



POLICY BOARD MEETING

May 20, 2021

City of Morgantown Council Chambers
389 Spruce Street. May 20, 2021, 6PM

Members Present:

Chair-Commissioner Tom Bloom, Vice-Chair Ron Justice-WVU, Treasurer-Mayor Patricia Lewis, Councilperson Bill Kawecki-City of Morgantown, Councilperson Dave Harshbarger-City of Morgantown, Mr. Mike Kelly-Board of Education, Mr. Joe Statler-Blacksville, Commissioner Sean Sikora-Monongalia County

Attending by Phone:

Commissioner Jeffery Arnett-Monongalia County, Recorder Steven Blinco-Star City, Mr. Brian Carr-WV DOH, Mrs. Maria Smith – Mountain Line Transit (on behalf of Dave Bruffy)

MPO Director: Bill Austin, AICP

1. Call to Order

With a quorum present, Chairman Bloom called the meeting of the Policy Board to order at 6:00 PM.

2. Public Comments

No public comments.

3. Approval of Minutes

Chairman Bloom noted that the minutes for the March regular meeting and the April special meeting are included in the agenda packet. Mr. Justice moved to approve the March meeting minutes as presented; seconded by Mr. Kelly. With no further discussion, the motion was approved. Councilperson Kawecki moved to approve the April meeting minutes as presented; seconded by Councilperson Selin. With no further discussion, the motion was approved.

4. Committee Report

a. Citizens Advisory Committee

Mr. Austin noted that Christiaan Abildso, the Chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee, was not able to attend the meeting due to a schedule conflict. Mr. Austin reported that the CAC had recommended

approval of the agenda items presented to the committee, including the TIP amendment request, the Unified Planning Work Program, the scope of work for Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update, the Performance Measures, the Mountain Line Transit Study, and the Don Knott's Blvd Crash Report.

b. Finance Report

Mayor Lewis briefed the Board on the financial report as the following:

At the beginning of March, the balance was \$14,701.77. In March, expenditures were \$25,853.39 with three deposits totaling \$52,417.11, leaving a balance of \$ 41,265.49 at the end of March.

At the beginning of February, the balance was \$41,265.49. In February, the expenditures were \$23,745.5, with one deposit totaling \$21,759.25, leaving a balance of \$39,279.24 at the end of April.

Mayor Lewis moved to approve the finance report as presented; seconded by Commissioner Sikora. With no discussion, the motion was approved.

c. Executive Director Report

Mr. Austin noted that MPO staff is working with DOH traffic engineers to review alternatives to improve pedestrian safety at locations identified by the Pedestrian Safety Group, which was consisted by officials and staff from the City of Morgantown, Mon County, WVU, and the DOH.

Mr. Austin noted that the MPO staff is preparing the second newsletter, which will be distributed by the end of May.

Mr. Austin noted that he resumed the role of Chairman of the WV Association of MPOs, after the previous chair left the position. Mr. Austin noted that he is serving as an alternate policy committee member for the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization (AMPO). The role provides opportunities to influence national transportation policies and legislation. The position requires attendance of the national conference in October this year. Mr. Austin noted that the MPO may need to reschedule its October committee meetings due to scheduling conflicts.

Mr. Austin noted that he served on the consultant selection committee for the broadband project in the region. Mr. Austin expressed his appreciation to Commissioner Sikora for his leadership role on the project.

d. Correspondence

Chairman Bloom noted that the MPO received two letters from the DOH. One is from the Secretary of WV Department of Transportation regarding the I-79 Exit 155 project. The other is from WV Division of Highways regarding the Mileground project. Chairman Bloom noted the letters will be discussed in the Other Business session of the meeting.

5. TIP Amendments

Mr. Austin noted that WV DOH requested amendments to update funding amounts for several projects, including the Beechurst Ave project, the Westover bridge project, the Everettville bridge project, the Morris Builder bridge project + 1, and the Boyer Ave / US 19 Improvements project. The DOH also requests the deletions the Mon River Rial Trail Maintenance Equipment purchase project from the MPO's

TIP. Mr. Austin noted that he has discussed this change with Ella Belling, the Director of Mon River Trails Conservancy. The MRTC is in the process of consolidating small grants for its projects, including this one.

Mr. Austin noted that the MPO will prepare an update of its Transportation Improvement Program and submit it to the Policy Board for adoption. The update will make some format changes to the project table and incorporate the information of performance measures.

Mr. Justice suggested postponing the approval of the amendment for the Beechurst Ave @ 6th Street. He noted that the DOH is still working with the City of Morgantown and WVU in finalizing the property lines. The amendment, if approved, could reduce the ROW funding for the project, eliminating the availability of funds that might be useful.

Councilperson Kawecky asked who is leading the design for the Beechurst Ave project. Mr. Austin noted that design is being done by Stantec. The design needs to be approved by the DOH.

