

Minutes
for the
August 4, 2021 Meeting
of the
Danville Metropolitan Planning Organization
Hybrid (Online and In-Person) Meeting
at 6:30 p.m.

Attendees

Ron Searce, Pittsylvania County, Chairman
Lee Vogler, City of Danville
Brian Dunevant, City of Danville
Marc Adelman, Danville Transit
Emily Ragsdale, Pittsylvania County
Rick Youngblood, VDOT
Chris Winstead, VDOT
Taylor Jenkins, DRPT
Bill Wuensch, EPR, PC
Jeanie Alexander, EPR, PC
Michael Armbrister, Danville MPO Administrator
Joseph Bonanno, Danville MPO Staff

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. Approval of Minutes from the March 22, 2021 Meeting

Mr. Searce asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 22, 2021 MPO meeting, to which Mr. Dunevant made a motion, which seconded by Mr. Adelman. The motion was voted upon and approved unanimously.

3. Presentation on Phase 1 of the Piney Forest Road Corridor Study, Bill Wuensch, P.E., PTOE, Principal/Transportation Engineer and Jeanie Alexander, P.E., Senior Transportation Engineer, EPR, PC

Ms. Alexander noted that, since the March meeting, she, representing the EPR team, would provide the MPO Board with an update on the Piney Forest Road Corridor Study. She noted that the team had concluded Phase I of the study, and added that she would be focusing on public input as well as Phase I recommendations as part of this presentation. She further added that Phase II would begin in several weeks, and would involve traffic operations; she noted that the second phase was scheduled deliberately to maximize reliability of traffic counts following the COVID pandemic. She stated that the second phase of the study would comprise a public involvement component, involving a public input meeting and a second MetroQuest survey.

Ms. Alexander stated that the two components of public involvement for Phase I included a public meeting and a MetroQuest survey. She noted that 562 individuals participated in the survey, which was available to the public from April through June. She noted that the highest-ranking issue was congestion, followed by vehicular safety, access management, speed and concepts of lowering speed, visual improvements, and the aspirational goal of teaching drivers to be more courteous. Following these, she stated that roadway geometry and bicycle and pedestrian safety were identified as priorities.

Ms. Alexander stated that the mapping element of the MetroQuest survey involved placement of 1,452 markers pertaining to congestion, safety, accessibility, multimodal mobility, and other issues. She added that congestion comprised 42 percent of the map markers, followed by safety at 26 percent, accessibility at 21 percent, multimodal priorities at 4 percent, and other at 6 percent. She noted that the heat map indicated that most of the markers were placed at signalized intersections. She noted that 615 markers represented congestion were placed mainly at signalized intersections, with the highest concentrations at the southern end of the corridor near Holt Garrison Parkway, followed closely by the intersection of Nor-Dan Drive and Nelson Avenue, and then by the Arnett Boulevard and Ash Street intersection area. She stated that safety needs were represented by 374 map markers, which were largely located at the intersection of Arnett Boulevard and Ash Street, the Deer Run Road intersection, the Piney Forest merge with Central Boulevard, and the area between Audubon and Churchview Drive/Redwood Drive. She then noted that 304 markers represented accessibility, and that, as with the other categories, signalized intersections were prominent, particularly the intersections of Arnett Boulevard and Ash Street, as well as between Audubon Drive and Churchview Drive.

Ms. Alexander next presented survey information regarding travel behavior, and she noted the results regarding the frequency of the respondents' use of the corridor, as well as for the reasons they did so. She also discussed results of questions pertaining to where and when respondents reported experiencing congestion along the corridor, when they experienced accessibility issues, when they experienced safety issues, what forms of transportation respondents believed should be accommodated along the corridor as well as which modes of transportation they utilized. Ms. Alexander then stated that the demographics section of the

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survey was optional. She noted that one issue revealed by the demographics analysis was that participation among African-Americans was lower than what was represented by census data along the corridor. She added that Mr. Armbrister would later share how greater outreach could take place.

