

MEETING minutes

Mississippi Gulf Coast Metropolitan Planning Organization

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)



Thursday, February 25, 2016 at 10:30am
 Gulf Regional Planning Commission
 1635-G Popps Ferry Road ~ Biloxi MS 39532



I. Call to Order

II. Introductions

Hancock Co.		D'Iberville		Bus. Council		
	Vic Johnson		Jeff Taylor		None	
Harrison Co.			Leslie Robertson	Other Parties		
	Patrick Bonck	Ocean Springs		Ethan Wise	Neel-Schaffer	
	Joseph Spires		Carolyn Martin	Jim Wilkinson	Neel-Schaffer	
		Gautier		Doug Rackley	AGR	
Jackson Co.			Chandra Nicholson			
	Butch Loper			FTA		
	Wendy Barnes	Pascagoula			None	
	Brian Fulton		None	FHWA		
Waveland		Moss Point			None	
			Sue Wright	Rep. Cochran		
Bay St Louis			Cathy Keeton	Rep. Wicker		
	Paula Fairconnetue	Coast Transit			None	
Diamondhead						
	Clovis Reed		Kevin Coggin			
		Intern'l Airport		Rep. Palazzo		
Pass Christian			None		None	
	None	MS State Port				
			None	MDOT staff		
Long Beach		Port Pascagoula			Jeff Altman	
	None		None		Necole Baker	
					Perry Brown	
Gulfport		Port Bienville			Josh Stubbs	
	Kris Riemann		None		Sedrick Durr	
		NASA/Stennis				
			None	GRPC staff		
Biloxi		Keesler & NCBC		David Taylor	Jeff Loftus	
	Christy LeBatard		None	Kenneth Yarrow	Ken Holland	
		Rail Roads		Stephanie Plancich	Jason Zimmer	
		Rail Commission	Elaine Wilkinson			

III. Public Comment - None

IV. Approval of Minutes: MOTION to adopt the minutes for the December 10th annual meeting made by Jeff Taylor. Second by Joseph Spires. No Comments. PASSED

V. Transportation Improvement Program(TIP)

TIP Application Period: Kenneth Yarrow discussed both the TIP development schedule and process with the TCC members. The schedule was printed on the agenda as follows:

Feb 11-May 13	Project Application period
March (TBD)	Sub-Committee will meet to finalize scheduling matrix
May (TBD)	Sub-committee reviews proposed TIP projects
May 26 @ 10:30	TCC meeting to review and recommend FY17-20 TIP
June 30 @ 10:30	TPC reviews to approve the draft for public review
July 5-August 19	Public Review and comment period
July 19-August 12	Public meetings are scheduled
August 25 @ 10:30	TCC reviews comments, recommends final TIP
Sept. 29 @ 10:30	TPC reviews and adopts the final FY17-20 TIP

Revised TIP Handbook

The TIP handbook is the tool each jurisdiction should use when developing their project application. It clarifies the project guidelines and describes the prioritization process that will be used to rank submitted projects. (Each jurisdiction present was provided a hard copy.) He informed the group that there are two separate application forms. One for the general STP funds, and the second for TAP projects. Each application should be accompanied by a signed resolution for the projects being proposed. (Application and Resolution hard copies were made available.)

***All TIP application materials are available for download at www.grpc.com.**

There was considerable discussion about TAP funds. Kenneth clarified that they can be used more broadly than general STP funds which are limited to functionally classified roadways. He made the TCC aware that projects within a quarter mile of a school zone, that support Safe Route to School projects, and those that provide connectivity from non-classified roadways are all ranked highly in the review process.

In addition to TAP funds, he reminds everyone that group funding is also still available. Groups include: Bike/Ped/Transit, Safety, and Technical Studies. Note on your application if you are seeking to use group funds.

Mr. Fulton discussed a recent ITE meeting presenter who talked about some of the changes to be expected with the adoption of the FAST Act to replace MAP-21. With comments from Mr. Brown and Mr. Altman as well as David Taylor, we were informed that the Fast Act combines TAP funds into another category, but they are expected to stay and perhaps increase to our community. Our STP apportionment may also increase slightly. At this time, US DOT is still determining how the new Act will be applied. FHWA will advise the MPO of any updates and needed process changes as that information becomes available. For now, we are advised to continue with the current planning process under the current funding structure.

We discussed that a fuel tax for road improvements is seriously being considered by our legislators. Questions were asked about how those funds would be managed and distributed to

the Gulf Coast Region. There were no answers to those questions yet, but as more information is released, the MPO will be updated.

Status of FY15-19 Projects: David Taylor reviewed the current status of our TIP projects for FY16-19. There are some opportunities for more projects to rise into 2016 if we are allotted additional obligation authority. It is too soon to make that call, says MDOT, but they encourage us to keep moving our projects forward so that, should we obtain extra authority we will be able to obligate quickly.

He presented a copy of a draft project scheduling matrix. This is a tool that will be used to assign every TIP project a proposed schedule. The schedule represents a projects life cycle from the time it is allocated funds and added to the TIP to the time it obligated with authority to Advertise from MDOT. The TCC members had several questions and showed great support of the scheduling tool idea. MPO staff will schedule a sub-committee meeting to discuss finalizing the tool as well as attaching consequences to lagging projects. Mr. Taylor reiterated that this is a tool to ensure we are doing our best to move projects forward and that MDOT project staff were integral parts of the draft process. Mr. Altman also chimed in to say that the tool is not a penalty nor is it meant to penalize. We've done a good job in recent years of moving projects forward, but as we look to the future, it will help streamline both the project development process.

