

Meeting Minutes

Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Advisory Committee

Date: December 12, 2012

Members Present:

Laura Padgett, Chair, City of Wilmington
Dean Lambeth, Vice-Chair, Town of Kure Beach
Pat Batleman, Town of Leland
Bill Sisson, Town of Wrightsville Beach
Earl Sheridan, City of Wilmington
Mike Alford, NC Board of Transportation
Frank Williams, Brunswick County
Steve Shuttleworth, Carolina Beach
Joe Breault, Town of Belville

Staff Present:

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director
Tara Murphy, Associate Transportation Planner
Suraiya Rashid, Associate Transportation Planner
Bill McDow, Staff Engineer
Adrienne Harrington, Transportation Planner

1. Call to Order

Ms Padgett called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM.

2. Approval of Minutes:

The minutes from the October 31, 2012 meeting were approved unanimously.

3. Public Comment Period

Mr. Andy Koeppel addressed members regarding the proposed MPO boundary expansion. He told members that he endorsed the boundary as proposed and would encourage members to pass the resolution.

Ms. Karen Reese, with Intercoastal Reality, addressed members regarding the path of a bridge to cross the Cape Fear River. She told members she has several listings in the Brunswick Forest community. It has come to her attention that the Skyway connector is a possibility and they are looking for information regarding at what point they should be disclosing that information to prospective buyers.

Ms. Padgett noted that at this point we do not know. The TAC does not have the information from the decision document which is the Environmental Document for all of routes proposed for the crossing the river. She told Ms. Reese those potential routes are shown on the WMPO website. Until the Environmental Document is complete, no one will know which route has been chosen. A resolution requesting completion of that Environmental Document is on today's agenda.

4. Presentations

a. 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program

Ms. Rashid gave a presentation on the proposed process for updating the *Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan*. She noted that the Long Range Transportation Plan has undergone a name change and is now referred to as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). She reviewed the MTP plan requirements, feedback from FTA and FHWA on the Cape Fear Commutes Plan 2035 plan, the proposed roles for creating a 2040 plan and the proposed process for going forward with the creation of the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. She told members there will be regular updates and TAC members will have opportunities to comment on the process as the 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program plan is developed.

5. Old Business

No items

6. New Business

a. Resolution adopting the Wilmington MPO Planning Area Boundary

Mr. Kozlosky told members at the direction of the TAC, the MPO boundary expansion will include the area in Pender County bordered by NC 210. The boundary will also expand from where the current boundary stops at Sloop Point Road up to and will abut the Town of Surf City, but does not include the town. The expansion does not require amendments to the current Bylaws.

Mr. Frank Williams made the motion to adopt the Wilmington MPO Planning Area Boundary. Mr. Lambeth seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

b. Resolution adopting amendments to the WMPO's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee Bylaws

Ms. Rashid told members that the Bike/Ped Committee decided to restructure their focus and re-define their role as a committee. They wanted to change the committee's objectives to reflect a more regional perspective for the MPO. The amendments to the bylaws reflect those changes.

Mr. Lambeth made the motion to adopt the amendments to the WMPO's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee Bylaws. Mr. Frank Williams seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

c. Resolution Supporting the City of Wilmington's application for the 2013 Recreational Trails Program grant

Mr. Kozlosky told members the City of Wilmington is applying for the 2013 Recreational Trails Program grant and is requesting support from the TAC for construction of Phase I of a multi-use trail along Park Avenue. The project is included in the *Cape Fear Commutes 2035 Long Range Transportation Plan* and is also the number 2 priority in the *Draft Wilmington/New Hanover County Comprehensive Greenway Plan*.

Dr. Sheridan made the motion to adopt the resolution supporting the City of Wilmington's application for the 2013 Recreational Trails Program grant. Mr. Breault seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

d. Resolution commending the North Carolina General Assembly and NCDOT on developing and adopting a data-driven prioritization process for transportation improvement projects

Ms. Padgett told members that the resolution recognizes and commends the General Assembly and NCDOT for developing and adopting a data-driven prioritization process to select transportation projects.

Mr. Sisson made the motion to commend the North Carolina General Assembly and NCDOT on developing and adopting a data-driven prioritization process for transportation improvement projects. Dr. Sheridan seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

e. Resolution requesting NCDOT/NCTA complete the environmental document to determine the best transportation solution to cross the Cape Fear River

Mr. Frank Williams told members he had some minor amendments he would like to propose for the resolution. He said his revisions include adding the Isabel Homes Bridge to the second paragraph because that is where half the traffic jams occur, and in third paragraph he proposed to add "make the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars". In the last paragraph, to clarify that we want information on all available options and not just for them to bring back one option, he said that he also change the wording to:

"Now Therefore, be it resolved that the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Advisory Committee request the North Carolina Department of Transportation and North Carolina Turnpike Authority complete the environmental document and provide the Transportation Advisory Committee with detailed information on all available options for a crossing over the Cape Fear River so the Transportation Advisory Committee can make a fully informed recommendation."

