

DRAFT  
READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY  
MINUTES OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY  
JANUARY 6, 2022

ATTENDANCE

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Scott Vottero, PennDOT 5-0, Acting Chair\*  
David Alas, PennDOT Central Office  
Alan Piper, Berks County Planning Commission, MPO Secretary  
Michael Golembiewski, Berks County Planning Commission  
Jeff Glisson, SCTA  
Tim Krall, City of Reading

NOT PARTICIPATING

Vacant - Reading Regional Airport Authority  
Vacant - City of Reading

OTHERS

Chelsea Beytas, Federal Transit Administration  
Amanda Leindecker, PennDOT 5-0  
Mike Donchez, PennDOT 5-0  
David Hunter, Berks County Planning Commission  
Ashley Showers, Berks County Planning Commission  
Regina Zdradzinski, Berks County Planning Commission  
Amanda Timochenko, Berks County Planning Commission  
Laura Mursch, Berks County Planning Commission  
Shanice Ellison, Berks County Planning Commission  
Matt Boyer, Commuter Services of PA  
Joe Romano, Larson Design Group  
Heather Berger, Berks County Information Systems  
Malcolm Townes, Berks County Information Systems

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Piper took a verbal roll call of the committee members. Acting Chairman Vottero then called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. He said that Mr. Kufro is temporarily assigned to District 8 as Acting District Executive. For now, Mr. Vottero will fill his position as Assistant District Executive for Design at District 5-0 and serve as Acting Chairman of the Technical Committee.

2. BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

Mr. Piper stated that Mr. Stan Rugis resigned his position as Public Works Director from the City of Reading. A replacement is needed, and the City of Reading anticipates making an

appointment to that position at their re-organizational meeting at the end of January. They have tentatively identified Mr. Kyle Zeiber, from the Public Works Department, to fill that position. Mr. Krall said that Mr. Zeiber was just assigned to be Acting Public Works Director for the City of Reading. He is interested to join RATS, but needs time consider whether it will be him or someone else to fill the position that Mr. Rugis left.

Mr. Piper stated that Mr. Sroka resigned from the Reading Regional Airport Authority. We need to see who is nominated to take his place on the Technical Committee. Appointments need to be made by the Reading Regional Airport Authority.

3. REVIEW/APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 4, 2021, TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

Acting Chairman Vottero asked if there were any questions or comments on the November 4, 2021 Technical Committee meeting minutes. There were no questions or comments.

MOTION: Mr. Golembiewski made a motion to approve the minutes from November 4, 2021, as presented. Mr. Alas seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Piper stated that, normally, nominations would have been done at the November meeting. He stated that the current slate of officers is the PennDOT Assistant District Executive for Design as Chairman, and the PennDOT Central Office representative is the Vice Chairman.

MOTION: Mr. Piper made a motion to re-nominate both positions for those seats. Mr. Krall 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 October 28, 2021 to December 22, 2021.

- There are four (4) Administrative Actions – these deal with adjustments for revised design estimates for utility costs/estimates and the return of de-obligated funds to the region.
- There are two (2) Statewide Administrative Actions – each of these involve shifting funding among existing projects to reflect current needs.
- There are no Amendments.

6. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON DRAFT FFY 2022-2024 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP)

Mr. Golembiewski stated that the Draft UPWP was sent to Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) after the November RATS

MPO meeting for the required 30-day public comment period. We did receive comments back from PennDOT Central Office, FTA and FHWA. Most of the comments were minor grammatical issues.

Mr. Golembiewski reviewed the comments received and the actions taken to address them. They are:

- Mr. Mosca, from PennDOT Central Office, said he was pleased with the document. There were items missing including the overall financial charts for both years. We had them individually by work areas, but he wanted to see the charts overall for the entire document for each of the two years. The MPO included those charts. As well, the timeline charts were broken out for each individual work area, but he wanted to see them as one separate, complete chart for each of the two years. The charts were included. Also, the ten Federal Planning Factors were missing. This was a new requirement that was overlooked.
- Ms. Crobak, from FHWA, made comments that echoed what Mr. Mosca had recommended along with a concern that we did not show any projects that were considered as carryover projects. This is a new requirement that was added from FHWA. This was included with the document in each of the five work areas.
- Ms. Beytas, from FTA, echoed the prior two individuals' comments as well as pointing out other grammatical and typographical errors, which were fixed. There were references to federal legislation that was not included. The MPO included that as much as possible.

