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**Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization
Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
150 Wakefield Street, Suite 12, Conference Rm. 1A
Rochester, NH 03867**

Minutes

**Friday May 6th 2016
9:00 AM-11:00 AM**

1. Introductions

Members Present: Larry Brown (Milton), Diane Hardy (Newmarket), Martin Laferte (Farmington), Carol Macuch (NHDOT), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Dianne Smith (Brookfield), John Storer (Rochester), Gretchen Young (Dover)

Staff Present: Cynthia Copeland (Executive Director), Rachel Dewey (Data Analyst), Colin Lentz (Regional Transportation Planner), Natasha Leuchanka (Regional Planner)

Guests Present: Michael Bezanson (Rochester), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Chris Gamache (NH Division of Parks and Recreation), Alexis Rudko (NH Division of Parks and Recreation)

The meeting began at 9:05am with a quorum

2. Staff Communications

No staff communications were brought forward

3. Action Item(s)

3.1 Minutes from April 1st 2016

L. Brown moved to accept the minutes from April 1st 2016

Seconded by D. Smith

Vote: unanimous in favor, with D. Hardy abstaining

4. Discussion Item(s)

4.1 Statewide Recreational Trails – Chris Gamache, Bureau of Trails, NH Division of Parks and Recreation

C. Gamache gave a presentation covering the Statewide Recreational Trails program (RTP), its relationship to the STIP and transportation funding, the role of the NH Division of Parks and Recreation, how municipalities and other entities can apply for funds to develop or improve recreational trails throughout the state, and what kinds of projects are eligible. He explained that

the Bureau of Trails is primarily funded through registration fees for off-highway vehicles (such as ATVs, off-road motorcycles, and snowmobiles). The Bureau of Trails manages the RTP which is funded primarily through federal taxes on fuel sales for the same off-highway vehicles. Because of this, the RTP program is tied to the fiscal constraint process for the STIP and is subject to the amendment procedures used by NHDOT and the MPOs. C. Gamache added that the RTP was reauthorized for the next 5 years under the FAST act, and that the RTP provides between \$700,000 and \$900,000 in local project grants per year. This funding is divided into three categories: 30% for Motorized Trail Projects, 30% for Non-Motorized Projects, and 40% for Diversified Projects (including motorized and non-motorized users).

C. Gamache noted that the RTP does not fund projects proposed by for-profit organizations that charge user fees to visitors (e.g. Cross-Country ski clubs).

L. Brown asked if membership fees paid to the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF) count as user-fees. C. Gamache said that they did not, and added that the Trails Bureau is currently working with SPNHF to acquire land and develop trails on Mt. Major.

V. Parmele asked for clarification about the RTP's ability to fund paving on trails. C. Gamache responded that trail paving is generally too expensive for the Trails Bureau to justify using RTP funds.

V. Parmele asked what materials the Trails Bureau prefers. C. Gamache responded that gravel, stone dust, and other traditional aggregate trail materials are preferred.

L. Brown asked if RTP funds could be used to improve parking areas. C. Gamache responded that RTP funds could be used for trailhead improvements, and that they have been used to pave parking lots. He added that installation of public restrooms at trail facilities is an eligible expense for RTP funds, but that applicants have rarely included them in an application and the Bureau has not built any in the 15 years since he has been the program director.

C. Lentz asked how trail access is enforced. C. Gamache explained that NH Fish and Game is the primary enforcement agency but any uniformed officer can enforce state and local trail access rules. He noted that the Trails Bureau has a very limited staff to cover the whole state and enforcement is difficult.

C. Copeland asked who is responsible for maintenance of projects funded by the RTP. C. Gamache responded that project sponsors are responsible for maintenance (usually specified in contract agreements). He explained that the RTP program does not include specific rules for maintenance (unlike most other federal highways programs). This is partially due to trails being considered temporary facilities.

C. Copeland noted that historically there seemed to be little interest in trails and trail development in the Strafford region. When SRPC conducted public outreach for the Regional Master Plan starting in 2012, respondents showed strong support for opportunities for outdoor activities. She asked if it was accurate to say that regional trail planning, development, and coordination depends on individual entities (such as land trusts). C. Gamache said that was an accurate statement, and explained that the majority of trails are developed, built, and maintained by volunteer organizations.

C. Copeland noted that trails are generally under-advertised, and asked whether the Trails Bureau was capable of assisting trails organizations with mapping and marketing. C. Gamache noted that support for marketing and mapping of recreational sites like trails is growing due to their importance to the New Hampshire economy. He said the Trails Bureau is in the process of developing capacity to assist their efforts.

V. Parmele asked about the future availability of funding to support mapping and marketing. C. Gamache said increased funding would require greater local and regional support; that the Trails Bureau has a limited role in requesting more funds.

