

# STRAFFORD



## Metropolitan Planning Organization

### Policy Committee

#### Meeting Minutes

Friday, October 15, 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: Bill Fisher, Farmington, Stephanie Benedetti, Dover, Don Hamann, Rochester, Joe Boudreau, Rochester, Michael Williams, COAST, Peter Nelson, Newmarket, Glenn Davison, DOT, Richard Micheau, Somersworth, Mark Richardson, Somersworth, Michael Bobinsky, Somersworth

Members participating remotely: Mike Bezanson, Rochester, Shanna Saunders, Rochester, Steve Diamond, Barrington, Tim White DES, Barbara Holstein, Rochester

##### Staff:

Staff attending in person: Colin Lentz

Staff participating remotely: Nancy O'Connor, Megan Taylor-Fetter

#### 2. Staff Communications

C. Lentz commented that there is nothing new to report regarding staff.

#### 3. Public Hearing 3.1 Amendment 2 to the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program

M. Bobinsky moved to open the public hearing seconded by D. Hamann. The motion passed with a unanimous vote of in person and remote members voting in favor.

C. Lentz explained that Amendment II is for the Dover Rochester project of the conversion to all electronic tolling on the Spaulding Turnpike tolls down to the Massachusetts border. This is currently in the plan, but the amendment adds a preliminary engineering phase and construction funding to align with the current schedule. He noted that in the draft ten-year project, it is delayed by two years. This is a turnpike funded plan.

C. Lentz explained Rochester has requested a change to project 14350, at the Strafford square 202A area and introduced M. Bezanson of Rochester to explain in further detail.

M. Bezanson explained that the project has been in design for a number of years and is proposed as two projects for construction. The bids for the first project came in a million dollars higher than the original estimate for the project. The 1<sup>st</sup> project consisted of putting arial utilities underground and other underground utility work. There were several factors that played into why that came in over budget. The cost estimate for the construction of the roundabout went up about 250 thousand dollars or more. DOT informed us that because the funding for the total project has increased over 25%, this amendment in the TIP is required. The increased cost will be locally funded and Rochester will not be requesting further federal funds.

C. Lentz presented an updated funding chart. He noted that there are stiff provision procedures even though there is not a request for further federal funds, but because federal dollars are involved and there is a 25% increase in the estimate this public hearing is required.

M. Bobinsky asked why the numbers are coming in higher and is that an area of basic materials, asphalt, mobilization?

M. Bezanson answered exactly, there is a lot of conduit incased in concrete in this first project as well as increased labor cost.

M. Bobinsky motioned to close the Public Hearing seconded by D. Hamann, B.Fisher, S. Benedetti, D Hamann, J Boudreau, M Williams, P Nelson, G Davison, R. Micheau, M. Richardson, M Bobinsky, M. Bezanson, S. Saunders, S.Diamond, T. White, B. Holstein, all in favor. Motion passed with all in favor none opposed.

#### **4. Items Requiring a Vote**

##### 4.1 Approve draft minutes from September 17th 2021

M. Bobinsky moved to approve the September 17th 2021 as written seconded by D. Hamann B.Fisher, S. Benedetti, D Hamann, J Boudreau, M Williams, P Nelson, G Davison, R. Micheau, M. Richardson, M Bobinsky, M. Bezanson, S. Saunders, S.Diamond, T. White, B. Holstein, all in favor. Motion passed with all in favor none opposed.

##### 4.2 Approve TIP Amendment 2

D. Hamann motioned to approve Amendment 2 to the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program seconded by J. BoudreauD. Hamann, S. Benedetti, D Hamann, J Boudreau, M Williams, P Nelson, G Davison, R. Micheau, M. Richardson, M Bobinsky, M. Bezanson, S. Saunders, S.Diamond, T. White, B. Holstein, all in favor. Motion passed with all in favor none opposed.

## 5. Items for Discussion

5.1 Meeting with Councilor Warmington – how should hypothetical additional federal transportation funds be invested in the region?

C. Lentz stated that Councilor Warmington requested a virtual meeting with himself and J. Czysz to discuss some of ten-year plan funding issues. The main issue that was discussed was that DOT is basing constraint for the Draft Ten Year Plan on the public works and highways bill. The hypothetical additional federal stimulus for transportation funding, basing the ten-year funding assumptions on what is the most likely. Additional funding for transit, roads and bridges, there are other bills out there but they are so far out there that is no way to base our funding assumptions on that. The state funded programs like betterment for the turnpike which are funded through state generated gas tax, due to lower travel there is less gas tax generated, so a lot of the projects that would be funded through those revenues are looking at delays. The Dover Rochester turnpike conversion is one of them. We talked with Counselor Warmington about some possible ways to apply that federal funding when/if it comes in. The baseline is advancing those delayed projects. They are still needed and are valuable to the region and municipalities alike. So, advancing ten-year projects are in the queue but are lacking funding because of the government shortfalls. Several projects are delayed 2-4 years.

