



Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization
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CHART Advisory Committee Meeting
October 7, 2009 Minutes

Present

Members

Stephen Bach
Bobby Burke
Jim Currie
Mac Lafferty, Vice Chair
Tom Loach
Bruce Odell
John Pfaltz
Linda Seaman, Chair
Peggy Westfall
Bill Wuensch

Representing

MPO, Bicycling
MPO, Pedestrian
Albemarle County, Transit
Albemarle County At-Large
County Planning Commission
City-At-Large
City At-Large
City-At-Large
City-At-Large
MPO

Not Attending

Marc Evans
Jeff Monroe

MPO
Albemarle County At-Large

Staff

Sarah Eissler
Chuck Proctor
Steve Williams

TJPDC
VDOT
TJPDC

Guests

Bill Edgerton
Albemarle County Planning Commission

Ms. Seaman called the meeting to order.

Matters from the Public

There were no matters from the Public.

Approval of the Minutes

Ms. Seaman stated that on page 2 of the minutes the word “difficulty” was misspelled.

Mr. Pfaltz stated that on page 2 of the minutes he was cited as discussing the Belvedere Development when in fact it was Mr. Proctor who mentioned the Belvedere Development. Mr. Proctor concurred.

Mr. Currie mentioned two typos. The first was at the top of page 3 where the word “one” was used instead of the appropriate word “on.” The second typo, also on page 3, was the term “citizen representatives,” which was not made plural, appearing as “citizen representative.”

Mr. Bach mentioned that on page 3 Ms. Eissler referred to herself as Mr. Eissler.

Upon a motion from Mr. Lafferty, seconded by Mr. Currie, the September 2, 2009 meeting minutes were approved as amended. Mr. Burke abstained from voting as he did not attend the September 2, 2009 meeting.

Route 29 Corridor Study Presentation

Mr. Williams stated that his presentation would be a summary of the presentation given by VDOT and the Parsons Transportation Group at the Department of Forestry on September 29th 2009. The route 29 Corridor Study was initiated by the Commonwealth Transportation Board and encompasses a review of the entire Route 29 corridor from Route 66 in Northern Virginia to the North Carolina state line. The Study also considers all types of transportation and land use issues that affect the corridor. Some of the recommendations that will affect the corridor focus on planning and construction projects and others recommendations will focus on process issues related to how the state considers route 29. Mr. Williams continued that the recommendations for the route 29 corridor followed a near-term, mid-term and long-term phasing timeline and mostly focused on safety improvements, access management, Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) methods, parallel roadway networks, and land use and development. Other recommendations included improving rail transit along the corridor allowing for both freight and passenger movement, which would decrease the number of vehicles on route 29. Mr. Williams also stated that a central overarching recommendation was allowing VDOT to maintain a more active role in any future projects along the route 29 corridor, while also still allowing local planners the opportunity to express the ideas, concerns and plans for their portions of the corridor. Mr. Williams continued that another major recommendation included developing a corridor implementation and funding plan to enact these numerous recommendations. Mr. Williams also stated that VDOT and the Parsons Transportation Groups realize that to achieve many of these recommendations legislation was going to have to be amended or developed.

Ms. Seaman asked if the new legislation, which would be required to implement many of recommendations, would be taken to the Virginia General Assembly this year. Mr. Williams stated that he was unsure of the planned timeline for legislation, but that he suspected it might be difficult to consider this year due to the election of a new Governor. Ms. Seaman asked how far the legislation would be pushed back. Mr. Williams stated that he believed the push for new legislation would be this year or next year, but did not anticipate any further delays. Ms. Seaman asked if new legislation was needed for the entire project. Mr. Williams stated that new legislation was needed for portions of the recommendations, particularly the recommendations that focused on access management issues.

Mr. Odell asked if the recommendations from the route 29 corridor study would be focused solely on route 29 or if the more general recommendations would be considered better transportation planning practices and implemented throughout the state. Mr. Williams stated that he agreed with Mr. Odell's assessment and believed that the recommendations would result in better planning practices statewide. Mr. Williams, however, clarified that VDOT has not yet made a decision on how the new legislation will be constructed and that the legislation could be focused solely on the route 29 corridor.

