



Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee Meeting

Friday, July 19th 2019 9:00 – 10:00 AM

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

AGENDA

1. **Introductions**
2. **Staff Communications**
3. **Action Item(s)**
 - 3.1 Minutes from June 21st 2019
 - 3.2 Ten Year Plan Priorities for GACIT Communications
4. **Project Updates**
5. **Other Business**
6. **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.
7. **Adjournment**

Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities are available upon request. Include a description of the accommodation you will need including as much detail as you can. Also include a way we can contact you if we need more information. Make your request as early as possible; please allow at least 5 days advance notice. Last minute requests will be accepted, but may be impossible to fill. Please call (603) 994-3500 or email srpc@strafford.org.

Rules of Procedure

*Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization, and
Strafford Economic Development District*

Meeting Etiquette

Be present at the scheduled start of the meeting.

Be respectful of the views of others.

Ensure that only one person talks at a time. Raising your hand to be recognized by the chair or facilitator is good practice.

Do not interrupt others, or start talking before someone finishes.

Do not engage in cross talk.

Avoid individual discussions in small groups during the meeting. When one person speaks, others should listen.

Active participation is encouraged from all members.

When speaking, participants should adhere to topics of discussion directly related to agenda items.

When speaking, individuals should be brief and concise.

The Strafford Regional Planning Commission & Metropolitan Planning Organization holds both public meetings and public hearings.

For public meetings, guests are welcome to observe, but should follow proper meeting etiquette allowing the meeting to proceed uninterrupted. Members of the public who wish to be involved and heard should use venues such as citizen forum, public hearings, public comment periods, outreach events, seminars, workshops, listening sessions, etc.

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee Meeting

Friday, June 21st 2019 9:00 – 11:00 AM

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Rochester, NH

AGENDA

The meeting was called to order at 9:08am

1. Attendance:

Committee Members

Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Richard Michaud (Somersworth), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Steve Diamond (Barrington), Beverly Crey (UNH), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Joe Boudreau (Rochester), John Hotchkiss (Middleton), Don Hamann (Rochester), Michael Williams (COAST), Elizabeth Strachan (NHDES), David Landry (Dover), Linda Dusenberry (NHDOT), Tom Crosby (Madbury)

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz

2. Staff Communications

C. Lentz said there were two promising candidates for the summer field work positions that would hopefully be filled soon.

J. Czysz announced that SRPC had received a new round of grant funds for Brownfields planning (\$300,000). She added that Economic Development Administration funds had been delayed at the federal level but would hopefully be reaching SRPC soon.

R. Dewey explained that SRPC had joined the other three MPOs and two RPCs to purchase access to expanded data through the National Performance Monitoring Research Data Set (NPMRDS). The additional data allows SRPC to monitor congestion along a greater number of roads in the region and provides additional analysis tools. This will be beneficial for future modeling and project development.

3. Public Hearing – Amendment #1 to the 2019-2022 Transportation Improvement Program

M. Bobinsky made a motion to open the public hearing

Seconded by B. Cray

Vote: Unanimous in favor

C. Lentz reviewed project changes included in the TIP amendment. He noted that a project in Durham at UNH was added following the start of the public comment period. The change was just

to transfer the project funds from Federal Highways to Federal Transit. This required no change to the funds and the project is going to construction over the summer.

S. Diamond asked for clarification about a statewide project to change the exit sign numbering approach for tier 1 highways. C. Lentz said the project was to switch from the current approach (consecutively numbered exits with no specific organizational structure or geographic reference) to numbering the exit signs based on mile markers.

M. Bobinsky made a motion to close the public hearing

Seconded by M. Williams

Vote: Unanimous in favor

4. Action Item(s)

4.1 - Minutes from May 17th 2019 [VOTE]

C. Lentz pointed out a change he had made to the minutes for clarification requested by L. Strachan.

D. Hamann made a motion to accept the minutes

Seconded by M. Williams

Vote: Unanimous in favor

4.2 Amendment #1 to the 2019-2022 TIP

M. Bobinsky made a motion to approve TIP amendment #1

Seconded by M. Williams

Vote: Unanimous in favor

4.3 Ten Year Plan priorities for GACIT

C. Lentz provided a draft list of regional planning priorities that would be used to communicate with members of the Executive Council during development of the Ten Year Plan in their role as the Governor's Advisory Council on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT).

M. Williams suggested that each individual issue in the document include more specific language about what was being requested for action.

