

READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY
MINUTES OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY
NOVEMBER 4, 2021

ATTENDANCE

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Chris Kufro, PennDOT 5-0, Chair*
David Alas, PennDOT Central Office
Alan Piper, Berks County Planning Commission, MPO Secretary
Michael Golembiewski, Berks County Planning Commission
Dave Kilmer, SCTA
Tim Krall, City of Reading

NOT PARTICIPATING

Terry Sroka - Reading Regional Airport Authority
Stan Rugis - City of Reading

OTHERS

Amanda Leindecker, PennDOT 5-0
Scott Vottero, PennDOT 5-0
Vanessa Koenigkramer, PennDOT 5-0
Jeff Rai, PennDOT 5-0
Mike Donchez, PennDOT 5-0
Ashley Showers, Berks County Planning Commission
Regina Zdradzinski, Berks County Planning Commission
Amanda Timochenko, Berks County Planning Commission
Devon Hain, Berks County Planning Commission
Laura Mursch, Berks County Planning Commission
Shanice Ellison, Berks County Planning Commission
Matt Boyer, Commuter Services of PA
Marta Gabriel, Sen. Toomey
Paul Gruber, Shoemakersville Borough
Heather Berger, Berks County Information Systems

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Piper took a verbal roll call of the committee members. Chairman Kufro then called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

2. BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

There was no business from the floor.

3. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON MINUTES FROM TECHNICAL COMMITTEE OF SEPTEMBER 2, 2021

Chairman Kufro asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the Technical Committee meeting of September 2, 2021.

MOTION: Mr. Alas made a motion to approve the minutes from the Technical Committee meeting of September 2, 2021. Mr. Golembiewski seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4. 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 August 27, 2021 to October 27, 2021.

Part 1 (Agenda Item 4 – Constraint Table)

- There are 14 Administrative Actions– each of these involve shifting funding among existing projects to reflect current needs and to address the FFY year-end closeout so money is not lost in the NHPP, STP, STU & 185-581 categories.
- There are 2 Statewide Administrative Actions which relate to the I-78 & Lenhartsville Bridge project.
- There are no Amendments.

Part 2 – Agenda Item 4A – Smoketown Road Bridge Amendment

- subsided 9 inches from its approaches as a result from recent storms.
- inspections revealed that structure needs to be demolished & replaced with a new structure.
- Preliminary Engineering Phase will be added to 2021 RATS TIP (\$490,000). The funding source will be from the Highway Bridge Reserve Line Item. Subsequent phases will be added to the 2023 TIP.

Mr. Krall asked if there is a federal match to this engineering phase. Ms. Leindecker said the project is not eligible for federal funding.

MOTION: Mr. Piper made a motion to recommend the proposed amendment for approval from the Coordinating Committee to add this project phase to the RATS 2021 TIP. Mr. Kilmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

5. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON 2022 RATS COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE

Mr. Piper stated that the proposal is to continue with a similar meeting schedule with the Technical Committee meetings being held on the first Thursday of each month and the Coordinating Committee meetings being held on the third Thursday of every other month beginning in January 2022. No dates were required to be shifted due to holidays.

The only question would be as to whether there would be consideration to going back to “in person” meetings. It is proposed to continue meeting virtually. If we should have the opportunity to re-evaluate that choice in the future, we would have to readvertise the change. Mr. Kilmer asked if it is known what the other MPOs are doing. He said that Lancaster County went back to “in person” meetings. Mr. Piper said some MPOs are remaining virtual and some continue using the hybrid platform. Chairman Kufro stated that the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission is remaining virtual and the NEPA region is beginning to hold hybrid meetings. Mr. Alas said that many MPOs across the state contain a virtual element, but many have added a hybrid element as well.

Chairman Kufro suggested a change to the meeting schedule. The Coordinating Committee meeting, scheduled for November 17, 2022, is the same day as a major PennDOT Conference with the construction industry. He asked to combine the November 3rd Technical Committee meeting with the November 17th Coordinating Committee meeting and hold it on November 10th as a Joint Committee meeting. The committee had no concerns or questions regarding this change in the meeting schedule.

