

DRAFT
READING AREA TRANSPORTATION STUDY
MINUTES OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY
APRIL 6, 2023

ATTENDANCE

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

Scott Vottero, PennDOT 5-0 Chair*
David Alas, PennDOT Central, Vice Chair
Alan Piper, Berks County Planning Commission, MPO Secretary
Michael Golembiewski, Berks County Planning Commission
Keith Boatman, South Central Transit Authority
Tim Krall, City of Reading
Kyle Zeiber, City of Reading

NOT PARTICIPATING

Zachary Tempesco, Reading Regional Airport Authority

OTHERS

Vanessa Shamberg, Federal Highway Administration
Jeff Rai, PennDOT Central
Amanda Leindecker, PennDOT 5-0
Michael Donchez, PennDOT 5-0
Vanessa Koenigkramer, PennDOT 5-0
Greg Downing, South Central Transit Authority
Matthew Boyer, Commuter Services of PA
Lauri Ahlskog, South Central Transit Authority
Amanda Timochenko, Berks County Planning Commission
Shanice Ellison, Berks County Planning Commission
David Hunter, Berks County Planning Commission
Devon Hain, Berks County Planning Commission
Malcom Townes, Berks County Information Systems
IS Production, Berks County Information Systems

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Vottero called the meeting to order at 1:32 PM.

2. BUSINESS FROM THE FLOOR

There was no business from the floor. Mr. Golembiewski stated that there was no public comment.

Chairman Vottero stated he is now Assistant District Executive for Design at PennDOT 5-0 and no longer 'Acting'. As such, he is now officially the Chairman of the RATS Technical Committee. Mr. Michael Rebert is now at PennDOT Central Office as Acting

Deputy Secretary for Highway Administration. Mr. Chris Kufro will return to District 5-0 as Acting District Executive.

3. REVIEW/RECOMMENDATION OF MINUTES FROM JOINT TECHNICAL AND COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING OF MARCH 9, 2023

Chairman Vottero asked if there were any questions or comments on the March 9, 2023 Joint Technical and Coordinating Committee meeting minutes.

MOTION: Mr. Krall made a motion to recommend approval of the March 9, 2023 Joint Technical and Coordinating Committee meeting minutes. Mr. Golembiewski seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

4. PENNDOT REQUESTED AMENDMENTS/MODIFICATIONS TO FFY 2023-2026 TIP

Mr. Donchez gave an update on PennDOT's requested Amendments/Modifications to the FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) from March 3, 2023 to March 29, 2023.

- There are three (3) Administrative Actions – the adjustments deal with increases for revised estimates, increases to meet low-bid and estimated costs for projects, and aligning funds to meet projected let dates.
- There is one (1) Amendment – this adjustment deals with the SR 222 and Long Lane Intersection Improvement project to address a construction phase cost increase of approximately \$3.3 million to cover the latest design estimate. The construction cost increase is a result of issues regarding product availability, rapidly increasing inflation prices related to petroleum, steel and concrete based items, and unit cost increases for 12-inch superpave up to approximately \$92 per unit from \$37 per unit. This amendment is contingent upon PMC approval.

Mr. Piper stated that the new funding under the Carbon Reduction Program is the funding source for approximately half of the total adjustment increase amount.

MOTION: Mr. Piper made a motion to recommend approval of the amendment for the cost increases related to the SR 222 and Long Lane Intersection project. Mr. Krall seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

5. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF DRAFT RATS ANNUAL PAVEMENT AND BRIDGE CONDITION REPORT

Mr. Piper stated that both the Draft RATS Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report and the Draft RATS Traffic Safety Report are new documents that staff put together. The goal of these documents is to begin preparing these on an annual basis to help identify conditions across the MPO and use these documents as tools to help identify and program projects on both the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Creation and maintenance of these documents can also be used

as guides for other discretionary programs that may arise. Both plans are based on RATS annual performance measures: PM-2 for Bridge and Pavement Conditions and PM-1 for Safety Conditions.

