

Northeastern Pennsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization

Transportation Programming for the Counties of: Carbon ✧ Monroe ✧ Pike ✧ Schuylkill

March 16, 2021 Technical Planning Committee

Meeting Summary and Minutes

9:30 a.m.

Meeting Location:

Microsoft Teams Videoconference

Attendees:

David Alas*
Ethan Baldwin
Dave Bekisz*
Marie Bishop*
David Bodnar*
Jim Brady
Chris Chapman
John Christy*
Steve Fisher
Marta Gabriel
Chuck Gould*
Micah Gursky
Doyle Heffley*
Kathy Henderson
Boots Hetherington
Peggy Howarth*
Vanessa Koenigkramer*
Chris Kufro
Amanda Leindecker
Chuck Leonard*

Organization:

PennDOT Central
PennDOT Central
STS
PennDOT District 4-0
Carbon Co. Planning
STV
Luzerne Co. Planning
Mo. Co. Commissioner
PennDOT District 4-0
Sen. Toomey's Office
Chestnuthill Twp.
St. Luke's Hospital
State Representative
CCEDC
Sch. Co. Commissioner
MCTA
PennDOT District 5-0
PennDOT District 5-0
PennDOT District 5-0
PMEDC

Attendees:

Randy Miller
Jim Mosca
Christine Meinhart-Fritz*
Mike Mrozinski*
Matt Osterberg*
John Petrini
Emma Pugh
Jeff Rai
Rich Roman
Dave Rostron
Susan Smith*
Matt Smoker
Brian Snyder
Scott Vottero

Alan Baranski
Jeff Box
Nettie Ginocchetti
Kate McMahon
Daniel Yelito

Organization:

Orwigsburg Borough
PennDOT Central
Monroe Co. Planning
Pike Co. Planning
Pike Co. Commissioner
PennDOT District 4-0
PennDOT District 4-0
PennDOT District 5-0
PennDOT District 4-0
PennDOT District 5-0
Schuylkill Co. Planning
FHWA
Pike Co. Planning
PennDOT District 5-0

NEPA Alliance
NEPA Alliance
NEPA Alliance
NEPA Alliance
NEPA Alliance

*Technical Committee members who voted at this meeting

Summary of Actions Taken by the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee:

During this meeting, the MPO Technical Committee voted on the following actions:

Action 1: Mr. Bodnar requested a motion from the Technical Committee to approve the minutes from the February 16, 2021 meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Smith, seconded by Mr. Mrozinski. The motion passed unanimously.

Action 2: Mr. Bodnar requested a motion from the Technical Committee to approve the submission of comments regarding the OMB's Potential Revisions to Metropolitan Statistical Areas. A motion was made by Mr. Gursky, seconded by Ms. Howarth. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Bodnar called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

1) Business Items

- a) Approval of minutes from the February 16, 2021 Business Meeting
Mr. Bodnar requested a motion from the Technical Committee to approve the minutes from the February 16, 2021 meeting. A motion was made by Ms. Smith, seconded by Mr. Mrozinski to approve the minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

2) TIP Amendments and Administrative Actions

- a) District 4-0 and 5-0 2021-2024 TIP Amendments and Administrative Actions
Information was included in the meeting packet which highlighted administrative actions on the 2021 TIP for District 4-0 and 5-0. Mr. Fisher highlighted actions for District 4-0, Ms. Koenigkramer highlighted actions for District 5-0 and Mr. Alas highlighted the actions for Central Office.

