

MINUTES
GASTON URBAN AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)
TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY (TAC) COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 26, 2010

The meeting of the Gaston Urban Area MPO Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was held Tuesday, January 26, 2010, from 6:30 pm until 8:55 pm in the Community Room of the Gastonia Police Department located at 200 East Long Avenue, Gastonia, NC.

Members Present:

Joe D. Carpenter	Gaston County, Commissioner, TAC Chair
Joe Will	City of Bessemer City, TAC Vice Chair
Dave Kirlin	City of Gastonia, Councilman
Brenda Craig	City of Gastonia, Councilwoman
Rick Coleman	Town of Dallas, Mayor
Ron Foulk	City of Belmont, Councilman
Bryan Hough	City of Mt. Holly, Mayor
Jason Williams	Town of Ranlo, Commissioner
Kevin Rink	Town of McAdenville, Councilman
Rickie Bush	City of Lowell, Councilman
Chad Brown	Town of Stanley, Mayor
Houston Helms	City of Cramerton, Commissioner
Mike Holder	NCDOT, Division 12 Engineer

Others Present:

John Torbett	Gaston County, Commissioner
Donnie Loftis	Gaston County, Commissioner
Dale Burkett	City of Gastonia, Councilman
John Howren	City of Gastonia, Councilman
Stacey Connelly	City of Gastonia, Assistant Police Chief
Phil Welch	City of Gastonia, Fire Chief
Jack Kiser	City of Gastonia, Director of Planning
Shannon Ransom	NCDOT, Gaston MPO Coordinator
Jamal Alavi	NCDOT, Metrolina Group Manager
Jack Flaherty	NCDOT, Planner
Jim Long	TAC past Chairman, 2002 – 2009
Eric Davis	City of Mt. Holly, City Manager
Frances Gallagher	Capital Investment Group
William Gray	Carolina Central RR Division, President
Hank Graham	Gaston MPO, Principal Transportation Planner
Vincent Wong	Gaston MPO, Transportation Planner I
Bernie Yacobucci	Gaston MPO, Transportation Planner I
Cass Roberts	Gaston MPO, Administrative Assistant III

Members with absences in 2010:

No absences to report at this time.

Mr. Graham stated that at this meeting, the TAC Chairman and Vice Chairman are to be elected. He added that staff would not be able to conduct this part of the meeting unless the TAC made a motion to suspend the rules in this instance and allow staff to conduct this portion of the meeting.

Mr. Hough made a motion to suspend the rules for this item and have staff conduct this portion of the meeting until a TAC Chairman and Vice Chairman were elected. Mr. Coleman seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

1. Election of Officers, Presenters: James H. Graham, Jr., AICP, Principal Transportation Planner

Because there were a number of new TAC appointees at the meeting as well as other interested attendees, Mr. Graham asked participants to please introduce themselves at this time.

Mr. Graham stated that the first order of business would be the election of a Chairman. He asked the TAC members for Chair nominations.

Mr. Coleman nominated Mr. Carpenter to be TAC Chairman. There were no other nominations.

Mr. Coleman made a motion to appoint Mr. Carpenter as TAC Chairman. Ms. Craig seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

At this time, Mr. Carpenter, as TAC Chairman, thanked the TAC members for their confidence in him. He opened the floor for nominations for the TAC Vice Chairman.

Mr. Coleman nominated Mr. Will to be TAC Vice Chairman. There were no other nominations.

Mr. Coleman made a motion to appoint Mr. Will as TAC Vice Chairman. Ms. Craig seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Will thanked members for their confidence in him.

2. Set Agenda, Presenter: Joe D. Carpenter, TAC Chairman

Mr. Carpenter asked the TAC members for any new business or any changes or additions that should be added to the agenda. There were none. Mr. Carpenter entertained a motion to approve the agenda as presented.

Mr. Helms made a motion to approve the agenda as presented with Mr.

Williams seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Determination of a Quorum, Presenter: Joe D. Carpenter, TAC Chairman

It was determined that a quorum was present.

