

Summary Minutes
Metropolitan Planning Organization Committee
Meeting of December 15, 2008

Chairman Joe Frank called the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Committee meeting to order at 9:40 a.m. in the HRPDC Board Room with the following in attendance:

MEMBERS:

Joe S. Frank, Chairman (NN)
Stan D. Clark (IW)
Unwanna Dabney (FHWA)
Randall L. Gilliland (HA)
Dennis W. Heuer (VDOT)

James O. McReynolds (YK)
Mark D. Rickards (WATA)
Ivan P. Rucker (FHWA)
Douglas L. Smith (PO)
James K. Spore (VB)
Michael S. Townes (HRT)

MPO STAFF:

Jessica Banks
Dwight Farmer
Kathlene Grauberger

Mike Kimbrel
Camelia Ravanbakht

OTHERS:

Chuck Cayton (Citizen)
Dana Dickens (HRP)
Jeff Florin (VPA)
Dave Forster (VA Pilot)
John Gergely (NN Citizen)
Lewis Grimm, (PBS&J)
Rod Ingram (VB)

Elizabeth Kersey (HA)
Scott Lane, (Louis Berger Group)
Russell Manning (NO Citizen)
Bob Matthias (VB)
Anne C. Morris, (PBS&J)
Ray Taylor (FHR)
Vince Thomas (FHR)

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There was no public comment.

Chairman Frank proceeded with the MPO Agenda.

SUMMARY MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 10, 2008

Chairman Frank stated the minutes from the November 10, 2008 meeting had been distributed to all committee members. He asked for amendments, if any. Hearing none, Chairman Frank asked for a motion to accept the minutes. Mr. Smith made a motion and Mr. Gilliland seconded it. The motion carried.

MPO BEST PRACTICES STUDY: DRAFT FINAL REPORT

Chairman Frank introduced Mr. Lewis Grimm, Project Manager from PBS&J to discuss the key findings from the MPO Best Practices Study. Mr. Grimm outlined the basic tenets of the MPO process and stated that 39 peer MPOs from around the United States were identified and interviewed regarding organizational and public participation best practices. This process was initiated to determine best practices that could potentially be used within the HRMPO.

Mr. Scott Lane of The Berger Group continued the presentation concentrating on the organizational advisory groups. A wide variety of focus groups were used including Citizens, Freight, and Transit. It was determined through this study that the advisory committees to the MPOs had both voting and/or non-voting members. Another issue addressed in the study was weighted voting. Mr. Lane reported the use of weighted voting is an independent decision made by each MPO and 70% of the peer MPOs surveyed do not use weighted voting. Mr. Heuer asked how the other MPOs in Virginia vote. Mr. Grimm replied the Richmond MPO has somewhat of a weighted vote and Metro Washington Council of Government Transportation Planning Board has a very elaborate voting system because of the large disparity in the population sizes of the member jurisdictions.

According to Mr. Lane, most MPOs do not participate in retreats. He commented that there is much interaction between the technical staff of member governments and staff of the MPO. He further commented that most MPOs also have an orientation/training meeting for new MPO Board members. He stated there was no standard for performance metrics for the MPOs. Chairman Frank asked Mr. Lane how external performance measurements would work considering an MPO may excel in planning a project but cannot implement it because of lack of funding. Mr. Lane responded that external measurements are very hard to accomplish. Ms. Dabney commented the FHWA will focus on this in the future and it is also expected to be a topic in the new Federal Transportation Legislation. She also stated now is a good opportunity to determine how the MPO can incorporate performance measures as part of the overall planning process. She suggested a FHWA representative from its resource center address the MPO on using performance measures in the transportation planning process. She also stressed it is important to recognize that much of what has been discussed regarding performance measures has had to do with reviewing the output of the planning process, but perhaps, instead, the MPO should focus its attention on the outcome of the MPO's goals.

Mr. Lane stated that 20-25% of the studied MPOs received recommended corrective actions regarding public engagement strategies. One best practice was to advertise the MPO meetings to the public at four weeks and then again at two weeks. Mr. Lane further stated that almost all MPOs agreed that the meetings must be accessible to the public. This means the meeting must be in compliance with the American Disabilities Act and the meeting must be on a transit line. Another best practice is to track how participants at a public meeting heard about such meeting and survey them after the meeting. However, findings have suggested public meetings may not be the best method to engage the public.

Chairman Frank commented if the MPO has major issues to discuss, the meeting should be at another location rather than the Regional Building. The Regional Building is on a transit line, but Mr. Townes stated buses run for a longer period of time on this line than on others and the public would miss its connecting routes after the meeting. Chairman Frank suggested that at public meetings, the public fill out information cards instead of signing in on a sign-in sheet. Mr. Farmer was impressed with the Miami Dade MPO because it had a huge database linked to other major databases that ultimately allowed it to have access to over a half a million people. Mr. Grimm interjected that more MPOs are linking with other databases to contact the public. Mr. Gilliland asked Mr. Farmer if the HRMPO is linked to any other databases. Mr. Farmer replied the MPO links to VDOT's database but also stated the MPO needs to be linked to at least all the stakeholders. Ms. Morris commented that to rely on technology alone would be a mistake as 35-40% of the population would be missed. Mr. Lane concluded his portion of the presentation by stating that none of the MPOs interviewed were happy with the current level of public participation.

