



TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
Minutes of June 27, 2007
11:00 a.m., Greensboro, NC
Blue Room
(County Commissioner's Briefing Room)
Old Guilford County Courthouse

ATTENDANCE

Lydia McIntyre	<i>GDOT / MPO</i>	Roger Bardsley	<i>Guilford County</i>
Craig McKinney	<i>GDOT / MPO</i>	Bill Bruce	<i>Guilford County</i>
Tyler Meyer	<i>GDOT / MPO</i>	Michael Abuya	<i>NCDOT</i>
Peter Ohlms	<i>GDOT / MPO</i>	Mike Cowan	<i>NCDOT</i>
Adam Fischer	<i>GDOT Engineering</i>	Mike Stanley	<i>NCDOT</i>
Chris Spencer	<i>GDOT Engineering</i>	Brian Thomas	<i>NCDOT</i>
Mike Kirkman	<i>Greensboro Planning</i>	Taft Wireback	<i>News & Record</i>
Hanna Cockburn	<i>PTCOG</i>		

Tyler Meyer called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m. as acting TCC Chair in Jim Westmoreland's absence.

Action Items

I. Approve Minutes of April 25, 2007

Bill Bruce moved for approval of the minutes. Roger Bardsley seconded the motion. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2007 meeting.

Business / Potential Action Items

I. NCDOT TIP Funding Allocation Constraints

Mike Stanley of NCDOT's Program Development Branch presented an overview of NCDOT priorities and funding and how it affects MPOs. Because MPO and RPO representatives often perceive a disconnect between local priority needs lists and what NCDOT actually funds, it is important to understand how the process works for funding transportation projects.

Planning for the transportation future

Stanley described the overall budget for NCDOT. Of the roughly \$4 billion total budget, about \$1.8 billion comes from the state highway fund, \$0.9 billion is from the federal-aid program, and \$1.1 billion from the state highway trust fund.

The General Assembly established the state highway fund, which includes no money for the Transportation Improvement Program (STIP); all STIP project funding comes from either the federal-aid program or the state highway trust fund. The funding sources for the state highway fund include the state gasoline tax, which does not increase with inflation, and some fees, and it pays for routine maintenance activities, mowing, contingencies, operating costs, secondary road paving, contract resurfacing, spot safety improvements, public industrial access, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and transfers to other state agencies such as the State Highway Patrol. Transit, including ferry and rail operations, also receives funding from the state highway fund.

Just over half the STIP budget is federal-aid funding, with the rest coming from the state highway trust fund. The main source of federal-aid funding is the motor fuels tax.

The state highway trust fund is a separate pot of money intended for specific state priority activities as directed by the general assembly in 1989. Its sources include the motor fuels tax and a small portion of fees, but over half of its money is from the highway use tax, which is similar to a sales tax but is assessed whenever a title is issued, not just when a car is purchased.

Stanley explained where the state spends the highway trust fund money. Program administrative support, transfers to the general fund, and formula programs receive funding under the state highway trust fund. Transfers vary each year and depend on the state legislature. While the current year's transfer is fairly low, it is likely to go back up in the future. Formula programs get funded at percentages specified in state law and include secondary road paving and state aid to municipalities through Powell Bill funding.

After net funding amounts are set for each major program, three takedowns apply: federal-aid matching, debt service, and a 1-percent set-aside for upgrading obsolete NCDOT facilities. Federal funding must be matched; a few programs are 90 percent federal and 10 percent state and local (90/10) or another ratio, but most are 80/20. The state highway trust fund is currently the only source for federal-aid matching funds. Debt service is the result of a 1996 bond that accelerated construction of various projects. Adding in takedowns for facility upgrades, the actual amount of funding available is about half of the net amount.

All federal money comes with strings attached, because each program has its own eligibility requirements. With minor exceptions, the following eligibility requirements apply:

- The Bridge program is for repair and replacement of structurally deficient bridges.
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) is for air-quality improvements in non-attainment areas.
- Safety (a new program under SAFETEA-LU) is for safety improvements.
- Appalachian Development funds may be used on certain roads specified in federal law.
- Federal earmarked highway funds, which are a method for Congress to override TIP priorities, direct existing funds to certain projects (they are not new money).
- Interstate Maintenance (IM) funds may be used for maintenance activities.
- National Highway System (NHS) funds are flexible but can only be used on NHS roadways.
- Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds are the most flexible pot of money and can be used for many activities.

Of the STIP, about 57 percent of the funding is from the state highway trust fund – supporting the intrastate system and urban loops – with the rest from federal-aid programs. About one-fourth of the STIP budget is for non-road-building purposes.

Another element of the funding system is the 1989 statutory distribution formula known as the Equity Formula, which directs NCDOT to allocate funding regionally. Each of the seven regions defined in the law represents two NCDOT divisions. Funding distribution to each region depends on regional population (50%), remaining mileage of intrastate system roads to be completed within the region (25%), and an equal share of funding for each region (25%). Certain projects and funding sources are exempt from the Equity Formula.

North Carolina's 79,000-mile state-maintained highway system has a small share of paved and unpaved miles that remain eligible for state highway trust fund dollars. A significant portion of the system is eligible for federal aid but not for the state highway trust fund, leaving over 57,000 miles of state-maintained roadway ineligible for either funding source.

Stanley presented an example of a high-priority roadway widening project for a two-lane secondary road in a high-growth area. The road might be federal-aid eligible but would probably not be eligible for other funding sources. As a result, less than 10 percent of the STIP budget can be used to address this type of need across the state. Many of the high-priority projects around North Carolina are this type of project.

Stanley explained what funding sources were available for major projects in the Greensboro Urban Area. The remainder of the Urban Loop is competing with over \$5 billion of remaining eligible urban loop projects statewide – at \$250 million in urban loop funding per year, the end is not yet in sight. Three of the five eligible intrastate-system projects in the area are complete: I-40 widening near the airport, I-85 widening towards Burlington, and US 220 widening south of Greensboro. The remaining projects are the NC 68/US 220 connector and the US 158 project in Stokesdale. Most of the area's roadway capacity improvement needs are eligible only for small pieces of the funding.

Stanley used examples from the MPO's Priority Needs List to illustrate this situation. Widening projects for Horse Pen Creek Road and US 70 are only eligible for funding from STP. The US 29/Eckerson Road interchange improvement project would be eligible for STP, NHS, and possibly IM funding. The Norwalk Street Extension project is not federal-aid eligible at all at this point, as with the Pegg Road/Thatcher Road Extension. If these roads are functionally classified differently in the future, then STP funding can become available. In short, many TIP projects compete for the small sliver of STP funding: about \$10 million per year per division is available through STP. Each project averages \$10-\$30 million, so very small pieces of projects can be completed in each year. Stanley advised that NCDOT works to determine how to most effectively pursue projects given the funding constraints.

Bill Bruce inquired why some US highways, such as US 70, lack the NHS designation. Stanley advised that Congress established a mileage cap on the NHS system, and that some US and NC routes were included but some were not. Tyler Meyer advised that major roadways entering the Greensboro area are on the NHS system but stop being eligible when they get deeper into the urban area. Also, US 70 in eastern North Carolina is on the NHS but is not in the central and western portion of the state, presumably due to the presence of alternate routes.

Meyer inquired about a revision to the eligibility requirements for the state highway trust fund that allowed for other projects to be pursued when the specific intrastate projects written into the law were not ready to be funded. Stanley said that the projects listed in 1989 are to be funded first, but that other projects can be funded if and when those projects are completed or unable to move forward in a

division. The idea is to have the flexibility to move on, but no division has completed the 1989 projects yet.

Meyer inquired about the state transportation plan and the need to emphasize strategic highway corridors. Stanley advised that one of the plan's focuses is on the mix of investments – capacity expansion vs. modernization and preservation – over a 25-year horizon. Because federal and state laws dictate how funds are to be used, legislative changes will eventually be needed to achieve the vision of the state's plan.

Peter Ohlms inquired about a legislative change for Durham's urban loop funding. Stanley advised that the General Assembly did change the law to allow Durham to apply loop funding for five consolidated roadway projects that are not technically loops. Only the loop projects in Charlotte, Greensboro, and Raleigh are true loops; most others are bypasses that receive loop funding.

2. Development of Priority Needs for 2009-2015 MTIP

Tyler Meyer advised that the 2009-2015 Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program will be developed shortly. The process is compressed as a result of a shift from even- to odd-year development cycles. The priority development process is occurring during summer 2007, and the MTIP process will include public review and various drafts of the state and metropolitan TIPs, concluding in summer 2008. Mike Stanley advised that NCDOT would release the draft STIP in Fall 2007 and adjust it through spring 2008 before releasing the final STIP for approval. The MTIP will be complete in summer 2008 but may not be formally adopted then because of the need to demonstrate conformity with air-quality requirements.

Meyer advised that the priority needs process is an opportunity to identify the MPO's key priorities for the transportation system, including system elements that are below the level of statewide priorities. Key considerations include (1) covering all modes, which can enhance the process by leveraging various funding sources; (2) the status of existing priorities; (3) new needs; (4) resource constraints; (5) opportunities for state and local partnerships; and (6) focusing on potentially achievable goals. While it is an opportunity to address major facilities such as the Urban Loop, the priority needs process is a good time to advise NCDOT of priority improvements to key arterials, pedestrian/bicycle improvements, and other facilities.

Meyer reviewed the status of priority needs as set out from 1999 through 2005. The priorities have been multimodal, and have included roadway widening; new location construction; bicycle/pedestrian projects; public transportation vehicles, technology, and facilities; upgrades to the traffic signal system; priorities for Urban Loop implementation, and a range of studies. The results have varied, including some significant successes such as Bridford Parkway, West Market Street, the Signal System, and a range of GTA investments. In the case of R-4707 and the US 70 widening, the initiation of environmental documents represents significant success, with the remaining challenge of establishing funding for implementation. In one case, existing funds were replaced with earmarked funds, an outcome with no financial gain but which may have boosted the status of the project. Some identified priority needs remain unmet or addressed only through feasibility studies.

The state legislature made changes allowing some priority projects related to the Urban Loop to use money from the state highway trust fund, but those projects will not receive funding until the Loop is completed. Adam Fischer inquired why the Urban Loop was not included in each year's Priority Needs List. Meyer advised that the list always includes a preamble indicating support for the Urban Loop and other freeway investments but is focused on lower-level needs.

Meyer advised that needs associated with current TIP projects include the following:

- preserving funding for eastern Urban Loop implementation between US 70 and US 29 and acceleration of funding for other sections;
- full funding and maintenance of the construction schedule for the Market Street Widening project, signal system upgrade, and Battleground Rail-Trail; and
- maintenance of the construction schedule for Bridford Parkway.

Currently known and potentially achievable future needs include the following:

- a new GTA operations, maintenance, and administrative facility;
- Phase II of the Battleground Rail-Trail (anticipating abandonment of the rail line);
- various pedestrian and bicycle projects, particularly implementing priority sidewalk projects in the City of Greensboro for which design and right-of-way acquisition are well underway or substantially complete but which local funding resource constraints have currently sidelined. Examples include sidewalks on Randleman Road, West Market Street, East Bessemer Avenue, High Point Road, Cotswold Terrace, and others;
- US 29 interchange improvements at Eckerson Road (advance to right-of-way acquisition); and
- Horse Pen Creek Road widening. Meyer noted that this project would likely have to be a City bond project or perhaps a partnership project between the City and NCDOT for the project to proceed, given its cost and the relative scarcity of STP funding resources as outlined by Mike Stanley.

The next steps in the process include further review of project status and needs and the potential to address them, a review of opportunities to use STP-DA funding, and tracking of the projects through the creation of the state and metropolitan TIPs. The July TAC meeting will likely include potential action on the STP-DA recommendations and Priority Needs List.

3. Comprehensive Transportation Plan Rail/Transit Map Review

Craig McKinney advised that the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) is intended to address all modes of transportation and will include maps of existing facilities and future needs for each mode. The draft Rail/Transit Element of the CTP includes bus routes, fixed guideways such as regional rail, operational strategies, and other rail corridors. There may be a need to show rail lines or spurs that are expected to be abandoned.

The map shows existing routes and facilities, facilities that need improvements or upgrades, and recommended new facilities or routes. McKinney advised that a consultant is studying one of the rail crossings shown on the map and that the environmental analysis process is beginning for the Knox Rd/Carmon Rd rail grade-separation in McLeansville.

Mike Kirkman inquired about the status of PART's regional rail process. Tyler Meyer advised that the process appears to have stalled for the moment. The completion of the regional travel model was a key milestone, but PART has not made any announcements recently.

Meyer commented that the current PART concept for bus rapid transit may have changed from what was shown on the CTP map. McKinney noted that what was shown on the map was what PART submitted as their current plans.

4. Long Range Transportation Plan Schedule

Lydia McIntyre explained the requirements for the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). SAFETEA-LU legislation requires this 20-year plan to be updated every 4 years and also includes some new requirements, such as a safety element (as distinct from security) and increased consultation with federal and environmental resource agencies.

The TAC must approve a plan that conforms to air-quality requirements by October 1, 2008. The general schedule for the LRTP development process begins now and continues through August 2008, with public meetings anticipated for September 2007, December 2007, and June 2008. Staff will coordinate the process with other MPOs in the region to ensure that assumptions are consistent.

The 2004 LRTP was a major effort, but because this iteration will be more of an update, the public involvement process will not need to be as extensive as it was before. Draft CTP maps will be part of the materials presented at the public meetings, and McIntyre noted that the bicycle and pedestrian CTP maps would be available at the next TCC meeting. Tyler Meyer advised that the LRTP is a good opportunity for the MPO to reassess needs and the feasibility and timing of transportation improvement projects.

5. Project Updates

Craig McKinney advised of the status of U-2412, the High Point Road widening project. NCDOT conducted a well-attended design public hearing on the project. Most comments dealt with access to properties and associated impacts due to right-of-way expansion, as well as with other NCDOT projects in the area. NCDOT will schedule a post-hearing review meeting shortly.

6. MPO Strategic Reports

Tyler Meyer advised that the bicycle map project, which was recommended in the Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenway Master Plan, is completed and that the printing process is expected to occur shortly. Meyer also noted that a new acronym guide and project update newsletter were included in meeting materials and that everyone was encouraged to take the Triad Commute Challenge.

Other Items

1. NCDOT Update – None.

2. TCC Member Reports

Mike Kirkman advised that the City of Greensboro adopted a new water-sewer policy that addresses where future growth may go. The Planning Department will post new materials on its Web site shortly. The policy, which becomes official on July 1, includes a three-tiered growth strategy. While projects in the second and third tiers may continue, the developers of such projects will pay more of the costs than the developers of projects in the first tier. The city and county have agreed on generic interim land-use classifications for the tiered areas.

Craig McKinney inquired if the wording of the policy had been posted to the Web yet and noted that it might help answer some questions at an upcoming meeting in Pleasant Garden. Kirkman said he would check and noted that the policy excludes incorporated areas such as Pleasant Garden.

Mike Mills noted that the construction of the Urban Loop would be an important consideration for water-sewer service extensions across it, because constructing such improvements is less expensive during construction of the roadway than after the fact. Tyler Meyer and McKinney

discussed examples of such coordination on the eastern portion of the Loop and the design of the Loop near Horse Pen Creek Road.

Adam Fischer inquired about the status of the portion of the Loop currently under construction. Mills advised that Doug Galyon had emphasized the project strongly and wants it done by the end of the year, which is the goal.

3. Wrap-Up

The TCC was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.