

**STATE PLANNING COUNCIL
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

January 23, 2014 at 6:30 p.m.
Department of Administration

APPROVED MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

TAC members present

Ms. Fran Shocket, Chair	Public Member
Mr. Everett Stuart, Vice Chair	RI Association of Railroad Passengers
Ms. Meredith Brady	RIDOT
Mr. Alan Brodd	Town of Cumberland
Mr. Richard Crenca	City of Warwick
Mr. David Everett	City of Providence
Mr. Ronald Gagnon	RI Department of Environmental Management
Mr. George Monaghan	RI Consulting Engineers (RICE)
Mr. Daniel Porter	RI Airport Corporation
Mr. Barry Schiller	RI Sierra Club
Ms. Pam Sherrill	RI Chapter, APA
Ms. Dinalyn Spears	Narragansett Indian Tribe
Mr. Michael Walker	RI Economic Development Corporation

TAC members absent

Mr. Lloyd Albert	AAA Southern New England
Ms. Sue Barker	Greenways Alliance
Mr. Dan Baudouin	Providence Foundation
Mr. Michael Cassidy	Public Member
Mr. Albert Dahlberg	Public Member
Dr. Judith Drew	Governor's Commission on Disabilities
Ms. Lillian Picchione	RI Public Transit Authority
Mr. Paul Romano	Public Member
Mr. Henry Sherlock	Construction Industries of RI
Dr. Robert Vanderslice	RI Department of Health
Mr. Michael Wood	Town of Burrillville / RI League of Cities and Towns

Others in attendance

Mr. Steve Devine	RIDOT
Ms. Marsha Garcia	URI
Mr. Andy Koziol.	RIDOT
Ms. Eugenia Marks	Coalition for Transportation and Choices / Audubon
Mr. Ken Orenstein	
Mr. John Preiss	RIDOT
Ms. Tia Ristano S.	City of Central Falls
Mr. Al Romanowicz	City of Central Falls
Mr. Kevin Viveiros	Pare Corporation

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

Ms. Shocket called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

2. Approval of October 30, 2013 Meeting Minutes – *for action*

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

3. Public Comment on Agenda Items

There was none.

4. Draft Rhode Island State Rail Plan 2014

- Public Hearing on the draft *Rhode Island State Rail Plan 2014*. Please see the Public Hearing & Comment Period Report (for January 23, 2014 hearing) on the Rhode Island State Rail Plan.
- TAC discussion of the draft State Rail Plan:

After the Public Hearing adjourned at 6:57 p.m., the TAC gave consideration to the Plan.

Ms. Sherrill stated she had three comments in addition to her previous comments on how comprehensive the Plan is:

- Page 9-3 and page 9-20: There are references to at-grade crossing rehabilitation in East Providence on Pawtucket Ave. Ms. Sherrill thinks it may be Ferris Avenue and asked that this be checked.
- She did not see a reference to the Shore Line East's interest in improving non-Amtrak interstate rail connections to Connecticut. She does not want lose opportunities to partner with other commuter rail services.
- She would like to see more emphasis on the enhancement of the Port of Providence and Quonset as economic drivers in the project evaluation process section on page 9-13. There is more detail in the Economic Vitality section of the Rail Plan and in Table 9-3.

Mr. Stuart, representing the RI Association of Railroad Passengers, stated that he and the Association appreciate everything that was done in preparing the State Rail Plan.

Mr. Schiller relayed comments from Bob Votava of DOT Watch and Friends of the South County Bike Path who was unable to attend the public hearing. Mr. Votava forwarded an email which stated that he wants to call attention to bicycles on Amtrak. Mr. Votava also wanted to call attention to issues of bottle necks farther down the Northeast corridor that could limit Amtrak service in this region. There is talk of growing freight congestion farther south, i.e., in the Washington D.C. – Baltimore area which could limit service in the New Jersey / New York tunnel. Rhode Island needs to be part of a coalition and think beyond its borders. Mr. Schiller stated he had already made his own comments at the morning public hearing.

Mr. David Everett stated that a letter was received from Dr. Castiglioni (see written comments of the Public Hearing Report). Mr. Everett wanted to speak about some of his points. Dr. Castiglioni emphasizes the need to take a metro view rather than a state view for the rail plan. Rail transportation needs are metropolitan-oriented. They involve moving people to, from, and through Providence as well connecting with the Massachusetts suburbs. For purposes of the Rail Plan, the area should be treated as a region. Dr. Castiglioni also supports the streetcar system.

