

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee Meeting

Friday, March 15th 2019 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
150 Wakefield Street, Suite 12, Conference Room 1A
Rochester, NH

AGENDA

The meeting was called to order at 9:08am

1. **Attendance:**

Committee Members

John Huckins (Barrington), Tom Crosby (Madbury), Don Hamann (Rochester), Michael Williams (COAST), Elizabeth Strachan (NHDES), Steve Diamond (Barrington), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Steve Pesci (UNH), David Landry (Dover), Lucy St. John (NHDOT), Mark Avery (Madbury)

Guests

Steve Workman – TransportNH

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Nancy O' Connor, Stefanie Casella, Colin Lentz

2. **Staff Communications**

No staff communications were brought to the committee

3. **Action Item(s)**

3.1 - **Minutes from February 15th 2019 [VOTE]**

M. Williams made a motion to accept the minutes with requested change

Seconded by D. Hamann

Vote: Unanimous in favor

4. **Discussion Items**

4.1 Legislation and State Budget

C. Lentz introduced Steve Workman who had offered to come to the Policy Committee to discuss transit funding in the state budget.

S. Workman explained that he had been the director of TransportNH (a transportation advocacy non-profit organization) for a little over a year. He provided handouts explaining a recent change to the Governor's draft capital budget that included an unexpected cut to state match for transit capital funding. He gave an update on two specific issues: inclusion of \$200,000 in the state budget for transit operating funds that was requested by NHDOT, and \$907,460 in state

match for transit capital. Neither of these was included in the Governor's draft budget that was presented to the legislature. S. Workman explained that the House Finance Division II would be reviewing the budget in the coming weeks. He recommended that Policy members reach out to the members of the finance committee by phone or with a letter rather than presenting formal testimony at a hearing.

C. Lentz asked the Policy members if they would be comfortable calling or writing representatives if they had a set of talking points. S. Workman said it would be great to get official input from the planning commission.

P. Nelson said the handouts looked like a good summary of points and he asked if the information could be provided in digital format so SRPC staff could distribute them to committee members.

S. Pesci noted that Representative Pitre on the House Div. II finance committee was from Farmington and asked what Farmington's relationship with COAST was like. M. Williams said among several recent public workshops throughout the COAST service area, Farmington had the greatest number of participants, and that there was good local support for COAST. S. Pesci emphasized the need to highlight that New Hampshire and Mississippi were the only states that didn't provide state match for transit operating funds. S. Workman agreed and noted that transit capital fleets throughout the state were rapidly aging. S. Pesci noted that the University of New Hampshire was not even part of the budget request for capital since the UNH Wildcat fleet has relied on grant opportunities (such as CMAQ) and student fees to operate service and purchase new fleet vehicles.

C. Lentz asked S. Workman what the way forward was for advocating for transit in the state budgets. S. Workman said there was a structure in place that agencies and advocates could use to reach out to legislators, and there needed to be a consistent set of talking points. He said he was in favor of some of the priorities in the Governor's proposed budget but wasn't sure about the logic behind the overall framework. For instance, funding was prioritized for address the opioid crisis (which is a good thing) but transportation would likely be a limiting factor for anyone seeking treatment and rehabilitation because they may have lost their driver's license or even the ability to afford a personal vehicle. Therefore, it was counterproductive to limit public transit when the goal was to reduce the opioid crisis.

P. Nelson that transit related communications need to come from the people who ride the buses, those who are widely underrepresented.

E. Strachan added that it was also important to get support from people who don't ride the bus. She said it was important to support members of the community who need transportation assistance. The equivalent situation is when people pay for local schools through taxes even if they don't have children in the school.

M. Williams added that the seacoast had a very successful program that supported alternative modes of transportation such as walking, cycling, carpooling, public transit. He said the program and some of COAST's peak-hour bus service would lose its funding once the little bay bridge project was completed.

S. Pesci emphasized that cuts to transit funding didn't mean the need for service goes away. The needs are still there, and the cost burden will fall to social service agencies, municipalities, and ultimately individuals. M. Williams agreed, providing an example of one of COAST's regular ADA riders who lived in Dover and worked a night shift in Portsmouth had to wait two hours

after his shift till the buses started running. He expressed regret that COAST was unable to be more responsive to the needs of this individual.

E. Strachan said it would be important to create a graphic comparing NH to other New England states in terms of their investment in public transit. C. Lentz said he was jumping ahead on the agenda slightly, but wanted to note coordinated grant applications that SRPC and Rockingham Planning Commission had each submitted to study the economic impact of public transit in the Strafford and Rockingham regions. The proposed project would include transit-specific case studies such as the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the Pease Tradeport, and others.

M. Williams emphasized that over the past ten years, demand for COAST's ADA service has grown 881%, but the federal transit funding they rely on has only grown by 15%. Ten years ago their ADA program cost \$180,000 per year; now it is up to 1.4 million per year. Because of New Hampshire's aging population, this demand will only keep growing.

E. Strachan noted that young people are wanting to drive less or even live places where they don't need to own a car. M. Williams said public transit isn't just a social services issue, it is also an economic development issue. He said that city staff from Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth are hearing from developers that they are reluctant to invest in new commercial and residential development projects if sites don't have good access to public transit service. The cost of supporting public transit is too much for municipalities to bear alone, but they are missing local economic development opportunities because of the lack of transit service.

D. Landry asked if developers see themselves as having a role in supporting and growing transit service, rather than just saying they would develop more sites if municipalities would only build more bus stops. M. Williams said he usually didn't hear from developers until they were fairly far along in site planning and wanted to coordinate on where to build a bus shelter. He said in his experience developers were unlikely to pay for anything additional unless a town makes them as part of their planning approval process.

C. Lentz asked if there was ideal timing for contacting legislators about this issue. S. Workman said the committee process would take about three weeks, so contacting them as soon as possible would be best. C. Lentz said he would send a summary of information to Policy members following the meeting.

J. Czynski asked the committee if they were comfortable with staff sending a letter to legislators in support of transit funding and the issues that had been discussed.

S. Pesci asked that staff personally reach out to the House Finance Division II Committee member from Farmington [Joseph Pitre] to discuss his support for transit funding.

D. Hamann made a motion to approve staff to send a letter and reach out to Rep. Pitre

Seconded by T. Crosby

Vote: unanimous in favor

C. Lentz gave a brief summary of bills that were being debated and developed in various legislative committees. He noted some that had been "retained in committee" [won't be formally voted on this cycle]. He noted that NHDOT had just received funding to study alternatives to the gas tax model for funding highways and bridges.

C. Lentz said since staff had only just started in-depth legislation tracking and bills were being processed quickly, he suggested that staff would follow up with the committee on various bills, but that the committee prioritize supporting or objecting to bills on which they had unanimous consensus. S. Pesci asked when crossover day was for the House and Senate. C. Lentz said the House crossover date for finance bills is April 11th and other legislation was April 4th; the Senate crossover date for all bills is March 28th.

4.2 Ten Year Plan Projects Update

C. Lentz explained that he and J. Czysz had met with NHDOT staff about regional candidate projects for the Ten Year Plan. NHDOT was able to provide more detailed cost estimates and additional guidance on project scopes. The TAC committee currently have a project scoring template and information about each potential project that will incorporate the new information from NHDOT so TAC (and ultimately Policy) can vote on a final list of projects to submit to NHDOT for the Ten Year Plan.

S. Pesci asked if there was any progress on getting a more accurate cost estimate for project at NH155 and Madbury Rd in Madbury. C. Lentz said that project did come up and NHDOT was interested in working with SRPC and the town to help accelerate that project contingent on fund availability.

5. Project Updates

5.1 DOV-SOM-ROC 108 Complete Streets

C. Lentz reminded the committee members that there would be a listening session for the 108 complete streets project at the Dover Middle School on Monday March 18th at 7:00.

There will be an additional listening session on May 2nd at the Somersworth middle school at 7:00.

5.2 Kittery/Naval Shipyard Joint Land-use Study

C. Lentz said the land use study between Kittery and the Naval Shipyard was moving forward. There had been two meetings recently that included staff from SRPC, RPC, and COAST to scope the overall purpose and goals of the project. J. Czysz noted that the largest share of shipyard employees living in New Hampshire were commuting from Rochester and Farmington.

6. Other Business

J. Czysz reiterated that SRPC and RPC had submitted applications for FTA 5305e planning funds to study the regional connection between public transit and economic development. The grant would get rolled into the next UPWP for fiscal years 2020-2021.

S. Pesci made sure that the study would include the importance of Amtrak service to the region. He suggested that Amtrak had provided the largest contribution to regional economic development even though New Hampshire pays zero dollars to support the passenger rail service.

S. Pesci asked if there was any progress on addressing the possibility of a rescission at the end of the Fast Act in 2020. J. Czysz said it didn't come up during recent meetings with NHDOT. She

noted that NHDOT was unable to obligate funds during the government shutdown, which increased the risk that NHDOT would have unobligated federal funding by the end of the FAST Act. She asked L. St. John if she had any insight. L. St. John said she would follow up with an update.

Local Updates from Commissioners

S. Diamond said he had sponsored a local proposition in Barrington to provide more funding for bicycle infrastructure development. He said he had received good support from local constituents, but heavy opposition from local decision-makers.

C. Lentz added that the Governor's draft budget had included a specific set-aside for rail trails throughout the state.

E. Strachan reminded members that they could provide input on the statewide Bike/Ped plan on the project website (pedbike.com)

P. Nelson asked if SRPC was still using STRAVA data [a database of primarily recreational rider activity in the state]. C. Lentz said that NHDOT had recently purchased an additional three years of STRAVA data for RPCs to use in analyzing cycling activity. The data would be used as part of a multi-regional analysis of bicycle safety and accessibility.

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. Williams made a motion to adjourn

Seconded by S. Pesci

Vote: unanimous in favor

Meeting adjourned at 10:18am



Approved on April 19, 2019