

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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MEETING NOTES

WASHINGTON REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY FORUM

DATE: Wednesday, June 6, 2007

TIME: 10:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.

PLACE: COG, 777 North Capitol Street, NE
First Floor, Rooms 4/5

Attendance:

Gaylynn Abram	VDOT/NOVA
Bala Akundi	BMC
Ron Bodmer	WMATA
Cheryl Cort	Coalition for Smarter Growth
Douglas Blackstone	Maryland MVA
Leverson Boodlal	KLS Engineering
Deborah Bowden	MDOT
Roxanne Brown-Anicney	US Park Police
Christine Burke	Inova Fairfax Hospital
Patrick Burke	DC Metropolitan Police Department
Dennis Cannon	US Access Board
Jim Chandler	Town of Leesburg
Randy Dittberner	VDOT
Jurek Grabowski	Inova Fairfax Hospital
Michael Hawkins	Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division, Maryland State Police
Cindy Hearrell	Inova Fairfax
Burt Henry	DC Metropolitan Police Department
Randy Hodgson	VDOT
Egua Igbinosun	MDSHA
Lara Jacobs	Design House
Patricia Jones	Alexandria Transit Company
Carol Kachadoorian	WMATA
Taft Kelley	Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
Bethany Koetje	NCAC/CIREN

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Jianming Ma	DDOT
Julie Maione	Montgomery County Highway Safety Office
William W. McGuirk	DDOT
Sharon McKay	Center for Applied Linguistics
Erica Mowbray	MEMA
Allen Muchnick	Virginia Transportation Safety Board
Norah M. Ocel	Loudoun County
Bill Orleans	PG ACT
Stephen Read	VDOT
Carlos Robles	Crash Investigation Unit, Prince William County
Christina Sinz	MDSHA – District 3 Office
Michael Spaulding	Maryland State Police
Paul Sullivan	Federal Highway Administration
Chris Wells	Fairfax County
John Z. Wetmore	Perils for Pedestrians TV

COG Staff Attendance:

Michael Farrell
Andrew Meese

1. General Introductions.

Participants introduced themselves.

2. Traffic Safety in the Washington Region

Mr. Farrell and Mr. Meese spoke to a hand-out on transportation safety in the National Capital Region. The most recent federal transportation bill, SAFETEA-LU, requires that Metropolitan Planning Organizations such as the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB) incorporate a Safety Element into the regional long-range transportation plan. In response to this new federal mandate, TPB is becoming more involved in safety planning, and is looking into the possibility of forming a standing Transportation Safety Subcommittee to advise the creation of a Safety Element of the long-range plan.

Previously there had not been a specific line item in the TPB's work program for safety, though it was addressed in part under a number of other programs. The FY2008 Unified Planning Work Program starting July 1st provides for one half full-time equivalent of a staff person, and mandates a Safety Element for the fall of 2007. Safety issues have been dealt with at a local, State, or Federal level. The challenge facing the TPB is to make sure that any TPB plan or program reflects safety considerations, and also to find what safety areas are relevant to the metropolitan region as an area of geography, and which are not needlessly duplicative of what is

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happening at other levels. Today's group was called together to help advise this.

Ms. Beer mentioned that WRAP (Washington Regional Alcohol Program)'s annual report on drunk driving in the region as a good source of data.

In response to a question, it was noted that data might be presented on a per-capita basis, though experience had shown that elected officials had preferred absolute numbers; both can be presented. This issue of visitor/daytime versus resident population was also discussed. The District of Columbia has a large daytime population, and that should be taken into account when reviewing its data.

3. District of Columbia Highway Strategic Highway Safety Plan

Leverson Boodlal, KLS Engineering

Mr. Boodlal spoke to a PowerPoint presentation. The District of Columbia has about 80,000 crashes per year. On average DC had 57 fatalities per year over the last five years. DC has a relatively high number of fatalities per capita compared to other "walking cities" such as Boston, New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. However, "driving cities" such as Phoenix, Austin, Miami, and Jacksonville have significantly higher (30% to 120% higher) fatality rates per capita than the District of Columbia. The purpose of the Strategic plan is to bring down the number of fatalities in the District of Columbia. The stakeholders wanted a zero vision, but for practical purposes the goal is a 50% reduction by 2025.

