Mayor Ken Trester, FOTBST representative John Adams, Hurley Stewart engineering representative Tim Stewart, and Fleis & Vandenbrink engineering representative Jon Moxey were also included on the conference call.

Below is an outline of the conference call details:

- Any interim route would require a sidewalk on at least one side of the roadway.
- MDOT suggested not moving forward with an interim route that needs additional improvements until it can be determined any proposed additional infrastructure is not duplicative.
- MDOT suggested the stakeholders spend additional time studying any potential routes in the City as MDOT requires justification via a feasibility study for a route identified as permanent that is requesting TAP grant funds.
- MDOT advised that any route is going to have some degree of impact on properties it intersects so all parties should be aware and identify issues in advance and involve impacted property owners early on in the process.
- MDOT stated there is more than one way to get a portion of a regional trail to meet AASHTO standards such as using existing sidewalks, enlarging sidewalks to meet AASHTO standards, and striping bike

lanes (sharrows) on areas of road that have low traffic counts. In urban environments with limited right-of-way space, MDOT recognizes separated uses are options to make up the connections needed for long distant regional trails.

- MDOT stated the granting of “exceptions” to the AASHTO standards is not preferred but they do realize that urban areas are not perfect and sometimes there is only so much room available for a trail and exceptions may be the only option. MDOT did state they prefer to keep any portion of trail that has been granted an exception to be shorter rather than longer, i.e. they don’t want a 26 mile portion of trail that doesn’t meet the AASHTO standards.
- MDOT stated Saugatuck City would likely be a “destination” location of a regional trail and the City should anticipate that once a regional trail is completed, to expect more bicycle traffic trying to get into the interior of the City via Lake Street. The existing Lake Street infrastructure heading into town may not be adequate if there are more bicycles and pedestrian traffic so this issue should be, at a minimum, discussed. This is outside the scope of the FOTBST “regional trail” but is a secondary planning component that, up until this point, neither the City nor the FOTBST have really explored. The City wouldn’t see the full potential impact of any increased bicycle traffic until the regional trail was completed and more bicycle riders utilized the regional trail. MDOT suggested the City should consider the impact of what additional bike traffic may cause via Lake Street and plan for it in advance because once MDOT TAP grant funds are used, MDOT will not spend funds to re-route the trail at a later date.
- MDOT believes feasibility studies and "larger" plans are important with these trail projects. MDOT suggest conversations need to happen in advance so best choices are made for the future. MDOT recognizes there are a lot of moving parts with this project and there are a lot of other priorities with the other communities on the route. Saugatuck is a high tourist area and it will only become busier. MDOT suggest considering issues now verses trying to fix them later. Exploring options that bring the trail into town verses routing around town was also suggested by MDOT.
- MDOT stated more than once during the conversation they recommend taking adequate time to fully explore all options and get complete buy in from the stakeholders in order to work through critical planning issues.
- MDOT stated the FOTBST could apply for grant funding later in the summer as MDOT has a revolving grant cycle so there are multiple submittal times throughout a calendar year. MDOT is not rushing this project or setting the timeline.
- MDOT stated the City of Saugatuck would have to be the applicant for any TAP grant application for constructing the portion of the regional trail in the Saugatuck City limits (east side/west side/city route option). The FOTBST is not an eligible organization to apply for the TAP grant as only public entities that receive ACT 51 monies are eligible.

NEXT STEPS

The February 4 conference call with MDOT clarified some issues while unfortunately, at the same time, making the project more complex. I will attempt to identify the major issues City Council may want to consider regarding this project in order to move it forward.

