

PPP Regional Partners Forum 12/8/11

RDG notes on participant feedback

Introductions

Leanne Doran and Matt Pavlosky reviewed the structure of today's meeting and introductions around the room were conducted.

PPP Overview and TIP input

Matt Pavlosky provided a presentation on the current function of the PPPs and the TIP testimony input that was submitted during the STIP STC comment period.

- Lynn Heckman noted that the Allegheny County list in Matt's presentation included only a sample of the projects that Allegheny County submitted written testimony on.
- Joe Szczur added that not all of the projects were listed in the correct counties. Matt Pavlosky responded that we would fix the lists ASAP.

Highway/Bridge TIP

Karen Franks provided a brief presentation on the Draft Highway Bridge TIP.

- Alex Graziani made a point that the tolls collected on the turnpike are distributed equally throughout the state as prescribed in Act 44; however this distribution is unfair for counties (e.g. Westmoreland) that have significant length of Turnpike miles. Alex noted that increases in tolls over the last few years, which disproportionately impacts residents of Westmoreland County versus other areas of the State. Alex suggested that major changes need to occur as to how the state administers tolling and how it spends toll revenue.
- A Panel member questioned what the difference between the Bridge Program and the Bridge Bonding revenue source. Kevin McCullough explained the background of Gov. Rendell's Bridge Bonding Program noting that the temporary funding will expire at the end of 2013.
- Alex Graziani asked if the percentage of Bridge projects has increased over the past 10 years, and correspondingly whether the highway projects are a much lower percentage of the total program than in the past.

Transit TIP

Tom Klevan provided a brief presentation on the Draft Transit TIP.

- David Wohlwill made the point that the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project is not only a Port Authority project, but a collaborative effort that includes over 30 community groups.
- Kevin McCullough asked about the status of the regional Smart Card initiative. Tom Klevan provided a brief status of the project including the implementation and testing with the University of Pittsburgh student IDs.
- Cindy Davis asked if the regional Smart Card Initiative was similar to the fare collection methods employed on the DC metro. Tom noted that many cities including Washington DC have smart card enabled fare collection systems.

Open Discussion

Leanne Doran introduced several questions from an earlier session pertaining to the status of the TFAC (Transportation Funding Advisory Commission) recommendations.

- Kevin McCullough provided the standard review of the status of the TFAC recommendations and addressed the make-up of the committee, status awaiting Governor action, level of MPO input, and legislative activity.
- Chuck DiPietro explained that the TFAC recommendations have made it into some legislation, but that there has been difficulty in moving the legislation forward. Chuck cited the overall weakness in the economy, the debates going on the oil franchise tax, and other legislative issues as reasons the TFAC recommendations have not been taken up in the legislature. Chuck made the point that the recommendations will not move as one piece of legislation, but rather as smaller elements. Chuck passed along the statements that the PA Secretary of Transportation has made regarding the necessity that transit be included in any TFAC recommendations that get adopted. Chuck noted several studies that have been initiated out of the TFAC recommendations including utilizing VMT (a user fee based on Vehicle Miles Travelled) as an alternative to gas tax funding.

Leanne Doran introduced several questions from an earlier session pertaining to additional programs for transportation funding and replacement for the now defunct LUPTAP program.

- Kevin McCullough noted there is no replacement for the LUPTAP funds. The State funds that come to the MPO also include some supplemental funds that MPOs are eligible to apply for. Kevin noted that these supplemental funds are available for the land use studies such as the ones the LUPTAP program conducted. Kevin referenced the Linking Planning and NEPA initiative, which should provide additional information including land use information into the project development process in the planning stage.
- David Wohlwill explained that the planning process for transit projects, including the BRT project, pays a significant amount of attention to land use. David noted that the BRT project has significant potential to benefit development and redevelopment projects.
- Chuck DiPietro noted that SPC is starting a Smart Transportation program that will be similar to the PennDOT PCTI (Pennsylvania Community and Transportation Initiative) program. Chuck is hopeful that having this program in place may position the region to capitalize on some future federal programs.
- Cindy Davis asked if there would be any benefit for counties to meet and lobby their state legislatures. Chuck stated yes, in fact many groups are now lobbying the legislature and the Governor on the TFAC recommendations. Chuck noted that the most effective efforts may be lobbying the Governor because the legislature is looking for his leadership on the TFAC recommendations.

Role of the PPPs & Public Participation Plan

Matt Pavlosky provided a brief presentation on the role of the PPPs.

Sara Walfoort provided a brief presentation on the updates to the SPC public participation plan.

- Kevin McCullough noted that one of the increasing roles for PPPs is the identification of transportation problems and options for solving those problems.

- Cheryl Moon Sirianni stated that it is still important to provide input because there are a lot of partnerships and collaboration to advance aspects of small projects. Cheryl cited a recent right of way acquisition that came about through a partnership. Cheryl urged the Panel members to stay engaged.
- Alex Graziani noted that he feels like the PPPs could play more of a role on the revenue side for example pushing for more tolling. Alex stated that counties could benefit from partnering regionally to advance tolling of state highways.
- Alex noted that it's time for a meaningful discussion of utilizing VMT tax to raise revenue for transportation infrastructure.
- Alex recommended that the PA Turnpike Commission be abolished and merged into PennDOT. Then the state could begin tolling at the state borders on the interstate system. Alex added that the attempt to toll I-80 was very poorly established by shoddy legislation.
- Heather Sage stated that the PPPs and PPP meetings need to have more of a regional scope and viewpoint to them. Within the county sessions there are only narrow project interest and not a larger more collective interest. Heather noted that the PPPs and SPC are too concerned with meeting legal minimum requirements to truly be proactive.
- Several participants noted that if they are to have more of these regional PPP meetings that they need to increase attendance. Many of the PPP members also noted that attendance and participation need to be increased at the PPP and public meetings held in the counties. Several attendees provided ideas to increase attendance.
- Heather Sage noted that the PPP meetings need to get away from solely information sessions to more of a work session atmosphere with real outcomes.
- Kelly Shroads noted that the announcements in the newspaper classifieds are not working and there are more efficient ways to reach people (e.g. E-mail blasts, Facebook, etc.)
- Heather Sage added that there should be a certain minimum level of policies and procedures for the PPPs (e.g. attendance, e-mail, conduit to other stakeholders). Heather added that there is no link from the PPPs to the other SPC committees. She feels that the real work is conducted in the committees and there is no PPP representation on those committees. This would be preferable to just providing comment on the TIP, which is what the PPPs do now. Heather noted that the meetings need to take on more of a strategic planning format.
- Cheryl noted that much of the planning within PennDOT has been more opportunistic than strategic.
- Matt Pavlosky noted that SPC could hold a workshop on improving communication and focus on one or two things to improve on. Everyone concurred that electronic media needs to be the focus of the improved communication. Heather noted that there must be follow-through on the items that get recommended.
- Kelly Shroads noted that the regional meetings are a good idea because they can lead to synergy and the sharing of ideas among the counties in the region.
- Sara Walfoort noted that with the update of the public participation plan perhaps some additional regional meetings could be included as a strategy.