Mr. Williams continued that in the Charlottesville/Albemarle region, recommendations include enhancing railroad facilities to encourage more passenger and freight movement along railroads. Mr. Williams also mentioned that extended bus service from Culpepper to Charlottesville was another recommendation from the study. Mr. Williams also mentioned that specific project recommendations in our area include creating a significant interchange enhancement at the route 250, route 29 and Hydraulic Road location. Mr. Williams continued that other recommendations in our area included an extension from Leonard Sandridge Road, an Eastern Bypass project, and most of the recommendations from the Places29 plan (if implemented with other recommendations).

Mr. Odell stated that he believed that the three possible extensions planned from Leonard Sandridge Road were publicly opposed by David Slutzky and Dennis Rooker. Mr. Williams stated that they were opposed by Mr. Slutzky and Mr. Rooker. Mr. Odell asked the reason behind their opposition. Mr. Williams stated that the public very much opposed the option. Mr. Currie stated that Mr. Rooker also did not believe funding would be available for the project and that numerous other incremental projects that could be built for less money with the same mitigating effect as constructing an extension of Leonard Sandridge

Road. Mr. Odell also stated that, as he understood the situation, the County also opposed other roadway projects, recommended by the CHART committee that might enhance a parallel roadway network. Mr. Pfaltz stated that this was true. Mr. Odell then continued stating that he believes there is a pattern of rejecting parallel roadways and connectivity opportunities in the County. Mr. Pfaltz also stated that the 120 million dollar cost estimate from the Leonard Sandridge Road Extension seems high because VDOT already owns most of the land that would be used for the project. Mr. Currie stated that he believed the cost estimation did not include the cost of the land but other construction costs. Mr. Williams clarified that an extension to Leonard Sandridge Road had not been engineered; therefore the engineering costs could not be accurately estimated. Mr. Williams continued stating that the cost estimate of 120 million dollars for the roadway was a loose estimate.

Mr. Edgerton stated that he is the representative for the Jack Jouett District, Dennis Rooker's District, and that only about 10% of the planned Leonard Sandridge Extension run along the right of way previously purchased for the Western Bypass project. Mr. Proctor clarified the location of the outlined extension options of Leonard Sandridge Road as compared to the existing right of way from the Western Bypass project. Mr. Odell asked Mr. Edgerton to clarify if the Places29 objective for a parallel roadway network was still embraced. Mr. Edgerton stated that the efforts put into crafting Places29 were significant, particularly over the past five years, and that developing a parallel roadway network was a central part of the Places29 plan. Mr. Edgerton continued stating that many of the existing issues of creating a parallel roadway network and enabling more connectivity stem from the fact that achieving these goals requires changes to the current traffic patterns in existing neighborhoods. Mr. Edgerton emphasized that many neighborhoods do not respond well to these planning initiatives. Mr. Edgerton continued stating that the major parallel roadway addition planned in Places29 is the extension of Berkmar Road, which is currently problematic because there is no available funding for the Berkmar Bridge. Mr. Lafferty stated that he has noticed a significant amount of opposition to Places29 from businesses because owners believe Places29 will have an adverse affect on their businesses. Mr. Edgerton agreed that opposition from this community has been significant.

Mr. Williams continued his presentation moving on to another proposed project, the new interchange recommended for the route 250, route 29, and Hydraulic Road bottleneck. Mr. Williams stated that land northeast of the existing interchange would have to be used. This would facilitate the reconfiguration of businesses in these locations creating a large grid network. Mr. Williams continued stating that this project would need to be considered soon because the land use would need to be organized around the roadway. Mr. Williams also stated that the Hillsdale Connector would be incorporated into the project. Mr. Odell asked if two projects, the planned grade separated interchange at Hydraulic Road and the planned modernization of route 250, would be scrapped in favor of this suggested project. Mr. Williams said that the grade separated interchange at Hydraulic would not be needed if this recommendation was implemented. Mr. Odell stated that he believed that this recommendation would cause less disruption to the Hydraulic Road/route 29 intersection, which is going to be significant with the construction of a grade separated interchange. Mr. Proctor confirmed Mr. Odell's assessment. Mr. Proctor also stated that currently Hydraulic Road acts as a gate to the route 250/route 29 interchange. If VDOT were to build a grade-separated interchange at the Hydraulic Road/route 29 intersection, the gate scenario currently in-place would be removed and the route 250/route 29 intersection would become highly problematic. Mr. Williams also stated that the project recommended in the route 29 corridor study would be significantly more expensive than a grade separated interchange due to the necessary amount of construction.