1. Currently the Blue Star Trail project proposed in the City of Saugatuck boundaries has not been identified as a City priority project through any fiscal appropriations, project priority designation,

or ranking in the City's 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan. After the most recent discussions with MDOT it is clear if the City desires to proceed with this project, there needs to be a much greater level of commitment of City resources. Mainly from a planning perspective, staff time and allocating some degree of fiscal resources in order to complete these activities. The proposed Blue Star Trail infrastructure options presented to date in the City of Saugatuck's jurisdiction are estimated between 1.2 and 1.9 million dollars. To put this proposed parks project in perspective with other recent Saugatuck park improvement infrastructure projects; the Mt. Baldhead stairs project was \$145,000 and the Coghlin Park Shoppers Dock was \$180,000. The Blue Star Trail project is a major park infrastructure project that may be determined by Council to have positive benefits; however it needs to have the proper resources devoted to it if the City wants to continue. The Council may want to re-evaluate the current priority projects it has identified and determine if adjustments need to be made, i.e. reprioritizing existing projects.

2. The FOTBST have requested the Saugatuck City Council give approval of an interim route to satisfy MDOT requirements allowing the organization to apply for grants to construct other portions of trail outside of the City's boundaries. The interim route the FOTBST have suggested is Allegan Street west to Lake Street then south to Blue Star Highway. Some Council members have expressed concerns this particular interim route would not be safe due to extremely steep hill at the end of Allegan and Lake Street. Another possible interim route has been discussed which uses State Street and Maple Street which has been called the "City Route". I have attached examples of the two proposed routes to this memo. MDOT suggested the FOTBST and the City investigate any potential routes and fully allocate the time needed to do so. The FOTBST have agreed to spend time investigating the pros and cons of the City Route. Walking the proposed routes with engineers present as well as the state grant coordinators has been suggested as a positive step in the process.
3. Due to the fact the proposed regional trail covers multiple jurisdictions, it would be prudent to encourage the FOTBST to hold a stakeholders meeting in which elected representatives from the local jurisdictions could attend and have open discussions about various components of the overall project. Topics for discussion could include current costs estimates of the proposed 20 mile trail project, overall status of other sections of trail, etc. It has been a considerable amount of time since a stakeholders meeting was conducted. Given the recent turnover of the Saugatuck Township Board among, other events, it would likely be beneficial for all parties to be in the same room for discussions. Having grant representatives from MDOT and the DNR at this meeting would also be very beneficial.
4. The City of Saugatuck would be required to be the applicant for both a MDOT TAP grant and MNRTF grant for securing funding for the section of trail in the City's boundaries. The FOTBST organization cannot be the grant applicant per the grant guidelines. The FOTBST are offering assistance through fund raising activities to assist with local match portion required of the grants for construction and engineering construction and admin costs. The current funding model the FOTBST has identified is 50% MDOT TAP grant funds, 25% MNRTF DNR grant funds and 25% local match. Engineering is not eligible for MDOT grant funding.

Blue Star Trail West Side Trail Option:

Estimated Construction \$1,156,500 (25% local match \$289,125)

Estimated Design & Construction Engineering & Admin \$173,600

Estimated Total Project Cost \$1,330,100

5. Since the City will be required to be the actual grant applicant for the proposed project, I have obtained a copy of the MDOT TAP Grant Applicant Guide from the MDOT website. Below are excerpts from the Applicant Guide that would be most relevant to the City as an applicant.
- “It is expected and highly recommended that potential applicants read this entire Applicant Guide, including appendices, and then contact the regional grant coordinator before beginning a TAP application.”
 - “The MDOT TAP program prioritizes funding for projects that demonstrate a competitive concept and a high likelihood of constructability. Both are needed for a project to earn TAP funding. Historically, the annual funding requested from TAP has been four times greater than the amount of annual TAP funds available; based on TAP funding limitations alone, some projects will not be approved.”
 - “There are no maximum grant request amounts for Michigan TAP funds; however, it should be considered that the actual grant commitment may be less than the requested amount.”
 - “The following items will be considered and may increase the competitiveness of a grant request—
 - o Additional match commitment over the required 20 percent. Over-match at 50 percent or more is expected for large TAP requests.
 - o A portion of match is expected from the applicant, not just other grant funding sources.
 - o Defined regional need, documented on multiple master plans and regional maps.
 - o Documentation of feasibility study to warrant the use of public funds:
 - o Exceptions will be considered for trails on abandoned rail corridors.
 - o The study should document how all possible routes were investigated, noting the analysis of each route and what risks are associated with each one.
 - o A detailed description of the selected route should be provided as to why that route is the most feasible.”
 - “It is the responsibility of the applicant to fully understand what is required to complete a TAP project and to operate and maintain it in perpetuity. The level of responsibility that falls upon a local agency when accepting federal funding should not be underestimated.”
 - “Public input is required for projects that are seeking federal transportation funding. MDOT expects to see well-documented information on how a project concept was presented to the public and how that concept was received. It is MDOT’s responsibility to vet and commit funding to projects that demonstrate a high level of local support and that have an engaged group of stakeholders. Public involvement is a fundamental component of effective transportation planning, project development, and implementation.”
 - “Consultants should not solely represent the community or make decisions on their behalf. Consultants can assist the applicant agency as the application preparer. It is the responsibility of the applicant to oversee the development of an application by their consultant.”
 - “TAP requires a minimum cash match of 20 percent of the construction cost. Projects awarded funding in the past have averaged a match of 35 to 45 percent of project construction cost. MDOT expects that local communities contribute financially to a project to demonstrate how strongly the project is desired by the local community, and as an

indicator that the community is prepared to further invest in operations and maintenance after it is constructed. The higher amount of TAP funding requested, the higher the expected match percentage.”

- “It is imperative that applicants work extensively with a grant coordinator long before the desired application deadline.”
- “Combining Grant Funds--For nonmotorized trail projects, TAP funds are sometimes matched with a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant or another state grant. It is important to understand these programs do not run on the same timeline as TAP, nor do they have identical eligibility requirements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to fully understand the requirements of each grant program and to know when exactly secured match and other documents are required. MDOT cannot expedite the review process because an applicant requires match documentation for another grant program outside of the normal TAP review schedule. It is recommended that TAP applicants apply to TAP at least six months prior to applying to any other grant program.”
- “Take care to estimate your project cost as accurately as possible in your application. The grant you receive will be based on the information included in the application and may not be increased once obligated. The applicant will be responsible for all cost overruns or any additional costs needed to complete the project scope.”
- “TAP funding does not pay for engineering costs on local agency projects; engineering is the responsibility of the applicant. TAP funding does not pay for preliminary engineering costs, design engineering costs, construction engineering costs, permit costs, soil testing, surveying, etc. Have you budgeted for the engineering costs so that you have enough local funding to finance engineering?”
- “Site and Design Considerations – How feasible is your project? Have you completed a feasibility study to ensure this is the best location for the project? Although this isn’t required for all types of projects, large-scale, regional trail projects that involve large structures should have evidence of an alternatives analysis to support the proposed project alignment and structure placement. Have you reviewed all the federal and state design standards to be sure your project can accommodate those requirements? Design exceptions will not be given to projects that cannot meet federal and state standards. Will retaining walls, bridges, or boardwalk be required? These scope items add significant cost to a project and take longer to construct and more time to maintain. Are there water features to work around? Water and/or wetland resources within the project limits will likely require working with the Michigan DEQ. This will add time to your project timeline. Do you have enough room within your project limits to adjust alignments due to topography? Be prepared to work with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to be sure your project is not disturbing any historical features or areas of tribal significance.”
- “Required Maintenance – Have you budgeted for the approximate cost of long-term operations and maintenance? The use of federal TAP funding requires the applicant to operate and maintain the project in perpetuity. Expect to begin maintenance on your project as soon as it is constructed. Frequent and consistent maintenance will save costs in the long run by extending the life of the facility. Have you established a funding source to pay for the labor and materials to maintain the project as often as will be

needed? Provide a detailed outline of what is included in your annual maintenance plan, such as tasks, schedule, cost, source of maintenance funding, and responsible parties. The quality of the maintenance plan is included in TAP grant decision-making. The applicant should provide documentation of executed maintenance agreements if maintenance is to be completed by an entity that is not the applicant.”