

TPO Technical Committee Minutes
March 11, 2014
9:00 a.m.
Small Assembly Room
City/County Building
Knoxville, Tennessee

The Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) Technical Committee met on March 11, 2014, at 9 a.m. in the Small Assembly Room of the City/County Building in Knoxville. Chair Cindy Pionke presided and called the meeting to order. It was determined that there was a quorum. Committee members were asked to introduce themselves.

*Kathryn Baldwin	City of Oak Ridge
*Terry Bobrowski	ETDD
*Brian Boone	City of Maryville
*Mark Donaldson	Metropolitan Planning Commission
*Karen Estes	CAC
*Jim Hagerman	City of Knoxville
*Ted Newsom	Knoxville Commuter Pool
*Jeff Ownby	Sevier County
*Jeremy Pearson	City of Alcoa, <i>for Andrew Sonner</i>
*Pat Phillips	City of Loudon, Loudon County
*Cindy Pionke	Knox County, <i>for Dwight Van de Vate</i>
*Jack Qualls	Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT)
*Melissa Roberson	Knoxville Area Transit (KAT)
*Blake Sartin	Metro Knoxville Airport Authority
**Scott Allen	FHWA
TPO Staff	
Partner Agency Staff	
Members of the Public	
*voting members	
** non-voting member	

1. Approval of February 11, 2014 Minutes

Item Summary: Approval of February 11, 2014 TPO Technical Committee Minutes.

A Motion was made by Terry Bobrowski and seconded by Jim Hagerman to approve the February 11, 2014 Minutes. The Motion carried unanimously.

2. Review of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program Applications

Item Summary: TPO staff received a total of twelve applications from nine different agencies for TDOT's 2014 Statewide General CMAQ Project Competition totaling over \$5.2 million of CMAQ funds being applied for. Staff has prepared emissions reduction estimates for the projects where it was not provided by the applicant and will be submitting the applications to TDOT by the deadline of March 14th. Staff will be attending a CMAQ proposal review meeting in Nashville on March 28th to present the applications to TDOT staff along with the other five eligible MPO regions in the state.

Discussion: Mike Conger, reviewing the proposed projects, noted the applications submitted fell into 4 types of projects: retiming signals along corridors, advanced traffic management/ITS type systems, alternative fuel-vehicle conversions (primarily diesel to compressed natural gas) and lastly alternative mode promotion projects.

He also noted the proposed projects are ranked in order of cost effectiveness in total emission reduction involving the 4 criteria pollutants: oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), volatile organic compounds (VOC), carbon monoxide (CO) and PM_{2.5}. Staff is working with each applicant to ensure the applications are complete by the deadline for submittal to TDOT. Mr. Conger further noted TDOT has issued another call-for-projects for what they are calling strategic air quality initiatives, 3 of which are now open. He reviewed each one briefly: Cleaner Transit Buses (larger transit vehicles only), New or Expanded Regional Transit Service and New or Expanded Park and Ride Lots. Mr. Conger stated the deadline to submit applications to TDOT for these is March 25th and requested member jurisdictions submit them to staff by the previous Friday, March 21st as TDOT wants these applications to come through the MPO's. He also touched briefly on the remaining strategic air quality initiatives for which we are still awaiting formal calls for projects: Tennessee Commute Options, Transportation Systems Management and Operation Pilots and PM_{2.5} Strategies. He stated some of the proposed projects submitted for the CMAQ competition could fall under these upcoming call-for-projects.

3. Transportation Planning Work Program

Item Summary: TPO staff will review the remaining tasks for FY 2014 and anticipated tasks for FY 2015. Staff is requesting that they be advised of any additional planning studies that should be included in FY 2015. The FY 2014-2015 TPO Transportation Planning Work Program can be found at the following link: http://www.knoxtrans.org/plans/upwp/14_15upwp.pdf

Discussion: Jeff Welch noted this was a 2 year plan adopted last August for FY 2014 and FY 2015. TDOT has requested staff review the plan's present FY 2015 planned activities to ensure the projects are still relevant and to see if there were any projects from FY 2014 that need to be continued into FY 2015. One area Mr. Welch suggested as a possible additional area of focus was transportation coordination in our area. He requested Committee members bring any suggestions and ideas to staff. He then noted several that areas FHWA is focusing on are sustainability, livability and climate change. A draft needs to be submitted to TDOT by April 21st.