Mr. Golembiewski explained the layout of the work document. The nine work areas were combined into five while keeping the twenty original tasks. The fiscal charts are included for each year. After the fiscal charts, the timeline is identified along with carryover projects, deliverable projects are identified and the responsible party for completing them, and the text for each of the five work areas is included. This layout was done for each of the five work areas, as well as adding the overall charts requested in the front by year.

Ms. Beytas stated that she gave praise to RATS for their development of the UPWP and being able to streamline the document compared to the current UPWP. It is a nice document with great detail and background. The timeline was nice to see for FTA regarding the anticipated schedule for the different planning documents and planning procedures.

Mr. Alas stated that Mr. Mosca was not able to attend the meeting today but said that RATS did a great job with the work program and is looking forward to funding great products for RATS.

MOTION: Mr. Glisson made a motion that the Technical Committee recommend the adoption of the draft UPWP as presented to the Coordinating Committee. Mr. Piper seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

7. UPDATE ON FFY 2023-2026 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (Highway/Bridge and Transit)

Mr. Piper stated that we were required to have the draft project listing done and submitted to PennDOT by the end of the calendar year. South Central Transit Authority (SCTA) completed their draft transit project listing and provided us with that information for inclusion in the submission to PennDOT. Our development of the highway and bridge draft project listing began back in August or September 2021. There was a total of 11 virtual meetings with the District, Central Office and the MPO to develop the draft Highway and Bridge Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

Mr. Glisson gave an update on the Transit TIP. He stated that, for each Federal Fiscal Year (FFY), beginning in 2023, SCTA gave a list of projects that proposed to advance in each of the upcoming Federal Fiscal Years. This is fiscally constrained with Financial Guidance that was provided to SCTA. In each of the four Federal Fiscal Years, the authorities projected to receive \$3.7 million in Federal 5307 Funds, which is the standard source of grant funds received from the FTA. Federal 5339 funds are also received and SCTA is projected to receive \$425,000 in those funds on an annual basis. The source for these proposed projects come out of the Transit Assess Management Plan documentation and the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

SCTA is focused on maintaining a state of good repair for our system. For example, making sure fixed-route buses are replaced at the end of their 12-year useful life cycle and share-ride vehicles at the end of their 5-year useful life cycle. SCTA has been investing in their facilities to ensure they are maintained. There is a scale used under the Transit Asset Management Program for ranking facilities. The goal is for those facilities to be ranked as a 4 or 5 on that scale. These projects will help achieve our Performance Targets that were established under the Transit Asset Management Program. Funds are invested in vehicle replacement and in facility upgrades and improvements. There is solar panel installation planned at the Operations Center and the Berks Transportation Center (BTC). Solar panels would be installed on the rooftops of both buildings. This will have a positive impact on the operating budget and will reduce the cost of electric usage.

Mr. Glisson stated that there are other additional improvements identified and proposed and we continue to focus on investing in bus shelters.

Based on the proposed listed projects, the total investment would be \$61 million over the four years. A significant part of those funds is in the operating assistance that is allocated to BARTA from the State (Section 1513) which is allocated based on a formula that includes revenue, ridership, and population.

Mr. Piper noted that there is nothing included on the table in the CMAQ Line Item as this time. In prior years we had allocated \$900,000 per year to SCTA for vehicle replacements. Based on the new funding, that allocation was not necessary during these four years. Mr. Glisson agreed, stating that based on new funding through the Infrastructure Bill and past investments of funds in bus replacements, SCTA does not anticipate needing additional CMAQ

funds programmed to fund our bus replacements in Reading. We will not need to replace or order new buses for the Reading system until the 2026 – 2027 time frame. We are looking to have CMAQ funds programmed for bus replacement after these next 4 years because there will be a larger group of buses that will need to be replaced. In order to replace those buses within the 12-year time frame, we would need the CMAQ funds to be programmed, because the \$3.7 million might not be sufficient funding to cover the cost of replacing those buses.

If there is an opportunity to expand service in the future, it would likely require the purchase of additional buses. In that situation, we might come back to the MPO to discuss providing programming funding in the future.

