

Meeting Minutes
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Transportation Advisory Committee
Date: February 27, 2008

Members Present:

Lanny Wilson, Chairman, NCBOT
Laura Padgett, Vice-Chair, City of Wilmington
Dean Lamberth, Town of Kure Beach
Bill Saffo, City of Wilmington
Bill Sue, Brunswick County
Chuck Thurlow, Town of Belville
Brenda Bozeman, Town of Leland
Mike Ballard, Town of Navassa
Nancy Pritchett, Cape Fear Public Trans. Authority
David Williams, Pender County
Allen Gilbert, Town of Carolina Beach

Staff Present:

Mike Kozlosky, Senior Planner
Lawless Bean, TDM Coordinator
Joshuah Mello, Transportation Planner

1. Call to Order

Mr. Wilson called the meeting to order at 4:01 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes

The motion to approve the minutes from the January 30th meeting carried unanimously.

3. Public Comment Period

Mr. Wilson asked if anyone would like to make any comments. No one wished to speak.

4. Presentations

a. "Keep America Moving" Video

Mr. Kozlosky presented the "Keep America Moving" video. The video discusses current transportation infrastructure and was produced by the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization's National Association.

5. Old Business

None

6. New Business

a. Resolution adopting WAVE Satellite Station Site Evaluation Study

Mr. Kozlosky introduced George Alexiou and Graham James with Martin/Alexiou/Bryson, and Peggy Hayes from Hayes Planning Associates who gave a presentation on the recommendations of the WAVE Satellite Station Evaluation Study.

Mr. Alexiou told members his team was charged with the task of identifying the best locations for the satellite transfer centers. Mr. James explained the process used in selecting the sites for the transfers stations. The final recommendations are Independence Station at Independence Mall, the East Station near Mayfaire and the Monkey Junction Station near Wal-Mart. Ms. Hayes told members as part of the study, they also surveyed transit passenger and conducted an internet survey to request input on amenities needed for designing a better transfer station for riders.

Following the presentation, Ms Padgett made the motion to adopt the WAVE Transfer Stations: Evaluation of Site Locations and Planning. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sue and the vote carried unanimously.

b. Approval of Section 5303 Agreement between WAVE and Wilmington MPO

Mr. Kozlosky told members currently the disbursement of Section 5303 funds, which is used for transit planning, is 50% to WAVE Transit and 50% to the Wilmington MPO. WAVE requested to amend the distribution formula to 65%/35%. The total allocation is \$73,000, of which 80% is funded through FTA and 20% coming from state and local match. The TCC recommended approval of the revised agreement with the stipulation that WAVE provide staffing for the update of the Long Range Transportation Plan, as well as the evaluation for the long term needs for the Wilmington Multi-Modal Transportation Center.

Mr. Sue asked about the funding loss to the MPO. Mr. Kozlosky said with the stipulations, he felt staff could sustain current operation with the reduction in funds and the disbursement agreement can be brought before this board yearly. Mr. Kozlosky told members it could come back next year because of the Transportation Demand Management System. If DOT requests that we do a TDM plan for this region, we could utilize some of these funds to complete this project.

Ms Padgett made the motion to approve the agreement. Mr. Sue seconded the motion on condition that we bring it back next year. Ms. Padgett accepted that modification. The motion, with modification, carried unanimously.

7. Discussion Items

a. Long Range Transportation Plan and Citizen Advisory Committee

Mr. Kozlosky told members that the Citizen Advisory Committee members have been selected from all but 3 TAC members. Staff will contact those members for their appointments. The kick-off meeting for the CAC is planned for sometime in March. Staff hopes to have someone from DOT or Federal Highway make a presentation at that meeting on the comprehensive transportation planning process to better help the committee understand their goals and objectives.

b. Discussion regarding a referendum for a ¼ cent sales tax increase within the MPO planning area

Ms. Padgett told members she and Mr. Saffo requested this item be added to the agenda. Across the country cities, towns and counties are going to have to begin providing some means of local revenue for transportation and we need additional tools to raise that revenue. One of the options North Carolina has provided is a county increase of ¼ cent sales tax. That money can be used for roads. It can create additional funding so that we can build the projects that we need.

The federal gas tax is going to run out of money this year so this is a problem that should have been faced two or three years ago. The current authorization goes through 2009 but there is not enough money to get through 2008.

Ms. Padgett said she thinks we are going to see some major differences in how transportation is considered and how it is funded. All local governments are going to be affected. She told members she would like this committee to consider having staff bring back a resolution to request that New Hanover County put on a referendum in the fall if possible. We can expect to see changes come about at the state and federal level in terms of money that can come down locally for transportation projects. We have projects that, if we don't move forward to get them done, we're going to lose right-of-way and it will cost a lot more. So there are some specific

projects that are being looked at are extending Military Cutoff Road and Independence Boulevard. In her opinion there should be some small piece set aside for transit to provide dependable funding.