Ms. Shocket stated that the meeting agenda item #4, Draft Rhode Island State Rail Plan, is listed as “for action,” when it should be “for discussion.” Ms. Callaghan stated it will be “for action” at the next TAC meeting. In answer to a question about follow-up, there will be a Public Hearing Report which will summarize the public comments and provide some answers to questions and comments raised. It will be available at the next TAC meeting, when members will be requested to vote on the Plan. Mr. Schiller suggested the report also be made available on the website. Ms. Callaghan answered that it will be.

5. MAP-21 Educational Series

Staff Presentation – for information

Ms. Scott presented on the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), which took effect in 2012 and transformed federal transportation policy. The bill defined seven national goals focusing on:

- Safety
- Infrastructure condition
- Congestion reduction
- System reliability
- Freight movement and economic vitality
- Environmental sustainability
- Reduced project delivery delays

In the past, geographic distribution was important to TIP project selection; with MAP-21, outcomes will become more important. In order for the TAC to better understand the overall conditions, needs, and performance of the State’s transportation system, Statewide Planning, RIDOT, and RIPTA will present on different elements of the system for 15-20 minutes at subsequent TAC meetings.

- Safety – February 27, 2014 TAC meeting
- Bridge – March 27, 2014 TAC meeting
- Road / Pavement Condition – April 24 TAC meeting
- Transportation Alternates – May 22, 2014 TAC meeting

6. RIDOT Transportation Funding Update

Staff Presentation: for information

Mr. Shawver of RIDOT’s Planning and Programming Division stated that there will be a greater emphasis on planning at RIDOT, and he introduced Mr. Andrew Koziol who works for Steve Devine in RIDOT’s Intermodal Planning Unit. Mr. Shawver also introduced Ms. Meredith Brady who will be replacing him as RIDOT’s designated TAC member. In response to MAP-21, RIDOT has established a new section for Asset Management, which is headed by John Preiss.

Mr. Shawver explained that the goals of his presentation to the TAC were to provide a basic understanding of highway financing in Rhode Island and to alert the TAC to the implications of the potential federal highway funding crisis. Overall the picture is bleak but there have been some improvements.

Rhode Island receives about \$200 million annually in federal transportation funds, which requires a state match of approximately \$40 million. Previously, Rhode Island used general obligation bonds to fund its state match for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), but it will have stopped this practice by 2016. Nevertheless, the state will face a significant burden from debt service on the bonds for years to

come. Federal transportation money comes from the Highway Trust Fund, which is funded primarily by taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel. Transportation funds are distributed to the states through MAP-21, the current transportation authorization legislation. Rhode Island has done well over the past few years, receiving \$2.96 in federal highway funding for every dollar paid by the state's residents.

Rhode Island's past practice of borrowing to pay its required federal match has created significant problems for the state. Beginning in 2003, the state issued GARVEE bonds to help pay for five transportation projects: the IWAY, relocated 403, Sakonnet River Bridge, Washington Bridge, and Freight Improvement Program, and now it must pay \$48 million in debt service on those bonds. Until 2022, the state must use a quarter of its federal highway funds to pay the GARVEE debt service.

Rhode Island relies heavily on federal transportation funds. Unlike many other states, Rhode Island has not provided state funding for transportation projects beyond what it has used to match federal highway funds. Most RIDOT employees, except maintenance workers, are paid with federal funding, and RI uses federal funds for things such as preventative maintenance, which other states support with their own funds. RIDOT receives \$90 million each year from the state gas tax, but much of the money is used to pay debt service on the general obligation and GARVEE bonds. The agency funds operations and maintenance with what is left from the gas tax. By 2016 Rhode Island will not be using bonds anymore, and the debt service will be finished in 2030. Governor Chafee has proposed a state-funded highway program in this year's budget, which would shift the debt service burden to the General Fund and Buy America bonds and provide more money for maintenance, including bridge work. Even more is needed, but this is a step in the right direction.

Rhode Island heavy reliance on federal transportation funds was not a problem in the past, but Congressional uncertainty has created difficulties. On September 30, 2014 MAP-21 will expire, and Congressional inaction hinders efforts to pass a long-term reauthorization. Compounding the problem, the Highway Trust Fund is projected to be depleted by August 2014. Projections show that in 2015 funding from the Highway Trust Fund will decline to \$5 billion from \$40 billion, and in 2016 it will rise again to \$33.4 billion, not \$40 billion.

