

Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program
STATE PLANNING COUNCIL
MINUTES

Thursday, April 10, 2008
William E. Powers Building
Conference Room A
One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI

I. ATTENDANCE

Members Present

Mr. Kevin Flynn	Representing Ms. Beverly Najarian, Chair, RI Department of Administration
Mr. Jared L. Rhodes, II, Secretary	Statewide Planning Program
Ms. Susan Baxter	Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission
Mr. Daniel Beardsley	RI League of Cities and Towns
Ms. Sharon Conard Wells	West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation
Ms. Carmella Corte	Representing Ms. Rosemary Booth Gallogly, Budget Office
Mr. L. Vincent Murray	Town of South Kingstown Planning Department
Mr. Peter Osborn	Federal Highway Administration (Advisory Member)
Ms. Linda Pointer	Representing Mr. Thomas Deller Department of Planning & Development, City of Providence
Ms. Anna Prager	Public Member
Mr. B. Michael Rauh	Environmental Advocate
Mr. William Sequino	Public Member
Mr. Robert Shawver	Representing Mr. Jerome Williams, RI Department of Transportation
Mr. John Trevor	Environmental Advocate
Ms. Janet White Raymond	Public Member

Members Absent

Ms. Jeanne Boyle	City of East Providence Planning Department
Mr. Steven Cardì	Public Member
Mr. Timothy Costa, Vice Chair	Governor's Policy Office

Guests

Mr. Daniel Burman	Federal Highway Administration
Ms. Meridith Holderbaum	R.I. House
Ms. Kelly Mahoney	R.I. Senate

Staff--Statewide Planning Program

Mr. George Johnson	Assistant Chief, Statewide Planning
Ms. Katherine Trapani	Supervising Planner, Transportation
Mr. Robert Griffith	Chief, Strategic Planning

II. AGENDA ITEMS

1. Call to Order

Mr. Flynn called the meeting to order at 9:06 A.M., and welcomed Ms. Carmella Corte, who was representing Ms. Booth-Gallogly of the Budget Office.

2. Approval of February 14th Minutes

Mr. Trevor moved to approve the Minutes of February 14, 2008, as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Murray, and carried unanimously.

3. Chief's Progress Report

Mr. Rhodes presented the Chief's Progress Report, presenting the following items:

- **Economic Development / Strategic Planning** – Mr. Rhodes reported that staff members Bill McKenna and Bob Griffith of the Strategic Planning section have been doing a wonderful job in ensuring that RI continues to have access to the Federal dollars offered to the State and our municipalities through the United States Economic Development Administration (EDA). In particular they have built upon the excellent relationship that we have with our Federal representative Mr. Tyrone Beach from the Philadelphia Office. Bob and Bill did an outstanding job in hosting Mr. Beach's 3 - day visit to the State last week in which they organized and executed a series of meetings between Mr. Beach and various local stakeholders to discuss key economic development projects and concerns. This included meeting with state officials from the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), municipal officials in Woonsocket, Middletown, Pawtucket, East Providence, Newport, and Cranston as well as with others including the Providence Performing Arts Center and the Providence Community Health Centers.

A significant portion of Mr. Beach's visit was also tied to this year's solicitation for the State's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). Mr. Beach participated in our annual CEDS workshop which was held on March 25 at the offices of the EDC, and was attended by approximately 15 community and non-profit group representatives. During the workshop, Mr. Beach and DOP staff overviewed the program requirements and submittal process and addressed the specific concerns of those in attendance. The deadline for submittal of CEDS applications is May 5 at 4:00 PM and anyone with further question or concerns should contact Mr. McKenna, Mr. Rhodes noted.

Mr. Griffith and Mr. McKenna have also finalized the details of our agency's submittal of its annual planning grant application to EDA for Economic Development Planning funds, and are awaiting EDA's invitation to submit the package. The primary focus of this year's grant is in securing the federal matching funds which are required for the Program to continue funding the staff FTE's dedicated to this function.

