

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization

Policy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, September 17, 2021, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Hybrid Meeting
Rochester, NH

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am

1. Attendance and Introductions:

Committee Members

In person attendees: Dave Landry (Dover), Don Hamann (Rochester), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Richard Michaud (Somersworth), Tom Crosby (Madbury), Peter Nelson (Newmarket), Wayne Burton (Durham), Barb Holstein (Rochester), Joe Boudreau (Rochester), Glenn Davison (NHDOT)

Members participating remotely: Tim White (NHDES),

Staff

Staff attending in person: Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz

Staff participating remotely: Jackson Rand, Nancy O'Connor, Stephen Geis, Rachel Dewey, Megan Taylor-Fetter,

2. Staff Communications

C. Lentz noted that most staff are working from home on a regular basis with occasional office work. Zuzy Duffy is working remotely from Norway currently and Alaina Rogers is back working in the office following maternity leave. J. Czysz noted that Autumn Scott had been hired to work as a part-time planner while she works on her Master's degree at UNH, and SRPC had just hired Blair as a new land use planner who will be circuit rider in Nottingham and working on CDBG grant management. She reminded members that next Thursday was the quarterly SRPC commission meeting. J. Czysz announced that the new SRPC website would be launching following a demonstration at the Commission meeting.

3. Action Items

Approval of the Draft August 20th 2021 Policy Committee Meeting Minutes

G. Davison made a motion to approve the minutes as written

Seconded by J. Boudreau

In-person members voted unanimously to approve the minutes; T. White voted remotely in favor.

Approve the proposed updates to the MPO bylaws – specifying provisions for virtual meetings in compliance with RSA 91-A

C. Lentz explained that the update was to several places in the bylaws to more explicitly state that the MPO would be holding hybrid meetings but ensuring a quorum of members attending in-person while also authorizing members participating remotely to vote as well.

M. Bobinsky made a motion to approve the draft bylaws update

Seconded by D. Hamann

In-person members voted unanimously in-favor with T. White voting in favor remotely.

GACIT letter & presentation – are regional transportation challenges and goals represented?

C. Lentz reviewed the draft letter describing regional planning priorities that will be sent to GACIT members as they consider the draft Ten Year Plan (TYP). He noted several places in the letter which he had edited or added in response to input from Policy members at the previous meeting.

C. Lentz began by running through the presentation he would be giving at upcoming GACIT hearings in Dover and Somersworth on October 4th. He noted that the time for NHDOT and RPC presentations had been reduced this round to ensure more time for public input. He said he had only five minutes to present and was under five minutes in practice. The presentation focused on projects in the approved TYP, projects submitted for inclusion in the draft plan, and high level planning priorities like addressing climate change and expanding the electric charging network. He noted that his presentation included a highlighted note on the Spaulding Turnpike exit ten feasibility study that was in the approved TYP but had been removed from the current draft TYP by NHDOT to balance competing projects and priorities considering reduced revenues. C. Lentz explained that the project was to study the feasibility of adding an exit ten to the turnpike between exit nine in Dover and exit eleven in Rochester. He said he had discussed the feasibility study with Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth staff and they were getting additional input from their council members. Many issues like wetlands and residential development that had restricted the original exit ten were still in play, however there was also increased economic development potential from more direct access to Somersworth. He said there was general support for the study and the idea of an exit, but he wanted additionally input from Policy members about advocating for the study in his presentation or not. Members discussed the history and factors around exit ten.

G. Davison said the exit ten study had been added back to the draft plan since the most recent GACIT meeting with NHDOT. That was an unexpected change but made the decision somewhat easier for the committee. C. Lentz suggested that he could support the exit ten study, but advocate for it to broadly consider how to improve access to the growing economic opportunities along the NH108 corridor (such as expanding the complete streets enhancements nearer to Rochester's urban area. M. Bobinsky said he would get back to Colin after the Somersworth City Council had discussed the issue. He wondered what the supposed outcome of the study would be if many of the same conflicting issues are still in place. M. Bobinsky asked C. Lentz if potential controversy around exit ten would impact the Dover-Somersworth-Rochester NH108 complete streets project. C. Lentz said no because they were separate projects with separate funding sources.

There was general consensus from Policy members for C. Lentz to support the exit ten study in his presentation since it was already funded in the plan.

C. Lentz asked Policy members for any other changes to the draft letter noting that it would also form the basis for his remarks to state legislators during the legislative process. They had no additional input. They felt general consensus was appropriate and did not require a formal vote.

4. Discussion Items

Summary of results of SRPC and RPC study of the Economic Benefits of COAST

C. Lentz explained that SRPC and RPC had recently completed a study of the economic impacts of public transit in SE New Hampshire that focused on the economic benefits of the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST). He reviewed the results of the study which included quantitative and qualitative components. Wide range of stakeholders was interviewed to understand the impact of public transit in sectors like healthcare, the service industry (hotels and restaurants), housing, and education. He highlighted the input from hotel and restaurant owners that they would not be able to sustain operations without public transit. On the quantitative side, overall they found that COAST is responsible for \$25.8 million in economic benefits to SE New Hampshire. These benefits are direct and indirect. Direct benefits are primarily from employment of COAST staff; some indirect benefits are from the regional contractors and consultants COAST hires. Other economic benefits are in the form of affordable transportation for area residents. Most trips on COAST are for employment, and many of those riders would have trouble keeping their jobs if they do not have an alternative to the bus. Missed medical appointments represent a large revenue loss to the healthcare industry every year and lack of reliable transportation is one of the primary causes. COAST provides that reliable transportation and represents a benefit to area hospitals. Seniors and people with disabilities rely on COAST for their transportation needs and the alternatives (taxis or ride-hailing services) are prohibitively expensive.

C. Lentz noted that an underlying goal of the study was to provide greater detail for public transit's economic benefit in the region so that SRPC, RPC, and other stakeholders could advocate for greater state investment in public transit. One of his slides showed that in 2021 state funding from NH to support public transit was only \$0.61 per capita. The New England state with the next highest contribution is Maine at \$11.55. Excluding states with large transit operations (NY, CA, MA), North Dakota represents the national median for state contributions to public transit (\$5.35).

D. Landry noted that it would be helpful to show the economic benefit of public transit systems in comparison to state investment [on a chart in the presentation which showed state investment in public transit]. Members discussed

P. Nelson suggested that the region should consider how to provide efficient transportation to the greatest number of people, to the greatest number of destinations, using modern technology like electric vehicles, with the funding available. Especially considering changes to the economy and job market moving into the future.

5. Other Business

C. Lentz noted that NHDOT had included a recommendation for which TAP projects should be included in the draft TYP. Rochester, Durham, and Dover submitted project applications, but only the Rochester project was recommended to the TYP. C. Lentz emphasized that NHDOT's list was

only a recommendation and municipalities could advocate for their projects at the GACIT and legislative hearings.

6. Commissioner RoundTable

P. Nelson noted that Newmarket had joined the Community Power Coalition of NH along with Dover and Durham.

7. Adjournment

D. Hamann made a motion to adjourn the meeting seconded by T. Crosby unanimous in favor, none opposed.