Ms. Morris then continued with the public participation findings from the Best Practices Study. She outlined key public engagement strategies and visualization practices including increased cooperation with member and non-traditional agencies, video webcasting, and GIS mapping. She stressed the MPO must go to the people, not have the people come to the MPO. Chairman Frank suggested Mr. Farmer contact the Chamber of Commerce or other organizational groups of the Korean, Black, Indian, and Hispanic communities. Ms. Morris outlined best practices outreach for traditionally underserved populations stating that one of the best ways to reach this population is by sending information home with school children. All this requires is permission from the County Superintendent of Education. Another well received practice is to have paid participation in MPO focus groups.

Ms. Morris concluded by stating the HRMPO has a marvelous opportunity to build a great MPO from ground zero. Hiring an experienced, well seasoned public information employee will be of great benefit to the MPO. Finally, she stated the MPO must demonstrate a true commitment if it is to achieve a successful public participation process.

Mr. Heuer, who was involved in the original screening process for the Best Practice Study, stated the original request for proposal (RFP) defined the scope of work which included a set of recommendations. Mr. Heuer asked why there was no such set in the Best Practices Study. Mr. Grimm replied there was a change in emphasis in the process and there was the decision to present the key findings to the MPO and let it decide its course of action. He further replied that through a conversation with Mr. Farmer it was decided that the Consultants and the MPO Committee jointly make recommendations on the next step in the process. Mr. Farmer stated he had an extensive discussion with the consultants and he advised them to have strong conclusions and the necessary recommendations of what they believed were truly the best practices. He cautioned the consultants that when it came time to making a decision of those best practices that it would be best to have the MPO Committee and then the MPO Board decide on which of those best practices should be implemented. Mr. Heuer responded stating he would like to have the benefit of the consultant's recommendations. Mr. Gilliland commented the study gave him a rounded background of the MPOs but he did expect stronger recommendations too. Mr. Gilliland

further commented he would like to have seen recommendations regarding the non-governing body members of the MPO. He would like to know the pros and cons of having them on the Board. Ms. Dabney agreed that there was a lack of recommendations as they relate to Hampton Roads in the study. Ms. Dabney thought the MPO Committee was meeting for the last time today but Mr. Farmer interjected that this was not necessarily true.

Mr. Rucker stated he and the other members of the MPO Committee were interviewed by the consultants and gave individual recommendations to them. He asked how the consultants incorporated this information because it was not mentioned in the study. Mr. Grimm replied there was clearly a difference of opinions among the Committee members and there is not a broadly expressed regional consensus on the issues. He concluded, stating this organization is at a major crossroads but there has been much positive change within the MPO.

Chairman Frank stated there would be an MPO Retreat in February of the full MPO Board and stakeholders to discuss all the issues at hand. After the retreat, any issues still outstanding could either be addressed by MPO staff or the MPO Committee. Chairman Frank suggested the MPO Committee ask the consultants to make clear recommendations based on best practices and how they relate to Hampton Roads and feasibility of implementation. These recommendations and issues would then be discussed at the retreat on February 18th. The MPO Committee agreed with this suggestion.

Mr. Heuer suggested an outside facilitator help draft the agenda and chair the meeting to keep the group focused. Mr. Farmer stated MPO staff has already taken on this task.

DRAFT MPO BYLAWS

The MPO Committee has already agreed upon separate PDC and MPO Chairs.

Weighted voting at the MPO Board meetings was deferred until the February 18th retreat.

The MPO Committee discussed adding a Freight Advisory Committee (FAC) to the MPO Board to provide input on freight-related transportation issues as well as raise the awareness of the importance of freight transportation. The MPO Chair would appoint two members of the FAC to serve as co-chairs for three-year terms with one being a private sector freight expert and one being a voting member from the MPO Board. The private sector co-chair would be a non-voting member of the MPO Board. The FAC would have to have minutes recorded, public notices and agendas. Mr. Smith stated the Virginia Port Authority (VPA) has offered to help staff the committee and host the meetings. Mr. Farmer stated the advisory committees should all be treated in a similar manner, and a framework be developed as to what would constitute these committees, how they would be operated, conducted, and communicate with the MPO Board. After more discussion, this issue was deferred until the February 18th retreat.

MPO REDESIGNATION

This was deferred until after the February 18th retreat.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING AGREEMENT

This was deferred until after the February 18th retreat.

LEGISLATIVE LIAISON: UPDATE

The MPO Committee agreed to have the existing local legislative liaisons work with the members of the General Assembly during the upcoming session and then determine its effectiveness.

NEW STAFF POSITION: PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH MANAGER

The MPO Committee agreed to begin the process to hire a Public Communications and Community Outreach Manager. Ms. Dabney stated Ms. Morris cited in the best practices study that the Public Outreach employee should have extensive experience. The job description the MPO has set forth states three years experience; however, the Committee agreed to increase the experience to ten years.

Old/New Business

Chairman Frank stated a cd agenda packet would be mailed to members of the governing bodies and all of the stakeholders approximately one month before the February 18th retreat.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:35 p.m.