

NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Policy Committee

MINUTES

July 28, 2015

2:30 P.M.

Niles City Council Chambers

Policy Members Present:	Georgia Boggs, City of Niles Dawn Bolock, Ontwa Township Craig Bradfield, Howard Township Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration (ex-officio) Darrell Harden, MDOT, Southwest Region John Klimek, Berrien County Board of Commissioners LeRoy Krempec, Cass County Road Commission Rick Low, Village of Edwardsburg Serita Mason, City of Niles Jess Minks, Berrien County Road Commission Kim O’Haver, Buchanan Dial A Ride Jan Personette, Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce Don Ryman, City of Buchanan Bob Ziliak, Cass County Commissioner
Policy Members Absent:	Jason Auvil, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township John Egelhaaf, SWMPC (ex-officio) Erin Jolivette, MDOT – Coloma TSC Jason Latham, MDOT-SW Region Steve LeClaire, Bertrand Township Representative, Buchanan Township Stewart McKenzie, FTA (ex-officio) Brad Sharlow, MDOT Planning (ex-officio) Representative, City of Niles Dial-A-Ride Joe Sobieralski, Southwest Michigan Economic Growth Alliance Bob Sutton, Mason Township
SWMPC Staff Present:	Gautam Mani Kim Gallagher Patrice Rose
Others Present:	Clay McCausland, District Representative for Congressman Fred Upton Matt Galbraith, MDOT State John Lanum, MDOT State

1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting was called to order by Mason at 2:30 p.m. and Ryman led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Minutes

A motion by Bolock with support by Krempec to approve the Policy Committee Meeting minutes from May 26, 2015. **Motion passed.**

3. Public Comment

None

4. Staff Report

- **Federal Transportation Update from Clay McCausland, District Representative for Congressman Fred Upton**

McCausland discussed the continuing battle over federal transportation reauthorization, and how the question in Congress is over how to find revenue. McCausland stated that Congressman Upton is in favor of a long-term solution that provides stable transportation funding. The House had voted for a 5-month extension of MAP-21, in order to really debate a long-term bill between now and December. The Senate was debating a six year transportation bill, with three years of funding attached. McCausland said that he did not foresee the House and Senate agreeing on a long term bill by the end of the week, as the House would be on recess beginning Thursday. The House has proposed a 3-month extension so that the Senate's long-term bill can be discussed well before the holiday season. It remains to be seen whether the Senate passes an extension through October 2015. [Post-script note: the House and Senate did pass a three-month extension of MAP-21.]

Ryman pointed out that the transportation bill seems to be getting tangled up with other issues. McCausland agreed, and said that the upcoming presidential election is also shaping the transportation debate.

Lanum asked if it is likely that there will be a funding extension. McCausland said yes. Dewey asked if the House was working on its own long-term bill, and McCausland said that yes, there had been discussions.

- **National Functional Classification Revision Requests- Voting in August**

Mani reported that National Functional Classification change requests were due to MDOT in September. Within the NATS area, Mani said he anticipated two requests to upgrade from the local system to the federal-aid system. These requests were for Section St in Edwardsburg and Carberry Road in Howard Township. Mani said that traffic counts were concluded and he would be working with the communities in question to fill out the necessary paperwork and mapping. The MPO would be voting on changes within its boundaries in August.

- **MTPA Conference Updates**

Mani reported that he and Gallagher had attended the annual Michigan Transportation Planning Association conference two weeks earlier in Ann Arbor. A big theme of this year's conference was recognizing all of the impacts that a transportation project can have on land uses, the environment, economic development, and health along a particular corridor. To that effect, there was a presentation on new tools that FHWA had introduced to look more holistically at community-wide impacts.

