

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Technical Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, March 5th 2021

9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

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 2021-01, 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 829 0534 5549, or by clicking on the following website address:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82905345549?pwd=eTQ4dEVrbjVPbm5iL2dqQmxIdXpyQT09>

- *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 603-948-9483 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

Lucy St. John (NHDOT), Marcia Gasses (Barrington), Scott Kinmond (New Durham), Michelle Mears (Somersworth), Tim White (NHDES), Christopher Parker (Dover), Michael Williams (COAST), Michael Hoffman (Newmarket), Michael Bezanson (Rochester), Steve Pesci (UNH), Shanna Saunders (Somersworth), Bruce Woodruff (Milton).

Staff

Jen, Czysz, Colin Lentz, Jackson Rand, Rachel Dewey, Natalie Moles, Stefanie Casella, Nancy O'Connor, Alaina Rogers

2. Staff Communications

3. Action Items

3.1 Minutes from January 8th 2021

S. Saunders made a motion to approve the minutes as written.
Seconded by M. Williams.

Vote: S. Pesci, L. St. John, and B. Woodruff abstaining; otherwise unanimous in favor (via roll-call vote)

C. Lentz presented meeting notes from the February TAC meeting (A quorum was not present in February)

3.2 Recommendations to be made to the Policy Committee

Draft 2022-2023 Unified Planning Work Program

C. Lentz gave a presentation highlighting the draft Unified Work Program (UPWP) for fiscal years 2022-2023. He said it was a contract developed with NHDOT comprising the next two years of transportation planning efforts supported by federal planning funds. C. Lentz said the overall structure of the UPWP was the same as previous contracts. The updated UPWP will include more specific descriptions of deliverables associated with individual tasks. SRPC will be increasing focus on several planning areas: climate resilience and disaster recovery planning, equity planning, bicycle and pedestrian accessibility, congestion analysis, and travel demand modeling.

C. Lentz said the draft UPWP was under review by NHDOT and FHWA there might be small edits and funding adjustments in the finalization process with NHDOT. TAC members should send any comments to SRPC prior to the Policy meeting.

S. Pesci commented that he was glad SRPC would be focusing on climate change and hoped the work would be very focused on the region's specific needs – especially transportation infrastructure. C. Lentz said the details of SRPC's approach were still being developed but it would likely focus on two areas: local coordination on infrastructure resilience, and equity analysis related to climate impacts. S. Pesci said rail crossing infrastructure was very vulnerable to power outages because they didn't have redundant power backups.

C. Parker made a motion to recommend the draft UPWP to the Policy Committee for their approval, barring any major edits between now and the Policy meeting.

Seconded by B. Woodruff.

Vote: L. St. John abstaining, otherwise unanimous in favor via roll all vote.

Selection of candidate Ten Year Plan projects as recommended by sub-committee

C. Lentz reminded members that NHDOT had recently provided engineering review of the top candidate Ten Year Plan (TYP) projects from the region. A sub-committee of TAC and Policy members had then reviewed the projects and developed an initial recommendation to the TAC based on the projects and available funding. There were six projects proposed but it would not be possible to fund all of them with the regional allocation of \$4.9 million. One of the projects [highlighted in green below] was already paid for through a swap with an existing project. C. Lentz explained that after NHDOT provided engineering review, Rochester had requested to reduce the scope and cost of their proposed widening of NH11. NHDOT would be responding to the request in the next two weeks. If the new Rochester scope is approved, there would be more options for funding multiple projects. He said he was optimistic that the proposed scope change would be approved, but to be cautious the committee should prepare a backup recommendation in case it is not. C. Lentz explained that for the current decision, there are two scenarios:

Scenario 1 – original Rochester NH11 widening scope

Barrington	NH125/NH9 sidewalks	\$ 1,253,514
Rochester	NH11 Widening (3,200 ft scope)	\$ 4,538,029
Farmington	Sidewalk network expansion	\$ 990,160
Milton	sidewalk expansion (Dawson and Silver St)	\$ 684,080
Durham	Main St/NH155A intersection	\$ 1,596,500

Under scenario 1, the only funding possibilities are Rochester alone, or the other four projects – no other combinations.

Scenario 2 – reduced Rochester NH11 widening scope and cost are approved

Barrington	NH125/NH9 sidewalks	\$ 1,253,514
Rochester	NH11 Widening (2,100 ft scope)	\$ 2,800,000
Farmington	Sidewalk network expansion	\$ 990,160
Milton	sidewalk expansion (Dawson and Silver St)	\$ 684,080
Durham	Main St/NH155A intersection	\$ 1,596,500

Under scenario 2 there are three possible project combinations:

- Barrington, Rochester, Milton
- Rochester & Durham
- Rochester, Farmington, Milton

C. Lentz explained that the TAC & Policy sub-committee had made the following recommendation:

- If the new Rochester scope is not approved, the TAC should recommend that the Rochester widening project be funded.
- If the new Rochester scope is approved, the TAC should recommend that the Rochester, Farmington, and Milton projects be funded

Members discussed the proposed NH11 widening project. C. Lentz noted that the proposed widening project was closely tied to a traffic signal being installed at Nashoba Drive (which was already paid for through a project swap). M. Bezanson said the Nashoba Drive project will include the signal to improve safety, and sidewalks from the intersection all the way to the NH16 overpass. The signal project will complete some of the widening of the corridor.

