

Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Friday, October 17th 2019 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Strafford Regional Planning Commission
150 Wakefield Street, Suite 12, Conference Room 1A
Rochester, NH

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am

1. Attendance:

Committee Members

Barbara Holstein (Rochester), Richard Michaud (Somersworth), Michael Bobinsky (Somersworth), Steve Diamond (Barrington), Victoria Parmele (Northwood), Joe Boudreau (Rochester), Elizabeth Strachan (NHDES), David Landry (Dover), Tom Crosby (Madbury), Glenn Davison (NHDOT), Jon Hotchkiss (Middleton), Michael Williams (COAST), Steve Pesci (UNH), Bill Fisher (Farmington), Jon Huckins (Barrington), Peter Nelson (Newmarket)

Staff

Jennifer Czysz, Colin Lentz

2. Staff Communications

3. Action Item(s)

3.1 Minutes from September 20th 2019

T. Crosby made a motion to approve the minutes as written.

Seconded by M. Williams

E. Strachen noted that her name was spelled incorrectly in a couple spots.

C. Lentz said he would fix those spots.

Vote: unanimous in favor (UNH abstaining)

3.2 What topics to include in a letter to GACIT for the Ten Year Plan development

C. Lentz referred members to the memo he had sent with the meeting packet. He and J. Czysz had met with Senator David Watters the previous week. They discussed several issues related to the Ten Year Plan (TYP) and regional transportation planning including CMAQ funding, corridor studies, and electric vehicle charging infrastructure (EV Charging). C. Lentz explained that the draft TYP is being reviewed by the Governor's Advisory Commission of Intermodal Transportation (GACIT). GACIT will amend and edit the draft plan before sending it to the Governor's office. After reviewed and edits by the Governor, he will send it to the legislature to be reviewed by the committees in the House and Senate. It is a good time to send a final letter as part of the GACIT phase of the TYP as

it will help continue the communication of SRPC's priorities to the Governor and help Senator Watters take up those issues with the Senate Transportation Committee. C. Lentz said such a letter would include the regional planning priorities already agreed on by the Policy Committee, but the discussion with Senator Watters covered several topics that could be focused on in the letter. C. Lentz said he wanted to get input from the Policy committee on these issues prior to sending any communications to GACIT. He said it would be ideal to get a letter to GACIT before their next meeting so the deadline for sending it was November 1st. G. Davison noted that GACIT has until December 1st to get their draft of the TYP to the Governor, and he has six weeks to review it and send it to the Legislature so his deadline is January 15th.

- Flexing of Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) funding
 - Because NH is in attainment of federal air quality standards, NHDOT can flex funding from the CMAQ program to other transportation priorities. Currently the draft TYP recommends flexing 25% (\$2.2 million) in CMAQ funds to paving and bridge priorities.
- Statewide corridor studies
 - C. Lentz explained that the current TYP has funds for a corridor study program. \$700,000 per year of the TYP will support approximately 2 corridor studies in each year. RPCs will likely play a role in ranking the corridors in their regions for a statewide competitive process of prioritizing and funding corridor studies, but the methodology and process for that needs to be developed.
- Electric vehicle charging infrastructure
 - C. Lentz noted that through the Volkswagen settlement, 4.6 million (15% of the total settlement) was dedicated to the installation, operation, and maintenance of new EV charging infrastructure. Some statewide studies have identified locations along major corridors for new EV charging infrastructure, and SRPC has done some analysis for the region

M. Bobinsky asked if funding could be added to existing corridor-based projects (such as the NH108 corridor improvement project between Dover, Somersworth, and Rochester) to increase the focus on EV charging. C. Lentz said that would simply be a scope change for an individual project. The NH108 project would not be in construction for several years and could be amended to include EV charging. The project would also not preclude the larger NH108 corridor from being included in the corridor study program.

S. Pesci expressed that CMAQ funds should be reserved for CMAQ related activities, not flexed to paving. He posed the question to the committee whether it should support the policy of flexing CMAQ funds away from projects that have an express purpose of reducing vehicle-miles-traveled and improving air quality, regardless of whether it's allowed under the law. S. Pesci added that he wasn't clear where the region was in terms of planning for EV charging.

C. Lentz said that a letter could include those topics. He said at the very least the letter could include an overall policy statement regarding CMAQ if the committee came to a consensus. He specified that in the discussion with Senator Watters, there was an emphasis that NHDOT should not have to take funds out of CMAQ in order to pay for paving needs. NHDOT does not set its own budget, it

has to work with the funds from the Federal Highway Administration and from the state legislature. NHDOT has to balance a complicated funding budget and it is incumbent on the legislature to ensure adequate funding is available for the different transportation needs. The continuing work with the legislature will involve finding additional revenues to reduce the number of trade-offs in transportation programs. J. Czysz noted that the letter is really for two audiences: communicating regional planning priorities for the TYP to GACIT members and advocating for policy and funding issues to the legislature.

S. Diamond said he didn't have a definitive proposal for how to balance the range of transportation needs but agreed that CMAQ funds should be reserved for projects that address the intended purpose of the CMAQ program.

