



Regional Planning Commission & Economic Development District

NCC Transportation Advisory Committee Tower Room, Littleton Opera House Meeting Summary March 15, 2018

Members Present: Doug Grant (Chair, Randolph), Joe Chenard (Lincoln), Carl Martland (Sugar Hill), Clayton MacDonald (Stratford), Stan Judge (Shelburne).

NCC Staff: Alex Belenz (Lead Transportation Planner), Greg DiSanto (Planner)

Guests: Joe Elgosin (Whitefield resident), Brian Bresnahan (Representative Kuster's office), Chuck Henderson (Senator Shaheen's office).

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Doug Grant at 1:05 PM. A roundtable of introductions was completed.

Approval of Minutes:

The TAC reviewed the January 18, 2018 meeting's minutes. The TAC representatives in attendance approved of the minutes, but tabled a formal vote until the next meeting, because there was not a quorum.

North Country Scenic Byways Council

Mr. Martland, chair of the North Country Scenic Byways Council (NCSBC) gave an update on the NCSBC. NCSBC's annual report is coming soon.

Carl was an intervenor on Northern Pass, as chair of the NCSBC. The NH Site Evaluation Committee denied Northern Pass's permit recently. As part of the permitting process, Eversource documented historic and cultural resources along the proposed route. Several cultural landscapes that the Scenic Byways highlight were identified that Northern Pass would have impacted.

NCSBC continues working with NHDOT on implementing the Corridor Management Plans of the Scenic Byways. NCSBC hopes to get more implementation actions approved at the next NH Scenic Byways Council meeting this spring. Byways funding has been lumped in with other NHDOT programs, so funding for Byways projects is more competitive than in the past. Potential projects could include scenic view pulloff; Mr. Martland says these improvements could be relatively affordable.

NCSBC is also updating the "Spend a Day on the Byways" document. NCC will send this document out to the TAC. NCSBC is considering rack cards/brochures.

Franconia Notch State Park Alternative Transportation

Mr. DiSanto (North Country Council) updated the TAC on the Franconia Notch Alternative Transportation Working Group. The working group is composed of several organizations that work in the Franconia Notch: NH Department of Natural & Cultural Resources Division of State Parks, NH Department of Business & Economic Affairs Division of Travel & Tourism Development (DTTD), NH Department of Transportation (NHDOT), Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), Plymouth State University (PSU), and North Country Council (NCC). The group is working to finalize a Request for Information for a Hiker Shuttle.

Mr. Martland asked about potential funding streams, such as corporate sponsorship. At the last TAC meeting, Mr. DiSanto said that corporate sponsorships (like LL Bean's sponsorship of the Acadia NP shuttle) was not being considered. NCC will ask the working group if the shuttle contractor will be permitted to seek corporate sponsorship independently of the State Parks.

Mr. Chenard mentioned that all of the hotels and resorts in Lincoln run their own shuttle buses to tourist attractions. Would they be permitted to pick up passengers at the satellite lot and drop them off at the trailheads? What exclusive rights would the State Parks shuttle contractor have on the Parkway and in the parking areas? NCC will ask this question of the working group.

Mr. Chenard also suggested that the working group revisit the 1983 Parkway MOU, because certain solutions might be incompatible with the MOU (such as expanding parking lots or constructing a monorail from Lincoln to the Notch).

Mr. Grant shared that the parking lot at Appalachia has an overflow problem. Since NHDOT owns that lot, nobody is collecting parking fees like the WMNF does at their trailheads; parking fees could help to offset a solution to the problem. Mr. Judge shared that Pinkham Notch had an overflow parking problem decades ago. The solution was sharing of the lots between AMC and Wildcat Ski Area. Mr. Judge said that the state is inviting people to come up to the State Park, but is not accommodating them. Mr. Bresnahan shared that the parking enforcement on Westside Road in Conway did not seem to reduce visitation to Diana's Baths, people adjusted. Mr. Chenard said that parking on NH 112 at Lincoln Woods is also a safety issue.

Mr. Grant and Mr. MacDonald suggest that the RFP could encourage transit providers to use electric vehicles. The shuttle system will not reduce vehicle-miles travelled in the Notch, it may increase them, so emissions are a concern. NCC will suggest this to the working group.

Mr. Chenard suggested that this is an opportunity to connect all of the tourist towns with transit. Towns in the European Alps are connected (via ski lifts and trails) and it adds to the tourist experience and could be an economic development opportunity for towns. Mr. Martland and others support looking at a regional solution. Mr. DiSanto said that the Working Group is interested in addressing parking and transportation issues around the White Mountain National Forest, but the Parkway is the most urgent

focus area. NCC will share with the working group that the NCC TAC supports looking at regional solutions and tying this system in with the existing shuttle systems.