If federal transportation funds disappear, Rhode Island faces serious problems. The state uses a method called advanced construction, to fund many transportation projects. Advanced construction allows the state to fund a large project on a cash flow basis, so that it does not need to assign all necessary funds at the start of a project. This frees up federal funds for other projects. Currently, the State will need \$54 million in advanced construction in 2014 and 2015 to continue projects that began in 2013. Rhode Island also needs \$97 million in 2014 and 2015 to pay down the GARVEE bonds. Potentially, the state could receive zero federal transportation funds in 2015. Although Mr. Shawver thinks but cannot be sure that the Highway Bill will be passed, RIDOT has developed a number of scenarios to address the funding risk.

- Use 2014 federal funding first to fully fund existing construction contracts payments and GARVEE debt service payments through December 2014;
- Maintain Design, Planning and Administrative activities at a curtailed level through December 2014;
- The 2014 Highway Construction Program will consist of projects funded by earmarks and projects previously authorized with prior year federal funding;
- Except for emergency / essential projects, there will be no new construction projects using 2014 federal funds. TIP projects will be deferred until funding becomes available.

Mr. Shawver said that if Congress fails to act by January of 2015, RIDOT would be in shutdown mode on the federally funded highway program. RIDOT would manage the completion of all ongoing

construction work, but no new construction work would be started. All non-essential design, planning and administrative work would be suspended. As expenditures occur which can no longer be charged to federal projects, payments will be made with funds that had been budgeted for the state match. None of the scenarios anticipates layoffs in 2015, and all construction contractor payments would be made. Regardless there would be an economic impact on the State. It is important to act now; otherwise the State could be \$85 million in the hole.

Mr. Schiller asked what is being done by other states or by the Association of State DOTs to push Congress to solve the looming funding issues. Mr. Shawver answered that other states believe that Congress will act. Many states also have the buffer of a state program; Rhode Island does not. Rhode Island will focus on the \$150 million in old projects that can be constructed, and the State will keep active its design contracts. Ms. Shocket stated she would think there would be uproar from the other states. Mr. Shawver believes they think the legislation will pass.

Mr. Schiller asked if Mr. Shawver would identify those projects that could be affected by the loss of federal funding. Mr. Shawver answered that a letter would be sent if they are affected.

Mr. Rhodes asked how this information would be shared with communities. Mr. Shawver stated RIDOT is trying to prevent these scenarios from occurring; they are potential only. RIPTA is also affected by this but they are not as leveraged. The funding crisis could benefit the State, if it leads to the creation of a with a state funded transportation program.

Mr. Brodd asked if TAC members could receive a copy of Mr. Shawver's presentation. It will be sent to TAC members.

Mr. Schiller asked if Mr. Shawver is optimistic. Mr. Shawver replies it differs on different days. Mr. Schiller asked if Mr. Shawver could discuss the transportation bonds that the Governor included in his message. Mr. Shawver replied that \$80 million are not bonds; it is money from the gas tax freed up by the State. Mr. Shawver asked Mr. Devine to talk about the RIPTA HUB project. Mr. Devine replied that it in the early stages, and it is still conceptual. They are looking at possible sites.

Mr. Schiller asked how projects are chosen for the TIGER program. He suggested that the public should have some input on what projects are included in the application. One of the last TIGER projects was the Apponaug Project in Warwick, which Mr. Schiller pointed out the TAC did not prioritize. He asked if RIDOT could provide a list of projects that are eligible. Mr. Shawver answered that this question would be for the Director. Mr. Shawver cannot guarantee there will be a public process on this.

7. Proposed 2014 Meeting Schedule

Mr. Walker moved that the proposed 2014 TAC Meeting Schedule be approved. This motion was seconded by Mr. Monaghan and approved.

7. Staff Report

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

- Changes to the State Planning Council Rules of Procedures including reorganization and elimination of redundant text and unnecessary language. Changes relevant to the TAC include two items:
 - Public Hearing Notification: Set a standard 30-day public notice requirement period with the option for either a newspaper ad or web posting.

- The TAC will be the governing body for the functional classification of highways. Previously the Technical Committee reviewed the functional classification changes. It is more appropriate for the TAC to review this.

8. Additional Public Comment

Ms. Eugenia Marks of the Audubon Society and the Coalition for Transportation and Choices spoke regarding MAP-21 goals. She hopes that the focus on highway will be construed to include, for example, the RIPTA HUB and projects involving fuel efficiency and alternative forms of transportation. She understands that the goals come from Washington, D.C., but it is somewhat concerning that the bill focuses on highways. Transportation is more than highways.

9. Other Business – *for discussion*

There was none.

10. Adjournment

Upon motion of Mr. Brodd, seconded by Mr. Walker, the meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Linsey Callaghan, TAC Secretary