

Southwest Region Planning Commission

Transportation Advisory Committee

Minutes

November 6, 2023

Present: Kendall Lane, Chair, *Keene*; Frank Sterling, Vice Chair, *Jaffrey*; Susan Ashworth, *Home Healthcare, Hospice and Community Services*; Brian Barden, *Town of Dublin*; Sara Carbonneau, *Town of Winchester*; Leslie Casey, *Town of Sullivan*; John Kallfelz, *New Hampshire Department of Transportation District 4 (NHDOT)*; Mike Kowalczyk, *Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative*; Alfred “Gus” Lerandeau, *Town of Swanzey*; Leandra MacDonald, *Town of Peterborough*; Cheryl Mayberry, *Town of Walpole*; Ed Smith, *Town of Hinsdale*.

Staff members present: Tim Murphy, *Executive Director*; J. B. Mack, *Assistant Director*; Jason Cooper, *Planner*; Jack Ahern, *Associate Planner*.

Guests: Bill Watson, *NHDOT Bureau of Planning & Community Assistance (remote)*; Jessica Wilcox, *NHDES (remote)*.

I. Welcome and Introductions

Chair Kendall Lane called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m., welcomed those in attendance, and asked for introductions from attendees.

II. Minutes of August 28, 2023

Motion: To approve the minutes of August 28, 2023 as presented.

Motion by Kendall Lane, seconded by Sara Carbonneau. Approved by unanimous vote.

III. Transportation Program Updates

J. B. Mack referred TAC members to the transportation program update information that was included in the agenda packet. He explained that SWRPC was in the process of procuring on-call engineering services that would support transportation planning efforts in the region, primarily by developing preliminary cost estimates. He asked the TAC for volunteers to help with evaluating the engineering firm proposals. Sara Carbonneau and Gus Lerandeau volunteered. J. B. Mack noted that proposals will be received in December.

J. B. Mack then introduced Jessica Wilcox of the NH Department of Environmental Services for a presentation on their Community EV Charging Program. Jessica informed the TAC that NHDES has applied for \$10 million in grant funding from the federal Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Program for community-based electric vehicle supply equipment. She noted that the grant funds have yet to be awarded

but would go toward installing electric vehicle charging stations within rural communities across NH. NHDES has been engaging stakeholders and taking public comments to determine how the new EV charging grant program will operate. Jessica Wilcox explained that they are currently reviewing and analyzing feedback, developing a web page, and awaiting a response to their application.

Chair Kendall Lane asked the TAC for any questions regarding the presentation. Leandra MacDonald asked if there were any specific criteria to meet for being considered a “rural” community. Jessica Wilcox answered that specific requirements regarding municipal eligibility for the EV charging grants would be made available after the funds may be awarded. She indicated the listening sessions for this opportunity will help inform the criteria. J. B. Mack announced that SWRPC has been providing updates on this potential funding opportunity and the listening sessions regularly in our newsletter.

J. B. Mack moved the discussion on to highlight the recent completion of NHDOT’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan. He noted that NHDOT had closely collaborated with regional planning commissions and the bicycle and pedestrian community on its development and there had been an extensive feedback process. He felt that because of this collaborative effort, the plan will fit well with local and regional plans. He noted that the regional planning commissions identified priority locations with pedestrian and bicycle safety deficiencies in the Region, but it is not clear if that information will be included with the Plan when it is published. Bill Watson let the TAC know that the final version of the Plan will be available to view on the NHDOT website soon. NHDOT is in the process of updating its website. He also indicated that the public input received in the process will also be made available online soon, including the regional planning commission’s recommended pedestrian and bicycle improvements. J. B. Mack thanked Bill Watson for his update.

J. B. Mack announced that October was the first annual Community Transportation Month for the state of NH and that the Monadnock Region Coordinating Council and Mobility Manager, Terry Johnson, had been hard at work promoting and celebrating the programs offered in our region.

J. B. Mack went on to update the TAC on the status of MAST Complete Streets grant applications for the region. He noted that Alstead, Antrim, Hancock, Temple, and Westmoreland applied for technical assistance with Complete Streets policy development, Peterborough and Hinsdale submitted proposals for engineering services, and Marlborough and Swanzey had applied for infrastructure implementation. He informed the TAC that awards are expected to be announced soon and encouraged communities that did not apply this round to consider ideas for the next funding cycle in 2024.

IV. FY 2025-2034 Ten Year Plan Updates

J. B. Mack discussed updates to the draft 2025-2034 Ten Year Plan (TYP) from the most recent hearings held by the Governor’s Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT) on September 25th and October 17th and provided the TAC with a handout of key changes (attached). He explained that at the previous TAC meeting in August, the draft TYP had just been published and SWRPC staff hadn’t had time to analyze any proposed changes from the 2023-2032 TYP. He stated the total costs for many of the projects in the 2023-2032 TYP have been revised in the draft 2025-2034 TYP to account for changes to inflation projections.