J. Czysz noted that the public hearings for the Ten Year Plan would likely start in September and SRPC staff would also be meeting directly with councilors to discuss the issues prioritized by the Policy committee.

M. Bobinsky asked about draft language supporting an increase to the turnpike toll rates and expansion of the turnpike into Concord. C. Lentz said his understanding from Commissioner Sheehan's recent presentation was that NHDOT would be proposing a similar toll increase and turnpike expansion for the upcoming cycle. He said in the past round Policy had supported the proposal with the caveat that the turnpike not be expanded beyond revenue-neutral capacity without consideration for proportional additions of toll plazas. C. Lentz said he would provide additional detail so the committee could understand the proposal and decide about supporting it for this round.

S. Diamond suggested that there be language focused on corridor planning and development. C. Lentz said he would include a section about corridors. He noted that past discussion had identified NH108, NH11, US4, and NH125 as regional priorities for corridor study.

D. Landry asked about the availability and application of Waze data. C. Lentz said some data from way-finding apps like Waze are included in the NPMRDS data that SRPC just got expanded access to. He added that the traffic management center in Concord, which monitors traffic conditions on major highways throughout the state, uses data from Waze and other programs. The MPOs have had several discussions with staff from the center about data and planning for technological improvements to the transportation system.

M. Williams asked what GACIT has direct authority over because they have no revenue generating capacity except for setting the turnpike toll rates. He suggested that the letter and the communication approach take this into account. M. Williams C. Lentz agreed and said he would incorporate more language for this consideration.

J. Czysz said the larger financial issues would have to be discussed through the legislature, but GACIT does address individual projects and prioritizing funding for them. Testimony by SRPC commissioners and staff would play a role in identifying issues and prioritizing projects. C. Lentz added that GACIT had requested the CMAQ funding round two years ago and had recommended to the Governor that CMAQ funds be flexed to paving needs.

J. Boudreau suggested that the content in the document should better show the integration between individual components discussed. M. Williams noted that public transit is noted in several sections as a potential benefit or solution to various challenges. It should also be discussed as an individual item in the document.

D. Landry asked about funding of projects and issues; how they are prioritized based on limited funding. He asked if there is a strategy for prioritizing projects to improve the chance of getting some projects funded. C. Lentz used the example of the approximately \$5 million that is allocated to the Strafford region for new projects in the ten year plan (for each two-year cycle).

J. Czysz provided an example of community in the Nashua region that had a priority project: they had applied for and received funding in the ten year plan, then been approved for a CMAQ grant at which point they removed the project from the ten year plan.

C. Lentz acknowledged that a clearer funding strategy will be an important part of the project development process over the next few months.

The Committee asked C. Lentz to incorporate changes in order to vote on the final document at the next meeting.

5. Discussion Items

5.1 Metro Plan Outreach update

C. Lentz provided an update about the Metro Plan outreach process. He said that survey had received 242 online responses and provided some snapshots of the survey results. He noted that the survey would be closed in early July. M. Bobinsky asked if C. Lentz could re-send the survey link so he could encourage more responses from Somersworth.

Members discussed various data points in the draft results.

6. Commissioner Roundtable

D. Hamann said that there had been a large public meeting regarding the Strafford square roundabout project, and that the city was hopeful construction and utilities would start this summer.

E. Strachan said there was a solicitation (using funding from the VW settlement) for municipalities to replace diesel school buses with new electric and propane buses. She noted that bus transportation companies that provide school transportation are also eligible.

M. Bobinsky said Somersworth would be completing the engineering for their TAP project to improve pedestrian connection from the schools to the downtown. He said Sebago Technics had been selected to be the consultant for the High St corridor signal coordination project. Somersworth is also close to embarking on a \$13 million waste water treatment plant upgrade that will improve water quality and accommodate projected growth in the city.

D. Landry noted that the Dover planning board is addressing in-fill as a priority issue as the city grows and increases density to preserve open space. He said the challenge is to preserve historic buildings. Many times private development threatens historic structures (such as the old court house, in a recent case). Older properties are cheaper to knock down and build something new. Density requires taller buildings in the downtown and developed areas, but by the time an application gets to the planning board it's often too late to address the historic structures.

B. Holstein said Rochester was continuing to update the transportation master plan chapter and was also developing a specific downtown plan. There is an active steering committee and the city is focused on revitalizing the downtown.

