

NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Policy Committee

MINUTES

September 22, 2015

2:30 P.M.

Niles City Council Chambers

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

1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting was called to order by Cooper at 2:35 p.m. and Sutton led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Minutes

Ryman submitted several typographical corrections to the August meeting minutes, which were noted by SWMPC staff and corrected.

A motion by Mason with support by Ziliak to approve the Policy Committee Meeting minutes from August 28, 2015, as amended. **Motion passed.**

3. Public Comment

None.

4. Staff Report

- **Policy Bylaw Review**

Mani said that it was time to conduct a review of Policy Committee bylaws, as TAC had revised its bylaws in 2014. Policy had not revised its bylaws since the addition of Mason Township, and that currently the Policy committee had no weather cancellation contingencies, technically. Mani said that given how much work there is in the months ahead, they would not be using the subcommittee structure for this round of review. Rather, staff would propose revisions and bring them in front of the policy committee for approval.

- **TAMC-IRT Reporting Tool for Act 51 Agencies**

Gallagher and Mani shared that they had taken part in a training on how to use the Investment Reporting Tool from the Transportation Asset Management Council. This tool is used to report how communities are using their Act 51 funds. Mani said that there were Youtube videos available on how to use the tool, as well as a Powerpoint presentation that is now available at: <http://tamc.mcgi.state.mi.us/MITRP/document.aspx?id=1277>. Mani said that the reason the state was focused on training Act 51 agencies on reporting is that most agencies are not reporting right now. Beginning October 1, the state will start pulling funding from agencies that do not report.

Gallagher focused on showcasing some of the tools that are available through the TAMC data dashboards. You can look at the pavement and bridge conditions data in your city, village or county, in addition to expenditures on regular maintenance and winter maintenance. These dashboards are available on the TAMC website.

- **Local Road Safety Plan Update**

There was no update on the Local Road Safety Plan.

- **Safety Funds**

Mani said that several committee members had approached SWMPC staff about the lack of projects in our area that are funded using federal safety funds. These projects are selected through the statewide competitive process, and during at least the last two TIP cycles, NATS has had no locally-generated safety projects. Despite the fact that we have safety issues in our area, there have not been very many applications for safety funds. Mani said that staff were compiling a map of K (Fatal) or A (Incapacitating) Injuries throughout the NATS area over the past three years, as this will be important in making applications competitive.

Gallagher said that NATS can potentially group desired safety projects together to warrant better consideration at the state level.

Mani said that based on past years' history, MDOT usually has a deadline of August for safety projects for two fiscal years in the future. In other words, projects seeking FY 2018 funding will need to submit applications by August of 2016. This gives NATS member communities almost eleven months to submit applications. Federal safety funds can be used on any road. It does not have to be federal-aid eligible.

Mani also said that the Village of Edwardsburg had taken advantage of the Local Safety Initiative, a free program provided by MDOT where they will send an engineer to your community and look at

your intersections and road segments to determine low-cost solutions to make them safer.

Sutton asked how a community would go about applying for the program. Gallagher said that the local agency needs to request the Local Safety Initiative from MDOT, and it needs to be initiated at that level, not at the MPO. Gallagher said SWMPC staff would write a form letter that all MPO member communities could use, so that MDOT could be efficient with its resources when sending engineers down to our area and we could have multiple communities have this process done at the same time.

- **Project Selection Criteria**

Mani said that the project selection criteria working group had met prior to this month's meeting. There were a great number of concerns expressed about a scoring system that did not take into account the state and local agency priority of preservation of the system. Mani said that SWMPC staff would be refining the criteria based on the feedback they had received.

5. Public Transit Updates

- **SWMPC Transit Updates**

Gallagher said that she would be sending the RFP to MDOT within about a week for the Countywide Fixed Route Service plan.

- **Agency Updates**

Gallagher said that Kelly Getman-Dissette had attended a regional transit planning workshop hosted by the KFH group. The region in this case covers the seven counties of the new MDOT Southwest Region. This is part of a regional mobility study that primarily was focused on facilitating county-to-county trips. Getman-Dissette said it was difficult often times for people to understand that by law, transit agencies cannot cross county lines. They have to rely on interlocal agreements. There is a general lack of understanding of how transit works among members of the public and other stakeholders.

Gallagher said that the issues become particularly important when people who live in Cass County or Branch County need to access dialysis across county lines. Gallagher said that in Cass County, Amtrak is an option. In addition, the state is required to spend 2% of its funding on private intercity buses such as Greyhound. So, the state is looking at those options to facilitate medical trips.

Mason brought up an issue under consideration by the City of Niles. The City of Niles is considering making it an official policy that Niles Dial-A-Ride is closed when the City of Niles is closed due to inclement winter weather. Gallagher pointed out that Berrien County Transit, Cass County Transit, and Buchanan Dial-A-Ride all had that policy in place, and that it was important to analyze how many days the City of Niles is typically closed to determine the closure's impact on transit services.

6. Land Use Updates

Cooper shared that Niles Charter Township had rezoned four parcels along S 11th St as part of the new overlay district in that corridor. In addition a new fitness center had opened in Buchanan. Gallagher asked about MDOT design guidelines for roads in an overlay district.

7. Project Updates

- **Obligation Thermometer-** Mani reminded committee members to get their projects obligated in 2016, and that for 2016 projects that intend to construct next summer, it is time to get program applications submitted.