In addition to the CEDS program our continued focus will be on completing our update and consolidation of the State's Economic Development Policies and Plan (EDPP) and CEDS Five Year Update. Finding the necessary staff time to complete this process has proven difficult due to the recent retirements and the recent elimination of the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council (RI EPC) staff. Given this, Mr. Griffith and Mr. McKenna have again stepped up to the plate and taken on the responsibility for completing the plan. A complete first draft of the consolidated EDPP and CEDS plans is expected within six months. EDA, through Mr. Beach, appears open to this process and unofficially agreed to grant the State a one year extension on completing the required documentation given the staffing consideration for which we have no control. Formalization of the agreement is in process.

- **Land Use and Comprehensive Planning** -- Mr. Rhodes mentioned that Ms. Blanche Higgins, Supervising Planner of our Land Use Section, had had an unfortunate accident that left her with two broken legs. He noted that many members have had long professional relations with Ms. Higgins, and offered to provide members with her contact information so that they could personally share their thoughts and regards with her.

Mr. Rhodes further noted that Ms. Higgins had been taking the lead on a major effort over the past 3 months – the Assessment of the current state of comprehensive planning in Rhode Island. In her absence, Kevin Nelson, Benny Bergantino and Paul Gonsalves have done an excellent job in keeping the effort on track.

The first phase of the Assessment effort has been completed. This involved the creation and administration of a 50+ plus question survey primarily aimed at professional planners, municipal officials, state agency representatives and the building, development and consulting community. Over 150 individuals (a good size response for the small state that we are) took the time to respond to the survey. Preliminary results have been calculated and presented to the Implementation Committee.

Phase Two of the effort, will be a series of focus group discussions with the three primary audiences noted earlier. The first of these will be held later today, he noted. The purpose of the focus group discussions are to delve deeper into the preliminary results from the survey and to clarify what the effected stakeholder groups see as the specific issues of concern and potential solutions. Once the focus group discussions are complete staff will work to synthesize the input received into a formal technical paper that is anticipated to put forth a series of recommendations for improving the system. This technical paper, he noted, will be formally presented to the Technical Committee and to the Planning Council later this year, with implementation following its approval.

- **Transportation** -- Noting that the majority of the meeting agenda today was dedicated to transportation topics, Mr. Rhodes only briefly touched base on the following three transportation related items:
 - Staff continues to work with the Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) and the City of Warwick to address the concerns that the City raised in reviewing the draft Airport Systems Plan that was presented to the SPC last fall. This work is approximately 50% complete and anticipated to be back before the SPC in June.
 - The past two weeks have also brought some major milestones in the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program. The “boiler plate” sections of the Cooperative Agreements that will be signed with each of the recipients have recently been approved by the Department's Legal staff, which clears the way for Program staff to start producing detailed Scopes of Work for signature. A contract with the National SRTS Center for the delivery of the national course

workshops has also been established, and approximately six of the workshops have been or are being scheduled within the recipient communities.

- o Lastly, Mr. Rhodes noted that work also continued on the updating of the States Surface Transportation Plan. The Plan was introduced to the Technical Committee in December. Staff has been presenting various sections of the Plan to the Transportation Advisory Committee over the last several months. Chapter 1 is an Introduction and Background, Chapter 2 provides Background Data and Trends, Chapter 3 is the Financial Program, Chapter 4 is new, and contains Environmental Mitigation, Environmental Justice, and Land Use Scenarios. Chapter 5 lists all of the goals, policies, and strategies. It is expected that the draft plan update will be on the Committee's May agenda for review and recommendation.

Mr. Flynn added several comments to the Progress Report. He noted that relative to the Solid Waste Management Plan, staff work on the RFP for an economic study of waste disposal is in abeyance, awaiting re-composition of the RIRRC Board. He also noted earlier drafts of the RFP had been shared with the audit team that is reviewing the Corporation's books and they have expressed interest in several of the items that the Corporation had objected to including in the scope. These relate to the costs of expanding the Landfill to the east, requiring the relocation of a number of the Landfill's facilities. He noted that these questions also came up during the Council's review of the draft waste management plan. Mr. Flynn stated that he was hopeful that the RIRRC will soon have a new Board constituted so that the economic study can move forward.

Mr. Flynn reported that the Keep Space Initiative projects are being reviewed at a RI Housing meeting this morning, and that he expects that winning proposals will be announced shortly. He stated that he felt that there would be 4 or 5 selected to move forward in the process.

Relative to Statewide Planning's staff, Mr. Flynn stated he was pleased to announce that after long delays, the Program has been able to hire a new Executive Assistant to fill the vacancy left by the departure of Ms. Patricia Greene. The new staff person comes from RIDEM, and Mr. Flynn stated that she is expected to start before next month's meeting.

Mr. Flynn noted for Council members that the Grow Smart Rhode Island's Second Power of Place Summit was scheduled for May 2nd, and that the Conference Agenda and registration materials are available at the Grow Smart website. He noted that staff will be presenting or moderating 3 or 4 workshop sessions.

There were no questions on the Chief's Progress Report.

4. State Planning Council Rules of Procedure -- Amendment

Mr. Rhodes updated the Council on this item. Since the draft Rule Amendment was presented at the February meeting, staff revised two items to reflect the Council's comments. These were an addition, in section **12.01.11. (d)**, of a reference to the Secretary publishing "finding of facts", and a revision, in section **12.01.11 (f)**, to a "written objection" being the trigger for denying a request. These changes were made in the version of the draft Amendment that was advertised for public comment. A public notice was published and the public hearing was held on February 19th. No comments were received on the proposed amendment.

Mr. Rauh moved approval of the Amendment. Ms. Conard Wells seconded this motion and it carried unanimously.

5. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): FY 2009-2012

Mr. Flynn introduced Ms. Trapani who delivered a presentation on this item. Ms. Trapani noted that this is the first TIP to be prepared under the SAFETEA-LU Act, and it covers four years rather than two under the earlier legislation. She noted that due to funding limits, a general solicitation of projects was held only for the Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) program. The CMAQ program was reviewed with the Air Quality Transportation Committee and a recommended program presented last

week to the Technical Committee by the Chair of the Committee, Steve Majkut of DEM. The recommended CMAQ program is now included in the draft TIP. She stated that RIDOT and RIPTA both have portions of the draft TIP. The RIPTA proposal is on the blue sheet, but there is no RIPTA representative present to describe it. She asked Mr. Shawver to describe RIDOT's programs in the draft TIP.

Mr. Shawver provided an overview of RIDOT's draft TIP, noting it is an authorization rather than expenditure document. A basic problem he noted, is that there are too many projects in the TIP given the funds available. Flexible federal funds have declined, and funds going to earmarked projects constrain the overall program. In addition, the large projects underway must be completed and paid for via the GARVEE bonds; this, he noted, is taking a larger share of available funding than was anticipated. He noted that bridge concerns are also a major new need that must be addressed, and the addition of several large bridge projects that must be done, have further strained the program.

He noted that the TIP was reviewed thoroughly by former Director Jerry Williams during his tenure at DOT. All projects were site-visited and assessed for priority in three categories by DOT. Category 1 included projects needed for safety concerns, to preserve the integrity of the system, or fulfill a legal commitment or high priority of the plan. Category 2 projects were similar, but could be delayed somewhat. Category 3 included all other projects. Bridge projects were increased from \$29 million in 2008 to \$60 million. Over five years there is a \$660 million shortfall in funds needed for all projects. In fitting projects to available funds, many were shifted to "out years". After 2008, only #1 priority projects are programmed until 2012.

Mr. Shawver noted that the program anticipates a \$10 million per year increase in federal funds, but even that is uncertain as the Highway Trust Fund is predicted to have major shortfalls in Fiscal 2009.

Mr. Shawver also pointed out that the TIP preserves investments in safety and preventative maintenance, such as striping and thin pavement overlays.

The GARVEE payback requires \$47 million per year to pay debt. This comes off the top of the program, before other needs can be considered. This payback will continue at this level through 2022, and then drop to \$9 million per year through 2026. There are also increased costs in the GARVEE-funded major projects that have to be absorbed in the regular program.

The Warwick Intermodal Station is in the TIP, shown for \$65 million of regular funds in addition to the earmarked funding from Congress. This is a prior commitment that is now in construction and must be completed, Mr. Shawver noted.

