

Notes from April 30, 2014 NATS AND TwinCATS Joint MPO Meeting  
1:00 PM  
Berrien RESA 711 St. Joseph Avenue Berrien Springs, MI

**Attendees**

*NATS Members Present:*

Jason Auvil, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians  
Joe Bellina, Cass County Road Commission  
Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township  
Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration (ex-officio)  
Darrell Harden, MDOT Southwest Region  
John Lanum, MDOT- Statewide Planning Section  
Paul Lott, MDOT Statewide Planning Section  
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  
Krishina Welch, MDOT- Statewide Planning Section  
Robert Ziliak, Cass County Board of Commissioners

*TwinCATS Members Present:*

Brian Berndt, Berrien County Road Commission  
Tim Fenderbosch, St. Joseph Charter Township  
John Gruchot, Berrien County Planning Department  
Richard Lewis, City of St. Joseph  
Kenton McAndrew, City of Benton Harbor  
Debra Panozzo, Berrien County Board of Commissioners  
Bill Purvis, TCATA  
Dick Stauffer, Lincoln Charter Township

*SWMPC Staff Present*

John Egelhaaf, Executive Director  
Suzann Flowers  
Gautam Mani  
Ryan Soucy

*Others Present*

Mitch Barloga, Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC)  
Steve Carlisle, Wightman and Associates  
Caitlin Day, Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG)  
Herschel Hoese, Niles Charter Township  
Bill LaDitka, Wightman and Associates  
Joe Mehl, MACOG  
Adam Mensinger, State Senator John Proos' office

**1. Call to Order**

Egelhaaf convened the meeting at 1:10 PM. Egelhaaf announced the departure of Suzann Flowers, Transportation Planner, on May 9<sup>th</sup>. Egelhaaf thanked Flowers for her tremendous service to the agency and to the MPOs. Flowers will be leaving to take up a similar position at the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study (WATS), the MPO for the Ann Arbor area beginning May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Auvil officially called the meeting to order at 1:15 PM, led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance, and also in introductions.

Flowers went over logistics from the meeting, and requested that committee members fill out the evaluation questions of MPO staff and place them in the boxes at the tables.

## **2. MPO Business**

Mani said that beginning next month, MPO staff would begin more closely tracking the dates of obligation, letting, bid, and construction dates of projects. We are in an environment where accelerated project delivery is required, and staff need to keep track of progress on projects even after they are obligated. Mani noted that in a performance measure based world, we also need to be keeping track of the post-construction results of the project, to make sure that the project achieved intended goals.

Flowers said that one particular reason to track obligation dates is that once a project is obligated, the applicant has twelve months to submit a billable construction expenditure. At nine months, a warning will come from MDOT that the project is . This is an FHWA directive.

## **3. Public Comment**

None.

## **4. Regional Prosperity Initiative Update (John Egelhaaf)**

Egelhaaf gave some background to the Regional Prosperity Initiative. Egelhaaf said that the initiative came from the Governor's office to direct funds towards bold plans for large scale new projects within regions. This would take the form of a five year plan for the region. Egelhaaf said that the tricky thing was that before regional cooperation could take place within the existing boundaries, the state redrew the map of regions that needed to cooperate on the grant application.

SWMPC took a leading role in the RPI grant process. Egelhaaf said that it was difficult to establish SWMPC as the agency to lead the application process and implementation because there was natural competitiveness between agencies to lead the grant process. Stakeholders in the three-county Southwest Michigan region feared that Kalamazoo would end up leading the process and that the plan would therefore be Kalamazoo directed. Likewise, stakeholders in Kalamazoo feared that SWMPC jurisdictions might dominate the process. A third party facilitator has been brought in to help ease these concerns.

SWMPC is still the grant recipient and is leading the process. A Regional Prosperity Committee has been created. Egelhaaf said that the committee is attempting to find broad programming areas where there is common ground across the seven counties involved. One key area has been regional broadband access. Some areas in our three counties have excellent speeds, while other areas have no broadband access at all. Another potential common area is universal access to transit across all seven counties, linking Kalamazoo, Benton Harbor-St. Joseph and Niles together. Ryman cited US-31 as a project of regional significance, and Egelhaaf said that was exactly the type of project that could come to the fore with the

RPI. There are also potential community development and housing considerations possible within such a regional plan.