4. Approval of Minutes, Presenter: Joe D. Carpenter, TAC Chairman

Mr. Carpenter asked if there were any changes, additions, or deletions to the minutes of the scheduled meeting of November 24, 2009. There were none. Mr. Carpenter entertained a motion to approve the minutes as presented.

Ms. Craig made a motion to approve the minutes of November 24, 2009, as presented. Mr. Bush seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

5. Introduction of Guests, Presenter: Joe D. Carpenter, TAC Chairman

Mr. Carpenter noted that guests had already introduced themselves.

6. Public Comment Period, Presenter: Joe D. Carpenter, TAC Chairman

Mr. Carpenter asked that those who wish to make a public comment to please do so in the 5-minute time limit allotted for each speaker. Mr. Carpenter recognized Mr. Bill Gray, President of the Carolina Central RR Division.

Mr. Gray stated that he wished to thank the TAC members for their support in his efforts during a two year period to establish a good freight rail network Gaston County. He was sorry to report that because of a turn of events in Raleigh, the process has been stopped.

Mr. Carpenter recognized Mr. Burkett. Mr. Burkett stated that the City of Gastonia is working on the educational portion of a "Bond Referendum" which amounts to \$18 million involving state roads and highways. He stated that in the future, the TAC may be called upon for their comments and feedback.

Mr. Carpenter recognized Mr. Torbett. Mr. Torbett asked TAC members to consider the HOV/HOT Fast Lane proposal during this time period so as to allow the promotion of "Ride Share" and to help our air quality containment.

Mr. Carpenter recognized Mr. Howren. Mr. Howren stated that back on September 25, 2007, he made a motion to move the intersection at I-85 and 321 to the Unmet Needs List and to the top of that list. There has been very little change to that intersection. He added that the real change that has taken place is traffic gridlock.

Mr. Howren stated that this same intersection is being revisited tonight in Agenda Item 9 regarding the issue of supporting or not supporting twin trailers utilizing 321 between the City of Gastonia and the City of Hickory (part of the National Highway Truck Network). He hoped that the TAC would vote not to support twin trailers at this location as they will

produce an unsafe travel environment, increase the number of accidents, and create possible problems hindering emergency vehicles from reaching citizens who may need assistance. He stated that the City of Gastonia has passed a Resolution stating that twin trailers would be detrimental to the interests of the citizens of Gastonia until the major interchange improvements have been completed as outlined in the Unmet Needs List.

Mr. Carpenter recognized Stacey Connelly, Assistant Police Chief of the City of Gastonia. He stated that he wanted to provide some accident numbers to follow up what Councilman Howren had pointed out in his presentation. Officer Connelly asked the Police Department Crime Analyst to provide high volume accident locations. He was provided with 13 high volume accident locations of which 4 are between I-85 and Tulip Drive on US321. In 2009, this area had 113 accidents. In comparison, there were 45 accidents on I-85 and Cox Road. He wanted to bring to light the number of accidents that do occur in the I-85/321 intersection before the possible introduction of twin trailers to this area.

Mr. Carpenter recognized Phil Welch, Fire Chief for the City of Gastonia. Chief Welch stated that emergency responses to the area I-85 and 321 deal primarily with personal injury. In the year 2009, the Fire Department responded to 49 accidents in this area with an increase in high speed maneuvering taking place in this area.

There were no other comments to be made.

7. Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP Maps), Presenter: Shannon Ransom, MPO Coordinator, NCDOT

Ms. Ransom stated that she had previously brought the CTP map series before the TAC back in the spring and summer of 2009. The Gaston Urban Area MPO is required to replace their existing Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Map with Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) Maps. These CTP maps are comprehensive and portray areas slated for multimodal transportation improvements including street systems, transit alternatives, and bicycle, pedestrian, and other transportation operating strategies.

Ms. Ransom stated that at the meeting tonight, she is asking the approval of the TAC to put these CTP maps out for a Public Comment period of 30 days.

