

# Minutes of the Joint NATS/TwinCATS Special MPO Meeting

September 30, 2013

Berrien RESA 711 St. Joseph Avenue Berrien Springs, MI

1:00p.m.-4:30p.m.

## Attendees

### ***NATS TAC and Policy Members Present***

Jason Auvil, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians  
Brian Berndt, Berrien County Road Commission  
Dawn Bolock, Ontwa Township  
Christopher Bolt, Cass County Road Commission  
Barbara Cook, Cass County Planning  
Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township  
Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration  
Juan Ganum, City of Niles  
Kelly Getman-Disette, Niles Dial-a-Ride  
John Gruchot, Berrien County Community Development and Planning  
Paul Lott, MDOT Statewide Planning  
Bill Marx, City of Buchanan  
Serita Mason, City of Niles  
Jess Minks, Berrien County Road Commission  
Kim O'Haver, Buchanan Dial-a-Ride  
Cliff Poehlman, Cass County Road Commission  
Don Ryman, City of Buchanan  
Dennis Schuh, Berrien County Transit  
Brad Sharlow, MDOT Statewide Planning  
Evan Smith, Niles Dial-a-Ride  
Kelly Sweeney, Milton Township  
Kris Welch, MDOT Statewide Planning  
Robert Ziliak, Cass County Commissioner

### ***TwinCATS TAC and Policy Members Present***

Brian Berndt, Berrien County Road Commission  
Chris Cook, City of Benton Harbor  
Tim Fenderbosch, St. Joseph Charter Township  
Ron Griffin, St. Joseph Charter Township  
John Gruchot, Berrien County Community Development and Planning  
Jae Guetschow, Village of Stevensville  
William Hodge, Berrien County Community Development and Planning  
Joanne Johnson, Disability Network Southwest Michigan  
Robert Judd, City of St. Joseph  
Paul Lott, MDOT Statewide Planning  
Tim Lynch, Berrien County Road Commission

Debra Panozzo, Berrien County Commissioner  
Bill Purvis, Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority  
Lee Scherwitz, Southwest Michigan Regional Airport  
Brad Sharlow, MDOT Statewide Planning  
Dick Stauffer, Lincoln Charter Township  
Kris Welch, MDOT Statewide Planning  
Tim Zebell, City of St. Joseph

*MDOT/FHWA Staff Present*

Chris Dingman, Federal Highway Administration  
Larry Doyle, MDOT Local Agency Programs  
Mark Harbison, MDOT Local Agency Programs  
Gonzalo Puente, MDOT Local Agency Programs

*SWMPC Staff Present*

John Egelhaaf  
Suzann Flowers  
Kim Gallagher  
Gautam Mani

*Others Present*

Matthew Busler, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians  
Jim Curran, Berrien County Commissioner  
Dan Dalton, KFH Group  
James Ivey, Disability Network, Southwest Michigan  
Matthew Kodis, Kinexus  
Holly Lancaster, Riverwood Center  
Chris Lannert, New Products Corporation  
Marvina Rastall, Disability Network Southwest Michigan  
Enriqueta Turanzas, New Products Corporation

**1. Opening Remarks: 1:06 PM**

Egelhaaf commented that bringing committee members from the two MPOs together in a setting like this one had been a goal for some time, and thanked committee members for their continued participation and attendance. Egelhaaf said that this was the perfect opportunity to recognize Bob Judd of the City of St. Joseph, who is the TwinCATS Policy Chair, for his many years of service to the TwinCATS committees. Egelhaaf mentioned that Judd was retiring from his duties with TwinCATS, and that he would be greatly missed, not the least by the Commission. Egelhaaf presented him with a commemorative plaque.

**2. Call to Order**

Judd formally gaveled the meeting to order at 1:10 PM.

**3. MDOT Local Agency Programs Presentation**

Harbison introduced himself, Larry Doyle, and Gonzalo Puente of Local Agency Programs at MDOT. Harbison showed attendees the MDOT Local Agency Programs website, located at [http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9625\\_25885---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9625_25885---,00.html). Harbison discussed the variety of funding available under MAP-21, as well as economic development funding.

