

Houma-Thibodaux Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
Policy Committee Minutes
May 15, 2008, 12:30 PM

(AS APPROVED BY THE POLICY COMMITTEE ON JULY 24, 2008)

Prayer: Arlanda Williams

Pledge of Allegiance: Pete Lambert

Roll Call: Leo Marretta

Terrebonne Parish President, Michel Claudet – Present, proxy Pat Gordon
City of Thibodaux Mayor, Charles Caillouet – Present, proxy Bonnie Lafont
Terrebonne Parish Council Member, Peter Lambert – Present
Terrebonne Parish Council Member, Johnny Pizzolatto - Present
Terrebonne Parish Council Member, Arlanda Williams - Present
Terrebonne Parish Council Member, Clayton Voisin – Present
LADOTD, Michael Stack – Present, proxy Dennis Hebert
Lafourche Parish President, Charlotte Randolph - Absent
FHWA, Jamie Setze – Absent

Others in attendance were:

Kevin Belanger, SCPDC
Leo Marretta, SCPDC
Emma Bergeron, SCPDC
Kermit Kraemer, City of Thibodaux
Katherine Gilbert, TEDA
Joan Schexnayder, TPCG
Al Levron, TPCG
Wendell Voisin, TPCG
Mark Atzenhoffer, Private Citizen

1. Approval of Minutes from February 28, 2008 meeting

It was motioned by A. Williams to approve the minutes from the February 28, 2008 meeting with discussion, J. Pizzolatto seconded. Motion carried. Mr. P. Gordon inquired on the status of the Bayou Gardens Extension. K. Belanger relayed that the Lafourche Parish President and the Councilman Matherne is supposed to contact SCPD&C after meeting with constituents. They have yet to contact SCPD&C. K. Belanger stated Mr. Mark Atzenhoffer was in attendance to speak on said issue.

2. Public Comments

Chairman C. Voisin asked if there were any public comments. Mr. Mark Atzenhoffer introduced himself as the former Lafourche Parish Councilman for the Bayou Blue area. He reported that he has recently received many telephone calls from residents of concerning the Bayou Gardens Extension Project. He reported the people who contacted him expressed that there is no longer strong opposition to the project and that they would like to see this project become a reality. It seems that they are now eager to know when this project will take place. Mr. Atzenhoffer requested that the MPO consider tying the Bayou Gardens Extension Project in with the North/South Corridor project. Discussion ensued. P. Gordon suggested that Lafourche would benefit from the creation of a "Parish Thoroughfare Plan" similar to the one in Terrebonne. The resulting plan would aid with local transportation planning. Corridor preservation and

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coordination with neighboring parish's plans would be important components of that planning effort. K. Belanger explained that in addition to the need for a Lafourche Parish Thoroughfare Plan the MPO is currently updating the long range plan for the region - the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). This process will ultimately delineate proposed roadway corridors such as the Bayou Gardens Extension and the North/South Hurricane Evacuation Corridor. The MTP will have to go through a public hearing process, be reviewed by the Planning Commissions and ultimately be adopted by the Parish Councils of all the MPO member jurisdictions within the urbanized area as delineated by the US Census.

It was motioned by P. Gordon, that the MPO draft a letter for Chairman Voisin's signature which will inform the Lafourche Parish Government as they may want to consider the proposed Bayou Gardens Extension Project in their actions affecting that area. The motion was seconded by P. Lambert. Motion carried.

3. Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government (TPCG) and Good Earth Transit (GET)'s new grant applications and associated transit issues.

Chairman C. Voisin introduced the next item for discussion: new transit grant applications. L. Marretta reported that the MPO had received a letter from TPCG requesting the MPO draft a letter in support of their new grant applications as required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The letter assures the FTA that the new grant applications submitted by GET, if approved for funding by DOTD, would be included in the Regional Coordination Plan and the Transit Element of the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). He went on to explain that due to the fact that the City of Thibodaux is in the process of conducting a study regarding the feasibility of providing transit service in the city, GET is no longer the only transit related entity within our MPO's borders. L. Marretta further clarified that the grants in question were only for the next fiscal year and that the City of Thibodaux would not be acting on the results of the feasibility study within that time frame. Mr. Wendell Voisin spoke on behalf of GET. Discussion ensued.

It was motioned by A. Williams, seconded by P. Gordon to approve the writing of the letter in support of the new grant applications. Motion carried.