J. B. Mack provided the TAC with a rundown of the key changes listed on the handout. He noted that there were timeline extensions and/or cost increases for the Jaffrey (16307), Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT (12210D), Keene (41590), Keene (43543), and Walpole, NH – Rockingham, VT (41720) projects. He explained that the budget for the proposed Swanzey (44218) project falls short and that the Town of Swanzey and TAC will need to determine the best way forward for that project.

With respect to GACIT hearings on the TYP update, J. B. Mack thanked Chair Lane and Vice Chair Sterling for speaking on behalf of the TAC at the Keene and Jaffrey hearings, respectively. He noted that much of the public comment revolved around the State of NH investing more in community transportation, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

J. B. Mack reported that at the Keene GACIT hearing, an official from the City of Keene indicated support for the Keene 41590 project if the next phase of the Transportation Heritage Trail was incorporated into the project making the argument that the two project areas overlap at the intersection of NH Route 101 and should be worked on simultaneously to save on costs. In a follow up discussion with the City Engineer, J. B. Mack learned that the next phase of the Transportation Heritage Trail project that the City was referring to would involve placing the historic Prowse Bridge over NH Route 101 connecting the Cheshire Rail Trail to the Stone Arch Bridge. In addition, it would involve placing the Bailey Bridge (formerly Keene's Island Street bridge) over Swanzey Factory Road connecting the Stone Arch Bridge to the rail trail that continues into Swanzey. J. B. Mack said that he felt it important to bring this to the attention of the TAC, as the original Keene 41590 project was nominated by the TAC through a recommendation from NHDOT District IV, rather than the City of Keene. The project was nominated four TYP cycles ago and first listed in the 2019-2028 TYP. While SWRPC staff support the Transportation Heritage Trail project, this particular proposal would require finding additional funding and could potentially delay the 41590 project.

Gus Lerandeau noted that the TAC had allocated funding to the 41590 project during two successive TYP cycles and expressed concern about the need for additional funding and possible project delays. A comment was made that the Bailey Bridge element is not part of the 41590 project area. Frank Sterling said that the Stone Arch Bridge will require updating to include safety features if pedestrian traffic is to increase, since it currently does not have any form of railings. J. B. Mack responded that the City Engineer reported working with the NH Division of Historic Resources about including railings on the bridge, have settled on a conceptual design and it is the City's intent to install a railing on the Stone Arch Bridge. Leandra MacDonald observed that many people currently use the bridge as-is without safety improvements. Mike Kowalczyk stated that there are parties currently looking into gathering cost estimates for this phase of the Transportation Heritage Trail. He added that if the pedestrian bridge is installed it will presumably increase foot and bike traffic over the Stone Arch Bridge considerably.

J. B. Mack asked Bill Watson for any comments or observations he would like to make regarding the GACIT hearings or the status of the TYP. Bill Watson stated that NHDOT worked with a consultant to produce a finite list of travel corridors in the State that warrant transportation studies in the next 5 years. NHDOT will be reporting their recommendations to NHDOT at an upcoming GACIT meeting on November 8th. In addition, Bill Watson reported that NHDOT will be recommending that the State fund several EV charging infrastructure applications that it received during the last round of the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement program (CMAQ). Originally these applications were put on hold to determine if other federal sources should be utilized to fund the projects. He noted that he plans to ask GACIT to also fund all eligible non-EV CMAQ project applications and will get final direction from GACIT at its meeting scheduled for November 29th.

V. Presentation: Monadnock Region Rail Trails Collaborative

J. B. Mack introduced TAC member Mike Kowalczyk who provided a presentation on efforts to improve and support regional rail trails (attached). The Monadnock Region Rail Trail Collaborative aims to rehabilitate and maintain the Cheshire, Ashuelot, Fort Hill, and Monadnock rail trails and the Peterborough – Hillsborough Line, as well as connect southwest NH to other regions in Massachusetts and Vermont. The Collaborative is made up of representatives of local municipalities, non-profits, and volunteers in support of the mission. They promote the trails as community assets for a combination of business, recreation, transportation, and tourism interests by highlighting their ability to generate economic value and activity,

act as a viable commuting alternative, and benefit the environment through clean transportation. Usage will be bolstered by providing amenities and points-of-interest along the trails. Further implementation plans include drainage and surface improvements, mowing, and the installation of gates at crossings. Long term goals involve adding connector trails between the Cheshire and Monadnock Rail Trails and between the Fort Hill Trail and Brattleboro, Vermont. Currently most trail sections have a dedicated organization managing year-round maintenance that is primarily funded through federal grants. The Collaborative has thus far secured funding resources, brought municipalities on-board, obtained state and federal commitment, and assembled working teams.

VI. Other Matters

No other matters were brought before the TAC at this time.

VII. Next Meeting: January 8, 2024

J. B. Mack announced that the next meeting of TAC is scheduled for January 8, 2024.

VIII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Ahern
Associate Planner