4. Discussion on Regional Transportation Authority White Paper

Item Summary: As part of the PlanET effort the University of Tennessee Transportation Center For Transportation Research provided an update to a white paper prepared in 2007 that explored issues related to creating a Regional Transit Authority in the Knoxville area. Staff will provide an overview of the study's contents.

Discussion: Doug Burton noted one purpose for requesting this update was to develop a starting point for a regional dialogue through the PlanET process on whether a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) might be beneficial for our region. Typically RTAs are most often legislated entities that cross jurisdictional boundaries. Most often, RTAs oversee fixed route and high capacity transit services and can vary greatly in size and the extent and types of services they provide. Mr. Burton noted that among other things, the consultants were asked to explore the concept of developing an RTA for the Knoxville region and provide an outline for a potential model. Mr. Burton noted that in 2009 the Tennessee State legislature passed a bill enabling the creation of RTAs statewide. He then reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of an RTA as noted in the white paper. Mr. Burton stated the study was not able to identify an existing model or template used in other regions that would exactly fit our area. The paper notes that each of the existing RTAs they reviewed had undergone multiple changes to their management structure and funding sources. Further, he noted the study was unable to identify an RTA that dealt solely with demand response services. Mr. Burton then stated the paper suggests the best option for the Knoxville area would be to utilize what is already on the state legislative books, the above referenced 2009 law. He reviewed the parameters necessary for the Knoxville region to form an RTA under that law and reviewed what the law would require/allow for an RTA in some detail. In reviewing the conclusions offered by the paper, Mr. Burton noted that a RTA can help improve existing services, implement new services or plan for the future but that local demographic data does not clearly indicate that the extensive regional transit services that typically drives the need for a RTA would be successfully supported, at least in the near term.

Therefore, the paper notes it is unclear whether efficiencies could be gained by coordinating services under an RTA. Mr. Burton reiterated that funding for an RTA would need to be identified and secured.

Mr. Burton noted the study recommends pursuing a new study to review our current transit systems before initiating the creation of an RTA. This new study would identify inefficiencies in our current transit systems and determine the best way to address them. It is possible coordination can occur with existing agencies. It was clarified that the creation of a RTA itself would not precipitate additional federal or state funding. Discussion then began surrounding a perceived overlap of CAC and ETHRA service area, and is merging these two agencies a possibility. Mr. Burton noted that in many instances, agencies can challenge themselves to better coordinate their services, and that the Human Services Committee, a sub-committee of the Technical Committee, has been meeting to discuss better coordination between existing providers. Further discussion ensued regarding the restrictions placed on the demand response services by TennCare. Most often when CAC vans are seen outside of Knox County they are on a TennCare trip. Conversely ETHRA also does TennCare trips in Knox County. TennCare trips are often randomly assigned, under contract, and have very strict guidelines making those trips difficult to coordinate. It was clarified that under new FTA funding arrangements demand response providers will not have to discriminate against nonmedical requests. Jeff Welch noted as part of the Transportation Planning Work Program update staff could develop a scope of work for a study to perform an analysis of the current transit systems inefficiencies, which could include hiring private consultants or TDOT on-call consultants.

5. Updates From Knox County CAC Transit and Knoxville Area Transit (KAT)

Item Summary: Knox County CAC Transit and KAT will give informational updates about various activities and services. Knox County CAC Transit just recently finished a research project that sought the input of seniors and people who are disabled on how to make public transportation in the region more accessible. CAC will present the results of that research project. KAT will give an overview of services and present ridership data and findings from a recent passenger survey.

Discussion: Jeff Welch noted as there has been much discussion about public transportation and related allocation of funds the TPO will be asking our transit providers for regular updates throughout the year. Karen Estes reviewed a report from a study funded by a grant from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Federal Transit Administration, and the Community Transportation of America to gather information on barriers to transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities in Knox County. They were also awarded additional funding through PlanET to expand the study to Anderson, Blount, Loudon and Union counties. She noted they held over 30 public meetings at locations that served these two populations and where many barriers were subsequently identified. She further noted they had over 200 respondents to an online survey seeking the same input. They were asked to prioritize the top five barriers and Ms. Estes and her colleagues were tasked with identifying solutions to eliminate those barriers. They partnered with the University Of Tennessee Department Of Industrial and Information Engineering who consolidated the data collected. Ms. Estes reviewed the report in some detail noting the top three categories of barriers reported through all means of data collection were: long wait time across the entire trip, limited services, hours of operation, scheduling and service options, and lastly customer service and communication. Ms. Estes noted many participants were unaware of all of the options available. She also noted they presented the possible solutions they identified to their funding source, KAT and ETHRA. This report is the first phase of this project. They have received additional funding from UT to work towards eliminating the barrier of communication, and began a 9 month project this month. Their goal is a transit application that will facilitate communication on transit vehicles. Ms. Estes noted they expanded their services this past December with additional funding from Knox County and are no longer limited to medical trips, and further noted they already coordinate with KAT on certain initiatives to provide services involving for example, education and employment related trips. Lastly Ms. Estes described their Volunteer Assisted Transportation (VAT) programs and services.

Melissa Roberson gave an overview of KAT's current services and noted they are the transit system for the City of Knoxville, typically covering approximately 10,600 boardings each day. She noted they have 24 fixed routes and use a hub and spokes system.

She noted they have multiple ride passes and other discounts which now account for about 50% of the fares. Ms. Roberson noted in addition to a customer service line, KAT has videos on how to use the bus and its routes as well as how to utilize the bike racks on the front of the bus. Additionally, they have a travel training program and will train individuals as well as small and large groups on how to use the bus. She noted KAT also operates the trolley which has 3 fixed routes which she briefly reviewed. The trolley, serving only the downtown area, is subsidized by the City with some assistance from the University of Tennessee and is free to all passengers. Ms. Roberson noted the third division of KAT is the lift system which exists because of the Americans with Disabilities Act which must operate during the same operating hours of the fixed-route system. This division carries approximately 4,000 trips each month. She reviewed their recent rider survey which while providing KAT with updated demographics also showed that the vast majority of riders are very happy with KAT and its services. She then noted they have had a number of large technology projects over the last three years. The first and largest was the Automated Vehicle Locator System which tells them where the buses are. It was the backbone of the piece needed to expand to other types of technology, such as the Passenger Information technology where one could receive a text based on a geocoded bus stop, or one could access that information with a smart phone. The City has an RFP out for implementation of that technology, hopefully by sometime this summer.

6. Other Business

- Executive Board Meeting Wednesday, March 26, at 9 a.m. in the Small Assembly Room of the City County Building.
- Technical Committee Meeting Tuesday, April 8, at 9 a.m. in the Small Assembly Room of the City County Building.
- Jeff Welch apprised Committee Members of an issue happening in the TN state legislature regarding the Nashville/Davidson County MTA which has been looking at developing a Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) in the west and east corridors of Nashville. They have done numerous studies over the years and the project has gotten both positive and negative public feedback. However, there is a state law before the legislature, to be voted on tomorrow, that will only allow busses to have passengers board/disembark on the right side/shoulder of a road (on state highways). Basically this is an attempt to stop the proposed BRTS in Nashville which is designed to utilize the median in the roadway as bus stops. Mr. Welch stated this could open the door for the state to dictate how and where transit operators provide services. Further, this could begin to open the door on how we design our transportation services altogether. The Senate Bill is #2243. The House Bill is #2156. Members are encouraged to voice their opinions to their legislators.
- Jeff Welch also noted that the Federal Transit Administration has released an application process for Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants and that there is \$600 million available dollars. This is an opportunity to move forward with a variety of projects nationally. The deadline for submission of applications is April 28th. Mr. Welch listed the types of transit projects that would be eligible. He noted of the \$600 million dollars, \$35 million has been set aside for planning and \$120 million has been set aside for rural projects. In urban areas the minimum project size is \$10 million dollars and will require a 20% match. Mr. Welch noted the first level selection criteria will look for projects with long-term outcomes reflecting economic development, sustainability, affordable, safe and convenient transportation choices and climate change.

7. Public comment

Members of the public may address the Technical Committee with a five-minute time limitation for each person. There were no comments from the public.

8. Adjournment

A Motion was made by Kathryn Baldwin and seconded by Pat Phillips to adjourn. The Motion carried unanimously and the meeting was adjourned.