MOTION: Mr. Kilmer made a motion to recommend approval of the proposed schedule with the November revisions and a recommendation to continue meeting virtually to the Coordinating Committee. Mr. Alas seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

6. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON DRAFT FY 2022-2024 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP) DEVELOPMENT AND SUBMISSION

Mr. Golembiewski stated that, at the last meeting, staff proposed two major changes to the UPWP. One change was in the organization of the document itself and the other change regarded billing and other processes in house. Central Office showed concerns regarding the change in billing. Instead of having the last Technical Committee meeting, we met as an informal steering committee to go over the draft UPWP. Sixteen people attended that meeting that represented transit, Berks County Planning staff, the District, Central Office and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Representation from Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was not available to attend the meeting. However, Ms. Crobak, from FHWA, did provide comments.

Although we were able to reduce the existing 9 Work Areas down to 5, we still need to maintain the original 20 Tasks for PennDOT invoicing and documentation requirements. The new Title VI Compliant Statement and the Non-Discrimination Compliant Statement were added. Instead of having 2 major funding charts for each year, they were broken down by year for each work area. The dollar figures have not been added yet. The Work Area timelines are a federal requirement. FHWA requires documentation identifying the deliverable products and the associated responsible parties for the deliverable products.

Since the Work Areas and Tasks will be combined, the current numbering scheme used by staff for billing and invoicing purposes will be changed. The invoicing process will remain the same.

It was recommended at the informal steering committee meeting to contact other MPOs to see how their UPWPs were developed. We are modeling this UPWP after York County MPO's UPWP document. Their UPWP is much smaller, but their billing is much more detailed than what we already do. Mr. Mosca, from Central Office, is in concurrence with the proposed document itself, while still maintaining the billing and invoicing we already do.

General Administration and Coordination is the first Work Area. These tasks are primarily the responsibility of Berks County Planning Commission staff on behalf of RATS and PennDOT.

Plans and Programs is the second Work Area listed. This is where the Long Range Transportation Plan, TIP, Congestion Management Plan, Freight Plan, potential Passenger Rail Study and other plans will be placed.

Work Area 3 is Data and Technology. This contains traffic counting, travel model development and validation, electric vehicles, and system reviews and mapping. This is where we change functional classification systems after new Census data comes out as well as reviewing that Census data for our plans and programs.

Work Area 4 is Transit Assistance. This process remains the same, however more detail has been incorporated. In review, Mr. Glisson provided comments regarding some of the text in this section. Those recommended edits have been completed.

Work Area 5 is The Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). This area relates to working with PennDOT to market and assist in facilitating the LTAP program.

MOTION: Mr. Kilmer made a motion to recommend to the Coordinating Committee that this is forwarded to FHWA only for their required 30-day review prior to formal adoption in January 2022. Mr. Krall seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

7. UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATION ON RATS PARTICIPATION IN EASTERN PA FREIGHT ALLIANCE REGIONAL FREIGHT PLAN

Mr. Piper stated that an approval was received from PennDOT to proceed with the program back in June 2021. Since that time, the five MPOs (Lackawanna/Luzerne, NEPA, Lehigh Valley, RATS and Lebanon) have worked together to develop an agreement to be signed that coordinates our commitment to the project and identifies the funding splits. It is a \$350,000 plan; \$70,000 comes from the MPOs with the split based on population and the balance comes from PennDOT.

A draft scope of work has been developed and is currently being refined. As the agreed upon contracting agent for the alliance, the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission will advertise for a consultant in the next several weeks. It is anticipated that responses should be returned shortly after the beginning of the year, at which point they would go through the selection process with the intent to start the study early in 2022.

MOTION: Mr. Golembiewski made a motion to recommend formal endorsement of the MPO to participate in this agreement and have our Executive Director, David N. Hunter Sr., sign on behalf of Berks County to guarantee our participation in the Berks County local share. Mr. Kilmer seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

8. UPDATE ON FFY 2023 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Piper stated that staff met with the District back in September. Key priority projects were identified, project priorities were re-evaluated and options for new projects were considered. Additional meetings have been scheduled to continue aligning TIP projects with dollars available, and to ensure consistency with our Performance Measures and other criteria.

The intent is to have a draft TIP project listing by the end of 2021 and move forward in 2022 with developing the various components of the document needed for approval.