Mr. Wilson told members he would ask that it be “spelled-out” if we are going to move forward with this in a referendum and include a “sunset” once the two projects are complete. If you have a stream of revenue, you can bond against that stream. Everyone on this board would have to agree, although we are optimistic that something will occur in the short session. However, there is not likely a “big-fix” until the long session and the final report will be issued to the 21st Century Committee in December of this year.

Mr. Kozlosky told members in 2005 Representatives McComas, Wright and Justice introduced a bill that would have allowed for a referendum for a ½ cent sales tax for transportation. It identified three projects: Independence Boulevard extension, Military Cut-off Road extension and Dow Road widening and extension. That bill stalled in committee but this board did endorse the resolution in support of that initiative and worked with the local delegation to get that bill introduced. Staff feels that this is the time to request the ¼ cent sales tax in New Hanover County.

Ms. Padgett told members we need to make sure DOT understands that we still want our current level of state and federal money and that we are not trying to supplant their responsibility with this funding. The 21st Century Committee will be looking at different things and this is an opportunity for us to present ourselves as a locality willing to help ourselves. In other places across the county, there are innovative ways to deal with things like this and one of those we might consider down the road is to create a regional transportation authority that has taxing ability in the area where they are responsible for the roads. There are sections of the country that utilize that method, particularly in large cities, and then we will have more people involved in funding transportation. The City of Wilmington pays for a great deal of the infrastructure that supports the sales tax we collect. In New Hanover County, 83% of the sales tax is collected within the City of Wilmington, but we only get back about 20% to pay for those infrastructure costs. This is an effort for the whole county, including the City of Wilmington and the beach communities, to have some funds that we control and decide how we want them used. They can also be used to leverage other dollars.

Mr. Gilbert said with the failure of the infrastructure bill that was going through the legislature for the ½ cent, if you are going to put this legislation through at ¼ cent, we need to define where that money is going to go. Our biggest issue is maintenance. Some of our roads in smaller towns and cities haven't been paved in 22 years.

Mr. Wilson said the legislation is already there to allow the ¼ cent sales tax and for the counties to put it to a referendum. It is up to the counties to make the determination where the money would be applied. We are just suggesting that the money be utilized for transportation.

Ms Padgett said she feels there is public support for this type of funding efforts. We must be specific in what we are going to use the funding for, get those projects done, and then look at where we may be at that point in time.

Mr. Gilbert said the public may not be able to see the value in new construction because every time they get into their car, they face the issues of maintenance with the existing roads.

Mr. Saffo told members the MPO is asking the City of Wilmington to protect right-of-ways and in protecting those right-of-ways, we take away peoples property rights. We need to make a commitment to these property owners. If the funding is not there, should we be taking this private property indefinitely in order to protect this right-of-way?

Mr. Gilbert said new construction is important but there are a lot of people who live inside the city limits that will have a hard time looking at a ¼ cent sales tax for building roads somewhere else, when their roads are not being maintained.

Mr. Wilson said he believes there is money at DOT for the maintenance of the roads and to contact them to discuss a particular maintenance issue. Mr. Lamberth agreed that the beach communities need help with the road maintenance. Mr. Gilbert said new roads are great, but we need to make sure the tax paying citizens are being served.

Mr. Wilson told members there is more of a chance to supplant maintenance dollars than new dollars. He said he would also ask that we keep the public transportation issue separate because he thinks the ¼ cent should be used for those two transportation projects. The committee could recommend the county add \$5.00 to the registration fee for public transportation because they already have that authority. That would go a long way in solving the issue with public transportation and implementing the ideas from the WAVE Satellite Station Site Evaluation Study. It would not require a referendum as it could be implemented by a vote of the county commissioners.

Mr. Ballard asked Ms. Padgett if she had any information on the creation of a transportation authority. Mr. Wilson said large cities in Texas have regional authorities but, they were generally put in place to build toll roads. Mr. Kozlosky told members York, South Carolina has a successful program in place called "Pennies for Progress". In 2001 they went to the voters with identified needs for transportation improvements with a sunset date. The voters passed the referendum by about a 54/46% vote. Because they delivered on all the projects they had identified, when they went back with another referendum request in 2004 or 2005, it passed in a 70/30% vote. As long as you can put the projects on the ground, you will get support for these efforts, but you have to be able to deliver these projects.

