

Southwest Michigan Alliance for Recreational Trails
May 16, 2013 - 1:00 PM - MDOT Southwest Region Facility, Kalamazoo
Meeting Summary

Attendees

Marcy Colclough, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Jim Coury, Calhoun Co. Trailway Alliance
Katie Deatherage, Kalamazoo County Parks Darrell Harden, MDOT Southwest Region
Cal Lamoreaux, Barry County Jean Lamoreaux, Barry County
Gautam Mani, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission Steve Redmond, MDOT Grand Region
Garrett Myland, St. Joseph and Cass County Road Commission
Jessica Simons, Potawatomi Resource Conservation and Development

Call to Order

Colclough called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM and led the group in introductions.

Introduction to SMART and Purpose of Meeting

SMART Background

Colclough stated that SMART had convened several years ago very informally, with the encouragement of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance. At a very successful initial meeting in Portage, a task force was formed. The **9-County SMART region** is based on MDOT's 9-County Southwest Region.

In the past, SMART has **hosted workshops** and was critical in helping to **develop the 9 county non-motorized map and 9-county non-motorized plan**. These efforts required a huge amount of coordination and that SMART provided a vehicle for that coordination. Harden added that as part of the plan development process, two public meetings were held in each county, so this was a really **intensive public outreach effort**. Harden also added that his superiors at MDOT were impressed with how substantive and accessible the plan was, as it did not have much "fluff." Public participation occurred on a very substantive level. Coury added that SMART brought together all of the different parks and greenways entities in the 9-Counties, in a way that otherwise might have been impossible.

Purpose of Meeting – Reconvene SMART

Harden said that one of the reasons to try to reconvene SMART was that MDOT has directed its staff to have **regional non-motorized advisory committees**. Harden says that because the SMART structure is already in place and has been highly successful, it makes sense to use it as a springboard for delivery of further non-motorized improvements. MDOT's focus may be on transportation (on and off-road facilities) and complete streets, but this can fit in with SMART's broader goals including recreational trails.

Continued Importance of Trails/Non-Motorized Connections – Need for SMART

J. Lamoreaux noted that she is observing "young seniors" moving into Barry County, and Middleville in particular, because of the presence of the trail. Coury said that trail expansion is happening due to a realization from the public in Southwest Michigan that trails provide a tremendous **economic development opportunity** for communities and **health benefits** for people of all ages. Harden and Coury both said that SMART would provide a better opportunity to ensure that new trails are coordinated, and that **on-road segments connect to off-road** counterparts where possible. C. Lamoreaux agreed that the **system was disconnected**. Coury said that bike lanes on road may not appeal to families; **different types of facilities are needed** for different audiences.

Task Force Composition

How big do we want the task force to be? Coury suggested a **size of 15**, but also wanted to ensure proper representation of all groups. Colclough noted that it has always been difficult to get volunteer trailways groups to the table because they are mostly volunteers and have other jobs during the day. Colclough also suggested that it would be good to have a **MDNR representative**. Harden said that it was difficult to figure out a DNR representative for this group because MDOT regions do not match up with DNR regions or the regional assignments of many other state agencies. It was suggested that Harden talk to Roger Storm at MDNR for a potential DNR representative.

Coury thanked SWMPC for their support in Kalamazoo County. The **Southcentral Michigan Planning Council** is reforming and will be a valuable partner. Coury and C. Lamoreaux suggested some new contacts for the Task Force, as noted in the database sheet. Harden also noted that the Calhoun County Road Commission had been absorbed under the general umbrella of the County. Coury, Harden, and Colclough noted that funding from Pokagon Fund and other tribal sources had been very helpful in trail development, particularly in the Harbor Country region and the area around Gun Lake Casino.

Meeting Schedule

Quarterly meetings were agreed upon. Harden said that he would take charge of doodle polling to find an appropriate meeting date for the next quarter.

SMART Goals

It was agreed that the current SMART goals are still applicable. Colclough and C. Lamoreaux wondered if the goals could be more explicit about including water trails and other trail uses.

Moving SMART Forward

Coury said that he liked the idea of a **facilitated workshop** that would lay out SMART, MDOT and local priorities and allow input on **creating a framework for moving SMART forward**. Harden said that he preferred that MDOT's role in that portion of the process be outreach. The workshop could also highlight funding opportunities (MAP 21, MNRTF, Safe Routes to School) and complete streets initiatives. An overview of new projects in the works in SW MI could also be highlighted.

J. Lamoreaux and Colclough both asked about exploring the potential for getting **equestrians** to the table.

Simons recounted her experience of getting a **Safe Routes to School** parent's survey from her daughter's school, and how this might be a new way of doing outreach and ensuring that new trails are meeting the priorities of residents. Harden agreed, noting that such efforts might help to avoid duplication and connect separated trailway segments.

