

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Technical Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, June 5th 2020 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Rochester, NH

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am
The chair read the following statement prior to the roll call:

The chair of the Strafford MPO Technical Advisory Committee has found that, due to the COVID-19/Coronavirus crisis and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-08, this Committee is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

- *Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means.* We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Committee have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone number 1-646-558-8656 and meeting ID 845 7090 3562, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84570903562>

- *Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting.* We previously gave notice to the public of how to access the meeting using Zoom, and instructions are provided on the SRPC website at www.strafford.org.
- *Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access.* If anybody has a problem, please call 603-994-3500 (ext. 106) or email at: clentz@strafford.org.
- *Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting.* In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time. Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote. Let's start the meeting by taking a Roll Call attendance. When each member states their presence, also please state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

1. **Attendance:**

Committee Members

Shanna Saunders (Somersworth), Chris Parker (Dover), Michael Williams (COAST), Leigh Levine (FHWA) Linda Dusenberry (NHDOT), Bill Watson (NHDOT), Scott Kinmond (New Durham), Tim White (NHDES), Michael Hoffman (Newmarket), Beverly Cray (UNH Transit).

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz, Jackson Rand, Rachel Dewey, Jack Aponas

2. **Staff Communications**

C. Lentz noted that most staff are still working from home. Two summer field staff have joined SRPC for the summer and early fall season. Jack Aponas and Alaina Rogers will both be working with Stephen Geis on data collection efforts. When they're not collecting field data, Jack will be working on various transportation planning efforts and Alaina will be assisting Kyle with environmental planning.

3. **Action Item(s)**

3.1 **Minutes from May 1st 2020**

C. Parker made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by S. Kinmond

Vote: unanimous in favor (via roll-call vote)

4. **Discussion Items**

4.1 **Ten Year Plan – update on projects, criteria, and scoring**

C. Lentz updated the committee members on the development of the Ten Year Plan process. He said all RPCs, NHDOT, NHDES, and federal partners (known as the Transportation Planners Collaborative, or TPC) had been reviewing the criteria used by RPCs to score candidate transportation projects. He provided a draft of the criteria and noted some recent changes. C. Lentz said there had been a proposal to skip criteria that did not apply to an individual project (for example: if bridge conditions do not apply to an intersection safety improvement project). The points for the criterion that does not apply could then be redistributed evenly among the criteria that do apply. C. Lentz said he agreed with other TPC members that this essentially eliminated the point of having the scoring criteria to compare projects, but he wanted to get additional input from committee members.

M. Williams agreed that eliminating criteria because they don't apply to a project is misleading. J. Czysz noted that the approach could be applicable in a case of a project proposing brand new infrastructure. There is no way for that project to get points under the infrastructure conditions criteria, and it could make sense to adjust the scoring accordingly.

M. Williams agreed but emphasized the value of having a scoring approach that is consistently applied to compare the value of one project to another. C. Lentz said the approach was only a suggestion, not a requirement.

B. Watson noted that the suggestion had not come from NHDOT but came mostly out of a lack of consensus among the RPCs on the criteria. He said NHDOT encouraged RPCs to customize the weighting of the criteria to fit regional values. He said when NHDOT assesses candidate projects from RPCs they will not be comparing the RPCs criteria weights, but looking only at the

top projects proposed by an individual RPC. C. Lentz said he would be collecting weightings from individual TAC members are compiling them for a regional average. He would then use the weighted criteria to conduct a preliminary in-office scoring that could be reviewed and discussed by TAC and Policy Committee members.

C. Lentz noted that the draft Ten Year Plan scoring and criteria guide included a new consideration for comparing the “need” for a project vs. the “impact”. For instance, there may be a high need for a project but the proposed scope would have limited impact, or vice versa. C. Lentz noted that the freight mobility criteria had been moved to the economic development criterion. He said criteria for environmental impact and economic impact were added.

C. Lentz said the TPC would be meeting one more time to finalize the criteria and guidance. He said SRPC staff were still working to develop technical analysis tools that could be used to identify potential projects. C. Lentz explained that SRPC would need to have a draft list of candidate Ten Year Plan projects ready for engineering review by NHDOT by December 1st [at the writing of these minutes, that date has been updated to November 6th].

4.2 Regional corridor studies – how to prioritize potential corridors and be competitive for funding?

C. Lentz reminded members that the current Ten Year Plan has funding for corridor studies (about two studies per year). The four corridors prioritized through previous TAC and Policy committee discussion were NH11, NH125, US4, and NH108 (in no particular order). He wanted to get input from TAC members on the criteria and approach to assessing and ranking the potential corridors in the region. C. Lentz said one of the first considerations was the overall approach. Do municipalities think corridors should be ranked using a “worst-first” perspective (focusing on corridors that have critical issues and the most need), or should the focus be on corridors with a lot of potential for smart development (NH125 being an example of a corridor with a lot of development potential). T. White mentioned that identifying potential sites for electric vehicle charging was also valuable for the upcoming third phase of Electrify America funding (through the Volkswagen Settlement). C. Lentz said staff were looking at data for identifying potential electric vehicle charging sites. T. White said Electrify America was going to hold a webinar on the upcoming round and said he would forward some web tools for identifying potential sites. C. Lentz reviewed some of the potential scoring criteria. M. Hoffman asked about the potential extent of the US4 study (proposed between the Lee traffic circle and the Epping traffic circle) – why wouldn’t it extend out to the intersection with NH16? C. Lentz said the extent was not final in any way, that was just a possible extent. The logic was that US4 between the Lee traffic circle was very different from the section west of the Lee circle. The extent of each study would have to be reviewed and confirmed.

B. Watson explained that NHDOT has received numerous proposals for potential corridor studies from many different groups. Some are more objective and data-driven, and some are based on political priorities. NHDOT is having to balance requests from RPCs, members of the Governor’s council, and other stakeholders. B. Watson said NHDOT has published a request for qualifications to hire a consultant to prioritize candidate corridors for study and conduct the studies. C. Lentz asked if the consultant will be asked to coordinate with RPCs in their review and prioritization of potential corridors. B. Watson said he anticipates NHDOT will make that request of the consultant. M. Williams asked if B. Watson knows whether NHDOT is considering the question of “worst-first” vs. “greatest potential” in their decision-making process. B. Watson said that was difficult to

answer at this point. He emphasized that NHDOT will probably be pulled in certain directions based on priorities of the Governor's Council. He said NHDOT may be taking a forward-looking approach: looking at corridors with development potential to resolve potential issues before they arise, and to allocate scarce resources strategically.

C. Lentz said he would continue developing metrics on each potential corridor to ensure SRPC had good information for the future consultant.

5. COVID-19 updates – emerging from the shutdown

5.1 How are COVID-19 and the stay-at-home order affecting the region, and how can we be better prepared in the future?

C. Lentz said he wanted to check in with communities about the COVID-19 crisis and how recovery and adaptation is progressing.

M. Hoffman noted the need to pay attention to the change in commuting. He said more people and companies are going to switch to at least part time remote work. This will affect travel patterns and have an impact on real estate prices as businesses reduce their building and facilities cost as they need less office space. C. Lentz noted that broadband internet access is still a barrier in rural areas of the country. S. Kinmond said the New Durham board members have quickly embraced the remote meeting technology for conducting town business. C. Lentz added that the details of NH right-to-know law related to local public meetings still need to be worked out. Individuals and communities have adapted quickly, but governments may be forced to adapt much faster than usual.

C. Parker said Dover had had their first in-person meeting with staff and development applicants. They limited the meeting to 10 people and used a large room designed for many more. The City Hall will also be opening for in-person business soon using an appointment-only approach. There will be a one way-flow of people and each visitor will be escorted by staff. C. Parker added that Dover boards will resume in-person meetings with a virtual option; masks will be required and no more than 10 people will be in a signing room. C. Parker agreed that offices will be changing the real estate market. He said some developers he's spoken to have said that traditional office building space is obsolete – except for special cases like retail space that has co-working space for meetings. He said there will be excess office space on the market as offices take advantage of reducing a major overhead cost.

M. Williams reminded attendants that COAST will be launching their new system on June 29th. All information is on the website and everything is on schedule for the transition. Ridership saw a major reduction since COAST's temporary shutdown and has been steadily climbing back up.

B. Watson asked if municipalities are increasing their capacity for outdoor dining during the pandemic. C. Parker said they were helping restaurants expand outdoor dining by waiving the usual fee for a sidewalk dining permit. He noted that the outdoor dining expansion is taking more public space, including sidewalks and parking spaces. This is essentially using public infrastructure and right-of-way for private revenue. The city has justified this under the circumstances based on the governor's order barring indoor restaurant seating. The city is working on what to do once the Governor's order is lifted. He said customers and businesses have responded positively to the expanded outdoor space. C. Parker complimented Rochester businesses and city staff for their quick adaptation of downtown parking spaces to expand outdoor restaurant seating. He said this will change the description about parking. M. Hoffman noted that outdoor public space and restaurant

seating in large Canadian cities is a huge economic driver. B. Watson noted that a group of Portsmouth business owners have hired an engineering consultant to analyze parking and traffic impacts from expanded pedestrian and outdoor seating in the Market Square area. M. Williams noted that would have a major impact on the existing public transit routes.

6. Other Business

No other business was brought before the committee.

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

C. Parker made a motion to adjourn

Seconded by M. Hoffman

Vote: unanimous in favor

The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 am