Mr. Justice moved to approve the TIP amendment request except the Beechurst Ave @ 6th Street Project; seconded by Commissioner Bloom. With no discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Statler asked if the Morris Builder Bridge + 1 project includes both bridges near that location. Mr. Austin noted that he needs to clarify the scope of that project with the DOH, but he believes it includes both bridges.

Councilperson Selin asked if the funds for the trail equipment purchase will go away because of the deletion of the project. Mr. Austin noted that Ella Belling has negotiated with the DOH on the issues. The funds will be folded into other grants for the Mon River Trails Conservancy.

Councilperson Selin moved to approve the TIP amendment to delete the project of Mon River Rail Trail Maintenance Equipment Purchase; seconded by Mr. Kelly. With no discussion, the motion was unanimously approved.

6. Project Status Report-Brian Carr

Mr. Carr updated the Board with the status of the following projects in the region:

The current engineering design for the Greenbag Rd project includes two roundabouts. One is at Dorsey Ave and the other is at Mississippi St. The DOH is waiting for the FHWA approval for the proposal. Mr. Carr noted that the project is expected to be cleared to proceed by the end of June.

The University Ave and Collins Ferry Rd project is in right-of-way phase. The DOH is working with two parcel owners to acquire necessary ROW for the proposed improvement.

The DOH is to finish the engineering design for the Van Voorhis Rd very soon and move to the right-of-way phase in the summer.

DOH almost finished the engineering design for the West Run project and will move to the right-of-way phase soon.

For the Beechurst Ave project, the DOH is working with the City of Morgantown and WVU on the boundary adjustment of impacted parcel along the corridor. The engineering design is nearly completed.

Mr. Carr noted that the DOH legal staff is working on Mileground project to secure right-of-way for the proposed improvement. He noted that there are 5 parcels in the issue. The Morgantown Utility Board started utility relocation for its sewage lines near the Easton Hill. The DOH will need to work with the Federal Aviation Administration on utility relocation adjacent to the airport.

Commissioner Sikora asked about the scope of work of the Van Voorhis Project. Mr. Austin noted that it is from the West Run Rd intersection to the Burroughs St intersection. The project will install sidewalks all the way through. Mr. Kelly noted that the sight distance of crosswalks should be taken into consideration for the project. Mr. Austin agreed and noted that design team is sensitive about the issue.

Chairman Bloom noted that many community members are confused about the scope of Van Voorhis Rd as it has been going on for several years. Mr. Austin noted that there had been a drainage issue on Van Voorhis. The DOH fixed the issue in collaboration with the Morgantown Utility Board. The project in discussion now is a transportation project focusing on roadway improvements for all users.

Mr. Justice noted that Congressman McKinley listed 5 projects in his congressional district. One of the projects is Van Voorhis Rd. Mr. Austin noted that the scope of the project listed is the same as the project in discussion.

Councilperson Selin noted that, if appropriate, the MPO could look for other funding opportunities to improve Van Voorhis Rd from the West Run Rd intersection to the Bakers Ridge Rd intersection, such as the federal RAISE grant. Mr. Carr noted that each state can submit a limited number of applications for the RAISE grant. The ideal projects are those located in low-income neighborhood.

Councilperson Kawecki asked about the type of right-of-way proceeding for the University Ave-Collins Ferry Rd intersection project. Mr. Austin noted that the DOH is using eminent domain for the acquisition.

7. Status Report on Metropolitan Transportation Plan Update

Mr. Austin noted that consultant held a second steering committee meeting and briefed participants about the outline of the MTP update process. The project team is expected to conduct extensive public engagement. Mr. Gast-Bray noted that the coordination between the MPO's transportation plan and the County's and Municipalities' land use plans is the key to success, as future year transportation model depends on land use forecasts. Mr. Yeager noted that he is excited about this project. The city is working with its consultant on finalizing their contract.

Mr. Austin noted that MPO staff is bringing the consultants up to speed on the MPO's travel demand model, which was developed by a different consulting firm in the previous MTP update.

8. Update on Mountain Line Transit Study

Mr. Austin noted that the Mountain Line is working with consultants to identify opportunities to develop a coordinated fare collection system in the area. He noted that the Mountain Line staff will meet with consultant tomorrow afternoon to discuss potential proposals. Mr. Austin noted that the study is an extension of the previously adopted Mountain Line Transit Study and is funded separately by a federal AIM grant. Mrs. Smith noted that the Mountain Line will meet staff of Federal Transit Administration next week to discuss the project, as the project is expected to set a national example for an integrated transit fare collection system.

9. Status of Mineral Ave./WV 7 Intersection data collection

Mr. Austin noted that MPO staff conducted data collection in the Mineral Ave/WV 7 Intersection area. The data collected include pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicle turning movement.

Mr. Justice noted that it is very difficult to cross WV 7 in the Sabraton from the Woodburn neighborhood. He noted that the speed of traffic on WV 7 is high and there are few entrance points along the corridor.

Councilperson Harshbarger noted that pedestrian crossing on WV 7 in Sabraton is difficult. There is no crosswalk along the corridor except at the Sheets intersection. Councilperson Selin noted that more sidewalks are needed in the corridor. Mr. Austin noted that he will encourage DOH to adopt a more holistic approach to improve the corridor.

10. Executive Session (If needed)- per WV 6-9A-4-2a Personnel matters

Chairman Bloom noted that public agencies will not be allowed to put an executive session on the agenda for public meetings. Instead, they can go to an executive session in any meeting as needed without an executive session on the agenda.

11. Other Business

Chairman Bloom discussed the status of the interchange project at the Exit 155 on I-79. He noted that the County Commission was surprised that the project remained at its initial stage and was not included in the list of projects which will be funded by the General Obligation Bond. He noted that there has been a lack of communication on the project status. Chairman Bloom noted that the DOH has committed to funding the project under other federal funding categories. It will be proceeded as design-bid-build and no modification can be made to the design as it is now. He emphasized the importance of the MPO representing the voice of local community and leading the communication with the DOH.

Commissioner Sikora noted that there have been some inaccurate assumptions held by the developers and consultants about the funding strategies for the project. As a result, the communication between the MMMPO and the DOH was broken down, causing confusion to both agencies.

Mr. Austin noted that the MPO staff had requested information from the developer about the project and provided technical support to facilitate the project development. Mr. Austin noted that MPO staff could be more helpful to the developer in communicating with the DOH about project's funding status.

Mr. Austin also noted that the MPO has policies for improving connectivity between the eastern part and the western part of the region for all users. Federal regulations also require provision of pedestrian and bicycle facilities as appropriate to any transportation project.

Commissioner Bloom suggested that MPO staff prepare a monthly report summarizing the status of major transportation projects in the region, such as the Mileground Rd project, the Collins Ferry Rd project, and the I-79 Exit 155 project.

Commissioner Sikora agreed and noted that the information is especially needed for projects of regional significance.

Mr. Austin noted that he will reach out to the DOH staff and prepare memos on projects status to ensure that the project development process is clear and transparent and is understood by the community.

Mr. Statler noted that community has often been misinformed on whether a project is funded by the General Obligation Bonds. It would be helpful to inform the community about the exact locations of big projects in the region.

Mr. Kelly noted that the I-79 Exit 155 project will improve access to the school in the Mylan Park area. It will also improve the safety of school buses traveling through the Exit 155 to the Mon County school bus hub during non-pick-up and non-drop-off time.

Mr. Statler noted that it would be helpful to know the hierarchy of roads based on which they are maintained. He noted that the MPO should provide the community with a clear map of locations for ongoing and scheduled road maintenance.

Mr. Kawecki agreed and expressed his appreciation for the projects accomplished by the DOH in the region. He noted that the condition of intersections on South University Ave at Walnut St and Pleasant St should be taken into consideration when discussing improving the traffic environment in the area. The two intersections are important to the urban core. He also noted that the MPO need to pursue the projects that are best in the long run and bring the voice of the community to the DOH.

Councilperson Selin expressed her appreciation for the effort to improve the communication with the DOH. She noted that the MPO should take advantage of the opportunities to bring attention to the DOH for the projects of community's concerns. She suggested having a diverse group of people interacting with DOH throughout time.

Commissioner Sikora noted that the DOH will hold workshops around the State to involve local communities in the transportation project development process. They are be good opportunities for local officials to have direct conversations with DOH staff.

Chairman Bloom emphasized the importance of clear and unified messages that the MPO send to the DOH. He noted that when different groups bring different perspectives to the Charleston, it causes confusions. He also noted that the messages should be delivered without any ramification.

Mr. Justice noted that the MPO needs to reset its communication with the DOH to better monitor the status of projects in the region. He suggested that the MPO be more proactive in exploring partnership opportunities among the DOH, local municipalities, and private sectors.

Mayor Lewis noted that the Town of Granville has worked with the DOH on maintaining the city streets, including solving the drainage issues on Main St. She noted that local initiatives are important when DOH's resource are not immediately available.

Chairman Bloom noted that the conversation should start within the MMMPO to build consensus before reaching out to the DOH.

Councilperson Kawecki agreed and noted that it is important to keep communication channels open to ensure that the DOH received a clear and unified voice from the MMMPO.

Commissioner Sikora suggested that the MMMPO strengthen its communication with the district office, which has more direct knowledge of local projects.

Mr. Statler noted that the DOH's district staff has been very responsive to inquiries from the Morgantown Chamber of Commerce -Morgantown Area Partnership. The two entities have established a good channel of commination for years. The MMMPO could establish similar communication mechanism with the district office as well.

Councilperson Selin agreed and noted that such connections will help the MPO get timely update on small projects at local level. Councilperson Selin noted that she expects more collaboration between the City of Morgantown and DOH on a variety of projects and emphasized the importance of consistence in the communication.

12. Meeting Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM.