

# NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Policy Committee

## MINUTES

January 27, 2015

2:00 P.M.

Niles City Council Chambers

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Policy Members Present: | Dawn Bolock, Ontwa Township<br>Darrell Harden, MDOT, Southwest Region<br>John Klimek, Berrien County Board of Commissioners<br>Leroy Krempec, Cass County Road Commission<br>Paul Lott, MDOT Statewide Planning<br>Serita Mason, City of Niles<br>Jess Minks, Berrien County Road Commission<br>Kim O’Haver, Buchanan Dial A Ride<br>Jan Personette, Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce<br>Don Ryman, City of Buchanan<br>Evan Smith, City of Niles Dial-A-Ride<br>Kris Welch, MDOT State   |
| Policy Members Absent:  | Jason Auvil, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians<br>Pat Bellaire, Village of Edwardsburg<br>Georgia Boggs, City of Niles<br>Craig Bradfield, Howard Township<br>Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township<br>Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration (ex-officio)<br>John Egelhaaf, SWMPC (ex-officio)<br>Representative, Howard Township<br>John Gruchot, Berrien County Community Development<br>Erin Jolivette, MDOT – Coloma TSC<br>Jason Latham, MDOT-SW Region<br>Bill Marx, City of Buchanan<br>Jane Mitchell, Buchanan Township<br>Stewart McKenzie, FTA (ex-officio)<br>Brad Sharlow, MDOT Planning (ex-officio)<br>Joe Sobieralski, Southwest Michigan Economic Growth Alliance<br>Bob Sutton, Mason Township Planning Commission<br>Representative, MACOG (ex-officio) |
| SWMPC Staff Present:    | Gautam Mani<br>Kim Gallagher   |
| Others Present          | Theresa Harrison, Milton Township  |

### 1. Call to Order & Introductions

Meeting was called to order by Mason at 2:29 p.m and she led the group in the pledge of allegiance.

Lott announced that Kris Welch would be taking over as the voting representative for MDOT Statewide Planning for the NATS MPO. Since Kris had already been working with our MPO for some time, it would help the transition. Lott

said that he enjoyed working in this area, but that he would now be able to focus on his other MPOs and several committees that he sits on.

## **2. Minutes**

A motion by O'Haver with support by Minks to approve the Policy Committee Meeting minutes from December 16, 2014. **Motion passed.**

## **3. Public Comment**

None.

## **4. Staff Report**

### **▪ Obligation Thermometer**

Mani let committee members know about a new tool that MDOT Local Agency Programs had put together to help MPOs and local agencies keep track of how much obligation authority the state of Michigan had left over at any given time. This way, communities could know the likelihood of projects in the pipeline getting obligated before it runs out, and could make plans accordingly. Mani said that any FY 2015 projects ought to have applications in to Local Agency Programs by now, but that there is still a fair amount of obligation authority left at this point. Mani said that the obligation thermometer would be updated monthly and transmitted to SWMPC. In addition, the obligation thermometer is always available at [http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9625\\_25885-339193--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,4616,7-151-9625_25885-339193--,00.html)

### **▪ Regional Safety Plan**

Gallagher said that MDOT had selected Southwest Michigan as one of two pilot regions to undertake regional safety plans. MDOT was hiring consultants to assist with developing safety plans, primarily for rural areas. The plans would pertain to all aspects of safety, including vehicular collisions, obstacles, and non-motorized planning. Gallagher said that SWMPC did not have a timeline as yet from MDOT, but that they would be assisting MDOT with public outreach and setting up meetings.

### **▪ MI Travel Counts Survey**

Mani passed around a letter that MDOT had just transmitted to SWMPC that was designed to assist communities with public outreach regarding the MI Travel Counts Survey. The MI Travel Counts survey attempts to construct travel patterns by sampling a portion of Michigan residents on their travel habits. Letters will be sent to over 700,000 households in Michigan. Of those, a sample of those households that respond will be asked to fill out a travel diary, detailing all of their travel activity for one day between April and June. In addition, some households will be asked to carry a GPS. Communities should make sure that if they get questions from residents, the survey is not a scam, and there is a financial incentive for participating. In addition, identifying information will be stripped when GPS data is sent to the state, so MDOT hopes that will alleviate concerns about privacy.

Mani said that the project is currently in the first phase, with pilot travel days being conducted. It is important that residents who get the survey do participate. Mani said that while we have covered the shortcomings of the Travel Counts survey in developing our travel demand model, these are the data that help feed the model. They are the best data we have available, and we do not know when MDOT will have \$3 million required to do the survey again. It is possible that the data gathered here will feed our next two Long Range Plan cycles, and we want accuracy.

### **▪ Traffic Count Requests**

Mani said that it was not too early for MPO members to get their traffic counts requests in for the 2015 season. SWMPC was already receiving requests for counts, and this was a good time for MPO members to talk with their local boards about where they would like to see counts done.

Count requests can be made at: <http://www.swmpc.org/trafficcountform.asp>.