Ms. Hain reviewed the sections identified in the Draft RATS Annual Pavement and Bridge Condition Report. Section 1 includes the introduction and identifies why the document was developed, identifies RATS concurrence with the Statewide Performance Measures including the 2021 baseline and the 2-year and 4-year targets, and the overall goal of the document.

Section 2 provides information related to pavement conditions including roadway background and data, pavement data, NHS Pavement Performance Measures, a scorecard that identifies the trends and pavement conditions in Berks County, and summaries of NHS, State, and Local Pavement Smoothness (IRI).

Section 3 provides information related to bridge conditions including bridge background and data, bridge inspection overview, bridge data, NHS Bridge Performance Measures, a scorecard that identifies the trends and bridge conditions in Berks County, and summaries for both state and local bridge conditions.

Section 4 provides maps that identify the pavement and bridge conditions across Berks County. The maps are broken out by 5 regions and identify the good, fair, and poor pavement conditions and bridge conditions.

Section 5 identifies programmed projects on the FFY 2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program that address pavement and bridge conditions throughout Berks County.

Mr. Piper stated that these reports were never produced previously and, while these reports are not in final formatting yet, we would like to take the opportunity to allow members to review the reports and provide any comments or feedback within the next two weeks. The reports will be formatted and any changes needed will be made with the goal of bringing these reports back to the committee members for recommended approval at the May 2023 RATS meetings.

6. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF DRAFT RATS TRAFFIC SAFETY REPORT

Ms. Timochenko stated that the Draft Traffic Safety Report for RATS identifies trends and potential mitigation strategies that can be used to reduce overall traffic related crashes and fatalities and serious injuries.

The document includes information on the National Strategy on Highway Safety Toward Zero Deaths and recognizes the global effort to reduce fatalities and injuries. There is information included on the Pennsylvania Strategic Highway Safety Plan and the themes it includes for progressing Towards Zero Deaths across the state as well as the focus areas identified in the plan.

Ms. Timochenko stated that at the time of writing the document, staff was aware that the PennDOT Districts across the state were preparing Districtwide Highway Safety Plans and included the information we had available at the time regarding District 5-0's Highway Safety Plan. This section will be updated to include more information about the District 5-0 plan as it was just completed at the end of March 2023.

The statewide and MPO targets for the Safety Performance Measures are included that the RATS Coordinating Committee approved in January of this year.

The report includes a lot of data. All of the datasets included in the report cover the 5-year period from 2017 to 2021. Some basic data that influences transportation throughout Berks County is included such as population, employment, passenger car registrations, and vehicle miles traveled. Then, the report moves into some of the general crash trend data which includes data for total crashes followed by the breakdown of crashes that involved fatalities and suspected serious injuries. All of the crash data was obtained from PennDOT through the Pennsylvania Crash Information Tool. Some of the general crash data included identifies crashes by month, day of the week, time of day, collision type, road condition, weather, and illumination.

The report then identifies more mode specific crash data related to crashes by driving behavior, young and mature drivers, Vulnerable Road Users, vehicle type, road ownership, intersection type and intersection control type, and work zones. A map is included and identifies crash locations with greater than 20 reportable crashes from 2017-2021.

In addition, the report includes data for 5-year periods from 2013 to 2021 that compares the crashes by severity type for both Berks County and Pennsylvania to identify the trends across the county and the state.

Using the data, a trend summary report was developed, similar to the scorecard that the State Transportation Commission provides at the start of their 12-Year Program Update. It includes a brief description or summary of the trend for the indicator identified and has trend ratings that a visual representation of areas that are seeing improvement, remained steady or have declined from 2017 to 2021.

The report then identifies potential mitigation strategies that can be used to help reduce crashes and fatalities and serious injuries. The Federal Highway Association's Proven Safety Countermeasures are included as well as a brief overview for each of their 5 categories and brief description for each of their 28 safety countermeasures. Additional countermeasures that help mitigate driver behaviors are included such as education and enforcement. Many of these strategies are programs or campaigns that PennDOT carries out in cooperation with state and local law enforcement officials.