Ms. Alexander stated that the virtual public input meeting which took place on April 27th had nine participants. She added that Phase I recommendations included safety, access, and multimodal travel options, and she further added that the team had formulated recommendations for the corridor. She stated that safety and access were closely related to one-another, and interpreting a graph, she noted that the corridor fell within 2.1 – 4.0 signals per mile range.

With regard to safety countermeasures, Ms. Alexander referenced a table that summarized a variety of countermeasures relating to traffic signalization and access management which were applicable to this corridor. She provided a visual of corridor recommendations in the vicinity of the Nor-Dan Drive intersection that involved median and other access improvements, as well as enhancements to a sidewalk. Shared access between parcels was another measure that was put forth. With regard to the corridor at the Arnett Boulevard intersection, Ms. Alexander noted the need to close several access points at a shopping center, realign an existing access point with Arnett Boulevard, and add a signal head to control traffic movements at that realigned access point. Inter-parcel access was also recommended, along with other access management techniques and median additions. Ms. Alexander then transitioned to recommendations along the southern segment of the corridor, where she noted that a median was already present and that the only access recommendation was to close one driveway. She added that signal timing adjustments could improve functionality of that segment. She added that other strategies included cross-parcel access and limiting driveways. She emphasized the need to include access management within the City's site review process, comprehensive plan, and the zoning code to establish policy and enable staff to enforce access within the corridor.

With regard to multimodal recommendations, Ms. Alexander began by noting a recommendation for improved transit amenities at stops that had a high level of use. She noted that pedestrian recommendations included eliminating sign posts and mailboxes from the sidewalks and eliminating a mid-block crossing at a school no longer used. She added that recommendations at signalized intersections included ADA-approved ramps for wheelchairs, crosswalks, pedestrian signals, and push buttons. She presented a graphic of pedestrian improvements at the corridor's intersection with Arnett Boulevard, and noted that the City applied for a grant for pedestrian improvements at that intersection; she added that it would be known in spring 2022 whether the grant will be funded. Transitioning to bicycling, Ms. Alexander noted that Piney Forest Road was a challenging corridor for bicyclists. She stated that an early recommendation involved construction of a shared use path adjacent to the corridor right-of-way. She added, however, that further investigation revealed that utility poles would have to be relocated, which, by itself, would cost millions of dollars. She noted that a parallel route, involving Arnett Boulevard and other local roads, was now recommended, as nearly all roads proposed to constitute this route had a posted 25 MPH speed limit and passed through residential areas. While she noted that this parallel route was less direct than a shared-use path, she added that it would be easier for bicyclists to navigate.

With regard to next steps, Ms. Alexander stated that Phase I was being concluded, and that Phase II would involve traffic data collection and existing systems analysis in September, 2045 forecast analysis in October, and development of improvement concepts in November. She added that the second MetroQuest survey and public meeting would take place in January, with the final report scheduled to be completed in February.

Ms. Alexander concluded her presentation and asked if there were any questions, to which Mr. Vogler asked if the school that had closed on Piney Forest Road was the Taylor School, to which Ms. Alexander noted that it was. Mr. Vogler stated that this facility was currently being utilized as a virtual academy, but would become an active school once again, serving children from throughout the City as a specialized school. Mr. Wuensch added that perhaps rather than eliminating the crosswalk, it could be improved. Mr. Vogler stated that the presentation was excellent, and that he may follow up later with additional questions. Mr. Wuensch asked Mr. Dunevant whether the utilities were existing at the pleasure of the City, to which Mr. Dunevant replied that Verizon likely owned some of the utilities, and that they would want to be compensated if asked to relocate them.

4. OIPI GAP Project Update, Joe Bonanno, Senior Planner

Mr. Bonanno provided the Board with an update regarding the GAP (Growth and Accessibility Planning) grant initiative undertaken by the MPO. He described the GAP program, noting that it was administered by the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment, the purpose of which was to promote several statewide goals. Mr. Bonanno added that the MPO submitted the grant in January, with the purpose of assisting MPO staff with the identification and selection of transportation studies. He added that in recent years, transportation studies were often selected based on anecdotal evidence and what the Board believed was important. He added that the grant would fund a consultant-led effort to develop a data-driven process to select projects via the development of a digital tool to adhere to VTrans and MPO Long-Range Plan goals. He stated that the three consultants that were involved in the development of the tool were Michael Baker International, High Street Consulting, and EPR, PC, noting that EPR was intimately familiar with the MPO and had recently developed the 2045 Long-Range Transportation Plan.

Mr. Bonanno stated that the duration of the planning process would be approximately one year, as it had begun in late June and would conclude in June 2022. He added that there would be a total of five quarterly meetings, and that appropriate performance measures would be developed to assist the MPO staff with identifying studies that were likely to result in viable transportation projects. He also stated that the team would develop an identification process for performance measures, and he elaborated on that and other areas of the planning process such as the ranking tool that would be developed to aid the MPO with selection of transportation studies. Mr. Bonanno concluded his presentation by noting the cost of the entire process was estimated at \$86,036.45, with the cost for Michael Baker International's services at \$22,695.04, the cost for High Street Consulting at \$33,148.48, and EPR's services at \$30,192.93.

5. Complete Streets Coalition Update, Joe Bonanno, Senior Planner

Mr. Bonanno updated the Board about activities of the West Piedmont Complete Streets Coalition. He defined complete streets, for those who may have been unfamiliar with the concept, and he briefly noted the history of the Complete Streets Coalition in the West Piedmont Region. He stated that the Coalition would have its next meeting on Thursday, August 26th, and welcomed anyone who may wish to attend, either virtually or in-person. He added that at the meeting, recent developments in complete streets in the region would be discussed, funding programs, relevant pending legislation, and resources would also be discussed.

6. Comments/Updates from VDOT/DRPT/FHWA

Mr. Youngblood stated that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) approved the Smart Scale program and the projects that were advanced in the draft funding scenario, and he specifically mentioned the Berry Hill Connector Road Extension. He added that the Connector Road Extension would extend from the Connector Road, which was currently in the design phase, south to Oak Hill Road.

Mr. Youngblood also stated that VDOT was looking at study areas, and that one of those would be a project pipeline study along Piedmont Drive, between Boxwood Court and Park Avenue. He added that this study would explore Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies such as bike/ped improvements, in addition to safety enhancements, and that it would be very similar to the STARS study, as well as the study EPR completed for the Riverside Drive corridor. He further added that the team would be doing studies for the purpose of generating projects and identifying funding streams.

Mr. Winstead updated the Board with respect to the gas tax increase, noting that the General Assembly in the Lynchburg District increased the gas tax by about 7.6 cents per gallon, the revenue of which would fund the District Grant Program. He added that in June, the CTB approved the next iteration of the \$474 million capital outlay for the Lynchburg District over the six-year period, which he noted was a strong figure. He noted that, in Danville and Pittsylvania County, the Southern Virginia Mega Site at Berry Hill transportation projects constituted \$70 million of that, and that the outlay for the City and County as a whole was nearly \$95 million. He noted that the studies the MPO has been developing and the collaboration were all working, and that needed to keep going. He thanked all for their work and support. Mr. Scarce replied to Mr. Winstead that he wanted to thank VDOT for that agency's support, particularly with regard to the transportation projects at the Southern Virginia Mega Site at Berry Hill. Mr. Winstead stated that VDOT was on track for the two-lane connector road to be advertised in September 2022; he added that a contractor was typically chosen two to three months after the advertisement date. Some discussion took place with regard to the funding of the Connector Road and Connector Road Extension.

7. Other Business

Mr. Armbrister acknowledged no additional business.

8. Adjourn

Mr. Scarce adjourned the meeting at 7:32 p.m.



Michael Armbrister
Danville MPO Administrator