Bridge 550 in Pawtucket is a major new and urgent need; this requires \$90 million over three years. The Providence Viaduct is included for \$25 million, but this cost could inflate. The Routes 6 & 10 bridges and interchange in Providence must also be replaced soon, at an estimated cost of \$300 million; but funds for this project could not be shown in the draft TIP.

Mr. Flynn asked why the total anticipated federal funds could drop. Mr. Shawver stated that the federal appropriations bill sets the funding levels higher than the amounts that the Highway Trust Fund could sustain. If the requirement for a balanced budget is enforced, there could be a cut in federal funds of 35%.

Mr. Flynn informed the Council that the Governor had recently appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force to address transportation finance issues, and that Council-member Bill Sequino had been named to it, to represent, he felt, local government perspectives, but also the Council as the MPO.

Mr. Beardsley asked how much funding the TIP puts forward for the Warwick Station. Mr. Shawver indicated that there are \$65 million in FHWA flexible funds shown, but that the project also has funds earmarked. The total is \$111 million. Mr. Beardsley asked if there was a commitment from

AMTRAK to service the station. Mr. Shawver replied that, as of now, AMTRAK will not stop at the station, but the MBTA is expected to service it. Mr. Beardsley asked what the frequency of the MBTA service would be. Mr. Shawver replied that he did not have the exact schedule, but believed it would mirror the current Providence to Boston schedule. Ms. Trapani stated that there are currently 15 roundtrips per day to Providence.

Ms. Trapani reviewed the next steps in the TIP review. The TAC will review the revised package at its April meeting, and make its recommendations. The draft will again be on the Council's May agenda along with the Surface Transportation Plan update, and acceptance of the TIP and Plan for holding a public hearing will be asked at that time. A consolidated hearing on both the TIP and the Plan will be held in June, and approval of both documents will be sought in August, after any needed revisions are made to reflect public comments.

Ms. Prager asked if the TIP provides for commuter rail service to South County. Mr. Shawver indicated that there is a section of the TIP dealing with FTA's Fixed Guideway funds. This shows funding for the Wickford station, and plans are moving forward for that portion of the commuter rail project. Future phases would bring service to Kingston and Westerly eventually, he noted. Mr. Flynn added that stations in East Greenwich and West Davisville would also be considered as future phases.

6. Transportation Plan Update

Ms. Trapani gave a presentation on the draft of the Transportation Plan update. She distributed several items for the Council to review, including results of a public survey done via the Program's website, a URI visualization study depicting the impacts of sea level rise on selected Rhode Island locations, and an atlas of maps prepared by the staff for the plan update. This is the first plan update under SAFETEALU guidelines, which required a number of new items to be addressed. The 2004 plan update used a series of focus groups; this time the effort relied upon a number of planning efforts being done by other groups and agencies, as well as staff work

Ms. Trapani reviewed the major parts of the draft. Part One includes a Performance Assessment (done in 2006) of the 2004 Plan, covers the SAFETEALU requirements and the USDOT's Strategic Plan, as well as summarizing new studies done, such as the Land Use Plan. Part Two includes a system inventory covering facilities, transit, management systems, and freight and intermodal components. It also includes a Needs Assessment giving four scenarios for the future transportation system. These are: *Sink*, which is the baseline, *Tread Water*, which provides minimal expanded service, *Swim*, which provides for some expansion, and *Win The Race*, which builds the system for the future. These scenarios are still being worked on with RIDOT and RIPTA, and will be more fleshed out in the next version of the draft. Part Three provides the required Fiscal Constraint analysis, that identifies available funding sources and matches them with needs. This also is being worked on and will be covered in May. Part Four includes an environmental analysis, which responds to the new SAFETEALU requirements and to recommendations made in the last Federal re-certification review. Ms. Trapani noted that a consultation was held with many environmental agencies to develop this section, and it identifies various mitigation programs. This Part also provides maps of natural resources and an environmental justice section. The environmental justice analysis is based on GIS and uses a ½ mile buffer around transit stops to identify benefits to environmental justice populations. One conclusion reached is that the environmental justice population has greater access to transit than the general population. Thus, transit service was found to be an overall benefit to the targeted groups. A similar analysis was also done of transportation system burdens. This used GIS to determine the proportion of the populations living within 250' of urban interstates and freeways that have increased exposure to vehicle emissions. The conclusion reached was that the environment justice population has greater exposure to air emissions than the general population. Remedies recommended in the draft include: starting the school bus diesel retrofitting project in the inner cities, and providing increased vegetation buffers along highway corridors.