Mr. Frank Williams made a motion to amend the resolution to reflect his proposed changes. Ms. Batleman seconded his motion.

Ms. Padgett asked Mr. Williams and Ms Batleman if they would object to including the request to see all the information from the environmental assessment and that members are allowed to see all the information detailing all options in their assigned order of recommendation. She suggested that members should see the scores so the TAC can agree or decide that we would be willing to forgo some of the items that they scored if we were to pick a different option.

Mr. Kozlosky told members the Environmental Document or the determination document only provides one "least environmentally damaging practical alternative". The environmental review involves several steps or screenings to work through the process. Those steps include a high-level screening, a more detailed screening, and then even a more detailed screening which help to eliminate some of the alternatives. There are about 15 different alternatives that are currently on the table and as the document is developed and the data is analyzed, the environmental document determines the one they consider as the least environmentally damaging practical alternative. That least environmentally damaging practical alternative would be the alternative that came out of the environmental review. It is also important to point out that the TAC would not make the

decision on the corridor. That would be done by the Merger Team, which is a group of individuals from Fish and Wildlife, the Army Corp of Engineers, NCDOT, the MPO and the other environmental review agencies who developed the Environmental Document. The resolution is asking the TAC to support the Department of Transportation and the Turnpike Authority in determining what is to be the best transportation solution. We can ask the Department to evaluate any additional alternatives but the document that is developed is only going to give one as the preferred alternative.

Ms Padgett asked at what point does the merger team do a spreadsheet detailing how many businesses, how many properties, how many wildlife species are damaged, how many wetlands it goes through, how many environmental justice issues there are, and providing points for those and then adding those up for each alternative. Mr. Kozlosky said they do that with each of the screenings processes. Ms. Padgett noted that those are the reports TAC members are asking to see. Mr. Kozlosky said we could certainly provide the committee with those results of what the Department has done to date as far as the environmental review of each of those alternatives. He noted that he has no problem with detailing all the alternatives but it is important to point out that the Environmental Document will determine what will be the least environmentally damaging practical alternative.

Mr. Frank Williams said his concern with the resolution as its currently written is that it paves the way for them to come back with what they are already predisposed to think they want us to do. He said he hears that people think they already have their minds made up and this is just opening the door for that and perception is reality. Mr. Kozlosky told members that the days of writing an environmental document to reflect a certain alignment are over. That is why the resolution was crafted as it was written.

Dr. Sheridan asked that even if it contains just the one environmental selection, could we not have access to the other things that they looked at and how they were scored. Mr. Kozlosky told members that he will provide the link to the Departments website where they have the presentations/library for the previous project which includes a lot of that information and if it does not include the information, he will make it available.

Mr. Alford told members the process is transparent as it goes forward via the website right now and they can make certain that TAC members get updates along the way.

Ms. Padgett asked if the MPO will be give a decision up or down on that route and that's it? Mr. Kozlosky told her that TAC members will decide whether the project is to be funded or not at some point in the future. Ms. Padgett asked if that is only with the recommended alternative. Mr. Kozlosky replied that was correct because that choice was determined as the least environmentally damaging practical alternative.

Ms. Fussell told members one of the things to remember is that those 15 alternatives are what we start out with. Those are the choices and the Merger Team will study all of them. She invited TAC members to come to the merger team meetings where all the different environmental entities are sitting around the table. She told members they are also welcome to see the data used by the merger team in reaching their decision. She noted that the numbers used by the merger team to

make their determination are solid and data-driven and that information cannot be tampered with. At the end of the process, the last alternative left standing is the one determined to be the least environmentally damaging practical alternative. Trying to come back and say we might want it here is not an option because the alternative chosen by the Merger Team is the only one that will be permitted.

Ms. Padgett asked has the DOT up until this point had a recommended alternative that says it's the least environmentally damaging practical alternative. Mr. Kozlosky said no because they have not finished the environmental document. Mr. Kozlosky told members that is the purpose of the resolution in requesting that the Department complete the environmental document to determine the appropriate solution. The process was a little bit different when it was a Turnpike Authority project than what it would be as a DOT project. This is now being looked at as a DOT process. The environmental document will pick up where it left off once the process restarts.

Mr. Frank Williams told members one of the reasons he would support amending the resolution even with everything that has been said is that he would like to know how they reach the conclusion that they reach and not just take their word for it. He would like to see the data on how they reached that decision.

