

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, December 20th 2019 9:00 – 11:00 AM

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

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am

P. Nelson filled in for Chair as both the Chair and Vice Chair were unavailable.

1. **Attendance:**

Committee Members

Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Joe Boudreau (Rochester), Richard Michaud (Somersworth), John Huckins (Barrington), Donald Hamann (Rochester), Elizabeth Strachan (NHDES), David Landry (Dover), Bill Fisher (Farmington), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Michael Williams (COAST), Mark Avery (Madbury)

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz, Rachel Dewey, Jackson Rand

Guests

Nicole McKenzie – U.S. Census Bureau

2. **Staff Communications**

C. Lentz said he and R. Dewey attended a workshop on December 11th and 12th hosted by Federal Highway Administration for MPOs, State DOTs, public transit providers, and federal staff in the northeastern U.S. The focus of the workshop was on performance-based planning implementation. C. Lentz said he participated on two panel discussions to discuss performance target setting and developing shared planning agreements.

J. Czysz noted that SRPC would be holding a regional interactive workshop on Transportation, Housing, and Economic Development. It will be held at the Strafford CAP office in Dover at 9:00am on Friday January 10th. This workshop is being held in lieu of the usual TAC meeting. The workshop is focused on planning issues for municipal and technical staff, but Policy members are welcome to attend as well.

3. **Action Item(s)**

3.1 **Minutes from November 15th 2019**

M. Williams made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by D. Landry

Vote: unanimous in favor

4. Discussion Items

- 4.1 Legislative outreach – Does the Policy committee want the legislative sub-committee to focus on specific policy issues?

C. Lentz explained that the 2020 legislative session was beginning and legislators were in the process of submitting legislative serviced requests (LSR). He would be holding a meeting with Strafford MPO's Legislative Sub-Committee to plan for outreach and engagement and wanted to discuss overarching issues with the full Policy Committee in order to focus discussion with the sub-committee. He provided a list of potential policy issues to focus on for advocating regional issues to legislators:

- Ten Year Plan (as a distinct piece of legislation that the House and Senate will address individually)
- Public transit
- Electric vehicles and alternative fuels
- Passenger and freight rail
- Highway safety
- Infrastructure resilience and climate change adaptation/preparedness
- Reduce travel demand through effective planning
- Solid waste management

P. Nelson asked that the list of primary issues include how transportation revenues are generated. How systems are funded is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. M. Williams added that sustainable funding for public transit should be a primary issue. COAST has an infusion of funds through the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Improvement program (CMAQ) that will only support COAST for the next 2-3 years. He noted that current state law prohibits the use of gas tax revenues from supporting public transit but even a one cent increase in gas tax dedicated for public transit could raise \$8 Million per year. M. Williams said the recently passed state budget included \$200,000 dedicated to public transit operating support; COAST will receive approximately \$34,000 per year. That funding helps but it's the first time in 8 years that the state budget has supported public transit operations, and COAST will still be \$1.5 million short on their operating budget once the CMAQ funds are spent in 2-3 years.

P. Nelson asked that the policy issue list include air transport and the development of park & ride availability. He wondered why eastern NH didn't have a well-developed regional airport to supplement Manchester. Pease Tradeport just received a multi-million-dollar grant to improve their runway.

M. Bobinsky asked if some attention could be paid to funding opportunities for trail development (including support for design and engineering). He added that the infrastructure resilience and climate preparedness issue should include consideration for how to support implementation of infrastructure that is designed for future climate impacts (e.g. rather than designing bridges and culverts only to current and past storm patterns and precipitation).

D. Landry said that the current list comprises a lot of work for the sub-committee for the foreseeable future. He asked if other RPCs are working on similar efforts and if there were opportunities to reduce duplicative work on the part of Strafford MPO staff and Policy committee members. C. Lentz said he wasn't aware that other MPOs were undergoing similar dedicated efforts but there were individual opportunities to collaborate or avoid duplicating work. He noted that COAST had formed a legislative outreach committee to address transit-specific issues with decision-makers. He will be participating on that committee and could be a collaborative liaison between the two. D. Landry said he was primarily asking about opportunities to join forces with ongoing or planned efforts. For instance, are there other public transit providers in the same position as COAST, and is that a cohesive stakeholder group? M. Williams said there are other providers like COAST and many providers meet as the NH Transit Association to discuss issues with state agencies like NHDOT and some legislators. He emphasized that input from the NH Transit Association does not carry as much weight as input from municipalities. For instance, it might be easy for a legislator to suggest it's self-serving for transit providers to say they need financial support. However, citizens and municipalities saying they want the state to provide more support for public transit would require more attention.

D. Landry suggested that SRPC staff reach out to the other RPCs to get feedback on the list of policy issues, see if anyone's already tackling any of them, and collaborate in other ways. J. Czysz agreed and noted that the list was long, but didn't even include important non-transportation issues. She explained that the NH Association of Regional Planning Commissions (NHARPC) has an open seat for representing the Strafford RPC. Currently D. Hamann is the only representative for the region. The association meets about every other month for a couple of hours in Concord. J. Czysz explained that the association tracks bills that are related to planning issues and select a specific few to engage on that affect regional planning. She said the current conversation was meant to focus on issue that are directly relevant to municipalities in the region, and develop coordinated communications on those issues. E. Strachan agreed, saying that NHDES also keeps track of bills that could impact environmental health and related issues.

P. Nelson suggested that the conversation should be focused around *why* people are traveling, not just where. People need to get places for food, housing, employment, education, entertainment, etc. If a goal is to reduce the amount people are required to drive, what is determining the location of critical facilities like grocery stores, healthcare facilities, etc? P. Nelson said it would be useful to flip that conversation on its head to focus less on the development on infrastructure and more on strategic location of critical services. D. Landry said the issue is tied to zoning and development decisions at the local level. He noted anecdotally that several urgent care facilities had been sited in Dover. P. Nelson said that was exactly his point – wouldn't it be great to study the strategic location of urgent care facilities at the local level. What are the things that people need daily that have a transportation impact? J. Huckins said these decisions are tied to developers' market analysis to determine if a facility will be successful from a revenue standpoint.

M. Williams asked if SRPC tracked food deserts [where people have low or no access to a vehicle and are more than five miles from a grocery store]. C. Lentz said they do track them and the primary one is in Farmington. The closest grocery stores (not including mini-marts at gas stations) from downtown Farmington are in Rochester. B. Fisher said the resistance to change of any kind is a major barrier to local development. There is a vacant space in downtown Farmington at the old fire station and the town is debating how to develop the space.

J. Boudreau said he liked P. Nelson's line of thinking – to focus on the ecosystem that transportation supports, not just the roads, bridges, cars, and buses.

C. Lentz thanked members for their input and said he would get the ball rolling with the sub-committee.

4.2 2019 Annual Listing of Obligated Projects

C. Lentz provided draft information on projects that had received federal funding in the 2019 fiscal year. He noted new projects that had been funded through the Transportation Alternatives program, several projects that had been completed (such as the Newmarket-Newfields bicycle shoulder expansion project), and ongoing projects. He highlighted the funding that had been obligated to individual projects and public transit providers. Funds are “obligated” during each fiscal year - once specific pieces of projects are approved, contractors or other entities are authorized to spend programmed funds.

C. Lentz referenced discussion at a previous Policy meeting about the potential rescission of federal transportation funds from states that was built into the FAST Act. He said after all the discussion about the major impact of that provision, the rescission had been repealed by congress a few weeks ago. This is a major benefit for all states in the country.

C. Lentz said he would be publishing the Annual Obligation report before the end of the year.

5. **Project Updates**

C. Lentz noted that the MPOs were going to be setting annual safety targets in February. He said the crash records at that point in the year indicated that the statewide crash statistics were much better than 2018.

6. **Other Business**

J. Czysz reiterated that SRPC was looking for a commissioner to act as a representative for the region on the NHARPC board.

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 11:10am
Minutes Approved by [Print Name] _____

Signed _____ Date _____