Moab City Council Agenda Item

Meeting Date: March 10, 2020
Title: Suspending Design of the Downtown Transportation Hub and Reconsidering Hotspot Project Priorities
Submitted: March 5, 2020
Submitter: Kalen Jones, Councilmember

Attachments:
- RESOLUTION NO. 17-2020, A RESOLUTION SUSPENDING DESIGN OF THE DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION HUB AND CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE USES OF THE HOTSPOT FUNDING

Recommended Motion: I move to approve Resolution No. 17-2020, A Resolution Suspending Design of the Downtown Transportation Hub and Considering Alternative Uses of the Hotspot Funding.

Background/Summary:
In 2017, UDOT was tasked with administering the distribution of $100M of “Hotspot” funding to areas with significant congestion related to recreation and tourism activity, for transportation improvements which met the three broad goals set by the Utah Legislature of congestion reduction, improved recreation access, and economic development, and which would be awarded via a competitive process. UDOT allocated $150,000 and staff time to support a process in the Moab area to identify capital projects which would score well in more detailed criteria established by UDOT, be deliverable within a reasonable time frame, and meet local interests. UDOT hired consultants to assist in project development, feasibility analysis, and cost estimating, and convened a local stakeholder group consisting of elected officials and staff from Moab City and Grand County, members of the public, and UDOT staff and consultants. The stakeholder group identified a range of possible projects which were scored relative to more granular criteria descending from the broad goals set by the legislature. The most viable projects for the Hotspot criteria were determined to be one or more parking structures in downtown Moab, more efficient use of existing surface parking lots (“dispersed parking”) serving other areas and additional vehicle types, and 191/Main St. improvements to increase pedestrian safety and calm traffic.

$10M was awarded to Moab for these projects, the majority for the design and construction of the downtown parking structure, recently rebranded as the Downtown Transportation Hub (DTH). On May 14, 2019, the Moab City Council adopted the Moab Parking Management Study which showed that the downtown block in which the existing City Parking Lot exists, parking demand often nears and exceeds supply. This lot was determined to be the most suitable for vertical expansion via a parking structure. On May 28, 2020, the City Council approved a Cooperative Agreement with UDOT for the design and construction of the Downtown
Transportation Hub. In October 2019, the City Council approved a contract with Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc, for DTH design. Kimley-Horn has worked through several design iterations to develop a design which balances raw parking capacity with site constraints, Moab City zoning code including height limits, non-parking needs such as bathrooms and transit connections, higher vehicle heights, aesthetics, sustainability, and connections with adjacent properties. They have worked closely with city staff and consulted repeatedly with a Design Advisory Committee consisting of city officials, staff, business owners and public. The most recent construction cost estimates project that the DTH can be built in budget. A preliminary operations and maintenance budget indicates that the DTH can break even, or generate revenue. Approximately $250,000 has been spent on design.

Moab City, Grand County, and UDOT have recently begun a one of several transportation planning efforts. As currently conceived, a Regional Transportation Planning process which is underway would be the first, which will support a Joint City-County Transportation Master Plan, and finally a Transit Study and Design. While planning has begun, the planning sequencing is not fixed and might be reprioritized. These planning efforts are hoped to support successful grant applications for other transportation system components, possibly including a FTA grant for electric buses, other federal grants for transit capital and operating expenses, and a transit tax.

Recently, and despite the many public meetings and decisions that have occurred, concern that the DTH is not an optimal use of Hotspot funds has grown. Specifically, building additional vehicle capacity may create short-term benefits, but supporting the continued use of private vehicles may ultimately result in an increase in vehicle use and subsequent congestion. Other projects which support a reduction in downtown vehicle trips may better meet goals. UDOT has indicated that it would consider the reallocation of the funds originally allocated for the DTH, as long as alternative project(s) meet the Hotspot funding criteria. While the current design of the DTH has evolved to address community needs beyond parking, pausing the design to allow other elements of transportation and transit design and funding to be developed would allow the decision to cancel the DTH, proceed, or modify its program to better integrate into a broader transportation vision, to be made with much more knowledge.

