

**STATE PLANNING COUNCIL  
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

October 30, 2013 at 6:30 p.m.

Department of Administration

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**ATTENDANCE**

**TAC members present**

Ms. Meredith Brady representing Mr. Robert Shawver	RIDOT
Mr. Alan Brodd	Town of Cumberland
Mr. Michael Cassidy	Public Member
Dr. Judith Drew	Governor's Commission on Disabilities
Mr. Ron Gagnon	RI Department of Environmental Management
Mr. Richard Crenca	City of Warwick
Mr. Albert Dahlberg	Public Member
Mr. George Monaghan	RI Consulting Engineers (RICE)
Ms. Lillian Picchione	RI Public Transit Authority
Mr. Daniel Porter	RI Airport Corporation
Ms. Pam Sherrill	RI Chapter, APA
Mr. Barry Schiller	RI Sierra Club
Mr. Henry Sherlock	Construction Industries of RI
Mr. Michael Walker	RI Economic Development Corporation

**TAC members absent**

Mr. Lloyd Albert	AAA Southern New England
Mr. Dan Baudouin	Providence Foundation
Ms. Sue Barker	Greenways Alliance
Mr. David Everett	City of Providence
Mr. Paul Romano	Public Member
Ms. Fran Shocket, Chair	Public Member
Ms. Dinalyn Spears	Narragansett Indian Tribe
Mr. Everett Stuart, Vice Chair	RI Association of Railroad Passengers
Dr. Robert Vanderslice	RI Department of Health
Mr. Michael Wood	Town of Burrillville / RI League of Cities and Towns

**Others in attendance**

Mr. Corey Bobba	FHWA
Mr. Steve Devine	RIDOT
Ms. Eugenia Marks	Coalition for Transportation and Choices / Audubon
Mr. Bob Votta	FHWA
Ms. Margarite Pryor	Member of the Public

**Statewide Planning Staff Present**

Mr. Jared Rhodes	Chief
Ms. Karen Scott	Assistant Chief
Ms. Linsey Callaghan	Supervising Planner
Ms. Ronnie Sirota	Principal Planner

## AGENDA ITEMS

### 1. Call to Order

Mr. Cassidy acted as chair due to the absence of the regular Chair and Vice Chair at the meeting. Mr. Cassidy called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

### 2. Approval of May 23, 2013 Meeting Minutes – *for action*

Upon motion to approve by Mr. Porter, seconded by Mr. Brodd, the meeting minutes were accepted unanimously.

### 3. Public Comment on Agenda Items

Ms. Margarite Pryor, a member of the public, commented that she is very interested in the transportation process. She was disappointed that copies of the draft Rail Plan were not available to the public, although she was eventually able to obtain a copy from Statewide Planning. Mr. Cassidy explained that tonight was just the beginning of the information on the draft Rail Plan. There will be plenty of opportunities to comment on the draft report before and during the Public Hearing.

### 4. FY 2014 Unified Transportation Planning Work Program, Proposed Amendment #1

Ms. Scott gave information about the proposed Amendment to the Work Program. The United States Geological Survey(USGS) is planning to fly the Providence Urban Area to acquire high resolution digital orthophotography in Spring 2014. They have offered the State the opportunity to purchase imagery at a discounted cost of \$54,000 (which may vary) to fly the entire state for this project. Funding would be \$43,200 (80%) in FHWA Metropolitan Planning Funds and \$10,800 (20%) in state RIDOT funds. A supplement sheet describing additional details was part of the TAC meeting packet especially listing the possible uses such as climate change efforts.

Ms. Sherrill moved that the TAC recommend to the State Planning Council that they approve Amendment #1 to the FY 2014 Unified Planning Work Program.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Walker and was approved unanimously.

### 5. Draft Rhode Island State Rail Plan 2014 (*See attached powerpoint*)

- ***Authorization to Conduct a Public Hearing – for action***

Ms. Scott presented a powerpoint on the draft RI State Rail Plan 2014. Ms. Scott thanked the Rail Plan Advisory Committee which included TAC members Everett Stuart, Mike Cassidy, Michael Walker, Dan Baudouin, and Steve Devine of RIDOT. The Committee consisted of public and private sector transportation and railroad stakeholders; eight meetings were held thus far. Ms. Scott stressed that the Plan is still in draft form and there will be plenty of opportunity for input from the TAC and the public before it is finalized. The attached copy of the slides explains the need for and development of the Plan, as well as a description of the various chapters, and Plan's content.