Mr. Piper stated that we do have funding programmed beginning in FFY 2027 and throughout the later years. There is \$450,000 in FFY 2027. After FFY 2027, the programmed amount is \$900,000. There are two more TIP updates between now and then. The programmed amount for bus replacement can be reviewed during those next two TIP cycles, and any adjustments can be made at that time.

MOTION: Mr. Piper made a motion to accept and forward the draft Transit TIP to the Coordinating Committee for their consideration. Mr. Krall seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Piper showed a chart that analyzed the funding allocations by funding source and program cycle between the FFY 2019-2022 TIP, FFY 2021-2024 TIP, FFY 2023-2026 (prior to the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), and FFY 2023-2026 (after the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act). Beginning with the 2021-2024 TIP, money was moved to the Interstate Program. The FFY 2023-2026 TIP development process began with allocations that were still based on the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act funding. After the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), new allocations were projected for the FFY 2023-2026 TIP.

On average during this TIP, there is just under \$60 million a year for the next four years. That is a 30-40% increase over the prior TIP. If we would have gone with the change between the 2021 TIP and the pre-Jobs Act TIP, we would have been losing money. If we compare the current TIP to before moving the money to the Interstate, on average, we are still 14-17% behind that per year over the next eight years.

FFY 2023 program funding shows an increase in almost all of the categories when compared to FFY 2021. Urban funds increased approximately 13%, the Transportation Alternatives Program funding increased 140-150%, CMAQ funding increased 10%, and Safety money increased 33-45%. There is a new Bridge Investment Program that was put in place that goes beyond the regular bridge program. That gave us \$6.7 million a year to spend on bridges that are on the Federal Aid System. As a part of the Bridge Investment Program, there was an additional set-aside of 15% (approximately \$1.6 million per year) that went into the off-system bridge funding category. There was also an increase in funding to the off-system bridges as a part of the regular formula. This resulted in over a 100% increase in funding that became

available for off-system bridges, which are bridges that are part of the state or local system that is not part of the overall Federal Aid System.

Mr. Piper said that the state highway and state bridge funding is down between 9% and 15%.

On the Federal side, Surface Transportation Program (STP) funding increases modestly averaging about 7%. PennDOT elected not to shift any additional funding to the Interstate Program beyond those commitments from FFY 2021. As such, the National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) funding increased significantly averaging gains of over 81% over the TIP and nearly 195% over the following four years compared to the FFY 2021 program.

Mr. Piper stated during the initial meetings, carryover projects were looked at and identified as priority projects. Throughout the meetings, projects were identified and discussed relating to safety, congestion, and bridges. Follow-up meetings were held with FHWA relating to potential CMAQ eligible projects. Mr. Piper went through the list and identified projects that were on the prior TIP and addressed those project standings for the current draft TIP.

Mr. Piper stated that PennDOT added three new line items to the draft TIP. They are:

- 1) Bridge Consultants Assistance – helps deliver bridge projects
- 2) Geo-Tech In-House Assistance
- 3) Guiderail Projects throughout Berks County

Mr. Piper reviewed new projects that were added to the draft TIP. There were new highway, safety, congestion, and bridge projects added.

Mr. Piper said we assign the CMAQ funds to projects that made improvements to our air quality. The safety dollars are based on projects that are generated using the Highway Safety Improvement Program criteria. With the Bridge Program, we are looking to maintain as many bridges as possible using the overlay bundles and the preservation groupings, and then addressing those bridges that need replacing on both the higher and lower system. There are several paving projects that were looked at in the program, as well.

Action Chairman Vottero thanked Mr. Piper and Ms. Leindecker and staff members for doing a great job and he appreciates everything that was done. Mr. Krall asked if the additional projects are due to the additional infrastructure funding. Mr. Piper said that projects added were not broken out by post IJA funding because there were going to be additions to the program anyway. However, a majority of the new projects added were a result of that additional post-IJA funding. A large amount of road projects would not have happened without that additional funding. The extra \$8 million per year for the Bridge Investment Program will go a long way to improving bridges throughout the area. Most of the money went to PennDOT's Off-system bridges and not local bridges. We still need to find a way to get money to the municipalities for their bridge programs. Additional increases in other programs are anticipated as we progress through the process.

Mr. Piper said that the District staff is what makes all of this work. The average person has no idea how complex this process is to take the available dollars and spread them out among the different projects/phases and make it come out balanced in every one of the fiscal years over a 12-year period. They do an incredible amount of work and do a great job.

