

AGENDA
New York State Association of MPOs
Friday, August 5, 2005
Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council
100 Clinton Square
126 N. Salina Street, Suite 100
Syracuse, NY 13202

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. Welcome and Introductions | All |
| 2. Meeting Summaries – June 10 and July 8 (Attachments A & B) | All |
| 3. Presentation by Richard Mudge | |
| 4. TEA-21 Reauthorization/AMPO Update/Allocation of PL Funds | Gayle/All |
| 5. NYSMPO Staffing and Organization Review (Attachment C) | Camph/Makler |
| 6. ITE Meeting Sessions (Attachment D) | Perrin/Siwiek |
| 7. SCI Projects | |
| Travel Colloquy | Poorman |
| Statewide Data | Gayle/Makler |
| Congestion Management Systems | Rowlands/Makler |
| Training | Siwek |
| SCI Selection Process (Attachment E) | |
| 7. Air Quality Work Group – (Attachments F & G) | Siwek/Makler |
| 8. Transportation Enhancements | NYSDOT |
| 9. NYSPTA Meeting and Sessions | Siwek |
| 10. Safety Forum Follow Up | Schissell |
| 11. NPTS Add-Ons | Schissell |
| 12. NYSMPO Brochure | Schissell |
| 13. Next Meeting Date/Location | All |

MEETING SUMMARY
NYSMPO Meeting
Friday, June 10, 2005
Poughkeepsie, NY

Attendees:

Larry McAuliffe, NYMTC
Mary Rowlands, SMTC
Jay Schissell, ECTC
Hector Boggio, GBNRTC
Richard Beers, FHWA
John Poorman, CDTC
Dennis Doyle, UCTC
Kealy Salomon, PDCTC
Rich Perrin, GTC

Eoin Wrafter, PDCTC
Fernando de Aragon, ITCTC
Rick Backlund, FHWA
John Zamurs, NYSDOT
Aaron Frankenfeld, A/GFTC
Tom Mark, UCTC
Steve Gayle, BMTS
John Czamanske, OCTC
Sarah Siwek, SJS & Assoc.

- 1. Welcome and Introductions**
- 2. Meeting Summaries – April 1 and May 6.** There were no comments on the meeting summaries.
- 3. AMPO/TEA-21 Update.** Steve Gayle reported that there would be a meeting with key AMPO members and FHWA the week of June 13 in Washington, D.C. The TEA-21 Conference Committee has begun deliberations and has 94 members. Key issues include funding levels, minimum guarantees, PL funds, etc. Current efforts are targeted at finishing the deliberations by the July 4 recess.
- 4. New York State DOT- EAB.** John Zamurs discussed the upcoming NARC conference on Climate Change where he will make a presentation on the NYS Energy Plan. He discussed his planned presentation and requested comments from the MPOs. He intends to speak about the background on the state Energy Plan, the technical approach to the ICF study, which was recently completed, the results of analysis of 10 of the 13 MPOs, and MPO reactions to the Energy Plan. The MPOs generally agreed with his characterization however requested that he not characterize the Energy Plan and NYSDOT's required analysis as an unfunded mandate. The MPOs see the Energy Plan as an opportunity for change and a way to promote awareness of the need to reduce energy use. Also, leadership is needed by the various departments within the State in order for meaningful change to occur.

John also discussed the recent conformity analysis for 6 MPO areas, which was completed in order to meet the June 15 deadline for conformity under the 8-hour ozone standard. A discussion was held on reviewing the interagency consultation

process now that the deadline has passed. There was a discussion about initiating a peer-to-peer exchange through the FHWA MPO Capacity Building program and Sarah will explore this with FHWA. John Zamurs pointed out that the Interagency Consultation process in one State may not be appropriate in another and that the process needs to be tailored to State and nonattainment area needs.

5. **Statewide Transportation Master Plan.** It was mentioned that possibly by the end of June the Plan would be available for review. The review period will be extended to 60 days once the document is available.