Mr. Wilson said when you keep the Department of Transportation out of it, as far as using federal dollars, then you don't have all the strings attached that come with the utilization of federal dollars. If we could undertake at least one of these projects, it would mean the City of Wilmington, working through the MPO, could get permits a lot faster.

Mr. Kozlosky told members if all the communities would step up, then we could find a revenue stream to do some of these transportation projects, such as the Wilmington Bypass, Hampstead Bypass and Independence Boulevard extension, which are regionally significant for this area. The entire region will benefit from the projects.

Ms. Padgett made a motion to request staff bring back a resolution with the details on how much revenue could be generated and a gross estimate of how much some of those projects would cost.

Mr. Wilson asked Ms. Padgett if she would consider making it two resolutions. Ms. Padgett agreed and made the motion requesting staff bring the TAC a resolution requesting New Hanover County put in place a \$5.00 license tag fee.

Mr. Lamberth told members he would like to see Dow Road included as a project on the request for a referendum.

Mr. Kozlosky told members in 2005 the estimated revenue for ½ cent was \$14 million. So, if we go to a ¼ cent, then it will generate about \$7 million per year based on the numbers in 2005. If bonded 12 times, it would generate \$94 million. That would be enough to do two of those projects, but not all three.

Ms. Padgett told members her motion is for staff to bring back details to this board and then we could vote on moving forward.

Mr. Kozlosky asked if this committee would like staff to also bring back a resolution supporting the possibility of creating a regional transportation authority for Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties. Ms. Padgett said she did not know if we needed it for the next meeting, but let's start looking at it.

Mr. Wilson said we need to be cautious when giving taxing authority to an organization that might not be elected officials. It may be a significant concern. .

Mr. Williams told members he would like to at least hear more about it. Mr. Wilson told members our best bet if we are going to get anything through, is to work with this 21st Century Committee to make the recommendations.

Ms. Padgett said her 1st motion is to request staff to come back with a resolution requesting New Hanover County to take a ¼ cent transportation tax to the residents of New Hanover County in a referendum with projects to be identified and a sunset. Mr. Williams seconded the motion. The vote carried unanimously.

Ms. Padgett made a 2nd motion asking staff to bring this board a resolution urging the New Hanover County Commissioners to impose a \$5.00, and up to a \$10.00 per license tag fee, specifically designated for public transportation. Ms. Pritchett seconded the motion. The vote carried unanimously.

8. Project Updates

a. Cape Fear Historic Byway Study

Mr. Mello told members staff has a meeting on the February 29th with the consultants to review the final draft of the corridor management plan for the scenic byway. Staff will be offering additional comments and bring it to the steering committee for their adoption. Staff will be bringing it to the TAC in March.

b. Blue Clay Road Bicycle Corridor Study

Mr. Mello said staff is wrapping up the Blue Clay Road corridor study. Staff met with the airport officials two weeks ago about using a piece of their property to the north of the airport for the multi-use trail. The airport was supportive and staff will take a resolution to their board within the coming months asking them to support the plan. Mr. Mello told members staff has had great success working with the larger developments to connect their internal trail systems.

c. Dow Road Widening and Extension

Mr. Kozlosky told members staff was able to come to an agreement on a fee and scope with Wilbur Smith and Associates to complete the analysis of the Dow Road widening and extension project. It was one of the three project identified back in 2005. We see the importance and need for this project in southern New Hanover County and especially the beach communities. We will have to have support from the Sunny Point because a large portion of the extension of the roadway traverses the blast zone. Staff is developing a memorandum of agreement between the MPO, the Air Force and Sunny Point as part of the scope for the project so that we have buy-in and have documentation to go forward with constructing the extension portion.

d. Monkey Junction Collector Street Plan

Mr. Kozlosky told members there is a meeting tomorrow night at Bellamy Elementary School to review the draft plan to the public and receive feedback. Staff will incorporate those comments from the community and take it back to the community, along with the cross sections for the collector streets. The proposal is to provide a road map and a guide for future development in that area.

e. Market Street Corridor Study

Mr. Kozlosky told members staff is moving forward in developing a scope for this project. It is on the Board of Transportation agenda for next Thursday, for which the MPO and the City of Wilmington will appropriate \$270,000 for the completion of the Market Street Corridor Study. Mr. Wilson said this project is important because it is the first study of this type that has been initiated by the state to integrate land use and transportation planning.

f. NCDOT Project Update

Attached

8. Announcements

a. Monkey Junction Collector Street Plan Public Meeting – February 28th

b. Wilmington Metropolitan Bike/Ped Committee Meeting – March 13th

9. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:25pm

Respectfully submitted

Mike Kozlosky
Senior Transportation Planner