Mani also noted that the NATS area had one project that was not obligated in 2015. Phase II of the Gumwood Road non-motorized path did not get obligated in time, and the area lost \$36,000 in FY 2015. Mani said SWMPC would be issuing another call for TAP projects for FY 2016 and FY 2017.

Fiscal Year	Job Number	Agency	Project Name	Update Information	Date of last update	Bid Savings	Obligation Month	Bills Submitted
		Berrien County	IN-MI River Valley Trail	TAP application sent in for next phase; Issues regarding routing and historical preservation, but should not hold up project	September 2015			
2014	104152	MDOT	M-139 CON phase Bridge replacement	No Completion date as yet.	September 2015			
		Niles DAR	Maintenance software					
		Niles DAR	Preventative maintenance	Issue with 5307 funding for 2015	September 2015			
		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)	Complete	August 2015			
		Berrien County RC	North Main St	Construction beginning this week	September 2015			
		Cass County	Adamsville Road Reconstruct	Almost complete; adding some shoulders	September 2015			
		Cass County	Gumwood Road Phase II	Unobligated	September 2015			
		Buchanan Dial-a-Ride	Replacement Bus	Contract probably not coming until next September	October 2014			

		Niles Dial-A-Ride	Replacement Tires	Waiting on contract				
		MDOT	M-139 from M-140 to Fairland Road Resurfacing	In progress				
		MDOT	Repaving US-12, Red Bud, and S 3rd St	Construction in September				
		MDOT	Concrete Patching on US-31	Under construction	September 2015			
		MDOT	M-62 from Hospital St to M-60 resurfacing	Will be finished this year				

In addition, Jolivette said that the mill and fill project on M-60 BR will be underway shortly.

8. Old Business

▪ GPA Policy

Mani and Gallagher shared the draft GPA policy with NATS committee members once again. Mani said that this was a useful way of grouping projects so that minor changes to costs or scope could be made without going through the full amendment process. Mani said that SWMPC was proposing that GPAs not be used for local projects but only for MDOT projects, as these are the projects that tend to have the most amendments.

Mani said that based on new guidance regarding GPAs, two of the categories listed are not actual GPAs anymore. These categories are rail safety and pre-construction phases. Mani said SWMPC staff would take a look back through that guidance document and make changes and bring the policy back up for a vote at next month's meeting.

▪ Future of TAP Funding

Mani said that the Senate version of the federal transportation bill that passed earlier this summer, the DRIVE Act, contains possible changes to how Transportation Alternatives funding would be distributed in Michigan. NATS would see its annual allocation double to \$86,500, but would no longer be eligible for TAP funds through the statewide competitive process. Mani emphasized that this is a preliminary analysis by MDOT's Office of Economic Development, and that this version of the bill has not been passed into law nor has it been signed by the President.

More immediately, Mani said that NATS had an opportunity to combine two years worth of TAP funds into a single year in order to be able to do a larger project. In other words, instead of receiving \$43,200 annually, NATS would receive \$86,400 every two years. Funds would be received beginning in 2017 if NATS chose to allocate two years worth of funding. Mani said that he would be issuing a Call for Projects for FY 2016 and FY 2017, and communities could apply for one or two years worth of funding.

9. New Business

- **FY 2016 Meeting Dates**

The following meeting dates were selected for FY 2016:

- October 27, 2015
- November 24, 2015
- December 15, 2015
- January 26, 2016
- February 23, 2016
- March 22, 2016
- April 26, 2016
- May 24, 2016
- June 28, 2016
- July 26, 2016
- August 23, 2016
- September 27, 2016

A motion by Ziliak with support by Mason to approve the FY 2016 meeting dates. **Motion passed.**

- **FHWA Updates**

With no FHWA representative present, Galbraith shared Dewey's updates from the TwinCATS meetings the previous day.

The Notices of Proposed Rulemakings were continuing to be released. The final rule on safety performance measures is expected in November. The final rule on Metro and Statewide Planning is anticipated sometime in July 2016. The pavement and bridge condition rule is expected sometime in 2016. The system performance rulemaking is expected to be available for public comment in November of 2015.

In addition, Federal Highway's Financial System, FMIS, will be down September 26 for a period of about five weeks.

- **MDOT Updates**

Galbraith said that the US Congress was continuing to consider transportation legislation, though it is very likely that we will receive additional short term funding extensions. The state legislature is focused on roads once again after handling the scandal involving two House members. The legislature is scheduled to be in session until November 12th, and then for the first three weeks of December.

- **News Items of Interest**

Park(ing) Day

Mani pointed out that Dowagiac and Buchanan had each hosted events for Park(ing) Day. Park(ing) Day is an international, annual event that highlights the potential alternative uses of parking spaces as public parks or relaxation areas. It also highlights the possibility of creating a better balance between cars and automobiles in cities.

10. Public Comment

None.

11. Privilege of the Floor

Bradfield raised the issue of funding being spent on signs. In some cases, poles and other objects are still blocking the replaced signs. Other committee members said that they appreciated many of the new signs for navigation purposes. Jolivette said that MDOT's signage projects would wrap up for the year on October 23.

12. Adjournment at 3:40 p.m.

- The next meeting will be October 27 at 1:00 PM.

Minutes compiled by: Gautam Mani, Associate Planner, 2015

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