

Minutes
Niles Buchanan Cass Area Transportation Study

PROJECT SELECTION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, December 13, 2022 – 1 PM

Niles City Hall

Attendance	Name	Representing
Subcommittee Members	Kevin Stack	Berrien County Road Department
	Joe Ray	City of Niles
	Pepper Miller	Niles Dial A Ride Transit
	Joe Bellina	Cass County Road Commission
	Heather Grace	City of Buchanan
	Richard Cooper	NATS Policy Committee Chair
Others Present	Kim Gallagher	Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
	Brandon Kovnat	Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
	Michael Swartz	City of Buchanan
	Don Ryman	City of Buchanan
	Rich Murphy	City of Buchanan
	Butch Payton	Bertrand Charter Township
	Sandra Seanor	Cass County Road Commission
	Richard Geberth	Richard & Patricia Geberth
	Patricia Geberth	Richard & Patricia Geberth
	Kathy Agostino	Richard & Patricia Geberth
	Peter Agostino	Richard & Patricia Geberth
Joe Agostino	Cass County Business owner	
Attending via Zoom	Jim Sturdevant	MDOT
	Deborah Perez	

Call to Order and Roll Call

Joe Ray Called the Meeting to Order at 1 pm. Kim Gallagher took roll call.

Changes to the Agenda

None.

Overview of the Purpose of the Meeting

Brandon Kovnat explained that there was unprogrammed funding available in the fiscal year of 2023 that needed to be programmed and obligated before the end of FY 2023 or it would be lost. The unprogrammed funding included the following amounts and programs:

- \$816,533 - Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)
- \$78,783 Carbon Reduction Program (CRP).

Kovnat further explained that the purpose of the meeting was for the subcommittee to work together to create a fiscally constrained recommendation on how to program these funds. The proposed funding recommendation would be reviewed and voted on by the NATS Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Committee at their next regularly scheduled meeting on January 24, 2023.

Public Comment

Peter Agostino introduced himself as an attorney representing his in-laws Richard and Patricia Gerbeth and stated his opposition to the Gumwood Realignment proposed by the Cass County Road Commission. He made the following points:

- The realignment will require cutting a road through the property owned by Richard & Patricia Geberth.
- The Cass County Road Commission is basing its decision on a 2014 study by the engineering firm CESO; this study is outdated.
- The 2014 study does not support the decision made by the Road Commission; the study supports a two-roundabout solution, citing 18 advantages compared to 14 for the single roundabout option.
- The cost for the one roundabout solution is significantly higher than the cost for the two roundabouts.
- Questions about the rationale for preferring one roundabout over two, as the safety concerns related to the jog in the road are not adequately addressed.
- Discrepancies are mentioned in the 2014 study regarding property measurements and undervaluation of land cost.
- The proposed plan will recreate existing problems caused by the angled roadway south of Redfield.

Agostino concluded by asking the Committee not to fund the Gumwood realignment and to consider a practical, cost-effective, and safer solution that minimizes property taking.

Richard Gerbeth introduced himself as the owner of the property on the northeast side of the Gumwood and Redfield Road intersections. He explained that he had spent the last several decades restoring the ecosystem on the 50-acre property, which the proposed realignment of the road would destroy. Gerbeth further explained that his wife has a hypersensitivity to pollution, which is why he located his house away from the existing roadway. The realignment of Gumwood Road would bring the road close to his home and thus cause his wife health issues. Gerbeth concluded with his support for the two-roundabout design option outlined in the 2014 study.

Joe Agostino introduced himself as a business owner and former employee of the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT). He stated that he believed the two-roundabout solution would slow traffic thus increasing safety compared to the higher speeds from a single roundabout. He concluded his remarks by stating that if the committee awards the funding to this project they are also approving the design and the destruction of the Gerbeth property.

Presentation of Projects That Could Utilize FY 2023 Unprogrammed Funding

Each agency was asked to briefly describe their proposed project.

