



Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership Meeting

February 10, 2021 @ 10:00 am *
Zoom Video/Audio Conference

Summary

Members in attendance: Kevin Adee, Bryan Anderson, Chris Belden, Ron Chicka, Jason DiPiazza, Kate Ferguson, Jim Foldesi, Krysten Foster, Rick Goutermont, Karin Grandia, Robbie Hass, Duane Hill, Holly Kostrzewski, Dan Larson, Jack Larson, Mark LeBrun, Susan Michels, John Mulder, Brian Napstad, JinYeene Neumann, Gary Peterson, David Reimer, Penny Simonsen, Jim Strezishar, Davin Tinquist, Cindy Voigt, Matt Wegwerth, John Welle

Guests in attendance: Brian Bluhm, Todd Campbell, Mike Casey, Bruce Fehringer, Jason Fisher, Russell Habermann, Jon Hendrickson, Scott Johnson, Oliver Liu, John Minor, Michelle Pierson, Kent Skaar

1. The Zoom conference line opened at 9:45 am to give participants time to get settled prior to the meeting start. Participants were encouraged to log or call into the meeting by 9:55 am. Russell Habermann, Senior Planner at ARDC Planning, greeted participants as they entered the meeting and gave a brief statement regarding processes and formats of the meeting, including procedures for voting.

Chair Duane Hill called the meeting to order at 10:02 am.

Michelle Pierson, Planning Assistant at ARDC Planning, requested that attendees type their name and agency they represent, if any, in the chat box to serve as meeting attendance. Everyone in the meeting joined by computer; no attendees joined by telephone.

2. Approval of Meeting Summary – October 14, 2020

A motion to approve the October 14, 2020, meeting summary was made by Jack Larson/Kate Ferguson. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Comments from Citizens Present

Mike Casey, representing Friends of Western Duluth Parks & Trails, requested an opportunity to read a statement. Casey let meeting attendees know he would send a letter outlining points presented to Russell Habermann for distribution to the membership as well. Casey presented comments regarding the alignment of Duluth's Cross City Trail through West Duluth, where a

segment of the Trail is programmed for FY 2023 Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program funding. This FY 2023 project will make connection between existing Cross City Trail segments, but Casey said the connection will continue development of a route that is non-direct and not suitable for transportation. He encouraged the City and ATP members to recognize a more direct alignment that would maintain a trail alignment on the “lower side” of Grand Avenue. Casey expressed his recognition of the importance of the Transportation Alternatives (TA) program and thanked the City and the NEMNATP for work with the program.

Cindy Voigt, City of Duluth Engineer, requested to respond. Voigt outlined the history of a segment of the Cross City Trail constructed in 2014 on the “upper side” of Grand Avenue. Voigt noted that the 2023 project will connect existing segments of trail on the “lower side” of Grand Avenue to the 2014 trail segment on the “upper side”. She stated this connection would not preclude the City from studying the lower alignment for future connections.

4. Open Discussion: COVID Impacts to Transportation

Chair Hill introduced impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic as a discussion topic and opened the floor for conversation.

Jack Larson, rural transit representative, noted that Arrowhead Transit ridership was down 51%. Due to physical distancing requirements, a bus designed for 20 passengers was able to accommodate five passengers. CARES Act funding permitted free fares in 2020. Arrowhead Transit buses delivered 23,000 lbs. of food, and it is currently working on vaccination transportation.

Chris Belden, urban transit representative, noted the Duluth Transit Authority (DTA) has seen a drop in ridership of 40%, mainly due to schools and universities transitioning to online education models. Free fares were given in the first months of the pandemic, and the DTA has installed barriers to protect drivers. It is also installing contactless pay stations in April.

Gary Peterson, Carlton County Commissioner, mentioned that Carlton County’s Transportation Center and the new Barnum garage are serving as drive-thru vaccination sites. They allow patients to remain in personal vehicles and pull through the garage; this model allows up to 80 vaccinations per hour. It has received national attention by Time online: <https://time.com/5925350/drive-through-covid-19-vaccine/>

Jim Foldesi, St. Louis County Engineer, discussed St. Louis County’s program delivery experience during COVID-19. With a \$50M program, projects were delivered with considerations to COVID protocols in the office and the field. Staff were as or more productive.

Duane Hill, MnDOT District One Engineer, noted an 80% reduction in air travel and the benefits seen from telework. He noted that 80% of MnDOT employees currently teleworking would like to continue to do so after restrictions are lifted at least two days per week. Hill also noted practices for MnDOT’s maintenance work, that MnDOT is on track to deliver the program for summer 2021, and that the November transportation funding forecast looked better than anticipated.

Hill also shared some statistics reported about cost savings of telework. He shared that employers could expect to save \$11,000 per year per employee in increased productivity and reduced facilities costs. Telework could also assist State’s sustainability goals. He said that employees also benefit due to time saved in commuting. For the NEMNATP, Hill figured this meeting being held virtually alone saved 100 hours of travel time and 6,000 travel miles.

Kevin Adee, Koochiching County Commissioner, noted that time saved by not traveling to distant meetings also has a safety component. Especially in winter, not having to travel great distances is appreciated.

5. FY 2025 Targets/Non-MPO Federal-Aid Candidate FY 2025 Projects

Bryan Anderson, MnDOT District One Planning Director, noted that targets for ATP-1's FY 2025 federal-aid program totals \$10M, with \$900,000 in the Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program, \$1.7M in the Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), \$2.96M for projects in the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) area, and \$4.44M for projects in cities/counties outside of the MPO area.

Candidate projects from outside the MPO include a project in the City of Virginia, a CSAH 52 project in Itasca County, a CSAH 61 project in Pine County, and a CSAH 100 project in St. Louis County. Each of these entities described their projects in further detail.

A motion to add these four projects to the ATIP was made by Cindy Voigt/Kevin Adee. The motion carried unanimously.

Two other projects within the MPO not requiring action include a City of Duluth Canal Park Area Reconditioning Project and a St. Louis County Woodland Avenue resurfacing project. A formal action will be required at the April NEMNATP meeting.

6. Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program FY 2025 Projects

Russell Habermann, Senior Planner with ARDC Planning, described the Transportation Alternatives process and the convening of the TA Task Force to make funding recommendations for the FY 2025 program. 12 applications requesting a total of \$4.98M were considered for the \$900,000 available for distribution. After the Task Force's scoring process, the top three applicants were: City of Moose Lake Trail, Biwabik Main Street Enhancements, and City of Two Harbors Trail System. Habermann noted that these projects respectively requested \$492,000, \$500,000, and \$600,000. The Task Force recommended that each of these projects receive \$300,000.

Jim Foldesi, St. Louis County Engineer, asked if all three applicants can deliver the project with the lower dollar figures being awarded, considering each requested significantly more in their applications. Habermann noted that all three noted in their applications that they would accept the amount recommended by the Task Force.

A motion to award funding as recommended by the TA Task Force was made by Bob Manzoline/Gary Peterson. The motion carried unanimously.

7. Project Sponsorship Requirements

Krysten Foster, MnDOT District One State-Aid Engineer, gave a short presentation about project sponsorship for programs such as Transportation Alternatives (TA) and the Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP). Recent changes have been made to allow small cities and townships to sponsor their own projects. But Foster shared that a small city or township sees considerable benefits from County sponsorship, including experience with project delivery and understanding of construction regulations. MnDOT and counties also have financial systems set up to transfer funds electronically for projects, which would be difficult for MnDOT to set up for all small cities and townships in the region. Foster explained that it was important to make

people aware of the change but also speak toward the benefits of continuing to utilize County sponsorships for projects.

8. Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council Updates

Ron Chicka, Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council (MIC) Director, shared about ongoing projects from the MIC, including finishing the Duluth-Superior Pedestrian Plan, working with the Port Authority on the Erie Pier Management Plan, and working with the Army Corps of Engineers about the shipping channel. Central Entrance in Duluth (194) will be reconstructed in 2026, and the MIC will work with stakeholders to study this commercial corridor and to look at multimodal opportunities. The MIC is participating in a DTA study regarding transit routes, and MIC staff members are also involved with comprehensive planning in the City of Superior.

James Gittemeier shared several slides about the recent Proctor Transportation Plan. MnDOT has an upcoming resurface project on US Hwy 2, and Proctor has an upcoming project on 2nd Street; this provided an opportunity to pull together insight and background from previous studies and plans to inform these projects. Many of the roads in Proctor are multi-jurisdictional, and the actual implementation of these future projects will require collaboration. Next steps will be looking at implementing recent SRTS recommendations and conducting an ADA assessment to ensure the City can continue its leverage of federal funding.

9. ARDC Regional Transportation Planning Workplan

Russell Haberman, ARDC Planning, reviewed ARDC's Regional Transportation Planning Workplan for FY 2021 and asked the NEMNATP to provide their ideas for FY 2022 projects. Duane Hill, MnDOT District One Engineer, noted that ARDC is working with stakeholders to enhance the Cross Range Expressway corridor on Highway 169. Hearing no other ideas, Habermann invited members to reach out to him if they have additional ideas.

10. Local Program/Local Road Improvement Program Update

Krysten Foster, MnDoT District One State-Aid Engineer, highlighted a few local projects for 2021, including a few changes:

- Carlton County and Itasca County had projects in 2021 and 2022, and due to changes in funding, they were able to swap funding between the two counties.
- The City of Duluth swapped their 2021 and 2024 projects. East Superior Street will be constructed in 2021, moving their Railroad Street project to 2024 to align with the Twin Ports Interchange project.
- The DNR asked to move the Lutsen segment of the Gitchi-Gami State Trail into 2022. St. Louis County will swap for an advanced construction project scheduled for 2021.
- The Mesabi Trail will move to 2022, for one of the District's HPP projects.

Foster then presented about the Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP), administered by State-Aid. Applications are due March 3, 2021. The Advisory Committee meets in April, and applicants will be notified about their status in May. The construction schedule is anticipated between 2021 and 2023 but will most likely be for between 2022 and 2023. Foster went over selection criteria for the LRIP funds. Sponsorship is required for small cities and townships.

Jim Foldesi, St. Louis County Engineer, mentioned that the counties received many requests for sponsorship. It sounds like this program will demonstrate a large need.

Gary Peterson, Carlton County Commissioner, asked a question regarding the makeup of the committee. Foster said she would look into whether the Advisory Committee members are posted publicly or not and will get back to Commissioner Peterson.

11. MnDOT Program Updates

Bryan Anderson, MnDOT District One Planning Director, presented a slide with an overview of the MnDOT program. Bryan Anderson said the draft ATIP for FY 2025 will be sent to the NEMNATP in advance of the April meeting, which is when approval of the ATIP will take place.

He also provided the following updates:

- Some projects will need to be delayed.
- At the October meeting, the NEMNATP provided letters of support for applications sent to the Highway Freight Program for Koochiching County, MnDOT D-1, and MnDOT D-3 projects. The Koochiching County project was recommended for funding.
- The Transportation Economic Development (TED) Program received two applications from our region. IRRRB applied for improvements on TH 53 and P&H Road in Virginia. The project cost was \$585,000, with TED providing \$315,000. The other project was a turn lane in Britt, but that was not funded.
- Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Planning Assistance in the 2021-22 school year was awarded to Littlefork, Chisholm, and Grand Portage. There are upcoming MnDOT projects in Littlefork in 2025 and in Chisholm in 2026.

12. Member Concerns/Future Agenda Topics

No concerns were brought forward.

13. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:40 am was brought by Jim Foldesi/Cindy Voigt. The motion carried unanimously.

Note: Bold print denotes action taken during the meeting.