

Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership Meeting

February 8, 2023 @ 10:00 am
Hybrid Meeting Format
(Carlton County Transportation Building/MS Teams)



SUMMARY

Members in attendance: Bryan Anderson, Chris Belden, Ron Chicka, Jason DiPiazza, Kate Ferguson, Jim Foldesi, Robert Hass, Duane Hill, Stephen Hallan, Andy Hubley, Michael Kearney, Mark LeBrun, Bob Manzoline, Susan Michels, Mike Moilanen, Angela Murphy, JinYeene Neumann, Gary Peterson, Dave Reimer, Ricky Roche, Penny Simonsen, Jim Strezishar, Cindy Voigt, Matt Wegworth, John Welle

Guests in attendance: Taylour Blakeman, Sarah Ciochetto, Jason Fisher, James Gittemeier, Russell Habermann, Dick Haney, Stacey Hawkins, Kevin Johnson, Scott Johnson, Scott Kyrola, Oliver Liu, Paige Melius, Prescott Morill, Anna Pierce, Michelle Pierson, Brian Shekleton

1. Call to Order

Chair DiPiazza welcomed attendees joining the meeting in person and on MS Teams and called the meeting to order at 10:03am. Chair DiPiazza went over directions pertaining to voting items. Attendance was taken by sign-in sheet for those attending in-person, and by typing names/representation in the chat feature for those attending virtually.

2. Approval of Meeting Summary – October 5, 2022

A motion to approve the October 5, 2022 meeting of the NEMNATP was made by Mark LeBrun/John Welle. The motion carried.

3. Comments from Citizens Present

Dick Haney, a Duluth resident, expressed his thanks to the City of Duluth for seeking funding and addressing gaps in the city's bike/pedestrian infrastructure, particularly in regard to the Campus Connector and Cross City Trails. He shared information about why these trails are necessary.

Taylour Blakeman, the new SHIP coordinator from Carlton, Cook, Lake, St. Louis Counties Community Health Board greeted attendees and informed people of the change in this position.

4. Presentation: Carbon Reduction Program Funding

Anna Pierce presented about a new funding source and program to reduce carbon emissions. FY 2023 & FY 2024 funding targets and approach were shared, answers to frequently asked questions, and there was a look at the approach FY2025 and beyond. Resources were also shared.

She discussed how the process is guided by the MnDOT Carbon Reduction Program Sub-Workgroup, meeting monthly. Pierce described the timeline and process for developing the Carbon Reduction Strategy for FHWA review in November 2023.

A question was posed by Duane Hill who inquired if there are any members on the subgroup representing the NEMNATP. It was noted that Ron Chicka, Jim Foldesi, and Penny Simonsen are members.

Pierce went over a list of eligible projects that prove a carbon reduction and are eligible for funding. She also noted that the legislation dictates the split between the funding. Details can be found on the presentation slides. Conversation included questions about types of projects.

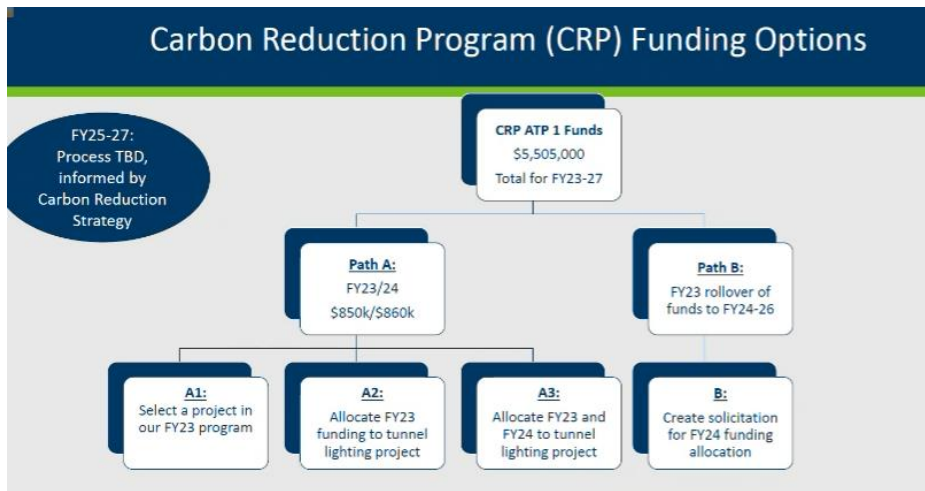
MnDOT is recommending that to get projects for FY2023 ready with the short turnaround time, to start by looking at state owned system with a distribution statewide. It is recommended that for the 35% statewide distribution that a worthy project could be to look to state-owned pedestrian/bicycle bridge system.

A question asked by Jim Foldesi regarding penalties for rollovers was responded to that there is not any reduction in funds for rolling FY23 funds into FY24.