S. Pesci raised concerns that the proposed widening was due to increased traffic caused by the recent commercial development at Granite Ridge. C. Parker asked if the developers had been involved in the conversation and if they were paying for traffic mitigation when the development was a major source of congestion. S. Pesci said he felt the widening project was based on an outdated approach, when developers build a mall, traffic increases, and the cost of mitigating the traffic is borne solely by the municipality. He said he was uncomfortable with potentially dedicating the entire regional TYP allocation to such a project when there were other needs around the region. S. Pesci suggested that the sidewalk component of the Nashoba Drive project should have been a TAP application. B. Woodruff said he shared S. Pesci's concerns and wondered if there was a way to re-engineer the Rochester projects so they weren't so closely tied together. S. Saunders said traffic on NH11 had been increasing well before Granite Ridge was completed. The Nashoba Drive intersection was necessary for safe access to and from a large residential development. M. Gasses agreed that it wasn't fair to pin all traffic impacts on the Granite Ridge development. Roadway upgrades had been made in the vicinity of Granite Ridge that improved traffic flow.

M. Bezanson confirmed that a Phase II expansion of Granite Ridge was still being constructed and would include a new access road from the Nashoba Drive intersection around behind the new development. This would improve local access and pedestrian safety.

M. Hoffman expressed concerns that the ultimate expansion of the NH11 corridor would lead to a high-speed boulevard that is only friendly to cars and trucks, but impassible to pedestrians. S. Pesci asked if there was really much demand for pedestrian access along the proposed section of corridor. M. Bezanson said they hadn't done pedestrian counts, but there was obvious use of the shoulder by pedestrians and a lot of local support for sidewalks. M. Williams noted that if the corridor is currently unfriendly to pedestrians and they aren't using it because it's unsafe, a pedestrian count wouldn't provide a correct picture of need. More pedestrians might use the route if it were safe and inviting. M. Bezanson noted that there were COAST bus stops in the vicinity and people must currently cross the road with no protection to reach the bus stops. M. Williams said it would be optimal to include a bus pull-off in the future. C. Parker asked about the possibility of bike lanes. M. Bezanson said the corridor includes enough width for bike lanes. S. Saunders noted that the proposed access road would be a much better route for pedestrians to access Granite Ridge.

S. Kinmond said the sub-committee focused more on the available funds and the overall benefits of proposed projects, rather than engineering details.

M. Gasses said the Barrington Planning Board had originally considered applying to the Transportation Alternatives program to fund the proposed Barrington project, but they opted to only apply for TYP funding since it could fund the project with 100% federal funds. TAP would require a 20% local match. She advocated for the Barrington project, noting that it would be the first sidewalks in town and would connect the middle school to a concentration of local business around the intersection of NH9 and NH125. She said residential development was increasing along with local demand for safe pedestrian facilities and the local boards were strongly in favor of the project.

B. Woodruff noted that the Milton project was paired with other improvements in utilities, stormwater management, and parking in addition to sidewalks. These multiple benefits would be constructed in a cost-effective manner under a single contract.

M. Gasses explained that the proposed Barrington project will tie together the businesses and growing residential development in the town center. The proposed infrastructure is critical to Barrington's development.

M. Williams said he thought it was important to note that the Barrington, Milton, Farmington, and Durham projects proposed improvements toward more walkable and accessible communities, which seemed closer to the overall intent and goals in the Metro Plan and regional priorities in general. He didn't want to disparage the Rochester project but echoed previous concerns about widening projects primarily benefiting motorized travel.

S. Pesci said UNH would prefer a roundabout at the NH155A/Main St intersection and that he suspected the current cost estimate was conservative because UNH owned all the right of way around the intersection, so right of way costs would be zero. He added that he always advocated for sidewalk projects but was not convinced the proposed segment in Rochester had the potential volumes to warrant a sidewalk. He said he was disappointed that more communities had not applied for TAP funds rather than the TYP, and said he felt the current TYP list did not reflect the regional goals.

B. Woodruff asked what would happen to the Rochester project if it was not funded through the TYP. S. Saunders said it would get proposed in another year or program.

