

## **MEETING NOTES**

### **TRAFFIC SIGNALS AND OPERATIONS WORKING GROUP**

**DATE:** Friday, November 9, 2001

**TIME:** 10:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** COG, 777 North Capitol Street, NE  
First Floor, Room 1

**CHAIR:** Woody Hood  
Maryland State Highway Administration

#### **ATTENDANCE:**

Deniz Callahan, City of Falls Church Department of Environmental Services  
John Collura, Virginia Tech  
Tim Connor, Gannett-Fleming  
Kathleen Donodeo, WMATA  
Craig A. Franklin, Trichord  
Jonathan Gifford, George Mason University  
Pat Harrison, Quality Consultants Group  
Ling Li, VDOT  
Cheryl Lowrance, Street Smarts  
Frank Miracic, FHWA  
Kajaz Safarian, DDOT-TSA  
Phil Tarnoff, University of Maryland  
Kenneth Todd, National Center for Bicycling and Walking  
Bob Winick, Motion Maps LLC  
Alex Verzosa, City of Fairfax DPW

#### **COG STAFF ATTENDANCE:**

Michael Farrell  
Andrew Meese

## **ACTIONS:**

### **1. Welcome**

Andrew Meese led the meeting, since Woody Hood was not able to attend

### **2. Developing Transportation Emergency Response Policies and Procedures in the National Capital Region - Andrew Meese, COG staff**

The events of September 11 attracted the attention of the COG and TPB boards, which have in turn directed the relevant committees to study the issue of transportation and emergency response. A handout provided the meeting chronology. Chairman Carol Schwartz of the COG board has appointed herself head of an ad-hoc task force on emergency preparedness, one of whose topics of interest is transportation. Chairman Mason of the TPB will chair the task force on transportation. Chairman Mason is looking to the MOITS committees for ideas. Recommendations are to be ready for the COG and TPB boards in the November to December period.

One question that has been addressed is how the various agencies communicate and cooperate during an emergency. Communications is being examined both from the technical standpoint and from the aspect of who should be talking to whom. Over the longer term, there is interest in developing a detailed playbook for transportation in an emergency. Another issue is communication with the public, which was generally poor on September 11. On September 11 there was considerable misinformation, and means of communication such as the emergency alert system were not used. Signal timing plans will be considered as part of evacuation plans.

### **3. Update on the Traffic Signal Problem Reporting System**

Andy Meese decided to do general introductions at this point. Michael Farrell noted that contact data had been gathered, but nothing had been posted on COG's web site yet. Andy proposed tentatively that we would have something more substantial to report at the next meeting. Generally, this web site has been put on the back burner due to the emergency preparedness meetings, but we hope to have something in place by the end of the calendar year.

The web site might be an opportunity to measure the degree of the public's concern over the functioning of traffic signals. Kathleen Donodeo suggested that many repeat inquiries, especially concerning signal timing and cycle length, as opposed to malfunctions, needed to be addressed beforehand through education. Forums such as Dr. Gridlock's column in the Washington Post might help educate the public about the functioning of signals. If the web site is able to record complaints, it may be possible to find a pattern of similar questions. Those questions can then be the subject of public education. Changes in signal timings that are likely to generate complaints should be announced in advance. The FAQ section of the web site should be re-examined.

### **4. Update on Pilot Arterial Corridor Studies - Andrew Meese**

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In Maryland SHA hired a contractor to get the speeds and volumes necessary to put into the Synchro model, in order to produce a signal optimization plan. There have been some problems with the initial data collection, so the “before” data will have to be re-collected. This data collection problem will push the schedule back by about a month on the Maryland side. Ling Li described progress on the Virginia side. Ling Li plans to do timing runs on Thursday. She regretted the lack of resources to do more travel runs. Andy Meese was interested in seeing what boundary problems might arise between jurisdictions using the SCOOT system and jurisdictions using time-of-day systems. Andy also wanted to see if COG could lend its GPS unit to aid the data collection effort. The person who was to have assisted with the data collection has been out on sick leave. There was some discussion on the merits of traffic-adaptive systems. Michael Farrell promised to look into the feasibility of using COG’s GPS unit in Virginia.

#### **4. Update on Traffic Signals White Paper - Pat Harrison, Quality Consultants**

Pat Harrison described progress on the Traffic Signals White Paper. Michael Farrell updated the data from the year-old surveys. Using that data, Pat Harrison produced a summary of the paper, which was distributed to the group. Kenneth Todd questioned the benefits of signals. Andy suggested that the paper focus on the benefits of improved operations, given the presence of traffic signals. A question was asked about the coordination of signals with transit. Michael Farrell replied that the survey asked signal operators if they had transit preemption, but transit preemption was not generally high on the wish lists of signal operators. AVL (automatic vehicle locators) were discussed. Together with transit preemption, it would be possible to use the two systems to see which buses were behind schedule, and to give them additional green time in order to get them back on schedule. A participant pointed out that Manassas Park had not been interviewed. While this municipality owns only three signals, it is important that they participate. Andy suggested that we gather data from governmental entities that do not own signals but interact with the agencies such as VDOT that do control them. Fairfax, Prince William, and Loudoun do not own any signals, but they have some control over installation. The White Paper should include a section discussing the interaction of Fairfax County with VDOT with respect to the installation and timing of traffic signals. Andy asked Doug Hansen if he would work with Mike Farrell on that section. Alex Verzosa added that when developers proffer signals, they have to be approved by the County. The issue of geographically specific data was raised, but Andy thought we should not be more specific than necessary. The possibility of producing a map of NEMA controllers was raised. Andy said that we do have time for revisions, but not much money. Andy suggested that we e-mail a draft to the committee some time in December, for completion by the end of the calendar year.

#### **5. Update on ITS as a Data Resource Study - Andrew Meese**

No news.

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**6. Discussion of Efforts to Develop Regional Performance Measures - Andrew Meese**

No activity. Part of the purpose of this item was to stimulate interest in the operation of the transportation system, but September 11 has done that for us.

**8. Update from other M & O/ITS Activities - John Collura**

John Collura discussed the progress of the Signal preemption/prioritization study. At the moment the key activity is the review of submissions. Columbia Pike, Route 1, and Georgia Avenue will be the three routes tested. They want to evaluate each test site, so that it will be easier to compare the results. Andy noted that Woody Hood is trying to put together a list of emergency contact numbers.

One option would be to ask the committee to work with D.C. to make sure that the D.C. committee has the emergency number. Or we could collect an emergency contact list for our own internal use. Mike Farrell explained that the contact list he collected did not have names or pager numbers since it was meant to be released to the public. Andy said that the first point of contact is the 24-hour operations center, but we should have a backup list of contact numbers that operators can call if one of the operations centers is out of communication or not functioning for some reason. Another person agreed, noting that a bomb threat could put an operations center out of operation, leaving operators working out of their cars with Nextel phones and Notepads. Maryland and D.C. are already collecting their own emergency contact lists, so we should focus on Virginia. Mike Farrell should work with someone in VDOT to get an emergency traffic signals contact list together for Virginia. Another participant expressed concern over the redundancy of many of the new emergency response committees. The issue of telephone communication was discussed. Andy suggested purchasing priority codes from Verizon, which would allow emergency agencies first priority to new circuits. The group agreed that redundant communications were important to have, in case of the failure of any one system.

Next meeting was set for Friday, January 11, 2002. Andy told the committee members to expect some contact with Michael Farrell on the Virginia emergency traffic signal contact list, as well as other matters.