Mr. Williams finished his presentation by outlining the five steps of the project development process. The first step is alternatives analysis (identify options), the second step is environmental review (satisfy NEPA, determine mitigation efforts), the third step is preliminary engineering (design the roadway to a point where reasonably accurate cost estimates can be determined), the fourth step is final design (create the designs that will be implemented), and step five is right of way acquisition, bid letting and construction. The minimum time for this process is typically 3 to 5 years.

Hollymead to Downtown Commuter Bike Route Project

Ms. Eissler showed committee members a map of the Downtown Trail Project previously planned by VDOT in 2006. This map was intended to give context to the distance, scope, and possible orientation of the Downtown Trail. Ms. Eissler presentation discussed the existing facilities from Hollymead into Charlottesville's Downtown that could aid in the creation of a commuter bike trail. Ms. Eissler discussed trail facilities in the Forest Lakes community, specifically a residents-only multiuse path and the possibility of striping public roads in Forest Lakes to create bike paths. Ms. Eissler also consider existing facilities along Carrsbrook Drive, Old Brook Road, Northfield Road, Huntington Road, Free State Road and Free State Railroad Bridge, Belvedere Drive, the future Meadowcreek Parkway, the future McIntire Road Extended, Schenks Greenway, Melbourne Road, Park Street, North Ave, and Locust Avenue. Ms. Eissler also considered barriers to the project including route 29, route 250, the Norfolk/Southern Railroad and the south fork of the Rivanna River. Ms. Eissler also utilized a mapping program called Map My Ride, which allows users to view elevation changes along their planned route.

Mr. Pfaltz asked if the Free State Railroad Bridge was going to be maintained. Mr. Proctor explained that the current circumstances regarding the bridge are uncertain, Norfolk/Southern Railroad no longer wishes to maintain the bridge. Mr. Proctor continued stating that there are no funds available to maintain the bridge, which is the main issue.

Mr. Pfaltz asked if it was possible to widen certain roadways, such as Northfield and Huntington, to add bike lanes. Mr. Proctor stated that right-of-way along roadways should go to the ditch, as VDOT maintains the ditches along secondary roadways.

Mr. Proctor asked if the North Avenue and Park Street intersection had crosswalks. Ms. Eissler stated that there were crosswalks.

Mr. Pfaltz stated that it might be prudent to emphasize the bike options from the Carrsbrook and Northfield neighborhoods instead of trying to emphasize creating a bike route from the Forest Lakes community given the significant barriers between the Forest Lakes community and the Downtown. Ms. Eissler stated that this was the intention in the next portion of the project, which would focus on what could be implemented in the near future.

Ms. Seaman asked if there was a way to allow the Woodbrook Community to access the trail. Ms. Seaman stated that she believed there was an in-place trail that might provide access. Ms. Eissler stated that she would look into it.

Mr. Bach asked if bike commuters were members of the committee. Ms. Eissler stated that bicyclists were on the committee but specific commuters were not on the committee. Ms. Eissler also stated that committee members were searching for individuals who have biked along these particular paths and what routes they chose. Mr. Lafferty stated that it might be helpful to contact bicycling organizations to find riders who might bike these routes.

Role of CHART Committee: Scope of Work

Mr. Williams stated that at the previous meeting the CHART Committee began to define a new purpose. Mr. Williams continued stating that this new purpose focused on reevaluating the public participation process currently used for planning. This new stance would allow an opportunity to not only educate the public on transportation issues but also to allow public input to be a part of crafting new planning initiatives. Mr. Williams continued stating that the next steps in this process would be to outline what the CHART Committee and the MPO were looking to discover with this process and plan opportunities to present at community meetings for various different types of organizations. Presentations would also include handouts for data collection. The overarching goal of this program would be to create a database of public information that could help guide future transportation decisions.

