

**NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY**  
Policy Committee

**MINUTES**

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

2:30 P.M.

City of Niles Public Works Building

Policy Members Present:	Jason Auvil, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians Georgia Boggs, City of Niles Chuck Collins, Berrien County Road Commission Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township Irving Frost, Howard Township Darrell Harden, MDOT, Southwest Region Don Kronewitter, Milton Township Joseph Kring, Bertrand Township John LaMore, Berrien County Commissioner Ray Lenze, MDOT Planning Dale Lowe, Cass County Commissioner Dennis Patterson, Howard Township Zach Perkins, Berrien County Commissioner Cliff Poehlman, Cass County Road Commission Johnie Rodebush, Cass County Commissioner Don Ryman, City of Buchanan Evan Smith, Niles Dial A Ride
Policy Members Absent:	Pat Bellaire, Village of Edwardsburg John Egelhaaf, SWMPC (ex-officio) Erin Kercheval, MDOT – Coloma TSC Stewart McKenzie, FTA (ex-officio) Jane Mitchell, Buchanan Township Jan Personette, Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce Brad Sharlow, MDOT Planning (ex-officio) Rachael Tupica, Federal Highway Administration (ex-officio) Representative, Berrien County Planning Commission Representative, MACOG (ex-officio) Representative, Buchanan Dial-a-Ride Representative, Ontwa Township
SWMPC Staff Present:	Suzann Flowers Trevor Thomas
Others Present:	Sue Kronewitter, Milton Township Jerry Marchetti, Ontwa Township

**1. Call to Order & Introductions**

- LaMore called the meeting to order at 2:35p.m. Ryman led the group in saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Minutes**

A motion was made by Poehlman with support from Rodebush to approve the January 24, 2011 Policy Committee Meeting minutes with the following changes:

- Page 2- First bullet, add a period after Committee members.

- Page 2-third bullet after facilitate change to “a” instead of the.  
**Motion passed.**

### 3. Staff Report

- **Michigan Works Bridge Academy Presentation-Delayed**

Flowers stated that as a means to reach out to the youth in the MPO planning area, she has scheduled a presentation with the Michigan Works JAG students and that the presentation has been delayed a week and will present information at the March 2012 TAC meeting.

- **Public Participation Plan Comments and Input Meetings**

Flowers stated that the 45-day public comment period is coming to a close, that both public input meetings were held during the month of February, and that once the comment period ends, she will compile all public comments received and present them to the Committee.

- **Investments Reporting Tools Training (IRT)**

Thomas again stressed the importance of the Asset Management trainings that have been on the SWMPC website and also brought up the topic of training for the new Investment Reporting Tool. Thomas will get the information out to the proper agencies, the county road commissions, cities, and villages, through an email to make sure that those agencies are aware of the changes occurring.

### 4. Old Business

- NATS TIP Policy

At the January 2012 NATS TAC Committee meeting, Flowers was asked to make some changes to the draft TIP Policy document. Those changes were done and a new draft document was placed on the website for review.

Motion by Collins with support by Rodebush to add the NATS TIP Policy document to the 2011-2014 NATS TIP. **Motion passed.**

- Support Letter for Harbor Authority

Flowers explained that the NATS Policy Committee had asked her to draft a support letter for the Harbor Authority and that at the January meeting, John Gruchot had asked if the support letter could come from both the NATS and TwinCATS MPOs.

Motion by Auvil with support by Frost to authorize NATS Policy Chair, John LaMore, to sign the resolution of support for the St. Joseph River Harbor Authority. **Motion passed.**

LaMore added that funding for the dredging should be continuous and not needed on an emergency basis. He stated that every ship on the Great Lakes, rivers, and oceans pay a fee that is used for commercial harbors. The Great Lakes fund comes from these fees and is channeled back to the harbors.

### 5. New Business

- **Legislative Updates**

- Federal

Flowers and Thomas handed out a 2-page sheet explaining the updates for the Federal Transportation Bills along with a handout from the Association for Metropolitan Planning Organizations, comparing the House and Senate versions of the transportation bill. Discussion focused on provisions to eliminate existing small (under 200,000 populations) MPOs, as well funding implications for transit and the Transportation Enhancement program. Finally,

Flowers and Thomas stated that the current consensus among experts is that neither the House nor the Senate transportation bill is likely to be passed in the near future.

Lenze pointed out that the current extension ends at the end of March and that would mean that if an extension or new legislation is not done that federal funding of projects would be in jeopardy. One member questioned what the justification would be to get rid of small MPOs and Lenze stated that there would be more funding to go around to the MPOs that were left. He also mentioned that there have been provisions about grandfathering in any small MPO but only new MPOs would be created if they had a population of 200,000.

Thomas explained that currently, both bills at the House and Senate level have stalled out. Rodebush expressed frustration with the amount of money that Michigan sends to Washington, D.C. for the trust fund. He stated that for every \$1.00 we send we receive \$0.92.

- State

A number of bills have been proposed at the state level many of the bills are discussing the reinvention of Act 51, funding for roads such as using additional vehicle registration fees, an increase in the gas tax.