Mr. Piper stated that, as part of the TIP development process, the public was solicited in two ways. The first way was through the State Transportation Commission survey in March 2021 that was conducted as part of the their 12-Year Program Update. The second way was through forms that were sent to every municipality in Berks County in September 2021 that allowed municipalities to identify their transportation related wants and needs. October 29, 2021 was the cutoff date for any submissions. There were not a whole lot of new requests. Former requests are still in the inventory and continue to be considered. There were several minor requests, which will be reviewed with the District to see where they fit into the overall program. We need to see what can be done with the limited dollars available. Should there be a change over time in the amount of state and federal revenues, there would be an agreed upon date for when the new dollars would take effect. The TIP and LRTP would then be adjusted accordingly.

9. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON PRIMARY HIGHWAY FREIGHT NETWORK REVISION REQUEST

Mr. Piper stated that there is a limited amount of time that this can be accomplished. He stated that, when the FAST-Act was written a few years ago, the Primary Highway Freight System was created. In that, there were several highways for moving freight that were identified and prioritized for funding availability using the National Highway Freight Program. The Primary Highway Freight System designation also is designed to reflect the most critical portions of our highway infrastructure system and focus where the state would direct the National Highway Freight Program funding. It is also a consideration in any discretionary funding and elevates those highways to a higher level of consideration.

The Statewide System consists primarily of Interstate Highways and provides links to what are known as Intermodal facilities. In Berks County, the Primary Highway Freight System was defined as I-78 across the whole northern tier; the Turnpike across the southern tier; and, I-176 extending from Morgantown up to the Reading area and over to the Intermodal Transfer Facility in Montello. That network was established prior to the completion of the US 222 South project. It was based on the original designation of Lancaster Avenue as US 222. It is proposed to request that this route be re-designated. The

original act noted that changes to the routes could only be made at the end of a 5-year review process, which we are currently in. The opportunity to recommend changes and submit the request to FHWA only extends into December 2021. The proposal is that the section along Lancaster Avenue through Shillington up to US 222 be removed and that the new route follow the limited access highway the full distance from I-176 along the West Shore Bypass to where it meets US 222, and then follows US 222 back down to Rt. 724 and into the Intermodal Transfer Facility in Montello. This is more compatible with the movement of heavy trucks. It also maximizes our ability to have both the West Shore Bypass and portions of US 222 be included in that Freight System identification. The National Freight System dollars that are coming into PennDOT now are being used on the PA Turnpike, but this might increase our chance to receive Discretionary Funding from the BUILD or the INFRA Grant Programs for the portion of those two corridors.

Mr. Piper discussed this issue with Central Office and FHWA a week ago. They understood and agreed with the concept of the request. Mr. Krall stated that what Mr. Piper is saying makes a lot of sense. He asked if there are any negative implications by switching the route. Does Shillington Borough have objections? Mr. Piper said that it is not a designated route, but rather a matter of incorporating the right highways into the network.

Mr. Piper stated that there are other levels of consideration that come into play. The National Highway Freight Network consists of four separate components. They are: 1) Primary Highway Freight System; 2) Critical Urban Freight Corridors; 3) Critical Rural Freight Corridors; and, 4) Portions of the Interstate System that are not part of any of the other systems. The potential exists that if we are successful in the redesignation of this route as the primary corridor, the Lancaster Avenue and the Rt. 724 pieces could be re-evaluated for inclusion as part of the Critical Urban Connector. That would be completed during a different submission process.

Mr. Krall asked if the redesignation would help with funding or advancing the US 422 project. Mr. Piper said that currently the state is using all of its National Freight System dollars on the Interstate System. The redesignation could help if we tried to get Discretionary Funding or if additional dollars became available from the Federal Government that focused on that program. Mr. Krall said that is worth considering.

MOTION: Mr. Kilmer made a motion that we make a recommendation to the Coordinating Committee to proceed with requesting to change the designation. Mr. Krall seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

10. UPDATE ON TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVE SET-ASIDE PROGRAM

Mr. Piper stated that this is a new cycle year. We went through the new process with PennDOT where applicants had to pre-register. There are five projects that have gone through this pre-application phase. Since that time, the Cumru Township project relating to storm water improvements was withdrawn because they were not far enough along on their project development to have a successful application at this time.

The four applicants are:

- Albright College – Pedestrian safety initiatives in the area located in Northeast Reading
- Sinking Spring Borough – Complete Street improvements related to their redevelopment project
- Governor Mifflin School District – Pedestrian and sidewalk improvements in their growing campus in Shillington Borough
- Ontelaunee Township – 2 Stormwater management improvements

Because we are a large MPO, there are dollars directly assigned to us to distribute. These projects will need to be reviewed and recommendations will need to be made on which projects we would like to fund out of the local allocation. Priority recommendations for anything else need to be made to the statewide funding pool. There is a total of approximately \$540,000 to allocate locally over the next two years.