Mr. Breault told members he doesn't want to see just the least environmentally damaging practical alternative; he wants to see several because we may not like the route that they have selected. Ms. Padgett responded by saying that as she hears the DOT, we will get the recommended alternative and that's the one the permitting agencies are willing to permit. It's not going to be up to the MPO to determine which route they recommend to us.

Mr. Shuttleworth told members his concern is that we get an environmental study that comes back and says this is the least environmentally impacted and therefore that's the one you can get permitted and if you want to get it funded, vote it up. If you vote it down, you have no project. The issue is that you can't allow just the environmental permitting agency to dictate the economics of a project.

Ms. Padgett told members one of the engineers at the workshop described the environmental document as a decision document. It isn't just the environmental permitting agency, it's also looking at what are the impacts on existing neighborhoods, the impacts on the existing commercial, as well as the economic impacts. They have to take all of those things into consideration. She told members we can sit here and debate this or we can pass a resolution that requests that they move forward with the environmental document. If we sit here and say no then it will not go anywhere and we will not have the bridge. We at least need the results of their study and we ought to request that we get the spreadsheets that detail what points each alternative had under each of the categories being taken into consideration.

Mr. Sisson told members one of the concerns expressed at the workshop was that so much time has gone by since the process was initiated. We want to move ahead with it in order to have something to react to. Right now there's nothing to look at or even consider. It's vital to move this process ahead because nothing is happening since the process came to a stop in 2010.

Mr. Frank Williams told members he has some slightly amended wording to his amendment that he made earlier. In the Now Therefore paragraph, on the third line, after the word document, strike the rest of the sentence and replace with the following: "and provide the TAC with detailed information on all available options". He said that by default that document will include their recommendation.

Ms. Padgett told members she thinks that is where we're going to get into trouble. She asked Mr. Frank Williams if he would accept an amendment that says "so that the Transportation Advisory Committee can make a fully informed decision including requesting the study of an alternate."

Ms. Fussell told members she needed to point out that if the environmental document gets through the process and the last alternative is something that members say no, this is not where we want it, we want it over here; the process starts all over again. which means another two to four years. If you go back to the table with a new alternative, you start over. Ms. Fussell suggested having another workshop that is not project specific, just how we go through the merger process. Mr. Kozlosky noted that Mr. Rob Hanson, Project Development Section Head for the Eastern Region gave a presentation to members on the merger process at their June meeting. Ms. Padgett pointed out that several new members have been appointed to the TAC since then.

Ms. Padgett told members that it's important to recognize that it has been two years since this process was stalled and it's fairly perilous for us to delay the request to ask them to move forward. If we get in a position when we get their recommendation that we are totally dissatisfied, then we have to make the decision whether or not we are willing to delay it another two to four years. We can make that decision but there isn't any way to get a route on the table without finishing the process and letting them look at it. The other critical issue is requesting that we be kept informed of where the process is going and that we have some indication of which routes are coming out on top through the process. Any of us can attend the merger process meetings.

Mr. Shuttleworth asked if members of the TAC have the opportunity to voice an opinion or question a result during the merger process meetings. Mr. Kozlosky told members the MPO is a signatory-agency on the environmental document.

Ms. Fussell told members she would like to encourage members to consider holding a workshop for the merger process in order to bring all TAC members to the same understanding. Ms. Padgett suggested that Ms. Fussell also provide information on exactly what the District Engineer does, what she handles, what her responsibilities are, what constraints exist on what she can do so that we can understand her role within the Department.

Ms. Batleman told members she would like to ask the Leland Town Manager, Mr. David Hollis, who is also an engineer to explain their frustrations. Mr. Hollis told members from the Town of Leland's prospective, they look at it as the DOT decided point A and point B. DOT then mapped out 15 different routes between A and B. He said that the Town of Leland is suggesting that maybe A and B need to be more flexible and therefore introducing more than the 15 options to be considered. If you don't look back at that to start over the process, then you are not really including all options that are out there. You're only including the options that were predestine between A and B. Being able to expand or flex A and B a little bit allows you to look at other

options and this environment document will not look at that, it's only going to look at the route that is being considered and look at the least environmentally impacted route. Their concern is that the scope is not wide enough.

Ms. Padgett told members that at one point the scope was wider. That was how they wound up with the alternatives that they've got. Mr. Kozlosky told members if you go back and expand the study area, you would start all over. The study area was based on where the model demonstrated that the traffic would be drawn. If we were to look further to the south, the crossing will not attract as much traffic and that was why it was determined to put the study area where it was. He told members if this board wishes that the study area be expanded, then we can certainly make that request. Ms. Padgett asked if we can reasonably request that some minor adjustments of the endpoints be considered in looking at the route without asking that they start all over. Mr. Kozlosky told members that it's not the end points, it's actually that there is a study area. There's a big circle and if you expand the study area and look at other alternatives, then you've got to go back and start over.

