ABSTRACT

Community groups have influenced, and are influencing decision-makers in municipal and provincial arenas. This project focuses on how one firm, Susan Freig and Associates, has worked with a group of citizens to facilitate a collaborative planning process surrounding the rehabilitation of the Disraeli Bridge. This process followed a substantive but ‘conventional’ community consultation process, which included background studies, community research, and open houses.

This Case Study examines how the community consultative process for the rehabilitation of Disraeli Bridge evolved to incorporate more collaborative approaches to design. This evolution towards collaborative planning was seen as necessary by the consultants managing the process.

The Collaborative Planning Working Group (CPWG) consisted of planners and stakeholders from the City of Winnipeg, as well as people representing groups who will be impacted by this rehabilitation. This includes pedestrians, cyclists, senior citizens, businesses, and community members.

This project is necessary, as the promotion of Active Transportation is positive for both environmental and health reasons. Because of this, it is essential to create infrastructure that will make active transportation a feasible and legitimate option in all seasons.
INTRODUCTION

This Case Study examines how the community consultative process for the rehabilitation of Disraeli Bridge evolved to incorporate more collaborative approaches to design. The evolution towards collaborative planning resulted largely from the work of the Collaborative Planning Working Group (CPWG), a committee whose members are working to improve the experience of cyclists and pedestrians. As the promotion of Active Transportation is positive for both environmental and health reasons, it is essential to create infrastructure that will make active transportation a feasible and legitimate option in all seasons.

The following pages are written within the context of system change, where community consultative and collaborative processes are becoming more participatory, more genuine, and more normative. The design process of the Disraeli bridge and overpass can be considered a “good precedent”, as it provides an example of how one firm has worked with a citizen group to gather important information within a short time frame.

BACKGROUND

In September 2008, the Winnipeg City Council approved a plan for the rehabilitation of the Disraeli Freeway, which is a bridge, overpass and road that spans the CPR mainline, crosses the Red River, and connects neighbourhoods with Winnipeg’s downtown. This plan will be contracted using a Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DFBM) form of procurement.

The Disraeli rehabilitation is a major project, as this transportation link sees an average weekday volume of around 42,000 vehicles. The prospect of full or partial bridge closure has garnered citywide attention, and residents in neighbourhoods on both sides of the river have expressed concerns about this project to local press, politicians, and residents’ committees.

Background work for this project included the formation of a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), preliminary engineering, a condition assessment, a traffic study, development of conceptual designs, and a public consultation process. This process gathered input through newsletters, display ads, resident and business surveys, and open houses, and was completed in June 2008.

During the public consultation, three main design concepts were given to the public for input. The indicated preferences were influenced by participants’ neighbourhood of residence, bridge access, and participants’ mode of transportation. Through a series of open houses, two highly rated options emerged.

Once the results of the public input had been analyzed and presented, the SAC reviewed new ideas brought forward, and considered modifications to existing options. After this process, City Council approved a proposal that was brought forward by Bike to the Future, a cycling advocacy group in Winnipeg. This proposal suggested that a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge be created in conjunction with the existing Disraeli rehabilitation project.

Because of the modifications to the original ideas put forth by the SAC, the final report on the Disraeli Bridges Public Consultation process suggested that further study was needed to determine more of the project dimensions, and figure out where this separate bridge could be placed. This statement formed the framework for the ensuing collaborative planning process that would continue to seek public participation through an additional group, called the Collaborative Planning Working Group (CPWG).
FACTS OF THE CASE

The CPWG was formed toward the end of January 2009. Members consisted of City employees and planners, as well as representatives from groups that would be most impacted by the Disraeli rehabilitation. Its first meeting was on February 2. The agenda included sharing background information about the Disraeli Bridge Project, and the background report for the Cycling pedestrian crossing. Members also shared with each other their sector/group’s interest, and participated in a site tour.

This group’s goals were to develop options that are technically sound, reflective of community and city needs, cost-effective, environmentally responsible and safe, and generally understood and accepted by most of those affected by Disraeli’s rehabilitation. The scope of the project was to:

a) Determine the location of the cycling and pedestrian crossing;
b) Determine the connections leading to and from the crossing;
c) Develop design criteria.

The Working Group was chosen by identifying organizations and individuals who represented stakeholders in the affected areas on both sides of the river. Representatives were identified through organizational delegation and through background research about community leaders. Representatives of Active Transportation groups, seniors groups, and businesses were involved. Each member had the responsibility to gather input from her/his constituency group, and speak for this group (and not individually) during the CPWG meetings.

The collaborative process itself was chosen because it has, in the past, been an effective planning and decision-making process. In this process, members contribute and influence outcomes. This process also suited the short time frame that was allotted.