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 M. Bobinsky

Vote: unanimous in favor

Meeting adjourned at 10:40am

Minutes Approved by [Print Name] _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Regional Priorities for the 2021-2030 Ten Year Plan Communications to the Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT)

This letter comprises Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization's (Strafford MPO) transportation improvement priorities for the Statewide Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan. These issues are important for the future of the region, and the state as a whole.

Multimodal Network Development

Continued advancement of the New Hampshire transportation network requires a multimodal approach that focuses on moving people and freight, not just cars. The southeast area of New Hampshire hosts the state's most diverse mix of transportation services and public transportation is a key factor of the observed growth of the region. COAST and UNH Wildcat Transit play a dual role in ensuring a broad range of residents can reach regional destinations for education, employment, health care, nutrition, recreation, and civic engagement.

As the region grows, workforce mobility is an increasing challenge for large employers and for congestion management. Multimodal transportation is critical for maintaining the mobility of residents while controlling highway congestion. We have heard from local economic development staff that businesses and developers place a high priority on direct access to public transit when researching potential sites. Public transit also plays an important role in the affordability and desirability of housing.

Transportation is a critical factor for two challenges facing New Hampshire: rising numbers of seniors, and the opioid crisis. As seniors age and become mobility challenged or choose to drive less, their opportunities for independence and quality of life are threatened by a lack of transportation options. Transportation is an essential part of the recovery process for NH residents struggling with opioids and substance abuse. Court attendance, treatment, and rehabilitation will likely require consistent access to transportation. People in recovery will likely have limited or no access to a personal vehicle; their recovery cannot happen without a reliable alternative such as public transit.

Strafford MPO advocates for increased consideration of multimodal development in the Statewide Ten Year Plan. Sustainability of the transportation system and New Hampshire's economy will require improving the mix of transportation options available to residents.

Public Transit

COAST and UNH Wildcat currently receive funding for service expansion to reduce congestion on the Spaulding Turnpike during the Newington-Dover project. Completion of the Newington-Dover project will be good for the region but threatens the sustainability of public transit operations in the seacoast. COAST's access to federal funds depends on local matching funds from municipalities in its service area.

COAST provides service on the Spaulding Turnpike that reduces congestion and increases mobility of a wide range of residents. As you are aware, COAST is in the process of redesigning its service and the turnpike plays an important role in the new design. We ask that COAST be considered as a recipient of turnpike funds due to their contribution to its level of service. CMAQ funds are critical to the successful implementation of COAST's system redesign and Strafford MPO strongly advocates for their allocation to COAST.

Strafford MPO strongly advocates for increased capital and operating support for public transit providers that more closely reflects their needs and ensures consistent, responsive service for users. Sustained support of public transit operating costs is critical for the growing urban areas of New Hampshire and carefully consider the positive economic impact of public transit. We ask that the council discuss the use of turnpike toll credits for matching federal dollars for public transit.

Turnpikes

Strafford MPO advocates for the value of New Hampshire's turnpike system and would support an increase in toll rates as necessary for sustainable maintenance and operations of the turnpike. Strafford MPO supports expansion of the turnpike sections of Interstate 93 to Concord to enable federal funds to be invested in other transportation needs, but turnpike expansion should be matched with additional toll collection as appropriate. We fully support the continuing work on the Newington-Dover project. As the Southern gateway to the Strafford region, the Little Bay Bridges and adjacent highway infrastructure are a critical access point for commuters, freight traffic, and visitors who are driving economic development. Ensuring that cyclists and pedestrians have safe, reliable access across the Piscataqua River is a top priority of the MPO as the project moves forward.

Strafford MPO supports NHDOT's proposal related to increased toll rates on state turnpikes, and expansion of the northern sections of the F.E. Everett Turnpike to Exit 15 in Concord.

Rail

Rail transportation continues to be a missed opportunity for New Hampshire – particularly in the Strafford region. The Amtrak Downeaster service receives no financial support from New Hampshire yet is at-capacity transporting New Hampshire residents for employment and recreation in Boston, MA and Portland, ME. Increased support for passenger/commuter rail development could lead to significant benefits for highway congestion reduction, access to jobs, and economic development at the local and regional level. Specifically at the local level, at-grade rail crossings present a complex safety challenge for several cities and towns in the Strafford region.

Strafford MPO advocates for increased collaboration with the New England Passenger Rail Authority to continue improving passenger rail service in the Seacoast. This includes projects (such as improved rail siding) to increase the frequency and reliability service, greater access through park and rides and public transit connections, and incentives for local transit-oriented development.