The plan focuses on high-risk drivers, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, engineering facilities and infrastructure, special vehicles, special target areas, and improving traffic records. "Special vehicles" included motorcycle safety, trucks, and buses. Special target areas included Emergency Medical Services and occupant protection.

DDOT will produce a separate Traffic Records Strategic Plan.

If the plan's goals are reached, it will save 300 lives and 50,000 injuries over the life of the plan, as well as saving \$8-10 billion in societal costs of crashes. Each of the 15 focus areas in the plan has five-year incremental goals between now and 2025.

The plan process has increased the awareness of various agencies of the role they can play in improving safety. Various agencies are already implementing changes to improve safety, including automation of the crash reports by the DC Metropolitan Police Department.

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4. Maryland Strategic Highway Safety Plan

Pam Beer, Cambridge Systematics

Ms. Beer spoke to a PowerPoint presentation. Cambridge Systematics was hired a year ago to create the Strategic plan, which has been adopted, and Maryland is now creating its implementation plan.

As in the District of Columbia, the level of traffic deaths is unacceptable. There were 651 deaths on the roads in Maryland in 2006, and the estimated monetary cost of traffic crashes is \$44 billion. Traffic safety is comparable to crime in terms of the level of deaths and injuries.

The Maryland counties of the Washington region, including Prince George's, Montgomery, and Frederick Counties, account for a large proportion of the statewide totals. Prince George's has particularly high traffic fatalities per capita.

The goal of the Maryland State Highway Safety Plan is the reduction of motor vehicle fatalities to fewer than 550 by 2010, from 614 in 2005, and to reduce injuries to 50,000 in 2010, which is a 10% reduction from 2005. These priorities were created by the safety stakeholders.

Maryland has an Executive Committee, a Steering Committee, and numerous Emphasis area subgroups, for a total of fourteen committees.

The main SHSP emphasis areas are impaired driving, improve information and decision support systems, eliminate hazardous locations, increase occupant protections, improve driver competency, curb aggressive driving, and improve emergency response.

The SHSP addresses all public roads, including roads maintained by local jurisdictions. More than 80% of the lane miles in Maryland are local roads.

SAFETEA-LU requires all states to identify the top 5% of hazardous locations. Part of the formula for picking hazardous locations is traffic volume, and the State does not have traffic volumes for local roads. MDOT will work with local jurisdictions to identify hazardous locations. Maryland will create a virtual data warehouse.

Maryland does not have data on the contribution of cell phone use to crashes in Maryland.

In response to a question on clearing snow off sidewalks, Ms. Beer replied that snow clearance of sidewalks would be a costly, and that priority is given to clearing the travel lanes. Ms. Beer promised that the pedestrian emphasis team would look at crashes related to snow clearance.

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5. Virginia's Strategic Highway Safety Plan

Stephen Read, Highway Safety Improvement Program Manager, VDOT

Mr. Read spoke to a PowerPoint presentation. The Virginia Strategic Highway Safety Plan was approved in the fall of 2006. The Executive committee is co-Chaired by DOT, DMV, and State Police representatives. The plan contains 119 strategies, covering enforcement, education, engineering, data, and planning. Virginia aims to reduce fatalities and injuries by 10% in five years.

Virginia is moving away from rate per VMT to absolute numbers or rate per capita. Virginia fatalities and injuries have improved on a per VMT basis, but have been stagnant in terms of absolute numbers and per population numbers.

Virginia started two years ago updating its crash record database. The goal is to make it electronic, GIS-based, and for all public roads. The system is called TRENDS, or Traffic Records Electronic Data System.

The urban crescent from Northern Virginia to Hampton Roads has the greatest number of fatalities. Virginia will put \$20 million into its top twenty jurisdictions for fatalities, with no match required.

Only 16% of the roads in Virginia are non-VDOT roads. VDOT is targeting its Interstate and primary system, especially in the urban areas. \$11 million in safety funds was allocated to Northern Virginia last year. The top ten corridors are in Northern Virginia.

Large trucks are an important issue in the plan, accounting for 13% of traffic deaths. VDOT is plotting out truck-involved crashes to locate the trouble spots.

Each State is required to complete an action plan. VDOT has started that process; every involved State agency is producing an action plan. The first draft of the action plan should be done by fall.

Ms. Beer asked if there was a way to determine whether enforcement actions were taking place at hazardous locations. Mr. Read replied that that was a goal of TRENDS, but not one that had been achieved yet.

