

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

Minutes

**Friday January 18, 2018
9:00 AM-11:00 AM**

1. Introductions

Meeting was called to order at 9:10 AM

Members:

John Huckins (Barrington), Fred Kaen (Lee), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Dianne Smith (Brookefield), Elizabeth Strachan (NHDES), Steve Diamond (Barrington), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Marcia Gasses (Dover), David Landry (Dover), Mark Avery (Madbury), Don Hamann (Rochester), Wayne Burton (Durham)

Staff: Jen Czysz, Stefanie Casella, Colin Lentz, Rachel Dewey, Nancy O'Connor

2. Staff Communications

2.1 SRPC strategic plan and planning retreat

J. Czysz reminded the committee of SRPC's strategic planning retreat on February 8 at the Durham Public Library. This is an opportunity to review progress SRPC has made and set priorities for the future. There will be a neutral facilitator as well as students from the UNH planning program to assist in note-taking and facilitation. All are welcome to attend and we look forward to getting input from everyone.

3. Action Item(s)

3.1 Minutes from December 21 2018 [VOTE]

D. Hamann made a motion to approve the December minutes, seconded by M. Gasses.

D. Hamann noted the misspelling of his name; correction was made in spelling from Hamman to Hamann.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

4. Discussion Items

4.1 Setting federal safety performance targets in February

C. Lentz: Reminded the committee that the regional safety performance targets need to be updated and voted on at the February meeting. He said targets are updated on an annual basis

and that staff were going to recommend that the MPO adopt the targets set by NHDOT. C. Lentz provided several reasons why supporting the state targets was the best option at this point:

- While there are identifiable highway locations that contribute to safety hazards, crashes essentially occur randomly across the state.
- NHDOT set their targets in June of 2018 but a spike in crashes happened late in the year, meaning that 2018 crashes were ultimately 46% higher than 2017. If Strafford MPO were to set their targets based on updated data they would be drastically different than NHDOT. Strafford MPO would theoretically set a higher target than NHDOT, which would be a confusing and inappropriate message.
- Performance targets are calculated averaging the past five years of crash data in each category (on a rolling basis). Crash rates respond to economic trends, and the end of the 2008 recession reduced the crash rate because fewer people were driving. The five-year rolling average for crash rates used to update the 2020 targets would now not include the end of the recession – therefore showing a significantly higher crash rate.
- It is difficult to “prove” that a certain highway project will reduce crashes by a specific number. Region-wide safety improvements will come from long-term planning and project development.

C. Lentz noted that the state’s 2019 target for fatal crashes was 116. He emphasized that supporting the state target did not mean endorsing that number for the region as well. The overarching philosophy for NHDOT and Department of Safety was that zero deaths is the only acceptable goal (“Vision Zero”). The performance target represents an incremental approach to reducing traffic fatalities. In supporting the state targets, SRPC will do everything it can to reduce the number of fatal and severe crashes in the region.

The committee discussed the need to improve data crash and crash reporting across the state and region. P. Nelson said SRPC should have a map of fatal crashes and target the locations for funding and improvement projects. J. Czysz said they already do that, using maps to identify fatal crash hot-spots and work with municipalities to apply for funding to make improvements.

C. Lentz noted that the safety targets and regional data would be incorporated with more specific goals and objectives as part of future updates to the metro plan. D. Landry asked how prevalent it was for states to adopt a similar “vision zero” policy and whether there were any state comparisons to be made. C. Lentz responded that he thought the vision zero philosophy was shared by a majority of states. He added that there are web resources for peer-reviewed research on types of infrastructure improvements and quantitative analysis on how much they

reduced crash rates. M. Avery said it was important to investigate the specific causes of crashes. If someone is killed or injured because they weren't wearing a seatbelt or were intoxicated, infrastructure improvements would not have made a difference in the crash outcome. R. Dewey noted that if someone involved in a crash dies as a result of injuries from the crash within 30 days, the crash is recorded as a fatal.

4.2 Decision-maker engagement

4.2.1 Updated resolution language (Regional Transportation Priority Communications)

C. Lentz presented the latest draft of Regional Transportation Priorities document, referred to as "resolutions". This document is designed to be a set of guiding principles and policy statements that represent the MPO's regional priorities for regional transportation goals and policies. C. Lentz reminded the committee that it was still under development and would ideally serve as an internal tool for developing formal plans and policy documents, vetting potential transportation projects, and communicating with decision makers. He noted section 3.a. was highlighted to emphasize the need for more in-depth discussion and revision. The section as currently read:

- 1) State support for public transit service may be inadequate to meet the needs of rural and urban residents.
 - a. Statewide, the age-65 and older population is growing and New Hampshire seniors are better able to age-in-place if they have responsive, affordable, and accessible transportation options.

C. Lentz explained that D. Smith had contacted him with edits to the resolutions and specific concerns about section 3a. D. Smith referred to comments she had sent to C. Lentz, explaining that she would never suggest people should be pressured to live in urban areas (or somewhere they didn't want to) but she had concerns about public policy that supported the use of public dollars to subsidize demand-response public transportation in rural areas. She noted the incredible expense of providing public transportation services in dispersed rural areas. She said it was important to encourage people to make wise choices about where they live and not expect that public service like transportation would be available everywhere.

Members discussed what "age-in-place" really meant. W. Burton noted that he was in the process of finding the best place to live in retirement. He noted that the legislature was discussing accessory dwelling units where seniors could live in a smaller separate unit on their

relatives' property. W. Burton added that over 50% of the emergency calls in Durham were to 55 and over housing areas.

