



TO: Midland City Council

DATE: January 18, 2006

RE: Eastman Avenue Traffic Study  
Citizen Response, Interim Report

### **Background**

At the citizen roundtables held in the winter of 2005 to ask Midland residents to discuss their budget priorities for municipal services and other civic issues, traffic was the item most frequently mentioned when citizens were asked what they would most like to change about life in Midland. Specifically, the matter of traffic on Eastman Avenue, particularly in the area of the Midland Mall, was raised repeatedly.

Responding to that significant concern, the City initiated a study of Eastman Avenue traffic, including information about current and projected Levels of Service (LOS), and the development of three alternative designs to avoid long-term traffic system failure.

Following City Council meeting on December 12, 2005, at which the three alternatives for improvements to Eastman Avenue were presented, Midland citizens were asked to review those alternatives and offer their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of each. In addition, a fourth alternative of postponing construction on Eastman for the time being was also offered for response.

As of the deadline on Friday, January 13, 2006, 704 responses were received. Those responses came through online forms posted on the City's web site, clip-out forms published in the *Midland Daily News*, forms available at civic sites such as the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, mail-back forms published in the City's newsletter, *At Your Service*, and from a public meeting / open house at the Midland Mall on January 12, 2006. The City also received e-mails, letters, and calls to the Citizen Comment Line discussing the Eastman study and potential improvements.

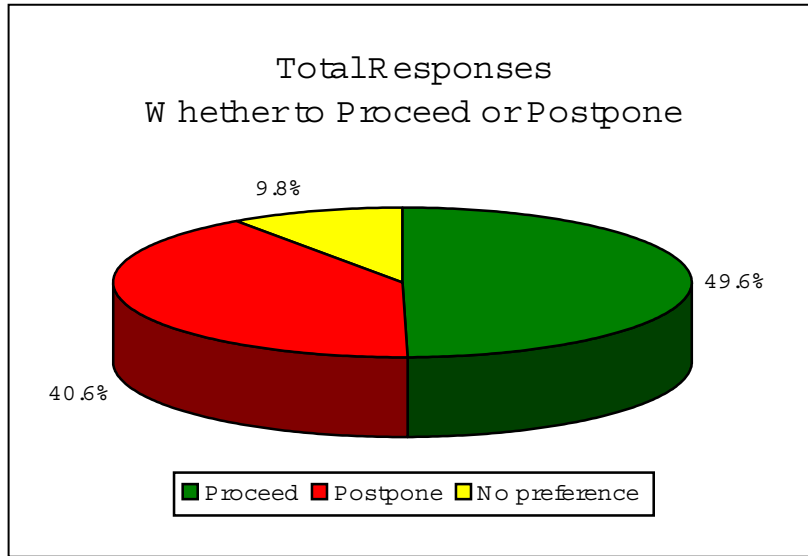
Of the total 704 responses, 616 (88%) were returned by citizens of the City of Midland. Residents of Midland County returned another 78 responses (11%) and 10 additional responses (1%) came from out-of-County or from unknown locations.

Upon review and analysis of the responses, it's clear that the citizens of Midland care about the question of traffic congestion in their community, and have invested a great deal of time and thought in responding to the City's request for their assistance.

**Whether to Postpone or to Proceed**

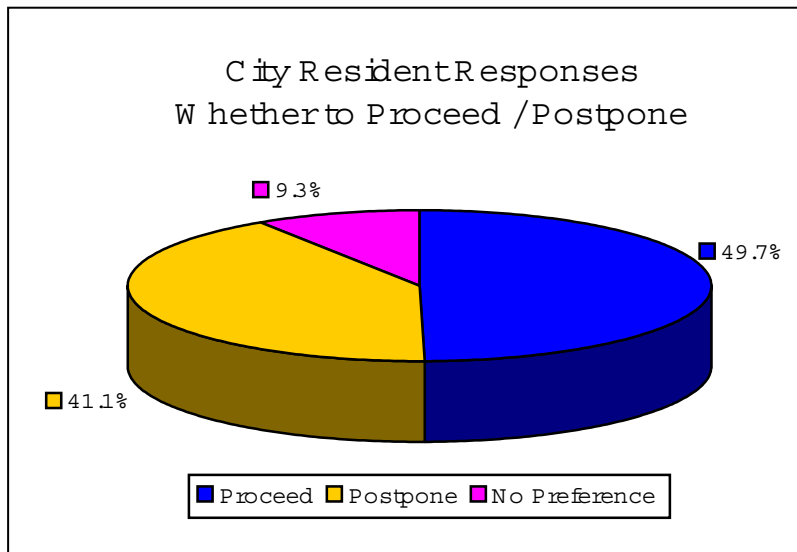
Most people who responded, though not all, expressed a preference about whether to postpone the construction of improvements on Eastman Avenue. Overall, the responses were as follows:

Proceed	349 responses	49.6%
Postpone	286 responses	40.6%
No preference expressed	69 responses	9.8%

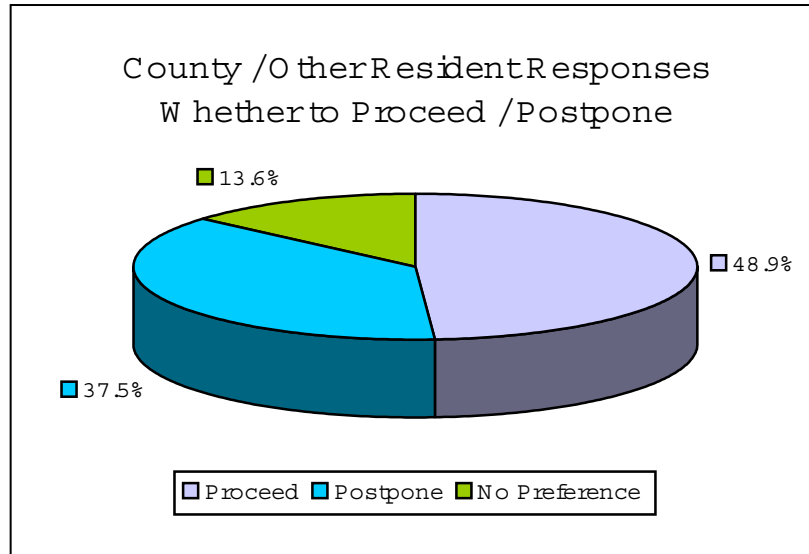


Breaking down those totals by place of residence:

City residents preferring to proceed	306 responses	49.7%
City residents preferring postponement	253 responses	41.1%
City residents not expressing a preference	57 responses	9.3%

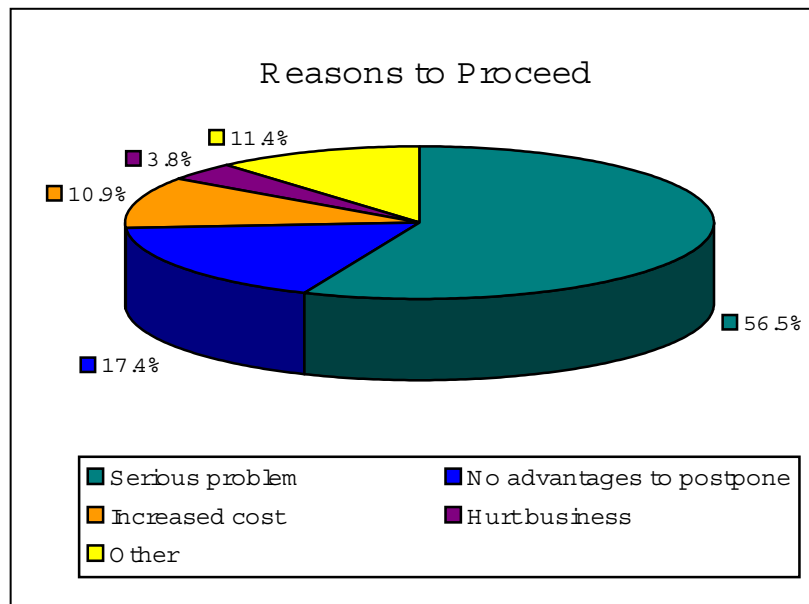


County / other residents preferring to proceed	43 responses	48.9%
County / other residents preferring postponement	33 responses	37.5%
County / other residents not expressing a preference	12 responses	13.6%



Reasons Given

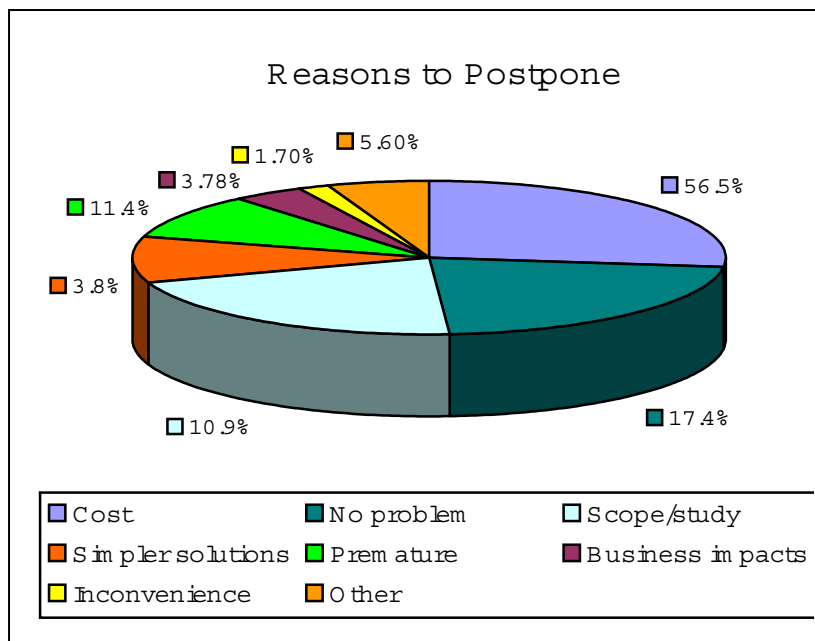
The response forms published in *At Your Service* asks respondents to list their thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of postponing the project. The disadvantages for postponing, or reasons that the project should proceed were listed as follows



