

July 28, 2016

The Chehalis city council met in special session on Thursday, July 28, 2016, in the Chehalis city hall. Mayor Dawes called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. with the following council members present: Terry Harris, Dr. Isaac Pope, Bob Spahr, Chad Taylor, and Tony Ketchum. Councilor Lund was absent (excused). Staff present included: Merlin MacReynold, City Manager; Judy Schave, City Clerk; Glenn Schaffer, Police Chief; Ken Cardinale, Fire Chief; Judy Pectol, Finance Manager; Peggy Hammer, Human Resources Administrator; Rick Sahlin, Public Works Director; and Don Schmitt, Street/Stormwater Superintendent. Members of the media included Natalie Johnson from *The Chronicle* and Susan DeLaire from *DeVaul Publishing*.

1. Update From Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) on Short-term and Long-term Solutions for the Chamber Way Bridge. Mayor Dawes reported representatives from WSDOT would be providing a brief update on the Chamber Way Bridge that was significantly damaged on July 22. He noted our state and federal representatives have been working together with WSDOT to come up with some short-term and long-term solutions for the bridge, noting their main interest in the short-term is to get traffic moving across the bridge. Mayor Dawes stated it's a very complex issue and it will take a lot of time, data, and analysis to come up with a long-term solution.

City Manager MacReynold introduced WSDOT Regional Director Bart Gernhart to brief the council and the public on what's happening with the bridge and to talk about their plans for the future.

Mr. Gernhart reported their top priority over the last six days has been to make the bridge safe for the public and to get it open as soon as possible. He noted the first step was to stabilize the bridge, so they could analyze it to be sure it wasn't going to fall down in the short-term.

Mr. Gernhart noted the bridge was hit by a truck carrying two excavators, which damaged four of the six girders beyond repair. He briefly described the damage to the steel located in the middle of the bridge, noting the damage was so great they couldn't repair it. Mr. Gernhart suggested if it were to be hit by another oversized vehicle there's a good chance that it would all come crashing down because there's not enough steel left in the critical location of the span to hold the bridge up. He noted, with safety being their number one priority, it was very quickly decided that they had to take the entire southbound span down.

Mr. Gernhart reported they looked at several solutions to address the gap in the bridge and identified the Acrow Bridge as being the best overall; and they just happen to be located in the Port of Centralia. He noted the span across the southbound lanes is 51 feet and six inches; however, the Acrow Bridge only comes in even increments, with 50 feet being the closest without being too large to fit. Mr. Gernhart reported they spent every waking hour trying to figure out how to make it fit, noting since it was built in 1958 they don't have a good model for how it will react when they add loading to it, or how it would function when cars and trucks go across it. He stated it can be done, but it's going to take a few days to actually go through the design to modify it to fit.

Mr. Gernhart reported, with the modifications describe, he believed they could get two lanes of traffic that will handle full truck loads. He noted the Acrow Bridge does not have a standard guardrail, so they'll have to design a custom guardrail that will connect to the old section of the bridge.

Mr. Gerhart believed the contractor, Atkinson Construction, would start work on the bridge the following day. He noted the critical path is to first design the bearing pads and the guardrail connection, and to come up with a design for the nine inch gap on each side of the bridge. Mr. Gernhart reported once the design is done everything will be given to the manufacturing company and the final step will be to put everything on the bridge. He noted they hope the Acrow Bridge will line up with the existing bolts because they don't want to cut into any critical steel.

Mr. Gernhart reported the bridge should be open in two weeks unless something unusual happens, which they would clearly communicate to the public. He noted once the bridge is in place and traffic is moving they'll try to figure out how and if they can connect a temporary sidewalk, adding they want pedestrians to be able to cross, as well. Mr. Gernhart stated they hope to have a better idea about where they are next week and plan to provide an update and press release.

Mayor Dawes inquired about interim signage to guide folks who may have used the overpass to get to the businesses on State Avenue, or the Twin City Town Center.

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Mr. Gernhart reported they didn't do a real good job on signage initially, and they realize that. He noted they made their best guess of where they thought signs were needed, but would welcome any comments and suggestions on how to do it better. Mr. Gernhart stated they know how much of an impact this has been on the community and the businesses, and they're willing to help out any way they can with signage. He noted the Chamber of Commerce has arranged for WSDOT to meet with the businesses on Monday, August 1 at the Holiday Inn, adding they hope to get feedback from them on the signage, as well.

Councilor Spahr reported a lot of people are using the frontage roads now and wondered if WSDOT could look at changing the timing of the stoplight at Highway 6 and Louisiana Avenue. He noted there's also an issue of traffic backing up at West Street and Louisiana Avenue.

Mr. Gernhart reported they should absolutely change the timing of the stoplight to give more time to Louisiana Avenue.

City Manager MacReynold noted the city is responsible for the issues at West Street and Louisiana Avenue.

Councilor Spahr asked if the Acrow Bridge would be higher than the old bridge.

Mr. Gernhart reported the Acrow Bridge would be six to eight inches higher than the old bridge deck and will have a 16-foot clearance under it.

Mr. Gernhart reported they have a lot of options to consider regarding a long-term plan and committed to providing that information to the public as soon as possible.

Mr. Gernhart reported the initial design funding for the replacement of the Chamber Way interchange and auxiliary lanes starts in the 2019-2021 biennium, and construction funding would not begin until the end of the 2021-2023 biennium. He noted there's \$75 million available, but the question is will the temporary fix last that long.

City Manager MacReynold reported he was part of the focus group that looked at this section of the freeway a few years back. He stated he had concerns about some of the alternatives that were discussed at that time and wondered if they would be moving the Chamber Way Bridge, or if they plan to keep it where it's at.

Mr. Gernhart reported WSDOT would be engaging the city, as well as folks from Centralia, Lewis County, and stakeholders in the community to provide input. He stated they would not do anything counter to what the city wants.

Councilor Spahr inquired about the height of the new bridge to be built in 2021-2023.

Mr. Gernhart reported the bottom of the bridge will be at least 16.5 feet off the ground, so they have room for a couple of overlays down the road. He noted, in order to allow for more lanes to come through in the future, it could be up to 10 feet higher than the current bridge.

Councilor Ketchum reported when they first talked about replacing the bridge they knew it would have to be higher and wider, which would change everything in the area including the intersections and ramps. He suggested a 16-foot bridge would require a lot of fill to go back down to Louisiana Avenue and over to National Avenue.

Councilor Harris noted they also talked about having to raise Louisiana Avenue as much as four feet, including the roads sloping up to it from all directions.

Mr. Gernhart suggested that could still happen, they just don't know right now because they haven't done the work.

Ron Averill (Centralia) reported he's been involved in the design of the new bridge along with several others over the years. He noted one of his concerns is the East span of the bridge, which is also too low and has been hit more often than the West span. Mr. Averill stated there doesn't seem to be an adequate warning system in place and wondered if they're looking at improving it, noting it would be terrible to have the East span hit right now.

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Mr. Gernhart reported they're looking at it and plan to put up some additional signage. He noted the challenge they have with the current detection system is that birds, rain, high antennas, etc., can easily set it off. Mr. Gerhart suggested the truckers just seem to ignore it, so they're trying to figure out a better way to do it. He indicated they also have issues with the bridge on Highway 6, which they're trying to collect data on. Mr. Gernhart noted reader boards seem to be the most visible, but people tend to grow numb to signs after a while and they definitely don't want that to happen either.

Joe Thomas (Winlock) asked Mr. Gernhart what he meant by 'full' truck loads, noting there's the regular 53-foot governed for 80,000 pounds (federally), and the trucks that he owns and drives that are governed by Washington State.

Mr. Gernhart reported both of those trucks described by Mr. Thomas would be allowed, noting it really has to do with axle spacing. He suggested the Acrow Bridge will handle any legal load that's not oversized.

Mr. Gernhart stated when they move forward with the future widening project, WSDOT will conduct a number of open houses to allow the public to give input.

Mayor Dawes thanked Senator John Braun for taking time out of his schedule to attend the meeting. He noted Senator Braun, as well as Representatives Richard DeBolt and Ed Orcutt were on the phone with WSDOT before the dust even settled, adding he could not emphasize enough how much the council appreciated that.

Mayor Dawes stated he also appreciated our federal representatives, Senator Patty Murray, Senator Maria Cantwell and Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler, noting they've been very involved with the situation and will be working with the local representatives to see what funding assistance they can help with in the interim.

Mayor Dawes reported WSDOT has also been very good about getting information out to the public and suggested people go to their website for regular updates.

Mr. Gernhart reported Senator Braun and his staff have been great, noting they helped organize the first meeting to pull everyone together so WSDOT had more time to focus on all of the details. He also thanked the council for setting up this meeting and for using all of our tools to inform the public.

Mayor Dawes stated there's a very good possibility that the bridge could be open to traffic in two weeks. He noted WSDOT wants to make sure that what they put up is safe to cross over. Mayor Dawes suggested if anyone wants to talk about a long-term solution that they work with our local representatives because they have the contacts with the people that run the different committees. He suggested these types of decisions are made collectively at the legislative level and that our local representatives would like to hear from people to ask them to do what they can when the Legislature is back in session.

There being no further business to come before the council the meeting adjourned at 5:52 p.m.

Mayor

Attest:

City Clerk

SUGGESTED MOTION

I move that the council approve the minutes of the special city council meeting of July 28, 2016.