Key points that Harbison and Puente made:

- Advance Construct projects are those in which local funds are spent up front, and federal funds are reimbursed in a later year. Advance Construct helps to spread out costs over multiple years. Advance Construct projects must have the future TIP year identified in the MPO TIP. In addition, reimbursement in the future year does not happen automatically; local agencies have to request the reimbursement in the year that it is scheduled.
- **Do not wait till the last minute to submit your final plans!** Submitting early means that there is a greater chance that obligation authority will not have run out. **It is unusual for obligation authority to still be available in late August; usually they are gone.** In addition, the MPO cannot reprogram any money gained through bid savings when the final obligation deadline has passed.
- Having a project amount listed in the TIP only “hypothetically” sets aside federal funds; it does not guarantee them. Obligation is the point at which these funds become set aside. Obligation only takes place once final plans are submitted and a cost estimate has taken place. Obligation is not based on programmed dollars in the TIP. Letting is the point at which those funds have been released.
- You cannot obligate a project without Right-of-Way certification, Necessary Permits, and clearance from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
- Be sure you know which items are eligible for federal-aid and which are not. There are many items which are non-participating construction items, for which federal funds cannot be used.
- The MPO and RTF determine what phases of a project can be covered through the federal share.
- Within the NATS and TwinCATs areas, a cost change equal to 20% or more of the total project cost requires approval by the MPO. **The funding amount cannot be changed after a project has been awarded.**
- From start to finish, the lifecycle of a project at Local Agency Programs is 5.5 months. More details for each step in the submittal process can be found in the link to the presentation below. **Do not wait till the last minute to make your submissions.**
- Remember: STP funds “sunset” at the end of the fiscal year; when funds have sunset, project cannot proceed. Other common “show stoppers” include No Environmental Clearance, No SHPO Clearance, No ROW Clearance, No railroad permits, or a lack of permits from MDOT and the DEQ.
- **If low bid exceeds 10% of the engineering estimate, the local agency can, if it so chooses, reject all bids.** If they decide to proceed with the project, the Project Engineer must justify the bid or agree to rebid immediately with revisions. The local agency refers to the Act 51 agency that applied for the funds.

The complete powerpoint presentation can be found at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/mdot\\_lap\\_presentation\\_93013.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/mdot_lap_presentation_93013.pdf)

#### 4. Transit Consolidation Feasibility Study with Consultant from KFH Group

Egelhaaf stated that study to determine the feasibility of having the four transit agencies in Berrien County work together to provide service had been underway for three years, with SWMPC managing the process and a third party consultant preparing a possible plan. Gallagher commented that technical memoranda had been created regarding the project, in addition to informational meetings. Gallagher commended those in the room who had been very active participants. Gallagher said that process has involved bringing people together from human services, businesses, the transit agencies, and riders, and she thanked Debra Panozzo, SWMPC mobility consultant for assisting with this effort.

Gallagher introduced Dan Dalton, Planner for the KFH Group, who prepared the plan. Dalton reminded the group that the purpose of the study was both to determine ways that transit service could be more efficient for agencies, and to improve access to transit and key destinations throughout Berrien County, especially among transit-dependent populations.

Key points that Dalton made:

- Currently, the four transit systems are highly fragmented. Even with a website like MyWayThere.org, it is very difficult for customers to navigate it, particularly when there are delays or complicated itineraries. In addition, customers have to pay separate fares when transferring between multiple systems within the same county. In many cases, people do not even know that there are four transit systems.
- There is a great amount of duplication in administrative functions between the agencies, increasing costs to the agencies.
- Among the challenges to consolidations are the different organizational structures of each agency, multiple local millages, some systems that are contracted, and different benefits and wages for employees.
- However, consolidation could help increase operating efficiencies and improve the ability of riders to connect with the destinations most important to them.
- One of the best options is to have a new countywide transit authority (Schuh pointed out that such an agency would be different from Berrien Bus, and would serve a different purpose). This countywide transit authority would serve as a permanent organization to explore further consolidation opportunities.
- **The new countywide transit authority would be an independent governmental unit, and would fall well within the bounds of current Michigan law.**

- Members of the board would only come from jurisdictions that contribute local funding to the countywide authority. Others would be ex-officio. (Ryman raised the issue of whether consolidation would actually degrade service efficiency because buses would have to travel further from their garage, and whether this would mean that locals were contributing more for less service. Dalton answered that these concerns are legitimate, **but that a countywide transit authority might also provide better access and more flexibility for customers, leading to revenue increases.**)
- A natural next step would be for communities to discuss joining a possible countywide authority, and creating a process to vote on whether to join.
- Once a countywide authority is established, the next possible step, given approval of authority board members, would be to move towards a single countywide transit millage. Such a millage would help connect individuals with destinations that are important to them.

