

Board Meeting Minutes
6th Floor Conference Room, 320 Chestnut Street
Wednesday, May 29, 2019

Members Present

David Piepmeyer, Pender County
Pat Batleman, Town of Leland
Neil Anderson, City of Wilmington
Jonathan Barfield, Cape Fear Public
Transportation Authority
Mike Allen, Town of Belville
Steve Shuttleworth, Town of Carolina Beach
John Ellen, Town of Kure Beach
Pat Kusek, New Hanover County
Frank Williams, Brunswick County
Eulis Willis, Town of Navassa
Mike Alford, NC Board of Transportation

Others Present

Mike Kozlosky, Executive Director, WMPO
Karen Collette, NCDOT Highway Division 3
Kevin Bowen, NCDOT Highway Division 3
Chad Kimes, NCDOT Highway Division 3

1. Call to Order

Chairman Piepmeyer called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

2. Conflict of Interest Statement

Chairman Piepmeyer read the conflict of interest statement and asked if any members had a conflict with any of the items on the meeting agenda. No members reported having a conflict.

3. Approval of Board Members' Excused Absences

Mr. Kozlosky stated that Hank Miller requested to be excused from the meeting.

Ms. Kusek made a motion to excuse the absence of Mr. Miller. Mr. Williams seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

4. Approval of the Agenda

Mr. Barfield made a motion to approve the agenda as presented, seconded by Mr. Anderson, and the motion carried unanimously.

5. Public Comment Period

No one from the public signed up to speak.

6. Presentations

a. Isabel Holmes Bridge Preservation Project

Kevin Bowen, NCDOT Division 3 Construction Engineer, gave an overview of the Isabel Holmes Bridge Preservation Project, part of NCDOT's High Value Bridge program mentioned in a presentation to the Board at its April 2018 meeting. He stated that restoration of the Isabel Holmes Bridge, constructed in 1980, is timely in that it will improve it from its current condition of "fair" to one that can more easily be maintained while reducing maintenance costs. The estimated cost of this project is \$18 million, \$5 million more than the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Rehabilitation Project.

Mr. Bowen stated that the Isabel Holmes Bridge was named for a past Deputy Secretary Transportation who died in 1978. He noted that its total length of the bridge is 2,270 feet,

and is comprised of 28 spans with the main span measuring 272 feet in length. The navigational vertical clearance measures 33.5 feet when closed and is unlimited when raised, compared to the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge's height of 65 feet when closed and 135 feet when raised. The navigational horizontal clearance is 200 feet compared to that of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge at 350 feet. The approach spans are concrete with girders of various lengths. The average daily traffic is 27,000 vehicles per day, less than one half of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge's average daily traffic at 61,000 vehicles per day. Truck traffic comprises 12% of the daily average for each bridge.

Mr. Bowen stated that improvements to the Isabel Holmes Bridge include repairing worn or aged steel and concrete components, replacing steel grid deck on the lift spans, expansion joints and nine traffic gates, applying sealant on the existing concrete bridge deck, electrical work, mechanical operating machinery work, installing submarine cables that would allow for future dredging projects, a new backup generator and bird deterrent screens, cleaning and painting structural steel, rehabilitating the operator/control house, and other various items. He displayed photo of examples of repair areas, and explained that some are permanent improvements to replace temporary fixes.

Mr. Bowen stated that the volume of replacement of the grid deck of the Isabel Holmes Bridge is considerably less than that of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, which had an exaggerated bounce prior to rehabilitation. Although improved, open grates are prone to some uneasiness. He noted that the Isabel Holmes Bridge has two concrete filled spans over the mechanical room, which need to be replaced in order to prevent water from leaking on mechanical and electrical components.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Anderson, Mr. Bowen stated that he would obtain the number of bridge raises per year from bridge maintenance personnel.

Mr. Bowen stated that the Wilmington Bypass provides an additional traffic option during bridge closures. He displayed a detour for cars through downtown, and a signed route on Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway to College Road to Oleander Drive through the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. He gave an overview of the construction schedule starting with letting the contract in February, which was awarded to PCL Civil Constructors, the contractor on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge Rehabilitation Project. He noted that lane closures will be allowed as follows:

- Seven days a week, but avoid Monday through Friday peak hours;
- Night closures Sunday through Thursday; and
- Two to six weekend closures over the life of the project.

Mr. Bowen stated that the project completion date is November of 2020 – in about a year and a half.

A brief question/answer and discussion period was held.

b. NCDOT Merger Process

Karen Collette, NCDOT Division 3 Engineer, stated that she plans to give an overview of the NCDOT Merger Process every six months. She noted that obtaining permit used to take anywhere from eight to 12 years. Now, Secretary Trogon has challenged NCDOT to reduce the timeframe to three years.