Staff is proposing to either schedule a review at the December Technical Committee meeting or schedule a separate meeting at some point in December. Comments and recommendations are required to be sent to PennDOT by January 7, 2022. If we coordinate and make recommendations in December, we can bounce it off the Coordinating Committee for feedback in January 2022.

Mr. Krall asked if there is a need for the committee to review and score the projects for the next meeting. Mr. Piper said packets will be sent to the members of the Technical Committee soon for review.

11. UPDATE OF I-78 LENHARTSVILLE BRIDGE TOLLING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Piper stated that a notification went out stating that PennDOT opened the public comment period for the replacement of the Lenhartsville Bridge on I-78 and the potential for tolling of that facility.

There is a virtual public meeting that began on October 25, 2021 and extends through November 24, 2021. There was also an “in person” meeting on November 1, 2021 that was held at the Kempton Community Center. Chairman Kufro stated that the meeting had a decent turnout. There were good comments and good feedback. The consultant and design team will pull together the comments from the person meeting and the virtual plans display. The comments will be addressed and will be sent FHWA for review. This bridge is still a candidate for tolling. As such, the design team continues to develop the plans with tolling facilities included in the designs. Impacts on the local communities as part of the diversion route have been identified.

12. PENNDOT UPDATES ON HIGHWAY AND BRIDGE PROJECTS

Chairman Kufro asked if there are any questions on the Highway and Bridge projects in the packet. He stated that he or Mr. Vottero from PennDOT can answer any questions at any time regarding these projects.

There were no questions asked.

13. COMMUTER SERVICES UPDATE

Mr. Boyer stated that there are two separate-two-minute reports today. The normal outreach report is outlined to a certain degree on the monthly activity report. Some of the familiar names of the partners that were visited are: Alcon Labs, F.M. Brown, Alvernia University, Reading Public Library, St. Joseph's Hospital, and Tower Health. Some of them are operating in a post-COVID world.

There is an upcoming event in November at the Berks County Jobs Fair. Commuter Services assists HR Departments who are trying to retain and recruit people for transportation, which can be an obstacle.

The transportation program is often used as a benefit for employers for their employees. The items listed reflect the statistics for the past month of the Commuter Services Program. It shows the new commuters who have joined the Commute PA Program, the number of trips they are tracking, the number of dollars saved, and the number of miles taken off the road. All of these are key components and core activities of the Commuter Services Program, which is funded primarily by Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality. The mission remains to continue to remove vehicle miles and clean up air quality.

The Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership (SRTP) recently completed a transition from a large project office to a telework base. The Commuter Services outreach team is now 100% telework with storage space remaining in the York area. The next SRTP board meeting will be held on November 17, 2021.

Mr. Boyer gave a second presentation. He stated that the SRTP is in the process of trying to comply with a request from PennDOT to complete the budget a year in advance. This is to bring Commuter Services in line with the general TIP process. The SRTP is listed as a line item on the TIP. For Commuter Services, it goes back 17 years; for RATS, it goes back to 2009, when RATS joined the program.

Other than CMAQ Line Item funding, there is also STP Line Items to help with funding Commuter Services through the Franklin County and Adams County partners. The amounts contributed on the TIP are identified using Census population. Each of the nine counties contribute a portion of their CMAQ or STP dollars to the SRTP to run the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs based on population.

Mr. Boyer stated, as part of the last Reading MPO TIP, the funding for the SRTP was frozen at the amount of \$275,000 per year for years 1 & 2. Mr. Boyer asks for consideration of the following:

- 1) Year 1 of the TIP: anticipated contribution the SRTP would normally receive under the historical calculations of how an MPO funds them would be \$277,000 from RATS. RATS provided a Line Item at \$275,000 with a shortage of \$2,800.

- 2) Year 2 of the TIP: anticipated contribution from RATS would be \$281,000 from RATS based on population. If we anticipate the \$275,000 flat line, it would leave a funding detriment of \$6,100.