The first tool is called INVEST, and it is often called "LEED for roads." It looks at the durability and sourcing of roadway building materials and the sustainability of highway projects from the standpoint of environmental impacts. FHWA's INVEST tool can be found at:

<https://www.sustainablehighways.org/>

In addition, FHWA has rolled out a tool known as Placefit to help individuals see how the community they are interested in performed on factors that are important to them. This tool can help with community visioning and goal setting, even for specific transportation projects. The Placefit tool is available at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/tools/placefit/>

Gallagher said that there was also a lot of great information shared on transit service planning in the Ann Arbor region. While Ann Arbor is quite different from any community in SW Michigan, areas of Washtenaw County such as Saline and Dexter are quite rural in nature and have similar service needs. Gallagher said that Michael Benham from the Ann Arbor Area Transit Authority was willing to come to Southwest Michigan to discuss fixed-route planning, so that would be a big help as SWMPC writes the request for proposals for the Countywide Fixed Route Service Plan.

▪ **Local Road Safety Plan Update**

Mani said that the consultants assisting MDOT and SWMPC with this project had just released a memo outlining countermeasures to safety issues in the three counties of Southwest Michigan. SWMPC staff had not had enough time to analyze the memo as yet.

▪ **Road and Transit Funding on a State Level**

Mani reported that two separate bills to increase funding for transportation had passed the Michigan House and Senate. Mani said that SWMPC's counterparts in the Detroit region had produced an excellent analysis of the bills, and the analysis can be found in the TwinCATS meeting packet at: http://www.swmpc.org/downloads/july_2015_meeting_packet.pdf .

Mani presented briefly on the key provisions of the bills:

- Senate plan would raise the state gasoline tax by 15 cents by 2017, and after that the tax would be indexed to inflation. Diesel fuel would ultimately be taxed at the same rate at the pump as motor fuel. There would be registration fee increases on electric/hybrid vehicles that would help raise additional revenue.
- The House plan would index the gasoline tax to inflation to raise revenue, but would not actually raise the level of the tax.
- Both plans rely on diverting growth in revenues in the general fund from other sources to transportation, primarily from the income tax. There is talk in both chambers of eliminating the state portion of the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- The Senate plan would increase revenues for transit and rail, which have been at the same level in real terms since 1987. The House plan would leave transit and rail funding stagnant, as all new revenues would go towards roads and bridges.

Neither plan would constitutionally protect general fund revenue that goes towards transportation. The legislature could move the funds if budget priorities change, as they have done in the past.

Mani said that one of the more controversial provisions in the Senate plan is the so-called "50-Year Roads Lock Box." 7 cents out of the 15 cent per gallon gas tax increase would go directly to the Treasury beginning in 2017. Funds could not be released for projects until certain conditions are met:

- MDOT must come up with a plan such that the costs of building and maintaining a road are reduced by 50% and also build roads to the 50-year standard, often known as the European standard.

- MDOT must come up with a plan such that no road under MDOT control is in poor condition in 10 years and no road under local control has its PASER rating deteriorate further.

Mani said that roads are currently built for a 20-year design life. According to our MDOT Region engineer, Kim Avery, there was a pilot project with building some roads on the eastern side of the state to a 50-year service life. Building to a 50-year standard cost 2-3 times as much, yet did not yield significant observed improvement in service life. The provision to reduce costs at the same time would mean that under a 50-year standard, very few miles of roadway in the state would be reconstructed or repaired.

Secondly, Mani reminded committee members of just how many roads in the state were in poor condition. A standard of no further deterioration while reducing costs would be a very tall order for MDOT and local agencies to achieve.

Finally, funds that are diverted to the Treasury could not be released until the legislature passes a resolution with an approved project list. Mani said that this sets a precedent for project selection by the legislature that circumvents the planning work that MPO members all do. This sort of selection happened during the RRR and PRIP projects in 2014.

Minks asked if SWMPC had a sense for whether the legislature was serious about moving forward with a consensus bill that includes the lockbox. Mani said he had not talked to legislators since the bills had passed, so he could not answer the question. Klimek expressed concern at the legislature making decisions that would increase the cost of delivering needed road projects.

- **Project Selection Criteria Working Group**

Mani said that project selection was coming up for the 2017-2020 TIP, and SWMPC staff needed an MPO subcommittee to review project prioritization procedures of other MPOs, as compiled by SWMPC, to see if these procedures could be adapted to the NATS setting. There were several volunteers from TAC, including: Darrell Harden, Kim O'Haver, Brian Berndt, and Kelly Getman-Dissette. Mason said she might volunteer and is not sure. Gallagher said that SWMPC would try to limit the commitment of this group to two in-person meetings.