Ms. Collette stated that the merger process, which combines the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) with Clean Water Act (Section 404), is an agreement between four government agencies as follows:

- United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- North Carolina Department of Environment & Natural Resources (NCDENR/DENR, now DEQ)
- North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT or DOT)

Ms. Collette stated that the rest of the group at the table includes:

- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- NC Department of Cultural Resources (NCDCCR)
- US Coast Guard (USCG)
- North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF)
- US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- NC Division of Water Quality (NCDWQ or DWQ)
- NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC)
- NC Division of Coastal Management (NCDCM)
- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
- Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Rural Planning Organization (RPO)

Ms. Collette stated that the goal of the process is to determine the Least Environmentally Damaging Practical Alternative (LEDPA) – the best route on which everyone can agree. She noted that the process includes four concurrence points starting with determining purpose and need and defining the study area. She pointed out for example that a southern alternative of the Cape Fear Crossing was excluded due to its failure to meet the purpose and need of improved travel time. She noted that sitting around the merger table has taken years to achieve. Today, all team members agree not to revisit previous concurrence points once they have signed off on each one.

Ms. Collette stated that during Concurrence Point 1, the team may discuss the scope of the project and topics such as safety, capacity, economic development, truck traffic, strategic corridors, hurricane evacuation routes, etc. During Concurrence Point 2, the team develops corridor alternatives, and begins detailed studies and environmental reports. Competing interests intensify during discussion of numerous additional topics. Concurrence Point 2 also includes the first citizens' workshop and meetings with local officials. She commented that the public is often dissatisfied with the timing of workshops. Too late in the process seems to devalue public input, and too early provides insufficient information.

Ms. Collette stated that at Concurrence Point 2A, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is completed, and another public information workshop and meeting with local officials is held. At Concurrence Point 3, the team selects and signs off on the LEDPA. The remainder of Concurrence includes engineering, planning and executing. She pointed out that the MPO and RPO have input at every stage of the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) project timeline starting from long range planning through design.

Chairman Piepmeyer inquired about the impact of miscalculated hydraulics. Ms. Collette responded that hydraulics affect the footprint of a project and often increase its limits.

Mr. Anderson inquired about the noise wall or reading at Military Cutoff Road and Market Street. Ms. Collette responded that a second sound reading was taken, and found that it did not warrant a sound barrier. She noted that up to half of the project cost goes toward enhancements, which can be used for mitigation. She pointed out that projects administered locally allow for meetings with neighborhoods and locals.

Chairman Piepmeyer expressed appreciation to Ms. Collette.

Mr. Williams stated that a detailed description of the merger process can be found online.

Ms. Collette stated that concurrence meetings have become closed meetings. She noted that Vice Chairman Batleman had a rare opportunity to experience one. She pointed out that having all of the merger team members meet together at one time has shortened the merger process considerably.

c. Prioritization 6.0

Caitlin Marks, NCDOT Division 3 Planning Engineer, gave an overview of the prioritization process, which is normally on a two-year cycle. She noted that the goal of prioritization is to have a project funded through inclusion in the State Transportation Improvements Program (STIP). She added that project selection for the MPO is limited to 19 submissions per mode for each of the six modes (rail, highway, pedestrian, ferry, aviation and public transportation), excluding carry-over projects. She presented an interactive, mock scenario of the three-month submittal window for Prioritization 6.0 (P 6.0), starting in October of 2019.

Ms. Marks stated that projects need to be entered into the SPOT's online system by December 2019. She gave an overview of the six-month scoring process, and the three tiers of prioritization (Statewide Mobility, Regional Impact, and Division Needs). She stated that most of the funding is available in the Statewide Mobility Tier, and projects considered in this tier have two additional opportunities for consideration. She noted that the selection criteria differs for each tier and mode. She added that projects in the Statewide Tier are programmed strictly by score and are cut off based on the availability of funds.

Ms. Marks stated that points matter in the other two tiers. She gave examples of opportunities to assign input points (2,400 points for NCDOT and 1,500 points for MPO) to projects in the Regional Impact Tier (70/30 split). She added that in the Regional Impact Tier B, Division 3 projects compete with Division 2 projects.

Ms. Marks stated that projects that were not programmed in the Regional Impact Tier automatically cascade into the Division Needs Tier, and those only in the Division Needs Tier are grouped together. Although the MPO has 1,500 points for each tier, they weigh more heavily in the Division Needs Tier (50/50 split). She noted that the results for P 6.0 will be released in April of 2021, after which the draft STIP will be released. The current draft STIP will be released in September due to some setbacks.

In response to an inquiry by Vice Chair Batleman, Ms. Marks stated that the number of points differ per planning organization based on population. Although NCDOT has 2,400 points, they must cover six counties.