C. Lentz noted that the CMAQ policy statement or request was fairly simple to include in the letter if the Policy Committee came to consensus on the language. He and J. Czysz also discussed a more complicated potential proposal for CMAQ funds with Senator Watters that would likely have to be developed over the long-term with state agencies and the legislature. They discussed the possibility of MPOs and RPCs proposing a more specific objective for the \$2.2 million of CMAQ funds. Two possible proposals: 1) fold the funds into the existing corridor study program and dedicate it an EV charging component of each study; and 2) dedicate the funds to a project development program led by RPCs that solicited projects for EV charging infrastructure in each region.

S. Pesci said he felt the corridor studies should include EV charging analysis by default under the existing program. The policy statement should focus on the big picture of "CMAQ should be reserved for CMAQ", and not get into the weeds of detailed proposals.

P. Nelson agreed, saying a long-range corridor study was not required to identify good locations for new EV charging infrastructure. The infrastructure is already being built and a study will take too long. He added that many communities would benefit from development of new EV charging stations at the local level. He proposed the idea of a block grant style program for development of EV charging infrastructure at the local level.

J. Boudreau asked if anything had been done to partner with existing gas station companies to install EV chargers at existing facilities, rather than trying to find separate locations. E. Strachan said state agencies had reached out to the gas station companies without success. The convenience stores are franchise-owned, but the parent companies (e.g. Irving) have not been open to installing EV charging stations. P. Nelson noted that many private companies are being proactive with EV charging.

S. Pesci noted that due to the limited amount of CMAQ funding in the most recent round, UNH chose to limit the number of applications they presented. They chose not to submit an application for EV chargers on UNH campus. He said he didn't think it was necessary for RPCs to get involved in a funding program and project solicitation process; funding should be available through a regular competitive statewide opportunity.

S. Pesci suggested a motion for discussion to get the major points in place for the letter to GACIT. He moved that the letter from Strafford MPO specific that they are not in favor of the state flexing

CMAQ funds to paving and other non CMAQ-eligible activities. The letter does not need to include discussion of corridor studies related to CMAQ funds, because EV charging infrastructure development should be included in corridor studies by default.

The motion was seconded by B. Fisher

V. Parmele said the letter should say something related to the overall funding issue where NHDOT is having to flex funds away from other programs to fulfill the state's basic highway maintenance needs. S. Pesci amended his motion to include language regarding the need for the legislature to develop additional revenue sources. D. Landry suggested that the letter mention that when funding in programs like CMAQ are reduced, it discourages applicants from developing innovative proposals.

C. Lentz re-summarized the motion on the table: the letter should say the Strafford MPO Policy committee does not support the flexing of CMAQ funds out of the program, it should be reserved for CMAQ-eligible activities including EV charging infrastructure and corridor studies; the reduction of CMAQ funding availability discourages innovative project development; and it is incumbent on the state legislature to develop adequate funding sources to address the needs and advancement of the state's transportation system.

Vote: Unanimous in Favor

C. Lentz said he would draft the letter as soon as possible for final review and comment by the committee but they would not be meeting again prior to the deadline to send it.

4. Project Updates

Update on Metro Plan Development

C. Lentz said staff were working on a regional workshop for technical staff in the areas of transportation, housing, and economic development. This would inform updates to the Metro Plan, the Comprehensive Economic Development Study, and the Regional Housing Needs Assessment. He said the proposal was to hold a half-day workshop as an expanded TAC meeting. C. Lentz said a full range of staff from small and large communities would be invited to participate.

5. Other Business

S. Pesci asked for an update on the existing CMAQ round. G. Davison said NHDOT had received around \$14 million in applications and had \$13 million available. They would be ensuring all projects were eligible; if they are able to match requested and available funds, they will recommend to GACIT that all eligible projects be funded in the TYP. C. Lentz said he had nearly completed the regional air quality analyses to support NHDOT's decision process.

E. Strachan reminded the committee that NHDES was holding a solicitation round for projects for funding under the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act. She summarized the types of projects that were eligible saying C. Lentz had forwarded information via email, and encouraged folks to reach out to her with questions.

S. Diamond suggested that SRPC staff develop more opportunities to increase committee participation. This could include small “homework assignments” He asked about FEMA floodplain maps that break at town boundaries. J. Czysz explained that many of the maps are digitized originals and there is no federal funding for updating the maps any time soon.

M. Williams noted that COAST would be holding their last set of public meetings to present a proposed service concept. They had incorporated a large volume of public input and would be implementing the concept on June 29th 2020.

S. Pesci noted that UNH and Durham had been discussing the rise of “micro mobility devices” (e.g. small rentable electric scooters) and bike shares. UNH will be holding a demonstration of these technologies in mid-November and the Town of Durham is in the process of developing ordinance in anticipation of needing to regulate such devices locally.

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.

7. **Adjournment**

M. Williams made a motion to adjourn
Seconded by T. Crosby
Vote: unanimous in favor

Meeting adjourned at 10:25am

Minutes Approved by [Print Name] Peter Nelson

Signed  Date 11/15/2019