



City of Havre de Grace

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Susquehanna River Rail Bridge Project
Advisory Board
Of the Mayor and City Council

Advisory Bulletin #5
Street and Lane Underpasses
November 3, 2014

Background

The Advisory Board met on October 28, 2014 to study all street and lane underpasses along the Amtrak rail corridor from Freedom Lane to Juniata Street, and to determine whether it would be in the best interests of the City to abandon any one of these to facilitate proposed changes in the elevated right-of-way alignment. The three rail bridge overpasses in question are located at Stokes, Adams, and Juniata Streets. The two narrow and tunnel-like rail overpasses in question are located at Freedom and Centennial Lanes.

The Board has carefully considered a range of concerns with regard to abandonment of any street or lane underpass. These include traffic impact, access to private property, neighborhood vehicular and pedestrian inconveniences, dead-end turnaround conditions, emergency response routes, and large truck maneuvering. The Board also recognizes the enormous cost savings to the rail project of eliminating one or more of the existing rail overpass structures. Such savings could make feasible a number of design and facility concessions that the City may wish to seek in connection with the overall SRRBP.

This advisory is put forth under the assumption that the river bridge abutment would be retracted westward almost to Freedom Lane, as detailed in Advisory Bulletin #3. It also refers to elements of the forthcoming Advisory Bulletin #6 - Rail Commuter Station, which would be dependent upon certain underpass eliminations and street alterations.

Freedom Lane Underpass

The tunnel-like street underpass at Freedom Lane is a very short and seldom-used vehicular passage from Otsego to Warren Streets. It does not provide a notably shorter driving route from any point to any other point in the City, and does not appear to be a clean and safe pedestrian route for most citizens and visitors. If the recommendations of Advisory Bulletin #3 are incorporated, the repositioned rail bridge abutment would lie so close to this underpass that it would no longer have purpose. If a new Otsego/Union intersection radius is relocated westward accordingly, its accompanying pedestrian sidewalk would become a more convenient shortcut from the Otsego Street neighborhoods to the downtown area than the "tunnel". The Advisory Board recommends permanent closure and elimination of this lane underpass.

Stokes Street Underpass

Stokes Street is an important cross-town secondary route that extends the entire north/south length of the Historic District, without interruption or right-of-way reduction. It is regularly used as a means of reaching the residential areas between Union Avenue and Adams Street, and is designated one-way from Otsego Street, with very few stop signs, to facilitate travel time.

Closure of this street at the rail overpass would defeat its purpose as a convenient cross-town route and cause residential traffic to thread its way in from boundary arterials, putting more pressure on the two-way crossing streets. In addition, the very short dead-end section of Stokes Street that would be created between Otsego Street and the railroad embankment would leave no room for a proper cul-de-sac or turnaround area for the few residences that utilize this street section. The Advisory Board strongly recommends that this street underpass be retained and provided with improved lighting. A concession could be made to shorten the rail overpass span here, provided that current street width is maintained and that public sidewalks of at least six feet in width are installed along both sides of the street (see Advisory Bulletin #4).

Centennial Lane Underpass

The tunnel-like underpass at Centennial Lane is also a seldom-used vehicular passage from Otsego to Warren Streets. It likewise does not provide a notably shorter driving route from any point to any other point in the City, and does not appear to be a clean and safe pedestrian route for most citizens and visitors. Centennial Lane does appear to provide sole access to at least one property and several buildings south of Otsego Street, however, which would require adequate means of U-turning or otherwise discharging vehicles if this street underpass were closed.

Advisory Bulletin #5

Page 3

The Advisory Board recommends permanent closure and elimination of this lane underpass, and extension of Centennial Lane west-southwestward to Adams Street. This extension should become a new segment of Morrison Lane, and should be located on current railroad property along its northwestern boundary. The installation of a rail commuter station (see Advisory Bulletin #6) would require the elimination of this lane underpass. In that circumstance, the stub end of Centennial Lane should discharge through the station's northwest main parking area to Stokes or Adams Street without the need for a dedicated Morrison Lane extension.

Adams Street Underpass

Adams Street is also an important cross-town secondary route; however, it becomes more narrow at City Hall and is interrupted between Pennington and Congress Avenues. In comparison to Stokes Street, fewer vehicular movements occur along Adams Street, as it is close to the Juniata Street arterial and has only ten dwelling units between the railroad and Pennington Avenue. There are more than thirty dwelling units along the same stretch of Stokes Street. Although closure of this underpass would isolate one full block of Adams Street between Otsego Street and the railroad, its intersection with the currently isolated northwestern segment of Warren Street would provide easy flow-through ingress and egress connecting with Juniata Street.

There are two good reasons to consider closure of the Adams Street underpass. First, elimination of this complete set of four or five new rail bridges and both new abutment structures would represent an enormous cost savings to the rail project. This could easily be the single largest concession that Havre de Grace has to offer in negotiating for other special requests, especially when combined with lane underpass eliminations. Second, the street-level space gained in the process would be very advantageous to rail commuter station parking areas, station traffic patterns, emergency access to a trackside station platform, and pedestrian safety.

The Advisory Board recommends permanent closure and elimination of this street underpass provided that a rail commuter station is installed and put into service as part of the overall rail bridge project. The Advisory Board recommends that this street underpass be retained, under the same conditions recommended for the Stokes Street underpass, if a rail commuter station is not put into service at this location.

Juniata Street Underpass

Juniata Street is perhaps the most heavily traveled north/south arterial east of Route 40 in Havre de Grace, and serves as a "second gateway" into the city proper. It is the primary gateway to City Hall, the post office, police station, stadium, public library and several churches. It is also

the most convenient route to the hospital, J M Huber industrial area, and Revolution Street. The current rail overpass span accommodates the width of Juniata Street with enough room for sidewalks but has the appearance of a constricted opening that seems to crowd the right-of-way, blocking view until the last moment of modern public facilities that lay just beyond.

The Advisory Board recommends that this underpass be retained under all circumstances, and that its abutments be spread at least twenty feet farther apart to compensate for the visual effects of a broader 4-5 track rail bridge complex. This underpass should also be well-lighted for safety and security.

Recommended Action

The Advisory Board requests that the Mayor and City Council take necessary steps to consolidate these or similar recommendations into a formal communication to the SRRBP Project Team as soon as possible. The Board wishes to stress the importance of recommended underpass closings in connection with the desired outcomes of several other advisories, and rapid resolution of related engineering issues.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Volney H. Ford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Volney H. Ford
Chairman