



June 18, 2008

Mason plan gets carbon OK

Report calls transit project environmentally beneficial

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A proposed \$74.2 million rapid transit system along Mason Street could reduce the number of vehicles and travel time on College Avenue, spur economic development and decrease carbon emissions, according to an environmental assessment report released Tuesday.

It also will add 19 acres of pavement, disrupt a business and require relocating a historic building, the report said.

The assessment for the city's proposed Mason Corridor MAX Bus Rapid Transit Project is likely to be more environmentally beneficial than not, according to the report that was prepared for and paid for by the city of Fort Collins.

But it would impact four areas including Brian Mowery's car wash just south of Troutman Parkway.

Mowery said Casey's Car Wash would lose its main entrance if the Mason Corridor is built.

But he expects he'll get back more than he'll lose along the proposed 5-mile corridor that stretches from Cherry Street to Harmony Road.

"We love it," said Mowery, who is building a café on the car wash property. "The bus will come right by here."

Mowery said he is happy to comply with any changes Fort Collins needs since the city will be responsible for the costs.

"It's a major, major impact on us," Mowery said. "We are excited about the corridor. It's my understanding that whatever upgrades we have to do is on the city of Fort Collins."

The city has a mitigation fund to pay for those and any other changes, said Denise Weston, the city's senior transportation planner.

As the city grows, traffic on College Avenue will escalate from an average of 40,983 vehicles per day in 2005 to a projected 50,248 per day by 2035, with few options to alleviate congestion, according to the report.

With the completion of Mason Corridor, Transfort buses would be pulled off College Avenue and the report suggests travel time along College Avenue would improve as more riders got on MAX for a quick trip across town.

And, ultimately, if the number of vehicles is reduced, their emissions will decrease as well.

Historic building

The 81-year-old Public Service Co. building on the northeast corner of Prospect Road and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad will have to be razed or moved, and the city will have to buy 17 acres now owned by the railroad, CSU and various public and private land owners, according to the report.

The building, constructed in 1927 as a substation, has been vacant for decades, but it is eligible for the national Register of Historic Places, the report said.

The state Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine if the structure should be demolished or moved.

The preliminary environmental assessment, which cost \$150,000, was conducted by Denver consultants Selsburg, Holt and Ullevig and Carter & Burgess. It was approved by the FTA at the end of May.

While transit plans for Mason Street have come and gone — the project was part of funding measures that were twice rejected by voters — the rapid transit plan is the first that would be paid for mostly by federal and state grants.

President Bush's budget includes \$11.8 million in funding, the first step of a \$60 million federal commitment to the plan.