Joe Bellina presented the Gumwood Realignment project with the following details:

- The roundabout itself is funded separately by the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), and the final plans for the roundabout have already been submitted.
- The request is for the NATS Policy Committee to award the NATS STBG funds to rebuild Gumwood Rd. North of Redfield at an angle that will create a single four-way roundabout intersection. The final plans for this realignment should be submitted by July 2023 and construction will occur in 2024.
- The 2014 study states that a single roundabout is the selected option, and the decision to realign Gumwood with a single roundabout was made by the Cass County Road Commission in 2014

Heather Grace, provided an update and request for additional funding on the programmed City of Buchanan's Front Street Reconstruction & Signal Replacement Project with the following details:

- The signal project was originally programmed using CMAQ funds, but a swap was proposed to use STBG and CRP funds instead. The city agreed to the removal of CMAQ funds in good faith, with an assumption that NATS would approve the STBG & CRP funding
- The costs for the signal and reconstruction have increased due to inflation.
- Proposed to fully fund the Bertrand project and award the remaining CRP & STBG funds to Buchanan.

Several members of the subcommittee raised questions about why the estimate for the Buchanan Front Street reconstruction increased from \$560,000 to \$1.6 million. Michael Schwartz, the Engineer for the project, responded that the current estimate included sidewalks, pavers, and curb forms, not part of the original plan.

Kevin Stack provided an update and request for additional funding for the programmed Bertrand Resurfacing project with the following details:

- Adding shoulder widening from 3ft to 5ft. to the project that will eventually connect the Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail and to the Gumwood Path, providing a non-motorized connection into the Granger area.
- The estimated cost increase is \$42,000 from what is currently programmed.

Discussion of Options for Programing the Remaining NATS Federal FY 2023 Funds

Stack opened the discussion by reminding subcommittee members about how NATS prioritized the use of additional funds

- The first priority is to add funds to projects programmed for the current fiscal year.
- The second priority is to move a project programmed in the NATS Transportation Improvement Program from a future year forward.
- The third priority is to program a project from the approved NATS illustrative list.
- It is only when all of the options are exhausted that a new call for projects is issued.
- Funding any project utilizing 2023 funding that has not begun design at this point in the calendar year can be risky due to the lengthy approval process for NEPA and SHPO.

Stack also added that the Subcommittee was meeting to make recommendations to the NATS Technical and Policy for the allocation of the FY 2023 unprogrammed funding and had no authority to force an agency to change the design of their project.

There was a question on whether funding the Gumwood Realignment is considered adding additional federal funds to the already approved roundabout, or whether it is considered a new project. Bellina stated that MDOT had told him that the Gumwood Realignment would be part of the Roundabout funded with HSIP, using the the same job number.

Stack presented four funding options utilizing the unprogrammed FY 2023 funding for consideration by the subcommittee. (Unprogrammed balances: \$816,533/STBG and \$78,783/CRP)

Option 1

Project	STBG to Add	CRP to Add
Gumwood Road Roundabout	\$0	
Front Street Reconstruction	\$388,519	
Front Street Signal	\$246,703	\$78,873
Bertrand Road Resurfacing	\$181,331	

Option 2

Project	STBG to Add	CRP to Add
Gumwood Road Roundabout	\$420,176	
Front Street Reconstruction	\$215,046	
Front Street Signal	\$0	\$78,873
Bertrand Road Resurfacing	\$181,331	

Option 3

Project	STBG to Add	CRP to Add
Gumwood Road Roundabout	\$271,065	
Front Street Reconstruction	\$158,971	
Front Street Signal	\$248,527	\$78,873
Bertrand Road Resurfacing	\$137,990	

Option 4

Project	STBG to Add	CRP to Add
Gumwood Road Roundabout	\$284,013	
Front Street Reconstruction	\$284,013	
Front Street Signal	\$246,703	\$78,873
Bertrand Road Resurfacing	\$0	

The Subcommittee did not reach an agreement on any of the presented options and a decision was made to continue the discussion at a later date.

Adjournment

Joe Ray made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:05 PM, and to reconvene a meeting of the subcommittee on January 11, 2023, at 9 AM, at the Niles City Hall.

Minutes Compiled by Brandon Kovnat, SWMPC Transportation Planner