Mr. Muchnick asked about the basis for the allocation of HSIP funds. Mr. Read replied that it was an application-based process. Bicycle and pedestrian safety is being handled as a set-aside. Not all cities have been taking advantage of that money.

Mr. Wetmore asked about pedestrian and bicycle access on the HOT lane bridges on the beltway. Mr. Read replied that the HOT lane project should abide by VDOT's bicycle and pedestrian accommodation policy, but it gets more complicated with public-private partnerships. Safety assessment should be part of every project.

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Mr. Wells asked if a safety check-off would be made part of all projects under this Strategic Highway Safety Plan. Mr. Read replied that it would be.

6. Proposed Emphasis Areas for the Safety Element of the Long-Range Transportation Plan

Mr. Farrell spoke to a handout. Though COG and TPB over time have been addressing safety in a number of ways, now SAFETEA-LU mandates that safety be a separate planning element in the long-range transportation plan for the region. The Safety Element must “incorporate and summarize” the priorities, goals, countermeasures, or projects for the MPA contained in the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. That requirement will be effective next fall; after October 1st, 2007 all new transportation plans must be SAFETEA-LU compliant.

In the case of the Washington region we have three Strategic Highway Safety Plans. All three plans have a zero vision goal for traffic fatalities. DC is treated as a State for transportation planning purposes. The five-year goals are consistent across the three plans, with all three States having a goal of a ten percent reduction of traffic fatalities and injuries.

A matrix was distributed comparing and contrasting the emphasis areas of the three Strategic Highway Safety Plans. While there are some differences of organization and emphasis, the three plans contain largely the same emphasis areas.

We should be able to agree that the transportation element should incorporate the common emphasis areas from State plans. Incorporating Strategies and countermeasures would be more difficult; DC alone has 139 strategies and 83 near-term action items, and the other States have similar numbers. The Long-Range Transportation Plan is not a voluminous document, and the Safety Element should be consistent in scale with the rest of the document.

Strategies tend to fall under the three E's of Engineering, Enforcement, and Emergency Services. So it should be possible to summarize or reference the strategies of the state plans in the Safety Element of the regional long-range transportation plan. All three states are moving to upgrade their traffic records and data reporting systems to support better safety planning.

Currently, we expect to combine the common elements of the three State plans to create a Safety Element of the regional long-range plan. The deadline is this fall, and we expect to have a review process. Mr. Farrell asked for comments on this proposed Safety Element and process.

Mr. Greene suggested that as this an urbanized region, perhaps we could have a vision which is different from the State Strategic Highway Safety Plans.

It is a benefit to us that so much work has already been done at the State level, so we can go

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further if our stakeholders feel that we should go further, or if there are areas that are particularly relevant to be addressed at the metropolitan level. We need to gather the stakeholders and have continuing input and dialogue as the Safety Element is developed as part of the overall regional transportation plan.

7. Exploration of Forming a Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee

Mr. Meese and Mr. Farrell spoke to a hand-out.

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) is a document that describes the slated planning activities MPO staff will undertake in a fiscal year. FY 2008 is the first time we have had a separate safety task within the UPWP. The task will provide for one half full-time equivalent of a staff person. It will incorporate data compilation and analysis. The electronic systems which the States have pledged to improve will be a big help as well in compiling metropolitan-level data.

COG/TPB has a traffic operations committee, a bicycle and pedestrian subcommittee, public safety and fire committees, a bus subcommittee, and an Access for All Committee that addresses underserved populations. Almost everything that we do has a safety aspect, though generally not dealing with local traffic engineering issues.

The primary requirement for the MPO is to have a coordinated long-range transportation plan for the region. Projects must be in the plan to get federal funding. The federal requirements have gotten more prescriptive over the years in terms of what must be in an MPO transportation plan.

In the previous transportation bill, TEA-21, safety and security issues were bundled together, but are now separate planning factors under SAFETEA-LU.

The handout contains a TPB committee structure diagram. The TPB board is not the same as the COG board, though it is housed at COG. The TPB is our Executive Committee and decision making body, including both local government and transportation agency representatives. The TPB Technical Committee is the advisory committee to the TPB, and in turn itself is advised by a number of subcommittees, grouped into three categories: Methods, Coordination, and Long-Range Planning subcommittees. The Transportation Safety Subcommittee would fall under the Coordination category. Staff believes there is a role for a standing subcommittee to advise our process on the topic of safety. Coordination subcommittees can bring in a diversity of stakeholders, not just representatives of agencies that are on our board.