According to Ms. Scott, the stimulus for this new Rail Plan was the passage of the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) in 2008. A new State Rail Plan was necessary in order for RI to be eligible for federal funding opportunities under PRIIA. In addition, the multiyear federal transportation authorization, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21) took effect on October 1, 2012. This Act includes grant funding for new and expanded rail systems, as well as national goals that states and MPO's must use as they craft their intermodal transportation programs. These

goals were used as a framework in development of Rhode Island's State Rail Plan goals, objectives, policies, and implementation actions as well as the evaluation and listing of specific projects.

Ms. Scott started to briefly explain each chapter. Ms. Sherrill asked if any comments or corrections by TAC members should be given at this time. Since this was answered in the affirmative, Ms. Sherrill pointed out a correction on page 4-21 about Waterfront Drive in East Providence. The text states "after the new Waterfront Drive road construction project is built" there will be room to re-establish rail service if needed. Ms. Sherrill believed this text should be corrected to indicate that the project is already built. Ms. Sherrill also stated that there may be some conflict with the rail R-O-W in the future as Waterfront Drive is extended further from Dexter Street north to Pawtucket. This can be explored with the P & W Railroad and the City of East Providence. Mr. Schiller added that this segment of Waterfront Drive is of interest with the bike community for a connection with the East Bay Bike Path. He also pointed out that the new Waterfront Drive is very bike friendly.

Ms. Sherrill pointed out on page 4-23 there is a reference to short sea shipping; both ProvPort and Quonset should have the opportunity to utilize the marine highway. Ms. Scott added that the new term is marine highway rather than short sea shipping.

Ms. Scott continued with the powerpoint presentation. Additional TAC comments include Dr. Drew's statement that the focus of the Plan seems to be on the expansion of passenger rail service in South County. She is concerned about passenger service expansion in northern Rhode Island. For example, people in Woonsocket cannot get to jobs in Providence because of limited RIPTA bus service. Dr. Drew asked when this topic would be addressed. Mr. Cassidy responded that there is a more detailed description of projects in northern Rhode Island in Chapters 9 and 10. Dr. Drew asked if this focus is because South County's population has increased. Ms. Scott answered that South County is where the existing Northeast Corridor tracks are located and therefore is somewhat easier to accommodate added commuter rail stations. There is a section on Blackstone Valley in Chapter 6 on the rail freight line. Ms. Sherrill pointed out that the map after page 6-6 does not show the Blackstone Valley rail line and should be shown on the inset. Ms. Scott replied that potential service to the Blackstone Valley is shown on another map.

Ms. Scott explained that the Plan's chapters include the different areas and potential services for passenger rail. There is an overview of the economic, environmental, energy and land use impacts of rail as well as rail safety and security. From the vision statement various goals, objectives, policies, and implementation action developed. This should be looked at along with the program of projects for a full understanding of the process. The project evaluation process indicates the types of factors that were taken under consideration as different projects were evaluated. Ms. Scott explained that not every project listed in the rail plan will go into the TIP for construction funding. Projects were divided into four project development phases, planning level analysis; preliminary engineering / environmental analysis; final engineering design; and construction. Ms. Scott added that it was difficult to evaluate projects together since the projects are in various stages of development.

The concluding Chapter 10 includes information on the Rhode Island rail investment program, for both freight and passenger projects. The projects are identified in a short range (0-5 years) investment program, as well as the long range investment program (6 – 20 years). The Appendix includes an inventory of Rhode Island's rail lines.

Lastly, Ms. Scott explained the next steps which are listed in the attached powerpoint including that there will be plenty of opportunity for comments from the TAC, Technical Committee, Statewide Planning Council, and the public. Additional comments, corrections, and edits should be emailed to staff. Ms. Scott also stated that the updated draft, incorporating the changes from feedback, will be posted on the website probably earlier than the minimum of thirty days before the Public Hearing.