Gallagher pointed out that neither consolidation alone, nor a millage alone, would necessarily improve transit throughout the county. They would have to work in unison, and both would have to be balanced with the unique needs of individual communities.

The complete presentation can be found at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/transit\\_consolidation\\_study\\_presentation\\_93013.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/transit_consolidation_study_presentation_93013.pdf)

## 5. Break

Egelhaaf announced a 10 minute break at 3:00 PM.

## 6. MPO Business

### *TIP Amendments*

Flowers and Mani advised that there were no actual amendments to the TIP this month that required committee approval. Flowers noted that in the NATS area, there was an administrative modification to the 2013 IN-MI River Valley trail project. Matt Wiitala of MDOT had advised that there was a very slight recession of federal funds, which created a very minor impact to the funding of the project. These changes had been noted in the comments section. On the TwinCATS side, Mani noted that two 2014 projects: the Pipestone and Empire traffic signal, and the Roosevelt Road non-motorized extension, now had MDOT job numbers entered in the TIP.

Mani and Flowers announced that the committee member handbooks were ready, though there was still room to add more information. Committee members should pick them up from SWMPC staff at the meeting, and some extras are available if they are needed by individual communities. Mani and Flowers encouraged committee members to read the contents and bring the binders with them to meetings. The binders contain a wealth of information, including NFC classification maps, a list of MPO procedures, and a list of acronyms. Mani said that these binders would be useful to all committee members, whether they were brand new or had served on the MPO committees for many years.

## 7. Freight Presentation by Chris Dingman

Egelhaaf introduced Dingman, who is the Northern Border Specialist for the Federal Highway Administration, Michigan Division.

Dingman introduced himself and the organizational structure of freight management under MAP-21. The primary freight network is designated and USDOT, and the initial designation will be complete by the Fall of 2013. Critical Rural Freight Corridors (CRFCs) are designated by the states, and a request for states to identify these corridors will also be sent out in the fall of 2013.

Key points made by Dingman:

- MAP-21 allows for up to 95% federal share on the federal-aid network for freight projects. Eligibility for this funding is determined by the Secretary of Transportation. Eligibility would also hinge upon inclusion of the project in Michigan's State Freight Plan. (When asked about US-31 developments, Dingman advised committee members to look for mention of it in the freight plan, the development of which is ongoing. Scherwitz pointed out that developments in Indiana and Kentucky that will greatly aid freight movements on US-31, and Michigan will be behind the curve due to the freeway not being completed).
- A national study of truck size and weight, and impacts on transportation assets, is ongoing. There are two schools of thought when it comes to truck size and weight: In one, lighter trucks mean less degradation of the road surfaces. To the other, larger trucks carrying more freight means fewer overall trucks on the road, reducing congestion, safety, and air quality issues. The idea behind the study is to have data-driven conclusions rather than ideological, so that authorities can better determine appropriate truck size and weight limits.
- A national freight performance report will be coming by October 1, 2014. It will provide a comprehensive look at all types of freight movement and the issues they present. This document will be the data and feedback that drive development of the required National Freight Strategic plan.
- FHWA has a contract to release data collected by Nokia which tracks freight movements. The data are collected for the entire NHS system and on arterials on both sides of the border at twenty select border crossings. The data will be available to the state and MPOs at no cost on a monthly basis.
- Members of the requisite National Freight Advisory Committee have been selected. There are 47 members outside of USDOT staff.
- In Southwest Michigan, Daltile and Whirlpool are already consolidating freight transport. They consolidated based on data showing that they were not individually using their cubes in the most efficient size and weight combination possible. Consolidating freight does reduce capacity, but more drastically reduces cost. Both companies benefit.

The complete presentation can be found at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/fhwa\\_freight\\_presentation\\_93013.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/fhwa_freight_presentation_93013.pdf)

## **8. Adjournment**

Egelhaaf said that unfortunately, Pete Probst, the speaker on rail safety, was not in attendance, and therefore the meeting agenda was concluded. Egelhaaf thanked the attendees. Meeting was adjourned at 4:06 PM.

***Next MPO meetings:***

**TwinCATS- October 21, 2013 at SWMI Regional Airport, TAC 9:30 AM, Policy 10:30 AM.**

**NATS- October 22, 2013 at Niles City Council Chambers, TAC 1:30 PM, Policy 2:30 PM.**

*Minutes compiled by Suzann Flowers and Gautam Mani, Transportation Planners, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission*