



SALEM-PLAISTOW-WINDHAM TAC Committee Meeting

MINUTES

Friday, March 16, 2001
Hampstead Town Hall

Members Present: Steve Laurin, Newton; Dick Sunday, Ross Moldoff, Salem; Ram Maddali, NHDOT; Kathleen Brockett, NHDES; Tom Case, Windham; and.

Others Present: Linda Harvey, Salem; Jeff Brillhart, NHDOT; Suzanne Langlois, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission; Dave Walker, Cliff Sinnott, and Roxanne Rines, RPC.

Quorum Calls: Merilyn Senter, Plaistow; and Ellen Faulconer, Kingston

9:10 SPW TAC MEETING OPENED

1. Introductions

Attendees introduced themselves and stated what municipality they were from or the agency they represented.

2. Communications

The communications file was distributed for members to review. **Walker** stated that the registration deadline for the Tri-State Safety Conference has been extended until March 21, 2001.

3. Approval of Minutes from January 12, 2001, TAC Meeting

Maddali stated that Bill Watson works for DOT not DES and that the "s" is missing on Winters. **Langlois** corrected the spelling of Terlizzi's name. **Walker** stated the minutes will be tabled because there are not enough members for approval.

4. Appointment of TAC Chair

After discussion amongst members the decision was made that Walker would ask Ellen Faulconer if she would be chair. The item was tabled until the next meeting.

5. 2003-2005 State Transportation Improvement Program

A. Review Projects and staff scoring results

Walker stated six projects were proposed and that 5 of them are from the last round. The new project was submitted by NH DOT, #2001003 to widen NH 111 in Hampstead and Atkinson. He and Sinnott prioritized the project list with TELUS. **Walker** gave a brief summary of each list.

Prioritized List of Projects:

- #1 – 1999018 – North Broadway Widening: Salem
- #2 – 1999013 – NH 125 Signal: Plaistow
- #3 – 1999017 – NH 125/NH121A/Haseltine Avenue: Plaistow
- #4 – 1999019 – Main Street Intersection Improvements: Salem
- #5 – 2001003 – NH 111 Improvements: NHDOT District 6
- #6 – 1999021 – Salem Wastewater Treatment Plant Conversion

Walker continued that there are two projects that (staff considered) fit better under the Transportation Enhancement (TE) program. They are: #1999012 – Plaistow Sidewalks and #1999023 – North Lowell Road Bike Lanes. Staff will encourage the towns to submit those projects when the TE round begins, which will be later this year.

Brockett asked what the estimated project cost is for #1999021? **Walker** stated he does not have the costs available. **Brillhart** stated it is estimated to be between one half to one million dollars and the project will be completed as part of I-93.

Sinnott stated the two Plaistow projects have been in other draft TIP's. The town has asked that project #2 be pulled out of a bigger project (that it's included in) and try to complete it sooner. It is the remaining bottleneck, all it really needs is a turning lane. It would also make the rest of the project less pressing.

Sinnott spoke about project #3 – There are two alternatives to fixing the problem that exists. Before 121 reaches 125 it crosses into Haverhill which is where the present intersection is located. This project is trying to address the above intersection. The question remains as to which state should handle the improvements (NH or MA). The Haseltine intersection would (essentially) address the problem by relocating 121A onto Haseltine Avenue, moving the intersection slightly north.

Sinnott continued that the alternative is a different project that is being discussed with Haverhill. The town is looking for either our project #1999017 or the Haverhill alternative to be completed.

Sinnott stated there was a meeting with the Haverhill Mayor and he was all for going ahead with the Haverhill project, but nothing has gone forward. **Langlois** stated there is a 125 study being conducted now that will give recommendations and she believes Massachusetts is awaiting the results. **Sinnott** concluded that both projects are not needed.

Maddali asked how the MPO is handling the DOT recommended projects? **Sinnott** stated project #2001003 is the only recommended project the MPO received.

B. TAC Project Priorities

Motion: **Case** made a motion to approve the prioritized list of projects and send that approval to the SPW Policy Committee for their approval, pending quorum calls. **Laurin** seconded the motion. **Motion carried with Maddali abstaining.**

Sinnott stated the projects will be submitted to DOT for April 1st. There are two submission lists: 1) the draft TIP which incorporates the projects in the present TIP that are still relevant; and 2) this current list of projects to be added to the 10-year plan. He suggested the MPO recommend to DOT that project #1999013 be added to the current TIP.

Sinnott asked **Brillhart** if project #1999021 is going to part of I-93, and does the project need to be programmed within in the next three years. **Brillhart** stated he believes it's going to be part of the I-93 project.

Walker stated it is on the list because it was submitted in the last round of the TIP; however, not added to the 10-year plan. **Moldoff** stated the land swap is on the town warrant for vote. **Sinnott** stated if within the next three years any right-of-way acquisition is to be completed or any money is to be spent than it needs to be on the TIP. **Brillhart** stated if it's part of the I-93 project than it is already on the TIP.

