

# TWIN CITIES AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY

Technical Advisory Committee

## Minutes

January 25, 2016

9:00 A.M.

St. Joseph City Commission Chambers

<b>TAC MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Calli Berg, Benton Charter Township Brian Berndt, Berrien County Road Commission Chris Cook, City of Benton Harbor Vince Desjardins, Southwest Michigan Regional Airport Matt Galbraith, MDOT Statewide Planning Joanne Johnson, Disability Network Southwest Michigan Erin Jolivette, MDOT Kalamazoo TSC, Coloma Office Jason Latham, MDOT Southwest Region Bill Purvis, TCATA Dan Roberts, MDOT Kalamazoo TSC Evan Smith, Berrien County Community Development Department Terrie Smith, Lincoln Charter Township Cathey Tilley, Cornerstone Alliance Tim Zebell, City of St. Joseph
<b>TAC MEMBERS ABSENT:</b>	Representative, Sodus Township Fred Featherly, MDOT Passenger Division (ex officio) Stewart McKenzie, Federal Transit Administration (ex officio) John Olson, Village of Shoreham and Village of Stevensville Gloria Payne, Lake Charter Township Representative, Cornerstone Alliance Donna Wittl, MDOT Statewide Urban Travel Analysis (ex officio) Representative, City of Bridgman
<b>SWMPC STAFF PRESENT:</b>	Kim Gallagher Gautam Mani

### 1. CALL TO ORDER:

Berndt called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m. and led the group in introductions.

### 2. CHANGES TO THE POSTED AGENDA:

There were no changes requested to the posted agenda.

### 3. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment made.

### 4. MINUTES:

- A motion was made by Cook with support by Zebell to approve the minutes of the November TAC meeting as presented. **Motion passed.**

## 5. STAFF REPORT

### ▪ **Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act Summary**

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 TwinCATS MPO would receive an increase in Surface Transportation Program funding over current levels for the next several years.

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.

Johnson asked about how the inclusion of Amtrak will help it in the appropriations process. Mani said that Amtrak would have an easier time asking for funding when it was based clearly in a multi-year policy. Mani said that the Amtrak authorization focused on safety and accountability, including a one-time authorization for railroads to implement positive train control, a safety measure that failed in the Philadelphia train crash last year.

Cook asked whether the ability to flex Transportation Alternatives funds to other activities meant that non-motorized transportation was becoming less of a priority. Mani said that it was likely a compromise between members of Congress who wanted to do away with the TAP program entirely and those who wanted to increase TAP funding, but he was not sure.

### ▪ **Benton Harbor Safe Routes to School**

Mani directed committee members to an article from the Herald Palladium in their packets about two schools in Benton Township that were undertaking the Safe Routes to School process: Hull International Academy on Territorial Road and the Arts and Communication Academy on Napier Avenue. Mani said that SWMPC had been approached by the principals of the two schools about their interest in providing better walking and bicycling facilities and undertaking a planning process as is required to use Safe Routes to School funds. Mani said that SWMPC had convened an initial meeting with stakeholders from MDOT, the schools, and the Berrien County Road Commission. Michigan State University was now assisting MDOT with the survey and data gathering process for the schools. Mani said that at the initial meeting, MDOT and others were quite surprised by the extent of the ROW and safety issues in the area. The project will need to be done in phases, which poses complications in the planning process for Safe Routes to School.

Latham pointed out that one of the issues has been the Township's historical reluctance to install sidewalks, given concerns about the cost of maintaining them. Berg said that was a concern of the township, and wondered whether there were ready funding sources available to assist communities with maintenance costs.

Tilley expressed concern with students walking in the road along Napier Avenue and on Territorial Road, especially when it snows. Johnson said that perhaps this was a good opportunity to revisit effective strategies for sidewalk clearance in winter and looking at best practices throughout our region. Johnson said that currently, many municipalities have sidewalk snow removal ordinances, but they are unevenly enforced.

Smith said that Lincoln Township's sidewalk ordinance placed sidewalk snow removal as a burden of the property owner, but that Lincoln Township often plowed the sidewalks adjacent to private property as a courtesy. In the cases when the Township is unable to plow the sidewalks next to private property, the property owners complain.

Zebell said that the City of St. Joseph prioritizes plowing on its routes to school since many students walk to school.