This resolution directs staff to suspend the Kimley-Horn contract, and facilitate a process to expediently develop alternative projects, seek from UDOT clarity on the scoring criteria that would be used for alternative projects, seek Hotspot funding for alternative projects, evaluate prioritization of transit in current transportation planning, and improve Hotspot project transparency.
RESOLUTION NO. 17-2020, A RESOLUTION SUSPENDING DESIGN OF THE DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION HUB AND CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVE USES OF THE HOTSPOT FUNDING

WHEREAS, significant investments have been made in delivering a Downtown Transportation Hub (DTH)/parking structure as supported by the Moab Parking Management Study and state funding; and

WHEREAS, building private vehicle capacity, including parking, does not always lead to congestion reduction, and capital projects other than the DTH may result in better long term satisfaction of Hotspot program goals and community priorities; and

WHEREAS, UDOT is willing to consider the reallocation of Hotspot funding for other projects which meet the original goals of reduction of congestion, increased economic development, and increased recreation and tourism opportunities; and

WHEREAS, developing a project proposal which is fundable, and meets the goals of the State and community, and whose operating expenses are affordable and commensurate with the benefits delivered will require significant professional support beyond what volunteers and local government staff can provide; and

WHEREAS, Moab City is currently partnering with Grand County and UDOT on a series of comprehensive transportation planning efforts, and is committed to improving transportation throughout Spanish Valley including Moab City, but as currently sequenced the transit component will not be complete until well after the Hotspot funding opportunity is past; and;

WHEREAS, non-Hotspot grant programs exist to support the capital and operational expenses of transit, and competitive proposals for such must be supported by quality studies; and

WHEREAS, meetings of UDOT staff and local advisory bodies convened by UDOT, are not subject to the conditions of Utah Open and Public Meetings Act; and

WHEREAS, on May 1 2018, Grand County formally convened the “Ad Hoc Moab Transit Authority study committee,” but in the following twenty-two months has failed to support it via meeting noticing, minute recordation, publication of such records; and

WHEREAS, Moab City Officials and residents value government transparency, and Moab City is committed and capable of providing meeting noticing and record keeping facilitating that, as well as other public engagement tools; and

WHEREAS, given a UDOT project may fall either entirely within or without Moab City
limits, or include both Moab City and Grand County; and

WHEREAS, Moab City has an interest in cooperating with Grand County to deliver services to their shared constituents more efficiently. Moab elected officials are accountable first and foremost to the citizens within their jurisdictional boundary, and Moab officials desire to cooperate with the County on projects which include both their areas, and retain the authority over projects entirely within City limits; and

WHEREAS, the Moab City Council believes that, despite the previous investments of time, money, goodwill, public process, and commitments made, on balance the interests of Moab and the satisfaction of the Hotspot criteria may be better served by project(s) other than the Downtown Transportation Hub.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MOAB, UTAH that:

1. City staff negotiate a suspension of work for up to six months with Kimley-Horn with the intent of minimizing financial liability to the City and UDOT; preserve the funding, contracts, work product value, and relationships established thus far, while other potential Hotspot projects are explored.
2. City staff shall seek clarity from UDOT regarding the measures by which alternative projects will be evaluated to meet Hotspot criteria, and submittal requirements.
3. City Staff shall engage with relevant parties at Grand County and UDOT to determine the feasibility, cost, and staffing needs to quickly shift the current transportation planning focus to transit. This information shall be brought to City Council, and County Council should their leadership so choose, for consideration.
4. City Staff shall procure a consultant to assist the City and stakeholders in developing other proposals for Hotspot funding, including but not limited to transit, and multi-use path expansion. Scope of Work may be informed by UDOT alternate project submittal standards and ranking criteria.
5. City Staff shall negotiate a cost and staff sharing agreement with Grand County for the resources necessary to sufficiently develop alternatives (including the item 2) consultant. City Staff shall negotiate an MOU with Grand County outlining allocation of operational expenses and revenues for new programs proposed for Hotspot funding which span jurisdictional boundaries. If such agreements are not ratified by both Councils by May 10, at the discretion of the City Council either a) the City shall pursue development of alternative Hotspot projects within city limits without involvement of Grand County government or stakeholders, OR b) the Kimley-Horn design work shall resume.
6. Transparency and public involvement shall be prioritized in the definition of alternative projects. A Hotspot alternative development stakeholder committee shall be convened by Moab City by resolution or ordinance, with clarity as to appointing authority, membership, organization, purpose, and expiration date. Moab City shall provide noticing and record
keeping in compliance with OPMA. City staff shall consult with Council on other public engagement tools for this process.

PASSED AND ADOPTED in open Council by a majority vote of the Governing Body of the City of Moab this 10th day of March, 2020.

SIGNED:

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Emily S. Niehaus, Mayor

ATTEST:

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Sommar Johnson, City Recorder