Mr. Sisson asked if we know where the Town of Leland is talking about isn't contained within that circle. Mr. Hollis said he thinks the boundary is limited to the MPO boundary and this is just outside the MPO boundary, below Town Creek. Mr. Kozlosky told members we can look to see if it's incorporated in that area. He said Town Creek was included but he thought the area further south was not. Mr. Frank Williams said that would be a minor deviation that would alleviate the impact on Brunswick Forest and other communities.

Mr. Frank Williams asked if someone would read back the current amendments to the resolution. Ms. Padgett told members the amendment will read:

"Now Therefore, be it resolved that the Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Advisory Committee request the North Carolina Department of Transportation and North Carolina Turnpike Authority complete the environmental document and provide the Transportation Advisory Committee with detailed information to provide an improved crossing over the Cape Fear River so that the Transportation Advisory Committee can make a fully informed decision."

Mr. Frank Williams added:

".....detailed information on all available options to provide an improved crossing....."

Ms. Padgett noted that TAC members were voting on Mr. Frank Williams' amended motion just read. Mr. Breault seconded Mr. Williams' amended motion. The motion carried unanimously.

f. Adoption of the 2013 Meeting Schedule

Mr. Sisson made the motion to adopt the 2013 meeting schedule. Mr. Frank Williams seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

7. Discussion

a. Crossing over the Cape Fear River Work Group

Ms. Padgett told members that the TAC was asked to consider forming a work group of three or four members to attend meetings with the merger team. The group will be involved in the process

and can report back to the TAC on how things are going. She suggested that members who are interested in serving on the work group let her know after the meeting.

b. Plan to ease traffic during expansion/construction of the Causeway

Ms Padgett asked Ms. Fussell if she would give an update on how NCDOT plans to address traffic delays while working on the Causeway expansion. Ms. Fussell told members she reviewed the traffic plans and during the construction period both lanes will be open in both directions the whole entire time, except for very short stents while paving. There will not be days on end of lane closures. Both lanes will be open in both directions.

Ms. Batleman said that was different from what she had been hearing which is that it is going to be a painful experience. She told members she believes we have a “perfect storm”. You’ve got a witches-brew of traffic calamity because you’ve got the causeway construction, repairs to the Rhodes Bridge, the possibility to the Memorial and Holmes bridges that are still subject to being raised and they are also subject to repair and maintenance work; and so at any time if you have things go out-of-wack with all of that that’s going on, you need to plan for that. She said her goal is to try to figure out how to get people out of their cars and using public transportation. She told members that we need to encourage optional transit plans for the duration of that construction. If we can emphasize the benefits of cooperative commuting in partnership with Brunswick County and its towns, the chambers of commerce, big businesses in Wilmington, Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender counties, we might be able to find a way to reduce the number of single occupancy cars using the causeway. She suggested utilizing the Cape Fear Breeze program to help. Mr. Kozlosky told members the Cape Fear Breeze program no longer exists. Ms. Padgett noted that there have been several efforts to put together a TDM program but this area is spread out enough that we have not been able to get major-employers on board, with the exception of UNCW. She told members that the critical-mass that’s needed to pull together.

Ms. Harrington told members currently the TDM program has reached out to a couple of the major employers in the area. UNCW has taken the lead role as they listen to the needs of some of the employers. They are trying to figure out the different dynamics within the area’s major employers. Ms. Padgett suggested that Ms. Batleman and Mr. Eby with WAVE Transit, along with Ms. Harrington work together to come up with some specific recommendations.

Ms. Batleman told members in addition to that you do have Cape Fear Commutes 2035 with some recommendations for express bus routes. Ms. Padgett told members there is not funding for express bus service.

Mr. Breault told members he would also like to see “break-down” lanes added to the Causeway. He said there also needs to be a turn-a-round before the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. Ms. Fussell told members to add break-down lanes and turn-a-rounds to the Causeway facility will require an environmental study. She noted that there would also be safety issues involved for those kinds of facilities. Mr. Breault said he would like for DOT officials to at least look at the possibility of installing break-a-ways and turn-a-rounds. Ms. Fussell said she would.

8. Updates

Project updates for the Wilmington MPO/City of Wilmington and NCDOT are included in the agenda packet.

Mr. Eby noted that WAVE Transit will be one of the first transit authorities in the state to commit to using compressed natural gas and they will be building a compressed natural gas fueling station.

9. Announcements

10. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM

Respectfully submitted

Mike Kozlosky

Executive Director

Wilmington Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

**THE ABOVE MINUTES ARE NOT A VERBATIM RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS.
THE ENTIRE PROCEEDINGS ARE RECORDED ON A COMPACT DISC AS PART OF THIS RECORD.**