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MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 1, 2006

TO: SPW TAC

FROM: Dave Walker, Senior Transportation Planner

RE: Addressing Concerns about realigning MPO boundaries with RPC boundaries

A few concerns about the impacts of realigning the Seacoast and Salem-Plaistow-Windham MPO's with the existing RPC boundaries for the Rockingham and Strafford Planning Commissions have arisen during the various discussions that have occurred on the subject. This memo is an attempt at addressing those issues based on the existing plan of action, as well as suggesting potential modifications to that course to mitigate these concerns.

1. Loss of Attention and Technical Assistance from MPO Staff

Summary:

Concerns have been raised that SPW will be in essence swallowed up and lost amongst the larger number of communities that constitute the whole RPC region. Specifically, the concern is that there will be less attention and time spent by MPO staff on SPW specific issues and projects as defined by the UPWP.

Discussion:

While the nine Salem-Plaistow-Windham communities are smaller in number than the 17 that are currently part of the Seacoast MPO, those 9 are many of our larger towns, and make up approximately 45% of the RPC population, and receive a proportional amount of RPC time and resources (assembled monthly data shows 45% of transportation planning time in FY2005 went to SPW and 48% in FY 2006). I don't foresee that this rough distribution of RPC transportation planning time will change significantly with a realignment of the MPO boundaries. Maintaining a high participation level will also help to ensure that no community feels left out of the process or that their needs are not considered.

The most significant benefit in the realignment of the MPO boundaries is how transportation planning time will be divided into the specific work that staff does. Currently, over **90% of staff time** goes into UPWP Categories 101,102,103, and 105 which is where much of the mandatory work occurs; data collection and analysis are completed, the Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) and Long Range Plans (Plans) are developed (and amended), along with related

air quality conformity analysis. This also includes the development and amending of the UPWP documents and the Prospectus for each MPO, participation in NH DOT Long Range Planning efforts and the development of the Ten Year Plan, as well as resources allocated for committee support to the two MPO structures that currently exist.

**Distribution of RPC Transportation Planning Hours
FY 2006 Before and After Realignment**

<i>UPWP Component</i>	As Exists FY 06		Estimated under Single RPC/MPO FY 06	
	<i>Hours</i>	<i>% of Total</i>	<i>Hours</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
UPWP 101 Data Collection	2584	31.23%	2584	31.23%
UPWP 102 Policy Development	1995	24.11%	1496	18.08%
UPWP 103 Implementation	2285	27.62%	1713	20.71%
UPWP 104 Local Tech Assist.	636	7.69%	1899	22.96%
UPWP 105 Administration	773	9.35%	580	7.01%
TOTAL	8272	100.00%	8272	100.00%

The current workload shows that once all of the administration and work on mandatory planning and project documents is accounted for, *less than 10% of our transportation planning time* is able to go towards direct local technical assistance to the communities.

With the movement to a single RPC based MPO, the efficiency gains from only having to do many of the above items once, will free staff time to provide additional technical assistance to communities that request it. The more that the RPC can be integrated into a single MPO, the more time savings there will be. For instance, if through having a single TAC, Policy committee, Prospectus, UPWP, TIP, Plan and Air Quality Conformity document, we could reduce our time spent on those items by 25% from current amounts, that would free up an additional **1300 hours** of staff time per year to pursue other projects, especially local technical assistance to communities. This is nearly equivalent to hiring a new full-time staff person (2080 hours per year). Some of these additional resources could be in the form of RPC matching funds to communities for transportation studies (similar to the TBG program).

Potential Resolution:

If the issue of loss of attention and focus on SPW specific transportation problem continues to be a concern of member communities, other measures can be incorporated into the realignment proposal to address them:

- a. Make efforts to ensure greater participation of current SPW communities in the expanded RPC/MPO Policy Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee to ensure that their needs are well represented and voiced.
- b. Detail local technical assistance work in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) so that communities know precisely what local and regional efforts will be undertaken in a given year. Towns could (and should) request specific technical assistance to be explicitly included in the Local Technical Assistance component of the UPWP which could be updated annually. A more detailed UPWP, together with increased participation of communities will help ensure that the work performed by the RPC is regionally balanced and fairly distributed among member communities.

- c. Subdivide the planning funding and tasks referenced in the UPWP into two distinct MPO sub-regions – the SPW towns and the former Seacoast MPO towns. This would require additional time and effort to do, but would guarantee that the existing distribution of planning resources would continue.

2. Loss of ability to get projects selected for funding in the State Ten Year Plan and the Transportation Improvement Program.

Summary:

Concerns have been raised that the SPW communities will lose “clout” and their ability to have projects selected through the TIP process due to the competition with a larger number of communities.

Discussion:

Currently, NH DOT, the Legislature, and the Governor/Executive council determine what projects go into the Ten Year Plan and the State Transportation Improvement Program. While this is based on the input from the communities via the MPOs/RPCs, there is no regional formula or suballocation that provides specific funding amounts to certain areas of the state. For this reason, staff believes that the realignment of MPO boundaries to coincide with RPC boundaries will have no impact on the ability of communities to get projects funded. In addition, the formation of a larger MPO region, with 3 times the number of towns and twice the population, will add clout to recommendations we make to the DOT and to GACIT. As is, SPW is by far the smallest RPC/MPO in the state. We also believe that strengthening the connection between land use and transportation planning by aligning MPO and RPC boundaries will lead to better transportation projects that will be more likely to be programmed by NH DOT into the Ten Year Plan and TIP.

The Transportation Enhancements program (TE) projects are already ranked regionally by RPC instead of by MPO boundaries and, to date under that system, Salem-Plaistow-Windham communities have a very good track record of getting projects funded. The final determination of which TE projects are funded is done on the state level, so again there is no set amount of money for particular regions and all projects face state-wide competition.

CMAQ, although regionally ranked via the MPOs in this area (by RPCs everywhere else), falls into the same category as TE projects in that the regional rankings are used simply as a starting point for the statewide ranking process. However, CMAQ projects have the advantage of easily comparable benefits to air quality, and at the state-wide level, those projects that provide more benefits will be funded whether or not they have been highly ranked on the regional level.

Potential Resolution:

There are additional measures that can be incorporated into the realignment proposal if equity in project selection/prioritization continues to be a concern:

- a. Subdivide the project prioritization and selection process into two sub-regions – SPW and Seacoast communities to ensure that a fair and proportionate number of projects from each area are recommended for funding. Taking this one step

further, the process could be carried to a corridor level so that projects are prioritized by the transportation corridor in which they occur. NH DOT is exploring a similar concept in their work related to the Long Range Transportation Business Plan. In this instance, a corridor wouldn't strictly adhere to the specific roadway itself, but would also include connections to that roadway analogous to a river and its watershed. This would tend to establish more natural "regions" for transportation planning – for example, communities in the NH 111 corridor or the NH 125 corridor would work together on problems specific to their corridor.

- b. Recognize the diversity of our region in our Plan and TIP and have specific goals and procedures that balance the project selection and prioritization.

Conclusion

Staff believes that the original proposal of uniting the two parts of the RPC into a single RPC/MPO region will have positive effects in both MPO areas. However, representatives from some SPW communities are concerned that the merger may result in less transportation planning assistance, and reduce their ability to have projects added to the MPO's recommended list of projects. In addition to the RPC's general commitment to equitable treatment of all member communities across the region, there are a number of procedural and policy changes that can be combined with the realignment to ensure that work efforts and projects are distributed fairly while still maximizing the efficiency gains of the realignment.