

**MINUTES OF
FAUQUIER COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE**

Special Meeting

March 10, 2017

12:30 P.M. – 1:30P.M.

***2nd Floor Conference Room – Warren Green Building
10 Hotel Street
Warrenton, VA 20186***

Members Present: Chair, Jim Stone; Vice-Chair, Chris Butler, Rick Gerhardt, Adrienne Garreau, Peter S. Eltringham, Patrick Mauney, Mark Nesbit

Guests Present: Alison DeTuncq, Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board, Culpeper District
Greg Yates, Virginia Commonwealth Transportation Board, At-Large Rural
Chuck Proctor, Virginia Department of Transportation, Transportation Planner, Culpeper District
Kimberley Pryor, Virginia Department of Transportation, Division Administrator, Infrastructure Investment Division
Margie Ray, Virginia Department of Transportation Assistant Director for Infrastructure Investment
Chad Tucker, Virginia Department of Transportation Assistant Division Administrator for Performance Based and Conceptual Planning
Kobina Gaituah, Virginia Department of Transportation, Trainee

Staff Present: Kimberley Fogle, Andrew Hopewell, Marie Pham, Maureen Williamson

Call to Order: Chairman Stone called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m.

Chairman Stone asked for Committee roll call and introduction of guests in attendance.

Ms. Pham used a PowerPoint presentation during the meeting to illustrate her points related to the Smart Scale prioritization process. The PowerPoint presentation has been added to the minute's document as Appendix A.

Ms. Pham opened the meeting by saying that the Transportation Committee had asked to meet to discuss issues and concerns with the Smart Scale prioritization process. She noted having communicated via email with Ms. DeTuncq and Mr. Yates previously and at that time she went through a brief PowerPoint presentation discussing, in particular, Fauquier County projects to highlight what the County was experiencing. At this time, the raw scores were not released and an analysis could not be done to show how the rural categories were competing against the urban categories and how the overall process was working for the County. During today's meeting, Ms. Pham said that she wanted to focus not on Fauquier County so much as on some of the general things

County staff is seeing and how this process is working for rural areas throughout Virginia along with some of our issues and concerns.

Ms. Pham said that one of the Committee's concerns is that the Access to Jobs category is nine percent of the total score for urbanized areas, Category A, and fifteen percent of our total score, Category C. She stated that the raw scores for rural areas cannot compete with urban areas. She continued that because our normalized scores are getting cut so low from the start of the process, we are not recovering whether it is from higher percentage points we get with this or from a lower cost project. She said that while there were instances where the normalized scores were level when the project cost was exceptionally high, this was not typical. She clarified that the average Smart Scale request for a project in Category A was approximately \$39 million and in Categories B through D it was around \$13 to \$15 million. A \$92 million project is not the average request even from the more urbanized areas. She said that this is not standard for what is happening in terms of leveling the playing field although we do see it in some cases.

Ms. Pham's observations include that Category A projects are doing fairly well across the board and staff does see some projects that are not scoring at all in the Accessibility category. With Category B projects there is some decline in the number of projects scoring strongly, particularly in Accessibility. She said there was a more subtle decline in high scoring projects for Economic Development, but it is not that bad compared to a Category A project.

Ms. Pham said for Category C projects, staff started to notice that you really start to lose projects in terms of scoring for Accessibility. She emphasized the County's concern as it is twenty-five percent of our total score and we cannot score well. She said that Category D projects experienced a substantial decline in scores, especially in the Accessibility category. For Economic Development you start to see projects drop off more in Categories C and D, but we are definitely seeing issues with the way the rural areas are performing compared to the urban areas.

Ms. Pham said that Safety is measured using a crash rate and a frequency, allocating half of the weight to both, which works well for urban and rural areas. It is expected that urban areas will score stronger with congestion than the rural areas. She stressed that we do not have the levels of congestion that Categories A or B areas would have. Rural areas also score fairly well in the environmental measures, particularly environmental impact.

Ms. DeTuncq previously requested that a percent change be utilized in the Accessibility Category rather than a raw score. Ms. Pham said that unfortunately this did not work out. She stressed that there has to be a better method for calculating this measure to allow rural areas to compete with urban areas.

