

MINUTES
GASTON URBAN AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
(MPO)
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY (TAC) COMMITTEE MEETING
JULY 24, 2007

The meeting of the Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was held Thursday, July 24, 2007, 6:30 pm until 8:30 pm in the Community Room of the Gastonia Police Department located at 200 East Long Avenue, Gastonia, NC.

Members Present:

Jim Long	City of Bessemer City, Councilman, TAC Chair
Ronald Murphy	Town of Cramerton, Mayor, TAC Vice-Chair
Rick Coleman	Town of Dallas, Mayor
Dale Burkett	City of Gastonia, Councilman
James Watson	City of Gastonia, Councilman
Judith Johnson	Town of Stanley, Mayor
Rickie Bush	City of Lowell, Councilman
Irl Dixon	City of Belmont, Councilman
Phyllis Harris	City of Mt. Holly, Councilperson
Lynn Black	Town of Ranlo, Commissioner
Mike Holder	NCDOT, Division Engineer – Division 12
Joe Carpenter	Gaston County Commissioner

Others Present:

Hank Graham	Gaston MPO, Principal Transportation Planner
Randi Gates	Gaston MPO, Transportation Planner I
Bernie Yacobucci	Gaston MPO, Transportation Planner I
Cass Roberts	Gaston MPO, Administrative Assistant III
Eu'Anna Hunt Martin	Gaston MPO, Intern
Jack Kiser	City of Gastonia, Director of Planning
Shannon Ransom	NCDOT, Gaston MPO Coordinator

Members with absences in 2007:

Town of Spencer Mountain	(Jan., Mar., May-June, July – 4)
City of Lowell	(Jan., Mar. – 2)
Town of Dallas	(Jan. - 1)
Town of McAdenville	(Jan., Mar., May-June, July – 4)
Gaston County	(Jan. - 1)
Town of Ranlo	(Mar., May-June – 2)

1. Set Agenda, Presenter: Jim Long, TAC Chair

Mr. Long asked for any new business or any additions to be added to the agenda. Mr. Carpenter requested an addition to the agenda to reconsider the Regional Commuting Time Study which analyzes peak and off peak transportation in and out of Charlotte on major corridors. Mr. Long stated that this request will be added to New Business.

2. Determination of a Quorum

It was determined that a quorum was present.

3. Approval of Minutes, Presenter: Jim Long, TAC Chair

Mr. Long asked if there were any changes, additions, or deletions to the minutes of the scheduled meeting of May 22, 2007 with no quorum present and the make up scheduled meeting of June 7, 2007. Mr. Long added that the March 27, 2007 minutes were omitted from this agenda package so they will be included in the September TAC agenda package.

Mr. Long entertained a motion to approve the minutes from the May 22, 2007 and June 7, 2007 TAC meetings as presented. Mr. Murphy made a motion to approve the minutes as presented with Mr. Watson seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Introduction of Guests, Presenter: Jim Long, TAC Chair

Mr. Long asked if there were any guests present. Mrs. Gates introduced Ms. Eu'Anna Hunt Martin, MPO intern for the summer. Mrs. Martin is enrolled in the Master's degree program at Strayer University in Public Administration. Mr. Long mentioned that all the summer interns for the MPO have been a talented group and he welcomed Mrs. Martin.

5. Public Comment Period, Presenter: Jim Long, TAC Chair

There were no public comments.

6. Thoroughfare Plan Map Amendments, Presenter: Hank Graham, AICP, Principal Transportation Planner/GUAMPO Coordinator

Mr. Graham stated that these Thoroughfare Plan Map Amendments are necessary to accommodate new land development proposals that would make right-of-way purchase more expensive and to eliminate or lessen detrimental impacts to the natural environment.

a. Hudson Boulevard/Garden Parkway Interchange Relocation

Mr. Graham stated that the Hudson Boulevard/Garden Parkway Interchange relocation reflects the relocation of a proposed interchange between Hudson Boulevard and the Garden Parkway.

Regarding the Garden Parkway, Mr. Graham stated that the consultant team originally conducted and completed the environmental impact study and proposed an interchange at Linwood Road on the western side of the city, as well as a larger taking of existing property for the proposed interchange. He believed that this is a problematic interchange proposal. Mr. Graham added that during a conference call with the consultant team, NCDOT, Fed. Hwy. Administration, and the NC Turnpike Authority, MPO staff and other agencies made a decision to move the interchange down from the proposed Linwood Road interchange area to Hudson Boulevard. This new proposed interchange for the Garden Parkway at Hudson Boulevard would be located on existing vacant land and no takings would be involved.

Mr. Long thought that the interchange for the Garden Parkway at Hudson Boulevard made more sense. He was concerned that if this amendment is approved today, what protection will there be for the Thoroughfare Plan and that Gastonia must pay diligent attention to proposed developments in this area. Mr. Watson agreed and stated that a new Family Dollar store has been built at the end of Hudson Boulevard. Referring to the proposed thoroughfare shown on the map, Mr. Graham added that there is a dedicated additional 100 feet of right of way on the edge of the property with no negative impact. We are coordinating with each land development application as they come in.

Mr. Graham agreed that until the Environmental Impact Study is complete for whichever alignment is selected, we cannot really protect or save the Garden Parkway corridor. What we can do is to hire a civil engineering consultant firm to do a functional design for Hudson Boulevard extension. Once we get the functional design finalized and have the necessary public comment period with notices to affected property owners, we could lock this down and preserve the corridor.

Mr. Burkett asked how far will Hudson Boulevard extend out? Mr. Graham said it would have to be an area large enough where the interchange for the Garden Parkway could be located. Mr. Carpenter thought that it should be turned out onto Carson Road and move Edgewood Road interchange further west. Mr. Long stated that on both sides of Edgewood Road at I-85, 200 acres have been rezoned industrial. Mr. Carpenter thought that was an excellent decision because of the proximity of the interchange on I-85.

Mr. Holder stated that he felt that there was not enough data for a decision since the Turnpike Authority has said that they would have trouble with the intersection relocation and will have to study this further.

Mr. Long stated that he has a motion from Mr. Carpenter to approve the change of alignment for the Hudson Boulevard/Garden Parkway Interchange Relocation as presented. Mr. Dixon seconded the motion. The motion carried with one dissenting vote from Mr. Holder.

Union Road

Mr. Graham stated that this map amendment involves removal of the proposed straightening of Union Road. The proposed roadway modifications are impacting a cemetery and a proposed residential development of 200-250 homes. This would cause problems for a right of way alignment area that would tie into an existing dedicated right of way that has already been conveyed to the city. Because of the cemetery and the proposed future land development, it is not feasible to have this alignment constructed topographically. Mr. Graham stated what is being proposed is utilizing the existing Union Road and widening it at a later date with the possible taking of 20-30 single family residences.

Mr. Long was concerned about the current alignment that was voted on at another time, that there wasn't a concern about the cemetery. Mr. Graham stated that he wasn't here at the time of that vote and could not offer a comment on this reasoning. Mr. Kiser stated that this decision went back a number of years and it had something to do with the sharp curvature of the road and the impact of the proximity of the dwellings situated on this road.

Some discussion ensued.

Mr. Long entertained a motion to table this item for further study and to bring it back to the next TAC meeting.

Mr. Burkett made a motion to table the map amendment involving the removal of the proposed straightening of Union Road for further study. Ms. Stroupe seconded the motion.

Mr. Burkett asked that for further study on this proposed amendment, we will need clear cut maps and that the entry and exit point should not be at the gravesite. He added that the taking of 30 homes is not a good idea. Mr. Kiser suggested that an aerial photograph of the area would be helpful at a fine grain level.

Mr. Long stated that we have a motion and a second. He asked for any further discussion. There being none and the motion to table this item for further study passed unanimously.

7. Priority List of 2009-2015 TIP Projects, Presenter: Randi P. Gates, Transportation Planner I

Mrs. Gates stated that it is time for MPO staff to start reviewing the Priority List of Projects for potential placement into the 09-15 TIP. She encouraged TAC members to inform their staff to bring projects to be added to the Unmet Needs List to MPO staff's attention to be reviewed and ranked for the September meeting in order to be ratified. Mrs. Gates said that she included in the agenda packet the Unmet Needs List Ranking Methodology as well as the Criteria Ranking Methodology. She reminded the TAC that the Unmet Needs List not only includes highway projects, but also includes transit, bike and pedestrian, and bridge projects.

7A. Revisiting Item 11 from the June 7, 2007 TAC Agenda: *Regional Commuting Report*

In order to provide information on this item, Mr. Long stated that the Centralina Council of Governments wanted to develop a regional commuting report for travel times between burgeoning residential areas near and outside of 485 and Uptown Charlotte. He added that the report was thought to appeal to local real estate and housing market audiences and would hopefully facilitate more efficient travel patterns for workers commuting to Uptown. The cost of the report is \$25,000 and all the regional partners have been asked to participate. Our share would be \$2,500 annually. This item was voted down at the June 7, 2007 TAC meeting.

Mr. Carpenter stated that the Regional Commuting Report would provide information that would help traffic planners, real estate agents, businesses, developers, and Economic Development and Chamber of Commerce professionals with data on traffic patterns. He felt that this information would be invaluable.

Mr. Murphy stated that at the last TAC meeting, Commissioner Price voiced his opposition to this report as he felt it benefited very few people except for realtors, it was costly and the money could be used for something more beneficial for the MPO. Mr. Carpenter stated that others in the region had endorsed this study and he wanted the MPO to have the opportunity to revisit this item. Mr. Holder stated that this report is not what NCDOT would use but rather would be beneficial to the real estate industry. Mr. Burkett felt that it may be beneficial for economic development in the region.

