



Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership Board Meeting

November 15, 2017 @ 10:00 am
Carlton County Transportation Building
1630 County Road 61, Carlton, MN 55718

SUMMARY

Present*: Kevin Adee (Koochiching County), Bryan Anderson (MnDOT), Lisa Austin (MnDOT), Chris Belden (DSMIC), Bill Bennett (LHB), Rex Bordson (MnDOT State-Aid), Todd Campbell (MnDOT), Ron Chicka (DSMIC), Vanta Coda II (Duluth Seaway Port Authority), Robert Deschampe (Cook County), Robert Ege (MnDOT), Earl Elde (Midway Township), Krysten Foster (Lake County), Rick Goutermont (Lake County), Russell Habermann (ARDC), Milt Hagen (Carlton County), Matt Hemmila (St. Louis County), Jason Holliday (Fond du Lac Band), Andy Hubley (ARDC), Gary Johnson (Blackberry Township), Scott Johnson (MnDOT), Jack Larson (Arrowhead Transit), Mark LeBrun (Pine County), John McDonald (MnDOT State-Aid), John Minor (MnDOT State-Aid), JinYeene Neumann (Carlton County), James Newman (Carlton County), Sophia Parr (DTA), Wade Pavleck (Koochiching County), Gary Peterson (Carlton County), Mark Rudningen (MN DNR), Jeff Rypka (USDA Forest Service), Jim Sharrow (Duluth Seaway Port Authority), Kent Skaar (MN DNR), Joe Sutherland (Koochiching County), Cindy Voigt (City of Duluth), Patrick Weidemann (MnDOT), John Welle (Aitkin County)

*Others may have been present but did not sign their name on the sign in sheet.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chair B. Bennett called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

2. Committee Business

- a. Agenda Approval

J. McDonald motioned to approve the meeting agenda. Motion was seconded by M. LeBrun and carried unanimously.

- b. Approval of April 5, 2017, Meeting Summary

C. Voigt motioned to approve the April 5 meeting summary. Motion was seconded by K. Foster and carried unanimously.

3. 2018-19 Program Status

J. McDonald first noted this agenda item would address the 2017-18 program status, not the 2018-19 as written. He said the updated program documents were sent out with the meeting agenda and explained that the fewer number of 2018 projects in comparison to other years is due to advance construction of county projects, specifically in Pine and St. Louis counties. McDonald then introduced Kent Skarr from the Minnesota DNR to present on the Gitchi-Gami State Trail project (#092-090-053).

a. Local Program – Gitchi-Gami Trail STIP Amendment

K. Skarr presented an update of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail project in Tofte, which was awarded Transportation Alternatives funding in 2014 and was originally written to run 1.1 miles, with would include trail and striping of Tofte Park Road to connect into other segments of existing trail. As identified in an engineering study, ADA compliance, resilience to Lake Superior, requirement of constructing a retaining wall in right-of-way, and coordination with area businesses became obstacles to construct the full project. In lieu of these challenges, Skarr proposed amending the STIP to constructing a 0.25-mile trail and addressing parking near businesses in the corridor. These projects would be let in March 2018 and construction in July 2018, deferring the on-road portions of the initial project to 2020 construction with LCCMR funding, which is currently in a request by the DNR to the legislature. Skarr mentioned this revised project would be completed in 2018 with other projects near Cut Face Creek and Beaver Bay.

G. Johnson asked if Skarr is asking to remove the project from the STIP. Skarr said the project will still be completed and all of the project funding will go to the project, but the entirety will not be done until 2020. A. Hubley noted that property owners currently allow trail users to access Tofte Park Road without enhancements, but this project funds a vital piece of connecting infrastructure that will help trail users safely make this connection; in the future, the road section will be completed as well.

Chair B. Bennett asked if the cost would stay the same as presented in the STIP. Skarr noted that the total project cost is \$1M and the federal funds reflected in the STIP would remain the same for the project.

G. Peterson asked if bicyclists will pay a fee for using the trail. Skarr noted the trail is funded by grants and that no wheel pass is included on trails in Minnesota. A. Hubley noted that the Mesabi Trail does require a wheel pass.

G. Johnson sought clarification on how the scope of the project is being drastically reduced while the project cost is still staying the same. Skarr noted that the cost of the trail segment itself was much higher than anticipated, still requiring the full requested amount and covering the cost of these additional costs. He reiterated that the road segment of the original project would be completed in 2020 with another source. Chair B. Bennett pointed out the project in the 2018 local project handout.

