

NILES/BUCHANAN/CASS AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Technical Advisory Committee

MINUTES

August 25, 2015

1:00 P.M.

Niles City Council Chambers

TAC Members Present:	Joe Bellina, Cass County Road Commission Brian Berndt, Berrien County Road Commission Barbara Cook, Cass County Planning Commission Richard Cooper, Niles Charter Township Matthew Galbraith, MDOT Statewide Planning Kelly Getman-Dissette, Niles Dial A Ride Darrell Harden, MDOT Southwest Region Erin Jolivette, MDOT Coloma TSC Melinda Michael, Four Flags Area Council on Tourism 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 Dennis Schuh, Berrien Bus
TAC Members Absent:	Pat Bellaire, Village of Edwardsburg Craig Bradfield, Howard Township Andrea Dewey, Federal Highway Administration (ex officio) Fred Featherly, MDOT-Multi-Modal John Gruchot, Berrien County Community Development 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) Jess Minks, Berrien County Road Commission John Monaghan, Village of Edwardsburg (Alternate) Brad Sharlow, MDOT Planning (ex officio) Joe Sobieralski, Southwestern Michigan Economic Growth Alliance Bob Sutton, Mason Township Planning Commission Kelly Sweeney, Milton Township
SWMPC Staff Present:	Kim Gallagher Gautam Mani
Others Present:	LeRoy Krempec, Cass County Road Commission

1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

Meeting was called to order by Ray at 1:03 p.m. and he led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Minutes

A motion by Berndt with support by Personette to approve the TAC Committee Meeting minutes, as presented, from July 28, 2015. **Motion passed.**

3. Public Comment

Personette thanked the City of Niles for its hard work on the city's roads this summer. She was impressed with the number of roads that she drives on that have new coverings and coatings.

4. Staff Report

Local Road Safety Plan Update

Mani updated committee members on progress on the Local Road Safety Plan, which is a collaborative effort between SWMPC and consultants retained by MDOT to address systemic safety issues in Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties. The consultants have delivered a memorandum outlining countermeasures that can be used to address safety deficiencies in the area. Mani said that SWMPC staff were pushing hard to make this a document that could be useful once the consultants are gone, and so that communities without engineering expertise on hand could still make preliminary decisions about safety solutions to pursue. SWMPC was suggesting the following changes to the countermeasures memo:

- A matrix of high, medium, and low cost solutions, as well as funding sources.
- A description of the circumstances that warrant the use of certain countermeasures vs. others (i.e. when a roundabout is appropriate vs. a four way stop vs. education).
- A framework for various agencies working on safety issues to pool resources and work together.

Gallagher also shared information about a statewide competitive grant process from the Office of Highway Safety Planning for specific education programs in schools. These grants are sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, and the grant amount is \$1,000 for each school selected. This funding is available for an education program based on a traffic safety issue that is relevant to that specific school; for example, alcohol use, night driving, or distracted driving. Gallagher said that information would be sent out regarding how to apply for those grants.

Project Selection Criteria Working Group Meeting Scheduled

Mani said that a doodle poll would be sent out soon to schedule the project selection criteria working group meeting for the 2017-2020 TIP. Mani was targeting a September meeting date. Mani thanked those who had volunteered to serve on that working group.

General Program Accounts Policy Draft

Mani said that MPO staff had drafted a policy on General Program Accounts (GPAs) for perusal by the committees. General Program Accounts can group projects of a similar work type or phase type together. This can potentially reduce the number of TIP amendments. Small changes to a project can be done by administrative modification. Only when a change is large enough to significantly impact the entire GPA would a TIP amendment be triggered. Processing a TIP amendment takes funds in the form of legal notices and staff time at the regional, state, and federal level. The MPO would still maintain oversight under its TIP amendment policy. A list of individual projects would still be maintained.

Mani and Gallagher said that the MPO may use general program accounts for transit projects in the future, and the policy leaves that possibility open. However, for now, staff are proposing that GPAs be established only for the following conditions:

- MDOT Trunkline Bridge Preservation Projects
- MDOT Trunkline Safety Projects
- Pre-Construction Phases of MDOT Projects
- Rail Safety Projects (generated by MDOT)

Gallagher said that GPAs could be useful to transit agencies because they would allow the agencies to make changes to projects more easily if they had planned their desired projects in advance. Gallagher said that having GPAs for transit would also be consistent with However, the use of transit GPAs would be reconsidered over the next month as transit agencies and SWMPC receive more guidance.

The committees will revisit the General Program Accounts policy in September.

5. Public Transit Updates

▪ SWMPC Transit Updates

No updates

▪ Agency Updates

Schuh shared that State Representative Miller from Cass County had joined him, Kim O'Haver and others for a bus ride and discussion of transit in the area. Schuh said that it was a really informative discussion for the representative, as he was not aware of how transit was funded or the challenges that transit agencies are facing. O'Haver said that the transit agencies had always been doing outreach to their legislators, but this time, the legislator approached them. Schuh said this was an opportunity for committee members to realize that is important to do educational outreach to their legislators, as the legislators may simply not be aware of how transportation funding works.

