

NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Technical Advisory Committee

MINUTES

January 26, 2016

1:00 P.M.

Niles City Council Chambers

TAC Members Present:	Pat Bellaire, Village of Edwardsburg Joe Bellina, Cass County Road Commission Brian Berndt, Berrien County Road Commission Craig Bradfield, Howard Township Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township Pete Fournier, Cass County Road Commission Matthew Galbraith, MDOT Statewide Planning Kelly Getman-Dissette, Niles Dial A Ride Steve Hicks, Bertrand Township Erin Jolivette, MDOT Coloma TSC Kim O’Haver, Buchanan Dial A Ride Joe Ray, City of Niles Don Ryman, City of Buchanan Debbie Sullivan, Mason Township Bob Sutton, Mason Township
TAC Members Absent:	Barbara Cook, Cass County Planning Commission Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration (ex officio) Fred Featherly, MDOT-Multi-Modal Representative, Berrien County Community Development Darrell Harden, MDOT Southwest Region John Klimek, Berrien County Board of Commissioners Jason Latham, MDOT Southwest Region (Alternate) Stephen LeClaire, Bertrand Township Bill Marx, City of Buchanan Stewart McKenzie, Federal Transit Administration (ex officio) Melinda Michael, Four Flags Area Council on Tourism Jan Personette, Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce Dennis Schuh, Berrien Bus Brad Sharlow, MDOT Planning (ex officio) Representative, Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance Kelly Sweeney, Milton Township
SWMPC Staff Present:	Kim Gallagher Gautam Mani

1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting was called to order by Bellina at 1:00 p.m. and he led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and introductions.

2. Minutes

A motion by Ray with support by Bradfield to approve the TAC Committee Meeting minutes, as presented, from November 24, 2015. **Motion passed.**

3. Changes to the Posted Agenda

Mani noted that under “Staff Report,” SWMPC would not cover the CMAQ update, but an update had been provided in the meeting packets. In addition, they would discuss the Call for Projects under “New Business,” while discussing the project prioritization system.

4. Public Comment

None.

5. Staff Report

▪ FAST Act

Mani said that since the committees had last met in November, Congress had passed a new transportation bill, known as the FAST Act. The FAST Act increases transportation investment nationwide primarily through non-transportation revenue sources. Included in committee members’ meeting packets was a brief, preliminary analysis of what the FAST Act would mean for the TwinCATS and NATS MPOs.

The FAST Act largely maintains the program structure of MAP-21, the previous transportation authorization. Mani said that more information would be provided once further estimates were developed at the state level. However, it is safe to say that the NATS MPO would receive an increase in Surface Transportation Program funding over current levels for the next several years. NATS will get an increase of the overall Surface Transportation Program share.

The FAST Act also breaks precedent by including passenger rail in the main transportation authorization. Previously, Amtrak was authorized under a separate bill. Amtrak will still need to go through the appropriations process annually, but inclusion in the main transportation authorization provides a longer-term policy vision for the agency.

▪ Passenger Rail Study

Mani noted that a rail study was still underway on the Wolverine Corridor from Detroit/Pontiac to Chicago to look at double tracking for part of the route, in addition to the continued attempts to implement high speed rail in the corridor. Both of these measures would reduce travel time and delays due to freight rail movements that currently clog up the system. In addition, it would raise the possibility of additional trains running on the route each day. Since Niles is along the route, it stands to benefit from the increased frequency and reduced travel times to and from Chicago and Detroit. Mani recommended that committee members contact Jan Personette of the Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce, who had attended a local meeting on the ongoing study.

6. Public Transit Updates

▪ SWMPC Transit Updates

No updates.

▪ **Agency Updates**

Niles Dial A Ride reported that it was having its Local Advisory Committee meeting on February 9th at 1:00 PM or 3:00 PM.

Buchanan Dial-A-Ride's Local Advisory Committee meeting had been cancelled due to lack of a quorum. O'Haver was pleased to report that Buchanan Dial-A-Ride would be receiving a delivery of three buses in March or April.

7. Land Use Updates

Sutton expressed strong concerns about traffic being diverted onto Mason St during construction of the new roundabout at the Five Points Intersection with Old M-205. In particular, Mason and Sullivan said that they were concerned about increased truck traffic on that route, which is ill-equipped to handle it.

8. Project Updates

a) Berrien County Road Commission

-North Main St from Reed to Miller Resurfacing project has had its Advance Construct (AC) funds converted in 2016.

-Bertrand Road, Third Street and Stateline Road preventative maintenance project has been obligated

b) City of Buchanan

-Traffic signal replacement at Red Bud Trail at Front St (CMAQ) and resurfacing on Red Bud Trail from Front St to the South City limits (STP) are separate projects but the applicant is aiming to have GI meetings for those projects at the same time in February

c) Cass County Road Commission

-Adamsville Road from May St to US-12 is under design – HMA base crushing and shaping

-Fir Road from Redfield Road to US-12 resurfacing- design work is underway

-Fir Road from Stateline to Redfield Road resurfacing- design work is underway

d) MDOT

- US-12 bridge deck over M-51 Restore/Rehabilitate is proceeding as planned

- US-12 resurfacing from Bakertown Road to the start of the divided section may need additional ROW easements, grading permits, and correcting culverts in the area. Construction is scheduled for 2017.

-The new bridge in Niles on M-139 is open!

e) Niles Dial A Ride

- Ordered a new bus last week. 2016 project applications will likely come in during the summer.

f) Buchanan Dial A Ride

- Purchased a total of three buses using 5339 and CMAQ funds.

9. Old Business

None.

10. New Business

- **Transportation Alternatives (TAP) Approval of Gumwood Road Phase II Non-Motorized Path for 2016 funding.**

Mani said that a memorandum had been included in the committee member meeting packets regarding NATS' Transportation Alternatives funding situation. Mani reminded committee members that NATS had been given the option to "bank" two years' worth of its TAP allocation and then spend them in a single year. This would allow for a slightly more significant \$72,000 to \$86,000 project to proceed. However, Mani said that if NATS were to use two years' worth of TAP funding in a given year, it would have to program \$36,000 less of STP in order to maintain annual constraint across all programs. Given the current need of our roads for STP funds and the possibility of using STP funds to fund what would have been TAP improvements, the committee had at a prior meeting recommended against "banking" TAP funds, and the SWMPC staff also recommended this approach for at least this year.

Mani also said that while a Call for Projects had been out, no jurisdiction had expressed interest in a new TAP project using the \$36,000 in TAP funds. Mani said that the Cass County Road Commission still had an application in MDOT's system for Gumwood Road Phase II Non-Motorized Path, which did not get obligated in FY 2015. Given that it is late in the fiscal year, a ready application was important to have. In addition, Phase I of this path from the state line north has been built, and the Indiana portions have been built as well. The 10-foot wide non-motorized path connects Milton Township to the commercial developments in and around Granger, Indiana. Future phases will connect the path to Milton Township Hall, and the project anticipates future residential development in the area. SWMPC staff recommended that the Gumwood Road Phase II Non-Motorized Path be allowed to use 2016's allocation of TAP funding.

A motion by Berndt with support by O'Haver to recommend that the Policy Committee approve the Gumwood Road Phase II project to use NATS entire allocation of TAP funds for 2016, and only the 2016 allocation. **Motion passed.**

- **Project Prioritization Procedure**

Gallagher introduced the project selection scoring system that had been developed in conjunction with members of the Project Selection subcommittee. The system was a 50-point system that gives major weight to project readiness and coordination as well as how well a project preserves the existing road network. Additional weighting is given to complete streets elements of the project and safety improvements. The draft prioritization system was distributed in committee member meeting packets. The sections correspond to sections of the TIP application.

Section 1 was simply basic applicant information. Section 2 listed the project, project description, and how much funding was being requested. Section 3 deals with safety. Section 4 looks in more detail at improvements being made on the road and non-motorized elements being added. Section 5 looks at how well a project will preserve the transportation system and what the current need is for the project. Section 6 looks at how ready a project is to proceed and whether it is coordinated with other investments or jurisdictions.

Berndt expressed his disagreement with the criterion in Section 2 that rewards additional points for additional local match. Bellina and Ray both voiced their concerns with this criterion as well.

Ray said that sticking purely to the points system could encourage communities to “game the system” and pick projects based on different point categories rather than actual need. Ray cited the example of a community picking three projects to submit that are all on the same roadway in order to gain continuity points, when the greatest needs may be spread out across the whole community. Similarly, Ray noted that an agency might throw projects into its master plan just to get points under this system. Bellina noted that in the NATS area, no eligible agencies even had a capital improvement plan.

