ATTENDANCE

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
Scott Vottero PennDOT 5-0, Acting Chair* for Chris Kufro
Gene Porochniak, PennDOT Central
Alan D. Piper, Berks County Planning Commission
Michael Golembiewski, Berks County Planning Commission
Jeff Glisson for Dave Kilmer, SCTA/BARTA
Ralph E. Johnson, City of Reading

*Tie-breaking Vote only

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT ATTENDING
Terry Sroka, Reading Regional Airport
Tim Krall, City of Reading

OTHERS
Andrea Ebur, FHWA
Amanda Leindecker, PennDOT 5-0
Jeff Rai, PennDOT 5-0
Shannon Rossman, Berks County Planning Commission
Pauline Klopp, Berks County Planning Commission
Amanda Timochenko, Berks County Planning Commission
Devon Hain, Berks
Shanice Ellison, Berks County Planning Commission
Gail Landis, GRCA
Bill Royer, Rep. Mackenzie
Craig Lutz, Senator Argall
Tom Gombar, Senator Schwank
Don Lerch, RK&K
Matt Boyer, Commuter Services
Christopher Spohn, Hamburg Area School District
Joe Romano, Larson Design Group
Don Potteiger, Lower Alsace Twp.
Holly Herman, Reading Eagle

1. CALL TO ORDER

   Acting Chairman Vottero called the meeting to order at 1:42 p.m.
2. REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION OF JOINT TECHNICAL/COORDINATING COMMITTEE MINUTES OF JULY 18, 2019

Acting Chairman Vottero asked if there were any questions or comments to the July 18, 2019 Joint Technical/Coordinating Committee Meeting minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Glisson made a motion to accept the minutes and recommended their approval. Mr. Johnson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

3. BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

- Mr. Lutz said that Austin Grant owns Stoney Run Inn in Kempton. His business has been hit three times by trucks due to the detour on I-78. The Chief of Staff would like a meeting there to see if there is anything that could be done.

- Mr. Lutz said a gentleman would like millings from District 8 for use at the Berks County fairgrounds. District 5 must give approval. Acting Chairman Vottero said he will check into this matter. He said that pug milling is when the maintenance units recycle the millings and additional asphalt to repave low ADT roads. It is very cheap to repave. It is tested for asbestos as part of the contract. When millings sit around for a long time, they become useless.

Non-voting agenda items were addressed while waiting for a quorum to be attained.

6. COMMUTER SERVICES UPDATE

Mr. Boyer stated that September-October is when attendance at Health/Benefit Fairs occur. There was a success in getting the transportation van management project as part of the health program and health benefit packages. If employees take part in the programs, track trips and take part in the TDM database, there will be points/credits towards health insurance benefits.

Mr. Boyer mentioned that there is an open invitation to committee members to attend the Friday, August 23rd Best Work Places for Commuters event to be held at the Antique Automobile Club of America. The Deputy Secretary for Multimodal Transportation, Jennie Granger, will be speaking and will giving out various awards to several businesses around our 13-county region.

7. PENNDOT UPDATE ON BRIDGE PROJECTS

Acting Chairman Vottero gave an update on bridge projects.

4. PENNDOT REQUESTED AMENDMENTS/MODIFICATIONS TO FFY 2019-2022 TIP

Amendments: There were no Amendments.

Administrative Actions: There were two (2) Administrative Actions.

Statewide Administrative Actions: There were no Statewide Administrative Actions.

Mr. Piper asked if the US 422 project’s use of toll credits as a result of not having state capital budget approval would impact the MPO’s federal funding allocation. Ms. Leindecker said no. She said it becomes 100% federal and is about authority and how it is distributed at the Central Office level.

5. PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF FUNDING REDUCTIONS AND INITIAL DISCUSSIONS ON PROJECT PRIORITIES AND SCHEDULE ADJUSTMENTS FOR DRAFT FFY 2021-2024 TIP

Mr. Piper stated that, based on the latest Financial Guidance received from the Department, we will need to readjust our Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for the reduced funding levels. There are three specific issues that have led to this reduction. They are: 1) There are less state dollars being generated to the Motor License Fund; 2) The state elected to increase the amount of funding that is being directed to the Interstate Highway System; and, 3) A switch in the funding allocation formulas away from a “worst-first” formula to an asset management allocation formula.

