

Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee
Suite 300, 777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002-4239
(202) 962-3358 Fax (202) 962-3203

MINUTES OF March 28, 2012 MEETING

Attendance:

Members and Alternates

Phil Mendelson, DC Council
Matt Orlins for Mary Cheh, DC Council
Karen Young, City of Frederick
Leta Mach, Greenbelt
Tim Male, Takoma Park
Redella Pepper, Alexandria
Jay Fisette, Arlington County
Linda Smyth, Fairfax County
David Snyder, Falls Church
Janet Clarke, Loudoun County
Monica Backmon, Prince William County
Cecily Beall, District of Columbia
Ram Tangirala, District of Columbia
George (Tad) Aburn, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
Diane Franks, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)
Tom Ballou, Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ)
Howard Simons, Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
Lyn Erickson, Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT)
Kanti Srikanth, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)
Austina Casey, District Department of Transportation (DDOT)
Scott St. Onge, Clean Air Partners
Randy Carroll, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE)

Staff

Julia Allman, COG/DEP
Elena Constantine, COG/DTP
Dusan Vuksan, COG/DTP
Jen Desimone, COG/DEP
Stuart Freudberg, COG/DEP
Ron Kirby, COG/DTP
Sunil Kumar, COG/DEP
Eulalie Lucas, COG/DTP
Joan Rohlf, COG/DEP

1. Public Comment Period, Approval of Minutes, Chair's Remarks

Chair Mendelson noted a change in the agenda order, moving discussion of the PM 2.5 Redesignation and Maintenance Plan to the top of the agenda. The minutes from the Feb 22, 2012 meeting were approved with one change, that the spelling of member Linda Smyth's name be corrected.

2. PM 2.5 Redesignation and Maintenance Plan: Mobile Budget Proposals

Overview

Joan Rohlfs, COG/DEP, presented on the status of the PM_{2.5} redesignation request and maintenance plan. Ms. Rohlfs explained that the Greater Washington region has been in attainment of PM_{2.5} standards since 2007. In order to be officially redesignated as an attainment area, the region must finalize a maintenance plan. This plan demonstrates the emissions inventories that have been conducted, identifies the sources of fine particle emissions in the region, and provides a plan for reducing these emissions through 2025, while meeting a 2017 interim benchmark. Additionally, it includes a contingency plan that would be enacted if fine particle emissions began exceeding the limit in the future. The plan sets mobile source budgets for both NO_x and PM_{2.5}. Once adopted by COG, the maintenance plan would need approval by the states and EPA.

TPB Proposal for Margins of Safety

Elena Constantine, COG/DTP, made the case that safety margins for transportation sources are necessary to include in the Redesignation and Maintenance Plan. Safety margins are emissions limits set slightly above projected emissions levels, while still falling under the applicable maintenance requirement. Safety margins are provided for in relevant regulations, and are commonly used by MPOs across the country.

While mobile emissions inventories show a clearly declining trend through 2025, projections predict an increase from 2025 levels in 2040. Thus, setting binding emissions budgets at the predicted 2025 could jeopardize future attainment. Falling into conformity lapse would invoke a one-year grace period, where only those projects already included in a conformity plan and TIP could move ahead. If, after a year, emissions did not decrease to required levels, all transit projects would be halted. Projects such as the Purple Line and DC Streetcars could potentially be affected if the emissions standard is set too low.

Uncertainties about the future mix of fleet vehicles, the overall aging of the vehicle fleet, and future improvements to emissions estimation models should be considered when deciding whether to implement a margin of safety. Ms. Constantine concluded that an emissions standard that included safety margins still promotes a healthy and noticeably declining emissions trend.

MDE Perspective on Mobile Budgets

Tad Aburn, Air Director, Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), presented the case against using safety margins for the Redesignation and Maintenance Plan. Mr. Aburn has been working with the state air and state transportation representatives from Maryland, Virginia, and the District on the use of mobile budget safety margins, and the integration and timing of PM_{2.5} and ozone planning processes.

Mr. Aburn noted that there is no deadline for the maintenance plan, and that the issue does not constitute a “crisis.” Additionally, it is a priority for MDE to support and protect transportation planning. There are no stakeholders involved who would be willing to move ahead with a maintenance plan that would jeopardize transportation projects. MDE is concerned that the safety margin will increase emissions up to the regulatory ceiling. NO_x is a critical pollutant, tied to a number of problems including nitrification of the Chesapeake Bay and ground-level ozone. The danger of a safety margin is that it could endanger ozone reduction programs by not encouraging deep enough NO_x reductions.

There are several options being currently explored: ways to keep emissions down while maintaining the TPB-endorsed safety margin, modifying the safety margin, dropping or delaying the maintenance plan,

or updating SIP budgets more routinely. Air and transportation agencies in Maryland, Virginia, and DC will continue to work together on this issue, and invite MWAQC, TPB, and elected officials to participate.

Discussion

Tom Ballou, of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ), said VDEQ feels strongly that the Redesignation and Maintenance Plan is needed. It is important to acknowledge progress in the region, and it is good for the economy to get rid of restrictions that come with a non-attainment designation. Additionally, VDEQ does not believe that emissions margins will increase in response to the safety margin.