Ms. DeTuncq thanked the Committee for inviting her and Mr. Yates to attend today's meeting. She appreciated the opportunity to hear the Committee's thoughts and concerns. She said the timing could not have been better as the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) is taking a deeper look at the overall Smart Scale process later this summer. She added that the CTB has a two-year period to wade through all of the issues and concerns and it is also an opportunity to take a step back to make sure the process is working. She said that it is never going to be perfect, but if we can make improvements to it or tweak it, this is the opportunity for us to do so.

Mr. Tucker commented that this is looking at one part of how an ultimate score is calculated. He said that an interesting calculation to look at is the normalized value of each measure divided by the project cost. He noted that this may provide a sense of how many points the project is receiving per dollar invested. In the end, the score that matters is the benefit score divided by the cost. He said that what you will see if you look at the cost break down of projects in Category A versus the other categories, is typically in Category A you have higher right-of-way costs and he feels this is an equalizer of the way Smart Scale works as you are not just awarded based on the total benefit rather how much benefit is achieved per tax dollar invested. Ms. Pham noted that some projects recommended for funding may not have scored well but ranked high because their Smart Scale request was so low.

Ms. Pham noted the Warrenton Interchange project was a good and strong project to submit for this process, but it scored in the bottom twenty-five percent last year because of its high cost and that it does not achieve the magnitude of benefit that an urban project would. While the high cost of the project did not work in our favor, the normalization of scores was more harmful. She asked if there is a way to revise the process to better indicate the benefit of a project.

Mr. Tucker said that he has seen it play out where there is a disconnect between the benefit. For example, he said where a project is receiving the benefits, like a grade separation of a signal that has a lot of congestion. He said that the project may be achieving a relatively good normalized score, but is hurt by the weighting in the end because it is in an area that does not put a lot of its weight on congestion. He commented by saying that you will see this in area types A and B where it is a safety project with a lot of safety benefit, but because the project is in an area type A and B, safety is a lot lower so it ends up not deriving as many points from safety.

Ms. Fogle said that safety is one of the key issues that we experience in the County. She said that initially, the CTB placed the Region in Category B. At the Region's request to be moved from Category B to Category C, she said it was done so with the understanding that in Category C, safety comprised thirty percent of the category's total score. However, at the time the Region was placed in Category C, the safety weighting was reduced to twenty-five percent. Ms. DeTuncq commented that weighting for congestion mitigation also went up.

Mr. Proctor said that even if the Region is moved to Category D you are not going to get as much benefit because there is not as many safety issues on the locations you have selected. He said this is something the Region needs to focus on. He referenced the top 100 safety locations list and its impact. Ms. Garreau commented that we had the top two safety locations on our list. Mr. Proctor explained that the way the analysis tool works, it does not look at property damage only crashes. The project submitted by Fauquier County at the intersection of Route 29 and Route 215 only focused on the vertical curves but not on the signal. Traffic stopped because of the signal continues to result in crashes. He concluded that the County is going to achieve a better score by looking at alternatives that address the signal, as opposed to addressing just the vertical curves on the approaches.

Mr. Eltringham asked if the top 100 list only addressed signalized intersections. Mr. Proctor said VDOT maintains two lists: Top 100 signalized intersections and corridors. He also said that he utilized the STARS database to see where the locations are with the biggest safety needs and congestion, as STARS has a component for the congestion factor and we can see where we have the worst case scenario. He said that most of them are on the Route 29 corridor in the development areas of Bealeton, New Baltimore, and Opal. He added that one of the corridors that is recommended for

study in the STARS package of projects is the Route 29 corridor from Old Alexandria Turnpike (Route 693) to the Prince William County line. He reiterated that these are some of the things we need to focus on. He said we have to identify the right projects to submit to Smart Scale and make sure we are addressing the most needs across the board.