6. SCI Projects

- a. **Travel Behavior Factors.** John Poorman reported on the recent Colloquy and briefed the group on the process that was used. The Steering Committee will schedule a conference call within the next week or two and identify next steps. John will be making a presentation on the project at the AMPO meeting in October. Sarah is to develop the project budget status and will report on that during the conference call.
 - b. **Statewide Data.** Steve reported that we will be looking at the NYMTC data plan, the memo from the intern which is near completion, and then decide on next steps. He also mentioned a traffic probe project that uses cell phones to track real time traffic volume and speed data. It was agreed that Dick Mudge, who is involved in this effort, will be invited to make a presentation at a future meeting of the NYSMPOs.
 - c. **CMS Status.** It was reported that the workshop will be held on August 4 in Syracuse which is the day prior to the next NYSMPO meeting.
 - d. **Training.** Sarah reported that the first Safe Routes to Schools training will be held in Rochester on June 20 and 21 and encouraged MPOs to sign up and to encourage other local agencies involved in traffic and safety for schools to attend. We need an MPO host for the various training courses that are planned and Sarah agreed to revisit the best way to manage the administration of the training program with FHWA/NYS DOT.
 - e. **Safety Forum.** The Safety Forum had just concluded and proceedings will be prepared by Cambridge Systematics and circulated to attendees. Sarah will circulate the list of registered attendees to CSI.
 - f. **Freight Data Made Easy.** It was announced that a course on freight data will be held on July 15 and sponsored by FHWA. For information contact the FHWA Division Office.
 - g. **Operations and Staffing Survey.** Jon Makler and Don Camph have the lead on this project and will have draft products ready in the near future.
7. **ITE/NYSMPO Annual Conference.** Sarah and Rich Perrin are going to collaborate on developing 2 or 3 sessions that are geared to planning issues. Jay suggested a session on the recent Safety Forum and he volunteered to work on that session.

8. **Statewide Coordination Update.** It was agreed that at the next in person meeting of the MPOs, a discussion would be held on how to increase coordination within the MPOs and how best to staff coordination efforts. Sarah agreed to develop some options on how this might be best carried out.
9. **Air Quality Working Group Update.** Sarah reported that there was no conference call in May or June but that in July there would be a call to discuss next steps on interagency consultation and other issues of interest to the MPOs.
10. **NYS Public Transportation Conference.** Sarah agreed to email the group the dates for the November Conference. She is going to be working with the NYSPTA to develop a half-day of sessions on planning-related issues that would interest both the MPOs and the transit operators.
11. **Next Meeting Date.** The next meeting will be held in Syracuse on Friday, August 5. Also on July 8 at 1 pm, there will be a conference call scheduled for the NYSMPOs.

**New York State MPOs
Teleconference Minutes
July 8, 2005**

Participants

Jon Makler	Sarah Siwek
Rob Griffith	Harry Miller
John Czamanske	Fernando de Aragon
Mary Rowlands	Jay Schissell
Bill Tobin	Dave Kimmel
John Poorman	Don Camph
Kealy Salomon	Michelle Badger
Tom Kearney	Larry Mcauliffe
Hal Morse	

1. Meeting Summary

2. CMS Draft Task #1 Report

Jon (Makler) reported that the draft report for task 1 of the CMS shared cost initiative has been submitted by the consultant (ICF). The report has already been reviewed by members of the study advisory committee. Jon requested feedback from each director so that the statewide forum (**which has been postponed from August 4 to September 16**) can be tailored to areas of interest. Several directors commented that the report held appeal for every kind of MPO, whether or not CMS was relevant. It was noted that there don't appear to be any references to the Texas Transportation Institute's report on CMS. **The deadline for providing feedback is July 22.**

3. CMS Workshop

As noted above, the CMS workshop, original scheduled for Thursday, August 4th, has now been rescheduled for Friday, September 16th.

4. NYPTA Meeting Sessions

Sarah reported that the initial agenda for this conference appeared to segregate MPOs from transit agencies in concurrent sessions, which is counter to the reason for MPOs to be involved. MPO-relevant sessions are being concentrated on one day (Thursday, November 17th). The theme of apparent mutual interest is the use of GIS in transit planning. Several MPOs (SMTC, PDCTC, CDTC) identified themselves as doing work in this area while others (ECTC) suggested there could be a useful link to asset management as a subtopic. Another possible topic was raised: Title VI reporting, based on experiences of some MPOs doing this work for their transit partner. There was some concern about a schedule conflict with the mid-Hudson offering of the safe routes to school course. There was also a question about whether a one-day discount would be available.

