

National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

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Meeting Notes

MANAGEMENT, OPERATIONS, AND INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS (MOITS) POLICY TASK FORCE AND MOITS TECHNICAL SUBCOMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, December 20, 2011

TIME: 12:30 PM

PLACE: COG, First Floor, Meeting Rooms 4&5

CHAIRS: Hon. David Snyder, City of Falls Church, Chair, Policy Task Force
Sean Kennedy, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority,
Chair, Technical Committee

Attendance:

Shahid Abbas, Arlington County
James Austrich, Parsons Brinkerhoff
Craig Franklin, Trichord, Inc
Taran Hutchinson, MATOC
Sean Kennedy, WMATA
Bob LeSueur, Sensys Networks
Ling Li, VDOT
Curt McCullough, City of Fairfax (phone)
Amy Tang McElwain, VDOT
Frank Mirack, FHWA DC Division
Tom Scherer, Arlington County DES

COG Staff Attendance:

Michael Farrell
Andrew Meese
Erin Morrow
Wenjing Pu (phone)
Huijing Qiang
Betsy Self
Daivamani Sivasailam

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Actions:

1. Welcome and Review of Notes from the November 8, 2011 MOITS Joint Meeting

Participants introduced themselves. Notes from the November MOITS meeting were distributed.

Item 2: Report of the Nominations Committee and Election of MOITS Technical Subcommittee 2012 Officers

Ms. McElwain reported that there will be one chair and one vice chair for the Subcommittee and that the vice chair would become the chair the following year. It was recommended that Sean Kennedy be the chair for CY 2012 and the recommendation for vice chair would be ready for the next meeting. She requested suggestions for candidate, preferably from Maryland. Ms. McElwain made a motion to nominate Mr. Kennedy as the chair of the Subcommittee for CY 2012. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 3: Report of the Traffic Signals Subcommittee and Initial Results of the Regional Survey on Traffic Signal Power Backup Systems

Mr. Kennedy introduced Ms. Li as the new chair of the Traffic Signals Subcommittee and remarked that there was particularly good attendance from Virginia (all major jurisdictions and VDOT) and the Traffic Signals Subcommittee meeting that morning. Mr. Meese explained that the reason this subcommittee held a meeting this morning goes back to the IMR Committee and the report based on the January 26, 2011 snowstorm. The COG Board formed a panel to look at lessons learned and produced a report that was accepted in November. One of the results of the report is that the RICP was formed and is housed in the DC Office of Homeland Security. The report also contained recommendations for MATOC as well as a special interest in power back-ups for the region's traffic signals. Staff followed up on that recommendation by conducting a regional survey to obtain information on this topic area.

Ling Li from VDOT is the new chair and Ed Jones of Prince George's County is the outgoing chair. The expectation is that the IMR Committee will meet in February and prior to that, a report from the Traffic Signal Committee on traffic signal power backup systems in the region will go to the TPB Technical Committee and the TPB in January [later changed to February]. Today, the Traffic Signals Subcommittee was presented with a draft memo on the findings from the survey. The memo has general information, but not enough to provide statistical details as staff has not received a response from some jurisdictions. Mr. Meese discussed the responses that were received and reported in the memo. He told the Subcommittee that there was a great deal of discussion at the Traffic Signals Subcommittee meeting on costs for backup power systems and how there was no "one size fits all" approach due to many variables including intersection configuration.

The Traffic Signal Subcommittee is also looking into other topic areas such as length of battery life, signal timing while running up backup power, legal liability during failures, and cost. The next meeting of the Traffic Signals Subcommittee is February 9, 2012. At this point, the Traffic Signals Subcommittee was ok to take a version of the draft memo to the TPB Technical Committee.

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Ms. Li said that comments were received from the jurisdictions on the benefits of backup power, and it may help during events such as hurricanes. She reiterated the earlier comment that there is no “one size fits all” approach to traffic signal power backup and that the Traffic Signals Subcommittee would continue its discussions at the February 2012 meeting.

There was discussion on how a regional backup power system might be incrementally installed and maintained provided that policy makers decided to provide funding. It was suggested by Mr. Austrich that as a starting point, all official evacuation routes and significant intersections be prioritized. Ms. Li remarked that VDOT knows which areas tend to lose power such as at the Tyson’s Corner area (Routes 7 and 123) and in addition to looking at backup power for evacuation routes and major roads, VDOT should also look at implementing ITS technology on evacuation routes. Mr. Meese remarked that the ability to know when a signal has lost power varies throughout the region. He commented that if a traffic signal automatically goes to backup power during an outage, a utility truck driving by may think that the signal has power.

There was discussion of different types of backup systems, both battery-based and generator-ready. Battery-based systems are instant-on, but have duration limitations (which vary), and considerations of battery swapping, storage, and replacement. Generator-ready systems require that a generator be transported to the site, but, once there, could be refueled theoretically indefinitely.

Mr. Kennedy noted the Subcommittee that the next meeting of the Traffic Signal Subcommittee will be in Arlington so that members can see what Arlington is doing with their traffic signal power backup program.

Item 4: Coordination Updates

a. Metropolitan Area Transportation Operations Coordination (MATOC) Program Activities

There were two updates to report. For the first, Mr. Hutchinson reported that MATOC has received the IMR report and is looking at what MATOC can do from the maintenance side. By the time the 3 AM COG snow call has taken place, DOTs have already made decisions for mobilization. There are discussions about having a smaller call with just transportation folks to decide on recommendations to make to OPM and other agencies. This idea will be piloted this winter season. The next MATOC meeting is in January. Mr. Hutchinson was asked if local agencies would be invited to participate in these calls. Mr. Hutchinson responded that the idea behind the calls is to keep them smaller than the 3 AM snow call. Mr. Hutchinson was asked if analytical tools would be used as the January 26th storm’s transportation problems came down to the timing of the storm. Mr. Hutchinson responded that on the call, the timing of affected roads would be discussed along with making sure that everyone is on the same page with the inclement weather forecast. Mr. Meese added that the point of this call would also be to coordinate transportation agencies to be ready for the RIC discussions.

The second update was that the MATOC Phase I static website was up and Phase II will be dynamic. At the November MATOC Steering Committee decided to move forward with the site. Michael

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Pack and his group just released trafficview.org (public view of RITIS). This is a soft launch that has not been advertised. He was asked if there are mobile phone apps yet. He replied that there is an Android app, but not yet an iPhone app. Mr. Meese added that on the MATOC website, there are links to other information sites of interest such as Maryland 511, Virginia 511, DC Live Traffic Alerts, and MATOC on Facebook and Twitter.

b. Regional Emergency Support Function #1 (RESF-1) Emergency Transportation Committee Update

Mr. Meese introduced Betsy Self as the new staff person for RESF-1 (replacing Patrick Powell). RESF-1 had a conference call last Friday. The committee is currently looking at the next round of the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) process. There will be a new shift in the process to an integrative planning approach that starts top-down rather than the bottom-up approach from previous years. There will be a series of meetings over the next couple of months to discuss the topic. Ms. Self told the Subcommittee that there is a Forward Resolve exercise planned in early March (date pending).

c. COG Steering Committee for Incident Management and Response (IMR) Activities Follow-up

Mr. Meese noted items from the IMR report that relate to transportation including MATOC, traffic signal power backup, and towing. He asked for recommendations for the best contacts to provide information on towing operations and policies.

Mr. Austrich commented that this is a great idea and long overdue. He commented that Maryland has strong programs for towing related to incident management. He recommended Betty Cromwell and Wanda Ellis as possible contacts. He mentioned that towing for buses and heavy trucks is a challenge.

A question was asked if this request for information was focused on snowstorms as it can be difficult for tow trucks to get through and the end up blocking an additional lane. Ms. Li responded that towing for incident management should not just be during emergency situations, but also for day-to-day traffic incidents. She commended the recommendation by the IMR to look at towing policies. She said that VDOT is planning to meet with Virginia State Police (VSP) on the topic. VSP has a contract with a towing company and VDOT is trying to work with VSP to tow disabled vehicles out of travel lanes. She had done some quick modeling on the length of the queue formed for different lengths of lane closures and said that it is a compelling story to tell.

Mr. Meese recommended MATOC as a venue for the towing discussions. It was asked if the entire issue could be pushed to the state police. Mr. Meese responded that there are differences in all three states as to what agency has the authority to authorize towing.

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Item 5: Update on the National Capital Regional Congestion Report (Draft) – A Congestion Management Process (CMP) “Dashboard”

Mr. Meese introduced this item by noting that the Subcommittee had seen previous versions of the Dashboard. The Dashboard will be posted to the COG website quarterly as part of the CMP and will provide a snapshot of what the quarter looked like from a congestion standpoint. A soft launch in beta is planned.

Mr. Pu went through a version of the Dashboard with data from the third quarter of 2011. The front page of the Dashboard is the most important and provides several measures of interest to the average traveler on the top of the page, including reliability and delay, as well as a “spotlight” item. It was asked whether a list of the freeways (the focus of the Dashboard) could be included. Mr. Pu responded that there is a map later in the document. Mr. Meese noted that a lot of thought and discussion went into determining what to put on the first page of the Dashboard and what to put on subsequent pages.

The rest of the Dashboard document goes into further details with a narrative of the quarterly report, three years of data on VMT and VHT, reliability for AM and PM peak periods, top 10 bottlenecks, most unreliable freeway segments, travel time for the 5 miles to/from the Beltway, and travel time for major commercial routes. Mr. Pu was asked what the data source(s) is (are). Mr. Pu responded that the source of data for this report includes: (1) traffic speed data from the I-95 Corridor Coalition Vehicle Probe Project (VPP) and its expansions; (2) traffic volume data from the FHWA Transportation Technology Innovation and Demonstration (TTID) Program and the Maryland Traffic Monitoring System. The TTID program covers almost all freeways in Northern Virginia where the VPP speed data are also available. The traffic speed data are integrated with the volume data to obtain delay per traveler and vehicle miles of travel (VMT); other highway performance measures are solely based on the speed data.

Mr. Franklin asked if there were any issues with public agencies using these metrics to make decisions about what projects to pursue. Mr. Meese responded that was a good idea, noting that in the past there had been a lack of data about reliability in order to help advise the decisions that are made. It breaks down to operations and capital decisions. With the Dashboard, he is hoping to highlight the kinds of things that are being done about congestion in the region. Mr. Franklin provided further context for his question. Virginia has an Office of Transportation for Public-Private Partnerships (OTP3), which is administratively supported by VDOT. OTP3’s mission is multimodal and they are to evaluate proposals that come in under Virginia’s Public-Private Partnership Act. His thought is that there is a potential new stakeholder for the planning process in the region. Currently OTP3 has a procurement that it is evaluating for consultant support and thinks it may be a good idea for that entity to evaluate the same metrics used in the Dashboard as they are evaluating public-private partnership proposals. Mr. Meese said hopefully the Dashboard will be on the website soon, but in the meantime, VDOT has its own dashboard as well as the underlying data internally.

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Item 6: Draft Spring 2011 Report of Traffic Quality on the Metropolitan Washington Area Freeway System (Skycomp)

Mr. Sivasailam reported on two resources provided by Skycomp that provide more interactive information (maps and photos) from the 2011 survey and survey information on the freeway congestion work they have done dating back to 1999. The website is: www.skycomp.com/MWCOG. Mr. Meese commented that staff is discussing changes to the congestion monitoring program for next year's work program. These changes could include a combination of changes to the methodology, changes to the frequency of data collection, and the use of different kinds of data such as INRIX or Bluetooth. Mr. Sivasailam suggested that for example, INRIX could be used as a screening tool to select road segments for monitoring and the Skycomp aerial photography could be used to learn more about that segment since that data can be used to study individual lanes.

Mr. Kennedy asked if the discussion about the future of the congestion monitoring program would be an all or nothing discussion. Mr. Meese anticipated that the process would be using a diverse range of sources. He would caution against relying on one source. Mr. Sivasailam added that staff would test a pilot of the new methodology, and then evolve, change, and fine tune as necessary. Mr. Meese responded that staff has discussed putting out an RFI for transportation condition data.

Item 7: Jurisdictional Roundtable

Ms. McElwain said that for the next meeting, she would try to invite someone from VDOT's Central Office to give a presentation on its new contract for transportation data sharing.

Item 8: Other Business

There was no other business.

Item 9: Adjourn

The next meeting is scheduled on Tuesday, January 10, 2012 at 12:30 PM in COG Meeting Room 1 [later postponed in favor of a meeting on February 14].