Ms. Fogle said that staff has reviewed the critical Route 29 corridor several times in terms of trying to plan and come up with an approach that everyone feels is the right one to take. She would like to work with Mr. Proctor to make that happen one final time. She said that staff has gone through many different types of proposals and if it is looked at like a corridor rather than individual intersections we may see better results. She noted that Mr. Proctor mentioned that there is more benefit to looking at signals as opposed to the approach. She said that staff submitted a project to remove the humps which are found on the approach to the intersection and the reason it was done that way was because the analysis showed that the intersection improvement did not solve the safety problem. Mr. Proctor said that if you look at the accident data that came out of the VDOT studies, the accidents are attributed to the intersection. He said that with the vertical curves you do get rear end collisions, but the critical accidents are at the T-bone type of intersections and they are crashes that create injury. He continued by saying if you look at where those crashes are distributed across the intersection they are all attributed to the signalized intersection and not necessarily just the northbound approach where the humps are. He remarked that the County did get safety points for some of the improvements, but you are not going to affect the intersection improvement without enough, from a safety standpoint, until you look at the intersection itself. He said if we just did the signal improvements, you would see a significant improvement because you would not be stopping the traffic to create the situation where the accidents are occurring.

Mr. Nesbit referenced the series of stakeholder meetings held during 2016 where the Route 29 project was broken up into three different segments. VDOT has prepared a map to show the whole corridor and applied how the three different treatments fit together. Ms. Fogle asked if VDOT feels that all of the treatments laid out on the concept map are treatments that VDOT would support. Mr. Nesbit said that they are treatments that the VDOT consultant presented. Ms. Fogle asked if the County is in a position to take this information out into the community to garner support. Mr. Nesbit said that the project needs some fine tuning, but it is a good start.

VDOT applied a crash modification factor based on analysis of a wide range of different solutions and one of those solutions resulted in a reduction in the number of crashes. At this particular intersection, the project proposed would result in about a fifteen percent reduction in fatal injury type crashes. Another type of improvement, which he believed had been discussed, is called a restricted crossing that would result in more than doubling as you would move to a thirty-five percent reduction. He noted that this was only addressing crashes in one direction – the northbound approach – something like an R-cut or a restricted crossing would be effective in both directions. So in addition to having a higher crash reduction you would be affecting more crashes and the safety score would increase accordingly.

Ms. Garreau said that you may be reducing the economic development potential of the area because this is a major gateway into Vint Hill and that is the reason the County wants to keep it open and not do an R-cut because the left turns and the turns coming into Vint Hill Road are key factors. Mr. Tucker said that from the southbound approach on Route 29 you would still be able to make a left turn. He explained that when making a left hand turn from Vint Hill you would make a right turn,

travel typically 800 feet and make a U-turn. He added that it is not that much additional time as you are not waiting at the signal and you can make your right turn even when the signal is red. Ms. Garreau expressed concern that vehicles would use Route 600 as a short cut. This is a residential road and it travels past an elementary school before connecting back to Route 29. This is what trucks and vehicles would do if they knew they could not make a left hand turn at the signal at Route 29 south and Vint Hill Road.

Mr. Eltringham commented that there would be opposition to removing the humps because they are the original humps that were there during the last Battle of 1863. He said that if you stand on the corner where the signal box is, you can see almost the entire typography of the battlefield. He added that the County must go into this intersection with an awareness that this was the last successful confederate cavalry engagement in this area in 1863.

Ms. Pham said that one of the things that she noticed is that the County received such little funding for the Construction District Grant Program to start with, but the CTB is allocating that Construction District Grant funding in Step 1 instead of funding statewide projects first. She said the way she understood the goal of the Construction District Grant Program was to try to get projects within the district funded that could not get funding through the state process. In Round #2, had two of the projects received High Priority funding rather than Construction District Grant funding, more projects in the district could have been funded. She asked if there is a possibility of changing the process of funding state projects first and then funding district grant projects.

Ms. Pryor explained that the state tried that approach but found in Round #1, because the cost has such a big impact on the final score and most of the top ranked projects are inexpensive, they were funding all of the inexpensive projects with statewide money and when it got to the District Grant Program, in some cases none of the projects got funded. In some cases it is a matter of the mix of projects that get submitted in a particular round and how that sorts out. She said the CTB is certainly looking at process improvements and what they can do to make things work better.

Ms. Garreau said that the County's Schoolhouse Road project had a parallel funding stream from the Safe Routes to School Program that was always viewed as a great fit for fixing the problems in the area in front of the school and along Schoolhouse Road (Route 661) where kids walk and bicycle to school. She noted that the road is never going to be safe with Safe Routes to School grant money only as its needs to have realignment and other things to make it safe. While we have been successful in getting grant money, we cannot use it because of the Smart Scale process. Ms. Ray said that in theory the County can use the grant money to leverage funds and that would reduce your Smart Scale scores. Ms. Pham said the project was submitted as a UPC for a project in that area, but in terms of offsetting the cost, no. Ms. Garreau said that the entire project would be that much more enhanced because of the two funding mechanisms and the parallel requirements that each project has.

