**Southwest Region Planning Commission**

**Transportation Advisory Committee**

**Minutes**

**October 31, 2022**

**Present:** Brian Barden, *Town of Dublin;* Leslie Casey, *Town of Sullivan;* Leandra MacDonald, *Town of Peterborough;* Cheryl Mayberry, *Town of Walpole;* Ed Smith, *Town of Hinsdale;* Ruth Ward, *Town of Stoddard;* Lucy St. John (ex officio), *NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT).*

**Staff members present:**  Tim Murphy, *Executive Director*; J. B. Mack, *Principal Planner*; Rebecca Baldwin, *Office Manager*; Henry Underwood, *GIS Specialist/Planner.*

**Guest:** John Byatt, BETA Group, Inc.

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

Ed Smith called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance.

**II. Minutes of October 3, 2022**

**Motion: To approve the minutes of October 3, 2022 as presented.**

Motion by Leandra MacDonald, seconded by Cheryl Mayberry. Minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

**III. 2025-2034 Ten Year Plan Project Review Process**

J. B. Mack announced that today’s meeting would be dedicated to reviewing the scores that TAC members arrived at for each of the five projects nominated to be considered for inclusion in the 2025-2034 Ten Year Plan update (TYP) in order to arrive at a prioritized draft candidate project list for NHDOT review and comment. He advised that should TAC not reach a consensus regarding project ranking at today’s meeting they would meet again on November 7, 2022 to continue the process. TAC recommendations will be forwarded to NHDOT by November 10, 2022 and it is anticipated they will receive feedback from NHDOT by either January or February 2023.

J. B. Mack reported that nine members of TAC participated in the independent scoring of the projects in our region. He shared a sheet that reflected the scores for each of the five projects in our region, noting that the Swanzey NH 10 West Swanzey Improvements project received the highest score. He noted that he would review the scores received by each of the projects and encouraged TAC members to ask questions or provide any additional comments on each of the projects. Tim Murphy noted that scoring is an important input for determining a draft ranking of projects, but the TAC can consider other factors. J. B. Mack added that, for example, there might be some other potential merits or drawbacks to the projects that aren’t adequately reflected in the scoring criteria.

Hinsdale Fort Hill Branch Rail Trail Trestle Bridge Improvements

This project received the lowest score among the five projects. Both Leslie Casey and Leandra MacDonald expressed that the criteria used for scoring favors highway projects, and observed that transportation projects that do not rank high with regards to safety do not score well. Lucy St. John pointed out that the TAC assigns the weights for each of the criteria and can change them if they feel they are not equitable. Leslie Casey expressed concern that none of the criteria adequately consider seniors or the disabled. J. B. Mack noted that seniors and those with disabilities are not expressly mentioned in the equity and accessibility metrics, but some people may score those criteria higher for projects likely to impact these groups. He continued that this observation can be brought to the attention of NHDOT and other RPCs as input on potential adjustments to criteria guidance for the future. J. B. Mack observed that the TYP projects that score the best are the more well rounded ones. It was noted that other federal funds such as the Transportation Alternatives Program might be a better source of funding for this particular project. Cheryl Mayberry noted that when scoring for need and impact, she takes into consideration what will affect the largest amount of people.

Keene NH 12 & 32 Intersection Improvements

This project ranked fourth in the scoring. Ed Smith pointed out that he was under the impression that improvements that were made earlier connecting Lake Street to the roundabout on NH Route 12 have provided NH 32 motorists with an alternative to connect to NH Route 12. J. B. Mack noted that it would be beneficial to conduct an analysis examining the impact on safety at the NH Route 12/NH Route 32 intersection “before” and “after” the installation of the NH Route 12/Lake Street/Swanzey Factory Road roundabout. Unfortunately, available data was limited when the City of Keene nominated the project. Leslie Casey shared that she thinks the project has a compelling safety component.

Keene-Swanzey Base Hill Road

This project scored third in the scoring. Brian Barden and Leslie Casey noted that widening this road will induce traffic demand resulting in added safety concerns for pedestrians and bicyclists. Ed Smith said that he believed that traffic demand on this road will change when lower Winchester Street is upgraded. Henry Underwood noted that the federal functional classification for the Swanzey portion of the road is considered local, whereas the Keene portion is a major collector. However, NHDOT is reviewing a potential change to the Swanzey portion from a local road to a major collector as part of its decennial analysis of the federal functional classification statuses of highways in New Hampshire. Additionally, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides state departments of transportation the flexibility to fund off-system, local roads with federal funds. J. B. Mack added that staff learned that NHDOT is not yet in a position to determine if it would use this flexibility, and it may be disadvantageous to do so because it could potentially “shrink the pie” of where federal funds are spent. Leandra MacDonald questioned how the same road can have two different classifications. Leslie Casey noted she would like to know if residents on this road would support this project.

Swanzey NH 10 West Swanzey Improvements

This was the highest scoring project. It was noted that the high score this project received for the safety criteria clearly makes it the number one choice. There was a question about whether the pedestrian crossing improvements would be supported by NHDOT. J. B. Mack discussed NHDOT’s history supporting Context Sensitive Solutions and its more recent support for Complete Streets and described the various land uses on either side of the road including residences, employers, a supermarket, post office and elementary school. It was reported that SWRPC staff and BETA Group, Inc. discussed the project with John Kallfelz, and learned from John that something similar to this has been done in Bedford and was very successful.

Westmoreland River Road Bridge Replacement

This was the second highest scoring project. Cheryl Mayberry noted there is a great need for this project even though it does not benefit a large amount of people. Leslie Casey noted that although it is important there isn’t a regional transportation impact involved and the only letter of support for the project is from Cheshire County. Brian Barden asked if the replacement bridge would be a regular bridge or a historical one. Henry Underwood noted that the bridge is eligible for the National Register for Historic Places. It was noted that the Town’s Board of Selectmen prefer to have a functional bridge and BETA Group’s cost estimate was based on full replacement of the bridge. Brian Barden asked if work will be done to improve Partridge Brook Road, and J. B. Mack said that he was not aware of any improvements planned for the road. A question was asked about flooding on Partridge Brook Road, and J. B. Mack reported that the Town of Westmoreland reported that the road floods every spring. Leandra MacDonald asked what would happen if the bridge were closed, and the Committee discussed the other access options to the Maplewood Nursing Home facility.

Tim Murphy asked John Byatt from BETA Group, Inc. if he had anything to add or sees anything in the scoring results that should be brought to the Committee’s attention. John Byatt responded that they evaluated the costs for each of the projects, and it appears the state of repair and safety concerns are addressed in the scoring.

J. B. Mack reminded TAC members that SWRPC’s assigned budget for the 2025-2034 TYP update is $4.9 million and based on 2033 and 2034 estimated costs we would only be able to fund one of the projects. Lucy St. John pointed out that inflation rates could change as we get closer to doing a project. J. B. Mack noted that the Swanzey project’s scope was reduced somewhat, and the Town of Swanzey may want to add back in certain aspects of the project using some of the additional funds. John Byatt noted that proposed medians were taken out, and J. B. Mack noted that some parts of the corridor don’t have sidewalk access. Leslie Casey and Cheryl Mayberry suggested that we submit our number one ranked project as our funding choice. Tim Murphy noted that if we take that approach we could request that the remaining budget allocation be used to partially fund one of the other projects. Lucy St. John advised that we submit our #1 choice as well as a 2nd and 3rd choice as is discussed in NHDOT’s guidance.

Ed Smith noted that he has a problem with recommending the Westmoreland River Road Bridge Replacement project since there are alternative means of funding available if the Town would be willing to participate in the cost. He said he believed other projects on our list do not have that option. J. B. Mack clarified that any of the projects may be eligible for other funding sources, but the Westmoreland project has already been identified by NHDOT as a candidate for the State Aid Bridge program. That program would require a 20% match from the Town and the Town is concerned about going to taxpayers because taxes went up last year for a new fire station. Cheryl Mayberry noted that Westmoreland could set-up a capital improvements plan fund to assist with this type of expense. Ed Smith noted that if the TAC awarded funding to the Westmoreland project, it could set a bad precedent with any number of towns in the future requesting regional priority project TYP funds for their local bridges. He suggested that the State Aid Bridge program, which is already available to the Town is a more appropriate funding source.

Leandra MacDonald questioned why expensive granite curbing is being proposed for the Keene NH Route 12 and Route 32 Intersection Improvement project, when curbing down the street is not granite curbing. Mr. Murphy suggested that is a matter that can be addressed as the priority project review process continues. J. B. Mack said that he feels that Leandra’s question should first be raised with the City of Keene in order to better understand their position and reasoning.

**Motion: To recommend the Swanzey NH 10 West Swanzey Improvements project as SWRPC’s top-ranked draft regional priority project for the FY 2025-2034 TYP update for the purposes of NHDOT review and feedback. Furthermore, to submit the Keene/Swanzey Base Hill Road Reconstruction project and the Keene NH Route 12 and Route 32 Intersection Improvement project as the second and third ranked projects.**

Motion by Cheryl Mayberry, seconded by Leslie Casey. Approved by unanimous vote.

**IV. Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Program Update**

J. B. Mack provided an update on guidance received from NHDOT regarding TAC’s potential participation in the scoring process. He explained that if there are two or more Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) proposals submitted from our region, TAC will be asked to rank them. The TAC’s ranking will serve as one of the criteria that NHDOT is using to score CMAQ projects. He added that SWRPC currently anticipates that two to three proposals may be submitted from our region.

**V. Next Meeting: January 9, 2023**

J. B. Mack announced that the next meeting of TAC is scheduled for January 9, 2023.

**VI. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca I. Baldwin

Office Manager