Bellina recommended that traffic count requests that were needed for NFC reclassifications ought to get priority, as FHWA requires the latest traffic counts to reclassify a road.

- **Upcoming PASER trainings**

Mani said that each year, trainings on the PASER rating system for roads take place around the state. Anyone who wants to rate roads on the federal aid system must be trained each year, and SWMPC always sends its PASER raters for training. Mani said that any communities that wanted to have that expertise in house to rate their own roads could sign up for \$10. The closest trainings to our area are in Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, on March 24 and 25 respectively.

- **Walk and Roll- Next Steps**

Mani said that SWMPC staff were continuing to follow up with results of the NATS Walk and Roll survey, and that we were trying to determine how that survey would inform the next project selection, coming up in calendar year 2016. NATS has not had a non-motorized subcommittee in the past, but Mani suggested the possibility of one. Mani said he was open to committee member ideas on how to move that work forward.

- **Local Resolutions of Support for FY 2016**

Mani said that the TAC committees had decided to leave the local resolutions of support due date in the same place that it has been: October 1 of the fiscal year in which the project is scheduled to proceed. Mani said that since the Road Commissions tended to have the bulk of the projects and that the timing coincided better with the Road Commission's budgeting schedule, an October 1 due date made sense to most committee members.

## 5. Public Transit Updates

- **Transit Consolidation Study Updates**

Gallagher said that consolidation was still an ongoing process and that presentations to various boards and councils were continuing.

- **Countywide Service Plan Updates**

Gallagher said that years ago, one transit agency had attempted to develop a fixed-route service plan. An RFP had been issued, but the bids had come back far too high. Gallagher said that now there was some support for a countywide public service plan to complement the consolidation effort. Several communities are willing to provide local match. Gallagher noted that even if there was a delay in consolidation, transit agencies like Buchanan Dial-A-Ride could still benefit from the service plan.

- **CMAQ Funding for Gasoline Buses**

Mani said that several transit agencies were facing issues when it came to applying for CMAQ funds for gasoline buses. The form that MDOT has for replacement buses does not use the correct emissions calculations for replacing a gasoline vehicle with another gasoline vehicle. MDOT is working with SEMCOG on a form that is sufficient. In the meantime, transit agencies were asked to find alternate ways of proving an emissions benefit; gasoline buses are definitely eligible. Transit agencies were struggling to get this information since a lot of emissions data will not be shared by bus manufacturers. Mani said that SWMPC was in conversation with MDOT about how to resolve this issue.

Lott said that MDOT had developed a form in conjunction with SEMCOG that would potentially work and would send it to SWMPC on Wednesday.

▪ **Agency Updates**

O'Haver said that Buchanan Dial-A-Ride had a good year in 2014, with ridership being up and overall efficiency of the system being up as well.

Smith shared that Niles Dial-A-Ride was scheduled to obtain its replacement computers soon now that the City Council had approved the local match funding. They were still waiting on their 2014 delivery of a replacement bus due to an axle shortage.

Smith also shared that the City of Niles had done a pass-through of \$5,000 in CDBG funds to the Ferry Street Community Resource Center to help fund bus passes and tokens for low-income residents that the Center assists.

This program will be highly supportive of individuals needing to get to and from work, school, and/or appointments. Eligibility will be limited to those individuals with an income at or below 50% of the area median income for the Niles-Benton Harbor, MI MSA without alternative means of transportation. It is undetermined what documentation (other than income eligibility documentation) will be required in order to participate in the program.

**6. Land Use Updates**

Gallagher shared that Berrien County was close to completing a draft of its master plan revision. Klimek also shared that the Parks and Recreation Plan was available for public comment.

**7. Project Updates**

| Fiscal Year | Job Number | Agency         | Project Name                       | Update Information   | Date of last update | Bid Savings | Obligation Month | Bills Submitted |
|-------------|------------|----------------|------------------------------------|--|---------------------|-------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2013        | 118207     | Berrien County | IN-MI River Valley Trail           | Article in paper about progress on trail being made near Mishawaka | January 2015        |             |                  |                 |
| 2014        | 104152     | MDOT           | M-139 CON phase Bridge replacement | Ongoing  | January 2015        |             |                  |                 |
|             |            | Niles DAR      | Maintenance software               |  |                     |             |                  |                 |
|             |            | Niles DAR      | Preventative maintenance           |  |                     |             |                  |                 |
|             |            | Niles DAR      | Replacement computers              | Purchase has been approved by City Council                         | January 2015        |             |                  |                 |
|             |            | Niles DAR      | Replacement bus                    | Awaiting end of axle shortage                                      | January 2015        |             |                  |                 |
|             |            | Niles DAR      | Operating assistance               |  |                     |             |                  |                 |

|      |  |                      |  |  |              |  |  |  |
|------|--|----------------------|--|--|--------------|--|--|--|
|      |  | Cass County RC       | Gumwood Road TAP project (Phase I)               | In letting phase   | January 2015 |  |  |  |
| 2015 |  | Berrien County RC    | Range Line Road, Lake St and Main St Resurfacing | Obligation Requested on January 15   | January 2015 |  |  |  |
|      |  | Berrien County RC    | Madron Lake, North Main, and Red Bud Trail       | TIP Amendment forthcoming  | January 2015 |  |  |  |
|      |  | City of Niles        | Broadway Avenue Resurfacing                      | Waiting on award- 11% overbid. Will have major traffic control with detouring onto M-51. | January 2015 |  |  |  |
|      |  | Cass County          | Adamsville Road Reconstruct                      | Still in design  | January 2015 |  |  |  |
|      |  | Buchanan Dial-a-Ride | Replacement Bus                                  | Contract probably not coming until next September  | October 2014 |  |  |  |
|      |  | Niles Dial-A-Ride    | Replacement Tires                                |  |              |  |  |  |

## 8. Old Business

### ▪ TIP Amendments

Mani said that there was effectively one TIP amendment this month. The Berrien County Road Commission was scrapping its sealcoat project this year on Madron Lake, North Main, and Red Bud Trail and instead just resurface North Main Street from Reed to Miller, a total of 0.8 miles. This would bring the total cost of the project from 94,000 to approximately 188,000. In order to program the project for FY 2015, the Road Commission proposes doing an Advance Construct, and providing the additional funds out of the local share in FY 2015. Then in 2016, the Road Commission is reimbursed with \$76,900 in federal funds for which they were already scheduled. In order to accommodate the reimbursement, Berrien County is moving its 2016 project on Galien-Buchanan Road, Fourth Street, Terra Coupe, and Bakertown Road out of the TIP and onto the illustrative list.

The project is not impacting fiscal constraint for NATS, and only Berrien County Road Commission projects are being affected.

A motion by Harden with support by Personette to approve the January TIP Amendments, pending the end of the public comment period. **Motion passed.**

### ▪ State Transportation Legislation

Mani shared some materials from the House Fiscal Agency (as reported by MLive) with members of the MPO regarding the transportation funding bills that were passed by the Michigan State legislature in December.

A ballot proposal that will be up for a citizen's vote in May would increase the sales and use tax from the current 6 cents to 7 cents, while eliminating the sales tax on motor fuels. Higher education (with the

exemption of community colleges) would be exempt from the school aid fund.

The application of a wholesale tax on gasoline would generate \$1.2 billion in revenue, but that assumes a higher gasoline price than current levels. In addition, transit continues to get a portion of state revenue, which is different from proposals that NATS had seen back in December.

Harden made it clear that if the NATS committees chose to take an official position on the ballot measure, that he would abstain because he did not think it was right for state employees to attempt to influence the public's vote on a matter that would increase state funding.

Personette asked about the ad valorem tax. Harden explained that an ad valorem tax is a tax tied to the value of a specific good; for example, a property tax is usually an ad valorem tax.

Minks said that something needed to be done to improve road funding, but that this set of bills was going to be a very hard sell to the voters. Lott said that the Governor's office was obtaining bids from public relations firms for the education process prior to this vote.

Smith said it was unfortunate that the legislature had placed the burden back on the voters, without a "plan B" if voters choose to reject this plan. This is a shift from their responsibility as legislators to come up with a solution, and they seem to be concerned with the politics of raising taxes.

Minks asked whether there was a projection of what system conditions would be like if there is no new revenue for transportation in the next few years. Harden and Lott confirmed that it would be catastrophic, as conditions on the system were already highly deficient. Harden noted that roadway maintenance costs were only going to increase over time, and since the state was already tapping into the general fund to help match federal aid, a lack of new revenue would only cause the system to deteriorate further within two years.

Minks said that the County Road Association of Michigan had come up with a projection of system conditions if the ballot initiative does not pass.

Harrison commented that discussions about the transportation funding proposal might be easier if we had easier-to-understand graphics available. Gallagher discussed the fuel pump graphic from MDOT from a few years ago that illustrated current funding levels, where revenue came from, and how it was distributed among schools, transit, and roads. Mani commented that it would be good to have some sort of graphic like that again. Harrison said that graphics are good because most people do not have time to read through the House Fiscal Agency.

- **National Functional Classification Review Ongoing**

Mani said that MDOT had held a review meeting regarding National Functional Classification Review meeting in the TwinCATS area in December. Any changes to the NFC system are due by September. Mani said that any proposals to upgrade roads to other principal arterials (OPAs) were due by April.

## **9. New Business**

Ryman shared that Kim Gallagher had presented to the Clark Retirees Luncheon regarding the need for improved transit in Berrien County. Ryman said it was a very effective educational session.

## **10. Privilege of the Floor**

Mason shared that Niles had an excellent ice festival, which was very well attended.

O'Haver thanked Paul Lott for his services to the MPO, and especially for including public transit in the discussion and

making sure the questions of transit agencies got answered. The group applauded Paul's effort.

**11. Adjournment at 3:37 p.m.**

- The next meeting will be February 24 at 2:30 PM.

*Minutes compiled by: Gautam Mani and Kim Gallagher, Associate Planners, 2015.*

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