Retain Holland’s Business Routes

Holland AM Rotary
Presented by Christopher Bessert
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Retain Holland’s Business Routes

- About the Presenter
- History of Holland Area Highway Transportation
- The Problem at Hand
- One Solution: The Turnback
- Turnback Pros and Cons
- Other Solutions
About the Presenter

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- Former Holland resident, currently residing in Byron Center
- Student of ground transportation networks and cartography
- Career: Geographic Information System Specialist at Grand Valley Metropolitan Council in Grand Rapids
- Maintain various transportation networks for GIS users
- Work hand-in-hand with urban planners
- Personal website: www.michiganhighways.org
Brief History of Highways in Holland

- **1914-1938:** The Early Years
- **1938-1950:** Before the Bypass
- **1950-1955:** Northside Bypass
- **1955-1963:** Holland Bypass complete, Business Route debuts
- **1963-1971:** Benton Harbor-Holland Freeway complete
- **1971-1973:** One-Way & Downtown Realignments
- **1973-1994:** Gerald R. Ford Freeway complete, second Business Route debuts
- **1994-2004:** The Transfers Begin
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- 1955–1963: Holland Bypass complete, Business Route debuts
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- **1963–1971**: Benton Harbor-Holland Freeway complete
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The Problem at Hand

- Successful downtown central business district
- Perceived lack of convenient parking
- Need to keep downtown vibrant and bustling
- Northside retail explosion continues unabated, Westshore Mall troubles notwithstanding
- Downtown needs to compete harder in stressful economic times
- The better downtown does, the worse parking problem may become
The Problem at Hand

- Downtown perception needs to remain pleasant
- Easy to access, easy to park
  - Get in, get out
  - Park at the door, like big-box competition
- Holland difficult to get through as is, even with signed route
  - One-way streets efficiently move traffic through downtown, but may be confusing to tourists and casual visitors
  - Lake Macatawa and Lake Michigan present additional natural “challenges” to getting through the city
- Poor state maintenance in some areas in past years gives MDOT a black-eye.
- Very difficult problem to solve!
One Solution: The Turnback

- City of Holland and MDOT at odds for years
  - City says three through traffic lanes unnecessary
  - MDOT states traffic volume levels support three lanes
  - City desires slow traffic
  - MDOT tasked with maintaining smooth traffic flow
  - City desires pedestrian friendly downtown
  - MDOT looks to efficient movement of people and traffic through the city
  - MDOT also allowed quality of Business Routes slide for many years

- Solution: MDOT to turnback most of Business Route to City
Turnback Pros & Cons

Pros
- Local control of turned-back streets
- Over 100 new parking spaces possible
- Slower speeds
- Aesthetic appearance of pavement, patching
- Flexibility in planning
Turnback Pros & Cons

- **Cons**
  - Loss of major tourism route: Lake Michigan Circle Tour
    - Casual tourists follow Circle Tour route/signs faithfully
    - People unfamiliar with area reluctant to diverge from signed Circle Tour route to explore unsigned, unmarked, unmapped route
    - Holland’s economy increasingly dependent on tourism dollars
  - Loss of TWO signed routes from TWO different interstate highways
    - Smaller communities clamor for just one signed Business Route off a single bypassing highway
    - Holland is blessed with TWO signed Business Routes off TWO major highways
Turnback Pros & Cons

Cons (cont’d)

- Loss of mapped route on millions of free state transportation maps printed and given out each year
  - “Nice, wide red line” on maps disappears
  - Similar route markings on commercially-produced maps disappear as well
- Requires additional $165,000 annually from city coffers for maintenance
- Loss of state trunkline maintenance contract dollars
- Additional trunkline transfers to come in the future
  - Washington Avenue from 32nd St southerly to US-31
  - Chicago Drive from Fairbanks/Eighth easterly to US-31
Turnback Pros & Cons

- Cons (cont’d)
  - Discourages tourists from “taking the plunge” by getting off mainline highways to explore the city
  - Locally-posted downtown “trailblazer” signage do not complete the route for visitors and tourists back to mainline highways
    - Local signage, while attractive, are often less-visible than the properly-sized, optimally-placed, reflective state trunkline signage
  - Loss of “channelizing” routes bringing visitors in via selected streets
    - Gateway planning easier when concentrated on just two or three routes
    - Less cost in signs and directional information, most is already in place
    - Additional signing would be necessary to direct visitors to other attractions, such as Windmill Island
Turnback Pros & Cons

Cons (cont’d)

- What tourists and casual visitors will see on state maps
Turnback Pros & Cons

Cons (cont’d)

- What tourists and casual visitors will see from the bypass
Turnback Pros & Cons

- Cons (cont’d)
  - What tourists and casual visitors will see from the bypass

Before

After
Turnback Pros & Cons

Cons (cont’d)

- Lack of balance between City and Metropolitan area concerns
  - City wants all traffic to slow down and encourage pedestrian travel
  - MDOT wants to move traffic smoothly and efficiently through the city
  - Too much of either of these throws equilibrium out of balance
    - Being overly “highway-centric” may kill off downtown
    - Need attractive, shaded sidewalks, ample crosswalks and reasonable speeds to reassure pedestrians it is safe to walk downtown
    - Being overly “pedestrian-centric” in our automobile-oriented culture may kill off downtown
    - People may think it is too difficult to get to and through downtown and it is just easier to shop at the big box retailers on the Northside
Other Solutions

- Transfer only “west end” of downtown loop
  - Seventh and Ninth Sts west of River Ave to City
  - Pine Ave between Seventh and Ninth Sts to City
  - River Ave between Seventh and Ninth Sts to State
  - Four additional blocks of city-controlled streets for parking
  - Gives city area in front of new police station
  - Reduces three turns for southbound traffic to one
Other Solutions

- City Leaders petition Governor Granholm for assistance
  - Ask Governor to force MDOT to explore more context-sensitive designs for downtown streets
    - Downtown Business Loops ought not be considered as high-volume alternatives to highway bypasses
  - “Cool Cities” initiative
    - Governor wants to encourage strong cities and downtowns to retain and attract young talent to Michigan
    - Governor can encourage MDOT to work more closely with Cities’ priorities
  - Remove third lane for trial run and analyze scientific results
Other Solutions

Education

- Discourage or prohibit employee parking in so-called “Gold Zone” on Eighth Street
- Businesses lose $30,000 each year when employees park in “Gold Zone”
- “There is plenty of parking downtown. We just need to convey to people that the space doesn’t need to be directly outside of where they’re going. We have created a walkable downtown.” – Phil Meyer, City of Holland Planning & Development Manager
- Encourage/challenge local residents to “find a better spot” to park downtown that is still close to their shopping/dining destination, leaving more “obvious” spaces for tourists and casual visitors
Other Solutions

- **Downtown “Office Tax”**
  - Use revenues to construct a parking structure
  - Tax non-retail businesses
  - Allow downtown employees to park for free or
  - Charge employees nominal monthly parking fees for premium “covered parking” spaces – nice in inclement weather, winter, etc.
  - Could be located one or two blocks north of downtown
Conclusion

- Problem exists
- Turnback solution chosen
- Turnback may have unintended side-effects
- Other solutions (or mix of solutions) exist