A moratorium on force account work from MDOT was discussed and Cook discussed how much this would impact the Cass County Road Commission. Lenze added that the contractors union wanted to ensure that they had the ability to bid projects and that is why MDOT was halting this work until a policy could be worked out. Thomas added that if people had questions regarding this discussion that they should contact Joe Bellina at the Cass County Road Commission.

Additional discussion regarding the possible changes needed to P.A. 51 in Michigan and how road projects in the state would be funded with the increased deterioration of the state transportation system.

- **TIP Amendments**

- Buchanan Dial A Ride

- Adding in FY 2013, Rural operating funds, for a federal cost of \$23,000; state cost of \$73,000; local cost of \$106,000; for a total project cost of \$202,000.

- MDOT

- Adding in FY 2012, General Program Account, for pre-construction phases, for a federal cost of \$34,000; state cost of \$8,000; for a total project cost of \$42,000.
- Adding in FY 2014, JN 113932, project US-31 roadside facility PE phase, for a federal cost of \$6,000; state cost of \$1,000; for a phase cost of \$7,000 and a total project cost of \$62,000.

- Niles Dial A Ride

- Adding in FY 2012, JN 115795, project free fare days on ozone action days, for a federal cost of \$2,000; and local cost of \$1,000; for a total cost of \$3,000.

Motion by Rodebush with support by Cooper to approve the 2011-2014 NATS TIP amendments. **Motion passed.**

Lenze noted that the next TIP submission to MDOT is April 2012.

- **NATS Walk and Roll Plan-Form Subcommittee**

Flowers discussed with the Committee members the option of forming a non-motorized subcommittee, similar to the TwinCATS Walk and Roll subcommittee, to address the growing need for pedestrian and non-motorized focused transportation planning. Flowers displayed a draft outline of what a potential plan would entail. The plan would represent information for citizens and communities to better understand where the greatest needs are in the NATS region. Flowers also reminded the Committee members that they were not a stand alone MPO, that they were part of the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) transportation management area (TMA), and that MACOG has been planning for and building non-motorized projects for many years.

Flowers stated that the TAC Committee had recommended that the Policy Committee take action to form the subcommittee. Flowers stated that if the Committee wanted to act on the recommendation they could or they could think about it until the April 2012 meeting and make a decision from there.

Cooper stated that this could be a good tie in to the South 11<sup>th</sup> Street project in Niles with the focus on making the street more walkable and friendly to pedestrians. Snow removal was also discussed and that planning for where to put winter snow piles should be addressed.

Collins added that SB 201 was being discussed in the Senate and that there could be an amendment regarding the liability of sidewalks. As he described, the threshold would be a 2 inch rule for liability.

Rodebush stated the sentiment of the group which would be to think about the subcommittee formation for a month and vote at the April 2012 meeting.

- **IN-MI River Valley Trail Support Letter**

Flowers discussed the Indiana-Michigan River Valley Trail effort. This is a 34-mile off-road trail project connecting the City of Niles, Niles Charter Township to the South Bend, Indiana trail system. Flowers asked the Committee members if they would sign a letter of support for the trail groups application to the Michigan Department of Transportation Enhancement program.

Motion by Rodebush with support by Ryman to sign the IN-MI River Valley Trail funding support letter. **Motion passed.**

LaMore asked if the minutes from the IN-MI River Valley Trail meeting could be emailed to the NATS Committee members. Flowers will email those notes next week.

## **6. Public Comment**

Sue K-asked why Milton Township with a population of 3,800 people do not have better access to Cass County transit. LaMore commented that people should consider access to transit where they live because transit will not be accessible for all people in all areas. Lowe stated that the Cass County transit system operates with many agencies on a contract basis because that is the only way they can stay in business. Smith added to the discussion about the difference between what Niles Dial A Ride does, a door to door service or a fixed route where people could pick up the bus at a designated location. He added that the previous management team at DAR had arbitrary lines in the county that they would not cross and that the current Berrien County providers are working to change that. This is one of the goals of the Berrien County Coordination Feasibility Study that is being coordinated by the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission. He continued that coordination among the 4 transit agencies in Berrien County had not been happening in the

past and that the agencies are working together now to fix that.

## **7. Privilege of the Floor**

Flowers stated that Tracy Vines will no longer be on the Policy Committee as she has resigned from the Berrien County Planning Commission. Flowers will circulate a card for all the members to sign and she will mail that to her next week.

Ryman discussed the importance of Amtrak service.

Marchetti discussed the SCORE program and that they help individuals with business start ups and offer free counseling and technical assistance.

Collins discussed the history of railroad crossing closures and their impacts on the region.

Poehlman reminded representatives from Cass County to vote in the millage request for county roads.

**8. Adjournment: 4:00 p.m.** Motion by Rodebush with support by Irving to end the NATS Policy Committee meeting. Motion passed.

The next meeting is **March 27, 2012 at 2:30P.M.**

*Minutes compiled by: Suzann Flowers and Trevor Thomas, Transportation Planners, March 2012*