Cook said sidewalk snow removal policies were subject to questions about how soon after or during a storm sidewalks need to be cleared. Someone could end up shoveling their sidewalks several times during a storm if snow keeps piling up. Zebell brought up the issue of setting reasonable expectations for when snow would be shoveled after a storm.

Gallagher said that SWMPC does have model ordinances and planning language regarding snow removal. SWMPC would be happy to forward out these templates to interested communities.

Gallagher said that the Safe Routes program funds infrastructure improvements such as new sidewalks or non-motorized paths, and that a small portion of the grant goes towards educational activities on walking. The grants are usually for \$200,000. The tricky thing with Safe Routes to School funding is that if you use the funding to build 5-foot sidewalks, they must be on both sides of the road.

▪ **CMAQ Funding Update**

Mani noted that an update on Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) projects funded within Berrien County and throughout the TwinCATS area had been provided in meeting packets. Mani advised committee members that in Michigan, new activities were now eligible for CMAQ funds, including:

- Installation of new, 5-foot wide sidewalks on a case-by-case basis.
- Replacement of municipal and county fleet vehicles, including the cabs and chassis of certain types of plow trucks

Other activities such as 10-foot wide non-motorized paths, traffic signal replacements, and bus replacements are still eligible for CMAQ funds.

Gallagher showed a graphic with the percentage of CMAQ funds in Berrien County that go towards each type of project from 2017-2020. Transit buses use approximately 61% of the CMAQ funds, per Berrien County's policy of using CMAQ funding to take care of transit agency needs.

▪ **2017-2020 Call for Projects Released**

Mani said that despite the funding increase under the FAST Act, MDOT was still advising MPOs to be conservative with their STP funding targets for 2017-2020. Mani said that TwinCATS was

keeping its funding estimate flat at 2017 levels by assuming revenues of \$871,925 per year, so this was still a conservative estimate. Projects can be added or modified once new estimates come in from the state.

Applications are due on February 8<sup>th</sup> by 5 PM via email. An application has been sent out to every jurisdiction that is eligible to apply for this funding. The eligible entities include the City of Bridgman, City of Benton Harbor, City of St. Joseph, Village of Stevensville, Village of Shoreham, and the Berrien County Road Commission. Townships should apply through the Road Commission. The application and more information about the TIP are available at: <http://www.swmpc.org/tcats1720tip.asp>.

## 6. PUBLIC TRANSIT

- **SWMPC Transit Updates**

None.

- **TCATA Updates**

Purvis reported that in 2015, TCATA's ridership had gone down for the first time since 2010. Ridership on fixed route is still increasing, but demand-response ("dial-a-ride") ridership is decreasing. Purvis said that one key issue is a shortage of drivers. TCATA and other transit agencies in Berrien County were struggling to hire drivers to replace new ones that were leaving. Purvis said that another issue was the new dispatching system where all rides were scheduled.

Johnson asked about whether TCATA had any long-term strategies to address the driver shortage and keep up with demand.

## 7. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Regional Inclusive Community Coalition (RICC)**

Johnson reported that the RICC had, at its last meeting, begun work on a letter expressing its continued support for consolidated or highly-coordinated transit throughout Berrien County, and the benefits that high-quality transit service would provide. Johnson said that she anticipated the letter being completed by the February RICC meeting.

- **Walk and Roll Report**

Mani noted that a member of the public had commented on the lack of activity on the Walk and Roll committee of late. Mani said that ideally, the Walk and Roll committee would have met by now to discuss 2017-2020 projects and whether they met the Complete Streets Policy. However, consideration of the Complete Streets Policy will need to be folded into the Project Selection Committee in order to get initial projects selected in time for MDOT's deadlines.

## **8. COMMUNITY LAND USE AND ZONING UPDATES**

Gallagher congratulated St. Joseph Township on having gotten Eagle Technologies to move into the area. They will be adding 100 new high-tech jobs at the former Greentree Composites building.

## **9. PROJECT UPDATES**

Gallagher and Mani noted that written project updates for TCATA and MDOT were distributed, and are attached at the end of these minutes. Other project updates are listed below.

### **City of Benton Harbor:**

1. Pipestone at Wall Street traffic signal replacement for \$99,719 in federal funds. Will be having a Grade Inspection (GI) meeting in February.
2. Pipestone at Britain Traffic Signal replacement for \$160,000 in federal funds. Will be having pre-construction meetings this week for a spring construction.