6. Land Use Updates

None.

7. Project Updates

- **Obligation Thermometer-** Galbraith said that he wasn't aware of the apportionment of the obligation authority to the different funding programs. Mani said that there was approximately \$40 million available in obligation authority for local programs for the remainder of FY 2015.

Ryman asked whether anyone was making an effort to simplify the way funding is allocated, because it can be very confusing. Harden said that the most recent federal transportation bill did consolidate a lot of funding categories in an attempt to make the process easier to navigate.

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; Working through issue of creek crossing. Trail is being heavily used.	August 2015			
2014	104152	MDOT	M-139 CON phase Bridge replacement	No Completion date as yet.	August 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)	Under Construction	August 2015			
		Berrien County RC	North Main St	Construction begins September 10th.	July 2015			
		Cass County	Adamsville Road Reconstruct	Under construction	August 2015			
		Cass County	Gumwood Road Phase II	Obligation issues, but will be submitted next week	August 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	Construction in September				
		MDOT	M-62 from Hospital St to M-60 resurfacing	Will be finished this year				

Harden also provided an update on an MDOT project that is only using state funds. The US-31 bridge over the St. Joseph River in between exits 5 and 7 will be painted. This is a \$6 million painting job. Harden said that he had consulted with Gautam Mani and that they both agreed that this project did not meet the criterion of being a project of "regional significance," which would have required a TIP amendment, because it is a painting job. Had a TIP amendment been required, it is likely that the project would not have been obligated in 2015.

Ryman wondered whether the materials used in the bridge and the type of paint might be making the project more expensive. Harden said that one of the issues on this particular bridge is scour, so a very specific type and thickness of pain is needed.

8. Old Business

- **NFC Reclassification Requests**

Mani said that he had received two requests for National Function Classification (NFC) changes to be submitted during the statewide review on September 1. The requests are:

- Reclassify Carberry Road from Lake St to Reum St from a local road to a minor collector, thus making it federal-aid eligible.
- Reclassify Section St in Edwardsburg from a local road to a minor collector, thus making it federal aid eligible.

Bellina asked where the request for reclassification request for Carberry Road had come from. Mani said that the request had come directly from the Township.

Bellina said he had talked to the Village of Edwardsburg about Section St reclassification and that his only concern was whether the Village could restrict truck traffic once the road became federal aid eligible. Galbraith clarified that as long as the road is not being upgraded to an arterial and as long as there were alternate routes available, truck traffic could continue to be restricted.

A motion by Cook with support by Bellina for the TAC committee to endorse the requested changes to the National Functional Classification system for the NATS area. A voice vote was conducted. Ray voted "Nay", stating that reclassification requests on streets with much higher traffic counts had not been approved in the past.

Ayes: 13

Nay: 1

Motion passed.

- **State Senate Lockbox Provisions- MPO Action**

Mani reiterated that there had been committee member concerns last month regarding the State Senate's version of the transportation funding package that includes a "lockbox provision," whereby

some of the new revenue generated goes directly to the treasury. MDOT would have to come up with a plan to build roads to a 50-year (or "European") standard, reduce road costs, and keep roads from deteriorating further. However, the most controversial provision as expressed by NATS members is that funds from the Treasury can only be released once a project list is developed by the state legislature and a resolution passes. This sets the stage for legislative project selection like that which occurred for the Roads, Risk and Reserve (RRR) allocation last year, and many committee members are concerned that this circumvents the local and MPO planning process. Educating our legislators on that process may be of value.

However, new proposals are currently being considered in the State House, and the legislature is on recess until after Labor Day. It may be worth holding off for some time on any formal action regarding the lockbox to see whether that provision is even under consideration in new funding packages.

9. New Business

- **FHWA Updates**

Mani noted that MAP-21 was extended through October 29, after which Congress hopes to pass a longer-term funding bill. Mani also noted that FHWA's financial system would be down for an upgrade from late September to late October. This would primarily affect projects that are scheduled for a December letting, and that is quite rare for local jobs.

- **MDOT Updates**

Galbraith shared that the State House had considered a plan to raise \$1.2 billion in new transportation revenue; \$600 million from new taxes and registration fees and \$600 million from existing sources elsewhere in the budget. Governor Snyder threatened to veto the bill, saying that the \$600 million in cuts would affect too many vital programs. The House then considered a package that would raise \$800 million from new sources and \$300 million from elsewhere in the budget. That plan never gained traction and the House left for recess without taking action.

- **News Items of Interest**

None.

10. Public Comment

None.

11. Privilege of the Floor

None.

12. Adjournment at 2:05 p.m.

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

Minutes compiled by: Gautam Mani, Associate Planner