Mr. Boyer asked for information regarding what shortfall amounts might exist, and what other MPOs might need to contribute for those MPOs unable to meet the previous criteria that was established. He is asking the Technical Committee's consideration, when financially available, for returning to the SRTP historical funding levels we had over the past years.

Mr. Golembiewski, chairman of the SRTP, stated that out of all the MPOs involved on the board and provide funding, Reading is the only MPO that froze their amount in the current TIP. Commuter Services does appreciate everything received from the MPO. He added to Mr. Boyer's request to return to the funding obligations as previously submitted. Mr. Piper said this request will need to be considered as part of the overall CMAQ funding process.

Ms. Leindecker asked if the CMAQ funding is eligible forever or is it limited to so many years like the Freeway Service Patrol. Mr. Golembiewski said as long as Berks County remains an ozone non-attainment area, we continue to receive CMAQ funding. Mr. Piper asked if the rules changed at all stating that there is a limited amount of time to use CMAQ for this. Mr. Boyer stated that TDM programs used for education do not have a time frame limitation. Other programs may have a 3-5-year limitation for receiving CMAQ funding. Because there is ongoing education of the public, there is no limitation for CMAQ funding for this program. This is guidance from FHWA across the United States that was researched thoroughly over the years.

Ms. Leindecker asked if PennDOT will be given the desired numbers to work into their active workshops. Mr. Boyer said that he is working directly with Mr. Green from Central Office to get an invoice from the SRTP. In prior years, there was an amount identified for SRTP programs and was split up around the MPOs and placed on their TIP. FHWA would like PennDOT to have an invoice from SRTP regarding what their costs would be in the future year, thereby, showing the invoice specific to each region.

Commuter Services is anticipating passing a budget at the November 17th SRTP meeting which would be delivered to Mr. Green in advance of the December 31, 2021 deadline. This will allow the MPO to move forward with the TIP in the nine counties they work with. Mr. Piper asked if this is to be done for one year. Mr. Boyer stated he was asked to prepare this information for the 2022-2023 year. Mr. Piper stated that, if we want to continue to maintain this program at that historic growing rate, the MPO would need something to put in the budget for the balance of the 4-year TIP and potentially beyond. Mr. Boyer said that could easily be done. Please know that the budget numbers submitted by SRTP include a 1% increase from each MPO each year. It is anticipated that the new numbers will be very close and not much larger than that percentage moving forward.

Mr. Golembiewski suggested Mr. Boyer get the estimate to Mr. Piper by November 17, 2021. Chairman Kufro agreed and it will be taken into consideration.

14. OTHER BUSINESS

- Mr. Piper stated that staff received an email from Ms. Naomi Crimm, a planner with the City of Reading. The City of Reading has received funding to complete an active transportation plan. They are requesting either Mr. Piper or someone else from the MPO to participate with them in the plan's development, by either participating on their Steering Committee or individual stakeholder interviews. Staff recommends that Mr. Golembiewski participate with the City of Reading to coordinate their plan with the County's Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan. Mr. Krall was not aware that Ms. Crimm sent Mr. Piper this email. He thinks it is a good idea to include Mr. Golembiewski in this committee due to his experience. Mr. Krall will be involved as well.
- Mr. Piper stated that FHWA and PennDOT have been working together on an Alternate Fuels corridor deployment plan for the I-78/I-81 Corridor going up from the Maryland border through Harrisburg, through Berks County and the Lehigh Valley to New Jersey. The intent is to put in place facilities that are consistent with allowing alternative fuel vehicles to have a regularly spaced distance for them to potentially refuel using either natural gas or electric. There are enough facilities in place on that corridor right now that there is no need for any special outreach regarding the natural gas facilities. Gaps in the system have been identified where there could be a need for priority locations for what is known as DC or fast charge electric infrastructure. One of those specifically targeted areas is for the area of the I-78/Rt.61 Interchange in Hamburg.

This information was received back in October. We took the memo and the associated fact sheet announcing that there is funding from PennDOT and DEP available for businesses along those corridors to install fast charging systems and sent it to the municipalities along that corridor. It was recommended that they share this information with any businesses within their communities that may be interested in this program. The grant program closes at the end of January 2022.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that there are six people on YouTube from the public and no comments.

Mr. Piper stated that the next meeting is scheduled for December 2, 2021.

15. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Kilmer made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Krall seconded the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 2:44 PM.

Date: 1/6/22


Alan D. Piper, Secretary