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## COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MONTHLY REPORT

September 21, 2022  
*Ashley Hutson, CAC Chair*

The TPB Community Advisory Committee (CAC) met on Thursday, September 15, for a joint meeting with representatives of the state departments of transportation. The session was designed to enhance the committee's understanding of the state processes for coordination with the MPO process, to let CAC members have the chance to provide input directly to the DOTs, and to strengthen the relationships among stakeholders in the regional transportation planning process.

### DISCUSSIONS WITH THE STATE DOT REPRESENTATIVES

The meeting began with short presentations from representatives of the three state DOTs: Amir Shahpar from VDOT, Kari Snyder from MDOT, and Sam Brooks from DDOT. All three spoke about the multifaceted ways in which their agencies coordinate with the TPB. They described the importance of working with the TPB to ensure compliance with federal planning regulations, including long-standing air quality conformity requirements, as well as more recent regulations, such as performance-based planning and programming.

The DOT presentations described opportunities for public input in state-level planning activities that identify the transportation priorities that are included in the TPB's long-range plan. For example, Ms. Snyder described the processes for developing the County Priority Levels in Maryland, which are developed by county councils and MDOT's Annual Tour in which the MDOT secretary conducts county-level meetings to get input about the contents of the six-year Consolidated Transportation Program.

All the state DOT representatives noted the importance of new funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) which will start to alleviate project backlogs in each state.

Before the session broke into state-based breakouts, one CAC member asked whether the DOTs were exploring opportunities to build additional river crossings. He said the region's population had increased 3-4 times since the last crossing was built. He said he believed there is too much deference to the local governments on this issue. Ms. Snyder said that looking at an additional crossing was not a high priority for the state of Maryland right now because the idea does not align with local priorities in Montgomery County. Mr. Shahpar added that both Maryland and Virginia have recently concentrated efforts on increasing connectivity between the states by expanding capacity on the Beltway, and more specifically, by plans to rebuild the American Legion Bridge.

The meeting separated into two breakouts—one for Virginia and one for DC and Maryland. In the breakouts, the DOT reps were asked to talk about what have been their general experience working with the public, and CAC members were asked to talk about their general experiences with the DOTs.

Comments about the nature of public participation included the following:

- ***Positive feelings in general...*** Participants said they generally have had positive experiences with public participation in state processes. The DOT representatives spoke about the importance of public involvement, noting "any public input is good public input."

- **... But some significant concerns.** One member did express disappointment with the recent toll road expansion project on the Beltway and I-270 in Maryland. She said her community felt blindsided by that project. A DC participant said he appreciated the opportunities for input through Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs), but he expressed concerns that the ANCs do not have significant powers.
- **The pandemic changed things.** Public participation changed a lot with the pandemic – in some good ways and some not so good. The groups discussed the need to learn from recent experiences, as we move into a post-pandemic world. The DOT representatives noted that virtual opportunities allowed a lot more people to participate. But they also said that face-to-face interaction is invaluable, and they look forward to starting public meetings again.
- **It's hard to get people engaged in long-range planning.** A number of participants noted that residents are much inclined to get involved in project-level planning than in jurisdiction-wide long-range planning, which can feel distant and abstract. Nonetheless, DOT representatives spoke positively about recent successes with long-range plan participation. Sam Brooks from DDOT, for example, noted that nearly 10,000 residents responded to a survey for the moveDC update.
- **Thoughts about “effective engagement.”** Participants from both the CAC and the DOTs also discussed approaches and techniques that they believe can make public participation more effective. Here are some suggestions:
  - **Persistence pays off.** Participants noted that elected leaders and DOT officials notice when citizens attend meetings on a repeated basis and get engaged over a period of time.
  - **Communications representing a broad base can be powerful.** DOT representatives said that comments coming from organizations or from multiple people within community are often more effective than messages from individuals. Taking the time to pull together comments that represent a community-perspective can be worth the extra effort.
  - **Need to pay attention to politics.** A member noted that, although it may seem obvious, it can be surprising for community members to realize how politically weighted planning decisions can be.
  - **How do the DOTs find balance between the input from lobby groups versus input from actual community members?** A CAC member wondered if one type of input gets more weight. The DOT reps said that public participation processes, which in the case of project development are prescribed by federal law (NEPA), typically require all comments to be recorded and considered. However, they also noted that the DOTs often try to follow up to verify the validity of comments and concerns, particularly if they relate to project impacts. For example, if someone expresses concerns about potential cut-through traffic, they often conduct analysis to determine impacts.

## OTHER BUSINESS

- Mr. Srikanth briefed the committee on the upcoming TPB meeting.
- Recruitment for the new committee membership for calendar years 2023 and 2024 will open in October. The application period will be open between mid-October and the end of

November. The TPB will be asked to approve new appointments in January. The new committee will convene for the first time in February 2023.

- A CAC member said that he does not think that CAC committee members should represent jurisdictions but rather they should be appointed as individuals who convey a regional perspective.

## **ATTENDEES**

### Members

Ashley Hutson, Chair  
Nancy Abeles  
Ra Amin  
Solomon Haile  
Daniel Papiernik  
Jeff Parnes  
Elisa Walton

### Staff

Rachel Beyerle  
Stacy Cook  
Kanti Srikanth  
John Swanson

### Others

Sam Brooks, DDOT  
Amir Shahpar, VDOT  
Kari Snyder, MDOT