4. Staff Report on the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD)'s administrative adjustments to the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

L. Marretta briefed the committee as to administrative adjustments made to the MPO TIP as a result of an April 1, 2008 email from DOTD. He reported that these changes were the subject of a staff report which had been emailed to all the MPO Policy Committee members on May 9, 2007 as required by our current TIP. Additionally it was reported that another set of administrative adjustments had just arrived by US Mail on May 12, 2008. The latest adjustments were received too late to implement the requested changes to the TIP before the Policy Committee meeting, but a copy of the letter was included in the packet handed out at today's meeting. K. Belanger stated that all of the changes which DOTD is continually working through do not typically affect the projects that we as the Policy Committee have control over. Most of the administrative adjustments are to state projects that are outside of the MPO's purview. Much discussion ensued.

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P. Gordon and others raised concerns that the process, as it currently exists, takes way too long and that the true costs have risen so dramatically that projects continue to languish un-started for years past the time we have programmed them to begin. This has left us with the situation in which the public's expectations have been raised as to the delivery date of our local projects only to be disappointed time and again.

It was explained that in an effort to rectify this situation staff is currently contacting the consulting engineers and DOTD project managers for each of our projects and will attempt to validate or change the numbers and dates used in the TIP. This has proven to be very time consuming but is necessary in order to properly program our available funds and accurately estimate the time and phasing of the STP<200k funded projects, the only ones that actually fall under our control.

As an example of the difficulties with the TIP AI Levron (TPCG) was called upon to speak about the current situation with the Hollywood Road project. It seems that costs for right of way (ROW) acquisition and relocation of utilities were historically programmed in the TIP together at \$3 million total. The Parish's latest estimate of these same costs is \$3 million each. Furthermore the TIP has a breakdown of \$2.4 million for ROW and \$750,000 for utilities programmed for this project as starting together in 2008. TPCG is actually ready to begin the ROW acquisition and would be allowed to move forward by spending the \$3 million programmed for this year to solely to acquire ROW. But, since the TIP does not reflect the true costs and cost allocations required for all the work specified, the question then becomes, if the Parish does spend it all on ROW, where will they find the additional \$3 million needed for the utility relocation, also programmed for this year. If they spend all \$3 million this year and then need an additional \$3 million of STP<200k funds for utilities will the project stall until an additional \$3 million becomes available (maybe years in the future) as the expected MPO resources are budgeted out to other projects for the next 5 years, or will they be allowed to do both and other projects will then get pushed back in time to accommodate the budgetary needs of the Hollywood Road project.

K. Belanger stated that the answer to these questions has to come from the Policy Committee and until we understand the true costs of all the projects in the TIP we will not be able to program any of the projects in an equitable fashion. In order to rectify the situation staff has been working with DOTD to update the cost estimates for each of our projects and will attempt to ground truth these numbers with the consulting engineers and may need to energize the MPO's Technical Advisory Committee. After that is accomplished we will be better able to program the projects with direction from the Policy Committee. L. Marretta added that complicating the situation is the fact that the target continues to move as DOTD makes more administrative adjustments to our TIP like the one that arrived on May 12th just days before our meeting. In closing L. Marretta stated that we will soon be starting the process of updating our long range plan – the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and that as such these issues will become very relevant and will have to be examined thoroughly.

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Noting the concerns expressed at this and other Policy Committee meetings, staff has agreed to continue to investigate ways to deal with the situation. Towards that goal, the following agenda item, which speaks to the ongoing meetings staff is having with DOTD planning staff and project managers, was called.

5. Staff Report on HTMPO Project Managers meetings at DOTD headquarters

K. Belanger reported to the committee on the meetings with DOTD in Baton Rouge held the day before. He and L. Marretta had met with several of the managers who handle our MPO's projects, as well as Dawn Sholmire and Robin Romero from DOTD Office of Planning and Programming.

Acadian By-Pass Road has completed the Stage "0" process and you should be receiving a city-state agreement from the DOTD contract section very soon. Additionally, an intergovernmental agreement between Thibodaux and Lafourche Parish will have to be enacted to specify which portion of the local match will be absorbed by the City and what portion by the Parish, probably based upon the number of miles of the project which lay in either jurisdiction.

Westside Blvd Phase B has been through several iterations before being approved but according to our conversations today it should be finalized within the month.

Hollywood Road was discussed and it was noted that Al Levron would be visiting with the DOTD project manager the next day with regards to this project and some other "Off System Bridge" projects.

LA 57 Industrial Blvd to Thompson Road effluent issues addressed. DOTD has said that the construction cost for the wastewater improvements could be included in the project but that the Parish must pay for the engineering. DOTD was made aware that the Parish wants a firm acknowledgement that if they do so, the improvements will be included in the project. Fred Borne of DOTD will pursue this on our behalf, if the Parish sends a request letter. Al Levron mentioned that he thinks a similar letter has already been sent. He will investigate further.