R. Deschampe asked why the project must cross Highway 61 from the inland side of Highway 61. Skarr noted the community wishes to build the trail on the lake side.

R. Goutermont motioned to approve the STIP amendment. Motion was seconded by J. Larson and carried unanimously.

b. State Program

Referencing the project update spreadsheets, R. Ege noted that sections highlighted in green show what has been let, and coordinating letting costs are in the rightmost column.

G. Johnson asked about the process for making road improvements, using the reconfiguration of a state highway between Grand Rapids and Cohasset from a four-lane to two-way and three-way as an example. He voiced concern that MnDOT's application of this "safety project" has caused more of a safety issue. T. Campbell noted recognition of the segment Johnson brought forth and said some public input was collected and there was currently a plan to reevaluate the specific project after unintended ramifications with the reconfiguration occurred. He noted anyone with concerns about MnDOT projects should reach out to Todd Campbell or Duane Hill.

4. 2019-22 ATIP

B. Anderson noted that no guidance for this year's program has been passed down yet, but it is expected to follow the same formula as last year's program. Under the 2018-19 ATIP, \$9.1M will be passed down, with \$1.5M to HSIP, \$54.02M to cities/counties (\$4.02M in STP), \$2.68M to MPO (\$2.68M in STP), and \$900k to the TA program. No transit funding would be a part of the formula this year.

Anderson noted that the local solicitation for cities with populations over 5,000 would go out that afternoon, November 15. The MPO solicitation would be released soon. J. McDonald mentioned he spoke to the cities.

K. Adee motioned to approve the solicitation. Motion was seconded by R. Goutermont and carried unanimously.

5. Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program

a. Timeline

R. Habermann gave a brief update on the TA program to date, noting how letters of intent were made available October 1 and due October 31. For Northeast Minnesota, eight LOIs were received amounting to \$3.1M in requests. Six of the proposed projects are in St. Louis County, one in Aitkin County, and one in Fond du Lac. He noted that all projects submitted will be recommended to proceed with the full application, which will be released November 20. Full applications will be due January 12, 2018.

b. Timeline

R. Habermann noted that due to an evolving program, the ATP is reviewing a new application for this year's TA solicitation for consideration. While most of the application is handed down from MnDOT Central Office, additional questions and scoring criteria are developed by the local ATP, which also scores and recommends final projects for funding. The new application responds to the multiple programs eligible for TA funding and was in part inspired by other federal funding applications. The revised application now includes three sections: project description, project support and partnerships, and project deliverability and sustainability. Chair B. Bennett stated that the RTAC had thoroughly examined and recommended the new application for adoption.

K. Adee motioned to approve the new TA application. Motion was seconded by R. Goutermont and passed unanimously.

c. Review of TA Task Force Membership

R. Habermann noted vacancies on the TA Task Force to be filled for this year's solicitation, including a DNR representative and two active living representatives. He recommended Annie Harala, a Duluth resident, and Molly McCann, Get Fit Itasca, to fill the active living representative seats. In lieu of not having a name to fill the DNR seat, he asked for permission to reach out to the DNR and have them fill their agency representative seat at their discretion.

K. Adee motioned to approve the Task Force membership as presented and allow staff to recruit a DNR representative. Motion was seconded by G. Peterson and passed unanimously.

6. ATP Restructuring

L. Austin and R. Habermann presented the proposed ATP Guidelines, which include points in restructuring the group. Significant research of other ATPs and their operations occurred. It was stated that currently the ATP and RTAC have similar geographic boundaries, duplicative memberships, and a total of five meetings per year. A subcommittee of the RTAC was formed in June to study the issue and recommend changes, which were recommended by the RTAC in September. A key recommendation is to merge the ATP and RTAC into one body that meets four times per year. Voting membership would be reduced from 52 to 34. Requested changes include:

- Having one elected official representative per county, totaling eight instead of the proposed four proposed;
- Including Mille Lacs Band in the list of regional tribal nations that are a part of the Board;
- Reintroducing the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council as a voting member;
- Expanding the nominating agencies for the economic development representative to the Duluth Area Chamber of Commerce and APEX as well as the Iron Range Economic Alliance;
- Adding rules for selection of officers directly into the Guidelines; and
- Eliminating quorum and using majority of present members to conduct business.

G. Johnson motioned to approve the Guidelines with changes as stated. Motion was seconded by R. Goutermont and passed unanimously.

7. Port Presentation

J. Sharrow introduced Vanta Coda II from the Duluth Seaway Port Authority. Coda introduced the Duluth Seaway Port Authority and their current work with Canadian National to bring intermodal infrastructure to the Duluth port. This intermodal infrastructure would allow loads to stay in Duluth, without using the port in Minneapolis as a connection before and after Duluth transfers. He noted that since Minneapolis's port is cornered with natural features and development, Duluth is important to Minnesota.

Chair B. Bennett asked how the intermodal project applies to the work the ATP is doing. Coda answered that the region's economy in primary industries are dependent on shipping.

C. Belden asked what current barriers exist for freight movement in the Duluth port. Coda answered that land is a primary barrier.

8. Transportation Selection Process

Patrick Weidemann, MnDOT Central Office, presented the results of and follow-up to the recent OLA audit. A key finding was that while the auditors do not think bad decisions are being made by MnDOT, sufficient data is not being presented in project selection and the public does not understand how MnDOT selects projects. In turn, a key recommendation was to tell people who else has applied. Also as a result, the Legislature passed a piece of legislation ("Chapter 3") that provides funding but requires better coordination and transparency of project selection; a part of this includes listing all unsuccessful projects in the STIP.

Weidemann then turned the conversation to receive feedback from the group. He asked if the group knows how projects are selected. It was noted the public often does not understand the difference between a MnDOT road and a county road, for example. Weidemann then asked MnDOT D-1 representatives to explain the process. B. Anderson answered that preservation projects are considered and selected by engineers and planners annually. While Weidemann noted the ease of this answer, he noted generally that MnDOT personnel in other districts are unable to explain how they select projects.

G. Johnson noted that the ATPs are generally not a part of the decision but asked if the ATPs are qualified and should even have that responsibility.

C. Voigt noted that the real issue at hand is that the legislature does not trust MnDOT.

J. Welle noted there is too much information out there for the public to absorb in a meaningful way. He also noted how CO looks at a very narrow scope of performance measures when programming projects on the National Highway system.

C. Belden asked why a program like Transportation Alternatives, with only \$900,000 annually, goes through such a rigorous and transparent process when bigger projects do not.

Weidemann brought forth an example of a scoring matrix from a previous MnDOT process and asked if the committee like the way the recommendations were presented - with categorical scoring and final scores presented. He asked the ATP to respond. M. LeBrun said processes for project selection are complicated and often the scoring process is subjective. A. Hubley said he liked how reasoning could be seen in the spreadsheet itself. G. Johnson mentioned that a higher institution with oversight needs to come in to create checks and balances for selection processes. A. Hubley said another related issue is how STIP projects bounce around between years, making it hard for the public to track; in the end, project selection shouldn't be a four-year process but in a ten-year timeframe. Weidemann noted that the ATP did not bring up a common factor not included in the framework - geographical fairness.

Weidemann noted that the Chapter 3 legislation says ATPs must be involved in the selection process and asked how the ATP feels they should be involved. G. Johnson noted that the ATP should be apprised early about projects but just on an information basis, mentioning how community objection on a project might heighten end products. J. Welle said ATPs' role is to keep MnDOT accountable.

Weidemann noted that, if nothing else, MnDOT will have a step-by-step process of how to select projects after the OLA audit.

He also noted that a MnDOT representative will follow-up about these policies in the spring.

9. Input on the Draft Corridors of Commerce Scoring Process

Weidemann noted how MnDOT developed and is implementing a scoring and prioritizing process for the Corridors of Commerce program as a part of the Chapter 3 legislation. He said \$400M will be available in the next round of the program, with \$300M coming from bonding, \$50M coming from biennium cash, and \$50M coming from the next biennium cash. Under this new process, MnDOT will take project recommendations from the public, score the recommended projects using a decile approach, and then group and compare the projects.

Members of the ATP noted that administrator positions could be replaced by computers under this process and that MnDOT could potentially receive 100,000 recommendations that it will need to fully scope out.

Weidemann noted project recommendations must be in the trunk highway system, an intensive media release will come in January, and a one-pager on the program and process will be coming soon. As a pilot process, MnDOT will be tracking the cost of the program as well.

10. Adjourn

Meeting was adjourned at 1:33 pm.