The Transportation Safety Subcommittee should meet periodically here at COG and can interact with some of the other Subcommittees, especially the Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee, which has a major interest in safety through the Street Smart Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety program. The new Freight and Bus subcommittees are likely to be interested in safety, especially the pedestrian safety around buses.

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It was noted that the TPB committee structure diagram depicts TPB committees only. A number of other committees were in a structure under the COG Board of Directors; notably, the Police Chiefs Committee and other public safety committees are in the COG Board committee structure. However, we will have opportunities to interface with them on an as-needed basis. We would also welcome some law enforcement participation at the technical level in the Transportation Safety Subcommittee. There is currently no COG or TPB subcommittee specializing in traffic safety enforcement.

Since the safety planning mandate is new, MPOs nation-wide have not been as active in safety planning as in other areas. However, a few such as the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) have been active.

A Transportation Safety Subcommittee could provide a forum for sharing best practices and it could oversee the safety element of the long-range plan. We should also look for program areas that need regional coordination such as enforcement and media campaigns. We might be able to coordinate the data improvements being carried out at the State level so that the data is reported in a way that is compatible if possible. Possible subcommittee members could include DOT safety staff, jurisdictional departments of public works, law enforcement, emergency medical services, transit, safety advocates, and public health representatives.

Mr. Read suggested that we review the safety process of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) for ideas.

Ms. Beer mentioned that in Maryland they were looking at establishing regional committees to implement the Maryland State Highway Safety Plans. Does the TPB expect this committee to get involved in implementation beyond regional media and enforcement coordination? Mr. Meese noted COG/TPB can coordinate with these Maryland committees, but probably could not act as the implementation committee. Implementation activities are generally not in the purview of COG/TPB, whose staff is supported by funds generally limited to planning activities; such funds could not be used for implementation of, for example, a regional media campaign. COG/TPB has some implementation programs, but only to the extent that we can obtain non-planning funding, such as the Street Smart Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety program carried out with separate funding provided by the TPB member jurisdictions.

Ms. Beer suggested that for the media elements of all the plans that we could do joint media events. We already do that on Street Smart, Smooth Operator, and Checkpoint Strikeforce, but there may be others where a joint media event makes sense.

In response to a question on safety as a prioritization factor in regional planning, it was noted that COG/TPB generally does not use quantitative prioritization, in part because funding sources are generally tied to being within each of the three major jurisdictions. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Subcommittee annually develops a set of top priority unfunded bicycle and pedestrian

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projects, which are brought to the TPB's attention; the Transportation Safety Subcommittee could do something similar.

The group briefly discussed what would happen if it were decided not to form a Transportation Safety Subcommittee. In that case, transportation safety would become one of many items addressed by the main TPB Technical Committee, and staff would prepare briefing materials for them, and periodically get on their busy agenda. They could then take back the materials to share with their colleagues and provide comments. This is common for many TPB work program items. But Mr. Meese felt that safety merits something more. A Transportation Safety Subcommittee would mean regular participation by State DOT people who are dedicated to the topic of safety, or by their consultants, and help plug into the state safety planning processes. Even meeting only a few times per year it would be valuable. Local jurisdiction, law enforcement, and public health participation would be helpful, but the participation by the state DOT safety staff is critical. However, attendance is open; agencies can decide who would be the best participant.

Mr. Muchnick asked whether the Safety Element would include regional crash data by mode, demographics, and location and trends in that respect, a summary of the HSIP allocations in the long-range program and TIP, and information on the behavioral highway safety grants that are awarded within our region, and how these are being targeted. Mr. Farrell replied that we start with the minimum of incorporating the emphasis areas of the State plans, and that crash data is a natural addition. We can look into tracking the allocations awarded in various safety grant programs. If the Transportation Safety Subcommittee feels that we should include that, we can do it subject to resource constraints.

We welcome suggestions for things that the Safety Element should consider, such as evaluation.

The Transportation Safety Subcommittee could meet every other month to start. The next meeting date was selected as July 31st. Staff was follow up with the attendees to see who would like to be on this subcommittee.