Comments from the TAC followed Ms. Scott's presentation. Ms. Sherrill stated that she was impressed with the quality and thoroughness of the draft State Rail Plan. Ms. Scott said the Rail Advisory Committee had a lot to do with that as there were representatives from different organizations throughout the State. Ms. Callaghan explained that the P & W Railroad has been heavily involved in the development of the Plan. Mr. Walker gave credit to Ms. Scott, Ms. Callaghan, Mr. Devine, and others at RIDOT for their work on the Plan that they drafted pretty much from scratch. There were a lot of challenges and hurdles to write the Plan as they did from scratch. Ms. Picchione had a question on Chapter 9. She thought the State's infrastructure policy is on maintaining what already exists. She suggested adding a statement on the recommendation of including operational funding. Ms. Scott replied that a stand was not taken or judgment on what should be priorities. Mr. Devine added the financial part would come later through separate efforts.

Mr. Schiller commented on the substance of the Rail Plan which he realizes is preliminary. He is glad that the Plan includes recommendation for electrification of the rail line for commuter service. The environmental committee is trying to promote electrification. He suggests that the priority for this be upgraded to high priority. Mr. Schiller added that he realizes the MBTA would have to agree. Mr. Schiller also believes that from the point of view of users coordination of fares on different types of transit (between bus and commuter rail) is needed such as an "easy pass". An example would be a ticket that can be used for RIPTA and MBTA commuter rail together. In addition, providing commuter rail service from the Woonsocket to Boston market through, for example, the Franklin station utilizing RIPTA service would be very helpful. Ms. Drew commented that it is standing room only on the Franklin MBTA line to Boston. However, there is no way to get from Woonsocket to the Franklin Station on public transit.

Mr. Schiller also spoke about the idea of the Providence Streetcar. He said that many RIPTA bus customers are afraid it would take resources away from the regular bus service and resources. The current proposed alignment for the Providence Streetcar is limited in the distance covered. He suggested that maybe the Streetcar could be studied through a Planning Challenge Grant to involve serving a larger corridor. Mr. Schiller also does not agree that the Providence Streetcar is a high priority, as it is proposed at this time in the State Rail Plan. He would not be in favor of funding any more of the project unless it is fully funded. Mr. Brodd thought that a streetcar proposal involving Providence, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket could be exciting rather than just in Providence where there already is plenty of RIPTA bus service. Ms. Drew commented that low income and people with disabilities living in Pawtucket and Woonsocket cannot access employment because of the lack of RIPTA buses. Mr. Sherlock stated that he agrees with Mr. Schiller's reservations about the streetcar, and is also concerned about the operating costs to provide the service. He stated that Rhode Island cannot support everything. Ms. Sherrill stated that she was surprised to see the Providence Streetcar in the rail plan. Mr. Dahlberg also added that the Providence streetcar would be expensive, but that it would be an economic development tool. He added that the Providence Streetcar is meant to cover destinations that RIPTA does not provide level of high service frequency and direct connection between the Hospital District and College Hill. Mr. Schiller stated that through existing RIPTA service can be used for the proposed Providence Streetcar route, the Streetcar would eliminate riders from having to transfer

busses in Kennedy Plaza. Mr. Dahlberg also added that the City of Providence's proposal includes a way to finance the Streetcar project. The universities and hospitals have also stated in writing their support.

Mr. Schiller, provided additional comments on the State Rail Plan and stated that a 1% increase a year in commuter rail ridership is a very weak goal. Mr. Devine stated that he can look into increasing the 1% goal.

Mr. Walker moved to request that the State Planning Council authorize a Public Hearing on the draft State Rail Plan including comments Statewide Planning receives from the Transportation Advisory Committee, the Technical Committee, and the State Planning Council.

Mr. Monaghan seconded the motion which was approved unanimously.