For more information, please contact John Egelhaaf at [egelhaafj@swmpc.org](mailto:egelhaafj@swmpc.org) or (269)-925-1137 x1512. You can also take a look at the website here: <http://www.michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-150-66155---,00.html>

### **5. Updates from South of the Border (Indiana)**

Mani said that one of the main purposes of the joint MPO meetings was to foster partnerships between NATS and TwinCATS, but we also want to continue to form better partnerships with our counterpart organizations across state lines. What is happening in Northwest Indiana and the Indiana portion of the Michiana area affect our own planning efforts, from improvement on US-31 to extensive non-motorized trails extending into Michigan.

Mani introduced Mitch Barloga, Transportation Program Manager and Active Transportation Planner for the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC) to give an update on planning efforts in that region.

Barloga gave an overview of NIRPC's activities, and primarily highlighted their trail network and non-motorized activities.

Key points from the presentation were:

- Northwest Indiana is attempting to develop a connected, non-motorized trail network for its entire three-county region. There are already 130 miles of paved trails in Northwest Indiana, up from 13 miles in 1990. **NIRPC is working with the City of New Buffalo to try to extend the Marquette Greenway, a 50-mile trail along the Lake Michigan shoreline, into Michigan.**
- NIRPC took advantage of any planned bridge or overpass repairs as an opportunity to add in right-of-way for pedestrians and bicyclists and make these spots aesthetically pleasing through landscaping.
- NIRPC is on two nationally planned corridors of significance- the 6,600 mile American Discovery Trail and the future US Bike Route 36. This is a huge opportunity for Northwest Indiana to capture revenue and spur economic development, just as revenue is captured with transit and highway infrastructure.
- NIRPC is committed to water trails as well as land trails.
- NIRPC sets aside a certain portion of its MPO CMAQ, Transportation Alternatives (TAP) and STP funds for trails, but also takes advantage of certain private grants and competitive funding programs.

Barloga's full presentation can be found at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/nirpc\\_presentation\\_joint\\_mpo\\_43014.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/nirpc_presentation_joint_mpo_43014.pdf)

Next, Mani introduced Joe Mehl, Regional Planner with MACOG, to provide an update on MACOG's planning efforts.

Key points of Mehl's presentation:

- All contracts for US-31 freeway construction between Plymouth and South Bend has been awarded. 15 of the 20 miles of freeway are being constructed on new terrain on this stretch.
- Gumwood Road between Mishawaka City Limits and Brick Road is being widened to accommodate a new roundabout at Brick Road and a multi-use trail. Phase II of the multi-use trail and resurfacing project on Gumwood will go from Brick Road to the State Line in 2015.
- The LaSalle Trail near the state line is scheduled for construction between Cleveland Road and Auten Road in FY 2016 and 2017.
- MACOG is developing a new GIS website. It can be beta-tested at <http://maps.macog.com> . They are also working on an update of the 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan.

Mehl's complete presentation can be found at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/macog\\_presentation\\_joint\\_mpo\\_43014.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/macog_presentation_joint_mpo_43014.pdf)

## **6. Break**

A 10-minute break was convened.

## **7. Vibrant Places Presentation and Discussion**

Mani introduced Bill LaDitka and Steve Carlisle of Wightman and Associates. Mani said that as an MPO, we tend to end up addressing very immediate concerns: finding funding to replace a bus that has gone past its mileage limit or repaving a road that has deteriorated. We rarely have a chance to take a step back and consider what an ideal transit system looks like, or how transportation can actually reshape our communities into places where we want to live. Mani said that the presentation by Wightman and Associates would help the MPO consider transportation in the context of economic development, housing, public health, and most importantly, overall community happiness.

Key highlights from LaDitka and Carlisle's presentation:

- When planning, it's important not just to consider the places that we want to live in, but the world in which people seven generations from now want to live in.
- Many of our municipalities have great amenities (good schools, nice housing, attractive natural resources) but lack elements of community connectivity and human scale that can allow those places to achieve their maximum potential.
- Both Baby boomers (currently age 51-68) and Millennials (Age 10-31) are choosing to drive less. These trends predate the recession of the late 2000s and constitute a fundamental change.
- Hope isn't a planning strategy! We need to take action.