Mr. Proctor said he did not think that the Safe Routes to School project extended that far and said that VDOT prepared two options. One option was further to the south and did not take the house that is on the corner. Ms. Fogle said that the County selected the option that would do it right the first time. He said the project could get more points if we reduce the cost and it would compete better. Ms. Ray said we saw this last year in a number of counties within the Culpeper district which did not get funding so they went back and value engineered what they were doing and how they were doing it and this year they are receiving funding for looking at the project in a different manner. She asked

how can we enhance our ability to receive funding on specific projects and make sure that the projects being submitting are the strongest ones for the area. She added we need to determine what components of the Smart Scale system itself are not working and why.

Mr. Proctor said that if you were to look at percent change in Job Access you could go from one hundred jobs accessible to two hundred, which is a hundred percent increase. More than likely the one that is resulting in a higher job access increase is a longer and more expensive project. So that would only be exacerbating the cost in the end. He said the way the process works, you have got the transportation network and today's performance of it and we are accessing the congestion – what is the speed increase, what is the reduction of delay – that all gets coded in the model and it looks at every block's ability to get to every other block so it looks at the combination of this block and how many jobs can it get to within this forty-five minute travel time. He noted that this year we changed the measure to be the number of jobs now accessible per person, which he believes made it fairer when you are looking at a rural/suburban versus an urban area. You can see the urban areas have a much higher density to jobs and hence speed improvements in the vicinity of those areas and are going to have a much higher increase in access to jobs, but you also have more population in those areas as well. Ms. Pham said that if we were to submit a project in New Baltimore closer to Washington, D.C. we would have more access to jobs which is beneficial for Fauquier County, but there are still rural areas throughout Virginia that do not have that advantage.

Initially localities were asked to weight the five or six measures based on their priorities. Safety is our highest priority so we want to make it the greatest percentage. While accessibility and economic development are priorities for Fauquier County, making them priorities in this process hurts our ability to fund projects. Mr. Tucker said that if we pick the projects that are going to address congestion you are going to see accessibility scores and if you focus on the major corridors where you have your development you are going to see higher scores in economic development, congestion, and accessibility than what you are seeing now. Ms. DeTuncq said in a broader context, the Smart Scale process, by virtue of the different weights, is driving the priorities for the different localities. It is not always safety. There are accessibility concerns. A one hundred percent increase from one hundred to two-hundred jobs is huge for a rural area. She said she understands that in the context when you are looking at an area like Northern Virginia.

Ms. Garreau expressed that congestion in rural areas is different from congestion in an urban area. For example Route 28 is significantly congested, but by the standards of Fairfax County it would not be considered congested. She asked what VDOT's standards are for defining a congested area. Mr. Tucker said that VDOT's methodology has to be fairly flexible to handle all sorts of improvements. You have intersection improvements, corridors where you are dealing with capacity expansion, and signal improvements, and this is one of the reasons why the weighting tries to take into account what is important for a different area. For example in Category A and B congestion is more of an issue whereas in Categories C and D economic development and safety are areas of concern. There are multiple methods that VDOT uses in order to assess the congestion. More spot based improvements will typically trickle over to accessibility because you are doing a speed improvement for a relatively short stretch of road and you are reducing the wait at a signal so your approaches are going to experience that delay savings. The shorter your improvement is related to how far you are able to get as a result to the speed change as opposed to say a three or four mile project before you improve speed for that distance. Now you can get much further as you experience that speed improvement for a much greater distance. The tradeoff is also that it is more expensive.

Ms. Garreau said generally speaking in a rural area you are likely going to need multiple intersection improvements in order to improve an overall congestion issue rather than in an urban area it might be concentrated in a particular intersection. Mr. Tucker said that it depends on what is being proposed. For example, he said reducing the number of signal phases is going to have both a safety benefit as well as congestion benefit. He said that you must look at what the problems are and work with your planners and traffic engineers to determine what solutions are likely going to maximize the benefits for the corridor. There are lots of projects that we see that are addressing a particular intersection, but what is being proposed has a relatively muted benefit per the dollar invested. He said this is why you need to be open to different alternatives as to what is going to solve the problems that intersection is experiencing.

Ms. Garreau asked if it would be an acceptable strategy where the County might concentrate all of its projects in one area in a particular year and would the project score higher as a result of being a collection of smaller projects that would solve a particular problem. She said for example combining all of Route 29 through New Baltimore in one year and all of Route 28 the following year. Mr. Tucker said it would depend as you start to piece projects together into one package you are going to get more benefits, but it is also going to be a higher denominator as there is going to be a higher cost associated with it. He said that certainly on a longer corridor that has several problem intersections the more of that corridor you can address, he believes accessibility will go up.

Ms. Fogle said that Rogues Road (Route 602) reconstruction was submitted in two segments. She said that one proposal was to reconstruct a smaller section of the road and another proposal addressed a larger improvement. She said it was the larger improvement that scored higher. Mr. Proctor said that Louisa County had an example of this with its Route 208 project where they submitted it last year as a higher type of improvement and repackaged the project this year as three projects: an intersection improvement, which scored the highest, the whole corridor, scoring second highest and the shorter corridor was one of the lowest scoring projects in the Culpeper District. Ms. Fogle noted that the Town of Warrenton's improvement to Broadview Avenue is another example of this. Warrenton separated the project into two and both projects were funded. Mr. Tucker added the town contributed \$1 million in funding which was split between both projects allowing them to be funded.

From a regional perspective, Mr. Mauney asked if there was going to be an opportunity to request a subsequent change to our categorization. He said that we have analyzed the numbers regarding the eighteen projects submitted for the Culpeper Region in two years and have found that fifteen projects would score best in Category D, two in Category A, and one in Category C. Ms. DeTuncq asked if the request was for the whole Culpeper Region or for Fauquier County only. Mr. Mauney clarified that the request to move categories would come from the entire Rappahannock-Rapidan Region. Ms. Ray asked if there was support from the entire region for the move from Category C to Category D. He said that preliminarily, the Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission had a discussion and we are waiting to see if the CTB would give regions the opportunity to move categories. Ms. Ray asked Mr. Mauney if his analysis looked at Fauquier County projects only. Mr. Mauney said that his analysis looked at the entire Culpeper District.

Ms. Ray said that when you look at the analysis from Round 1, it is a fifty/fifty split as to the projects that were funded in area types A and B versus area types C and D. She said that Round 1 costs were slightly higher in the urban areas, but they also had the opportunity to contribute local funds. She said, in Round 2, it was not quite a fifty/fifty split, but with the District Grant Program it was close

to fifty/fifty. There was additional high priority funding in Round 2 as a result of the Interstate 66 project being funded with other funds. This skewed it slightly toward the urban areas so there are more projects funded from urban areas for Round 2. Ms. Fogle asked for the comparison in terms of project expense. Ms. Ray said that projects from the urban areas were more expensive. She explained that an average cost for a project in Round 1 in an area A project was \$21 million and \$4.5 million in area D. Also in Round 1, the process funded forty-eight projects in area A and forty-eight projects in area D. Ms. DeTuncq said that projects are being fully funded for the first time in a long time and therefore there is a better chance of getting projects executed and in a reasonable timeframe than ever before. Ms. Pham agreed and said she appreciates the idea of a prioritization process and being able to have something to stand behind as to why or why not a project is receiving funding. Her concern remains that there are areas where the Culpeper Region cannot seem to score as a whole, not just Fauquier County and therefore asked if there will be an opportunity to provide input to revise the process. She feels in some respect that the urbanized areas have an easier time accumulating points even though they have more expensive projects and inquired about ways to level the playing field.

Mr. Tucker said that the Smart Scale process provides an objectively based decision. He said we continue to want to improve the process and encourage everyone to review the recommendations discussed today and as you think of weaknesses or improvements please visit the Smart Scale website and provide feedback, input and comments. Over the next couple of months, he said the group is prepping for a CTB retreat where the Board will be digging into what things we are seeing with the process and recommendations received. He encouraged all to be part of that discussion and help identify ways to improve the overall process.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:10 p.m. The next regular Committee meeting will be held on **Wednesday, March 22, 2017.**