

NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Technical Advisory Committee

MINUTES

February 23, 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 Pete Fournier, Cass County Road Commission Kelly Getman-Dissette, Niles Dial A Ride Steve Hicks, Bertrand Township Erin Jolivette, MDOT Coloma Office Jason Latham, MDOT Southwest Region Bill Marx, City of Buchanan Kim O'Haver, Buchanan Dial A Ride Jan Personette, Four Flags Area Chamber of Commerce Joe Ray, City of Niles Don Ryman, City of Buchanan Evan Smith, Berrien County Community Development Jim Stover, Niles Charter Township Debbie Sullivan, Mason Township
TAC Members Absent:	Barbara Cook, Cass County Planning Commission Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration (ex officio) Fred Featherly, MDOT-Multi-Modal John Klimek, Berrien County Board of Commissioners John Lanum, MDOT Statewide Planning Stewart McKenzie, Federal Transit Administration (ex officio) Melinda Michael, Four Flags Area Council on Tourism Representative, Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance Representative, Milton Township
SWMPC Staff Present:	Kim Gallagher Gautam Mani
Others Present:	Dan Applegate, Niles Community Schools

1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting was called to order by Ray at 1:02 p.m. and he led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Minutes

A motion by Getman-Dissette with support by Bellaire to approve the TAC Meeting minutes, as presented, from January 26, 2016. **Motion passed.**

3. Changes to the Posted Agenda

Mani noted that at the request of a committee member, he had listed the recent “Niles Township accident” on the agenda. However, NATS was not the appropriate venue to be discussing the vehicle accident. Mani directed all committee members to direct questions regarding the accident to the Road Commission directly or to the Niles Township police.

4. Public Comment

None.

5. Staff Report

- None

6. Public Transit Updates

▪ SWMPC Transit Updates

None.

▪ Agency Updates

Getman-Dissette reported on the Michigan Public Transit Association Annual Legislative Conference that had occurred last week in Lansing. The conference had discussed many topics, such as transit funding under the FAST Act. Overall, Getman-Dissette said that there was great turnout at the conference, and that the agencies were able to meet with legislators from the SW Michigan Region, even if it was not the local representative.

O’Haver shared that she was pleased to report that Buchanan Dial-A-Ride had received its delivery of three new buses much earlier than expected. They were looking forward to putting these buses out on the road, as there was a need for them.

7. Land Use Updates

None.

8. Project Updates

Berrien County Road Commission

- North Main Street from Reed to Miller sealcoat project has been completed. The Road Commission is checking on whether all funds have been converted
- Preventative Maintenance project on Bertrand Road, Stateline, and Third Sts has been obligated.
- Indiana Michigan River Valley Trail was currently in the midst of an archaeological study to make sure no historic artifacts were being disturbed. Once the study concludes, the grant can be officially awarded for 2017 construction.

Cass County Road Commission

- Adamsville Road from May St to US-12 Resurfacing. GI plans have been submitted and CCRC anticipates construction in July.
- Fir Road from Redfield St to US-12 resurfacing—GI Plans will be submitted in the next couple of weeks.
- Fir Road from Stateline Road to Redfield Road resurfacing- GI plans will be submitted in the next couple of weeks.

Bellina requested that SWMPC check with MDOT regarding the Gumwood Road Transportation Alternatives project and the design phase of the Edwardsburg Sports Complex Non-Motorized Path CMAQ

project. Apparently, there were issues on MDOT's end regarding the year in which those projects are scheduled to proceed.

City of Buchanan

-The Red Bud Trail resurfacing from the South City limits to Front Street, and Red Bud and Front St traffic signal replacement project have completed their GI submittal and will be obligated within the next few weeks.

MDOT

-US-12 bridge deck over M-51 restore and rehabilitate is still on track for construction in 2017.
-US-12 from Bakertown Road to the start of the divided section is still on track for 2017 construction.

9. Old Business

None.

10. New Business

▪ Detailed Discussion of Project Selection

Mani gave an overview of the application and selection process for the \$518,608 in Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds that NATS receives as a federal allocation each year between 2017 and 2020. These projects feed the four-year Transportation Improvement Program, a document that NATS develops every three years.