Safety

Safety improvements for users of the statewide highway network is a top priority of Strafford MPO. The Highway Safety Improvement Program provides much needed direct access to funding for local safety improvements through a straight-forward, timely process and Strafford MPO has had great success helping municipalities access funding. Safety and accessibility for vulnerable users like cyclists, pedestrians, and people with disabilities is inconsistent across a network that still favors cars and trucks.

Strafford MPO requests that the Ten Year Plan continue to support local and state efforts to improve the safety and connectedness of the transportation network.

Infrastructure Resilience

Climate change is already affecting New Hampshire's transportation infrastructure. Major storms are happening at a higher frequency and past events have revealed the vulnerability of roads and bridges. The seacoast has already seen increased flooding, sea level rise and storm surge, and

NHDOT has developed a Transportation Asset Management Plan that assesses risks to transportation infrastructure from a range of threats. This and other vulnerability assessments should play a larger role in prioritizing infrastructure investments. Climate adaptation requires planning for disruptions due to infrastructure damage; this includes preparedness, mitigation, and recovery. A multimodal transportation network is also a resilient network. A transportation system that is dependent on a single travel mode cannot respond effectively to sudden disruption or damage to the system (such as a large storm or other disaster). But a transportation network that comprises multiple options for traveling between destinations reduces the economic and social impact of such events and reduces the cost of emergency response and recovery.

The preparedness of individual municipalities may depend to limited local resources. This variability in local preparedness is a concern for the regional scale if major routes travel through small communities. Recovery from large storms or other events will require regional cooperation and depend on a complex network of roads and bridges. Vulnerability assessments should be used to identify the most vulnerable links in the network to mitigating the inevitable impacts from climate change and ensure recovery can be rapid and effective.

Investment priorities in the Ten Year Plan should focus on infrastructure resilience – especially where critical roads, bridges, and rails are vulnerable to impacts. Strafford MPO strongly advocates for increased support for local efforts to increase transportation resilience.

Corridors

The current Ten Year Plan contains funding for corridor studies starting in 2021. There are several corridors in the Strafford region that are priorities of the Strafford MPO: NH 125, NH11, US4, and NH108. Strafford MPO will be working with partner regional planning commissions and NHDOT to develop a regional process for prioritizing corridors.

US4 is the primary east–west corridor and the most direct route to Concord and the I93 corridor for communities in the Strafford region. US4 bisects the Town of Northwood, effectively separating it into northern and southern halves and creating a barrier to local travel. Northwood’s local economy, safety, and overall quality of life are vulnerable to poor freight planning and management along US4.

NH125 poses challenges similar to US4. It is the only alternative to NH16 for direct north-south travel and it links the City of Rochester to NH101 in Epping. NH125 carries high volumes of freight traffic and is an important link for several rural communities, including Barrington. However, high traffic volumes and speeds conflict with local development efforts. One critical bottleneck is intersection between NH125 and NH9. The intersection is a local nexus point of commercial and residential development in Barrington.

NH11 is an important regional route that links the City of Rochester through Farmington and New Durham to Alton. It is the primary northbound alternative to NH16 in the region and it carries large numbers of tourism traffic to the Lakes region. In recent years the corridor has experienced significant commercial development, traffic volumes, and congestion. Comprehensive planning and collaboration with municipalities along the 25 miles of NH11 in Rochester and Farmington are needed to ensure that economic development, local traffic, tourism access, and freight movement do not conflict as the corridor is developed.

Individual Projects

The projects currently in the Ten Year Plan remain priorities for the Strafford MPO. One of these includes funding in FY2028 for a study at NH155 and Madbury Rd in Madbury (project #41596). This intersection is a significant safety hazard and a priority for the towns of Durham and Madbury. We would like the study to be advanced as much as possible.

Strafford MPO also submitted five projects that have been included in the draft Ten Year Plan by NHDOT. These projects were developed in collaboration with municipalities and were prioritized for the draft plan by the Strafford MPO Policy Committee:

1. **Rochester:** Intersection improvements at the sequence of Charles St/NH 125 (Columbus Ave) and Old Dover Rd
2. **Dover:** Pedestrian and accessibility improvements along Chestnut St
3. **Somersworth:** Pedestrian improvements along W. High Street and High Street to connect schools to the downtown
4. **Northwood:** Intersection improvements at School St (107) & US 4/US 202 Intersection