

**Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization
Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
150 Wakefield Street, Suite 12, Conference Room 1A
Rochester, NH 03867**

Meeting NOTES

**Friday, October 4th 2019
9 – 11 a.m.**

A quorum was not present for and official meeting so it began as an informational meeting at 9:10

1. Introductions

Municipalities:

Scott Kinmond (New Durham), Michael Williams (COAST), Jon Hotchkiss (Middleton), Kelley Collins, Shanna Saunders (Somersworth), Bruce Woodruff (Milton), Arthur Capello (Farmington)

Staff: Colin Lentz, Rachel Dewey

2. Staff Communications

3. Action Item(s)

3.1. Minutes from September 6th 2019

A quorum was not present to vote on the minutes

4. Discussion Items

4.1. CMAQ projects – review of technical analysis and assumptions

C. Lentz explained that he had expected to need to complete a detailed analysis process with TAC members. However, NHDOT had received \$13 Million in CMAQ project applications, with \$14 Million in available funding. They are reviewing projects for availability - if they can find a way to match requested ad available funds, NHDOT will recommend that all eligible projects be funded in the Ten Year Plan. This would eliminate the need for RPCs to review and rank projects and left room in the agenda for the next discussion item. He said he had nearly completed the air quality analyses for projects in the region and would need to report results and the assumptions used for each analysis.

C. Lentz briefly reviewed the projects proposed from the region:

- UNH Wildcat had proposed to replace three 2006 diesel buses with bio diesel and natural gas buses
- Rochester was proposing improvements to a local intersection to improve traffic flow
- NNEPRA (Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority) had proposed improvements to track siding in Dover to increase the speed of trains
- NHDOT proposed a park and ride in Lee at the intersection of NH125 and US4

4.2. Examining the role of TAC and improving technical analysis

C. Lentz explained that he wanted to take the opportunity to take a broader look at the role of the TAC and the type of work it does. This had not been discussed since C. Lentz had started working at SRPC. He said he wanted to start by making sure he had the correct understanding of what the TAC members saw as the role for the Committee. Then work to develop more opportunities for technical analysis (e.g. for the Metro Plan) and relevant engagement opportunities. C. Lentz acknowledged that TAC's work had seemed one-sided – it had only provided input on specific projects and funding opportunities, and not conducted any work that would benefit members communities. He said he wanted to change that and ensure TAC's role was more engaging and developed its important role for the Strafford MPO.

A. Capello asked if a specific mission and goals was developed when the TAC was formed. C. Lentz said the SRPC bylaws has a purpose statement and lays out a set of roles for the TAC but isn't anything like a formal mission and goals. B. Woodruff said the TAC was formed around 1990-1991 when the Strafford MPO was still the Seacoast MPO. He said that could be a great place to start and he would send a copy of the Bylaws to the committee.

J. Hotchkiss asked if all MPOs have a TAC committee. C. Lentz said they aren't required in the Federal law, but it's standard practice for MPOs to separate their technical review and have it inform the MPO board (the Policy Committee in Strafford MPO's case). M. Williams noted that the Southern Maine Planning Commission has one committee that does both roles, but they are smaller than Strafford. J. Hotchkiss suggested that C. Lentz review examples from other MPOs to adapt for the Strafford region.

B. Woodruff said he would like the TAC to ensure its role is balanced between the rural and urban communities. C. Lentz agreed and noted that the only recent real opportunities for TAC members to exercise their skill set had been project scoring for the Ten Year Plan, CMAQ, and TAC processes. He said he wanted to know if there was specific technical work that TAC members wished they could do more, or other similar opportunities to develop the committee's role. An example could be doing deeper analysis on project scoring criteria.

B. Woodruff said the TAC could do more to develop a better process for developing regional and local projects. For example, he did a lot of work to develop a Milton project proposal to apply for a federal BUILD grant. It would be helpful to get TAC review of projects and work to develop a set of grant-ready projects to help communities apply for limited funding.

S. Saunders said she would like more opportunities for hear from guest speakers on technical topics and other continuing education opportunities. When she worked in the Lakes Region Planning Commission, they had guest speakers on a range of topics related to projects and local technical work. B. Woodruff agreed and remembered a past project that the Lakes RPC had reviewed at the request of a town – the project had languished from lack of funding, and the TAC recommended that the project be developed as a road safety audit. C. Lentz surmised that B. Woodruff and others were getting at the idea that TAC should have a greater role in proactive project development. He said one of his next steps was to reach out to municipalities and get their top three projects to begin refining those projects so they can be ready for future funding opportunities. B. Woodruff agreed, noting that one of TAC's direct roles in the past was prioritizing projects in the Metro Plan.

