

Meeting Notes
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Transportation Advisory Committee
Date: February 24, 2010

Members Present:

Jonathon Barfield, Chairman, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Laura Padgett, City of Wilmington
Mike Ballard, Town of Navassa
Bill Sue, Brunswick County
Jack Batson, Town of Belville
David Williams, Pender County
Walter Futch, Town of Leland
Mike Alford, NC Board of Transportation

Staff Present:

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director

1. Call to Order

Mr. Barfield called the meeting to order at 4:03 PM. He introduced Mr. Jim Trogdon, Chief Operation Officer for NCDOT and Mr. Mike Alford, NC Board of Transportation appointee and asked both to say a few words.

Mr. Trogdon told member that the Department is working on delivering the stimulus projects (ARRA). They have been extremely successful in making sure all projects (393 projects for \$735 million) were obligated within the timeline required by the federal government. Out of the 393 projects obligated, 309 are either under contract or have already been completed. With the money given to North Carolina, we were able to put 33,000 North Carolina transportation workers to work that we couldn't have done otherwise. That's about 1.7 million worker hours over the last year.

Mr. Trogdon also updated members on the TIGER grant submittal for the Yadkin River bridge/I-85 Corridor improvements. He said he felt it was important for all MPOs to be aware of the project. Although they weren't successful in getting what they asked, the project will be using design/build financing where the Department is partnering with the contracting industry to provide some financing for the project. That will allow projects that aren't fully funded to move forward more rapidly. Right now the economic environment has provided the Department with a narrow window of opportunity because of the hunger of the market with the contracting industry. We are generally seeing a 20% reduction in price. Section "A" of the Wilmington Bypass that was just awarded came in less than the engineers estimates. The project was estimated at \$100 million and the low bid came in at \$81 million.

Mr. Trogdon said he also wanted to mention the announcement of the initial results of the Project Prioritization Process. The prioritization process is important because the Governor directed the Department to be more transparent and accountable. The only way to do that was to work with all the MPOs and RPOs to develop a system to rank the projects to be considered in the Transportation Improvement Program. It had to be something that made senses to everyone across the state. The Department has \$45 billion in highway and bridge projects submitted but anticipate only \$9 billion in revenue. We must make sure we are using every dollar as wisely as we can. That is why we need the Project Prioritization Process. Now that we see what we can't do due to lack of revenue, the second step must be to convince our legislature and members of the community to look at innovative financing options in order to get those projects done.

Mr. Mike Alford said his background is in business and any time we can employ capital at a 20% discount or better, it's good for everyone living in North Carolina. He told members that the role of the Board of Transportation has changed. It is now to be an advocate for a data-driven process. He promised members that he will work together with them in making certain that the data, in terms of the

prioritization, is data that we agree with and makes sense. He said he looks forward to working with the TAC members.

Mr. Barfield told members he would like everyone to take a moment to look at the mission statement at the top of the agenda before moving forward with the meeting. He said it's a good reminder of why we're all here and the focus of what the organization is trying to accomplish.

2. Approval of Minutes:

Minutes for the meetings on January 27th were approved unanimously.

3. Public Comment Period

No one wished to address the Committee.

4. Presentations

a. Transportation Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Group (TIPAG)

Mr. Kozlosky told members the Transportation Intergovernmental Policy Advisory Group was organized in an effort enhance relationships through collaboration and partnerships with local governments, other groups and NCDOT to make the Department a great place to work, to make a network that efficiently moves goods and people, to make the infrastructure last longer and make a safer environment for transportation throughout the state. The objectives are to design and manage a collaborative process to identify policies that result in NCDOT and local governments/transportation partners working more effectively together to establish and direct expert workgroups to explore opportunities for improved policies and practices.

The committee developed three work groups: Communication and Education; Future Transportation Funding Strategy (Reauthorization); and Reduce the Land Use and Transportation Disconnect. He told members that they are also considering forming additional work groups. Two areas being discussed are the evaluation of various organizational boundaries and effective communications with NCDOT and FHWA.

Mr. Kozlosky said one work group is asking the Department to purchase software that will allow efficient communication in tracking where money is going and how it's being spent throughout the state.