Gallagher noted that at last month's NATS meetings, the Policy Committee had approved a prioritization system for these projects as a guide. Federal, state, and local planning factors had all informed that prioritization system. Gallagher also gave an overview of the timeline for project submittal and selection, and that additional opportunities would be forthcoming for comments on projects. The selection committee had recommended a list of projects to TAC, who in turn recommended projects to the Policy Committee.

Mani shared that \$4 million in federal funds was requested, but only \$2 million in funds were available, so prioritization was needed. A total of 25 projects were submitted by jurisdictions, which is many more than previous calls.

Mani went through the results of the scoring system, and the PASER rating of the various projects.

Mani said that the scoring system had not been used in project prioritization. The NATS project selection committee instead asked each member jurisdiction (city, village, or township) that had submitted a project to pick their top priority project. Once top priority projects for each municipality were identified, the total demand equaled approximately \$2 million. The agencies had to spread it out so that it matched the amount available in each fiscal year. Mani noted that projects already scheduled for 2017 were once again applied for, so the subcommittee decided to proceed with the 2017 funding program as scheduled. However, we were overprogrammed based on available funds in 2017, so NATS needed to reduce funding for projects. In the interest of fairness, the agencies with 2017 projects each agreed to take a 10% cut in order to bring us into constraint.

Each project was discussed in detail. Regarding plans to do preventative maintenance on Niles Buchanan Road, Ryman noted the poor condition of pavement and wondered whether the Road

Commission could simply pour concrete to improve pavement condition. Berndt said he would look into all possibilities regarding that project.

Bellina explained that the Mason St project scheduled for 2018 was important to Mason Township in order to accommodate traffic being detoured because of installation of a roundabout at the Five Points intersection. Currently, the pavement condition is very poor and more traffic will only cause further deterioration.

A motion by Bradfield with support by Personette to recommend that the Policy Committee approve the 2017-2020 NATS recommended project list for STP funding. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Ray raised the issue of whether each city, village, or township that had been awarded a project had paid its dues to SWMPC. Ray said that municipalities that do not pay in should have their projects pulled. Gallagher said that invoices had just gone out to NATS agencies in the last two weeks, and none had been returned so far from NATS. Gallagher also reminded agencies to fill out and return the committee member information forms that were attached to the invoices, even if the same people were being appointed. This was the local match money used to pay SWMPC staff salaries and indirect costs of planning services for the NATS MPO, and is based on population of the jurisdiction. Bellina said that the payment of dues had been an issue in the past, and jurisdictions that had not been paying in needed to Bellina asked if SWMPC could look at 2015 data to see which jurisdictions had paid. Gallagher said that all NATS member jurisdictions had paid in 2015, but that she would look back in the records to verify.

Getman-Dissette asked about whether transit projects that had been submitted would be discussed. Mani said that at next month's meetings, transit and MDOT projects would be discussed and voted on. Mani thanked transit agencies that had submitted projects.

- **State and Federal Updates**
None.

11. Public Comment

None.

12. Privilege of the Floor

Gallagher shared that throughout Southwest Michigan, and throughout the state, transit agencies were struggling to hire and retain drivers. Gallagher said this was an issue even in larger metropolitan areas like Grand Rapids, where the wages for drivers are much higher, and even on the west coast of the country. Getman-Dissette reported that this was one of the reasons why Niles Dial-A-Ride was struggling to meet demand for service. Smith reported that with Transpo in South Bend, driver wages increase on a step-wise system; there is incentive for them to stay and eventually attain full time status.

Bellina reported that a driver shortage was an issue in the road construction and maintenance industry as well, as there were fewer and fewer people with commercial drivers' licenses. Agencies used to be able to put time and financial resources into training drivers, but now they are expected to come in with those skills. This means there is a scarce pool of truck drivers. Gallagher reported that the Regional Prosperity Initiative, which comprises seven counties in Southwest Michigan, is looking to possibly address this issue as part of ideas for workforce development.

Personette asked about drivers' wages at Niles Dial-A-Ride and whether they would be impacted by the federal minimum wage increase. Getman-Dissette reported that starting wage at Niles Dial-A-Ride was well above the federal minimum. The agency would like to offer even higher starting wages, but as with roads, local money for transit is increasingly scarce.

Mason noted that one of the issues at Niles Dial-A-Ride was that potential drivers were not passing drug tests.

13. Adjournment at 1:51 p.m.

- The next meeting will be March 22 at 1:00 PM.

Minutes compiled by: Gautam Mani, Associate Planner, 2016

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