V. Parmele disagreed with D. Smith, saying that there were many senior NH residents who live in rural areas and it was incumbent on the state to ensure its policies supported those people as they age, regardless of where they live. M. Gasses said it bothered her when seniors were discussed as a burden and a cost. Seniors have paid taxes and supported their communities all their lives and their investment is paying for those who came after them.

The committee discussed the challenge of balancing public investment with individual quality of life, agreeing that any MPO language would need to be more precise. Discussion touched on numerous variables, including: emergency services to rural and urban residents, residence proximity to public transit routes, demand-response service, socioeconomic impacts, and proximity to healthcare.

C. Lentz suggested that the issue was such a difficult and complex discussion because the core issue was about balancing the qualitative "quality of life" (which is based on personal preference) with quantitative costs to communities and public funds (which is impacted by the decisions of individuals).

J. Huckins suggested that there may not be a definitive answer to the issue because it's going to be a constantly shifting challenge. P. Nelson agreed, saying it wasn't only a transportation issue, but a community planning issue. Communities should plan for growth and development in a way that ensures services and residents are in closer proximity to each other. C. Lentz said he had been making adjustment to the document during the discussion and would investigate various resources that would help move the conversation forward. He suggested that this topic presented a great opportunity to invite a legislator or other issue specialist to a future Policy meeting.

P. Nelson suggested that it would be beneficial for the region to collect data and model things like drive times to area hospitals and other critical services. D. Smith noted that Brookfield, Wakefield, Milton, Middleton, and New Durham currently had no organized transportation services, and it currently took about 20 minutes to get from her house to the nearest grocery stores.

4.2.2 Upcoming legislation

C. Lentz presented a list of Legislative Service Requests (proposed house and senate bills) that would be under review at the state level in the coming months. He reminded the committee

members that if there are any items on the list that they would like further information on, SRPC staff can gather materials for them to support testimony and other communications. He added that several TAC and Policy committee members had volunteered to participate on a legislative sub-committee focused on engaging decision-makers and pending legislation.

W. Burton noted that he had testified on behalf of SRPC in support of a bill that would provide reimbursement for municipalities that had completed recent sewer upgrade projects to reduce water quality impacts from septic system overflows. He said the bill would be critical for encouraging continued efforts by municipalities to reduce water quality impacts. M. Gasses noted that when private septic systems get pumped, the waste gets processed by the municipal waste water system anyway. She added that septic systems do not remove medicines and impurities that eventually seep back into the ground.

J. Czysz emphasized that Strafford MPO is strictly prohibited from lobbying. Any individual can speak to a specific bill or issue, but any lobbying (e.g. testimony) for a specific vote would need to be paid for with local dues dollars, not MPO funds. She noted that she is going to NH Municipal Association sub-committee meeting and will get the list of bills that they are monitoring.

V. Parmele asked how the subcommittee would weigh in on legislative issues and if they could go beyond the explicitly transportation-related and issues. C. Lentz responded that transportation was a factor in so many issues that it made sense that the committee members could engage about a wide range of bills. For instance, transportation was a critical factor in healthcare.

E. Strachan said she would send a list of transportation-relevant bills that NHDES is tracking. She added that the NHDES website has a page with relevant legislation

4.2.3 Presenting issues and information

C. Lentz explained that Governor Sununu would be submitting his draft state budget to the legislature soon, so he had drafted a letter to be sent to the governor based on language from the resolutions. He asked if the committee would be comfortable reviewing the letter and providing edits by the following Wednesday so he could have V. Parmele sign it in time to send the letter by next Friday.

M. Bobinsky noted a typo and Colin said he would incorporate an edit. M. Bobinsky asked for clarification on language regarding State match in place (or addition to) turnpike toll credits. C.

Lentz clarified and said he would improve the readability of the sentence. S. Diamond asked that the letter include more specific mention of trails.

There was consensus from the committee that they would provide input by Wednesday so comments could be incorporated.

5. Project Updates

C. Lentz reminded the committee that the TIP was out for public comments until February 14th, and public comments could also be submitted at the public hearing at the Policy Committee on the 15th.

6. Other Business

S. Diamond recalled an article he had read about ozone levels. The article referenced research that had found that even healthy ozone levels (standards established under federal law) were potentially harmful to respiratory health. E. Strachan clarified that the federal and state standards were based on days with the highest concentrations of ozone (certain hottest days in the summer). She added that some of the highest ozone concentrations were in the White Mountains where eastbound winds carried pollution from the Midwest.

M. Bobinsky explained that Dover and Somersworth had recently received funding to build a shared emergency water connection so that both communities would have resilient drinking water supply. W. Burton noted the importance of collaboration in projects like this. He added that members of the panel deliberating the Seacoast Reliability project (to construct high-capacity electrical transmission lines across Little Bay) had heard substantial evidence that the project would severely impact the estuary and natural resources, but had ignored it by claiming that the electrical system was in danger without the project. He emphasized the power of language and power of playing on people's fear to push dangerous projects through. He added that the law specifies that any consultant proposing similar projects of regional impact must consult with the regional planning commission, but they had not done so for the Seacoast Reliability Project.

E. Strachan said the state contract for passenger vehicle replacements had just been released. Municipalities can purchase vehicles through the contract to replace older vehicles, and the contract now includes all-electric vehicles as well. She said detailed information was available on the NHDES website.

7. Citizen's Forum – Citizens of the Strafford region are invited to speak on the subject matter of the meeting. Statements should be limited to three minutes.

8. Adjournment

M. Bobinsky made a motion to adjourn, seconded by D. Hamann

Vote: Unanimous in favor

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 AM

Minutes prepared by Colin Lentz and Stefanie Casella

Approved by

Name Printed: Victoria Parnell

Signed: Victoria Parnell

Date: 2/15/19