Mr. Mendelson inquired how cumbersome the SIP revision process is. Mr. Aburn responded that a revised SIP budget for the Baltimore area was achieved, with EPA approval, in six months. Mr. Ballou said in Virginia the process takes a year or longer.

Cecily Beall, of the District Department of the Environment, reiterated that the District is committed to working together on this project, and not jeopardizing transportation planning.

David Snyder of Falls Church supports setting an ambitious plan, but recognizing that there are forces beyond the region's control that impact emissions levels, and that there are draconian consequences of not achieving standards. An alternative approach would consist of setting a low-emission plan but including language to reserve our ability to revise the standards based upon elements out of our control.

Kanti Srikanth of the Virginia Department of Transportation, noted that since the last MWAQC meeting, the conversation between agencies has continued. They have made progress in recognizing the issue, and may have something to report in the next 30 days.

Stuart Freudberg, COG/DEP, said that without the maintenance plan, the 2002 emissions budget will stay in place. Mr. Freudberg's perspective is that the maintenance budget is needed in order not to default to a higher emissions.

Action

The Chair proposed setting up a workgroup to report to the next meeting on April 25. The working group will consist of two people from each state—one from air quality, one from transport—and one representative of MWAQC. The motion was approved by the Committee.

3. Ozone Non-Attainment Area Designations: State Proposals

Sunil Kumar, COG/DEP, presented Virginia's, Maryland's, and the District of Columbia's proposals to EPA Region 3 for boundaries of the new ozone nonattainment area to comply with the 2008 ozone standard. The current ozone standard of 75 ppb was published in 2008, and the NAA designation for the current standard is expected to be finalized in May 2012.

Virginia proposed to keep the nonattainment area boundaries that which applied for the 84 ppb standard. This area encompasses the Northern Virginia counties of Loudoun, Prince William, Fairfax, and Arlington. All other counties and cities in Virginia are in attainment of the 75 ppb standard, and the Northern Virginia counties are the only ones not in attainment.

Maryland proposed two options. The preferred option is to create a “mega” nonattainment area which includes 16 states and the District of Columbia. The area would address ozone transport from outside the region. The second option is to extend the current nonattainment area to the entire combined Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore statistical area (CSA). This option would include adjoining areas that contribute to Baltimore’s ozone pollution.

The District of Columbia proposed a large, multi-jurisdictional nonattainment area which at minimum covers the entire CSA. The proposal carries the same rationale that the boundaries should address ozone transport and include areas outside the District that contribute to the District’s ozone problems.

Discussion:

The Chair asked about EPA’s recommendation, and Mr. Kumar indicated that EPA prefers to continue with the current NAA.

There was a discussion on implications for the conformity process. Diane Franks, of MDE, noted that a larger NAA would not necessarily require changes in the conformity process. For example, Cecil County, Maryland is part of the multi-state Philadelphia NAA , and when one state is not in compliance, only that state is held accountable. This could serve as a template for the Washington area.

Kanti Srikanth added that EPA doesn’t have clear guidance about doing transportation conformity in subregional nonattainment areas. If one part of the nonattainment area is not in compliance, all parts of the larger area could have a transportation conformity lapse.

Stuart Freudberg, COG/DEP, posed the question: how would MWAQC’s role change if we establish a larger ozone planning area?

4. Committee Reports

Technical Advisory Committee, Tom Ballou, VDEQ

TAC had a meeting on March 13. There was a discussion about issues on MWAQC’s agenda, namely emissions budgets and safety margins. The group came to the conclusion that for the time being they would agree not to agree. A smaller group is being formed to address these issues.

Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee, Caroline Petti, Chair

ACPAC met on March 19. The group discussed the safety margin issue and received a presentation on the CEEPC progress report for 2011. The group made suggestions for the report. ACPAC has submitted a comment letter to MWAQC, which is included in today’s meeting materials. The letter acknowledges the tradeoff between transportation funding and meeting goals for health and the environment. ACPAC supports a lower emissions budget and without safety margins.

Clean Air Partners, Scott St. Onge, Managing Director

Clean Air Partners has several upcoming events, including Bike to Work Day on May 15. Members should contact them with any other events. DC Weatherline, a project of Clean Air partners, received 32,000 calls in January. The Poster Competition deadline has passed. Judges are now evaluating entries and prizes will be awarded at the May meeting. Clean Air Partners also recently attended the DC STEM Fair.

5. State and Local Air Reports

Cecily Beall, DDOE; Tom Ballou, VDEQ; and Diane Franks, MDE reported that they had been most focused on the emissions budget and safety margin issues discussed here.

Ms. Beall added that Maryland has released a 2012 Climate Plan, which details how the state will achieve a 20% reduction in Greenhouse Gasses by 2020. Additionally, they have held an advisory council meeting and have passed new source review regulations.

6. Set Date for Next Meeting, Adjourn

The next meeting date will be April 25, 2012. The meeting was adjourned.