5. Old Business

none

6. Public Hearing

a. Resolution supporting the MTIP/STIP Amendments for EB-5118, ER-5100 and U-5200

Mr. Kozlosky told members staff conducted the required 30-day public comment period for the amendments in case a funding source were to come available that we could use for these improvements.

Ms. Jill Stark, with Federal Highway Administration suggested changing the title of the resolution to MTIP/STIP Administrative Modifications, not MTIP/STIP Amendments. She told Mr. Kozlosky until we have an updated LRTP in place, these changes will be administrative modifications, not actual amendments.

Mr. Barfield opened the public hearing. With no one wishing to speak, Mr. Barfield closed the public hearing. Ms Padgett made the motion to support the resolution with the suggested change in wording. Mr. Ballard seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

7. New Business

a. Resolution adopting the Kure Beach Parking Study

Mr. Kozlosky told members the Town of Kure Beach adopted the study at their January meeting. Mr. Futch made the motion adopt the Kure Beach Parking Study. Mr. Ballard seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

b. Opening of 30-day Public Comment Period for the 2010-2011 Unified Planning Work Program

Mr. Kozlosky told member the Unified Planning Work Program is the budget for the Wilmington MPO. The public comment period was opened on February 22nd and will close on March 23rd. The program includes \$316,250 in PL funds. That includes the state allocation of \$253,000, as well as \$63,250 in local match. As part of the work program, staff is proposing to conduct a city-wide collector street plan for the City of Wilmington. Staff is also proposing \$10,000 to conduct an organizational analysis of the MPO to see if it can be more effectively and efficiently operated.

Mr. Williams made the motion to open the Public Comment Period for the 2010-2011 Unified Planning Work Program. Mr. Ballard seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

c. Opening of 30-day Public Comment Period for MTIP and STIP Amendments for Public Transportation Projects

Mr. Kozlosky requested the board open the 30- day Public Comment Period for MTIP and STIP amendments for public transportation projects to utilize funds for stimulus projects and to accurately reflect funds being spent within the MPO boundary by the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority. Mr. Williams made the motion to open the public comment period. Ms. Padgett seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

d. Change of March Meeting Date

Mr. Barfield told members he would like to request changing the March TAC meeting date from March 31st to March 24th due to a conflict for the NHC Commission Agenda Briefing Meeting. Mr. Futch made the motion to change the meeting date. Mr. Williams seconded the motion and it carried unanimously

9. Updates (moved ahead)

a. Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Committee

Mr. Howard Loving, Co-chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) provided an update on the *Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Transportation Plan*. He told members that it has been a 2-year long process creating the federally mandated assessment of transportation projects and programs looking out 25 years. A final plan will be present to the TAC for approval in late June. Mr. Barfield thanked the members of the CAC for the commitment and dedication to the project.

Mr. Kozlosky told members it's important to update members on the draft plan. He proposed holding a joint work session with the Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Committee so they may present the plan at the March meeting.

b. City of Wilmington/Wilmington MPO

Mr. Kozlosky provided the update on transportation projects in the City of Wilmington

c. Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority

Mr. Eby provided the update for the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority

d. NCDOT

Mr. Pope provided the update on the department's projects

8. Discussion

a. Wilmington MPO Legislative Agenda

Mr. Kozlosky told members staff has been working on developing a legislative agenda to submit to our elected representatives. Staff wanted to present the information to this committee for comment. He said following today's discussions, staff will bring the revised legislative agenda back to the next meeting for action. Mr. Kozlosky stated that the financing options in the document are the recommendations that were developed by the 21st Century Committee.

Mr. Futch said he felt that the list should be in priority-order with the "B" Section of the Wilmington Bypass as the number-1 project.

Mr. Sue asked Mr. Trogon asked where the funding stands on the "B" Section. Mr. Trogon said because it is a loop project, the department is completing a prioritization on all the loops, which was separate than the other prioritization process that was briefed today. Based on the feedback the Department received, we're including a lot of other things like economic impacts, and are working with the Commerce Department using their IM planning model in order to estimate economic impact. We have gone out for an additional commenting process with the MPOs and RPOs and the deadline is the 26th. Then we will take the final comments and within the next four weeks we'll be applying all the projects and getting some estimates on where they all stand. You will probably hear around the end of March or the first of April on the results. Those would be draft because that's financially constrained based on the pay-as-you-go plan. He said in the mean time, he is working with some other financing options out there that we can also consider.