L. Brown asked whether it would be practical to propose state legislation for diverting registration fee revenues from SUVs and other 4-wheel drive vehicles to the RTP. C. Gamache said at the current time it would not have an effect because the FAST Act locked RTP funding levels for the next 5 years, and FHWA has not required the state to report its registrations in the previous 6 years.

G. Young asked if RTP funds could be used to purchase equipment for trail maintenance. C. Gamache said that they could be used for this purpose.

M. Bobinsky asked about the process for assessing the presence of Long-Eared Bats. A. Rudko said a certified biologist would have to assess sites for presence of bats or critical habitat.

C. Copeland asked whether the Trails Bureau had received any requests for equipment to collect data about trail traffic and use. C. Gamache responded that they had not, and added that the Bureau of Trails owns counting equipment that it deploys on trails on an annual basis.

C. Lentz asked whether municipalities or other entities could request that the Trails Bureau place its counters at specific locations. C. Gamache said their equipment was limited and in use year round, but they would consider putting counters on bureau-owned trails under certain conditions.

D. Smith asked for clarification about the grant application review and scoring process. C. Gamache responded that applications are reviewed and scored by the Statewide Trails Advisory Committee which consists of representatives from trail users groups and State Parks staff. The committee meets 3-4 times per year as the state is required to have the committee in order to be a sub-recipient of federal funds.

D. Smith asked if applicants were made aware of scoring criteria. C. Gamache said they were.

5. Project Update(s)

a. Performance Based Planning – SHRP2 work schedule

N. Leuchanka explained that the SHRP2 project implementation window had been shortened an additional month, as the funding agreement was not included on the Governor and Council meeting agendas in April. She said SRPC anticipates that the agreement will be approved at one of the May G&C meetings. After approval of the funding agreement by the G&C and release of a “Notice to Proceed” by the NHDOT, Strafford MPO will release the subcontracts to the other MPOs involved in the project. With these timeline changes, staff anticipates to start the project by June 1, 2016.

b. Performance Based Planning - FTA/APTA Peer Exchange Workshop

N. Leuchanka said she attended a peer exchange workshop on May 4th and 5th in Albany, NY with Jen Czysz from Nashua RPC. They gave a presentation about the Granite State Future regional planning project and the recent efforts between RPCs, MPOs, and NHDOT to implement performance measures.

c. Dover-Rochester-Somersworth Complete Streets Project

C. Lentz gave an update about the ongoing complete streets project along NH108 from Weeks Crossing in Dover to Skyhaven Airport in Rochester. He explained that project stakeholders met on April 12th to review project progress and discuss local concerns. Stakeholders discussed the need for an engineering plan that represented the individual development trends of the three communities, as well as the regional connectedness the project should create. Several technical issues were also discussed including: minimum shoulder widths for bicycle safety and winter maintenance requirements; how to avoid potential landuse disputes (especially with existing and future businesses); taking into account future development patterns and appropriate location/relocation of transit stops; and how to transition the physical northern boundary of the project near Skyhaven Airport in Rochester.

M. Bobinsky said the project was an excellent example of regional collaboration. He asked for clarification on the date NHDOT had requested stakeholders send comments about desired engineering and environmental objectives. C. Lentz responded that NHDOT had asked that input be sent by the end of the summer, and stated he would contact the project manager (Keith Cota) to get an exact date.

6. Other Business

D. Hardy informed the meeting attendees that the Newmarket Town Council had recently approved the construction contract for the downtown safety improvement project. She said construction is scheduled to begin in June and should be completed by the end of the summer. D. Hardy thanked NHDOT, SRPC, and FHWA for their support.

C. Lentz said Steve Pesci from UNH had sent a summary of the joint UNH/Durham application for a TIGER grant that was recently submitted. The application included a number of infrastructure improvements and transit fleet replacement. He said copies of the document were available with the other printed meeting packet materials. He could send digital copies to anyone who was interested in the TIGER grant summary.

L. Brown asked NHDOT whether residents and drivers were becoming comfortable with recently completed changes on the roundabout in Lee. C. Macuch said she wasn't aware of public feedback on the completed design.

V. Parmele said she felt the project had improved traffic flow but that it will take some time for people to get accustomed to the new design.

7. Citizen's Forum

No members of the general public were present at the meeting.

8. Adjournment

L. Brown moved to adjourn

Seconded by D. Smith

Vote: Unanimous in favor

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11am

Minutes submitted by,
Colin Lentz, Recording Secretary

Approved by

Name Printed: Jonathan B. Hotchkiss

Signed Jonathan B. Hotchkiss

Date: ~~6 JUN~~ 3 JUN 2016