Mitigation discussion ensued amongst members. After discussion it was decided to keep project #1999021 as a prioritized project.

6. I-93 Widening

A. Project Update; Project Rationale Report discussion with Jeff Brillhart

Sinnott distributed excerpts from the two key chapters of the Rationale Report: chapter 5 – the alternative analysis and 6 – the recommendations of the report that will be carried forward.

Brillhart stated I-93 is to be widened from the Massachusetts line to Manchester (18 miles). Today the highway has four lanes, five interchanges in five communities, two planning commission areas, 36 bridges, one rest area, two weigh stations, two park and ride lots, and it carries approximately 110,000 vehicles a day in the Salem area. The highway is above capacity and is not safe.

He continued DOT hopes to widen the highway to three or four lanes in each direction, reconstruct all five interchanges, add 3 park and ride facilities, add bus service and provide space for the possibility of a rail line in the highway corridor.

Part of the study is the Environmental Impact Study (EIS), which has developed into a number of reports: 1) scoping report, this document discusses the project purpose and need; 2) rail alternative evaluation report, this document looks at three potential corridors for rail; and 3) rationale report has two volumes one with maps and the other with text. This report includes the alternatives that were forwarded in the EIS.

He continued that this project has the normal constraints (as with any project). There are two overriding issues with this project: 1) reconciling what transportation improvements are most reasonable in the I-93 corridor; and 2) quantifying and mitigating the temporary impacts.

Brillhart further explained the above reports and gave an overview of the needed improvements.

The alternatives recommended in the rationale report include: widening the highway to three lanes in each direction the entire 18 miles; widening the highway to four lanes in each direction the entire 18 miles; widening the highway to four lanes south of Exit 3 and three lanes north of Exit 3; each of the interchanges be reconstructed as appropriate to address geometric and safety issues; recommending three additional park and ride lots at Exits 2, 3, and 5 be constructed; consideration being given to expanding the park & ride lot at Exit 4; expand existing bus service into Boston with stops at Exits 2, 3, 4, and 5; enhance bus service from NH to the major industrial centers in MA; employ Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technology to improve efficiency and safety; and to look at transportation systems management type of improvements. Also, whatever design is chosen to widen the highway, that it includes room for a rail corridor in the future (if that makes sense).

Brillhart continued that another major issue is secondary impacts, the EPA has made it very clear that this is a very critical issue and that getting a permit is dependent upon the above issue being met to their satisfaction.

Brillhart stated the draft EIS should be completed by the end of the year 2001 with a public hearing in about another year, the final EIS should be completed in summer 2002. The highway should be under construction in spring of 2004. DOT wants the additional park & ride lots completed prior to the start of construction and they also will make sure that Concord Trailways has enough busses to provide service from all of the lots.

He continued that there are two wetland mitigation sites (Salem and Londonderry) that will be under construction prior to the highway improvements being started. A bike corridor along I-93 is also being explored, he's not sure how that will be laid out. NH is working with Massachusetts concerning their study and how they are proceeding with I-93 in their state, so that the same recommendations and ideas are being explored for the highway.

Further discussion ensued amongst members and DOT staff about alternatives that were not carried forward. **Sinnott** stated the release of the rationale report is a milestone in the EIS process, it represents a smaller list of serious alternatives (from all of the previous alternatives that were discussed in the earlier stages).

Brockett stated some critical aspects are the timing to get the alternative choices in place concurrently with the actual widening, everything needs to be planned upfront and together so that the impacts are identified and the communities can deal with those impacts and plan for them now, not wait for them to happen.

Brockett continued that EPA has money available for outreach directly related to transportation and mobile sources. DES has teamed with DOT to receive money to start promoting (right away) the alternatives available on I-93; park & ride lots and enhanced bus service.

Brillhart stated both states (NH and MA) need to allocate funds so that a combined state study can be completed, NH is waiting for MA to say they want to have such a study completed. **Laurin** asked if any bike issues are being looked into? **Brillhart** stated when the more detailed designs are completed they will include access for bikes.

Sinnott summarized that at this point the EIS is moving into the next phase, looking at the alternatives and making final decisions as to the design of the improvements. Discussion ensued about NH having a HOV lane and why it's not feasible.

7. Salem-Windham Bus Service Project - Status

Sinnott stated this item is somewhat related to the I-93 and that Dick Sunday, Commissioner, has been making progress with the possibility of temporarily use of the park & ride facility at Cisco Systems in Salem.

Sunday gave the history behind a grant to initiate bus service between Salem and Windham. Currently there are discussions with Cisco Systems to rent 300 of their 1900 parking spaces. The spaces for this service have a private entrance and is fenced off from the rest of the lot. Cisco has the following issues: how long would we use the lot; liability; maintenance; and security issues.

Sinnott stated the original temporary park & ride lot was going to be set up at the Salem racetrack; however, that did not work out with the racetrack owner. This MPO has flex funding of \$144,000, Concord Trailways was selected as the recipient. With this kind of funding (and because it's more than 3 year old) the grant can not be amended. Therefore, the money can only be spent within this region and only Concord Trailways can receive the funds.

The funds can be given back to the state and spent elsewhere, which is what the Policy Committee voted to authorize at it's last meeting. This idea was presented after the Policy Committee vote.

Sinnott stated he spoke with Concord Trailways and they are not very interested, they are concerned that there will be a gap between when this funding will end and the I-93 enhanced bus service will begin. Members further discussed this and other potential park & ride lots.

Sunday suggested that the Cisco lot may work if the state takes a lease and the responsibility for the lot. **Sinnott** stated maybe the state could construct the exits in the order of Exit 5, 3, and 2. **Brillhart** stated this entire discussion about using Cisco lot is a surprise to him.

Sinnott stated he and Sunday discussed if any of the FTA funds can be used for bus service. The problem is there is no FTA approved recipient, the state can do it because they are urban funds. The entities that can do it are: Merrimack Valley Transit Authority, COAST, the MPO or the town of Salem. He continued that the other option is that the money is lost. **Sinnott** stated he will talk to Kit Morgan and he will also draft a letter to Carol Murray addressing the questions discussed.

8. River Road TMA Bus Service Proposal

Walker stated the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA) has requested \$30,000 from our FTA Section 5307 funds for an extension of the River Road TMA bus service into NH. Both Windham and Londonderry park & rides would be serviced by this. **Case** asked if a park & ride at Exit 2 becomes available would this service include a stop there? **Walker** stated he does not know, the survey they completed didn't ask about Exit 2.

Walker continued the \$30,000 would come out of the \$144,000 that the region receives now. They are also talking about service to Mishawum Commuter Rail station and the Lowell Junction area. The MVRTA are still negotiating with Trombly Bus Line. The estimate for passengers in each direction is 75 a day to start with potential for 125 at peak times.

Sinnott stated the money does not go to the MPO, it is money that is allocated to this urban MPO area for use for public transit, which we have never used. Every year the MVRTA negotiates with DOT for the transfer of these funds for use elsewhere, because we have had no use for it. This is a

case where we could use some of the funds, the process wouldn't be much different. We would inform DOT that this is how we want some of the funds spent. The transfer would probably still occur the same way.

Sinnott stated the Policy Committee needs to approve the authorization of funds. He suggested that if the TAC Committee supports this, they should recommend that the Policy Committee also support the transfer of funds. Staff recommended the approval of this item.

Laurin asked how long will MVRTA need the funds? **Sinnott** stated he believes they will ask that this be an annual transfer. He continued that this service will also operate in the Southern NH Planning Commission, the Londonderry park & ride. He does not know if they have been approached or asked to provide any funding.

Sinnott has asked Joe Constanza, MVRTA for a distribution of ridership between the two areas (at some point) to make sure we are not paying too much. This service is being largely funded out of Massachusetts, but it benefits a lot of NH citizens. **Walker** stated the survey showed that 36% of the riders would be from Londonderry and 34% would be from Windham.

Motion: Case made a motion to send TAC's approval of the transfer of \$30,000 for this coming fiscal year from the region's FTA Section 5307 funds to MVRTA for bus service to Londonderry and Windham to the Policy Committee for their approval pending quorum calls. **Laurin** seconded the motion.

Sunday asked if MVRTA needs to come to the MPO every year? **Sinnott** stated yes.
Motion carried.

9. Project Updates

A. Portland to Boston Rail Service

Sinnott stated this item is once again on hold, the current issues are the speed of the train and who will be liable for the stations.

B. Regional Bike Plan

Linda Harvey stated the current plan is that each tourist region will have a different map. She further explained some of the thoughts of how the maps would all fit together. Once the map is completed, there is a plan to update different sections every couple of years, that way it continues to be current.

Brockett asked what is the planned year for commuter rail into Plaistow? **Sinnott** stated this coming year; however, Guilford will not even entertain the idea of commuter rail until there is double track available from Plaistow to Haverhill.

Case asked Brockett what is happening with CO2? **Brockett** stated CO2 is not considered a pollutant; therefore, it is not regulated under the Clean Air Act. NH has a plan before the Legislation to instate a pollutant reduction from power plants which does include CO2.

C. State Rail Plan

Sinnott stated this item will be discussed at the next TAC meeting.

10. Other Business

None.

11. Adjourn

Motion: Case made a motion to adjourn at 12:00 p.m. **Laurin** seconded the motion. **Motion carried.**

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Roxanne M. Rines