



MINUTES
NASHUA REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
Held via Zoom
December 16th, 2020

Members Present:

Susan Ruch, Amherst
Mike Dell Orfano, Amherst
Tamara Sorell, Brookline
Robert Larmouth, Hollis
Venu Rao, Hollis
James Battis, Hudson
Kim Queenan, Litchfield
Burton Reynolds, Lyndeborough
Bill Boyd, Merrimack
Karin Elmer, Merrimack

Tim Tenhave, Merrimack
Tim Berry, Mont Vernon
Chris Constantino, Milford
Janet Langdell, Milford
Sarah Marchant, Nashua
David Tencza, Nashua
Ed Weber, Nashua
Dave Hennessey, Pelham
Hal Lynde, Pelham

Others Present:

Chris Buchanan,
William Rose, NHDOT
Tim White, NHDES

Staff Present:

Jay Minkarah, Executive Director
Sara Siskavich, Assistant Director
Gregg Lantos, Principal Transportation Planner/MPO Coor.
Matt Waitkins, Senior Transportation Planner
Ryan Friedman, Senior GIS Planner
Mason Twombly, Regional-Environmental Planner

Welcome and Introductions

Ruch opened the meeting at 7:02 p.m. A roll call attendance of staff was conducted.

Privilege of the Floor

No members of the public wished to speak.

Approval of Minutes – September 16th, 2020

Queenan commented on page 5, 3rd sentence the date should read 2020, not 2021.

Tenhave motioned to approve as amended with a second from Weber,

THAT the minutes of September 16th, 2020, be approved as amended and placed on file. A roll call vote was conducted. Tim Berry, David Tencza, and Bill Boyd abstained.

The motion **carried**.

Presentation – Chris Buchanan and Matt Waitkins: Souhegan Valley Rail Trail Concept Proposal

Minkarah introduced Chris Buchanan from Amherst who will present a proposed rail trail that would follow the existing Hillsborough branch of the Pan Am freight line. This rail trail is getting a lot of buzz.

Buchanan introduced himself as a Fire Captain in Amherst, a member of the Amherst Bicycle Advisory Committee, and a Department of Safety employee.

Waitkins indicated that he and Chris Buchanan are colleagues on the Friends of the Souhegan Valley Rail Trail and the Nashua Region Complete Streets Advisory Committee. Waitkins noted that complete streets are streets designed for safe access by motor vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and transit users. Waitkins continued that Route 101A between Nashua and Milford and 101A out to Wilton is great at accommodating motor vehicles but not pedestrians and bicycles. The committee has been discussing the feasibility of developing a shared use bike path alongside the active rail line to accommodate various modes of transportation.

Buchanan reviewed a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed the need for alternative transportation and the benefits to the local economy, health, and community. The presentation displayed the proposed route from 25 Crown Street in Nashua which is a park and ride and following the rail northwest into Merrimack and Amherst then into Milford and connecting to Wilton center. Buchanan reviewed the next steps and indicated that the Friends of the Souhegan Valley Rail Trail is a new organization that meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month.

Minkarah asked if people are interested in participating who should they contact. Buchanan stated that people can reach out to him or Matt Waitkins. People can also visit www.souheganvalleyrailtrail.org for more information or to complete the form to volunteer.

Berry stated that he thinks this is a really good idea and asked if the right of way had been assessed to see if the area is serviceable for a rail trail. Buchanan indicated that is a priority for the next step, they can obtain good estimates from GIS maps, but he knows the right of way is variable along the proposed route. Berry voiced his support for the project and wished the Friends of the Souhegan Valley Rail Trail luck.

Ruch raised Hennessey's comments from the Zoom chat that the Route 122 crossing is very dangerous, and it will be interesting as this project progresses if the new rail owner will improve this section.

Weber asked if anyone has walked the entire distance. Buchanan indicated not to his knowledge and noted that much is private property with no trespassing signs. Buchanan however has driven alongside, captured aerial views, and studied intersections.

Minkarah noted that the extension of the Nashua Heritage Rail Trail would intersect this proposed trail as well as the improvements/completion of the Nashua Riverwalk.