### **Berrien County Road Commission**

1. Shawnee Road from Jericho Road to the City limits of Bridgman resurfacing for \$373,658 in federal funds and a local cost of \$91,066. Will have final plans submitted as of January 25th.
2. Pipestone at Napier Traffic Signal Replacement for \$225,000 in federal funds is under construction.

### **City of St. Joseph**

1. Lakeview Avenue reconstruct from Hilltop to Highland for \$90,000 in federal funds and \$370,000 in local funds. The City anticipates making the May project letting.

Tilley asked when Pipestone Road might be resurfaced throughout the Township and the City of Benton Harbor, as pavement condition was getting to be quite bad on some stretches. Berndt suggested it would depend in large part on when MDOT was planning to reconfigure the Pipestone I-94 interchange. Latham said that the reconfiguration was probably a 2022 project.

## **10. OLD BUSINESS**

None.

## **11. NEW BUSINESS**

### **▪ Review and Approval of Project Prioritization Procedure for 2017-2020 STP funds**

Mani 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, including the Complete Streets Policy. 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 concern and strong disagreement with a scoring criterion in Section 2 of the system that gave additional weighting to projects that were willing to provide 30% or more of the construction costs in local match. Berndt and Purvis both expressed concerns with that approach favoring the wealthiest jurisdictions and not necessarily those areas with the greatest deferred needs for road funds. Purvis in particular cited his experience with transit funds, where those jurisdictions statewide that have more money keep spending it and getting more money, to the detriment of smaller or less well-equipped transit agencies.

Zebell said that the purpose of the local match criterion was to allow TwinCATS to spread its federal dollars across more projects in more jurisdictions. Those jurisdictions that can provide additional local match help free up federal dollars for projects in jurisdictions that may not be in a position to provide more than the required 18.15% match.

Cook said that the criterion was a useful scoring mechanism and helped spread out dollars across more communities. He noted that the City of Benton Harbor, which he represented, often struggled to provide local match, but that he still thought this criterion promoted fairness in geographic distribution of federal aid across TwinCATS communities. Gallagher noted that only a small amount of weighting was given to the local match criterion to make sure that jurisdictions with less resources are not punished for proposing good projects.

Berndt expressed disagreement with the safety project application criteria. Berndt said that if he knew projects would not be eligible for federal safety funding, this system would encourage him to submit them to MDOT anyway to score points at TwinCATS. Zebell and Cook agreed and recommended eliminating that criterion from project selection.

Berndt expressed disagreement with the criteria in Section 6 pertaining to whether a project is in a master plan or capital improvement plan, since the Road Commission does not have either of those documents. Zebell said that the idea behind that criterion was to look at roads as part of holistic infrastructure in a community; he used the example of the City of St. Joseph's SAW grant. Cook noted that while the Road Commission may not have those documents, some townships will, and those townships ought to be rewarded for sound planning on their transportation networks. Berndt said that those documents can be difficult to find for the townships.

After discussion, it was resolved that the scoring system would be run in two ways: 1) with criteria regarding local match and inclusion of the project in capital improvement plans or local planning documents, or 2) without those criteria incorporated. Zebell suggested that this way, the project selection subcommittee could see if those criteria really ended up making a difference in project selection. Cook agreed, stating that the entire project scoring system was a test as we had not used this system in the past. Mani also reiterated that the ultimate authority for project selection was still with the Policy Committee, who would be informed on their decision by the TAC.

A motion by Cook with support by Zebell to recommend that the Policy Committee approve use of the project scoring system with the understanding that Section 2a., Section 6a and Section 6b be subject to a "sensitivity analysis" to see if they impact the projects that are selected, that the criterion regarding safety project applications be eliminated, and with the understanding that projects will still be selected through an open, public process and after extensive debate by the TAC and Policy Committees. **Motion passed.**

The project selection subcommittee meeting was scheduled for Tuesday February 16<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM in the SWMPC Conference Room, 376 W Main St Suite 130, Benton Harbor, MI 49022.

- **MDOT and FHWA Updates**

None.

**12.PRIVILEGE OF THE FLOOR:**

Jolivette introduced Dan Roberts from the MDOT Kalamazoo TSC. With the reorganization of MDOT's TSC offices, Dan would be attending many of the TwinCATS meetings moving forward.

**13.ADJOURNMENT at 10:56 AM.**

Next meeting is February 22, 2016 at 9:00 AM in Anchor Rooms A+B at St. Joseph City Hall, City Commission Chambers.

*Compiled by: Gautam Mani, SWMPC Associate Planner, 2016.*

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