6. The proposed 2014 calendar of TAC meeting dates was distributed for approval at the next meeting.

## 7. Staff Report

Ms. Callaghan covered the following items during the staff report:

- The State's Travel Demand Model is a key element in the air quality determination for projects identified in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Long Range Transportation, as well as have many other projects to project future travel demand. The current model is based on the 2000 US Census data. Now that most of the 2010 Census data is out, staff has been working to incorporate 2010 data into the model including population, household characteristics, employment, etc. There are also a number of improvements that will be added to the model to improve its accuracy and usefulness, including the addition of commuter rail as a mode choice.
- Ms. Scott reported on the Safe Routes to School Program. She reported that there are exciting developments to obligate the balance of the non-infrastructure funds, including two new projects. The first one is at the newly opened Pell Elementary School in Newport where all the City's elementary students were consolidated in one school. Many students in Newport were not getting to school and that there is an issue with truancy. A Walking School Bus, with volunteers, is being organized, as well as partnering with RIDOT for a Road Safety Audit of the area. This will be a large investment for two years. It is hoped to show the value of the program and is set up to be successful. Ms. Scott reported that the second project involves Providence Family Service of Rhode Island. The non-profit has been operating a Walking School Bus all last year. They also have a truancy issue and many students were not going to school. It is anticipated there will be positive changes with this large scale contract.

There were no further questions from the TAC.

## 8. Additional Public Comment

Ms. Marks representing the Coalition for Transportation and Choices and the Audubon Society expressed her gratitude for the new SRTS projects. Ms. Marks also commented on the Rail Plan appreciating the work that went into the development of the plan. She is however concerned about how the frequency of the existing commuter rail service is outlined in the Plan. She added that while it is important to describe the commuter rail schedule in the Plan, not just the timing of first and last trains of the day but added information should be included on the need for a full and frequent scheduled to serve the public. She also added that reduction of congestion in highways as a result of improved

commuter rail ridership should be a goal under needs assessment under congestion reduction. She also noted that she just read that the State of Utah, just quantified how many lanes of traffic on the interstate highway has been transferred to the rail system ridership.

Ms. Marguerite Pryor, a member of the public spoke next. She stated that she utilizes commuter rail service and takes the 5:07 a.m. train to Boston from Providence. In her review of the State Rail Plan, she stated that it would be helpful if the Rail Plan contained more of a connection to *Transportation 2030* with its goals and objectives and that the two plans should work together. The Rail Plan should be part of a subset of a holistic system. She added that *Transportation 2030* included four scenarios: sink, tread water, or swim regarding how to fund transportation infrastructure investments. Ms. Pryor also stated that she feels the performance measures listed in the State Rail Plan are unambitious. Ms. Pryor believes there should be more discussion of the rail lines, particularly in Connecticut, due to predicted sea level rise. Another question is the use of the rails for freight such as scrap metal and how much longer will the rail lines be used to move scrap metal. Ms. Pryor commented that there is no real discussion of bicycle commuters in the Plan; there is no safe parking for bike commuters even at the Providence train station. A seamless system is needed. Connections are needed with schedules that mesh; currently the various transit modes do not connect. This needs to be looked at as a system. An example is putting Wickford Junction on the other side of the nearby Stop & Shop supermarket development. There is a need for more intelligent siting especially if the goal is compact development.

Mr. Schiller suggested that TAC members use the email list to discuss transportation issues more. He suggested it be modified to not have to go thru Mr. Rhodes first. He suggested there should just be a "response to all." He also said that RIDOT Director Lewis stated that if Congress does not get together there will be a major transportation reduction in the Highway Trust Fund. This reduction will affect all forms of transportation including maintenance. Mr. Schiller believes that Rhode Island should encourage reduction in employee commuter miles; however, the State will be building more parking. Mr. Schiller reminded members to contact Mr. Rhodes if anyone wants to join the email discussion list.

#### **9. Other Business – *for discussion***

Ms. Sherrill notified the group about the NEDA Passenger Rail-Economic Development Webinar on November 7 from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. as well as on December 5 from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Information will be emailed to TAC members.

#### **9. Adjournment**

Upon motion of Mr. Walker, seconded by Mr. Dahlberg, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Submitted By: Ronnie Sirota, Principal Planner to Linsey Callaghan, TAC Secretary.

Respectfully submitted,

Linsey Callaghan, TAC Secretary