The end result of implementing these changes is that every MPO or RPO in the state, except for the Altoona and Williamsport MPO’s, lose funding over the 10-year period of overlap between the existing and proposed programs. Even those two MPO’s cannot really say they gained money because it was only 2% and 3% respectively.

Areas were impacted in different ways. The Northwest RPO was hit the hardest losing 45% of their overall funding. The remaining areas hit the hardest were District 5 MPO’s (NEPA (-37%), Reading (-35%), Lehigh Valley (-33%) District 4 MPO (Scranton/Wilkes Barre (-31%), the Southwest Pennsylvania Commission (-30%), which is the MPO for the Pittsburgh area and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (Philadelphia MPO) lost 25%.

The primary driver for significant funding reductions is based on the number of miles of the Non-Interstate National Highway Performance Program highways in certain areas. The NHPP system includes the Interstate, but the interstate funding is allocated separately. For purposes of funding in Pennsylvania, the Interstate System is its own “MPO”. The Interstate program increased by 88% or an additional $4.1 billion. The funding box is getting smaller. If the state is electing to move $4.1 billion from one place to another, it must take that $4.1 billion away from other places. This is the biggest driver for loss to the region.

Mr. Piper stated that the Non-Interstate NHPP system in Berks County consists of US 422 running east and west, SR 222 running north and south, their associated Business routes,
The current program is operated under the 2019 Financial Guidance. The 2021 Financial Guidance is for the proposed program. When programming highway and bridge projects, we are required to allocate no more than what is available during any fiscal year under each funding category. The handout shows dollar differences by year between the FFY 2019 and FFY 2021 programs. The NHPP line shows the biggest impact. Mr. Piper said that for the NHPP program alone, Berks County loses approximately $158 million over that 10-year period. The total loss in all the funding programs $239.4 million. The range of loss, by year, is 12% in FFY 2021 increasing to a 43% loss by the tenth year. Virtually all of the NHPP funding will be lost by the time we reach the end of the process. The last three years holds only $3.5 million in NHPP funding per year, which needs to address all the roads that are on the NHPP network. Staff needs to look at projects on the TIP to reprogram and reprioritize projects and attempt to fit projects into the dollars we have to maximize utility and impact on our system.

Mr. Piper mentioned the primary projects along those corridors (SR 222, Rt. 61 and Rt. 12, West Shore Bypass). The dollar changes do not begin to take affect until the beginning of FFY 2021. The program needs to be adopted and in place by October 1, 2020. Projects that are scheduled between now and that point will not be impacted by this issue unless those projects extend into 2021. Then there will be a potential for impacts.

Mr. Piper said that Ms. Leindecker put together a spreadsheet to illustrate how we must work through this process to look at projects and show how moving them has an impact on different areas of the budget. All of the NHPP projects on the 2019 TIP or the LRTP that extend into the 12-Year Program are included and show up here. The spreadsheet shows where funding amounts cover those funding categories for the projects listed. The focus today will be on the projects that impact the NHPP system because that is where the biggest negative impact will be. Similar exercises will be needed for each of the funding categories as we move through the program.

The NHPP category for 2021 shows a $3.5 million deficit, another $6 million deficit in FFY 2022, and another $14 million deficit in FFY 2023. Because we need to be fiscally constrained with how projects are programmed, if we take the $3.5 million away to balance FFY 2021, those dollars need to be moved further out in the program. If everything is left the same, there would then be a $9.5 million deficit in FFY 2022. Then $9.5 million will need to be moved to the next year and added to the $14 million deficit. By the time the third years starts, we will be up to a $23 million deficit. Another $15 million will be added to that amount when the fourth year starts. Larger projects would need to be prioritized, moved out into the Long-Range Transportation Plan or deferred.

Ms. Leindecker said she took every listed project in the current program that has any NHPP funding and listed their status and where they are in the pipeline. Almost all of the projects are active except for three that have not started. She said if a project is federally
funded and already in the pipeline, progress needs to be continued or we will go into “payback” mode. There are 32 projects currently funded with NHPP that need to be discussed and prioritized.

Mr. Golembiewski asked, if we would have to pay back funding if the project is in any phase presently and it is deferred. Ms. Leindecker said yes unless the federal government is convinced there is a no-build option. She said we have a challenge before us. The total dollar amount is not shown but will show if federal funds have already been started. The only two projects in the current TIP not started are the Bingaman Street Bridge because it was going to be wrapped into the overall West Shore Bypass project and the Preliminary Engineering for the US 222 Widening between Kutztown and Lehigh County. There are a few projects where Preliminary Engineering was scheduled to start in the 12-Year Program. The 5th Street Bridge, US 422 Bridge over Tulpehocken Creek with a 2024 Preliminary Engineering start, 422 Ben Franklin Congested Corridor in 2023, and US 422 Penn Avenue over Cacoosing Creek with a start of FY 2024. There are 27 active NHPP projects.

Mr. Golembiewski asked if there is a preference to advance Decade of Investment (DOI) projects versus those that are not. Mr. Porochniak said no.

Mr. Piper then reviewed the NHPP projects listed to be considered/prioritized for the 2021 TIP update.

Mr. Piper said that, in any case where there is a bridge, we must see if it is feasible to do preventative maintenance instead of bridge replacements. Mr. Johnson asked if decisions will be made today. Mr. Piper said no but that he wants to give the committee a feel for the framework to make decisions.

Mr. Johnson said, if there is no hope in sight for the redistribution to go away, we are kidding ourselves. Mr. Piper said that may be so but that is what we are required to do. When the formula was endorsed at the large scale, it made sense. Until the actual details were seen, and every other area is being hit, maintenance projects may be all that are being done after the fourth year. Beyond the sixth year, even routine maintenance may not be able to be done.

Mr. Lutz asked if this will happen only if the federal government does not increase funding. Mr. Piper said that is true, but we are not allowed to make an assumption that they will increase funding. Mr. Lutz asked, if the federal government does increase the funding, does this revised program stay in place or does something else kick in. Mr. Piper stated that this happened before when the state passed Act 89 and when the federal stimulus money came out. If something changes the allocation, then as soon as it becomes official, the Department would probably redistribute the new funding. Whether or not their decision to take any new money and immediately apply it to the MPO’s as opposed to providing additional money to the Interstate System would remain to be seen. The goal for the Interstate System was to get it up to $1.2 billion per year. In this period, it only reached $1 billion and was held there. The state could still elect to take a portion of that money to apply it to the Interstate. It might be difficult to apply any new money to the Interstate System first without restoring funding to the MPO’s and RPO’s.
Mr. Piper said the MPO’s bridge funding numbers would have changed significantly with the next few updates. Under the old formula, 80% of bridge dollars were based on the allocation on the prorated share of the structurally deficient or poor bridge deck area. As our big bridges like Penn Street would have been completed and moved to the good category, the relative percent of the poor area would have gone down anyway. With the change in the formula that kicks in in 2023, everyone will get funded according to their relative proportion of all bridge deck area.

Another issue is that, in almost every case that we use federal dollars, we are required to match these federal dollars with state dollars or some other source. State match must come out of state highway or state bridge money, depending if bridges or highways are being built. When federal funds were shifted to the Interstate System, those matching funds moved as well.

Mr. Piper said we will try to maintain our commitment to the projects already started as we move through this process. Rather than trying to pursue full expansion projects that will need to be split into tiny pieces to fit the funding, we need to look at key projects that improve safety, congestion or prevent complete failure from a physical standpoint. Maintenance needs to be focused on.

The two highest priorities have always been the 222 Corridor and the 422 West Shore Bypass Corridor. The Long Lane intersection project is the last remaining true choke point on the 222 Corridor. This should be a high priority project.

Mr. Piper stated that, if we weren’t sure where the $600 million was coming from for the 422 West Shore Bypass Corridor before and now that we have another $240 million less, it is less feasible. We need to identify the key elements of that project and see if there are ways to break out specific improvements. Are there structurally deficient bridges that need to be addressed? Are there key safety and congestion areas that can be addressed as independent projects? Acting Chairman Vottero said that he had envisioned that job to be broken into three or four different phases, but now with the money crunch, it might be broken into six or more pieces. How do we fit that in? Mr. Piper said that after 2023, we have $13 million or less a year for funding in the top two federal categories for the entire county. We are not building a $600 million project at $13 million a year. Is there a possibility to shift additional state money onto the project? The answer is yes, but if we start doing that, money will be taken away from the rest of the system.

Discussion continued regarding projects and their proposed priorities. Mr. Piper noted that the US 422 Reconstruction project has advanced significantly through the Design and Environmental process. If we do not program some portions of this project, we would need to repay the federal funds used to date. That would be an additional hit to our program.

Mr. Piper said that, the way the schedule is set up now, September is a joint meeting with the Coordinating Committee. He asked the committee if they would want another Technical meeting earlier in September to revisit the preliminary findings before the joint meeting. Mr. Piper said he just wants to tell the Coordinating Committee that we are vetting the recommendations. We are not to the point of having a final recommendation, even after the joint
meeting. Mr. Johnson said this should not be rushed because there are big decisions to make. Mr. Piper said that staff will continue to work with the Department. Ms. Leindecker reminded the board that the TIP’s are supposed to be developed by the end of December.

Mr. Piper said if nothing is done at the federal level by the end of this year, it is highly unlikely that there will be changes before 2022 due to the national elections. Mr. Porochniak said that the current authorization will most likely just be extended at the same funding amount.

Ms. Leindecker asked Mr. Piper, when we return for the September meeting, if she should continue to use the numbers as they are programmed now or put in any new numbers based on updated estimates. Mr. Piper said if there are new estimates, they should be used. A valid plan cannot be put together without updated numbers.

Mr. Piper said he hopes we will have an initial draft by the September joint meeting.

Mr. Johnson complimented Mr. Piper on the explanation of the work that needs to be done regarding the TIP date. Mr. Piper commended Ms. Leindecker and her staff for their outstanding work as well.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

- Mr. Piper stated that there is a memorandum and a list of projects in the packets. All of the projects submitted by Berks County residents in response to the State Transportation Commission’s 12-Year Program On-Line Survey conducted this spring are listed. Ms. Hain went through the list and summarized it in the cover memorandum and broke all the projects out by municipality. The list includes the projects and the number of requests each received.

In this year’s survey, the Department had a built-in response where if projects that people asked for showed up in the current TIP or Twelve-Year Program, that was indicated back to the submitter. There were no real surprises. Most of the requests were for projects that were already targeted on our plan. Sometimes there are projects that are just maintenance projects and not TIP projects.

- Ms. Landis said that the reason why the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) is engaged is because communities need to be safe, connected and vibrant so transportation infrastructure is important. They believe that one of the jobs of government is to maintain infrastructure. A letter was drafted to be sent to our elected officials, both state and federal. When each piece of a community wants their project to be a priority, it can get confusing. A public/private partnership was created between the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance and the Commissioners that engages a very diverse group regarding issues and concerns and how that is communicated as well as offering suggestions. The partnership is called ReadingBridges.net and works very well. There is a very active transportation committee within the Business Community Advocacy Council.
With the significant sums of federal and lesser amounts of state dollars used to fund our vital state highway system, there is a concern on the impact it will have on the Berks County’s critical projects. Ms. Landis said that this letter is self-explanatory. GRCA is committed to work with all the elected officials as the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) decides what the project priorities will be so we can collectively work with PennDOT to make the projects a reality using the funding we have at both the state and federal level. Decisions need to be made.

Ms. Landis said, unless there are objections, this letter will be sent to the elected officials. Mr. Piper said the Ms. Landis is accurately expressing the fact that we are concerned with these issues moving forward. Mr. Piper said he had discussions with some members of the Coordinating Committee that are also in agreement that we need to conduct a meeting with our legislators to present these issues and explain what the impacts will be.

Mr. Glisson said the letter is well done and is a good foundation piece. The next step should be to come with the specifics, which will come in September. The specifics of the impacts will motivate people.

- Mr. Piper said that U.S. Congressman Chrissy Houlahan will be holding a Town Hall meeting this evening at 6:30 PM at the Goggle Works to address infrastructure issues. Mr. Piper will be representing Berks County at this meeting.

9. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Piper made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:19 PM. Mr. Golembiewski seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Date: 10/3/19

Alan D. Piper