The second meeting was a design charrette, on February 18, 2009. At this day-long charrette, participants began with a “blank slate”, and discussed issues and opportunities in each neighbourhood. Participants, had the freedom to create options, and imagine how and where these options would make sense. Two ideas (found on page 5) emerged. Option 1 included attached a pedestrian and cycling crossing to the Disraeli, and Option 2 included a separated bicycle and pedestrian bridge.

Placement of the separated bike path (see option 2 diagram on page 5) was a major topic of conversation. Initially, participants shared their neighbourhood

Option 1: Attached Crossing

This pedestrian/cyclist crossing is attached to the Disraeli Bridge and features a 3 m multi-use sidewalk on the east side. This concept will lower the entire river bridge structure by 10–15 feet which will improve the existing long ramp slopes. Following are the features of this option as identified by the Collaborative Planning Working Group:

- Includes connections to main cycling routes at Annabelle and Beverley using off-ramps
- The route is closer for accessing the commercial districts
- With the crossing placed next to traffic, there are more lanes, provides a better sense of personal safety
- Vehicle access is maintained at South Pointe
- Will still have cyclists for cyclists wanting to stay on the road
- Would require a multi-use pedestrian crossing on Monckton at various locations including Beverley
  - Could explore the possibility of installing a sidewalk at the bridge, definitely closed to trucks
  - The future “Bridge extension” not precluding it becoming a cycling/pedestrian crossing in the future (involving the Disraeli Bridge crossing is the key part of the Disraeli Bridge project)
- The South Pointe secondary plan is not affected
- Would create an amazing Disraeli Bridge, something distinctive
- Facially responsible option as the cost should be relatively comparable to the estimate for the separate crossing

Compare potential pedestrian routes as it connects to the Active Transportation system and does not disturb the riverbed.

- Overall good access
- Would require new signage to guide pedestrians and cyclists
- The bank grade crossing at the pedestrian grade crossing is improved and will feature a new, more visible crossing.

Technical Commentary from Resource Teams:

- Potential pedestrian and cyclist crossing required, though not identified by charrette group.
- Longer ramp required on south side of bridge rather than that shown on charrette drawing. Spiral ramp is one potential solution.
- May be property issues on south side.
- No structures in water within the contamination plume – may limit ramp options.
- Channel group identified limits with for separate bridges. City of Winnipeg has no minimum width in 3.5 m. Proposals will vary with the usable bridge width. Width changes at bridge piers will also vary from piers.

Option 1 aerial diagram with observations and benefits.
knowledge by mapping out significant spaces and problem areas on each side of the river. A second part of this charrette involved the drawing of potential crossings for the cycling and pedestrian bridge. A major outcome of the day was the emphasis placed on bridge width, and safety issues that included upgrades to lighting on specific streets.

A third meeting of the CPWG was held on the 18th of March. Members of the CPWG looked through the feedback forms that they received from their constituency groups, and looked for themes. A matrix was put forth that represented each of the two bridge options. Members of the CPWG were asked to help fill out this matrix, indicating how each option responded to themes related to City needs, cyclist and pedestrian needs, or community needs.

**CHALLENGES**

This rehabilitation project has had its share of challenges. These include:

1. **Broader political and situational environments.**
   The collaborative planning process took place during a provincial by-election, where closure of the Disraeli Bridge was a major issue in each candidate’s campaign platform. In addition, this group also needed to work with individuals concerned with how this project impacted future rehabilitation of the Louise Bridge. During this time, there was also a motion to council to delay construction until a larger traffic study had been conducted in the area. Finally, a Secondary Planning process for South Point Douglas is currently underway, and this also has had an impact.

2. **Competing interests**
   Motor vehicle drivers were concerned about the bridge closure, and neighbourhood residents were concerned about community impacts of this rehabilitation. In addition, advocates of active transportation options insisted that safe and connected infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians must be considered in this project. These (and other) competing interests asserted the need for both problem solving expertise and compromise from all parties.

3. **Neighbourhood concerns**
   As was stated above, South Point Douglas is currently involved with a Secondary Planning Process. Because of this, there is ample information available for this area, and ample public participation. North Point Douglas, East Kildonan, and Elmwood will also be
impacted, but there was less representation from these neighbourhoods. Giving equal representation to voices from each area was important.

4. Time limitations
In order to include work done by the CPWG, work needed to be completed to align with the DBFM Request for Proposals time frame. Because of these time pressures, three very purposeful meetings were held. Although more meetings may have been preferable, the process was uniquely designed to respond to a unique situation, and the “roll-up-your-sleeves” approach got a lot of work done in a short amount of time.

5. Trust building
The above time constraints decreased relationship-building opportunities, which may have affected levels of trust among CPWG participants, neighbourhood residents, and consultants.