The report includes some current funding sources that are available for safety improvements. Additionally, projects that are programmed on the FFY 2023-2026 TIP that address safety are included and mapped.

The Crash Locations with Greater than 20 Reportable Crashes map and the TIP Project Locations map were combined and included as another map to see how well our programmed projects relating to safety align with the identified crash locations. Overall, a good majority of the programmed safety related projects do align to address those identified crash locations. As well, there are additional projects that are programmed to address different issues such as congestion and roadway improvements that will improve safety at many of the crash locations identified on the map. A map identifying where Intelligent Transportation Systems are located and where Freeway Service Patrol Routes exist in Berks County is included as these elements help address emergent safety issues on Berks County roadways.

A list of sources is included at the end of the document that identifies where the information was gathered from as it is referenced throughout the report and may be useful for anyone that might want to learn more about some of the plans and programs mentioned in the report.

Mr. Piper stated that the objective is to utilize these plans and develop recommendations that can be useful when working with the Department in developing the next draft TIP and update of the Long Range Transportation Plan.

Mr. Piper thanked Ms. Hain and Ms. Timochenko for their work in developing these reports and noted that any comments or changes will be addressed and a cleaner version of these documents will be presented at the next meeting.

Mr. Piper asked if anyone had any comments or feedback on either of these two reports. Mr. Krall stated that the maps in the Pavement and Bridge Conditions Report are somewhat grainy and its difficult to view the details. Ms. Hain replied that these maps will have better resolution once the draft report is formatted.

7. REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF URBAN AREA SMOOTHING AND NEED FOR UPDATED MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING WITH SURROUNDING MPOS

Mr. Golembiewski stated that the Census Bureau began defining Urban Areas in the 1950's as a way to see how the country was growing and developing. Urban areas are densely developed areas that have residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses. The Census Bureau delineates urban areas after each decennial census by applying specified criteria to the decennial census and other data. After applying the criteria, the Census Bureau identifies urban areas and rural areas. Rural areas encompass all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area. The Census Bureau intended to use the identification of urban areas for their own statistical purposes. However, over the years, other Federal agencies have incorporated the Census Bureau identified urban areas for use in their own programs for various aspects such as to determine funding specific to 'urban' populations or 'rural' populations, setting program standards, and implementing aspects of their own programs.

The Urban Areas change every 10 years. Previously, the changes were based on population. The criteria have changed and Urban Area criteria now includes population

and/or housing units. The 2010 Decennial Census identified 64.7% of Berks County's total population as being Urban. The 2020 Decennial Census now identifies 64.4% of Berks County's total population as being Urban.

The 2020 Urban Area extends along the major roadways in Berks County such as Route 61 into Hamburg, east and west of the City of Reading along Route 422, along a portion of Route 222 breaking towards Fleetwood Borough, and within the urban core which is the City of Reading. As a result of using the criteria to delineate the Urban Areas, there are small gaps that occur between the Urban Areas.

The 'Smoothing' process completes 'missing gaps' in the Census-defined Urban Area. Smoothing is completed for transportation purposes related to the Federal Aid Functional Classification System. Every roadway has a classification based on what the roadway is designed to do, the amount of traffic carried, how a roadway is built, speed limits of roadways, and whether they are urban or rural roadways. The design standards are affected by the designation of a roadway as well as whether federal Surface Transportation Block Grant – Urban (STU) funds can be used. Urban (STU) funds can only be used for improvements on roadways designated as Urban. The 'Smoothing' process fills in the gaps between the Census-defined Urban Areas so that roadway classifications and ultimately design standards for those roadways remain consistent.

The 'Smoothing' process must be approved by the RATS MPO at the upcoming May 2023 meeting so that the information can be submitted to PennDOT by June 30, 2023. Once PennDOT gets all the 'Smoothing' information gathered from all the MPOs across the state, they submit it to the Federal Highway Administration for approval. After FHWA approves the 'Smoothing', the MPO can review and make possible changes to the Federal Aid Functional Classification System.

