

REPORT

TPB Citizens Advisory Committee April 15, 2010 Maureen Budetti, CAC Chair

The CAC's April 15 meeting focused on discussion of the current U.S. DOT Certification Review of the metropolitan transportation planning process. The CAC also discussed the upcoming Conversation on Setting Regional Transportation Priorities scheduled for May 26. In the absence of current chair Maureen Budetti, the meeting was led by former chair Farrell Keough.

Public Involvement is a Key Concern of Federal Agency Representatives

Present at the meeting from the federal review team and resource staff were Melissa Barlow of FTA Region 3 DC Metro Office staff, Sandra Jackson of FHWA DC Division staff, and John Sprowls and Joanne Waszczak of FTA headquarters staff. Ms. Barlow gave a presentation describing the certification review process and the reason for the review team members' attendance at the CAC meeting. She told the Committee that the review is conducted to ensure that federally-required planning activities are satisfactorily implemented by the TPB. She noted that this meeting provided CAC members and the general public an opportunity to speak with FHWA and FTA staff about the process and areas for improvements. She also mentioned three new areas of focus for federal certification reviews: livability, sustainability, and climate change.

The federal review team then heard from CAC members on public participation in the transportation planning process, the development of transportation policies, and regional decision-making. The review team provided the following discussion questions to the CAC prior to the meeting:

1. *How effective is public involvement in transportation planning conducted by the National Capital Region TPB and its partner transportation agencies?*
2. *What methods to encourage involvement are working and what are not? Please provide examples and explanations.*
3. *How does public involvement assist the region to reach consensus on difficult and controversial issues related to transportation?*
4. *How can public views successfully be communicated to decision-makers in an area as large and complex as this?*
5. *Please describe situations where public involvement has had an impact on the planning process and decisions reached and where it has not. For example, consider how involvement contributes to developing strategies in the long-range plan, selecting investments in the TIP, or any other activities.*
6. *How might the TPB improve public involvement? For example, consider changes to the structure of advisory groups, use of media, use of facilitators, or efforts to reach a broad range of groups, including minority and low-income communities.*

Several CAC members thought that the public is less interested in TPB activities because regional-level transportation discussions tend to be abstract and complex, and people cannot find a direct connection to daily lives – in contrast to more local transportation issues such as the condition of neighborhood streets. Members said that the TPB staff, in concert with the CAC, has done an admirable job at reaching out to various audiences around the region with information and activities that help demonstrate the importance of region-wide transportation issues and planning, but that it remains an uphill climb. CAC Members suggested a public relations effort aimed at featuring regional transportation issues and planning efforts appearing in local newspapers and other media outlets might be helpful. Other suggestions for improving the success of outreach were to utilize public access television networks in the region, to videotape TPB meetings, and to make better use of Internet blogs and social media platforms.

In response to a suggestion that a couple TPB members could regularly attend CAC meetings to promote interaction, the federal review team sought to explore the relationship between CAC members and the TPB, particularly regarding those members who were nominated by the TPB rather than those elected by the previous year's CAC. TPB staff and CAC members clarified that the CAC nominations resulted from an application process and that there is often little or no interaction with the nominating TPB officer nor the expectation that the CAC member is to serve as the officer's representative on the Committee.

CAC members in turn asked questions of the federal review team, inquiring whether U.S. DOT representatives might serve as resources and provide information on best practices for CACs and MPOs nationwide. This prompted a question about CACs at other MPOs, to which the federal review team responded that most MPOs have something similar to the TPB CAC though structures differ. They noted that part of the reason for the federal team attending the meeting was to learn about the CAC's relationship with the TPB and how that compares with other metropolitan areas.

In response to a question about possible federal policy implications of a recent statement by DOT Secretary LaHood concerning accommodation of biking and walking and its connection to the certification process, the federal team explained that this certification review was reflective only of current federal policy and the current federal authorization (SAFETEA-LU) and that changes being discussed at the federal level right now would be reflected in future reviews. They also mentioned that there may be additional opportunities for MPOs to apply for grant funding for projects specific to those modes mentioned by Secretary LaHood.

An attendee from the public at large asked if any MPO had ever failed to achieve certification and what the consequences would be if one did. The federal team said that in some instances, the federal team has prescribed corrective actions and the certification process has been delayed as MPOs worked to remedy a problem. They emphasized, however, that the process is not meant to be punitive but rather to help MPOs be most effective in carrying out federal policy and federal programs.

CAC Input on “Conversation on Setting Regional Transportation Priorities”

Though there was limited time at the end of the meeting, the CAC briefly discussed plans for the May 26 event. Some members expressed disappointment at the rebranding of the event into a “conversation” rather than the initially described “public forum.” Staff explained the rationale behind the change and noted that the event could be thought of as a “mini-retreat” with the goal of getting the participants in the TPB planning process, including members of the TPB, Technical Committee, CAC, and Access for All Advisory Committee, in the same room to discuss the regional transportation planning process together. It was emphasized that the event would be open to the general public, but that invitations and assigned seating would only go to the participants in the TPB process.

CAC members reviewed the draft agenda for the event, sought further logistical clarifications, and asked if the “guiding questions” for tabletop discussion mentioned in the draft agenda were still under development. TPB staff said that they are still in development and that CAC input as to the questions that could “seed” the small-group discussions would be welcomed, and that the CAC presentation during the event would also help lay a foundation for these discussions.

It was noted that one or more additional conference calls would be arranged for interested CAC members to discuss plans for the event and the CAC presentation, including the possibility of an evening call since some members have been unable to participate in the lunchtime calls. Further information about upcoming calls will be distributed to the Committee via email.

Other Business

- Ron Kirby, Director of Transportation Planning, briefed the committee on the upcoming TPB agenda, including the project submissions for the 2010 CLRP and 2011-2016 TIP
- A CAC member provided an update on the scheduled memorial service for past CAC member Harry Sanders.

ATTENDANCE

CAC Meeting, April 15, 2010

Members in Attendance

1. Zach Dobelbower, DC
2. William Easter, MD
3. Harold Foster, DC
4. Farrell Keough, MD
5. James Larsen, VA
6. Allen Muchnick, VA
7. Tina Slater, MD
8. Emmet Tydings, MD
9. Faith Wheeler, DC

Alternates in Attendance

1. Kim Kaplan, VA
2. Kevin Posey, VA
3. Frederick Walker, VA

Members Not in Attendance

1. Maureen Budetti, VA, Chair
2. Larry Martin, DC
3. Stephen McCoy, DC
4. Madeline McDuffy, VA
5. Gail Parker, VA
6. Roxanne Taylor, MD

Staff/Others

Melissa Barlow, FTA Region 3 DC Metro
Office
Sandra Jackson, FHWA DC Division
John Sprawls, FTA Headquarters
Joanne Waszczak, FTA Headquarters
Ron Kirby, COG/DTP
John Swanson, COG/DTP
Darren Smith, COG/DTP
Marisa Lang, COG/DTP
Bill Orleans, interested citizen
David Kaplan, interested citizen