City of Milwaukee

Department of Public Works
Infrastructure Services Division

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June 30, 2011

Mr. Mark Gottlieb, Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Transportation
4802 Sheboygan Avenue
Madison, WI 53707

Subject: Bicycle Accommodation on Hoan Bridge

Dear Secretary Gottlieb:

I am writing this to express the City of Milwaukee's continued support to open the Hoan Bridge to bicyclists and pedestrians. The upcoming re-decking project is the logical time to revisit this issue. It is our understanding that the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) has retained consultants to undertake the design of the re-decking project. Please accept this letter as the City of Milwaukee's formal request to include a bicycle and pedestrian facility in the scoping for this design work.

As you are aware, in the late 1990's, the WisDOT retained the consulting firm of URS to determine the best way to utilize federal funds to improve bicycle travel between Bay View and downtown Milwaukee. That final report dated December, 2002 looked at three alternatives in great detail, including the Hoan Bridge alternative. Even though the Hoan Bridge alternative would be the most direct route, had the largest number of supporters, and would provide spectacular views, the WisDOT/URS selected another alternative. While the City of Milwaukee subsequently agreed to implement the selected alternative, we continue to support providing bicycle and pedestrian accommodation over the Hoan Bridge. In addition, the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force recently voted to formally support bicycle and pedestrian use of the Hoan Bridge.

The State of Wisconsin legislature recently adopted a Complete Streets law which requires the WisDOT to consider bicycle and pedestrian accommodation in all highway construction projects. While most freeways in Wisconsin are not appropriate for bicycles and pedestrians, we believe that the short segment of I-794 known as the Hoan Bridge meets the criteria defined in Chapter Trans 75 of the State statutes.

Lastly, we would like to highlight Title 23 of the United States Code, section 217 Bicycle Transportation and Pedestrian Walkways. Title 23 U.S.C. sec. 217(e) Bridges indicates,

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"In any case where a highway bridge deck being replaced or rehabilitated with Federal financial participation is located on a highway on which bicycles are permitted to operate at each end of such bridge, and the Secretary determines that the safe accommodation of bicycles can be provided at reasonable cost as part of such replacement or rehabilitation, then such bridge shall be so replaced or rehabilitated as to provide such safe accommodations."

The Hoan Bridge re-decking appears to meet this provision in all aspects. The Hoan Bridge connects with Milwaukee County's Oak Leaf trail system at both ends of the bridge. The URS report indicates that a bicycle facility can be constructed to provide safe passage for all users. Lastly, based on the cost estimate in the URS report and the reported estimates for the Hoan Bridge re-decking, the bicycle/pedestrian component would add approximately one (1) percent to the project cost. It appears, therefore, that federal law may require such accommodations.

The U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration website (www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/highways.htm) includes several examples of shared use paths within Interstate freeway rights of way, and a link to the League of American Bicyclists list of Interstate bridges with bicycle access. An example of an Interstate bridge in Wisconsin with bicycle and pedestrian facilities is the I-94 bridge over the Saint Croix River in Hudson, Wisconsin.

In a related matter, we would also like to state the City of Milwaukee's position on the ramp configuration at both ends of the Hoan Bridge. The City requests that the WisDOT consider reconfiguring these ramps at the north end so as to create additional lakefront development potential. At the south end, the City requests that consideration is made to provide better access to the Lake Express Ferry.

The City of Milwaukee staff is available to participate in any project meetings regarding the Hoan Bridge re-decking project.

Very truly yours,

Jeffrey S. Polenske, P.E.
City Engineer

Ghassan Korban, Special Deputy
Commissioner of Public Works

MDL: ns
MDL
cc: Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force
Mayor Tom Barrett
Mr. Dewayne Johnson, WisDOT