C. Parker asked if it would be possible to defer the decision one week to allow committee members to consider the issues raised in the discussion. J. Czynski noted the TYP decision process has become split up and the final decision ends up being pushed to the last minute. She acknowledged the help NHDOT has provided through engineering review and welcomed input on how to improve the MPO decision process to have these kind of detailed project discussions earlier. She said it would be possible to schedule an emergency TAC meeting the upcoming Friday morning. S. Pesci wondered if waiting a week would actually change any of the issues discussed and change people's votes. He asked if it would be possible for Rochester to commit to the \$2.8 project cost regardless of the feedback from NHDOT on the proposed scope change. M. Bezanson said he was confident that Rochester could keep within the \$2.8 million amount and the city had already committed local funds to match federal dollars. He reiterated how long the two projects had been in planning and how vital they were to the city and the region. C. Parker raised the concern that postponing the meeting risked not having a quorum in a week. B. Woodruff noted that the sub-committee already developed a recommendation to the TAC and suggested that someone make a motion regarding the proposed projects for the purposes of taking a vote. He noted that the simple reality is that there just isn't enough funding to make everyone happy in this decision.

B. Woodruff made a motion that the TAC accept the sub-committee's recommendation to fund the Rochester, Farmington, and Milton projects. Seconded by C. Parker

S. Pesci requested that the motion be modified to be contingent on Rochester ensuring local funding or amendment of plans to keep the project capped at the \$2.8 million so other TYP candidates could be funded as well. B. Woodruff agreed with the modification of his motion.

Motion amended: the TAC accept the sub-committee's recommendation to fund the Rochester, Farmington, and Milton projects - with the expectation that Rochester find a way to cap the federal (TYP) funding for the Rochester project at \$2.8 million.

M. Gasses asked why the Barrington project was not included in the original recommendation. S. Kinmond said the sub-committee had a difficult time deciding between the Farmington and Barrington projects since it wouldn't be possible to fund both. B. Woodruff noted that the original motion left a remainder of around \$400,000 and asked if it would be possible to make either the Barrington or Farmington project phased for more funding flexibility. M. Gasses said the Barrington project was already engineered and programmed as a single project. S. Pesci asked why the Barrington Select Board was opting for the TYP rather than applying to the TAP program. M. Gasses said the town budget was constrained with COVID-19 and providing the 20% local match for a TAP project was a challenge. She noted that the NHDOT engineering review said the project would be funded with 100% federal funds and the Select Board opted to wait a few extra years to get the project funded through the TYP. S. Pesci said NHDOT should consider whether providing the option of 100% federal funding through the TYP was discouraging municipalities from applying to the TAP program for eligible projects.

C. Parker made a motion that the TAC recommend to the Policy that the Rochester, Barrington, and Milton projects be funded through the Ten Year Plan - with the expectation that Rochester find a way to cap the federal (TYP) funding for the Rochester project at \$2.8 million.

Seconded by S. Pesci

Vote: L. St. John abstaining, otherwise unanimous in favor

Draft 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program & Metro Plan updates

C. Lentz presented the draft update to the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that will cover years 2021-2024. The TIP includes federally funded transportation projects in the region that are ready for final engineering and construction. C. Lentz reviewed some of the projects that were added to the TIP since the last update. Many projects are added between updates through individual funding programs like Transportation Alternatives and CMAQ. C. Lentz explained that he had updated the fiscal constraint approach since the last TIP update to make it more intuitive. The previous approach was to show the amount of funding programmed for projects in the region, and compare it to a theoretical proportion of federal funding that could be allocated to the region. This created an inaccurate perception that the region wasn't getting all the funding it should. Strafford MPO gets a certain amount of funding to program new projects but overall, the statewide funding allocation is more fluid and context specific. A new approach assumes that the amount of funding programmed in the region in any given year is the amount of funding that will be spent (no more no

less). That amount can change through amendment, but it assumes fiscal constraint because dollars programmed and spent will be the same.

C. Lentz reviewed the comments he had received since the public comment period began and asked if there were any other questions or comments from committee members. He noted that there hadn't been a STIP amendment for nearly 12 months and that impacts progress on many projects, so approving the update was critical. S. Pesci asked why there had been such a long delay in amendments. C. Lentz said it was a combination of the pandemic and the timing of the STIP update itself.

C. Parker made a motion that the TAC recommend the draft 2021-2024 TIP to the Policy Committee for their approval. Seconded by M. Williams.

Vote: L. St. John abstaining; otherwise unanimous in favor

4. **Municipal Roundtable – Updates on local COVID-19 adaptation** Are there ways that SRPC can help your community recover from COVID-19?

No members brought items forward for discussion.

5. **Other Business**

S. Kinmond said he had taken a new position with the Town of Alton and would no longer be able to represent new Durham on the SRPC TAC. C. Lentz and others thanked him for serving on the TAC and providing his expertise.

6. **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.

No citizens were present to provide input.

7. **Adjournment**

B. Woodruff made a motion to adjourn

Seconded by M. Hoffman

Vote: unanimous in favor

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15am