Mr. Carpenter entertained a motion for the release of the CTP maps for a Public Comment Period of 30 days.

Mr. Kirilin made a motion to release of the CTP maps for a Public Comment Period of 30 days. Mr. Brown seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

8. HOT/HOV Lane Study, Presenter: Jack Flaherty, Planner, NCDOT -Transit

Mr. Flaherty stated that at the July, 2009 TAC meeting, Tim Gibbs, Transportation Planner for CDOT, gave an update on the HOV/HOT Fast Lane Study. This study looks at the idea of taking the highways and arterials within a region and converting lanes on these highways and arterials into HOT/HOV lanes. He stated that in our area, emphasis would be placed on the I-85 South corridor.

Mr. Flaherty stated that the work is complete on the HOT/HOV study that will determine the technical, financial and institutional feasibility of dedicating lanes on major highways in the region for active traffic management. The study area comprised geographic areas for the Rocky River RPO, the Lake Norman RPO, Cabarrus Rowan MPO, Gaston Urban Area MPO, Mecklenburg Union MPO, Rock Hill-Fort Mill Transportation Study, and the Town of Mooresville.

He stated that managed or Fast Lanes are dedicated lane systems for one or more user groups. These lanes provide reliability and unimpeded travel during peak demand periods.

Some reasons why Fast Lanes are important are the following:

- Maintain capacity on freeways for longer distance trips
- Encourage carpools, vanpools, and express bus ridership
- Inform commuters of peak travel costs
- Charge tolls for travel time savings and reliability
- Use tolls for revenue to reduce outlays for construction and the operating and maintenance costs of the lane/s.
- There is less fuel consumption which affects Air Quality.

Mr. Flaherty stated that the original study corridors consisted of 340 miles. Currently, Phase 2 of the study is considering 167 miles of highway.

Mr. Flaherty reviewed the HOT Lane Revenue/Cost Analysis chart and pointed out that I-85 South is among the longest length corridors in HOV lane demand in 2013 and 2030. He stated that the physical attributes of the I-85 South corridor in Gaston County are a major consideration for managed lanes implementation. What can be done with the existing right of way is to consider reducing a 12 foot lane to an 11 foot lane and decreasing shoulder widths from 14 feet to 11 feet while the buffer width between lanes and shoulders would decrease from 4 feet to 2 feet. By gaining this additional lane footage, HOT/HOV lanes in each direction can be created.

Mr. Flaherty added that the estimated travel time savings through HOV/HOT lanes between Gastonia and uptown Charlotte is greater than 0.5 minutes per mile and that the revenues will exceed operating and maintenance cost estimates in 2013 and 2030 when HOT lanes are considered.

Mr. Flaherty added that HOT lane could be supportive of both operational costs and debt service. In 2030, it is estimated that the tolling would get to a point where it would support not only the operating and maintenance of the road but also would provide the

funding that would cover the costs that built the road though that this is still a policy issue at this time.

Mr. Flaherty stated that the next steps are as follows:

- Incorporate study recommendations in the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)
- Formalize interagency partnerships – working closely with the other MPOs and RPOs.
- Conduct corridor engineering and usage studies
- Address potential policy and institutional questions

Mr. Carpenter thanked Mr. Flaherty for his presentation and invited comments.

A brief discussion ensued.

Some points discussed involved:

- The Fast Lane Study costs \$500,000 of which NCDOT pays half of it and with the remaining half broken up into amounts based on population of the MPOs and RPOs. For the Gaston MPO, the cost for the study was \$20,000.
- Mass transit was needed and there should be more choices as well – transit, highway, mass transit, and light rail.
- Some members were unsure of the feasibility of this study at this time. Mr. Holder stated that planners look 25 – 30 years from now while Engineers look in 5 year increments. Even if this study is never enacted, I-85 may be expanded at one point in time in the future. Costs will only increase. For such a small investment (\$20,000) and to include this study in the LRTP will help in our Air Quality achievement for the region is money well spent.