7. Consent Agenda

- a. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes – April 24, 2019**
- b. **Resolution approving FY 2020 Unified Planning Work Program Amendment #1**
- c. **Resolution approving 2018-2027 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Amendment #19-2**
- d. **Opening of the 30-day public comment period for 2018-2027 STIP/MPO Transportation Improvement Program Amendment #19-3**

Mr. Ellen made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Ms. Kusek seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

8. Regular Agenda

- a. **Resolution adopting the Top 5 Resilient Transportation Infrastructure Priorities for the Wilmington Urban Area MPO**

Chairman Piepmeyer reminded the Board that at its last meeting, members requested that staff return with a recommendation based on discussion.

Mr. Williams made a motion to approve the Resolution adopting the Top 5 Resilient Transportation Infrastructure Priorities for the Wilmington Urban Area MPO. Mr. Ellen seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

9. Discussion

- a. **Supplemental Funding for TMAs – FY19 Appropriations**

Ms. Kimes gave an overview of supplemental funding for fiscal year 2019. She stated that last year, the MPO received an Omnibus appropriation in the amount of \$641,000. This year, the MPO received an additional \$904,063 with a very short turnaround time for obligation of construction funds, and an added rail component. After reaching out to the member jurisdictions, only the Port expressed an interest for a rail component. She noted that a swop with NCDOT is planned for \$1.45 million, and the Port will include a submission for a rail project in the current call for projects.

Ms. Kimes stated that the \$2.35 million in Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP) funds will increase by \$1.5 million for use in fiscal year 2020 or 2021 during the next five-year plan.

A question/answer and discussion period was held.

Mr. Kozlosky stated that the MPO will be accepting applications until 5:00 p.m. on July 1st.

- b. **FY20 BUILD Grant**

Ms. Moore stated that a notice of funding opportunity for the 2019 BUILD Grant that was released in late April has been included in the agenda packet. She noted that the grant can be used for any surface capital project between \$5 million and \$25 million. She added that applications must be submitted by July 15th, and funds must be obligated (design complete and permitting in place) by September 30, 2021. The minimum match is 20% and the funds must be spent by September 30, 2026. Although planning funds are available, they must lead to a surface transportation project.

Mr. Kozlosky stated that given the criteria, staff could not identify any projects for submittal.

In response to an inquiry by Chairman Piepmeyer, Ms. Moore clarified that the Port has submitted an application.

10. Updates

a. Crossing Over the Cape Fear River

Chad Kimes, NCDOT Division 3 Deputy Division Engineer, gave an update on the Cape Fear Crossing. He commented that the public hearing for it was one of the largest the Division has ever held, similar to the turnout for the Hampstead Bypass. He noted that 366 people attended the New Hanover County meeting and nearly 800 people attended the Brunswick County meeting. He added that 3,000 comments have been received to date, which is a large measure of its success providing valuable information for the merger process leading into Concurrence Point 3 (CP3).

Mr. Kimes displayed a pie chart showing a closely divided preference between Alternate MA, the southernmost route, and Alternate VAW, which follows the existing causeway. He stated that the CP3 LEPDA decision scheduled for June 19th, will be delayed until December due to the feedback and comments received. He noted that VAW modified and MA will be reviewed in greater detail. He commented that many people are working on it right now.

Ms. Collette stated that a large portion of the public comments advised slowing down, and that the Division will follow that advice.

Mr. Kozlosky stated that this and other updates are included in the agenda packet.

11. Additional Updates

Mr. Kozlosky introduced Regina Hopkins, Senior Accountant replacing Britt Strait, who accepted a position at nCino.

Ms. Hopkins expressed appreciation and gave some details about her professional background.

Mr. Kozlosky announced two other staffing changes. He noted that Project Engineer Fred Royal has accepted a position with City's Stormwater Division, and Associate Transportation Planner Katie Moore will be leaving on June 7th to accept a position in Horry County as a Senior Environmental Planner.

Chairman Piepmeyer pointed out that the MPO is understaffed. He commented that the market is difficult for hiring with fewer job seekers, a low unemployment rate and high demand.

In response to an inquiry by Mr. Ellen, Mr. Kozlosky stated that the two jobs are posted on the City's website, Indeed.com, and list servers of professional associations such as the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) and the American Planning Association (APA).

12. Announcements

a. Bike/Pedestrian Committee Meeting – June 11th

b. Direct Attributable Applications Due – July 1st

Mr. Kozlosky stated that the MPO has seen an increased interest in Direct Attributable funds and anticipated a competitive process. He noted that the MPO will submit an application for the multi-modal center for office space via the city.

c. The next WMPO Board meeting – July 31st

Mr. Kozlosky proposed to cancel the June Board meeting, and for the next meeting to be held on July 31st.

Chairman Piepmeyer concurred and noted that the agenda for the June meeting was lean, and that many jurisdictions are busy finalizing budgets in June.

No members expressed any opposition to the change in meeting schedule.

Mr. Barfield encouraged Board members to participate in the “Be A Looker” pedestrian safety campaign.

13. Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:01 p.m.

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.**