

**REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
JANUARY 11, 2024**

The WILMAPCO Council meeting was held at WILMAPCO, 100 Discovery Boulevard, Suite 800, Newark, DE 19713 and virtually via Zoom.

1. CALL TO ORDER: Mr. John Sisson, Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members present:

John Sisson, representing Delaware Transit Corporation
Tyson Byrne representing Heather Murphy, Maryland Governor's Appointee
David Edgell, Office of State Planning and Delaware Governor's Appointee
Stephen O'Connor, representing Cecil County Executive, Danielle Hornberger
Charuni Patibanda, representing New Castle County Executive, Matthew Meyer
Pam Steinebach, representing DelDOT Secretary of Transportation, Nicole Majeski
Eric Thompson, Mayor of Elsmere, representing New Castle County Municipalities

Members absent:

Timothy Lucas, representing City of Wilmington Mayor, Michael S. Purzycki
Charlestown Commissioner, Cecil County Municipalities.

Guests, Observers:

Mike Kaszyski, PAC Chair
Deanna Murphy, Board of Realtors
Rashad Pinckney, Maryland Department of Transportation
Mahir S., Public
Pamela Salaam, Public
Marilyn Smith, Dover/Kent MPO

Staff members:

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner
Heather Dunigan, Principal Planner
Sharen Elcock, Executive Assistant
Elizabeth Espinal, Administrative Assistant
Dave Gula, Principal Planner
Bill Swiatek, Principal Planner
Jacob Thompson, Senior Planner
Dawn Voss, Outreach Coordinator
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Minutes prepared by Elizabeth Espinal.

3. MINUTES:

ACTION: On motion by Ms. Charuni Patibanda seconded by Mr. Eric Scott Thompson the Council approved the November 9th, 2023, Council Meeting Minutes.

Motion passed.

(01-11-24-01)

4. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

None.

COUNCIL MEMBERS' AND DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

5. Chairperson's Report:

Mr. John Sisson shared two updates. Beginning on February 1st, DART will host a Public Workshop regarding the DART annual changes at the Wilmington Library. Additionally, information on DART post-changes can be found on the DART website. Mr. Sisson encouraged attendees to participate in the workshops or submit comments if they have any concerns.

In another update, DTC received a \$500,000 grant from the Federal Railroad Administration. The grant aims to study passenger rail service from New Castle County to the Newark area, extending down to Berlin and Salisbury, Maryland. Mr. Sisson expressed excitement about the opportunity. The study, which is a three-phase approach, involves revisiting old studies, collecting new demographics and ridership data, updating cost estimates, and meeting requirements set by Michael Clemens regarding climate. This phase is anticipated to take 18 to 24 months. Upon successful completion, the project will potentially progress to the second phase with FRA to further develop the projects. Mr. Sisson highlighted that the first phase will be funded entirely by federal dollars, marking the first such study in about 10 years.

Council Member's Reports:

Ms. Charuni Patibanda shared that at the NCC council meeting last week, discussions revolved around various topics. One significant decision involved the approval of expanding the Village and Hamlet Development options throughout New Castle County, extending beyond the existing areas below the canal. This expansion, exemplified by the town of Whitehall, was passed with the condition that developments must be located within 2 miles of a transit stop. The implementation of these code changes is currently underway, marking an exciting opportunity for development expansion in the county.

Additionally, another ordinance was unanimously passed to address concerns raised by residential communities adjacent to or near large industrial projects, particularly logistics centers. These communities have expressed issues related to increased traffic trips and subsequent impacts such as particulate matter, noise, and lighting disturbances. While the council acknowledges these concerns, they are working to coordinate with DeIDOT to find solutions. However, the growing number of such projects remains a pressing concern for the community.

Mr. Dave Gula inquired whether the Village and Hamlets Ordinance could be applied to existing municipalities that are not formally incorporated, such as Claymont or Marshalton. Ms. Patibanda confirmed that yes, it could. Additionally, it was noted that there are acreage limitations, requiring a minimum of 50 acres. However, adjustments to this requirement may be considered in the future if necessary. This option would be available to unincorporated parcels within New Castle County. Further information was offered, with a willingness to share details with interested parties.

6. Executive Director's Report – Ms. Tigist Zegeye shared the following information:

- On November 8th the 202 Concord Pike Monitoring Committee met.
- On November 17th South Claymont Area Master Plan had their kick-off meeting.
- On November 27th staff attended the Claymont Transportation Center grand opening.

- On the Newark Bicycle Plan Update, on November 28th, City of Newark held a meeting on Diversity and Inclusion Commission where concerns on safety and equity were discussed.
- On December 7th, staff participated in the Delmarva Freight Summit in Dover.
- On December 11th, Kirkwood Highway Transportation Plan held their first Visioning Workshop
- On December 13th the Newport Transportation Study Monitoring Committee held a meeting
- On December 14th staff attended the Council on Transportation in Dover.
- On December 14th, East Elkton Steering Committee held a meeting, the next meeting will be on February 13th.
- On December 21st, the Route 9 Monitoring Committee held a meeting, the next meeting will be on January 18th.
- On January 5th, the Ardens Monitoring Committee held a meeting.
- Staff continues to collaborate with DVRPC on climate pollution reduction grant with the Philadelphia MSA.
- On January 22nd WILMAPCO will send out UPWP Project Submissions letters to Town Official, Managers, and Municipalities accepting applications through February 26th.
- On February 15th, staff will participate in the FRA Long-Distance Study, Northeast Working Group Meeting to be held in Boston.
- The TIP Public Comment Meeting is being delayed until we receive more information on projects from DeIDOT and can present it to Council by next meeting in March.
- In review of the December Financial Report, it is observed that 44% of the budget has been expended.

7. Public Advisory Committee (PAC) Report:

Mr. Mike Kaszyski shared that the PAC convened on December 18th in both in-person and hybrid formats, achieving quorum with six members present in-person. The meeting included a pleasant holiday meal, a traditional annual event. The agenda covered various updates, including reports from the last council meeting, upcoming vision workshops, and monitoring committee meetings. No action items were on the agenda.

During the discussion, two presentations were delivered, focusing on outstanding verifications for East Elkton Circulation and Safety Plan and highlighting key aspects of circulation and basic plans. Specific areas of concern were addressed, such as Muddy Lane Rd. and Delancy Road intersections.

The second presentation, led by Dan and Dave from WILMAPCO, centered on the extensive Kirkwood Highway Corridor study spanning from Newark to Elsmere. Mr. Gula noted a significant turnout of over 100 attendees at the first workshop for the project. Additional discussions revolved around historical developments along the corridor and the need for further action. No other business was discussed and the meeting adjourned.

8. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Report:

Ms. Heather Dunigan shared that the TAC convened on December 21st with no action items on the agenda. However, three presentations were delivered, covering topics such as urban area adjustments by DeIDOT, the East Elkton Traffic Circulation and Safety Study, and the Kirkwood Highway Land Use and Transportation Plan. Additionally, the November 16th meeting was noted for its lack of action items, providing an opportunity for in-depth discussion on 2023 Population Projections, which was the sole agenda item for that session.

ACTION ITEMS:

There were no action items during this meeting.

9. East Elkton Traffic Circulation and Safety Plan.

Mr. Bill Swiatek presented an update on the East Elkton Traffic Circulation Safety Plan. He highlighted that the study originated from two separate UPWP planning requests, one from Cecil County and the other from the Town of Elkton. The study area extends from Delancy Rd. to Bell Hill Rd. and Muddy Lane, covering the corridors of East Elkton.

The steering committee for the study is diverse, comprising representatives from WILMAPCO, MDOT, schools, the town, Amtrak, fire department, state police, East Coast Greenway, and others. The primary goals of the study include understanding existing traffic patterns, exploring potential roadway realignments, addressing land use conflicts near I-95 and MD 279 interchanges, improving road safety, and enhancing walking and cycling connectivity.

The study has progressed through various phases, including the completion of the existing conditions report and the visioning phase, which involved a survey and a public workshop. Currently, consultants are drafting alternatives based on community feedback, with plans for a second public workshop in the spring to gather additional input.

Community engagement efforts have been extensive, including surveys, workshops, direct mailings, and stakeholder outreach. Initial survey results revealed significant concerns about traffic safety, particularly on Delancy Rd., Muddy Lane, and Bell Hill Rd. Key issues identified include traffic volume, speeding, lack of pedestrian and cycling paths, and inadequate lighting.

The study aims to address these concerns and is halfway through its planning process. Consultants are working on potential improvements, which will be presented at the upcoming workshop. The project website, <http://www.wilmapco.org/east-elkton/> serves as a resource for additional information.

10. Kirkwood Highway Land Use and Transportation Plan.

Mr. Dave Gula began his presentation by expressing the purpose of the study was to explore alternative modes of transportation along the corridor spanning 8 miles between Newark and Wilmington, including Elsmere. He emphasized the importance of involving all stakeholders in the planning process to ensure that existing neighborhoods are preserved while enhancing vitality and accommodating potential growth. Mr. Gula outlined the tasks involved in the study, including data collection, market analysis, and stakeholder interviews.

He highlighted the insights gathered from the listening tour, which involved discussions with various stakeholders, including cultural and social institutions, businesses, real estate professionals, and civic organizations. The key issues identified included safety concerns, traffic congestion, public transportation, pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, affordable housing, and land use.

Mr. Gula provided an overview of the first workshop held on December 11th, which attracted approximately 100 participants. He mentioned the provision of Spanish translation services and the presentation of data to inform attendees about the current conditions along the corridor. He discussed the feedback received from attendees, which informed the development of a vision

statement and the initiation of the advisory committee phase. Efforts to engage the youth planning board and the broader community through online platforms were also highlighted.

In conclusion, Mr. Gula emphasized the ongoing nature of the study, encouraging continued participation from stakeholders and the public. He added that this study is an 18-month project, and they are only two months into the coordination, there is more than enough time to have folks chime in on comments in between.