Ten Year Plan

Mr. Belenz updated the TAC on the NHDOT Ten Year Plan. The Ten Year Plan is currently in the NH House Public Works and Highways Committee. The floor date for the bill in the house is today. On February 1st, Mr. Belenz attended the public hearing held by the Public Works & Highways Committee and delivered testimony in support of North Country projects. The testimony largely mirrored the letter that was developed by the TAC in support of North Country projects included in the Ten Year Plan. In the testimony, NCC wanted to stress the importance of a safe and efficient transportation network for the large and dispersed North Country, as well as highlight several specific projects:

- Highland Street – Plymouth – badly needed reconstruction project on a former state highway, with all local matching funds in place.
- Main Street – Conway – intersection of regional corridors and associated traffic issues.
- Main Street – Gorham – coinciding with the major water and sewer project under Main Street would reduce costs and streamline the process.
- Mt. Washington Valley Bike Path – Conway – 1st time CMAQ funds have been available in our region, and therefore wanted to emphasize the support for getting this project funded.

NCC was the only entity present to testify on behalf of North Country projects. The vast majority of the testimony was in reference to the \$4 million allocation for engineering and environmental studies for passenger rail in southern NH. NCC will keep TAC updated on the Ten Year Plan.

Statewide Freight Plan

Mr. Belenz shared an update on the Statewide Freight Plan update. NHDOT is holding an open house on the State Freight Plan in Claremont on March 22nd. Registration closes tomorrow. More open houses will be scheduled, but we don't have any information on those yet. As Lucy St. John mentioned in the last meeting, local knowledge will be very important in the development of these plans (e.g., where is there outdated infrastructure, where are there bottlenecks).

Mr. Grant shared that the TAC could provide a list of bottlenecks in our region. Gorham (US 2&16), Whitefield (the hill on US 3 north), and Berlin's construction on NH 16. Mr. Martland shared that Sugar Hill is concerned with trash haulers staging their trucks on NH 117.

Littleton Parking Study

Mr. Belenz updated the TAC on the Littleton Parking study. NCC is in the planning stages for a parking study with the town of Littleton. We are currently working on a scope of work for the project. Essentially, Littleton is trying to look at its parking situation empirically before looking at potential infrastructure improvements. The study will focus on the downtown area, and will likely consist of a quantitative component (manual counts to look at occupancy rates) and possibly a survey component to get information on destinations, parking behavior, etc. This is something NCC can do for any town in the region that wants to better understand its parking issues.

Mr. MacDonald suggested considering a poll of pedestrians in town about how traffic and parking affects pedestrian use in the downtown area. Mr. Grant shared that parking is particularly bad around Schillings, especially the handicapped parking.

NCC Staff and Leadership

Mr. Belenz updated the TAC on NCC's leadership and staffing. The interim leadership changes at NCC have been finalized. Michelle Moren-Grey and Kathy Frenette have been named Co-Executive Directors, with Michelle serving as CEO and Kathy as COO. Michelle was previously the Senior Economic Development Planner and Kathy was previously the Operations and Finance Manager. Greg DiSanto is leaving NCC in early April and Alex Belenz is the Lead Transportation Planner going forward.

Androscoggin Watershed Culverts Assessment

Mr. Belenz updated the TAC on the potential Androscoggin Culverts Assessment project this summer. NCC is planning to partner with New Hampshire Fish and Game to assess stream culverts in the Androscoggin River Watershed. This will be very similar to project that NCC participated in 2016 to assess culverts in the Ammonoosuc River Watershed. Culvert assessments can reveal issues with geomorphic compatibility, damage, blockages, and erosion that are important to prioritizing culvert replacement projects that protect road infrastructure. They can also reveal instances where culvert designs are blocking passage by aquatic organisms. Culvert assessments are a service that NCC can contract with any town to do.

NCC Technical Assistance

Mr. Belenz shared that NCC just received its list of traffic count locations from NHDOT. NCC can do traffic counts on local roads, too, at the towns' request.

Mr. Belenz shared that NCC continues to provide technical assistance to Transport Central.

Mr. Grant shared that it is challenging to find out PSU's route and schedule. PSU's shuttle system is not likely to expand to serve the town's non-student population, like UNH's bus system. Mr. Martland suggested that the system could be the other way around; if the town operates the shuttle, the University could partially fund it so that students could ride for free.

Next meeting:

Mr. Belenz said that Liz Strachan from NH Department of Environmental Services Air Resources Division is planning to attend the May 17 meeting to discuss electric vehicle charging infrastructure. She has presented at other RPCs' TACs. The Volkswagen Settlement could be part of discussion. Mr. Grant said that electric buses could be important.

Additional suggestions for topics for the next meeting: Mr. Martland is interested in NHDOT Rail staff discussing rail ROWs, particularly abandonment and rail trails.

Other business

Mr. MacDonald asked about the results Stark's warrant article to ban ATVs on town roads. The article failed. Mr. MacDoanld shared that in Stratford, the costs of damage to unpaved roads from ATVs may outweigh the benefits. The aggressive tires and aggressive driving behaviors loosen the road surface, leading to erosion.

Mr. Bresnahan mentioned that the deadline for applications for North Borders grants is May 11. Letters of Interest should be submitted sooner. Infrastructure applications are welcome. There is an informational meeting on the grant process in Groveton soon. Projects in Coos, northern Carroll, and northern Grafton counties are eligible.

Mr. DiSanto said that NCC is updating the transportation pages on its website. Comments and feedback are welcome.

Mr. Grant motioned to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Martland seconded the motion. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 2:33 pm.

Next meeting May 17th, 2018 at 1:00 PM at the Littleton Opera House.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Alex Belenz.