Mr. Carpenter made a motion to accept the Regional Commuting Report as presented for a one-time fee for this year of \$2,500. Mr. Burkett seconded the motion. There was a tie vote of 6 to 6.

Mr. Long asked for a recount and a show of hands. Those in favor were Mr. Carpenter, Mr. Black, Ms. Stroupe, Mr. Burkett, and Mr. Watson. Those opposed were Mr. Holder, Mr. Dixon, Ms. Harris, Mr. Bush, Mr. Coleman and Mr. Murphy. The Regional Commuting Report failed to pass by a vote of 5 in favor and 6 opposed.

Mr. Long wanted to clarify voting for the record. According to the Bylaws, no vote passes without a majority. If there is a tie, the motion does not carry.

8. New Business

9. Other Business

Gastonia Express 85-X Ridership Report – Mrs. Gates stated that ridership still goes up monthly from 2006.

Air Quality Report – Mrs. Gates pointed out that this report will be included in the agenda showing EPA Observed Ozone Days yearly.

TIP Project Location Map – Mr. Yacobucci stated that staff is currently developing a GIS layer of the transportation projects currently included in the 2007-2013 TIP for the MPO.

Carolina Thread Trail – Mrs. Gates stated that in June, a regional Transportation/Greenway Planning Workshop sponsored by the Catawba Lands Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land was held in Charlotte to discuss the Carolina Thread Trail concept. She said that the concept of the Carolina Thread Trail will reach over 2 million citizens by linking regionally significant trails and attractions much like a “green interstate system” within 15 counties throughout North and South Carolina. Project funding for the for this trail includes \$35,000,000 in private capital and about \$80,000,000 in public grants totaling \$115,000,000 for use in planning trails, acquisition of land, building trails. The next meeting for the Carolina Thread Trail is tentatively scheduled for a lunch meeting on November 9.

Conformity Determination – Mr. Yacobucci stated that staff received a letter from federal highways stating that the Gaston MPO 2030 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for FY 2007-2013 are in conformity.

Other Discussions

Mr. Murphy asked where do we stand on the Transportation Funding? He said that he hasn't seen anything on the NC Senate or House agenda on this. Mr. Long stated that we are planning a CRAFT meeting for later in the year and this topic will be on that agenda as well as the agenda for the Regional Charlotte Alliance. What should come out of these meetings is the formation of an MPO

lobby to fight this “legislative problem.” Mr. Long stated that the Federal Highway Trust Fund is near bankruptcy; federal money is not flowing. Mr. Holder stated that the state can raise all the money it wants to but it won’t be able to raise enough for the capital for projects. Mr. Holder added that if the federal money doesn’t grow, we would not be able to complete projects on the Capital side. Most of the money that is raised goes to the Legislature just for maintenance operations of the existing systems. On the Capital side, you need the federal investment because it pays 80% of the investment with the State contributing match of 20%. It doesn’t make any difference if the state tries to raise more money because it cannot raise enough money for the Capital to pay for projects.

Mr. Long stated that no matter which side the Equity Formula is coming from – whether from the Legislative side or the Capital side – the Equity Formula is outdated and has to be changed. There has to be some pressure brought upon our representatives in Raleigh and the only way he sees how this can be done is by building more and more coalitions with the surrounding areas and divisions. He pointed out that some surrounding areas don’t want the Equity Formula changed because they are already benefiting from the way it is structured now. Mr. Holder stated that even if we change the Equity Formula, we will still get x number of state dollars. Until the Federal share increases by Congress authorizing more dollars from the Federal Trust Fund for North Carolina, we cannot do a thing. This situation can be compared to “our banker is out of money.” The state cannot do it by itself.

Mr. Long said he understood but there has to be something done on a federal level. He added that when he looks at how the dollars are distributed throughout the state, it is not an equitable distribution. When he sees a division with less population receiving more dollars, it just doesn’t match up. Mr. Holder said he understood and suggested to the TAC members that they may be able to influence the Federal Congressional delegation which is the money source. Mr. Long stated that even if the Federal portion to the state was increase, we would not be happy with the way it is distributed in the state because of the Equity Formula.

Mr. Holder stated that if the MPO wants to leverage our political clout, the Congressional Delegation has the power over federal dollars. He added that the gas tax will always be the “work horse” that funds transportation. Solutions like toll roads are not going to make that much of an impact.

Mr. Murphy stated that he is concerned that when he traveled through the eastern part of the state, he sees a six lane boulevard built through cow pasture country and you see about ten cars as you pass through that jurisdiction.

There being no other business or discussion, Mr. Long entertained a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Dixon made a motion to adjourn with Mr. Coleman seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm.

10. Adjournment