Lamoreaux suggested that he would talk to people on the **Michigan Paddling Council**, of which he is part, about possible ways to work with them.

Coury and C. Lamoreaux said that **trail programming** is a key element to get people to be enthusiastic about trails.

How to use the Non-Motorized Plan and other documents

- Colclough and J. Lamoreaux have used the plan in grant applications. State agencies and others are looking for projects that connect to regional systems.

- The SW MDOT region engineer consults the plan when they are planning for road improvements on State Roads.
- There are more opportunities for the plan to be used by municipalities/counties/road commissions/MPOs in their plans and road projects. SMART could help to ensure the 9 county plan is included in local planning efforts.

Southwest Michigan Updates

Kalamazoo County - With significant funding from the Kellogg Foundation, Kalamazoo has done excellent trail related programming. Significant programming has also taken place in Barry County. There will be a grand opening event on June 9 for the Kalamazoo River Valley Trail segment near Comstock. Kalamazoo River Valley Trail has been working with a company called Land Matters to secure easements on private lands for trails.

Branch County- There was an effort to place an unused rail line into rail banking status. The corridor is from Sturgis to Coldwater. However, there is significant opposition to a trail by very influential people.

Allegan County – There is renewed interest in a trail along Blue Star Highway. This is an important corridor for SW MI, but there is a potential issue with the Blue Star trail because the entire route may be under the designation of a “historical place.” Also there is work being done on the interurban from Wayland to the Casino funded by the Potawatomi Indians.

Calhoun County – 5.6 miles of trail is being planned from eastern Battle Creek to Historic Bridge Park this fall. MDOT project will include bike lanes on BL94 bridge over I-94 (exit #92). J. Lamoreaux reported on the upcoming gravel road bike race in Middleville.

St. Joseph/Cass County- A trail from Bronson to Broadway Park in Three Rivers was nearing completion. Crossing 131 will be problematic. Marcy advises that Myland connect with Scott Wyman (Cass County Parks), who was tremendously helpful when SMART was previously active and is interested in a trail from Cassopolis to Vandalia along an abandoned rail line with only a few property owners.

Barry County- There is renewed interest in the 17 mile people path around Gun Lake. There have been expansions to the Thornapple Trail. MDOT has funded a trail connection from Middleville to Caledonia. This will be important for connecting to the MDOT Grand Region.

Berrien County – Funding has been secured from MDOT and MDNR to build over 4 miles of trail in Niles Township as part of a 34-mile off road trail between Niles, South Bend and Mishawaka. This could be the first off-road paved trail in Michigan to cross state lines. Harden noted that the Coloma TSC was really instrumental in helping this project move forward with safety concerns crossing US12. MDOT is currently working on the I-94/Pipestone interchange and will consider pedestrian/bicycling facilities because this area was highlighted as a priority in the local Walk and Roll Plan. MDOT is also putting paved shoulders on M140 north of Watervliet because it was listed as a local priority in the 9 –County Non-Motorized Plan. Harbor Country Trail is submitting a TAP application to MDOT for consideration. There is interest from SWMPC and Northwestern Indiana Planning Commission in forming a bi-state coalition to connect the Harbor Country system to the Marquette Greenway effort in Indiana and on to Chicago, IL. Harden said he would get in touch with Ryan Fellows, Assistant City Manager, about the current status of New Buffalo’s interest in that coalition.

Potawatomi RC&D – explained their continued work and interest in the region and reorganization efforts.

MDOT - MDOT would be hosting its annual Training Wheels workshops this summer. These courses provide some background knowledge on bicycle planning, and then on-road bicycle training and exploration of possible ways to improve bicycle facilities in local communities. The training in Coldwater is on June 13, and the training in Niles is the next day on June 14. Trainings are from 8 AM to 2:30 PM. The training is free, but space is limited.

Safe Routes to School Training will be taking place on the morning of August 21 at the MDOT Southwest Region facility in Kalamazoo.

MDOT Grand Region- Redmond said it would be a good idea for MDOT to provide support in a coherent way to local entities along the Lakeshore who are looking to build and connect trails, in the Southwest Michigan region and outside.

Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Colclough said that the August meeting should be about planning and promoting the facilitated workshop which will include members of the public and other stakeholders. Simons suggested that it would be a good idea to bring the full set of data that SMART has on each county's non-motorized priorities to that meeting (county fact sheets from the 9 county plan). Colclough said that the group should begin thinking about agenda items and ways to promote the workshop. Simons suggested that people tend to come to meetings when they know clearly that it involves their own county or township.

Harden to set up doodle poll for next meeting date. Harden stated that the SMART meeting time should be planned so that it does not conflict with Safe Route to Schools on Aug 21.

Others could continue to promote SMART and spread the word to new officials and local agencies about the 9-county map and plan being available and the benefits of using it in local plans and efforts.