Next we discussed the monthly progress reports. It was reiterated that every TIP project, not just this year's projects need to be emailing a monthly report to David Seyfarth and Stephanie Plancich. This process will let us know which projects are getting hung up and where so we can help get past barriers. It will also help ensure that should one project be forced to move back a year in the TIP, another will be ready to move up toward construction.

VI. UPWP Update: FY17-18

In addition to the TIP update, our Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) will also be updated this year. The UPWP described the specific work that the MPO staff plan to undertake in the next two year period. This UPWP will be the 2017-2018 update. Staff will have a draft copy available for TCC review at the May 26th meeting, and then will ask the TPC to approve the draft at their June 30th meeting. Perry Brown clarified that the due date is earlier in the year than done in the past to allow MDOT a slightly longer review time to get through each MPO's draft and have it reviewed by FTA and FHWA before they adopt the statewide plan in September.

VII. Rail Program Updates

MDOT Rail Crossing Improvement Program: Josh Stubbs provided a brief update on the MDOT rail crossing program. He informed the group that several crossings have been upgraded along the coast, including in the cities of bay St Louis, Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gautier. He explained that as the Amtrak passenger rail planning evolves, MDOT may need to reevaluate all crossings to determine if, with the faster speed of that train, safety improvements will need to be added to our crossings. He did note though that with current funding levels, MDOT receives enough funding to upgrade between 10 & 15 crossing per year, statewide.

He discussed a little bit of how quiet zones are developed, but after discussion with the group, the feasibility of getting a significant quiet zone in our communities is very low. CSX is not very supportive, regular gates have to be changed, non-gated crossings must have them added, then there are requirements to have median barriers which block or require alteration of driveways,

a zone must be a continuous $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, and new train detection must be installed costing several hundred thousands of dollars.

Being aware of these hurdles, someone asked about crossing closures and the possibility that CSX will push for them in order to get the passenger rail service up and running. Mrs. Wilkinson Mr. Stubbs both replied that there is no push for closure happening to date, but it may be something discussed later down the road. He noted that the only safe crossing is no crossing. Closures are a best practice, but it's very hard to sell to the community members and elected officials. Perhaps this new rail option will be the catalyst for some closures in the future. Mr. Taylor suggested that there may be a way for the MPO to help fill safety gaps at crossings across the coast.

Elaine Wilkinson then provided the TCC with an update on the Amtrak Passenger Rail planning process. First she addressed an article published recently in the Sun Herald in which a lack of support was being offered for the new rail service. Much information they cited was misinformation based on the old sun coast service. This is not the plan for the new service. Instead they hope to extend the New Orleans train service across the Gulf Coast and down to Orlando. The project has significant support from our legislators and the governor who see this as a superior new opportunity to support economic development and tourism expansion. She provided a copy of the Southern Rapid Rail commission's response to the Sun Herald Article. Written by, Mr. Cliff Kirkland (Biloxi). Is his response article much of the misinformation was clarified and he garners support for the multi-state project.

Elaine also provide a handout that showed some of the cost alternatives to run the new system. The current favored route is expected to cost \$9.5 million annually to operate. Consensus notes that that cost will be shared among all of the states gaining benefit from the train service, but we are a long way off from knowing exact numbers and who will be contributing what.

In response the Mr. Coggin's question, she told the group that the proposed time to have the rail service live and function in up to 4 years from now, 2020. Although, with the amount of support received already and the progress being made, the Commission is fully expecting them to launch in just three years. She also pointed out, that they are taking into consideration, Coast transit Authority's current planning efforts to develop an east-west bus rapid transit route along the track in Harrison County. Adding rail service to the already planned, "Complete Street" will just bolster the benefits to the community even more.

Next steps are being under taken by Sen. Wicker, who is developing a working group to create a comprehensive implementation plan which will include financial sustainability programming. We will also be participating in a state to state, MPO working group to determine priorities along the rail corridor. She expects that our MPO technical personal may be called upon to participate in that decision making process down the road. Improving crossing safety will be a key element of this service's success.

Improved safety = higher rate of speed a train can travel

Higher speed = more train schedule reliability/perhaps more regular trips

She and other members of the Southern Rail Commission will keep the MPO informed of progress, but you can also follow on their website.

VIII. CTA Update

Kevin Coggin, Executive Director of Coast Transit Authority provided a brief update on their agency programs and progress. They continue to install new solar shelters across the fixed route bus system. New hybrid buses have been on several routes for a while now. They are being well received by the riders and community at large. He is still working closely on several economic development projects including the aquarium coming to downtown Gulfport and the Galleria being built in D'Iberville. CTA is actively participating in these and other planning activities to continue supporting the growth of the region.

IX. MDOT Update

Jeff Altman let the group know that they are scheduling a few Project Development Manual training courses this year. The one closest to the coast will be in Hattiesburg this October. Exact dates will be emailed to everyone. He also asked that the jurisdiction remember to send him a letter when an elected official is replaced on their boards and councils. This will ensure they are contacting the right people with project updates, information and requests.

X. FHWA Update**XI. Old/New Business**

Ken Holland informed the group that GRPC is coordinating with FHW and the VLOPE Center, a scenario modeling workshop on March 15th. Scenario planning is a new priority for FHWA and they are helping, through these events, get people informed about what it is and how it can be used in the planning process. There are several peers coming from across the country to share their information with us and we'd like to have a good showing. Stephanie will email the invitation to everyone on the TCC to view.

XII. Next MPO Meetings

Transportation Policy Committee (TPC) March 31st, 10:30am at GRPC

Next TCC Meeting – May 26th, but expect an emailed invitation from Stephanie to participate in a sub-committee meeting to develop the project scheduling tool and, if needed, to review proposed TIP projects before the next meeting.

XIII. Adjournment – MOTION to adjourn made by Elaine Wilkinson. Second by Christy LeBatard. No Comments. PASSED.