- **Walk and Roll Working Group**

Mani is also seeking volunteers to be on a Walk and Roll Advisory Committee to help staff develop and implement a Walk and Roll plan based on data gathered in the survey last year. Serita Mason is interested in serving. Bolock also advised that SWMPC contact Don Delong, who is a trails advocate in Ontwa Township.

5. Public Transit Updates

- **SWMPC Transit Updates**

Gallagher spoke about SWMPC's participation in the statewide effort to reform the 211 service, specifically for veterans. Gallagher said that SWMPC had provided information on where the transit service gaps exist, and that the KFH group had been contracted by MDOT to identify strategies for improving the 211 service based on those gaps.

- **Agency Updates**

There was no report from Niles Dial-A-Ride. Committee members welcomed Kelly Getman-Dissette back to the MPO and the City of Niles.

O'Haver reported that the City of Buchanan had launched an app. Buchanan Dial A Ride is featured and the app can call dispatch directly. O'Haver said that Buchanan is one of three cities in the state of Michigan with this sort of app.

6. Land Use Updates

Gallagher reported that under a new Niles Township ordinance, the IN-MI River Valley Trail would be closed from sunset to sunrise and limited to use by pedestrians and non-motorized transportation. Pets must be kept on a leash and their waste must be picked up. Fines range from a minimum of \$75 to a maximum of \$500.

Gallagher reported on STRAVA labs heat map, which allows you to view activity on trails and bicycle paths based on people's reports into the fitness app. This is useful for tracking walking and bicycling activity in our area.

Darrell Harden reported there will be an open house to discuss the US-12 roundabout project at Five Points Road. It is an MPO project and planned for 2016 construction.

7. Project Updates

- **Obligation Thermometer-**

Mani reported that there is no obligation authority and that the 2 month extension is due to expire on August 31, 2015.

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	TAP application is in for next phase. No issues with ALCOA property; route will run along 3rd Sreet	May 2015			
2014	104152	MDOT	M-139 CON phase Bridge replacement	According to MDOT, construction is still on schedule for a November completion.	May 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)	Obligated; working to acquire ROW	May 2015			
2015		Berrien County RC	Range Line Road, Lake St and Main St Resurfacing	Completed.	July 2015			
		Berrien County RC	North Main St	Construction begins September 10th.	July 2015			
		City of Niles	Broadway Avenue Resurfacing	Completed: no parking signs posted	July 2015			
		Cass County	Adamsville Road Reconstruct	Will be completed September 11th	July 2015			
		Cass County	Gumwood Road Phase II	Close to being awarded	May 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

None

9. New Business

- **TIP Amendments**
- MDOT proposes moving the ROW phase of JN 127449 (a resurfacing project on US-12) from 2015 to 2016. Construction is still scheduled to take place in 2017.
- MDOT proposes adding PE phase (2015), ROW (2016) and CON (2017) phases of JN 127563, a cold mill project on M-139 from the turn on Front St to Marmont St in Niles.

A motion by Mason with support by Ziliak to approve the July TIP Amendments. **Motion passed.**

- **FHWA Updates**

Dewey reported that FHWA's financial management system, FEMUS, would be down for upgrades from October 1 through October 26. No billings will be processed during that time, and FHWA is working with MDOT to minimize interruptions to MPO and project billings. Dewey also said that

performance measures rulemakings are starting to be finalized, and to expect final rules on metropolitan and non-metropolitan planning in September.

▪ **MDOT Updates**

Matt Galbraith officially introduced himself as the new MDOT Statewide Planning representative to NATS, replacing Kris Welch who has moved on to work with other MPOs in Michigan.

11. Public Comment

None

10. Privilege of the Floor

None

12. Adjournment at 3:33 p.m.

- The next meeting will be August 25 at 2:30 PM.

Minutes compiled by: Gautam Mani, Associate Planner and Patrice Rose, Administrative Assistant.

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