Mr. Odell stated that these efforts would make transportation issues seem less like special interest issues. Mr. Williams agreed that this was one of the advantages to a more proactive public participation program. Mr. Odell asked what kinds of questions would you ask and would these questions attempt to tease out opinions. Mr. Williams stated that he thought a PowerPoint presentation would be the best way to quickly and effectively explain the CHART Committee's objectives and gain helpful public input. Mr. Williams continued, stating that the best method for gaining useful input is to have general information about certain transportation issues, such as unsafe intersections, and then allow citizens to draw their own conclusions about those issues.

Mr. Loach thought that public participation presentations might be redundant in the County because development locations, or growth areas, have been studied for specific master plans and, thus, the major transportation issues in these areas have been identified. Mr. Loach continued stating that he thought it would be advantageous to include more transportation-oriented questions in the Albemarle County Citizens Survey, which helps the County prioritize projects.

Mr. Pfaltz stated that it would be best to target organizations that include both City and County representatives. Mr. Pfaltz continued, stating that as a City resident he received citizen surveys but often ignores those surveys because the questions appeared slanted. Ms. Seaman concurred that the surveys did seem slanted. Mr. Loach stated that the TJPDC staff and CHART committee could work with the County to ensure that the questions used in the citizen surveys were not slanted. Mr. Loach continued, stating that all development communities have established master plan committees that measure the progress of each master plan's initiatives and these committees have the potential to be great sources for this kind of public outreach.

Ms. Seaman stated that at the last CHART meeting there was some discussion on the relationship between the MPO Policy Board and the CHART Committee. Ms. Seaman asked if there was more information on the state of that relationship. Mr. Williams stated that the committee structure for MPO Committees is being reestablished to redefine their roles. Mr. Williams continued, stating that once these committee changes have stabilized that he anticipates the bylaws will be adjusted to reflect these changes. Mr. Williams continued, stating that these changes were explained to the MPO Policy Board and that he informed the MPO Policy Board that CHART was being altered from a committee that gives public input to a committee that seeks public input. Mr. Odell asked if the MPO Policy Board was receptive to the CHART Committee's new role. Mr. Williams stated that the Board was receptive.

Ms. Seaman asked what the next steps were in establishing this public participation program. Mr. Pfaltz stated that he thought it was important to ask committee members if they thought this course of action was appropriate. Committee members agreed that establishing a more vital public participation program seemed like an appropriate action for the CHART Committee.

Mr. Currie stated that he thought that the CHART Committee also needed to take a more active role in the MPO, and that the CHART committee is often unaware of issues being brought to the MPO Policy Board. Mr. Currie stated that he believed that the CHART committee should have a more formalized role in the MPO and that CHART should have an opportunity to express an opinion on MPO projects and issues. Mr. Currie continued, stating that the MPO Policy Board should aid in defining the committee's role, since the Policy Board established the CHART Committee. Mr. Odell stated that it is important to be in a dialog with the MPO but it is also important to establish a role for the CHART committee where the committee can legitimately advise the MPO Policy Board. Mr. Williams stated that it is important to realize that four of the five MPO Policy Board members are elected officials and they regularly receive public input. Mr. Williams continued, stating that it would be more effective to gather public input in a way that transcends simply voicing an opinion to MPO Policy Board members. Mr. Williams continued, stating this proactive public participation program allows the CHART Committee an opportunity to reestablish their role with the MPO, displaying that the CHART Committee is sensitive to the pressures

being exerted on the MPO Policy Board but also has a legitimate perspective on public opinion that is important to consider.

Ms. Seaman asked if staff and committee members were at a point where a proposal on this outreach plan needed to be developed. Ms. Eissler stated that she would begin to developing a draft presentation for this program.

Other Business

Mr. Pfaltz stated that there is rarely a cost/benefit analysis for road projects being planned in the MPO. Mr. Pfaltz invited committee members who were interested to participate in crafting a one to two page worksheet that could help establish some elements of a project's worth relative to its costs. Mr. Pfaltz stated that it might be useful to establish set criteria that measure benefits of a roadway compared to its costs. Ms. Seaman suggested that if members were interested in this project then they could set up a meeting time with Mr. Pfaltz after the committee meeting adjourned.

Additional Matters from the Public

There were no additional matters from the public.

Ms. Seaman adjourned the meeting.