Mr. Kirilin made a motion to approve the Resolution endorsing Charlotte Region Fast (Managed) Lanes Study Recommendation as presented. Mr. Rink seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of 10 to 2 with Ms. Craig and Mr. Helms casting the dissenting votes.

Mr. Kirilin felt that the consensus of opinion from this board is that they are very pro-active regarding mass transit. He hoped that an agenda item would be introduced at the next TAC meeting that outlines the possibilities, studies, and what this MPO needs to do to get behind some type of mass transit using the P&N line.

9. I-85/321 Interchange Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) Truck Recommendation, Presenter: James H. Graham, Jr., AICP, Principal Transportation Planner

Mr. Graham stated that MPO staff received a letter from NCDOT requesting comments on whether the designation of US 321 from I-40 in Hickory, Catawba County to I-85 in Gastonia, Gaston County could be used by trucks with twin trailers and if so, be added to the North Carolina National Truck Network as a permitted use. Mr. Graham stated that I-85 from the eastern end of the county to the western end of the county and US

321 South from I-85 are already on the National Truck Network roadway list but that US 321 North from I-40 in Hickory to I-85 in Gastonia are not on this network list.

Mr. Graham added that there was a cut and paste error in the agenda package that was corrected and the revised Agenda Item #9 has been emailed to the TAC members as well as a revised handout of that item provided for their review.

Mr. Graham stated that staff has not made a formal recommendation to the TAC as to whether members should support or deny this item. Mr. Graham added that there was detailed discussion among members on this item at the TCC meeting this month.

Mr. Graham stated that for the City of Gastonia, the priority is to fix geometric problems with the interchange. Gastonia City Council would like US321 opened up to twin trailers but not until the interchange is permanently upgraded. The TCC voted to support the addition of US 321 Highway segment from I-85 North to Catawba County to the National Network of Highways while noting the concerns of the City of Gastonia.

Mr. Carpenter invited the TAC members to give their comments on this matter.

Mr. Foulk was concerned that if this segment is not placed on the North Carolina National Highway Truck Network as a permitted use, then these twin trailers will have to take I-85 North to I-77 North to I-40 West.

Ms. Craig asked Mr. Graham if US321 North is an evacuation route and Mr. Graham stated yes. She was concerned that there are two major corridors that are affected by gridlock, I-85 and US 321.

Mr. Rink couldn't see any reason why the TAC should not approve this request given the TCC's recommendation. He felt that obviously the TCC saw reason enough to make its recommendation to the TAC.

Mr. Kirlin asked if the TCC was a voice vote or a hand vote. Mr. Graham stated that it was a counted vote (7 to 3), with 3 in opposition. The three against were staff from the City of Gastonia. Mr. Kirlin asked if the TCC consists of Town or City Managers and Planners. Mr. Kiser said that was correct and Town or City Engineers are included as well.

A discussion continued.

Mr. Rink made a motion to accept the TCC recommendation to support the addition of the US 321 Highway segment from I-85 North to I-40 in Catawba County to the National Network of Highways while noting the City of Gastonia's concerns. Mr. Hough seconded the motion and the motion passed by a vote of 8 to 4 with Rickie Bush, Chad Brown, Dave Kirlin and Brenda Craig casting their votes in opposition. Mr. Carpenter, the TAC Chair, voted as well in the affirmative.

10. Air Quality/LRTP Update, Presenter: Hank Graham, AICP, Principal Transportation Planner

Update on the Air Quality/Conformity and LRTP schedule was presented as an informational item.

11. New Business

12. Other Business

MPO Staff Update

- a) Gastonia Express 85-X Ridership Report
- b) \$2.9 million contract for resurfacing projects in Gaston County
- c) Regional Transportation Planning Initiatives
- d) Gaston MPO on Facebook

NCDOT Report

13. Adjournment

There being no other business to discuss, Mr. Carpenter entertained a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Rink made a motion to adjourn the meeting with Mr. Bush seconding the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 pm.