MOTION: Mr. Golembiewski made a motion to recommend forwarding this project list to the Coordinating Committee. Mr. Krall seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

8. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES SET-ASIDE PROGRAM PROJECT FUNDING

Mr. Piper stated that municipal recommendations were solicited for Transportation Alternatives Set-Aside (TASA) funding through PennDOT. TASA funding is available for ten different categories of non-traditional transportation-type projects. The program has two sources of funds with an allocation to RATS and the other is money that is available statewide. This was another program that received an increase in funding. Prior to the passage of the IJA, RATS was allocated approximately \$550,000 over two years. After the passage of the IJA, the RATS allocation increased to \$1.4 million available over two years. PennDOT's funding increased as well.

The projects were evaluated through a two-part submission process this year. Municipalities and other sponsors put together a draft proposal of their project which was submitted to PennDOT. Each applicant then met with PennDOT and the MPO to discuss their proposal. They were given tips on their scope of work, associated costs, and a better understanding of the required federal involvement part of the process. The applicants were allowed to revise their application and re-submit them by mid-October 2021. After the revised applications were received for our review and recommendations, this committee met in December to review and score the projects. The following rankings and recommendations are:

1. Governor Mifflin School District submitted an application in the amount of \$700,000 for pedestrian improvements along Waverly Street in Shillington Borough related to their campus expansion. This project was highly ranked by the Technical Committee. Following our review and ranking, Governor Mifflin received \$620,000 from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) under their Multimodal Transportation Fund. They did not need the full amount of funding that was requested from us. We discussed the possibility of offering them the balance of the funding for their project to get to their \$700,000 estimate. The Multimodal Funds are state funds; the TASA funds are federal dollars. With federal funding, the whole process must proceed as if it were a federally funded project. Governor Mifflin decided to withdraw their request for TASA funds and will proceed with Multimodal Funding and local funds to complete the project.
2. Albright College – Proposal to make pedestrian improvements in the neighborhood around their campus with pedestrian crossings and facilities in that area. They were requesting \$726,000.

3. Ontelaunee Township – Requested \$230,000 to do improvements relating to treating stormwater runoff in the township.
4. Sinking Spring – Proposal to do Complete Streets and streetscape improvements along their Columbia Avenue Extension project being proposed in the borough. This was not a bad idea but needs to be ready to go to construction by fall 2023. This project needs to be designed yet and is not appropriate to be funded at this time.
5. Cumru Township – Submitted a project to look at a stormwater project on the Wyomissing Creek. There is a significant flooding issue involved. This is too early in the process, so they voluntarily withdrew their project for consideration at this time. They will resubmit the application in the future.

Mr. Piper stated that the Technical Committee recommended to fully fund the proposed projects for Albright College at \$168,475, and for Ontelaunee Township at \$233,705. This totals \$402,180 that would be funded from the available TASA funds in our region. We are recommending retaining the balance of the remaining funds in a TASA Line Item in order to apply the remaining funds to current projects that may go over budget or for future projects, subject to eligibility and readiness.

The Sinking Spring application will be forwarded to PennDOT with a recommendation that the project concept is acceptable at this time, but the timing of the request is too early in the process based on the current state of planning for the road on which the improvements are to be applied. We are willing to consider this project in the future.

MOTION: Mr. Krall made a motion to forward these recommendations to PennDOT and the Coordinating Committee. Mr. Golembiewski seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

9. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION ON UPDATED BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLAN MAPPING

Mr. Golembiewski stated that, in July 2020, the MPO adopted the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The Steering Committee created to develop that plan has continued to meet. One of their recommendations, even as the plan was adopted, was to take the listing of proposed projects, project types, and locations and develop a more formalized network throughout the county. The listing of projects in the current plan is almost entirely based on public input that was received during the plan development process. As a result, the project types and locations are scattered and therefore not a cohesive network.

Since July 2020, staff set out to review mapping, review potential projects, and try to develop a more formalized integrated network. When we look at these projects, the mapping contained both bicycle and pedestrian locations for each of the five county planning areas that are used in the Berks County Planning Commission. It was recommended that we separate these two modes into separate bicycle-based mapping and pedestrian-based mapping.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that staff member, Ms. Laura Mursch, worked many hours over multiple iterations of these. We went through a number of review processes inhouse. With each process, there were more recommendations. The two modes were separated, which allowed more detail to be visible and remove confusion. As a result of separating the two modes and mapping them individually, the sidewalk network was added which made it more apparent where additional connections could be added.

