

Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

Meeting Minutes of May 22, 2024

A meeting of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) was held over Zoom.

Attendance

TAC Members Present: Kristi Morris, Springfield; Wayne Wheelock, Baltimore; John Saydek, Cavendish; Peter Hudkins, Chester; Sharon Bixby, Ludlow; Ray Stapleton, Weathersfield; Diane Foulds, Windsor; Barbara Bye, At-Large (arrived at 6:17pm); Eric Bye, At-Large (arrived at 6:17pm).

Others Present: Logan Nicoll, MARC; Faith Dall, VTrans.

Kristi Morris called the meeting to order at 6:09 PM

1. Welcome and introductions

All present members and guests introduced themselves. The board welcomed new member from Weathersfield, Ray Stapleton to the Committee.

2. Changes to the agenda

No changes were necessary.

3. Acceptance of February 28 minutes

Wayne Wheelock made a motion to approve minutes as presented. Seconded by Peter Hudkins. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Update on the TAC Bylaws

Logan said he had been working to update the TAC Bylaws, but decided to put off finalizing those changes until after the Governor and legislature had finished acting on the related bills for this session that will make statewide changes to things the TAC wants included in the new bylaws.

Logan summarized the changes the board has asked for thus far, including:

-A quorum constitutes four members as opposed to currently, it is five members.

-At-large members are given a vote on action items, but they do not count towards a quorum.

Consensus of the board was that these updates make sense and they would like to continue to move forward.

Wayne asked about engaging with the Town of West Windsor to make sure they appoint someone to their TAC seat.

Logan said he has been making efforts to reach out to all the towns that don't regularly engage with the TAC.

5. Comprehensive Safety Action Plan Update (SS4A)

Logan gave an overview of a grant that MARC received from the US Department of Transportation to get draft a plan to get to zero deaths on all MARC roadways and presented a memo that was prepared by the subcontractor the MARC has hired to help write the plan, VHB. The plan will help the MARC to pull down more money for projects identified in the plan.

Diane is supportive of the project and thinks it is an ambitious goal to get to zero deaths. She asked about the funding sources.

Logan talked about the details of the grant and federal bills that have funded the program. He elaborated on the types of projects that may be called out by the safety action plan and how that may open up other money for those projects.

Diane mentioned that many of our accidents may have a nexus to weather conditions beyond our control.

Kristi suggested there are specific areas on our interstates that seem especially accident prone and seemingly unique pockets of irregular weather that could have better signage. Kristi asked about the public engagement plan.

Logan said the memos prepared by VHB contain a timeline that includes them attending at least one TAC meeting and otherwise there are performance measures in their contract to ensure they prioritize community engagement.

6. VTrans Grants-in-Aid Program Update

Logan talked about the Grants-in-Aid program and some of the confusion that towns have had this year because of overlap in the funding rounds, and the extension of the deadline for last year's funding because of the flooding. Almost all MARC towns did sign up for the FY25 grant round.

Peter asked for some clarity about last year's funding, Chester was not able to spend their FY23 allocation because of the July floods.

Logan said because of the flooding VTrans extended the deadline for FY23 funds, which should have been due September 2023, but because of the floods and many towns not being able to spend their allocations, VTrans extended the deadline to September 2024. This has created confusion for towns because of the overlapping funding rounds.

Ray clarified that VTrans required towns to sign an amendment extending the due date for their grant agreements to September 2024 for their FY23 funds.

Logan said he was not aware of that and would be in touch with VTrans.

Faith offered to connect with colleagues at VTrans as well.

The board discussed ongoing town projects and the status of funding locally in this program.

7. VTrans Construction Projects Update

Logan talked about some construction projects underway throughout the region, notably the pedestrian bridge that is being installed in Ludlow, and the planning underway for projects that have not begun construction but will have a large impact to the region, such the Toll Bridge project.

Kristi said he attended a presentation in Charlestown, NH by the NH DOT on the Toll Bridge project. The original plan was to fully close the bridge for 34 weeks, but there was a lot of pushback to that proposal, an alternative was offered to reduce traffic to one lane for 34 weeks and only fully close the bridge for 8 weeks. The alternative was still met with significant resistance from the Charlestown Selectboard and residents, who suggested they should build an entirely new bridge and preserve the existing bridge as a pedestrian/bicycle bridge. NH DOT has put off the project to 2027 now and is re-evaluating their options.

Kristi said on the VT side, in that same area, a VTrans project is scheduled to remove the current cloverleaf pattern for the entrances/exits to I91 at Exit 7. Planning is still underway, and alternatives are being considered, but VTrans current proposal includes moving the section of the Toonerville Trail that currently goes under I91 along Route 5 and instead create pedestrian crossings at the entrance to I91 South and Exit 7 off I91 North. VTrans and Springfield are still discussing what level of signage/lights would be necessary.

The board talked about other local projects and town equipment purchases.

8. Legislative Session Recap

Kristi said in the last week of the legislative session the legislature passed 40 bills.

Logan said the Governor has vetoed one bill so far, but that means the legislature will be going back on June 17th for a veto session. One reason he did not put too much time into the bylaws is uncertainty about the future of the Open Meeting law bill and the State Code of Ethics bill. He said the T-Bill was mired in more politics this year than it is normally.

Kristi talked about the yield bill and the complications this year with education spending.

Logan talked about some of the programs in the T-Bill, notably new funding for the Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment program to install EV chargers and the MTI program which provides grants to support infrastructure that reduces single occupancy vehicles.

Logan said there is an effort to apply for an MTI grant to kickstart a micro-transit program in Springfield, it's still in the early stages but is an interesting idea and he has been hearing great feedback from the micro-transit pilots in Windsor and Brattleboro.

9. Future agenda items & next meeting date

Kirsti said the next meeting is proposed for June 26, we could potentially have draft bylaws to review by then.

Diane would like to know more about the EV charger program statewide, and what the uptake has been and how many chargers have been installed.

Logan said he would connect with VTrans and try to set up someone to present to the TAC.

Ray asked about funding specifically for guardrails, it has been hard for Weathersfield to find funding for guardrails, and they have a lot of need which would improve safety on local roadways.

The committee discussed other local guardrail issues and projects.

Ray said that working on guardrails requires a lot of special tools and equipment that smaller municipalities don't always have access to and while grants often include guardrails it isn't always enough for the work.

10. Adjourn

Peter Hudkins made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Sharon Bixby. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:02 PM.