5. PL Allocations

There was a discussion concerning the fiscal outlook, particularly for the smallest MPOs in the state. ECTC, ITCTC and UCTC all shared concerns about the consequences of stable or declining funding levels in light of increasing burdens. The absence of new federal transportation legislation compounds this concern. Some discussion followed about possible courses of action, including re-negotiating allocation formulas and recent changes in FHWA/FTA rules about certain types of expenses and certain methods of providing matching resources. Action: Jon will follow-up with Tom Kearney about recent changes in federal rules.

6. Training Status

Sarah mentioned that GTC has agreed to amend its UPWP in order to host the general-purposes training SCI budget. There is some concern about low registration numbers for the upcoming regional emissions course. Asked if the course could have benefit for conducting the energy plan analysis, regardless of air quality status, Sarah suggested that it might and that (Action:) she would look more carefully at the agenda/curriculum and then advise.

7. NYS ITE Meeting Sessions

Sarah pointed out that Rich sent out some session topic ideas. The conference is scheduled for Wednesday, October 5th in Rochester.

8. Staffing/Operations Survey

Jon summarized the work that he and Don have been doing since the interviews were conducted in March. Data from the information request segment of the survey are being compiled. This includes job descriptions, committee structures and composition, salary comparisons and other information derived from the data submitted by each MPO. In the “interesting practices” area, Jon distributed a memo asking each director to write brief descriptions of the areas of interesting practice that were identified during the March interviews. These entries will be compiled into a reference document that will be distributed to all members. **The deadline for submitting entries is Monday, August 1.** There was also dialogue how the study’s findings can help one agency learn about another’s interesting practice; also, if the study’s findings illuminate minimum level of effort that an MPO must invest in any given planning topic.

9. Other Business

Sarah reported that she has been working with Senator Clinton’s office on CMAQ language for the reauthorization but that it is very low and the agenda of critical issues.

10. Upcoming Meetings

August 5: Syracuse (Discussion of Association activity and staffing)

September 6: CMS Forum

October 5: ITE Conference

October 7: Rochester

August 1, 2005

MEMORANDUM

TO: NYSMPO Directors
FROM: Don Camph, Jon Makler
RE: **Synthesis of Statewide Survey Discussion Topics**

Our survey of staffing and operations of the New York State MPOs included a limited number of open-ended discussion questions having to do with: intergovernmental/institutional relations; the NYSMPO Association; and MPO management and operations.

The attached report summarizes those discussions and highlights salient points that emerged. After reviewing the report, directors may want to discuss whether there are follow-up actions that reasonably derive from the observations made therein.

Please note that the report does not reflect our interview with NYMTC Director Joel Ettinger and his staff, which took place today.

NYSMPO Staffing and Organization Review: Synthesis of Statewide Survey Discussion Topics

Introduction

The statewide staffing and operations survey conducted in March consisted of three sections. In the first, we requested “data tidbits” about staff and committee composition. In the second, each director discussed “interesting practices” at each MPO. In the third section, our interviews with NYSMPO directors included open-ended discussion questions dealing with three general topics:

- Intergovernmental/institutional relations, including local level, NYSDOT, and State Legislative and Congressional offices;
- The NYSMPO Association, including content and conduct of meetings, staffing issues, and the SCI Program; and,
- MPO management and operations, including governance, financing of operations, operational responsibilities, and opportunities for shared staffing.

This report summarizes those discussions and highlights salient points that emerged.

Intergovernmental/Institutional Relations

Relationships at the Local Level

Most directors made a distinction between relationships with local elected officials vs. with staff at other local agencies. With respect to staff-to-staff relationships, virtually all directors noted that these are important and generally positive, although some references were made to the MPO not necessarily being “in the loop” on at least some issues. Federal earmarks were cited by several directors as an example, although most said that these had not been a major problem. In order to establish/strengthen relationships, directors noted the importance of “being at the other guy’s table”; i.e., “putting the MPO on their agenda” and participating in processes at other agencies and, in some cases, with the private sector (such as local chambers of commerce). Another important factor noted by several directors was the idea of “finding opportunities to provide value-added” to other agencies. By taking an entrepreneurial approach, albeit in a government context, directors felt that the MPO’s legitimacy can be enhanced, thereby making it more of a “player” in local and regional processes. Some directors noted that not all municipal agencies necessarily have as good understanding of what an MPO is and what it does, and this may be a contributing factor to the MPO not being included as much as it perhaps should be.

All directors cited the importance of relationships with local elected officials, and with only a few exceptions said that these are generally good. Some directors cited rotating membership on policy boards/committees as being important, noting that a lot of local

electeds have been involved in the MPO process at one time or another, thus helping to establish legitimacy for the MPO. Interestingly, other directors (mostly from smaller MPOs) felt that the limited number of players, and thus the lack of need for rotation, was a positive, making it mentally more manageable for all concerned and assuring that all the key players are involved.

One challenge cited by several directors were keeping up with the constant turnover of both elected and staff officials which means having to constantly educate people about the MPO and its processes. Another problem facing at least a few MPOs is figuring how to effectively reach out to some local executives who evidently don't really want to be informed about MPO activities.

Relationships with NYSDOT

Based on our survey, MPO directors have a somewhat paradoxical relationship with NYSDOT that might be termed "locally good but globally in need of improvement." Without exception, MPO directors noted that they have a positive and professional relationship with RPPM and regional staff. In some cases, the long tenure of the RPPM and/or the director was cited as contributing to mutual understanding and a smooth working relationship. Several directors also mentioned the importance of regular meeting with the RPPM to review issues and matters of mutual concern. Keeping communications channels open and active is seen as an important element of good NYSDOT-MPO relations.

Although director-RPPM relationships are viewed as good, that does not mean that disagreements never occur; however, generally ways are found to resolve issues in a professional manner. Directors noted that there is generally little value in trying to go over the RPPM's head to headquarters, and for two reasons: one, as noted, it generally possible to work things out at the regional level; the other is that under the NYSDOT devolved structure, most decision-making authority resides at the Region, with only a small circle of top level NYSDOT executives in Albany having the authority to overrule a decision by an RPPM.

Somewhat paradoxically, although MPO-NYSDOT relations are generally viewed positively, some directors noted that NYSDOT has some institutional capacity limitations that sometimes prevent it from being a full participating partner in the MPO process. The "withering" of the planning function at NYSDOT was cited as an example: "planning doesn't have a priority at NYSDOT, so there are not NYSDOT planners to act as go-between between the MPO and NYSDOT traffic engineers." In other cases, it was noted that the MPO process, given heavy involvement by local elected officials, sometimes creates expectations that NYSDOT is challenged to fulfill. Some directors expressed hope that NYSDOT transformation would help to address these issues; others were less confident.

Finally, the tension between MPOs and NYSDOT with respect to project selection and programming of dollars was noted. While some directors noted an ability to 'work things

out” with the Region, others expressed frustration about lack of local input and real decision-making authority.

A related source of frustration had to do with lack of NYSDOT compliance with Federal regulations requiring a cooperative revenue estimating process involving State DOTs and MPOs. It was noted that this is not currently the process in New York, and this leaves MPOs in a difficult position in terms of being able to plan and program in an informed and timely way. There has apparently been little effort made by NYSDOT to meet this federal requirement.

State Legislative and Congressional Relationships

By and large, directors did not feel that they have particularly strong or frequent interaction with their State or Congressional representatives. At the State level, the way the Legislature works was cited as a one reason, with most members not really having any throw weight on transportation issues. One observation was that there might be more reason to engage with legislators if NYSDOT were more involved in the MPO process. It was also noted that at least some legislators, having previously been local elected officials, have some understanding of the MPO.

At the Congressional level, *earmarks* were most frequently cited as the main reason for interacting with members’ district or Washington offices. Apart from earmarks, no directors felt that there is a particularly compelling reason (from either the MPO’s or the member’s perspective) to have frequent contact. As to earmarks, several directors complained that they have been sometimes blind-sided by an earmark that resulted when a local agency or private sector interest bypassed the MPO and went directly to the member. Other directors noted that earmarks are sometimes a nuisance, but generally a manageable one.

The NYSMPO Association

Content and Conduct of Meetings

Most directors expressed generally positive views about the bi-monthly meeting of MPO directors, although a number of suggestions were made as to possible improvements. On the positive side, directors cited the following:

- Meetings provide a good opportunity to interact with peers, learn what others are doing on issues of common interest.
- Interface with FHWA/FTA and NYSDOT is helpful to understand Federal and statewide issues, and also to “triangulate” on what they may be doing in other parts of the state on issues of common concern.
- Smaller MPOs and newer directors cited the opportunity to learn from the “veterans” and from larger MPOs.

- Agendas are generally substantive providing practical questions and lessons.

While the above points represent widely held views, a number of suggestions for improvement were made, including:

- It would be beneficial to have more opportunity for informal/social interaction amongst the directors as well as with NYSDOT and FHWA/FTA reps.
- There needs to be more thought given as to how much time we spend on various agenda items; sometimes items of marginal interest take up a disproportionate amount of time, leaving insufficient time for more important items.
- Some issues seem to keep coming back; we need to resolve them and move on.
- Sometimes the lack of action items on the agenda make the value-added of the meetings questionable.
- There is a tendency for discussions to be dominated by a few; we needed stronger participation by more directors.
- It might be useful to have more peer exchanges with MPOs in other states (e.g., comparing notes on approaches to LRPs).

Shared Cost Initiatives (SCI)

There was a widespread view that the Shared Cost Initiative (SCI) program is valuable and should be continued and perhaps expanded, although there is a recognition that not every SCI project will have the same relevance for all MPOs. Training courses in particular were cited as being practical and useful. Generally, directors felt that the focus should be on pragmatic questions as opposed to theoretical research. Other comments with respect to improving the SCI program included:

- There should be an explicit consideration of the “valued-added” of a potential SCI project before the Association commits to it. How useful will it be, and to whom?
- We should try to figure a way to get NYSDOT involved in more of the SCI projects, including financial participation. The SCI program should be coordinated with the SPR program so that MPO issues are addressed on a statewide basis.
- Some of the projects have taken too long; we need to keep things moving along. The Steering Committee approach tends to drag things out, doesn’t take the burden off the directors. Perhaps it would be better for the directors to be involved at the front end in writing the problem statement, then let staff manage

the consultants, with the directors more or less out of the picture until it comes time to review the draft products.

- We need to figure out how to minimize the administrative burden on sponsoring MPOs.

NYSMPO Association Staffing

Directors seem generally to be satisfied with the level and quality of staff support. As noted above, management of SCI projects is viewed by many directors as a major staff responsibility, and should be carried out in a way to minimize burden on directors. Directors were generally cognizant of the “ramping up” of staff support in the first six months of 2005, and felt that this has been effective. Another suggestion was that, within limits, staff should be available on an “on-call” basis to individual MPOs to respond to specific questions. One director suggested that there be a full-time staff person located in the State, but this view did not seem to be shared by others.

Management & Operations

MPO Board Membership

Many of the directors mentioned instances of friction related to the addition of new MPO board members. For example, several MPOs dealt with membership issues that were stimulated by the 2000 census, such as the expansion of Binghamton’s boundary into Pennsylvania. In select areas, Indian communities and business groups have approached the MPO about becoming members, although none of these MPOs reported any decision to approve such requests. There are a few instances of MPOs that would like to decrease their board membership, either because of unwieldiness or to phase out inactive parties. In the regions that utilize a rotation system for towns and villages, some directors reported occasional tension with jurisdictions that have felt underrepresented. There are clearly several models for rotating members and each appears to have a unique combination of advantages and disadvantages.

Based on the Operations Plans or Governance Policies submitted by a few MPOs, it seems that some but not all have explicit rules/policies for the addition of new members. It also appears that most MPOs attempt to incorporate certain planning partners on the planning committee or other technical advisory bodies, which report to the voting body of the policy committee.

Operational Responsibilities

Very few New York MPOs are involved in operational activities, based on responses during the survey. There is some experience and some additional interest in organizing ridesharing programs (e.g., ride-matching or guaranteed ride home). Some MPOs said that they were involved in the development of the Regional ITS Architecture, which included some operational dimensions. In a few cases where the host agency relationship

created proximity or overlap with an operating agency, MPO staff were involved with operational areas such as county-run transit. For the majority of MPOs that currently have no operational duties, there was very little indication that such activity would be added.

Shared Staffing

Directors expressed a variety of views on the prospect of shared staffing arrangements within the state. Those who indicated that they might be interested in the concept generally saw in it the possibility of having access to significant expertise in a specific technical area. The notion is that such a resource would be underutilized by any given agency as a full-time employee but would be needed periodically, hence providing the rationale for a sharing arrangement. Examples used included modeling and GIS as well as public information and communications.

In contrast, those skeptical about the notion generally cited the burden of management and oversight and the probability of scheduling conflicts. Many directors shared doubts that a person could sustain enough local comprehension to make his or her specific skills valuable on a short-term basis.

In general, the idea of shared staffing appeals most to the smaller MPOs who have the hardest time sacrificing the breadth of a multi-purposes staff person for the depth of a specialist. On the other side of the coin, there are some agencies who feel that they could benefit from “renting out” members of their staff, although there is a simultaneous concern that the financial benefit would not be worth the managerial headache.

On balance, it would appear that the potential for shared staffing arrangements between MPOs is limited at best. However, several directors referred to experience that they have had with other forms of shared staffing arrangements, most of which involve the “composite staff” approach whereby MPOs “own” a share of professional staff at the host agency or other local organizations. Some of these situations have been effective but others have demonstrated the management/oversight concern: that an individual is ultimately ruled by their most immediate colleagues and other “bosses” suffer at a distance.

In New York, the special case of the Hudson Valley already exists, wherein three individuals who are based at NYSDOT Region 8 in Poughkeepsie provide various support services to UCTC, PDCTC and OCTC. The current arrangements earns these individuals a mixed reaction from their partners at each the three MPOs. Presently, there is significant interest in what role the so-called “NYMTC staff” at Region 8 will play for the newly designated TMA, especially for the completion of the congestion management system (CMS).

ATTACHMENT D

TO: NYSMPOs
FROM: Sarah Siwek
SUBJECT: ITE Meeting Sessions
DATE: August 2, 2005

Rich Perrin has developed the following three ideas that would be of potential interest to planners and engineers/MPO staff for the October ITE meeting.

- 1) Travel demand modeling, Microsimulation, and 3-D modeling – This session might include uses of each for planning, project development, etc.; data requirements
- 2) Safety and Transportation – How to integrate safety into the planning and design processes, opportunities for improved integration; associated data needs
- 3) Trail Planning and Design – key components in the development of trails that people will use for transportation and recreation; standards; funding sources and use (local funds at one end of the spectrum vs. Transportation Enhancements funds at the other end)

We need your input on these ideas and suggestions for panelists at our meeting on August 5.

ATTACHMENT E

TO: NYSMPO Directors
FROM: Jon Makler
DATE: Friday, August 5, 2005
SUBJECT: Shared Cost Initiative Selection Process

In preparation for the next round of shared cost initiatives (SCI), we have made an attempt to prepare a schedule and process for nominating, reviewing, selecting and programming new projects. In part, this is in response to a sentiment expressed by many during the staffing/operations survey conducted in March that there should be a more organized, rigorous approach to developing the SCI program.

Our goal is to have the new crop of SCI's selected, funds identified and hosting agreements agreed to by the December directors' meeting. Our suggestion is that we use the following approach:

1. Ideas (re: nominees) will be submitted by or during the September conference call, tentatively scheduled for Friday, September 2nd.
2. Immediately after the meeting, association staff will distribute the list of nominated SCI project topics, including brief descriptions.
3. Each director will have the opportunity to rank the nominees. Responses will be due one week before the October directors meeting.
4. At the October meeting, the tallies will be shared. The actual selection of SCI projects, achieved through discussion, will be based in part on the rankings but also based on budget considerations.
5. Between the October meeting and the November conference call, association staff will refine the project descriptions, scopes and budgets, reflecting views and issues raised during the October meeting.
6. During the November conference call, each selected SCI will be adopted by an MPO for inclusion in its UPWP.
7. At the December meeting, the SCI program will be finalized.

To get the ball rolling, there are several topics that emerged during the "interesting practices" section of the survey that we feel may be appealing SCI nominees. Food for thought:

- Asset Management
- Freight Planning
- TIP Screening/Selection Strategies
- Liability Constraints on Bicycle Planning

**NYSMPO Air Quality Working Group
July 25, 2005 Teleconference
Minutes**

Present:

GBNRTC (Hal, Doug)
GTC (Rich)
NYSDOT (John M.)
OCTC (Fred, John)
PDCTC (Kealy, Mark)
SMTTC (Jim, Sean)
NYSMPO Staff: Jon Makler, Sarah Siwek

Review of July 2005 Conformity Highlights Newsletter

Of the various items covered in this recent edition of FHWA's newsletter on transportation conformity, there was substantive discussion about a few topics.

- The updated Basic Guide to Transportation Conformity for State and Local Officials is now available online (PDF) or in print. Contact Sarah Siwek if you need assistance getting printed copies.
- The AMPO Air Quality Group is launching a website that should be a useful resource for MPO staff in New York. More information forthcoming.
- Two courses are being offered locally in August. Estimating Regional Mobile Source Emissions will be in Albany August 9-12 and there is still room! PM2.5 Transportation Conformity Workshop will be offered on August 30-31 in Newark, NJ. There was also interest expressed in scheduling the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Course.

Discussion of ICG Process

Concerns about the ICG process were raised during the group's conference call in March but were postponed until the June 15th deadline had passed. In summary, some expressed concerns about having an adequate understanding of what was expected and needed throughout the process. There was broad concern about communication issues, including the dissemination of meeting minutes. There is also quite a bit of interest in identifying best practices or model approaches to meeting individual requirements, whether from experiences within the state or elsewhere around the country. Some MPOs hope to get feedback on what they did well or not well on with respect to their submitted materials.

The group's decision is to have further discussions, beginning with the August 5th directors meeting, when Sarah and Jon will present some ideas for approaching the issue. It seems that an in-person event would be best and would require careful planning to ensure high value outcomes and products. It is important to all that the issue not be approached with a "system is broken" mentality. It seems likely that what follows will be a two-step process for identifying which issues need clarification, which need reconsideration, and subsequently an identification of the areas in which external (i.e., national) experience would be valuable.

ATTACHMENT G

Monday, August 1, 2005

TO: NYSMPO Directors
FROM: Jon Makler, Sarah Siwek
SUBJECT: Air Quality Working Group Activity

During previous NYSMPO meetings and conference calls, there has been some discussion within the air quality working group about the Interagency Consultation Group (ICG) process. Concerns were initially raised during the working group's March conference call but were tabled pending the June 15th conformity deadline that faced many MPOs in the state. The issue was taken up again during a conference call on Monday, July 25th.

There are a variety of concerns held by the MPOs that participated in the conference call and because of the diversity of MPOs in the state, not all concerns are shared universally. Generally speaking, there are some topics about which MPOs seek clarification in order to fully understand their roles and responsibilities. This includes a common desire to have more feedback about the quality of MPOs' submissions during the process. There is common interest in best-practices or templates that each MPO might follow rather than each reinventing the proverbial wheel. Beyond the interest in clarification, there is a sense within the group that certain aspects of the process deserve improvement, based on either local or national best practice.

At the conclusion of the 7/25 conference call, it was agreed that we (Sarah and Jon) would formulate an approach for moving ahead on this issue. Based on our sense of the group, we would like to recommend additional conference calls for the group to articulate the areas in which it seeks clarification. The group would then invite ICG to a special meeting to address these issues. Subsequently, the group would identify areas in which, considering the clarifications, there is still interest in making changes to the process. At that point, there would be a decision point concerning how to identify alternative and best practices in the relevant areas.

One option already under consideration is the FHWA Peer Exchange Program. This program provides Volpe Center staff resources, logistics support, and financial support for bringing guest speakers from other regions for a workshop on a specific issue, such as the one at hand. It is our group's decision that this resource should be reserved until the number of issues has been narrowed down.

The objective is to work collaboratively with MPO, NYSDOT, and ICG staff, as well as federal planning partners (FHWA, FTA, EPA) to develop new approaches to individual parts of the ICG process. The intent, from start to finish, is to work cooperatively and to use communication and the identification of best practices to benefit the existing ICG process.