Mr. Sue told Mr. Trogon that 10 years ago the elected officials from the entire region established the Wilmington Bypass as the number-1 priority and it has been the number-1 priority for all those years. Here we are, more than 10 years down the road and we still don't have the outer loop. When the former Chairman of the Department came down during the celebration of 50-years of the interstate highway system we spoke to him about how eastern North Carolina has been on the short end of the stick for a long time on transportation. At that gathering, one of the associate secretaries told the audience that the last segment of I-40 all the way across the county was the one coming into Wilmington. It's time we got a little attention down here. He told Mr. Trogon he would appreciate any help he could give us on getting the loop finished. You would really jump to the gun if you started across that causeway and somebody dropped a box of tacks. You would be backed up all the way to 17th Street and all the way to past Lanvale Road.

Ms. Padgett said she would like to make a suggestion for consideration. Both the "B" Section and the Cape Fear Skyway are critical pieces to the loop. Rather than discuss which one should be first, we want the loop finished and we need both pieces.

Mr. Pope told members he would like to make a comment about the "B" section. We do know that the Federal Highway Administration has opened the case that was presented by the Town of Navassa and they began reviewing that claim. The Department has not heard one way or the other.

Mr. Kozlosky distributed copies of the draft letter regarding the Urban Loop Prioritization Process addressed to Mr. Don Volker. At the November TAC meeting members recommended that the Wilmington Bypass, specifically the "B" Section not be considered as part of the this analysis because it was funded, it has an environmental document and the right-of-way had been appropriated and this letter reiterates those comments. We have reviewed the proposal and we are providing some additional comments based on the criteria that were outlined. He stated that he wanted this committee to know the letter will be mailed Friday to the Department.

He asked that members forward questions or comments to him regarding the letter before noon of Friday.

Mr. Barfield told member he had one more topic to discuss with the committee. At the last meeting he talked about being as inclusive as we can in terms of all the different groups that are represented here at the TAC meetings. One of the options discussed in the past was the name for the committee. He said he was wondering if changing the name of the Wilmington MPO to something that is more inclusive to all that are here. Some suggestions were the Southeastern Region MPO or perhaps the Tri-county MPO. He told members he just wanted to open discussion as we move forward in making it a more regional type of name.

Ms. Padgett told members she would have some problems with a name change. The City of Wilmington is the largest city on this board, as well as the fact that the City pays the largest part of the bill in keeping the Metropolitan Planning Organization active. It is a Federal designation for the Wilmington Area. She stated that she felt until other cities exceeded the City of Wilmington in size, the name should continue to be the Wilmington MPO. Mr. Futch said he agreed. As long as the City of Wilmington is providing the funding, it is the appropriate name. Mr. Williams said he agrees with Ms. Padgett. As long as they are providing the funding, the name should remain as it is. Mr. Batson told members it is not a big issue for him.

Mr. Barfield told members he and Mr. Kozlosky attended the prioritization process unveiling meeting in Kinston today. In listening to the strategic prioritization results and looking at the top 25 projects from the state, there were very few projects that were centered toward Division 3. Mr. Pope told members to remember there are laws today that require certain dollars to come to Division 3, primarily through the equity formula. Even though our number 25 project may be 200th in the state, it may still be a funded project within our division because of funding and dollar constraints. Our projects may have not ranked very high state-wide, but in some pots that won't make a difference. We will still get our fair share of the funding sources.

Mr. Barfield said another of the main points that came out of this meeting again is transparency and taking politics out of the decision ranking process. As we go forward in looking at these projects, the need will be data-driven, versus an elected official saying we need this in our region. The Department will be looking at data to support the decisions being made.

Mr. Alford told members he would like to urge everyone to look at the list and the ones that resonate in such a way that either yes this makes sense, or even more importantly, this does not make sense. It's critical that we all come together on this in a timely fashion. We have until June of 2011 before the projects are firm and we have lot of time to come together. It's important we speak cohesively to which of these projects make sense. He promised that he would do everything he can and will be spending some time on the equity piece.

10. Announcements

11. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:20 PM

Respectfully submitted

Mike Kozlosky
Executive Director
Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization