

DRAFT  
READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY  
MINUTES OF THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY  
MAY 20, 2021

ATTENDANCE

COORDINATING COMMITTEE

Tom McKeon, Berks County Planning Commission, Acting Chair \*  
Kristin Mulkerin, PennDOT Program Center  
Commissioner Michael Rivera, County of Berks  
Donna Reed, City of Reading  
Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt for Dave Kilmer, SCTA/BARTA  
Joseph Rudderow, Reading Regional Airport Authority  
Stephen H. Price, Boroughs (Wernersville)  
Scott Vottero, PennDOT 5-0

\*Tie-breaking Vote only

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEMBERS NOT ATTENDING

James Oswald, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Townships (Lower Alsace Township)  
Leonard “Chip” Bilger, II, 1<sup>st</sup> Class Townships (Cumru Township)

OTHERS

Jen Crobak, FHWA  
Jim Mosca, PennDOT Central Office  
Amanda Leindecker, PennDOT 5-0  
Vanessa Koenigkramer, PennDOT 5-0  
Jeff Rai, PennDOT 5-0  
David Alas, PennDOT Central  
Michael Donchez, PennDOT 5-0  
Alan D. Piper, Berks County Planning Commission, MPO Secretary  
David Hunter, Berks County Planning Commission  
Ashley Showers, Berks County Planning Commission  
Michael Golembiewski, Berks County Planning Commission  
Regina Zdradzinski, Berk County Planning Commission  
Shanice Ellison, Berks County Planning Commission  
Amanda Timochenko, Berks County Planning Commission  
Devon Hain, Berks County Planning Commission  
Laura Mursch, Berks County Planning Commission  
Jessica Blauser, County of Berks  
Barbara Lopez, County of Berks  
Matt Boyer, Commuter Services of PA  
Heather Berger, Berks County IS  
Lori Schneider, Berks County IS

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Piper took a verbal roll call of the Committee members. Acting Chairman McKeon then called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

2. INTRODUCTION OF NEW MEMBER- Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt

Acting Chairman McKeon introduced Commissioner Kevin Barnhardt as the new member of the committee. Commissioner Barnhardt stated that Mr. Kilmer and the SCTA/BARTA Board asked him to represent BARTA. The committee welcomed him back following his two-month hiatus.

3. BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

Ms. Crobak, from FHWA, gave an update on federal funding. Currently, there is limited information available on funding proposals that are under consideration.

There are several federal funding initiatives that are under consideration by Congress. The American Jobs Plan was proposed by President Biden. This proposes a significant investment in infrastructure of all types including transit, highway, and bridges. More information on this can be found on the White House website.

In addition, there are several proposals by Congress and the Administration to discuss reauthorization of the current federal funding transportation law (FAST Act), which is set to expire in September 2021. At that point, Congress will either reauthorize that legislation or issue another continuing resolution.

Ms. Crobak said that there are currently some funding opportunities that are available regarding the COVID Relief Bills. They are:

- The COVID Response Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act was passed by Congress in December 2020, which appropriated an additional \$10 billion for highway infrastructure programs. Within this funding source, Pennsylvania received \$407 million in COVID relief funding for highway infrastructure programs. FHWA is working closely with PennDOT to coordinate these relief funds, which will help address some of the lost revenues during COVID and those short-term cash flow challenges.

There are several discretionary grant fund programs that are available. They are:

- USDOT Grant Program – the Rebuilding American Infrastructure and Sustainability Equity Grant Program or RAISE Program; formally known as BUILD or TIGER. Projects are evaluated for RAISE funding based on criteria that includes safety, environmental sustainability, quality of life, economic competitiveness, state of good repair, innovation and partnership. There will be additional prioritization to projects that reduce climate change, create good paying

jobs and improve racial equity. These are priorities of the Biden Administration. There is \$1 billion available through this program and up to \$25 million per grant can be issued. Applications are currently open and will be accepted through July 2021. It is a highly competitive program and the grant process takes a long time.

- Transit Oriented Development Planning through FTA – This grant is for projects that address climate change and equity. \$10 million in grant money is available. Applications will be available through June 21, 2021.
- From EPA – Environmental Justice grants are available for projects that focus on improving air quality and drinking water quality. The deadline for applications is June 1, 2021.

Mr. Piper stated that, under some of the pending federal legislation, Congress had elected to bring back consideration of earmarked projects. We have been working with federal legislators to make recommendations for projects to be considered for earmarks. We were allowed to submit up to five recommendations for consideration within the County to each of our representatives under guidance issued by both PennDOT and our representatives. For projects to be considered, a project had to already be identified on our Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and it had to be far enough along in the process that it could be implemented within the next two years.

Ten projects located within the County were submitted for consideration. Five projects were submitted within Congressman Meuser's District and five projects were submitted within Congresswoman Houlahan's District. Congresswoman Madeline Dean's District, which includes only a small portion of eastern Berks County, did not have any projects that met the criteria.

In Congressman Meuser's District, the five projects submitted were: restoration of I-78; a repaving project on Old Rt. 22; a section of Rt. 61 improvements outside of Hamburg; the intersection of Rts. 12 & 73; and the piece of US 222 that extends north from Rt. 61 up to the Maiden creek Township/Ontelaunee Township line. Out of the five projects submitted, Congressman Meuser's office has agreed to advance the US 222 project.

In Congresswoman Houlahan's District the projects submitted were: Rt. 183/Schuylkill Avenue Bridge; a bridge on Carsonia Avenue in Lower Alsace Township; and the western portion of Rt. 12 Repaving project in the Glenside section of Reading. Together with PennDOT, we submitted both the US 222 Hard Shoulder project which is trying to correct the issue of the southbound traffic on US 222 merging onto Warren Street and a rehabilitation project on Warren Street that extends from that merge point south to the split between US 222 and Penn Avenue. Her office has chosen to advance three of those projects for further consideration which are the Schuylkill Avenue bridge project, the Route 12 project, and the US 222 Hard Shoulder project.

In addition to these highway and bridge projects, both Congressman Meuser's office and Congresswoman Houlahan's office have agreed to support funding for a rail study to evaluate if the Norfolk Southern line, between Reading and Norristown, has capacity to accept passenger rail service. It is included as a recommendation right now.

There is no guarantee that any of these projects will receive any additional funding until it is completely vetted by the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and their staff, and ultimately included in any adopted legislation.

Acting Chairman McKeon asked if these projects are being considered for funding as part of the American Jobs Plan? Mr. Piper thinks so but is not 100% sure. Ms. Crobak said that the earmark funding falls under Congressional discussions and decisions. FHWA has not been involved in any of the discussions regarding earmarks. Ms. Mulkerin said that it might fall under the reauthorization bill.

4. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING OF MARCH 18, 2021

Acting Chairman McKeon asked if there were any questions or comments on the March 18, 2021 Coordinating Committee meeting minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Rudderow made a motion to approve the March 18, 2021 Coordinating Committee meeting minutes. Ms. Reed seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

5. PENNDOT REQUESTED AMENDMENTS/MODIFICATIONS TO FFY 2021-2024 TIP

Mr. Donchez gave an update on PennDOT's requested Amendments/Modifications to FFY 2021-2024 TIP from February 26, 2021 to April 23, 2021.

- There were no Amendments.
- There were eleven (11) Administrative Actions and one (1) Statewide Action— each of these involve shifting funding among existing projects to reflect current needs.

6. REVIEW/APPROVAL OF CMAQ FUNDED PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

Mr. Golembiewski stated that FHWA requires us to have a formal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) project selection process. This process identifies what projects will be implemented using CMAQ funding. Mr. Golembiewski explained that CMAQ funds are used for projects that reduce congestion and help improve air quality. FHWA requires that this process be transparent, in writing and publicly available.

There was concern noted at the March 4<sup>th</sup> Technical Committee meeting that this selection process had not been formally discussed with officials from PennDOT District Office. Staff met with District officials on April 8, 2021. There were three major questions that they requested to be addressed. They were: 1) When would this process take effect? This will take effect

beginning with the development of the 2023 TIP and update of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP); 2) Will it be required to use this process for local input into the 12-Year Statewide Program or LRTP? No. It is not needed for the statewide plan; 3) At what point in the project development process do we need to incorporate this process? As part of this process, we need to be able to determine emissions impacts. Each project must be analyzed to determine their emissions benefits or non-benefits. A project needs to be far enough along that we can put enough information into the models to determine those benefits.

There are three major areas where we currently direct CMAQ funding. They are: 1) Funding for the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership (SRTP) to continue their Commuter Services Program; 2) We give \$900,000 a year to South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) to continue replacing buses in the BARTA fleet with newer, cleaner technology; and 3) Examining off-road, non-construction improvements to help address congestion or air quality which can include message boards on highways, Freeway Service Patrol expansion, Operators in the PennDOT District 5-0 Traffic Management Center, etc.

The project selection begins with a meeting between MPO staff and officials from PennDOT District Office to identify and share potential projects they would like to see implemented and evaluate their eligibility for CMAQ funds.

The eligibility requirements for CMAQ funding according to Federal regulations are: 1) Does it generate an emissions reduction? In Berks County's case, as an area with ground level ozone, it must reduce NOx and/or VOC emissions; 2) Does it reduce congestion, or will it increase traffic? 3) Does it increase capacity? If lanes are added, CMAQ funds cannot be used.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that a table was developed by FHWA and PennDOT for MPOs to use to screen candidate projects and document their emission reduction benefits. The spreadsheet documents such things as:

- Is the project consistent with the Long-Range Plan?
- Is it consistent with our Congestion Management Process (CMP)?
- Is it listed in the Bicycle-Pedestrian Plan?
- Are their benefits to Environmental Justice Populations?
- Is the project ready to go or will it soon be ready to go once funding is approved and it is put on the TIP?

Once the spreadsheet is completed for all the proposed projects, another meeting with District staff will take place where projects will be reviewed and recommended for CMAQ funding. Most of the projects proposed are funded. If there are more projects than available funding, this process would be used to select the projects that identify the most benefit versus cost. Once concurrence is received from District staff and MPO staff, the spreadsheet will be sent to PennDOT Central Office for review and to the projects will be incorporated into the draft TIP. Since there is no active project solicitation process for those outside of the MPO, this selection process is used as a documentation feature to show that an evaluation of proposed projects was performed.

Mr. Golembiewski said that, if we would get a request for additional projects, and if funding is available, those candidate projects would have to go through this selection process as well. The District and FHWA gave their concurrence with this selection process. The Technical Committee made a recommendation at their last meeting that the Coordinating Committee adopt this process.

Acting Chairman McKeon asked if CMAQ funding could be used for electric vehicle charging stations? Mr. Golembiewski said yes, they would be eligible for consideration. When projects are solicited for the TIP update cycle, requests from municipalities are made to the MPO and those requested projects would then go through this selection process.

MOTION: Ms. Reed made a motion for adoption of the CMAQ project selection process with implementation beginning with the generation of the upcoming TIP. Mr. Rudderow seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

## 7. REVIEW/APPROVAL OF FTA COMPLIANT DRAFT TITLE VI PROGRAM

Mr. Golembiewski stated that formal notification was received in March 2021 regarding the results of our MPO Certification Review. FTA officials submitted one Corrective Action noting that we did not have an FTA compliant Title VI Program. It requires that any program using Federal funding does not discriminate based on race. The documents we produce met the policies, procedures and items that FHWA officials required. However, because we receive FTA funding through PennDOT, we are also subject to their (FTA) regulations which require that all of those items, which we already had, be combined into one, cohesive program and submitted to PennDOT.

Back in March 2021, this body approved our response to that Corrective Action which is the development of a Draft Title VI Program. This document, including appendices, is over 200 pages long with the meat of this program located in the first 12 pages. The program gives a brief introduction to RATS and the makeup of the committees. An overview of the Title VI requirements (Civil Rights Act of 1964) is included.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that Title VI and Environmental Justice are similar. However, under FTA regulations, they are strict in keeping Title VI separate from Environmental Justice. Environmental Justice incorporates all the other unique communities into non-discrimination. There are a number of requirements needed in the Title VI Program. Some are general for anyone who receives funding whether it is the MPO, SCTA/BARTA, Reading Regional Airport, etc.

Some requirements are specific to MPOs. This Title VI Program document was generated to address the specific requirements that need to be fulfilled as part of the Title VI Program.

Program requirements are:

- Title VI Notice to the public
- Title VI Complaint Procedure

- Title VI Complaint Form
- List of transit-related Title VI investigations, complaints, and lawsuits
- Public Participation Plan
- Language Assistance Plan for Limited English Proficiency (LEP)
- Memberships of non-elected committees and councils
- Primary recipients & how agency monitors subrecipients
- Copy of board meeting minutes or resolution adopting Title VI Program
- Demographic Profile of the metropolitan area
- Maps showing distribution of state and federal funding for public transportation projects
- Analysis of our system of investments that identifies and addresses disparate impacts

FTA requires us to have this program, but they do not provide concurrence as PennDOT's Bureau of Equal Opportunity (BEO) is responsible for approving this Title VI Program document. Their staff reached out to Mr. Golembiewski with a few minor concerns. One of the more noteworthy concerns addresses our Notice to the Public that was adopted in 2016. When it was adopted, the Notice to the Public met FHWA requirements that it be all inclusive. Currently, FHWA and FTA want two specific policies: one addressing Title VI and another one being a general non-discrimination policy addressing everyone. Staff intend to generate these two policies, get them in front of the Technical and Coordinating Committees for adoption, and then adopt an updated, inclusive, correct Title VI Program at the July 2021 Coordinating Committee meeting. Mr. Golembiewski requested that this action be tabled.

Acting Chairman said the action is suspended for now. No motion is needed.

8. UPDATE ON PENNDOT PATHWAYS: DRAFT PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL LINKAGES (PEL) STUDY AND PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Mr. Piper stated that the Planning & Environmental Linkages Study is something PennDOT is developing that identifies and evaluates various options for alternative funding. The links to the full study and the executive summary are on the Planning Commission's webpage.

The chapters contained in the study are:

1. Identifies the purpose, need and goals
2. Background information on the current sources of PennDOT funding and expenditure needs
3. Compares revenue vs. needs and identifies funding gaps
4. Reviews previous studies that looked at funding options & identifies recommendations for early actions
5. Details other specific funding options
6. Identifies near, medium and long-term action plans for addressing funding gaps
7. Discusses the proposed methods to review & analyze impacts on low income & minority populations for many potential funding solutions
8. Presents the framework for considering potential mitigation strategies should a project proposed under the program be found to have impacts

There are a number of different funding alternatives being considered. They are: sales tax, fuel & gas tax, personal income tax, real estate tax, mileage-based fees, other taxes and fees, and various forms of tolling fees including the tolling of bridges. Mr. Piper stated that the study looks at ways to analyze each of these alternatives. The public review and comment period for this study began on April 29, 2021 and extends through June 1, 2021. The PennDOT webpage has more information.

Next Tuesday evening at 6 p.m. there will be a telephone public meeting and people can register through PennDOT in order to participate. The draft study and its results will be discussed. Based on comments received, PennDOT will issue a final PEL report. The meeting coming up will address all of the funding options and is not specifically related to the tolling of bridge programs. Each of the bridge projects will have a separate public outreach meeting that will be held later in the year to review the alternatives, recommendations and the impacts of a proposal. The I-78 Lenhartsville bridge project funding proposal meeting will be later this summer.

#### 9. COMMUTER SERVICES UPDATE

Mr. Boyer stated that they are in the middle of a few promotions. Within the Battle of the Chambers competitions, the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance won for the large size chambers. Lancaster won for the medium-sized chambers. This was an initiative to get the employees to track their trips and log into our system.

The Earth Day promotion was held in April. May is Bike Month, rebranded as 'Motorless May', and contains Bike Week.

Commuter Services put out a Request For Information regarding bike share across our 9-county region. Tandem responded and their response is being reviewed. A final report is being prepared to go to the 9 counties being served in our region. This is an initiative to help communities that used Zagster which went defunct or did not have a bike share at all. This was an initiative to identify options and create connectivity from a bike share perspective across the region. Bike share provides a first mile, last mile connection when using transit or other opportunities. That report should be out within the next 7-10 days.

Commuter Services' outreach staff has been doing things virtually and has been happy that companies are starting to open up their doors. There are Lunch & Learns and transportation days starting up again.

Acting Chairman McKeon noted that this is Mr. Golembiewski's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of commuting back and forth to work on his bicycle.

#### 10. MAJOR PROJECT STATUS REPORT

Mr. Piper gave a status report on the major projects.

## 11. OTHER BUSINESS

- Mr. Piper stated that he would like to recommend that the MPO authorize him to write Letters of Support for the proposed projects that are to move forward for consideration of earmark funds and have them entered into the record on behalf of the MPO.

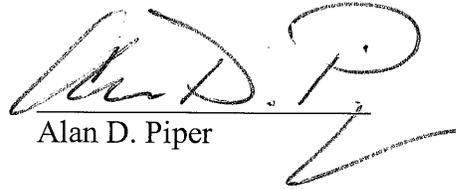
MOTION: Commissioner Barnhardt made a motion to authorize Mr. Piper to write Letters of Support for proposed projects on behalf of the MPO. Mr. Rudderow seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Ms. Reed did not vote as she had to leave prior to the conclusion of the meeting.

- PennDOT put out a survey to obtain Pennsylvanians' feedback of the potential introduction of automated vehicles onto Pennsylvania highways. The survey runs for another week. This is an opportunity to let PennDOT know what citizens think about using automated vehicles across the state.
- There is an article in the packet regarding the Pennsylvania Turnpike addressing their Long-Range Plan and the mention about potentially scaling it back. Based on the return of traffic, they have now added \$200 million to their Capital programs. Most of their focus is widening the Mainline Turnpike to three lanes. They are advancing out from King of Prussia to Morgantown. In advance of the actual widening, there are bridge projects that will need to be completed to widen the bridges that go over the Turnpike. The first part we might see out of these programs would be the reconstruction of the Rt. 10 bridge over the Turnpike on the eastern edge of Morgantown, and to the east of that where Twin Valley Road goes over the Turnpike to get into the back end of the Morgantown Industrial Park.
- There is the potential to have a diverging diamond interchange at the West Shore Bypass where Penn Avenue and the bypass meet. PennDOT just opened one in Lancaster County at the US 222 interchange with US 322 at the Ephrata exit, which gives people an opportunity to try it.
- There is a second proposal for a diverging diamond interchange on US 222 at Broadcasting Road. It was related to the proposed development of a parcel across US 222 from the Penn State Berks Campus.
- The group of MPOs for the proposed freight plan has prepared a submission to PennDOT. The proposal was sent on May 1, 2021 for consideration. There has been no response yet if PennDOT will fund the project.
- Notice was received from PennDOT that there will be a new round of projects under the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). This is the program where municipalities can apply for bike ways, trails, etc. The application period begins in June and applications will be due in October 2021. \$18 million will be available statewide.

12. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Rudderow made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Barnhardt seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 2:09 p.m.

Date: 7/15/21

  
Alan D. Piper