Various land use scenarios were also analyzed utilizing the travel demand model through 2030. This
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analysis showed that the Sprawl Scenario would result in a 1.5 % overall increase in VMT, and a 3% reduction in transit ridership. A Compact Growth Scenario results in a 1% decrease in VMT overall, and a 2% increase in transit ridership. These numbers are still being refined, Ms. Trapani noted.

Part Four also covers operational and management strategies, such as access management and the Transportation Management Center (TMC). An on-going congestion management process is recommended. The new Strategic Highway Safety Plan is also incorporated in Part Four. This plan found that the biggest highway safety issues were speed and aggressive driving, impaired drivers, young drivers, intersection and run-off –the road crashes, and occupant safety. The implementation of this plan will be continuing with an on-going task force.

Freight planning is also covered in Part Four, with recommendations made for addressing new truck stops, and undersized (rail and highway) bridges. In addition, Security and Transit Planning are covered, including new studies done by various groups.

Part Five includes the plans vision, goals, objectives, policies, strategies, and performance measures; all have been updated where appropriate to reflect the new studies and planning work. Changes are shown as marked – underlined for added text, and deletions shown as grey text. This part of the draft will be mailed out before the next meeting, Ms. Trapani noted.

Ms. Conard Wells asked if the emergency evacuation signage cropping up along highways is covered by the plan. She noted that this sometimes appears to provide confusing directions. Ms. Trapani replied that this is not covered directly by the plan, but that the local Emergency Managers posting the signs need to coordinate with the RI Emergency Management Agency so that an overall coordinated system is put into place.

Mr. Trevor asked if the Transblog mentioned can give information on carpooling to Newport. Ms. Trapani replied that the Transblog was just for public input, but that RIPTA's Commuter Resource Program can provide assistance on carpooling and other travel options.

Mr. Burman asked if the plan considers the impact of the aging population. Ms. Trapani noted that there are several recommendations for improved signage and lighting that recognize the changing capabilities of older drivers.

Mr. Johnson commented that the recommendation for increased vegetated buffers is a long-standing Guide Plan recommendation, but that it often can conflict with federal and state desires to sell surplus highway corridor land for revenue. He stated that a clear definition of how these policies are balanced should help in the future.

Mr. Murray stated that the calculated increase in transit ridership from the compact development scenario seemed small. Ms. Trapani replied that the model does not have a commuter rail component yet. This could add additional ridership, so the 2% figure is a likely a low estimate.

There were no further questions at this time.

Ms. Trapani concluded by noting that it is anticipated that the entire draft Transportation Plan will be mailed to Council members in mid-April and the Council will be asked for approval to schedule a Public Hearing on the Plan update at its May meeting.

7. Other Business

Ms. Prager commented on the information provided earlier relative to the Resource Recovery Corporation study. She noted that she has asked herself, as the RIRRC story has unfolded in the news, if there was anything further that the Council could have done to probe for information as the draft waste management plan was under review. Mr. Flynn stated that the Council did ask a number of tough questions, and moved the plan in the right direction, probably as far as it could have. The Corporation's current woes involve a number of issues that were not within the purview of the draft plan, such as contributions to charitable groups and asset management decisions. He noted that some of the items in the draft RFP that the Corporation objected to seem to be of considerable interest to the auditors.

Mr. Trevor stated that the Council did seek more information, but was rebuffed. Nevertheless, he agreed that the waste plan addressed a number of issues and provided many concrete recommendations that now need to be acted on. He expressed hope that the plan will not sit on the shelf, and stated he was encouraged that the Governor and the Legislature both seem very interested in turning things around.

8. Adjourn

There being no other business before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 10:38 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jared L. Rhodes, II
Secretary