Because the Urban Areas are based on population and housing criteria, some Urban Areas extend into Berks County and the Reading Urban Area extends into other counties and MPO planning regions. To address the crossover of Urban Areas into other counties and MPO regions, Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) are executed between RATS and the surrounding MPOs. These MOUs identify the responsible parties for planning and funding in those designated portions of the Urban Area extensions. As a result of the updated Urban Area boundaries, these MOUs will ultimately need to be updated as well and are required by FHWA and PennDOT.

A small portion of the Reading Urban Area extends into Lebanon County along Route 419. Two small areas of the Lehigh Valley Urban Area extend into Berks County: one along Route 222 and the other along I-78 at the border with Lehigh County. The Philadelphia Urban Area expanded to include what used to be the Pottstown Urban Area. Additionally, the Reading Urban Area north of Hamburg has retracted and no longer extends into Schuylkill County.

During previous TIP developments, The Northeastern Pennsylvania Alliance (NEPA) MPO had requested STU funding from Berks County because a very small portion of the

Reading Urban Area extended into Schuylkill County around the Port Clinton area. These funds will no longer be provided in the next TIP update.

If we use the same formula that was used to determine the dollar amount given to NEPA for the Reading Urban Area extension, roughly \$340,000 per year or approximately \$1.3 million during the FFY 2025-2028 TIP cycle of STU funding could be requested by the RATS MPO from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission MPO (DVRPC) to be applied to improvements in the Philadelphia Urban Area that extends into Berks County. This STU allocation request would be subject to both MPO's approval during the MOU update process.

Mr. Golembiewski stated that this discussion topic today is for information purposes only. Once the 'Smoothing' is complete, this information will return to the MPO Technical Committee meeting in May 2023 for recommended approval. Upon recommended approval, the information will be presented to the RATS Coordinating Committee at the May 2023 meeting for approval and submission to PennDOT. After all approvals are obtained, the MPO staff can revise the Federal Aid Functional Classification of roadways as necessary and revise and approve MOUs with surrounding MPOs.

Mr. Piper stated that a new agreement will need to be completed with NEPA that retracts the Reading MPOs financial contribution. The MOUs with Lebanon, Lancaster, and Lehigh Valley will most likely be the same noting that the Reading MPO will handle all transportation planning within Berks County and they will handle all transportation planning within their respective regions. Because of the limited amount of crossover with these MPOs, there is no anticipated exchange of STU funds.

While the funding amount is only roughly \$340,000 per year for the portion of the Philadelphia Urban Area that extends into Berks County, over the 4-year TIP cycle period the amount equates to over \$1 million which becomes more significant for funding improvements in that area in Berks County. The Committee will have to determine whether or not to work out an agreement with DVRPC as part of the MOU to obtain those STU funds. An initial discussion with Mr. Matt Gates at DVRPC has occurred to address the 'Smoothing' in that area of Berks County and make them aware that the Reading MPO may consider the funding request/exchange as part of the MOU with them. Nothing is official at this point, and it has all been preliminary discussions for right now.

Mr. Piper asked Mr. Alas if the Department has any new information on when the MOUs are to be completed. Mr. Alas responded that no official date has been determined yet but it is anticipated that information regarding the MOUs will be coming out soon. Mr. Piper noted that it's assumed that the MOUs are to be completed prior to beginning the TIP update as those funds could impact the amount of funding available. Mr. Alas concurred and stated he'd provide information as it becomes available.

Mr. Krall asked where the maps come from. Mr. Golembiewski replied that the Census Bureau defines those borders and is a Census generated map using their products. The

particular maps used in the presentation were derived using PennDOT software. The data is all the same and available on various platforms.

Mr. Golembiewski noted that any areas that are added during the ‘Smoothing’ process do not equate to additional funding. The goal of the ‘Smoothing’ process is to provide consistency along those roadways and allow for STU funding to be used for projects that may be programmed on those roadways. Mr. Piper added that the ‘Smoothing’ also provides for consistent design standards to be used throughout those corridors.