6. Concerns with the Louise Bridge
Although work done on this bridge is beyond the scope of the Disraeli project, there were fears that decisions made during this process would negatively impact work done on this bridge. A review for the Louise Bridge is scheduled for 2014.

OUTCOMES
Results from the charette and the two CPWG meetings have been submitted by the consultants and the City of Winnipeg, and these will be passed along to the three firms who are bidding on the bridge partnership, as this project will be a Design-Build-Finance-Maintain (DBFM) project. Once the re-design process is complete, the City will communicate the new design options to the impacted communities, and to the rest of Winnipeg.

OBSERVATIONS
The work of the CPWG has been extremely valuable to the public consultation process, and much wisdom can be gleaned from this experience. However, because this project is still unfolding, consultant analysis of “Lessons Learned” is still pending. Instead, specific observations about the collaborative process will be reviewed.

1. Power-balancing deserves attention.
Group members were chosen through neighbourhood research, and an exploration of the different groups of people who would be affected by this project. Pedestrians, cyclists, seniors, community members, and businesses were all represented on the CPWG. It was important that the group remain balanced, and that each of the affected sectors be represented equally. The consultants’ work in this area was very intentional.

During the process, continual attention was paid to power-balancing. A facilitator was hired for each meeting, who made sure that no voices became too dominant, and that all voices were given chances to contribute to the dialogue.

2. Process evolution is normal and good.
As the Disraeli rehabilitation project moved forward, the CPWG was formed to help determine the best place to put this crossing. Had this group not been formed, the suggested crossing may have been at a place that is not accessible to neighbourhood residents, and therefore less functional.

3. Facilitating new alternatives has positive effects.
During the design charette, the CPWG was ‘stuck’
for a while regarding where to put the Active Transportation bridge, until someone suggested attaching it to the Disraeli (Option 1). This helped revitalize the group, and moved them past different needs that were not being met by looking solely at one option. It also helped address the needs of those who were concerned that a separate bridge would affect future Active Transportation opportunities for the Louise Bridge.

4. Existing models can be adapted to fit processes
Building on or adapting past strengths saves time and effort. The work of the CPWG was modeled after collaborative efforts utilized in the design of the Provencher Bridge. This process had worked well, and it provided a good foundation that could be adapted in response to the unique challenges and constraints facing the Disraeli project.

5: Trust and relationship building is vital
Multiple meetings were needed to build trust and relationships among group members. Participants spent time getting to know each other and sharing particular interests and concerns. This facilitated positive communication and decision-making. Fostering good relationships was also important for the consulting team. Over the years, good working relationships have been built that enable the consultant to bring in extra members as needed. Many of these have worked together in the past.

6: Everyone must begin from the same place
The first CPWG meeting was dedicated to developing a common knowledge base. This included information sharing about each of the groups represented, particular needs of each affected group, and about the neighbourhoods directly impacted by this project. This knowledge allowed each member to think not only about her/his constituency group, but also about the needs of other groups.

7: Careful listening and synthesis goes a long way
One of the Working Group’s objectives was to find a specific place for the pedestrian and cyclist crossing. Although this was accomplished, a participant remarked that, because of all the careful work done by the CPWG, it did not really matter whether Option 1 or Option 2 were chosen. What mattered was that the bridge be 5 m in width, as opposed to the standard 3.5 m. This width increase would enable cyclists to remain on their bikes while crossing the river, and it would allow ample room for both pedestrians and cyclists to cross safely. This conclusion was incorporated into reports, and will be communicated to the City.

8: Opportunities exist beyond pressing issues
The Background Research Report prepared for the CPWG’s first meeting was not just a profile of the affected neighbourhoods. In addition to listing what existed in each neighbourhood, it also mentioned the opportunities found in each place. These opportunities are connected with heritage, environmental concerns, aesthetics, community enhancement through meeting places and significant crossings. Part of the CPWG’s role was to help provide information on other neighbourhood opportunities. The design charrette in particular reflected the opportunity to design, imagine, interplay, and explore different possibilities.

CONCLUSIONS
The collaborative process emerging from the Disraeli Bridge’s public consultations was designed to harness the expertise and energy found within each participant, and each constituency group. Contributions of this group will have neighbourhood, transportation, and recreational effects, and will leave an Active Transportation legacy for future generations. In addition, the willingness of the City of Winnipeg to participate in this process and listen to emerging ideas emerging should be commended.

Observations from this dynamic process are transferable, and much can be learned from this experience. Despite different challenges, a clear way forward is emerging that celebrates collaborative efforts, and sets a precedent for future projects.
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REFERENCES


CPWG. 2009. Cycling Pedestrian Crossing Minutes - Collaborative Planning Working Group. Meeting No. 2 at Norquay Community Centre; February 18, 2009


Current conceptual drawings of rehabilitated Disraeli bridge cross section with separated Active Transportation bridge.