Mr. Golembiewski said there was a recommendation for some type of a project along Hampden Boulevard going out of the City of Reading into Muhlenberg Township towards Barnhart's Dam area. That would serve bicyclists but not necessarily pedestrians. One of the concerns was that PennDOT was looking at a resurfacing project on Hampden Boulevard. They said that a striped bike lane would probably not work. Mr. Krall said this project was let last year. Now it is marked as a connection. These are spelled out in the document. A particular type of treatment and a specific location are not necessarily identified for each project location, but rather that some type of connection in that general area should be provided. This allowed us to highlight Hampden Boulevard both for bicyclists and the northern part for pedestrians, as well. The sidewalk network does go to the city line but then it is broken up and nothing is available for getting through the interchange and out to Bernhart's Dam.

There were other areas where connections were recommended such as from the Flying Hills Area to the Schuylkill River Trail. Again, instead of a specific location and treatment, it was recognized that a connection should be provided in that area.

Mr. Krall said he would like to see this mapping in more detail. He asked if there is still time for him to review the Metro Region mapping. Mr. Golembiewski said there is no required time frame on approval of this mapping. Staff has been working on the maps for a while and would like to get them adopted as an amendment to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. The maps were sent to the municipalities for review in November 2021. Comments were requested by December 31, 2021. There were no comments received from any municipality. Mr. Krall said he doesn't want Reading to hold up the process. He wants to look at the Metro area and doesn't know if Mr. Golembiewski wants to wait until after the Reading Downtown Bicycle/Pedestrian meeting occurs. Mr. Golembiewski stated that the City's study Mr. Krall is talking about will not be completed until August 2022. Mr. Piper said he is okay with deferring any recommendation on this until either the February or March meeting.

#### 10. PENNDOT UPDATES ON TASA/MTF AND HIGHWAY PROJECTS

Acting Chairman Vottero gave an update on TASA, Multimodal Transportation Fund and Highway Projects.

Mr. Krall told Acting Chairman Vottero to call if there are ROW problems regarding the Spring Street Corridor Improvement, especially if it is around Railroad Street. Acting Chairman Vottero said he doesn't think it is a city issue, but rather an issue with Norfolk Southern. Approval is not needed by the railroad.

Mr. Krall said that the Reading Schuylkill River Trail project has been awarded, and the city is scheduling a pre-construction meeting in a few weeks. This is called the N-Gap Project and runs from Buttonwood Street to the Penn Street Bridge along River Road and N. Front Street (RACC). The city is planning on fixing the remaining piece south between Penn Street Bridge and the Schuylkill River crossing with their own money and some grant money from DCED.

#### 11. COMMUTER SERVICES UPDATE

Mr. Boyer stated that the “Clash of the Career Links” competition was held in December. York County won that competition. Their transportation management staff works well with the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and the Career Link offices trying to find transportation options for the people looking for work and can be matched with available employment.

In Berks County, a transition has been completed for an outreach coordinator. Mr. Mark Eastadt, from Commuter Services, has transferred to Virginia. Ms. Michelle Schribbick, from the NEPA region, is now the main outreach person in Berks County.

Commuter Services came out of December with a busy schedule of health fairs and employer-sponsored events that are ready to go in January. The MPO will continue to be updated with any outreach news.

Mr. Boyer stated that, in December, there were 91 new people that joined the Commute PA system. The people in the system tracked 5,300 green trips, which includes 138,000 miles not driven. About \$77,000 went back into the pockets of those commuters who tracked their trips and are a part of the program.

Berks County was the victor in the “Clash of the Counties”.

#### 12. OTHER BUSINESS

- Mr. Piper stated the 2022 meeting schedule was distributed.
- There was a notice sent out from PennDOT that money was distributed under the Rail Transportation Assistance and Rail/Freight Assistance Program. The Redevelopment Authority of Berks County will receive \$1.4 million to replace track and construct siding in Boyertown. The Redevelopment Authority owns the track operated by the Colebrookdale Railroad and Eastern Berks Gateway Railroad Company.

13. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Piper made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Golembiewski seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Alan D. Piper

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