M. Williams noted that in recent project ranking processes, he found it difficult to provide an objective assessment of prospective projects when he was unfamiliar with specific locations. He said it would be helpful to have more time and comprehensive information about prospective projects. B. Woodruff asked if project sponsors come to the TAC to present information about their projects; they used to do this in the past. C. Lentz said they did that for the most recent TAP round and that had been the plan for CMAQ before the process was simplified. J. Hotchkiss asked if there was funding for TAC to do project site visits. C. Lentz said he wasn't sure about individual project visits, but he had discussed the possibility

of holding a TAC meeting on a COAST bus to discuss proposed route changes and learn more about COAST operations.

S. Kinmond asked if it would be possible for a review of recent corridor studies (such as NH route 11). Other members said it would be good to review corridor studies but enough has changed in the region that they may be well out of date. K. Collins said it would be great to see the last NH16 corridor study that was completed around 2000 to look at the impacts of those projects on northern communities like Milton and Wakefield. C. Lentz said he could do a review of corridor studies. He reminded members that the current Ten Year Plan includes funding for corridor studies starting in 2021. S. Kinmond noted major increases he had noticed in traffic and congestion on major highways off the Spaulding Turnpike. A. Capello agreed, noting that those highways were not designed to handle the large volumes of traffic. C. Lentz said he would work to compile information about regional corridor studies. S. Saunders said it would be important to be organized and prepared well ahead of the start of the NHDOT corridor study process.

Members discussed the challenge of developing and raising funds for expensive local project such as bridges. It takes time to raise funds through the town meeting process or build up a capital reserve, at the same time the cost for a project will increase with time, and the infrastructure in question may continue to deteriorate. C. Lentz asked if there is technical expertise that is missing at the TAC table for these issues. K. Collins said she said not necessarily, it's more a planning issue. S. Kinmond said it would be beneficial to develop opportunities to learn more about the RFQ/QBS (request for qualifications/qualification-based selection) process. M. Williams said it sounded like the cities may be able to hire professional engineers (either staff or consultant), but the smaller, rural communities may not. He wondered if it would be possible for several communities could hire engineering service they could share. K. Collins said it was theoretically possible but it may be difficult to share one consultant logistically with multiple projects and schedules. B. Woodruff said the firm would have to be large enough to handle the workload from multiple municipalities. K. Collins added that many local projects may not be anywhere near "shovel ready" and an engineering study may be five years old by the time a town raised enough money to fund it – by that time the engineering study would be out of date.

C. Lentz noted that RPCs and NHDOT will be discussing the manual for Locally Managed Projects (the LPA manual) to find ways to maintain its purpose and reduce the administrative burden it imposes on municipalities and NHDOT. He said it would be an ongoing conversation and he would have more information in the future.

5. Project Updates

R. Dewey reminded members that she had sent out information requests regarding the Census new building program. She asked that anyone who wants to participate please contact her early next week because she has to submit new building data at the end of the week.

6. Other Business

B. Woodruff announced that NHDES Wetlands Bureau had begun a process to review and update the WTENV-300 regulations pertaining to development impacts to wetlands. The process had started in October of 2018 and a final draft had been adopted in May of 2019; the proposed change was scheduled to go into effect December 15th. He noted the specific change to a section of the rule (311.07 2B): proposed commercial development on lots that have wetlands requiring review under the WTENV regulations will have to provide a review of adjacent lots with wetlands. If there is an equivalent nearby developable lot (regardless of ownership) that would not have wetlands impacts, the developer's permit

application would be denied. S. Saunders said she had attended a training on the proposed rule change – her understanding from NHDES staff was that the change was targeted mainly at large Walmart developments to reduce the impacts those developments have on wetlands, not the small-town commercial lots. B. Woodruff said he objected to the rule because it specified any commercial lot over 1 acre. He said he understood the intent of NHDES to minimize the impact of large developments, but worried the rule would be unfairly applied to small developments in rural communities and impact their ability to infill town centers. S. Saunders said there were likely more trainings coming up because there were so many people at the session she went to who had questions about the proposed change.

M. Williams announced that COAST would be holding several public meetings to review their proposed service concept and redesign that had just been funded in part through an award from NHDOT. This will include proposed fare structure adjustments. Hearings will be in Portsmouth, Dover, and Rochester and details are on the COAST website. C. Lentz added that COAST had just celebrated providing a ride for its 15 millionth passenger that morning. M. Williams added that COAST ridership had increased in the most recent fiscal year.

7. Citizen's Forum – Citizens of the Strafford region are invited to speak on the subject matter of the meeting. Statements shall be limited to three minutes.

No citizens brought comments before the committee.

8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned