



## Regional Planning Commission & Economic Development District

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### **NCC Transportation Advisory Committee Tower Room, Littleton Opera House Meeting Minutes January 18, 2018**

**Members Present:** Doug Grant (Randolph), Clayton MacDonald (Stratford), Donna Laurent (Jefferson), Raymond Gorman (Colebrook), Carl Martland (Sugar Hill), Sharon Penney (Lisbon), Dick Hamilton (Littleton)

**NCC Staff:** Greg DiSanto (Planner), Alex Belenz (Planner)

**NHDOT:** Lucy St. John (Senior Planner)

**Guests:** Joe Elgosin (Whitefield)

**Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Doug Grant at 1:01 PM. A roundtable of introductions was completed.

**Approval of Minutes:** Mr. DiSanto will correct the spelling of Phil Beaulieu's name. Mr. Gorman motions to approve minutes from September 21, 2017 with the correction. Ms. Laurent seconds motion. All in favor.

**NCC Staffing Update:**

Mr. DiSanto provided an update on NCC staffing changes. Barbara Robinson resigned her Executive Director position in December. Michelle Moren-Grey (CEO) and Kathy Frenette (COO) are now NCC leadership. Alex Belenz will be replacing Greg as lead transportation planner starting in February and will be the point of contact for the TAC going forward.

**North Country Transit Update:**

Ms. Gagne not in attendance.

**North Country Scenic Byways Committee Update:**

Mr. Martland provided an update on the North Country Scenic Byways Committee (NCSBC). The NCSBC has been heavily involved with Northern Pass. The committee submitted briefs along with several historical societies and organizations regarding the impact of Northern Pass on natural, cultural, and historic landscapes that make the North Country special. Northern Pass would also follow scenic byways for a significant portion of its route. The possibility of burying the transmission lines has been raised, but DOT has not given permission. The New Hampshire Site Evaluation Committee is set to deliberate on Northern Pass later in January.

Mr. Martland noted that NCSBC has also been working on the route structure of the byways and to keep byways designated. There had been some confusion between NCSBC, NCC, and DOT regarding the

corridor management plans for the byways. In the plans, some byway segments were identified to be considered for de-designation. The NCSBC ultimately voted not to de-designate these segments. DOT interpreted this as not being in-step with the recommendations of the corridor management plans. Mr. DiSanto added that NCC produced a master reference map to lend some clarity to the discussions with DOT over de-designation. At this stage, DOT and NCC are on the same page regarding byways. Mr. Martland added that only one byway segment will be de-designated – NH 110 through Berlin to West Milan, which has a lot of development. A new byway segment has been proposed that would include NH 110A and 110B in order to connect to West Milan. Mr. DiSanto added that NCC was in the process of developing applications to designate these new segments. Ms. St. John explained that these segments will be considered at the June meeting of the NH Scenic Byways Committee.

Mr. Martland noted that the main value of the byways in the North Country was as a marketing asset. It is important that the byways are noted on the state road map. Mr. Grant suggested that booklets and online media could be produced to show what is available along the routes. Ms. Penney suggested that NCSBC could partner with the NH Division of Travel and Tourism. Ms. Penney inquired about DOT spending on scenic byways. Carl noted that while there are federal dollars available, DOT has opted to focus these funds on bicycle and pedestrian projects. It could be possible to divert these funds to byway projects (e.g., overlooks).

#### **Franconia Notch Parking and Alternative Transit Update:**

Mr. DiSanto provided an update on the Franconia Notch Parking and Alternative Transit Working Group. Unauthorized parking on Interstate 93 has been an issue, with up to 800 cars illegally parked on weekend days. NH State Parks wants to have an alternative transit system in place before enforcement of illegal parking begins. They are concerned that if enforcement were to begin now, hikers would occupy parking spaces at Flume Gorge and the Cannon Mountain Tram, which would prevent paying customers from accessing those attractions. Revenues from Flume Gorge and the Tram comprise a significant portion of the State Park budget. Currently, State Parks is working with the NH Division of Tourism and Travel to develop an RFI for contracting out the transit operations. Ms. Laurent asked about parking locations and fees. Parking for the shuttle will likely be located at the Peabody Slopes parking area at Cannon Mountain. Some overflow parking may need to be identified. Most likely, visitors will pay a parking fee that supports transit operations. The transit service will need to be self-sufficient, as there are no federal or state dollars available. There is no fee currently for parking on State Park lands in Franconia Notch; however, there is a fee for parking in Forest Service parking lots, so hikers are used to paying parking fees.

The working group is currently discussing how to best inform the public about shuttle parking and fees and illegal parking areas. Mr. Hamilton noted that Franconia Notch is already “oversigned,” so it will be important to limit the number of additional signs used. Mr. DiSanto added that existing variable message signs may be utilized. Mr. Grant noted that the timeline for getting the transit service operational seemed very tight. Mr. Martland asked if the working group had looked the Island Explorer Shuttle in Acadia National Park and Bar Harbor, Maine as a case study. Mr. DiSanto replied that it was discussed; however, State Parks is not interested in corporate sponsorship (the Island Explorer Shuttle is funded by LL Bean and other businesses and groups).

#### **NHDOT District 1 Update:**

District Engineer not in attendance.

### **GACIT Ten Year Plan/Update:**

Mr. DiSanto updated the TAC on the draft Ten Year Plan and the GACIT process. The Ten Year Plan was approved by the NH Executive Council by a 3-2 vote in December, and now heads to the Governor's desk. The Ten Year Plan assumed funds would be available from a toll increase; however, the toll increase is unlikely to be approved by the Governor. The toll increase was added late in the Ten Year Plan Process, so the plan will be relatively easy to revise for a more constrained budget. Projects that would have been funded by a toll increase in the Ten Year Plan include corridor studies, sound wall projects, interstate projects, electronic tolls, and Red List bridges. NCC was not able to submit a letter in support of the toll increase due to leadership turnover at the time of the proposal.

Regarding projects in the Ten Year Plan for the North Country region: the Conway Bypass project has been officially removed, the Colebrook Main St project has been advanced to 2020, and a widening project for NH 16 in Dummer was modified. The Highland St project in Plymouth was advanced to 2025 from 2027, which is not soon enough from the town's perspective. The US 3 project was added in Whitefield. The TAC will have an opportunity to submit scoring for regional projects next March as part of the next Ten Year Plan cycle.

Starting in 2017, CMAQ funds became available for projects statewide, whereas they were previously available only for areas that were in "non-attainment" for air quality. An application for a bike path in Conway was funded, while an application for a bike path in Franconia was not funded. Criteria for funding projects are based on the potential for a project to improve air quality by taking cars off the road. The Conway bike path was located in an area of relatively high population density, and there is a history of bicycle use in the town. NCC is available to assist towns with CMAQ funding applications. Ms. St. John added that additional information on the CMAQ program is at <https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/planning/cmaq/index.htm>, and noted that the CMAQ program is not regularly occurring. The next round has not been announced. Mr. Grant asked if it was possible to apply CMAQ funds to the Franconia Notch shuttle. Mr. DiSanto replied that it could be eligible if the shuttle bus were replacing vehicle trips, which is unlikely.

Mr. DiSanto asked about transportation issues in the attendees' towns. Mr. Grant described the effort that Transport Central put in to improve transit service in Plymouth. Service is currently provided by Plymouth State University; however, the system is designed to cater to students. There has been tacit support from PSU and the town for an improved transit system, but not firm commitments. NCC is currently providing technical assistance. Ms. Penney asked if they had looked at the recent parking study, Mr. DiSanto replied that it had been incorporated in the new master plan for the town. Mr. Martland is assisting with the Regional Energy Fair in Franconia, including offering rides in his Chevy Volt to attendees. Mr. Martland added that there may be some funds available from the Volkswagon settlement to support electric vehicle infrastructure and planning in the region. Mr. Elgosin noted that there are some ongoing tractor trailer parking issues in Whitefield; however, not much can be done about it. Mr. Gorman noted that Colebrook just finished up the first phase of water and sewer construction on Main Street. The second phase will involve side streets. They are pleased with progress so far. Mr. MacDonald described two ongoing transportation issues in Stratford. US 3 in North Stratford has a long, straight section heading into the village. Vehicles regularly travel through the village well above the 30 MPH limit, and there are no sidewalks. Some form of traffic calming is needed. In Stratford Hollow, vehicles often roll through the intersection of Hollow Rd and US 3. Ms. Penney noted that Lisbon is making a big push to update water and sewer infrastructure. Within the next few years, the town would like to work with NCC and DOT on planning and modeling for a reconfiguration of the US

302/School St intersection and some traffic calming measures. They are also looking at connections to the rail trail.

Ms. St. John noted that DOT is in the process of developing a state freight plan, which will cover ports, airports, rail lines, and highways. The consultant that is working on this is WRA (Whitman, Requardt & Associates, LLP). DOT will be holding open houses on the freight plan, dates will be posted on the freight plan website (<https://www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/planning/freight-plan/>). Local knowledge will be important, as DOT will need to know where there are instances of outdated infrastructure, bottlenecks, clearance issues, etc.

**Other Business:**

None.

**Suggestions for March 15<sup>th</sup> meeting:**

Mr. Elgosin noted that there hasn't been anyone from DOT who has come to discuss rail and aeronautics (current and proposed projects) recently. Mr. DiSanto replied that NCC could reach out to DOT for an update or invite and asked if there were any focused questions for NHDOT rail and aeronautics. Mr. Martland suggested a discussion of the future of rail rights-of-way in the North Country – should they be preserved for future rail use, converted to rail trails, or set aside for some other use? There was also interest in an update on the track improvement project north of Berlin.

**Adjournment:** Mr. Gorman motions for adjournment at 2:49 pm. Mr. Martland seconds the motion. All in favor.

**Next meeting March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 1:00 PM at the Littleton Opera House.**

Minutes respectfully submitted by Alex Belenz.