Gallagher and Mani said that an agreed-upon project prioritization system is needed to be able to justify project decisions to the public. Mani said in particular that members of the public and even other MPO committee members often asked why particular projects were selected, and it is important to have clear factors for how projects are selected.

Bellina said he understood the need for transparency and supported that idea fully, but said that the committees should be careful with approving a point system. If a point system is approved as the sole means of decision-making and then the committee uses any additional judgment to select projects, the transparency of the system is lost and the decision-making process actually becomes less defensible to the public. Bellina favored maintaining engineering judgment in decision making.

Fournier said he was concerned that issues such as whether a route is used for emergency purposes, whether it is located next to a school, and other factors. There is no way to come up with a point system that captures every single factor that needs to be looked at. It is important to leave room for subjectivity. Sutton expressed concern that the factors being considered did not always capture the on-the-ground unique conditions of specific roadways. He worried that a rigid point scoring system would reduce our ability to really program appropriate treatments for the roads. O’Haver conveyed that it is impossible and not desirable to eliminate subjectivity from project decision making.

Fournier suggested perhaps allocating a certain portion of points to “judgment of the committees.” Ray expressed concern with allocating points to subjectivity, stating that subjective judgment was necessary in project selection and should exist as a counterbalance to the scoring system. Bellina said that he would be amenable to adoption of a scoring system, if there were a clear statement at the top that it would serve as “a guide” for decision-making, and that the ultimate authority for project selection still rests with the Policy Committee after an open debate about projects based on engineering judgment and unique factors.

Ray asked who would serve on the project selection subcommittee. Mani said that they are looking for those with engineering expertise from each eligible agency to serve. This would include representatives from the City of Niles, City of Buchanan, Village of Edwardsburg, Berrien County Road Commission, Cass County Road Commission. This would include Berndt reiterated that the project selection committee must be an open, public meeting. Mani and Gallagher agreed, stating only that they were hoping that the five eligible entities would lead the discussion. Anyone is welcome to come and help voice their thoughts on project selection, and the meeting will be publicly noticed.

A motion by Fournier with support by Sutton to recommend that the Policy Committee approve the project prioritization with strong language added at the beginning that the document serves as guidance, and that scoring will be one factor in projects that are selected through an open and public debate at the project selection meeting, TAC meeting, and finally Policy Committee meeting in February . The revised project prioritization procedure will be published prior to the project selection subcommittee meeting on February 18th. **Motion passed.**

▪ **Edwardsburg Section St Reclassification Revisited**

Mani recounted that at a past TAC meeting, the TAC had voted against approval of reclassifying Section St between Max St and US-12 as a federal-aid road because of the concern that it would eliminate the ability of the Village of Edwardsburg to restrict truck traffic. Mani said that after the meeting, information became available that the Village of Edwardsburg could still restrict truck traffic because of the availability of alternate routes. Mani said it was worth revisiting the possibility of approving the route as a federal aid eligible road.

Ray reiterated his concern that given all of the school activity in that area, encouraging truck traffic on the route would only cause further safety issues for students and for other drivers in the area. Ray did acknowledge that the road was in bad condition, but noted that if it were made federal-aid eligible, it might have to be widened. This would encourage more trucks and higher speeds generally on the road, compounding safety issues, unless enforcement took place. In particular, trucks trying to access the industrial park would use the route.

Bellaire said that the road is used by all people in the Village already, and not just for school purposes. Bellaire said that the police department in Edwardsburg did its best to keep trucks off the route. Bellina noted that the Cass County Road Commission had decided not to reclassify Max St. Minor collectors cannot generally terminate at a local road, in order to meet continuity requirements.

Ryman wondered whether a study had been done on traffic conditions. Gallagher said that SWMPC did have count data on that road and could provide it at the next meeting.

Ray felt that the issue had been discussed enough at TAC. TAC had voted against the reclassification; policy had voted to table it. Ray advised SWMPC to bring data directly before Policy at the next meeting.

▪ **State and Federal Updates**

None.

11. Public Comment

None.

12. Privilege of the Floor

None.

13. Adjournment at 2:35 p.m.

- The next meeting will be February 23 at 1:00 PM.

Minutes compiled by: Gautam Mani, Associate Planner, 2016