



Meeting Report

Project Name: Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Transportation Plan
M/A/B Project #: 2009043.00
Meeting Date: November 18, 2009
Subject: Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Committee Meeting

Attendees:

Howard Loving	NC Board of Transportation, Chair
John Melia	Wilmington
Stuart Smith	Belville
Mike Roberts	Leland
Howard Capps	Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Ryan Rhondenhiser	Wrightsville Beach
Al Freimark	Pender County
Eric Coffey	New Hanover County
Steve Stanton	Carolina Beach
Joshuah Mello	Wilmington Urban Area MPO, Staff
George Alexiou	M/A/B
Than Austin	M/A/B
Greg Saur	M/A/B
Nathaniel Grier	M/A/B

Meeting Summary

1. Howard L. welcomed everyone to the meeting. After introductions, he distributed a memo outlining the state's current fiscal situation, highlighting information from a recent presentation by DHHS.
2. Howard L. recapped the current state of evaluation of the surveys and recommendation of highway projects. Some 3,300 surveys were completed in total. The highway committee is nearing completion on recommendations for projects to be included in the LRTP.
3. George began the M/A/B presentation with some additional welcoming remarks and an overview of the agenda for the presentation.
4. George began by reviewing the vision statement from the last plan and asked whether it was appropriate for this update.
5. Josh responded that for each goal there should be one or more criteria that can be used to evaluate projects.
6. George commented that while he felt the goals and vision were generally appropriate, they are largely highway-centric and thus may not assist in the evaluation of transit projects. M/A/B will review goals and revise as appropriate.

7. George provided an overview of the process of the short list assessment of transit projects before turning to Greg to walk through in more detail.
8. Greg explained that in evaluating transit service one looks at two different ridership categories and that there are often different criteria for each:
 - a. Captive riders are those who typically have no other mode choice and depend on transit. These require local service at both ends of the trip.
 - b. Choice riders are those who have an option but elect to take transit. These riders typically live in less dense (often suburban areas) where local service is not practical. These riders are often served with express service from one or two collection points (with park and ride facilities) to the final destination – in this case most likely Downtown.
9. Greg showed a series of maps outlining the analysis of potential new service areas.
 - a. The density analysis shows that aside from Downtown Wilmington, the densities in the area are generally low. This means that establishing successful local service to these areas may be difficult.
 - b. Evaluating total trips within an area helps to identify potential ridership corridors, typically for express-type service where patrons can get to the key stops on their own (often park and ride). This analysis shows several locations to the south, northeast and west with potential.
10. There was a question about whether the maps and analysis reflected the recent growth and development in the area.
 - a. Josh responded that the data was updated within the past four (4) months based on certificates of occupancy and building permits within the region. Future projections are based on the average density for a given zoning subject to environmental constraints of unbuildable land.
11. Greg provided a review of potential transit technologies highlighting those most likely to be appropriate for Wilmington. Technologies discussed included
 - a. Bus: local, express and bus rapid transit (BRT);
 - b. Rail: inter-city or commuter rail and light rail (LRT); and
 - c. Water: heavy ferry and water taxi.
12. Greg covered the types of transit improvements that could be considered for the LRTP: express service; capital investment such as BRT or rail; local circulators; expanded local bus service; improved local service quality and amenities.
13. Howard C. and others indicated that it was important that the plan reflect input and discussion with WAVE.
 - a. Josh indicated that the plan will be adopted by the WAVE board as well as all members of the MPO.

14. Josh commented that it is very difficult to get encroachments or easements within the state right-of-way (such as for bus shelters). Additionally advertising is not allowed on state property (such as advertiser-funded shelters).
15. George commented that the NCDOT has recently adopted a “complete streets” policy so that hopefully introduction of some of these amenities may become easier in the future.
 - a. Howard L. commented that such successes will require the DOT to work with local citizens and jurisdictions.
16. Several members of the committee pointed out that many other areas, particularly other states (with specific mention of Florida), make developer pay for improvements, either a fixed fee or proportional to the impacts. North Carolina instead has a “last in the door” policy. There was additional discussion regarding pending legislation at the state level that might change this philosophy.
17. Greg discussed the evaluation of the identified transit projects, describing the criteria and the relative weights assigned to each. He indicated that the “community preference” criteria had yet to be filled out and that M/A/B would be looking to the committee for assistance in determining those weights.
18. Josh indicated that the short term WAVE Transit Plan identified four routes that are not yet implemented and wondered whether these should be higher on the list. The plan called for express service to three key employment centers: Downtown; Cape Fear Community College; and the medical center.
19. Than asked whether there were any routes or service the committee felt were missing from the listing.
20. Mike asked about balance between communities. He was also interested in how connecting service would be identified and shown on the plan.
21. Several indicated that the City of Wilmington owns right-of-way along Park Avenue and thus the cost of an exclusive right-of-way transit service would be lower along this corridor.
22. A question was raised about the potential for connections to Southport and the new state port:
 - a. Josh answered that as it is outside the MPO boundary it cannot be in the official plan. But such service can be discussed in the text or included in an appendix.
23. Ryan pointed out that the Wrightsville Beach aldermen are generally opposed to any transit service which would cross the bridge.
24. WAVE is currently looking at a trolley line downtown. There is also an old trolley line from downtown Wilmington to Wrightsville Beach.
25. Several asked how project U overlaps with several other projects.
26. Greg indicated that the list would be revised to correct that.

27. It was pointed out that the recent Market St corridor study examined land use and the potential impacts of transit.
28. It was suggested that the plan should look at the staging of projects. For example a corridor could first be improved with higher-frequency bus service; later see the installation of BRT; and possibly finally converted to LRT.
29. In discussing the potential for new privately-operated ferry service, it was pointed out that the Bald Head Island ferry currently operates at a loss but continues to operate as it is necessary to support the development.
30. Nat discussed the financial component of the plan. The primary question for the committee is how to handle potential additional sources of revenue.
 - a. George clarified that the ¼ cent transit sales tax will be examined as a separate scenario so there is the potential to evaluate additional revenue sources as part of this separate scenario.
31. There was question about whether I-140 and Skyway tolling would be included.
 - a. George and others indicated these could be considered this way.
32. There was discussion about the potential for the vehicle registration fee. Such a fee is easier to pass, legally, as it must only be approved by the county, not a public vote. The committee was uncertain whether the local county boards would support such an increase, particularly in the short term.
33. There was additional discussion about the potential of impact fees and the like. The committee had mixed feelings on what would be appropriate and what might be implementable, particularly in the short-term.
 - a. Eric indicated that there is pending legislation at the state level known as the Developer Responsibility Act which may make some of the discussion moot.
34. Howard L suggested that the transit-oriented vehicle registration fee increase be included as part of the future-year revenues.
35. The committee suggested that, at least until the various funding mechanisms are better-evaluated, the plan develop a “base portfolio” of projects. Additional projects would be prioritized and, based on available revenue, added to the plan.

Action Items

- M/A/B to review goals and vision statement and revise as appropriate. Goals should include (or be accompanied by) one or more criteria for evaluating projects.
- M/A/B to review transit projects and combine/adjust as appropriate to reflect committee comments and eliminated duplicate items.