Boyd stated that one of the exciting things about this proposed rail trail is that there are amenities all along the route which presents an urban benefit. He foresees this to be a busy connection and a great idea.

Ruch asked Minkarah to circulate the link for commissioners who are interested in getting more involved.

Berry further discussed other factors the Friends of the Souhegan Valley Rail Trail may want to consider. Buchanan thanked Berry for his input and acknowledged that the circumstances surrounding the railroad are evolving and will impact the proposed project.

Presentation – Ryan Friedman: NRPC Metropolitan Transportation Plan Project Web Viewer

Minkarah introduced Ryan Friedman, NRPC's Senior GIS Planner. Friedman presented an overview of the MPO project viewer which can be found here:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/04584d07ad6d4785b8fbc24524ca59ce>

Friedman indicated that NRPC recognized the need for a better way to retrieve and share information about the various transportation plans. Federal reviews have also encouraged more innovative ways to disseminate information. As a result, NRPC developed an online application that fits our GIS data in the framework of a story map. Friedman relayed that to the left is a narrative describing each plan. Each plan has an associated interactive map. The map is labeled with DOT project numbers which provide a pop-up with more specific project information and a picture. The map also includes a legend that depicts the map features categorization such as the type of project. The viewer includes the TYP, TIP, and MTP. The map does not include all that is included in the transportation plans such as state-wide initiatives, but Friedman noted that the viewer is evolving, and the intent is that it will be continually updated. Friedman showed where on the NRPC website the viewer can be accessed, there is an icon on the homepage, and it can be accessed from the Transportation and GIS dropdown menus. From the viewer, commissioners can share the viewer on Facebook and Twitter or share the URL on their town's website.

Ruch stated that the viewer looks very user-friendly and a really good product. Marchant agreed that the viewer looks incredibly useful. Friedman hopes that it is a tool that can be used to quickly access information at meetings and as needed.

Weber asked if an NRPC icon is on every town/city website. Minkarah thought maybe as a link but not an icon. Siskavich stated that it is a good thought to develop an NRPC icon that links to the NRPC website for towns to add to their websites.

MPO Policy Committee

Nashua UZA Memorandum of Understanding

Lantos indicated that this is the 3rd time before the commission for consideration. The 1st MOU was with NHDOT and NH MPO's which established planning responsibilities, incorporated performance measures, and TMA-specific sub-allocation authority of MPO's. Which was a corrective action from the 2015 federal certification review. The 2nd MOU dealt with the Boston UZA that includes 3 MPO's in NH and NHDOT, this general agreement included data sharing. The 3rd MOU, which is the one proposed tonight, addressed the corrective action from the last certification review which is to enact the Nashua UZA MOU. The UZA extends slightly into Massachusetts and requires a new MOU. Lantos highlighted the MOU parties and new provisions including a few performance targets. Lantos stated that signatures have been received on the document however the document requires adoption by the MPO Policy Committee.

Boyd motioned with a second from Battis:

THAT the Nashua Regional Planning Commission MPO Policy Committee approves the Nashua UZA Memorandum of Understanding.

A roll call vote was taken. The motion **carried**, all in favor.

State of New Hampshire FY 2023 to 2032 Ten Year Transportation Plan project proposals

Lantos described the proposal process which was initiated on May 22. As previously reported after the initial application submission from the towns, funds were remaining. NRPC extended the submission deadline and reached back out to towns. Unfortunately, there were no other eligible projects. Lantos provided an overview of the list of projects and informed the commission that with the remaining funding allocation NRPC has included an unfunded project from the last Ten-Year Transportation Plan round and is proposing a regional project for state highway traffic signal improvements. Lantos added that NRPC staff ranked the projects, and they are now under review by NHDOT. Ruch stated she is pleased that NRPC was able to determine a viable project that will leave no money on the table.

Boyd questioned the local dollar amount listed for the Merrimack project, indicating that the number does not match the CIP. Lantos stated that the project dollar amount comes from the town and the local match is 20%. Minkarah indicated that NRPC can reach back out to the town to ensure accuracy. Boyd asked if the project breakdown displayed could be sent to him.