G. Davison explained that much of the state funds in the TYP come from gas tax revenues. There are fewer state funds in the TYP available because traffic decreased so much during the pandemic. Fewer people driving means less gas being purchased, and lower revenues to gas taxes. P. Nelson asked if there was a resource that showed the projected funding impacts and proposed changes to the TYP due to the pandemic. G. Davison said the NHDOT Ten year Plan website will have the best information. C. Lentz said he would forward website information to committee members.

C. Lentz stated that in the meeting with Counselor Warmington, they talked about how that additional federal funding could be invested in the transportation system. It remains to be seen what restrictions the additional funding comes with, it needs to be directed to specific things. All three of the projects that were submitted are highly valuable. We also talked about the bike pedestrian plan. A number of bike projects in our region possibly could be paired with paving.

S. Diamond stated that he has been following the Durham Mill Pond Dam situation, and questioned if the dam generated electricity, and more broadly our critical infrastructure electricity usage items like streetlights, are those in circuits that are easily backed up in case of a power outage?

C. Lentz answered that it depends on the municipality. His guess is that no they are not backed up. Is there a way to incorporate incentives with this funding for projects that carry utilities upgrades?

P. Nelson stated the issue of bike trails is one that has his caught attention. When he was in Alaska recently, he noticed that bike trails were everywhere, and people were using them. He asked if anyone is looking at how much bike usage is for work and for recreation purposes and does it make a difference in where funding comes from? He added that in Alaska he noticed that bike riders follow the rules of the road. He asked is there funding for increasing the numbers of bike trails and in addition for educational courses on cyclist safety?

C. Lentz answered there is limited data on work commuting and recreational biking. We have not heard of a situation where funding would be specific to usage. Regarding safety, due to lack of real bike infrastructure except where a community has invested in it directly, people are not used to seeing cyclist, drivers and riders are forced into dangerous situations.

Members engaged in a conversation on the connection between cycling and transportation including the connection of rail trails for commuting and recreation.

C. Lentz added that he will communicate with decision makers moving forward more emphasis on bike trails and pedestrian improvements especially the inter-regional trails.

M. Bobinsky commented that he is supportive of the bike network funding but to also consider the Somersworth Ten Year Plan which includes a pedestrian improvements project that ties in school walking areas specifically. He asked is it a possibility, if additional federal funds come in, to help move this project up.

C. Lentz asked if we have a windfall of funding, is there is a way for communities to demonstrate a move forward with their projects.

G. Davison answered that if municipalities can demonstrate readiness to get projects ready for construction, NHDOT will be ready to do everything possible.

C. Lentz stated that at the GACIT Hearing, there were a lot of positive, emotional comments on the value of COAST.

## 5.2 Legislative outreach: what should SRPC staff focus on in advocating for proposed bills during the 2022 legislative season?

C. Lentz looked at service requests to see which will become bills. The Ten-Year Plan is always first on the docket. He stated that he will be there to talk about the same issues as was talked about at the GACIT Hearings. There is a future bill to establish a commission to study revenue alternatives to the road toll and how to keep funding highway maintenance now that more electric vehicles are on the road and less vehicles are buying gas. That question will be up with a similar bill coming up for alternative revenue generation.

P. Nelson suggested he would like to see a legislative tracking table on the website; a single place to see bills in progress. He stated he has a program he can share with SRPC.

## **6. Other Business & Updates from Staff**

P. Nelson Stated that Dover, Newmarket and Durham have joined the New Hampshire Power Coalition and encourages other communities to join. He added that Newmarket just approved their Solarized Newmarket Campaign.

M. Bobinsky stated that Somersworth is again releasing a RFB for quotes for a solar array for the Blackwater road site. They are working with EPA on all the various testing. Somersworth is working in collaboration with Dover and Rochester on homeless issues specifically a large homeless encampment.

P. Nelson stated he attended the Energy Solutions Conference where member T. White of DES made a presentation on electrification.

C. Lentz stated that DES has an RFP out for fast charging stations. There will be another round of clean diesel funding and they are talking about electric school busses.

C. Lentz informed the committee that Wayne Burton is no longer part of SRPC because he accepted a position Eastern Maine Community College.

M Bobinsky motioned to adjourn seconded by D. Hamann. All in favor to adjourn.