- § Traffic on Eastman Avenue presents a serious problem that will only get worse - 104 mentions (56.5%)

- § There are no advantages to postponement - 32 mentions (17.4%)
- § The cost of improvements will increase - 20 mentions (10.9%)  
*Because respondents believe the costs of any solution will escalate over time, they prefer that the project not be postponed.*
- § If not fixed, the problems will hurt existing businesses or deter new businesses - 7 mentions (3.8%)
- § Other ideas - 21 mentions (11.4%)

The advantages to postponing, or reasons to postpone, indicated as follows:



- § Cost of the proposed solutions - 130 mentions (27.1%)  
*Cost of the alternatives was seen as a deterrent.*
- § There is not a serious problem - 104 mentions (21.7%)  
*Some citizens believe Eastman Avenue traffic problems are primarily seasonal and are not yet critical. Few respondents indicated that they believe there is no problem at all; rather, these residents seem to believe the level of the “fix” is out of balance with their perception of the level of the problem.*
- § The scope of the study and solutions have missed the mark - 101 mentions (21.0%)  
*This response was tied with the one above. Many residents who stated this belief expressed the conviction that other streets surrounding the Midland Mall area should be included in an area-wide analysis. They therefore*

*don't believe that the three alternatives proposed are the best that can be designed.*

- § There are simpler solutions - 46 mentions (9.6%)  
*Citizens have offered other ideas for relieving traffic congestion on Eastman at peak hours and seasons. While some of those suggestions are quite complex, many are less disruptive than the proposed alternative and propose less comprehensive improvements.*
- § The project is premature - 46 mentions (9.6%)  
*People expressing this point of view indicated that they believe either that the projected growth is not likely to occur or that additional development will indeed occur in the broader study area, requiring another re-design and re-construction once that happens.*
- § There will be negative impacts on businesses in the area - 18 mentions (3.78%)  
*Some people objected to the damaging effects the proposed alternatives are likely to have on local businesses.*
- § Construction inconvenience - 8 mentions (1.7%)  
*The two year construction schedule presented a deterrent for some residents.*
- § Other ideas - 27 mentions (5.6%)

It's important to note that citizens often cited more than one of the perspectives described above. A paragraph in response, for example, might have included the thought that Midland's problem is relatively manageable, that the larger geographic area should have been included in the study, and that the proposed alternatives are not justifiable in terms of cost.

The complete verbatim responses are attached.

## **Recommendations**

There are several primary considerations in the decision ahead:

- § A slightly greater number of people indicated a preference to proceed with the improvements to Eastman Avenue than expressed a preference to postpone;
- § The proceed / postpone division among residents is a significant one, with considerable numbers supporting each proceed / postpone option;
- § Although people found important advantages and disadvantages to each of the alternatives, there is no clear preferred alternative among the three proposed;
- § Of those indicating a preference to postpone, cost, scope and complexity of the three alternatives made up a combined 57% of the reasons why respondents wanted to postpone. That there is "no traffic problem" or that the project is

“premature” was cited by 30% of the postpone respondents. In addition, many residents expressed an interest in finding other approaches to traffic problems in the area north of U.S.10 and a significant number have suggested additional options for addressing the problem. We believe this presents an opportunity for the city to evaluate some improvement measures that would fall somewhere between a “do nothing” or postpone option and the major improvements indicated in the three alternatives.

### **Next Steps**

In order to be responsive to the guidance residents have provided to City Council to this point in the process, we recommend the following course of action:

- § that the workshops originally scheduled for February 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> be cancelled;
- § that staff and consultants explore and analyze the suggestions and recommendations provided through the survey mechanism and report the results to the City Council upon completion.

There is still a great deal of material to compile and analyze regarding the advantages and disadvantages Midland area residents cite about each proposed alternative long-term solution to Eastman Avenue traffic congestion. In addition, many substitute solutions have been proposed and will be organized and forwarded to City staff and consultants for technical review and analysis.

KezziahWatkins is preparing a complete report of all citizen responses that will be forwarded to Council along with the staff’s analysis of the community’s suggestions.