Chairman Vottero asked how much STU funding was NEPA getting from the Reading MPO each year. Mr. Piper noted it was a very small amount per year.

8. PENNDOT UPDATES ON HIGHWAY PROJECTS

Chairman Vottero gave an update on the status of highway projects.

Mr. Piper noted that as a result of a RAWA and Western Berks Water Authority project near the Berks County-owned Buttonwood Street bridge, there were some discussions regarding the schedules for major transportation projects that are happening in the area and how those two water authorities could potentially be impacted. There is a coordination meeting with the District, RAWA, and Western Berks Water Authority coming up within the next two weeks. An interesting takeaway from those discussions is that while we try to minimize impacts when a project is under construction, it is important to include and inform the different utility agencies within those areas to minimize any potential interruption of service a project under construction could potentially cause. Especially when multiple projects are scheduled concurrently.

9. COMMUTER SERVICES UPDATE

Mr. Boyer stated that Commuter Services staff continues to interact with local employers with recent site visits to Albright College, BARTA, Berks County Community Foundation, Morgan Truck Body, Ashley Furniture, Berks Connections Fair, Berks Fire and Water, PA Career Link, and UPS.

Commuter Services is in the midst of the Earth Month promotion that allows people to enter their tracked trips in the Commute PA database and be entered to win rewards. In May is the Bike to Work week where Commuter Services promotes green trips and the regional bike share program. There will be a Bike to Work week ride in Reading and West Reading on the 3rd Friday in May in partnership with Tower Health, Penske Racing Shocks and some other partners. Commuter Services is looking forward to doing some promotions and finding partners that could provide e-bikes to local law enforcement in that area.

The Commuter Services year-end report discusses the Performance Measures that were developed as a result of the programs that occurred over the last year.

Commuter Services is very involved in the regional bike share initiative to facilitate installation of bike share programs across county borders within Commuter Services 9 county region. Commuter Services continues to work to develop regional congestion management planning with PennDOT providing guidance.

Commuter Services is in the process of trying to obtain Safe Routes to Schools funding.

During the month of March, 106 new members joined the program, over 7,000 trips were tracked, and over 133,000 miles not driven were recorded for a savings of over \$83,000 as a result of using green modes of transportation.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

- Mr. Piper stated that DCED made an announcement that included 5 projects from the Berks area that received multimodal funding through the Commonwealth Financing Authority that totaled \$2 million. Lower Alsace Township received \$850,000 for construction of sidewalks along Carsonia Avenue. Blue Creek Investments, a private developer located north of I-78 on Route 645, received funding for intersection and roadwork improvements. South Heidelberg Township received \$250,000 towards a project that they are doing to extend Krick Lane across Mountain Home Road to Wernersville Road to create a smoother flow of traffic through that area and reduce accidents. Cumru Township received just under \$125,000 for paving improvements on their portion of South 9th Street. The Colebrookdale Railroad received approximately \$115,000 for improving their facility in Boyertown.

The MPO is currently in the process of reviewing projects that have been submitted for the PennDOT Multi-Modal Program. To the best of our knowledge, the only local applicant for that program during this cycle is South Heidelberg Township for additional funding towards the Krick Road project.

- Mr. Piper stated that just as a reminder the State Transportation Commission is currently conducting outreach for its Twelve-Year Program Update. There are links on our webpage and Facebook directing people to participate in their survey and provide opinions on transportation needs, improvements, how funding should be allocated, and opportunity to provide specific recommendations on highway, bridge, or transit projects. Their mapping tool for reporting potential projects is sophisticated in that it includes projects that are already programmed on the current TIP. It's important that people participate in this survey because the results of the survey are provided to the MPO and helps the MPO identify needed improvements when identifying projects to be programmed in the TIP and the LRTP.
- Mr. Golembiewski stated that Ms. Koenigkramer noted in the chat that NEPA received \$27,340 in STU funds from the Reading MPO over the 4 years of the TIP. There was no additional public comment.

11. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Mr. Golembiewski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Piper seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 2:44 PM.

Date: _____

Alan D. Piper

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