

SUMMARY MINUTES

MACORTS Policy Committee
WebEx Virtual Meeting Platform
Wednesday, November 10, 2021
10:00 a.m.

Members Present: John Daniell, Oconee County Chairman
Todd Higdon – Madison County Chairman
Dave Henson, Oconee County Citizen
Sara Beresford, Athens-Clarke County Citizen
Radney Simpson, GDOT Planning Office
Virginia Hamilton, UGA Transit Alternate
Brad Griffin, Alternate for ACC Mayor

Others Present: Cherie Varnum, MACORTS
Sherry McDuffie, MACORTS
Pat Hale, ACC Transit Department
Victor Pope, ACC Transit Department
Tom Caiafa, GDOT Planning Office
Kimberly Grayson, GDOT Planning Office
SueAnne Decker, GDOT District 1
Todd Berven, UGA Transit
Ann-Marie Day, FHWA
Tamara Christion, FHWA
Lee Becker, Oconee County Citizen
Stephen Bailey, ACC Transportation & Public Works
Daniel Sizemore, ACC Transportation & Public Works
Rani Katreeb, ACC Transportation & Public Works
Tim Griffeth, ACC Traffic Engineering
Jeramy Durrence, GDOT District 1

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Mr. Daniell called the meeting to order at 10:02 am. Ms. McDuffie took roll of members and guests.

II. APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER 8, 2021 MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Henson made a motion to approve the minutes from September 8, 2021 Policy Committee meeting. Mr. Higdon seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

III. REVIEW OF PUBLIC COMMENT RECEIVED AT TCC MEETINGS / PLANNING COMMISSION MEETINGS

John Butler spoke regarding the Watkinsville Truck Bypass Amendment. He wants all options and alignments to be examined, and he hopes that the least invasive option will be chosen.

IV. REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF FINAL AMENDMENT TO 2045 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN (MTP) & FY 2021 – 2024 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) TO ADD THE SCOPING PHASE FOR THE WATKINSVILLE TRUCK BYPASS FROM US 441/SR 24 TO SR 15

Ms. McDuffie explained GDOT made a request for staff to include a Scoping phase for this project in the MTP & TIP so that federal transportation funds can be used for it. She noted there is no alignment proposed at this time, and the amount of funding required would be \$500,000 (\$400,000 federal & \$100,000 state). The amendment to the MTP could be accomplished using some of the ‘leftover’ funds in the MTP so that no projects would have to be moved out to make room for it. The TIP would be amended to include the Scoping in FY 22.

She explained the public comment for these amendments was held September 20 – October 4 with a virtual public meeting on September 27 and in-person meeting on September 30. A summary of the public comment along with the raw public comment as it was received by staff during that time was sent for your review and consideration last week. She stated that there was very good attendance at both the virtual (12 people) and in-person meetings (48 people) along with a substantial amount of public comment received. She noted this bypass project generated a lot of local interest and concern. She stated TCC recommended approval of the amendments.

****Mr. Henson shared the following statements:** “I have a few feedback comments and then a question for clarity. First of all, I received feedback from a few residents - two households to be exact - in the Greene Ferry Road area that are adamantly opposed to using Greene Ferry Road for the bypass. Instead, they believe that an extension of Flat Rock Road would have fewer residential impacts, including fewer displacements, and be an ideal solution.” Mr. Simpson stated comments from Mr. Henson and the comments MACORTS received during the public comment period would be shared with the GDOT project manager assigned to the Truck Bypass project.

Mr. Henson continued**, “And secondly, as you know, we received a ton of great community feedback, and there is strong, unanimous opposition to using Astondale Road for the bypass. Also, there is a strong opposition to adding truck traffic through Bishop, along 441 from GA-186 to Astondale Road. It’s my understanding that 441 south of GA-186, which includes all of Bishop is not in our MACORTS scope, because the MACORTS area extends southward only to the intersection of 441 and GA-186. However, outside of our MACORTS scope, will the area south of GA-186, including

Bishop and Astondale Road, also be studies for this same truck bypass?” Ms. McDuffie stated, and Mr. Simpson verified, that the any area between US 441 and SR 15 in Oconee County could be studied as part of the project development. Mr. Simpson explained that there are no alignments ‘on the table’ at this point. Mr. Henson replied**, “I cannot support the study of this truck bypass if it – even OUTside the scope of MACORTS – considers using Astondale Road, or considers adding more traffic through Bishop. Turning left from Price Mill Road AND High Shoals Road onto northbound 441 is already far too dangerous. These intersections need immediate attention as it is, so I will not support any project that could add to the traffic volume on 441 until after these intersections have been properly addressed.”