Action 1- Glenbrook Road Slope Remediation- add PE and CON phases to TIP. Glenbrook Road Bridge- Isaias PR- add CON phase to the TIP. Isaias Permanent Repair I-81- add PE and CON phase to the TIP. The sources are Delivery Consultant Assistance, SR 715 over Pocono Creek, SR 715/611 Intersection, Rt 61-13M and the Regional Highway and Bridge Line Item. Action 2- MS 4 Inspections- add phase to the TIP. The source is the SR 2002 Slide. Action 3- 209/115 Intersection Improvements Phase 2- advance funding and adjust for low bid. The source is the 443 Roadway Improvements, Rt 61-13M and the Regional Highway and Bridge Line Item. Action 4- 209 Bus over Kettle Creek- increase for preliminary engineering supplement. The source is SR 715 over Pocono Creek and the NEPA Highway and Bridge Line Item. Action 5- Columbia Street Arch Bridge- increase for final design amount. The source is 924 over 4030, RR & Mahanoy Creek. Information Item 1- I-81 Pine Grove to Minersville Resurfacing- cash flow to align with anticipated need. The source is the Interstate Contingency Line Item. Information Item 2- Reading BM&N RR Yield Signs- return deob funds to Statewide RRX reserve. Action 6- SR 2004 Emergency Bridge Demo- increase for emergency bridge demo based on latest inspection after Tropical Storm Isaias before it falls into the stream. NEPA Bridge Overlay Bundle- increase to cover actual expenditures. The sources are Glenbrook Road Bridge- swap 581 for 185 funds, and the NEPA Highway and Bridge Line Item. Statewide Amendment 1- Shohola Falls Road over Balliard Creek and Carlton road over Taylor Creek- add PE and CON phases for approved County \$5 Fee Project. The source is the STP Reserve Line Item.

Mr. Smoker asked if toll credits will be used for the Pike County \$5 fee bridges. Mr. Mosca stated that they are using toll credits. Mr. Smoker asked that it be noted in the remarks section on the chart.

Mr. Baranski stated that an amendment that was approved at the February meeting to add paving projects using STU funds was flagged by FHWA as not being an appropriate use of the STU funds. District 5 is working through it and will find an approved expenditure for the use of the STU funds. Mr. Kufro stated that they are working through the issue and looking at ways to swap the funds and still accomplish the projects.

- b) Transit Amendments and Administrative Actions
None. Ms. McMahan stated that we received Schuylkill Transit System's Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan. No action is required by the committee. Ms. Howarth stated that MCTA's TAM plan is forthcoming.

3) Transportation Planning & Programs

- a) Current Project Status

Ms. Bishop provided an update on highway projects in District 4-0. Mr. Rostron provided an update on highway projects in District 5-0.

Mr. Christy asked about the note under the SR 33 Median Barrier project that funds may have to be paid back. Mr. Kufro stated that the original SR 33 project was pushed out due to funding constraints and the paving project replaced it. Federal funds were used to start the project and we have until 2027 to start the more extensive project before federal funds have to be paid back.

b) OMB Potential Revisions to Metropolitan Statistical Areas and U.S. Census Bureau Proposed Redefinition of Urban Areas

Mr. Baranski stated that as we discussed at the February meeting, OMB has issued recommendations for redefining the threshold for establishing Metropolitan Statistical Areas from 50,000 to 100,000. The East Stroudsburg MSA was designated in 2010, resulting in the establishment of the MPO. There are 8 other MSAs/MPOs in Pennsylvania potentially affected by the change. Since the last meeting, we had a meeting with the other affected MPOs and Central Office to discuss the issue. NEPA has developed draft comments and shared them with the committee. Other MPOs are also developing and submitting comments. We have contacted the federal delegation about the matter as well. We are seeking an approval from the committee to submit the draft comments to the Federal Register docket.

Ms. Gabriel asked what precipitated the proposed change. She stated that the Lebanon MSA is also affected by the proposal. Mr. Baranski stated that the action was taken by an OMB committee that was created in 2018. The committee claims a review of the MSA definition has been under consideration since the last census due to the population growth in the country. The OMB committee is made up of representatives from various federal agencies. They did not look at funding impacts, but many agencies use MSA designations for determining funding levels. The OMB committee left it to the affected parties to determine what the impacts are. The Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) has been in touch with OMB and OMB claims that there is no connection to funding impacts; they only did a demographic evaluation. Mr. Baranski stated that the impacts go beyond transportation to HUD, Department of Health, Department of Labor, etc. Mr. Box stated that the House of Representatives is circulating a letter opposing the OMB recommendations. He is not sure if a similar letter is being circulated in the Senate but stated that if Senator Toomey could weigh in, we would appreciate it.

Ms. Howarth stated that the comments are due by March 19th. She stated that the comments have Mr. Baranski's signature but should indicate that they are on behalf of the MPO. She stated that a group in Monroe County met to discuss the issue and reviewed the comments that had already been submitted. There were 69 comments submitted already and many were opposed. MCTA is sending their own letter.

Commissioner Christy stated that the notification of the proposal from OMB only came to Monroe County but the other counties in the MPO are potentially affected by the change. He would appreciate more letters or signatures.