K. Belanger also reported on the current State funding situation. MPOs with access to monies other than DOTD funds are seemingly better able to get projects engineered and environmentally cleared. This allows them to better leverage federal and state monies for construction or to do more projects. It was suggested that as an MPO we need to figure out how to generate other revenues in order to compete more effectively. Some of the ideas mentioned included sales taxes dedicated for capital projects, impact fees, public/private partnerships, a local gasoline tax consistently applied across the region, leverage parish money to obtain more bang for our buck. It was also suggested that we may need to think about limiting our large scale projects (which are becoming more and more unattainable) in favor of smaller projects that add capacity without constructing new roadways. The Efficiency Analysis which the Policy Committee has already reviewed and endorsed has also been approved by most of the other Louisiana MPOs. It has however, been delayed in Shreveport. Popular opinion holds that this is because they knew they were in line for the lion's share of the recently allocated State surplus funds. Baton Rouge and New Orleans have come on board as well as some ranking officials that K Belanger has spoken with at DOTD. He reported that everyone agrees that finding a better way to move forward with projects in a timelier and less costly fashion would be good for our future. Discussion ensued and a general dissatisfaction with the manner in which State

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Surplus Finds were distributed was expressed by several members, including C. Voisin and Pat Gordon.

6. City of Thibodaux's request for new projects to be included in the TIP

On behalf of the City of Thibodaux, Ms. B. Lafont requested the two high priority projects for the City of Thibodaux to be included in the 2008 MPO TIP. The projects are as follows: Tiger Drive Bridge Replacement +/- \$3.4 million and LA Highway 20 (N. Canal Blvd) Road Widening +/- \$4.8 million. A Canal Blvd Bridge Pedestrian Crossing (already funded by Transportation Enhancement Grant, \$200,000 donation and city funds) was also mentioned. Discussion ensued.

It was motioned by P. Gordon, seconded by B. Lafont to include the Tiger Drive Bridge replacement project, LA Hwy 20 Road Widening project, and Canal Blvd Bridge Pedestrian Crossing in the 2008 MPO TIP. Motion carried.

7. Discussion about how to go about maintaining a fiscally restrained TIP

It was agreed upon by all that this issue was touched through the previous topics.

8. Assumption Parish Representation

L. Marretta spoke to the committee about representation of Assumption Parish within the HTMPO. A part of Assumption Parish is included in our urbanized area; therefore Assumption Parish should be represented on the MPO's governing boards. Setting up a sub-committee or energizing the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to further research this topic was recommended by L. Marretta. K. Belanger spoke about the funding structure of the MPO, as well as the representation being based upon the population of the various jurisdictions that actually lay within the Urbanized Area. He suggested that if a sub-committee is appointed they also be tasked with reviewing the pro rata share structure of both of these components. Discussion ensued.

It was motioned by B. Lafont, seconded by J. Pizzolatto to consider setting up a sub-committee consisting of J. Pizzolatto, A. Williams, C. Randolph and C. Caillouet (or his designee) to further research Assumption Parish Representation within the HTMPO. Motion carried.

9. Safe Community Task Force's Annual Traffic Summit \$500 Grant

K. Belanger briefed the committee on the upcoming Safe Community Task Force's Annual Traffic Summit will be held on July 17, 2008 at 8:00 a.m. The MPO typically sponsors the food for the event out of its Administrative Budget. This year's grant \$500.00.

10. LADOTD newly promulgated rules regarding "New Access Requests Affecting Traffic on State Highways"

Item deferred until later date due to the individuals scheduled to speak were not present. It will be placed on a future agenda.

L.S. LADOTD Letting Schedules

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LADOTD Letting Schedules dated 5/13/08 were given to each committee member within their meeting packet for their review on their own accord.

Other Business

K. Belanger brought up P. Lambert's request for a turning movement count to be conducted at LA 24 and LA 659 Intersection at the Presque Isle Bridge. Al Levron and Pat Gordon mentioned that this was recently accomplished; Neel Schaffer did study for new traffic signal controllers at the intersection. They will see if the study will be sufficient to fulfill Mr. Lambert's request.

Next Meeting Date

It was agreed upon that the next meeting date of the Houma-Thibodaux Policy Committee would be held on July 24, 2008 at 12:00 PM.

Adjournment

The motion to adjourn the meeting was made by J. Pizzolatto, seconded by P. Lambert. Motion carried.