Other members of the committee asked about what is included in the scoping phase. Ms. McDuffie, with the help of GDOT representatives, explained the scoping phase does not include a determination of a route. Scoping includes setting up the project parameters, figuring out how much would be needed to continue the development of the project, and perhaps identify how many routes might be examined. Ms. McDuffie also explained that the next phase of the project (Preliminary Engineering) would include a narrowing down and eventual choosing of an alignment. The scoping phase was the only one being discussed at this time. Any movement forward of the project into the Preliminary Engineering phase would have to come back through the MACORTS process and back out to public comment. Mr. Griffin, representing Athens, asked GDOT to confirm that MACORTS would not be seeing this project if options within the MPO area (north of the US 441 / SR 186 intersection) were not going to be studied and GDOT concurred. Mr. Henson stated he would support the vote, but he told the group that it was clear from the public comment received that any use of Astondale Road for the bypass was not acceptable.

Ms. Beresford made a motion to adopt the amendment to add the scoping phase of the Watkinsville Truck Bypass to the 2045 MTP & 21-24 TIP. Mr. Griffin seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

***Note: Direct quotes were provided by Dave Henson after the meeting via email. Much more detail is provided in these minutes regarding this item due to the lack of a complete audio/video recording of this meeting.*

V. REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF AMENDMENT TO FY 2022 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM TO INCLUDE THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN (MTP) UPDATE AS FUNDED

Ms. McDuffie explained the unused federal transportation planning (PL) funds that are not spent by MPO’s in Georgia are annually rolled into a fund that is redistributed as competitive grant program awarded by GDOT and vetted through the Georgia Association of MPO’s (GAMPO) Planning Fund Group. This is how the last update of the MTP was funded.

She stated the update of the MTP to 2050 was included as an unfunded work element in the FY 22 UPWP. MPO Staff presented the unfunded work element to the GAMPO Planning Fund Committee at their September 27 meeting. They chose to award this project. Therefore, this amendment is necessary to move the MTP Update Work Element from the unfunded section into the funded portion of the document. This action will allow MPO staff and GDOT to execute the contract that will pay for the update of the MTP. Ms. McDuffie noted the following changes made to this project as part of the amendment:

- Staff refined the project description after coordination with GDOT and FHWA.
- Some paraphrasing has been done and expansion of the MTP freight section to be more robust.
- The funded project was added to the funding table.

No public review beyond that associated with the TCC and PC meetings is required for this amendment. Once the contract between ACC and GDOT is executed to pay for the MTP Update, work will be finalized on the Request For Proposals (RFP) through the ACC Finance Department, GDOT, and FHWA. The final RFP and slate of members for the review committee will come to TCC & PC early next year. Staff will then move toward hiring a consultant to complete the work.

She noted TCC recommended approval of the amendment to the FY 22 UPWP.

Ms. Beresford made a motion to adopt the amendment to the FY 22 UPWP to include the MTP update as funded. Mr. Higdon seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

VI. REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF DRAFT FY 2023 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM

Ms. McDuffie explained that the Draft FY 23 UPWP outlines how the MPO will utilize transportation planning funding. MACORTS is required to submit a Draft UPWP to GDOT/FHWA/FTA by December. A final draft will be brought to TCC & PC after the first of the year for final approval. The committee members were sent a list of changes made to the FY 23 UPWP compared to the FY 22 version. Staff updated all of the funding levels to align with the FY 22 levels since we are under a continuing resolution for now. She noted work on the MTP update would be the largest work endeavor in FY 23. The results from the 2020 Census results may affect the MPO boundary and/or status in FY 23.

Ms. McDuffie stated staff updated the priorities to align with the federal priorities. The national goals were kept as they were in the FAST Act as well as keeping Census work as a priority. The Administration's priorities of Equity, Economy, Climate Change, Resiliency, and Covid-19 Relief were added. She explained those priorities have been added throughout the document. The FY 22 Accomplishments were updated with present and anticipated accomplishments.

Ms. McDuffie discussed the federal and local funds used for transportation planning. She noted there are 2 fiscal years of transit planning funding and the 2nd year is increased by 5% as an estimate. Two years of funding were shown because of the timing of the Transit grant application submission cycle.

Mr. Griffin made a motion to approve the Draft FY 23 UPWP to be submitted to GDOT & FHWA for review. Ms. Beresford seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

There was none.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

Ms. McDuffie announced that this would be Cherie Varnum's last MACORTS meeting. She thanked Ms. Varnum for all of her hard work with MACORTS. Several members of the committee wished her well.

IX. ADJOURN

Mr. Daniell stated that the next Policy Committee meeting is scheduled for February 9, 2022. Mr. Higdon thanked Mr. Griffin for his clarification regarding the scoping phase for the Watkinsville Bypass.

Ms. McDuffie thanked Chairman Daniell for his work as Chair for the Policy Committee during the 2021 calendar year. For the 2022 calendar year, Todd Higdon will be the Chair of the Policy Committee. Mr. Daniell adjourned the meeting at 10:35 am.