At the conclusion of the discussion, Mr. Bodnar requested a motion from the Technical Committee to approve the submission of the NEPA MPO's comments in opposition to the OMB's Potential Revisions to Metropolitan Statistical Areas. A motion was made by Mr. Gursky, seconded by Ms. Howarth. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Baranski stated that the U.S. Census Bureau has also issued proposed changes to the criteria for establishing urbanized areas. The Census Bureau is looking to redefine urban areas using housing density, rather than population. This change also has potential impacts on the designation of our MPO. Urbanized areas are referenced in other federal funding statutes. The MPO will likely be

commenting on this proposed change as well. Comments are due by May 20th so we will have something for the committee's review by the May meeting.

c) PennDOT Transportation Funding Issues

Mr. Baranski stated that this is an ongoing topic. Funding issues have been exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic. The 2021 funding shortfalls have been closed by federal COVID relief funding. PennDOT has initiated the Pathways project to identify alternative funding sources. The first initiative is a P3 bridge tolling initiative. PennDOT announced that 9 bridges on the interstate system have been identified as part of the P3 initiative, including the I-80 bridges over the Lehigh River on the Carbon/Luzerne County line. Mr. Baranski stated that there is opposition to the tolling initiative and a bill has been introduced in the PA Senate to amend the P3 enabling legislation. Ms. Gabriel stated that the I-78 bridge in Berks County is facing a lot of opposition. Mr. Kufro stated that both bridges are in District 5. They are both large structures. They are currently working on the Environmental Assessment, including the impacts of tolling on the community. There will be public outreach meetings for both projects.

Mr. Kufro stated that they Governor has created a commission to look at ways to replace the gas tax in funding transportation projects. They are looking at short-term and long-term solutions. The first meeting is next week and the Governor wants options by August 1st. Mr. Baranski stated that Congress is also in serious discussion about the federal highway reauthorization bill.

d) State Transportation Commission 2023 Twelve Year Program Outreach

Mr. Baranski stated that the STC announced the first step in the 2023 TIP development. The STC is taking comments from the public and is holding a public forum online on March 23rd from 6:30-7:30. Ms. McMahan stated that the comment period runs until April 14th. Mr. Mosca stated that the feedback is important for the development of statewide TIP and encouraged everyone to submit comments and take the online survey. The 2021 Performance Report is also available. All of the information can be found at <https://talkpatransportation.com>.

e) Milford Borough Traffic Study

Mr. Baranski stated that we are engaging the Milford Borough Traffic Study. We had just kicked off the study last March when the pandemic started. At that time, the steering committee decided to delay the study. Traffic is picking up and the issues in Milford are returning. We have a meeting this afternoon to begin the study again. We expect it to take about a year and be done by June 30, 2022.

f) Public Involvement Plan, Title VI Plan and Limited English Proficiency Plan Updates

Ms. McMahan stated that as part of our UPWP, we identified the need to update our Public Involvement Plan, Title VI Plan and Limited English Proficiency Plan. The plans were previously done by McCormick Taylor and adopted in November 2015. We think the plans we have are good, so we don't want to start over. Instead, we plan to update them in-house to include new outreach methods including virtual public involvement. Ms. Ginocchetti will be involved in updating the data and mapping in the plans. We will review PennDOT's Public Participation Plan which was adopted last year to see if there is anything we should include in our plan. We will also consider any recommendation that come out of our program review with PennDOT and FHWA later this summer. Mr. Baranski stated that we will also incorporate any recommendations from our Title VI review conducted last year.

4) Other Business

Ms. Smith asked if District 5 could comment on the Rt. 61 INFRA grant application. Mr. Kufro stated that PennDOT is submitting an application for INFRA funding for the Rt. 61 project, similar to what was submitted last year. There has been a lot of coordination this year and efforts to generate support for the

project. This year, we have about 70 letters of support; last year it was only about 20. PennDOT Central Office has made the application a priority and they are hoping to get funded this year. Ms. Gabriel stated that Senator Toomey was happy to send a letter in support of the project. Mr. Kufro stated that Ms. Smith was very helpful in preparing the package and reviewing the project narrative.

5) Adjournment

There being no further business, the NEPA MPO Technical Planning Committee meeting adjourned at 10:30 a.m.