



POLICY BOARD MEETING

243 High Street Room 026, Morgantown WV 26501

January 27, 2022, 6PM

Virtual Meeting Link:

<https://morgantownmonongaliampo.my.webex.com/meet/baustin>

Members Present:

Chair: Commissioner Tom Bloom, Vice-Chair: Ron Justice -WVU, Treasurer: Mayor Patricia Lewis, Recorder: Steven Blinco-Star City, Dave Bruffy – Mountain Line Transit, Mr. Brian Carr – WV DOH, Councilperson Dave Harshbarger-City of Morgantown, Councilperson Bill Kawecki-City of Morgantown, Mr. Mike Kelly-Board of Education, Mayor Jennifer Selin – City of Morgantown, Steve Solomon – City of Westover

MPO Director: Bill Austin, AICP

Members of the Public: Frank Gutta, Kevin Trembush, Leonard George (Virtual), Jim French, Matt Gutta, Jason Sites, Matt Cross, Christiaan Abildso.

1. Call to Order

With a quorum present, Chairman Bloom called the meeting of the Morgantown Monongalia Metropolitan Planning Organization (MMMPO) Policy Board to order at 6:02 PM.

2. Public Comments

Kevin Trembush, a resident of 801 Willowdale Rd, speaking for the Guttas and himself, as landowners on the West side of this Van Voorhis Rd project. He noted that improving Van Voorhis Rd is a good idea and that his position against the project is not a “Not in My Backyard”: (NIMBY) issue. He noted that there has been a lot of miscommunication between the Department of Highways and the MPO. He noted that the MPO did not provide accurate information to the citizens, causing confusion and misunderstanding. He noted that the project is not safe and will have negative impact to the local businesses and tax revenue. He noted that project should have been designed better if there were better coordination among the DOH, the

MPO, and the property owners. He asked the Policy Board to veto the funding for the Van Voorhis Rd project, forcing DOH to go back to the drawing board.

Leonard George noted that if the project is constructed as currently designed, it will make the lot on the west side of the Van Voorhis Rd near the intersection unusable. He noted that his group has been unfairly treated in the project development process, and that there has been a lack of communication with property owners. He noted that long term cost of the project to the City of Morgantown and Monongalia County will be high. He suggested that the Policy Board veto the project.

Jason Sites, a resident of Maidsville, WV, noted that he had requested project documentation under the Freedom of Information Act in August and got a response in August 30th saying that if the information exists, he would have it within a month. He stated that he still has not received the requested information. He noted that the DOH did not do their job in providing accurate information of the project in a timely manner. He noted that the design of the project failed to provide a safer alternative at the intersection and to minimize the impact to the community. If constructed, the project will have negative impact to the traffic in Van Voorhis Rd area in the long term. He requested for the Policy Board to veto this project.

Commissioner Bloom suggested using 15 minutes to address the concerns raised in the public comment session. Commissioner Bloom paraphrased the letter from WV Secretary of Transportation, Jimmy Wriston, regarding the Van Voorhis Rd project.

Councilperson Selin expressed her appreciation to the property owners for participating in the project development process. She noted that people involved in this project have been trying their best to make project successful. Councilperson Selin noted that the project has been gone through a long planning process and involved multiple stakeholders. The project needs to keep moving forward.

Mr. Kelly noted that the MPO has the power to vote funding for a federally funded project, but it does not have much control of the design of a specific project beyond that point.

Mr. Justice noted that the project will have a long-term impact to the community. The leadership in the city and county should weigh all the factors presented to the board and move forward.

Mr. Austin noted that a much larger project is needed to fully address the issue of the Van Voorhis Rd intersection.

Chairman Bloom noted that from the County perspective, we have no documentation of any kind that could show that what DOH have done was incorrect and that could justify to veto this project. The project should move forward.

Chairman Bloom asked Mr. Austin to continue working with concerned property owners of the project and coordinating the communication with the DOH on this matter.

3. Election of Officers

Chairman Bloom noted that the Officer Nomination Committee has nominated Mr. Justice for the Chairman, Mr. Kelly for the Vice Chairman, and Mayor Lewis for the Treasurer. Chairman Bloom asked if anyone else wants to be an officer, hearing none, the Policy Board unanimously confirmed the appointment of new officers. Chairman Justice asked Commissioner Bloom to continue presiding over the current meeting.

4. Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Bloom noted that the minutes of last meeting were included in the agenda package for review. Mayor Lewis noted that the name “Maidsville” was not spelled correctly in the minutes. Councilperson Harshbarger noted an error in the minutes. The MRTC was not requesting a retaining wall, it was for a removal of a concrete wall.

Mr. Kelly moved to adopt the minutes as corrected; seconded by Mayor Lewis. With no further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

5. Committee Report

a. Citizens Advisory Committee

Mr. Austin noted that the Chairman of Citizens Advisory Committee is not able to attend this meeting. He noted that the Citizen Advisory Committee has reviewed and recommend approval of proposed TIP amendments.

b. Finance Committee

Mayor Lewis briefed the Board on the financial report:

At the beginning of November, the balance was \$64,686.68. The expenditures were \$68,938.38 with three deposits of \$20,849.17, leaving a balance of \$16,597.47 at the end of October.

At the beginning of December, the balance was \$16,597.47. The expenditures were \$44,805.67 with one deposit of \$61,594.88, leaving a balance of \$33,386.68 at the end of October.

Mr. Kelly moved to approve the finance report as presented; seconded by Councilperson Selin. With no discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

c. Executive Director

Mr. Austin noted that besides the letter that Commissioner Bloom mentioned earlier this meeting. The MPO also received a letter from Secretary Wriston concerning the removal of the northern loop from the MPO’s TIP. Mr. Austin noted that MPO will set up a meeting with WV DOH State Highway Engineer Alan Reed on this issue.

Mr. Austin noted that the MPO needs to amend the UPWP at the March meeting. The reason for the early adoption is that the consultant on our Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update got started late because of the way we were coordinating with the city and the county planning process. We did not spend those funds during the previous fiscal year that we would have and we still need to have the work done by the consultants.

Mr. Austin noted the it will require amending the planning program to the amount of about \$25,000 for this fiscal year so we can finish paying our consultant fees. The MPO already has the match and there is no additional local money needed.

Mr. Austin noted that he has reached out to the freight community in the area. He has not received many responses so far. Mr. Bruffy asked if the MPO was reaching out to FedEx and some soda distribution companies. Mr. Austin noted that the consultant reached out the them and received a few comments on the driver's level. There have been no responses from the corporate level.

Mr. Austin introduced Jessica Moberly, the MPO's new employee, to the Policy Board.

Mr. Austin noted that the Goshen Rd signal project has been turned over to the DOH traffic division for investigation. There have been some the negative comments about installing traffic signal at that location.

Mr. Austin noted that the MPO is expecting an increase in grant applications this year because of the recently passed infrastructure bill. The bill includes some new categories for project funding such as rural development, lot improvement, reconnecting communities, and resiliency. Mr. Austin suggested that board members get together and come up with a list of projects that are suitable for funding targeting resilience and transportation.

Mr. Austin noted that he has been reelected as the Chairman of WV Association of MPOs. The association will be meeting with Secretary Wriston on various issues. Two issues are especially important; the first is the surface transportation block grant program, the FHWA specifies that states have to come up with a program to identify how they will equitably distribute funds to all the MPOs. The other issue is to develop a process for MPO to initiate projects in the DOH project selection process. This would provide the MPO with a formal process to get the Tier 1 projects funded.

Mr. Austin noted that he is planning to attend Mon County and Preston County Day next week in Charleston.

Mr. Austin noted he has been appointed as a full committee member of the policy working group at the National Association of MPOs.

Mr. Austin noted he will take a vacation in the middle of April.

6. TIP Amendments

Mr. Austin stated the Mountain Line Transit request amendment to the Transportation Improvement Program. For FY 2022, the MLT requested increasing the Operating Assistance funding (§5307) from \$857,800 to \$1,758,000, increasing the Preventative Maintenance funding (§5307) from \$61,100 to \$180,000, decreasing the Federal 5311(f) funding from \$1,290,200 to \$658,300, increasing the Bus & Bus Facilities funding from \$900,900 to \$2,192,800, and increasing the AIM Accelerating Innovative Mobility funding from \$13,100 to \$40,000. For FY 2023, decreasing the Bus & Bus Facilities funding from \$1,291,800 to \$650,000.

Mr. Bruffy noted that the Mountain Line received six new heavy-duty buses in the past 12-to-14-month period. Those vehicles will serve the community in 2023 and 2024 for 12 years. The budget amendments are juggling federal funds that have come in alone with the recovery act and all the other special funding sources to rebalance what we are spending.

Mr. Austin noted that West Virginia Department of Transportation-Division of Highways has requested a TIP amendment to increase the funding for the project of I-79 Bridge Rehabilitations.

Mayor Lewis moved to approve the amendments as presented, seconded by Mr. Kelly. With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

7. FY 2020-2021 Audit

Mr. Austin noted that enclosed with the agenda packet is the audit of the MPO's finances for FY 2020-2021. There were no findings in the audit. The MPO's Officers were provided with an opportunity to review the draft audit. They had no comment on the Audit. Mayor Lewis moved to adopt the audit report; seconded by councilperson Selin. With no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

8. Designation of Representative(s) to Speak with the State Highway Engineer

Mr. Austin noted that at the last MPO Policy Board meeting there was a concern that the area would lose significant funding, due to the removal of the "Northern Loop Project" from the TIP.

The MPO will meet State Highway Engineer Mr. Allan Reed on this issue, and the MPO will need to determine the composition of the MPO's representatives at the meeting with Mr. Reed.

It was the consensus of the Policy Board that Chairman Justice, Mr. Austin and one representative from the County Commission and one representative from the City of Morgantown will represent the MPO in this meeting.

9. First Review of the Draft FY 2022-2023 UPWP

Mr. Austin noted that a draft UPWP for FY 2022-2023 is included in the agenda package for the Policy Board's review in January. The proposed UPWP includes a 3% cost of living increase for MPO employees. Major working items include reestablishing the traffic count program which

has been dormant due to the pandemic and creating a test data collection program for bicycle and pedestrian data.

Mr. Bruffy noted that the cost of living has been going up at a pace faster than normal, as consumer index increased 5 to 6 percent. Commissioner Bloom suggested bringing back the UPWP with options of 3 to 5 percentage of salary increase to see if the MPO has funds to cover such increase.

Mr. Carr noted the new infrastructure bill requires that 2.5 percent of the planning budget be dedicated to complete streets. Mr. Carr asked if the UPWP meets such requirement. Mr. Austin noted that the UPWP meets and exceeds the requirement. Mr. Carr noted that the UPWP may get tweaked as more information becomes available from the FHWA.

Mr. Austin noted, some text in the MPO's Prospect will need to be changed to reflect the most recent changes in federal legislation.

10. Executive Directors Review

The Policy Board went into Executive Director Review Session.

The Policy Board went out of Executive Director Review Session.

11. Other Business

No other Business

12. Meeting adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:25 PM.