Pierce provided a link to the carbon Reduction Program Funding website, which can be found here: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/carbon-reduction-program/>

Outside of the statewide funding percentage, there will be opportunities for each ATP to make some decisions about funding.

From this point, MnDOT D1's Bryan Anderson directed the NEMNATP group to think about a strategy for FY 2023 and FY 2024 funds through this program. He highlighted two potential pathways:





Anderson asked how the NEMNATP would want to spend the \$850,000 in FY23 and FY24. He laid out a suggestion about a MnDOT project pertaining to lighting in the Silver Creek and Lafayette tunnels located on the North Shore along Highway 61.

Carbon Reduction Program Candidate Project

TH 61 Tunnel Lighting Project at Silver Creek Cliff and Lafayette Tunnels

- Project would replace the existing lighting systems with new LED systems.
- The existing high pressure sodium light fixtures are unable to be dimmed and controlled for actual lighting needs. MnDOT's inventory of replacement fixtures is low, and they are no longer available for purchase.
- The estimated cost of the project is \$6.425M in FY23.
- Currently electricity usage cost is \$200,000/year. New LED system \$18,000/year, resulting in a 91% reduction in annual operational costs as well as resulting in carbon pollution reduction.

Conversation showcased support for this project, but questions were also asked about cost/benefit prioritization for projects. It was noted that this project can help fund gaps in shovel-ready projects. Discussion of previously awarded Transportation Alternatives projects ensued, with an acknowledgement that there is a gap in funding for a trail project in Pine County that was awarded funds.

Due to time constraints, discussion also noted that if the NEMNATP were to recommend funding the tunnel lighting projects with the FY23 and FY24 funding reserved for NEMNATP, that in future funding years, MnDOT will recognize that projects should be dispersed on local systems across the region and noting that this provides time to develop a good process to solicit this funding source in the future years.

A motion to commit FY23 funds to the MnDOT tunnel lighting project, and to split the FY24 funds directing \$300,000 to MnDOT and the remainder to the Pine County

Oberstar Trail Project was made by John Welle/Jim Foldesi. The motion carried.

5. Presentation: Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) (Brian Shekleton)

MnDOT’s Brian Shekleton presented information about this new program, that is tracked at the statewide level, authorized under the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. The program provides funds to states to help make surface transportation more resilient to current and projected natural hazards. Federal appropriation for Minnesota is \$23 million annually for Federal FY 22-26. Shekleton covered limitations, key areas, and project types which aim to protect at-risk coastal infrastructure and supports community resilience, resilience planning, and evacuation routes.

Shekleton provided some background information. He noted that with the funding breakdowns, it is anticipated that the NEMNATP will be able to access \$800,000/year between FY24-27. Projects will need to be amended into the STIP. Projects will need to protect against the variability that is inevitable due to climate change. We are experiencing warmer and wetter weather, and infrastructure isn’t always able to manage the impacts of these changes to weather. This funding source may help address gaps in local and state projects. Shekleton presented a slide of eligible resilience projects:

Eligible Resilience Improvement Activities

- Incorporation of natural infrastructure
- Resurfacing, restoration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, replacement, improvement, or realignment of an existing eligible surface transportation facility eligible
- The upgrade of an existing surface transportation facility to meet or exceed design standards
- Installation of mitigation measures that prevent the intrusion of floodwaters into surface transportation systems.
- Strengthening systems that remove rainwater from surface transportation facilities.
- Upgrades to and installation of structural stormwater controls
- A resilience project that addresses identified vulnerabilities described in the eligible entity’s Resilience Improvement Plan
- Relocating roadways in a base floodplain to higher ground above projected flood elevation levels, or away from slide prone areas
- Stabilizing slide areas or slopes
- Installing riprap
- Lengthening or raising bridges to increase waterway openings, including to respond to extreme weather
- Increasing the size or number of drainage structures.
- Installing seismic retrofits on bridges
- Adding scour protection at bridges
- Adding scour, stream stability, coastal, and other hydraulic countermeasures, including spur dikes
- Vegetation management practices in transportation rights-of-way to improve roadway safety, prevent against invasive species, facilitate wildfire control, and provide erosion control.
- Any other protective features, including natural infrastructure, as determined by the Secretary.

www.dot.state.mn.us/sustainability/resilience.html 8

\$800,000 can only go so far. Shekleton asked the group what kind of project should be developed for how to spend the money? He then went through next steps:

- TP&IC voted to finalize FY24-27 distribution approach – Jan. 30, 2023
- Project identification guidance released based on funding distribution approach – Mid - Feb. 2023
 - Develop an ATP1 Project Selection Process, select projects, and amend them into ATIP/STIP
 - Think about projects in your area that can be delivered in FY2024
 - Invite me back to talk through your process
- 2023 – 2026 STIP and TIP amendments deadline – August, 10 2023

Brian Shekleton noted that these funds are only for projects that include measures that will improve resilience and that project guidance is being developed right now. He noted that ATPs need to start identifying projects so they can be amended into the ATIP/STIP.

There is an August 10th deadline for directing FY24 funds. It was asked if this group would like to form a PROTECT subcommittee of the NEMNATP.

The PROTECT funds for Minnesota are split 70% to MnDOT / 30% Local. It was noted that MnDOT is absorbing all of the FY22/23 funds into their program. From FY24-26, locals will get an increase such that they get a true 30% of the funding in the bill. It was noted that forming a working group may help evaluate needs such as culvert projects or North Shore erosion projects that are ready to go.

Paige Melius was asked if ARDC was willing to facilitate a subcommittee; ARDC agreed. Paige asked if there would be NEMNATP members who would volunteer to participate. Angela Murphy, Cindy Voigt, Jim Foldesi, Jason DiPiazza, Robbie Hass, Bryan Anderson noted they would participate. Brian Shekleton would also be invited to participate.

Jason DiPiazza noted that if NEMNATP members who were not in attendance would also like to participate, they may reach out, and that an email opposition only voting method would be employed in the coming weeks to call for making this group an official subcommittee of the NEMNATP.

Brian Shekleton, Principal Climate and Resilience Planner in the Sustainability and Public Health Office of MnDOT invited people to reach out to him with questions at: brian.shekleton@state.mn.us

6. Local Federal Aid Projects

Bryan Anderson began by going over FY 2027 ATP Targets noting they were down a little from from FY25/26. MnDOT absorbed FY22/23 federal funding and will pay back ATPs in FY 24, 25, 26..



He quickly reviewed the 2027 Federal Aid candidate projects including one on Carlton County's CSAH 61, a Pine county CSAH 27 project, a project in St. Louis County on the Vermilion Trail, and an Itasca County project on CSAH 7. Anderson reviewed each project and asked for a motion to approve these projects in the draft ATIP. Bryan Anderson noted that projects in the MPO region will go in the MPO TIP.

A motion to approve these projects in the draft ATIP was made by Cindy Voigt/John Welle. No discussion. Motion carried.

7. Angela Murphy, interim State Aid Engineer, noted that the local Federal projects are mostly on target. She called attention one Duluth project (sequence No. 43) resulted in finding contaminated materials in and around the project area and a plan to move forward is in progress

She also noted that there was a request from Itasca County for a FY2025 project already programmed on CSAH 52. There is a request to change this project to a mill and overlay on CSAH 29.

A motion to move a project in Itasca County from a reconstruct of CSAH 52 to a bituminous overlay on CSAH 29, maintaining the same amount of federal funding, was made by Cindy Voigt/Jim Foldesi. No discussion. Motion carried.

John Welle called attention to a motion in the previous meeting regarding on-system bridges in Carlton County. It was noted that we were still waiting on approval from FHWA, anticipate there will be action on this at the April NEMNATP meeting.

8. Gitchi-Gami State Trail- Two Harbors to Flood Bay Wayside Update

MnDNR Area Specialist and Gitchi-Gami State Trail coordinator Oliver Liu presented an

update and a proposal to modify the project. He noted that the Gitchi-Gami State Trail is legislatively designated to begin in Two Harbors and MnDNR has determined this will be at RJ Houle visitors center and that the Two Harbors to Flood Bay segment is vital trail segment, recognizing the formal beginning of the trail. Liu noted that the DNR's mission is to connect to Flood Bay, but preliminary cost estimates and necessary strategies to address a critical coastal wetland will require a suspended bridge deck on piles to cross a wetland area in order to limit damage to the wetland., An option of purchasing wetland credits and filling the trail corridor across the wetland is not recommended. DNR proposes to phase this project and seeks approval to build trail from RJ Houle to the intersection with Superior Shores Roadway, an endpoint that will provide trail users with a destination, and connection to the Burlington Bay residential area, approximately 1 mile of trail. DNR is still committing to advance the trail to Flood Bay in a second phase.

Proposal that stands today:

We would like to address wetland. Coastally connected wetlands. \$1.4 million project to go 1.4 miles, the discussion of wetland. Would like to limit mitigations and determined best strategy to cross the wetland. Building a suspended deck bridge on piles, \$2.6M. This drastically increased estimates.

A motion to approve the proposed change to the trail length with new endpoint of Phase 1 to be located at the intersection with Superior Shores Road for construction in FY 2024 was made by Bob Manzoline/Mark LeBrun. Motion carried.

MnDNR Area Supervisor Kevin Johnson added comments of thanks to MnDOT, Lake and Cook Counties, and North Shore townships for collaborative partnerships in the effort to advance trail construction.

9. TA Program and ARDC Updates

Paige Melius, Senior Transportation Planner at ARDC provided information about the applicants for the current Transportation Alternatives program solicitation. Melius noted that the TA Task Force would be meeting on February 23, 2023 to review and score applications, and that the Task Force would advance funding recommendations to the full NEMNATP at the April Meeting. Melius noted there is a total of \$1,980,000 in federal funds available to eligible projects in NE Minnesota, and that 8 applications from across our NEMNATP have been submitted with a project request totalling about \$3.5 million. Projects submitted include:

- Cook County – Gunflint Trail Path;
- Biwabik- Additional funds request for the Main Street Renewal Project on TH135;
- City of Duluth-Campus Connector Segment #6;
- City of Duluth- Campus Connector Segment #4;
- City of Deer River SRTS Connection;
- MnDNR-GGST Lutsen Downtown Connector segment;
- St. Louis & Lake Co. Regional Rail Authority- Mesabi Trail spur between Aurora and Hoyt Lakes;
- St. Louis County- Arrowhead Road sidewalk project

In interest of time, Melius then presented on her other agenda item regarding ARDC Updates. She reviewed project updates in ARDC's Transportation Planning Workplan including: Community transportation plans in Cloquet, Aitkin, and with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Additionally ARDC has been working Regional Scenic Byway development items including Skyline Parkway's Corridor Management Plan, Edge of the Wilderness Corridor Management Plan, and ongoing general assistance with North Shore Scenic Drive Council, Mille Lacs Scenic Byway, Superior National Forest Scenic Byway including participating in meetings around the future Silver Bay Multi-modal trailhead, and Avenue of Pines assistance including trail and trailhead planning assistance. Work continues with paved trail development including items alongside the Gitchi-Gami Trail Association, Mesabi Trail strategies involving the upcoming Ely Multi-Modal Trailhead, and the Nashwauk Multi-Modal Trailhead.

10. MnDOT Program Updates

Bryan Anderson shared information regarding the background on MnDOT funding targets for 2027, and anticipates it will be finalized and shared at the April meeting of the NEMNATP. Anderson also demonstrated 2024-2027 Targets noting changes due to recent guidance.

Anderson provided updates to current MnDOT planning processes including the I-35 Corridor Plan in partnership with DSMIC; Cloquet Transportation Plan, and Aitkin Transportation Plan in partnership with ARDC; and corridor studies on TH73 between Kettle River and Cromwell, TH169 in the City of Hibbing, and a TH48 study in the City of Hinckley. Anderson gave updates about the Corridors of Commerce program which saw applications from the City of Grand Rapids for intersection improvements at TH2 and TH169; an application by St. Louis County impacting Rockridge Area School Transportation at intersections along TH51; and an application from DSMIC impacting the Blatnik Bridge replacement. Final project descriptions are due March 1, 2023, scoring takes place in March and April, and MnDOT announces project awards on May 1, 2023.

Anderson noted that upcoming solicitations include the Minnesota Freight Program with a solicitation expected in the summer of 2023 impacting FY 26, 27, and 28. Additionally, Anderson anticipates providing an update about the Transportation Economic Development Program at the April meeting of the NEMNATP.

A question was posed by Cindy Voigt about the status of Scenic Byway applications? Bryan Anderson noted he would track down answers about that program.

11. MIC Updates

Ron Chicka of the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council presented updates to standing work program projects including ongoing work on the Transportation Improvement Programs, updates to the 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the MIC's which will feature updates to the long-range Metropolitan Transportation Plan, Sustainable choices 2045. Chicka also touched on short-range planning projects including entering into Year 2 of the Duluth Area I-35 corridor Plan, and Year 2 of the Duluth-Superior Safety Action Plan and highlighted ongoing/modal planning projects including subcommittee work in bicycle & pedestrian planning, harbor, transit, roadway, and freight initiatives.

12. Member Concerns/Future Agenda Items

Scott Johnson from MnDOT noted this has been a challenging year and invites members to work on project description changes to Angela Murphy as soon as they are apparent to permit facilitation of STIP Amendments. The current STIP will require amending at a future meeting of the ATP, either the April or July meeting.

Carlton Co. Commissioner Gary Peterson asked a question about the value of supporting the NLX line. Regional Rail Authority Bob Manzoline provided some background information and invited the Commissioner to review the facts on project website here: <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/nlx/index.html>

Andy Hubley, ARDC, asked the membership if anyone would be interested in a presentation regarding Dark Skies. It was recommended if that topic were to be presented, it should be done in conjunction with which programs (Carbon Reduction Program or the PROTECT program) may fund updated lighting, styles available, and ways for modal authorities to seek funding and make improvements.

13. Call to Adjourn

Chair DiPiazza thanked the agenda setting committee, meeting attendees and presenters and called for a motion to adjourn. **Jim Foldesi/Cindy Voigt made the motion at 12:05pm. Motion carried.**