- Building places is about creating choices, not simply zoning out cars---people might prefer traditional “suburban” home in an auto-oriented neighborhood. That is a choice that they can make. We have an abundant supply of auto-oriented places, and it is time to retrofit some of them to cater to the unmet demand for walkable, human-scale places.

LaDitka and Carlisle’s presentation is available at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/wightman\\_presentation\\_43014.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/wightman_presentation_43014.pdf)

Mani and Flowers then divided the participants into groups for an activity where they discussed places that were vibrant and what made them vibrant. Some important points that were brought up during the post-activity discussion included:

***Examples of vibrant places***

- Harbor Shores
- Benton Harbor Arts District
- Edwardsburg and directly southward into Indiana
- New Buffalo (specifically, the lakefront)
- Farmers market in Niles (and other farmers markets)
- Amphitheatres
- Air shows
- Art shows

***What makes those places vibrant?***

- People
- Live entertainment
- Natural resources
- Flexible zoning to allow residences near businesses and urban food production
- Safety (and more importantly, the perception of safety)
- Availability of infrastructure (sidewalks, roads, internet connectivity)
- Access to healthcare, and clustering of various healthcare needs

***How do we make places that aren’t currently vibrant more vibrant?***

- Connected transit throughout each county, and regionwide
- “Lawnmower test”- do neighbors have a means of interacting with each other, be it at the front lawn, on the sidewalks, or at designed spaces within the community?
- Focus on public safety provisions and safe paths to cross roads and bicycle on roadways.
- Organize around existing natural resources
- Reinvigorate interurban rail (connect Michigan to South Shore Line)
- Focus on building up skillset of working age population that already lives in area.
- Integrate new technology into high school education to create a college and career-ready workforce that wants to remain or come back to the area.
- Reformed revenue methods for transportation funding
- Use of asset management and data-driven local planning

For the complete list of responses during the interactive activity, please take a look at:

[http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/breakout\\_activity\\_responses\\_1.pdf](http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/breakout_activity_responses_1.pdf)

**8. Legislative Update**

### *Federal*

Dewey said that US Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx had submitted a \$302 billion, 4-year transportation bill to Congress known as the GROW AMERICA Act. The bill would increase funding for transit by 70%, and in particular, promote the importance of bus rapid transit. However, the biggest provision in the bill would prevent the highway trust fund from becoming insolvent this August by ending tax breaks for certain businesses. The bill will continue MAP-21's progress towards performance measures.

More information on the GROW AMERICA Act from the US DOT can be found here:

<http://www.dot.gov/grow-america>

Dewey also said that the comment period for the safety performance measures rulemaking was continuing, and that further draft performance measures will be available for 30-, 60-, or 90-day comment periods in the months ahead.

### *State*

Lanum said that there had been a road funding proposal on the state level as well, introduced by House speaker Jase Bolger. The Bill would fund roads through a 6% wholesale tax rather than an increase in the current gasoline tax. Lanum said that an important point was that there was no set-aside funds for transit in this scheme, which would be potentially catastrophic to transit agencies. Purvis said that state funding from the Comprehensive Transportation Fund (CTF) currently makes up 38% of his project funding.

Flowers said that state Senator Proos had his own funding proposal for roads, and that his aide Adam Mensinger had left copies of literature regarding the proposal at the back of the meeting room.

## **9. Adjournment**

Egelhaaf thanked everyone for their attendance and attention at the meeting, and said that SWMPC continues to value the work that they do as committee members.

A motion by Auvil with support by Minks to adjourn the meeting at 4:58 PM. **Motion passed.**

Next meetings:

TwinCATS May 19- TAC at 9:00 AM, Policy at 10:30 AM

NATS May 27-TAC at 1:00 PM, Policy at 2:30 PM

Meetings will be at usual locations.

*Compiled by Suzann Flowers and Gautam Mani, Transportation Planners, 2014.*