Transportation Project Updates

Lantos stated that NRPC is making progress on the Interregional Transit Study which evaluated surface alternatives into Massachusetts which had been delayed due to COVID-19. NRPC is developing the UPWP for the next two years which included the Merrimack Exit 12 interchange study which was deferred this year due to COVID. NRPC is also updating performance targets for the TIP update which is also underway. Minkarah noted that because of the TIP update a special meeting will be planned for February.

Electric School Bus Discussion – Venu Rao

Rao presented a PowerPoint regarding electric school busses which can be viewed here:

<https://www.facebook.com/357505764325546/videos/387460849009619>

Rao's presentation describes the health and environmental benefits of switching to electric school busses. There is also the potential for revenue from vehicle to grid selling electricity back to the electric company. Rao's presentation informs of two pending house bills regarding electric school busses. Rao stated that this initiative may be too costly for each town to do individually and a joint or regional effort may be more feasible if commissioners are interested in working together.

White discussed some potential funding opportunities and is aware of 6 school districts in the state that are working towards implementing electric busses. White empathized the importance of involving the local utility companies in these efforts. White is willing to provide information and answer questions.

Minkarah clarified that Rao is proposing a collaborative of more than one school district. Rao agreed that he is proposing a joint effort, perhaps a pilot program. Ruch suggested that perhaps there is a role

for NRPC in convening a workshop with potential partners and other community representatives to share ideas. Rao suggested including subject matter experts also. Weber thinks that the solar banks are an important part of implementing electric buses and suggested looking to other communities who have had success to also participate in the discussion.

Boyd indicated that he doesn't disagree with the idea and supports reducing carbon footprint, but he would like to know the performance of electric busses in the winter before really embarking on this. Ruch suggests that the topic be included in the proposed workshop. White added that he does have information from Massachusetts that he can provide to Minkarah to be passed along to commissioners. Ruch would like to see the conversation advance. Minkarah can pull together a working group to move the conversation forward.

Four Hill Landfill Discussion – Ed Weber

Weber noted that the Four Hill Landfill is going to run out of room in the next 15 to 25 years. Some incinerators do not throw toxins into the air, but a facility would have to be regional to be cost-effective. This is something that he would like to be on Nashua's mind and perhaps do a study, but at this point, he would like to share the situation and get input. Ruch indicated that certain states and countries have new waste combustors, New England has older combustors. Ruch agrees that it is not too early to think about what is going to happen in the future, adding that there may be a private market interest. Berry noted that Mont Vernon, Brookline, Milford, and Amherst are currently in a collaborative and burn waste, he is sure a new facility would be better served than an old one. Sorell agreed that it is a good idea to pursue a regional effort and is happy to be involved in the conversation. Sorell added that public opposition is the largest obstacle.

General Updates

Minkarah informed that NRPC has welcomed a new Regional Planner, Caleb Cheng.

Commissioners Roundtable

Nashua – Weber updated that the Master Plan update is underway, and the city is in the process of soliciting public input regarding the community vision for the city.

Litchfield – Queenan noted that a member of the Board of Selectmen is questioning rate increase from Pennichuck East and is curious if other towns are experiencing the same. Over the next few weeks, the Selectmen will be gathering input from other communities before reaching out to Pennichuck. Tencza believes that the PUC sets the rates.

Merrimack – Boyd stated that he is mourning the loss of Dick Hinch. The NH Speaker of the House was very involved in the community and state. Saint-Gobain matters are ongoing. Regarding Pennichuck, 30% of the town's water is from Pennichuck with agreements between them and the outlets and Anheuser-Busch.

Milford – Langdell noted that two sidewalk projects do not have the Selectmen support, hopefully, that can be turned around.

Due to the time, several commissioners simply wished each other happy holidays.

Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made by Hennessey with a second from Boyd. The meeting ended at 9:06 p.m. The next Commission meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 17th, 2021, at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jay Minkarah, Executive Director