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Final report on Lincoln-Bismarck roadway comes in Bismarck Tribune

By GORDON WEIXEBy GORDON WEIXEL

The Burleigh County Commission accepted SEH Inc.'s final report on the Lincoln to Bismarck roadway connection, but not before arguing over its cost-share assumptions.

SEH's Kate Miner delivered the final report at Monday's commission meeting. The study had been contracted for through the Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Miner said that little had changed from the draft report which came out earlier this spring. The report provides short-, mid- and long-term recommendations.

Short-term includes the improvements to six intersections of existing transportation routes between Bismarck and Lincoln. Mid-term calls for reconstruction of south Airway Avenue as the airport expands its runway; and long-term calls for further improvements to 66th Street, including a railroad overpass, and widening of Yegen from three to five lanes.

"We've been to the city of Lincoln council, which did not support the report. The main reason is the city really wants to look at constructing a more direct route and taking cost out of the equation," Miner said. "We really can't take cost out of the equation. There is an alternative route that is very good from a transportation standpoint, using the old railroad bed, but it is expensive."

The final report had been delivered to the North Dakota Department of Transportation upper management, which has yet to comment, according to Miner.

Commissioner Claus Lembke questioned how the sharing of costs was determined by the report. Miner said that ownership of the road was the determining factor.

Lembke and the other commissioners were perturbed by the Bismarck City Commission's seeming unwillingness to help pay for reconstruction of the Airway Avenue-Yegen Road intersection. The report calls for a 50/50 cost share on this particular intersection, Miner said.

"Explain why, when the city closes a road, they change a road, and detour a road, we (county commission) had nothing to say about it? Yet their activity (reconstruction of Yegen Road to serve the Northern Plains Commerce Centre) are the reasons for the change," Lembke said. "But now, half the cost is ours

(Burleigh). What is the logic?"

An original request of the county of the city to share in the cost of reconstructing the intersection, met with no commitment coming from the city. Later, the city appeared willing to split the cost.

Lembke said that the city should be taking the lead in this project because of its involvement with NPCC. He said the county was never contacted on the closing on north Airway Avenue west of Yegen Road.

Commission chairman Doug Schonert said he was put out by Bismarck's contention that the intersection is the county's responsibility. He said he believes the county does have half interest, but shouldn't be the lead.

"When we complained the city seemed willing to go 50/50. If we complain longer, maybe they'll go 100 percent," commissioner Jerry Woodcox said.

Woodcox asked that should the commission accept the final report as submitted, would it have to accept all the recommendations? MPO director Steve Saunders said that wasn't necessary and that the report had many recommendations that no entity is bound to.

Lembke, in making a motion to accept the report, told Miner, "I think you did a very nice job on the report, though you screwed up on that corner." The commission approved the motion.