Ms. Charuni Patibanda emphasized the importance of reaching out to Councilman Sheldon personally, as he is the elected official for Kirkwood Hwy. in Newcastle County. She suggested engaging with him to ensure he spreads the word through his newsletter, even if he couldn't attend the meeting.

Mr. Dave Gula acknowledged that Councilman Sheldon has been approached about the advisory committee meeting, though there has been no response yet. He highlighted the presence of Councilman Toole at the workshop and emphasized the importance for in-person meetings to foster meaningful dialogue and engagement, recognizing the challenges of virtual meetings. While recordings will be available for those unable to attend, efforts will be made to facilitate face-to-face interactions for greater participation.

11. 2024 Draft Inter-Regional Report

Mr. Jake Thompson presented an overview of the 2024 Inter-Regional Report. Emphasizing that our transportation system extends beyond county lines, Mr. Thompson noted that the study area includes MPOs and counties within 80 miles of the WILMAPCO region, comprising a total of 28 counties across four states, including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Data for the report was sourced from various entities including the US Census Bureau, FHWA, state DOTs, MPOs, county planning departments, and transit providers.

Projected demographic changes indicate a population growth from 11.5 to 12.6 million by 2050, with Cecil County expected to experience the largest increase and Salem County facing a notable decline. Employment is forecasted to grow by 11%, with Philadelphia being the primary contributor. Mr. Thompson highlighted shifts in urban area delineations based on Census definitions, affecting 26% of the study area.

Regarding traffic trends, Mr. Thompson pointed out an increase in average daily vehicles on I-95 despite a slight decline in recent years, potentially influenced by remote work and traffic patterns between Baltimore and Philadelphia. Looking ahead to 2045, a 52% traffic increase is anticipated, with I-95 expected to see a 73% rise. The COVID-19 pandemic spurred an increase in remote work, yet average commute times remained stable. Notable variations in commute times were observed across different counties. Truck traffic, particularly on I-95, is highlighted as a significant component of regional transportation, with projections indicating a 25% increase by 2045. Mr. Jake Thompson also touched upon domestic trade volumes and transit routes extending beyond county lines.

The presentation concluded with discussions on land use patterns, investment areas, demographic shifts, and transportation projects. Mr. Thompson summarized the report, indicating projections such as significant population and employment growth by 2050, with the population increasing by nearly 10% and employment by 11%. Moreover, a 25% increase in truck traffic and a 52% increase in overall traffic are anticipated if no alterations are made to the transportation system. In addition, he highlighted recommendations including the expansion of

intercounty transit services, continued interagency coordination, and support for dense, walkable land uses.

For further details and access to the Inter-Regional Report and past reports, interested parties can visit www.wilmapco.org/interregional.

Ms. Charuni Patibanda inquired about the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic truck numbers, wondering if there had been an increase or decrease since the pandemic started. Mr. Jake Thompson clarified that the current report focuses on projections for 2045 and suggested referring to past reports for historical data on truck counts.

Mr. John Sisson raised a question about whether increased immigration in the country had influenced the data, particularly in urban areas like Baltimore and Philadelphia. Mr. Dan Blevins explained the challenges of predicting migration patterns due to various factors such as policy changes and economic conditions.

Regarding truck counts, Mr. Blevins noted that they were generally higher post-pandemic compared to pre-pandemic levels. Ms. Patibanda expressed interest in specific statistics on the matter and discussed the need for discussions with DelDOT regarding trip analysis for projects involving trucks and determining thresholds. Mr. Blevins mentioned that truck counts remained relatively stable during COVID-19, with only a slight increase compared to before the pandemic.

Ms. Pam Steinbach remarked that the report holds significant value and expressed keen interest in leveraging the data it contains. She inquired about potential ways to utilize the report. In response, Ms. Tigist Zegeye explained that the report has been compiled since 1999 primarily for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to synchronize land use and transportation efforts. She clarified that the report serves the purpose of data reporting and facilitating information exchange.

12. Newark Bicycle Plan Update

Ms. Heather Dunigan provided an update on the Newark Bicycle Plan, highlighting the collaborative efforts between WILMAPCO, the City of Newark, and Bike Newark. The update involves assembling the same team from the previous plan in 2013, with extensive outreach efforts underway. The plan aims to incorporate significant new planning developments from the past decade into its framework, expanding the analysis to address locally important areas and national priorities in bicycle planning.

Key accomplishments in Newark's bicycle infrastructure over the past decade were outlined, including new pathways, bridges, protected bike lanes, and improvements to roadways. These efforts have been supplemented by initiatives such as bike parking installations, wayfinding signage, and the forthcoming construction of a bicycle-pedestrian bridge over I-95.

External recognition from the League of American Bicyclists commended Newark's progress, elevating its status from Bronze to Silver. However, the city aspires to achieve Gold status, with areas for improvement identified, particularly in equity, accessibility, engineering, and education.

To gather feedback and ensure community engagement, outreach has been conducted with various stakeholders, emphasizing safety, equity, and education. The next steps involve expanding outreach efforts to schools and other community groups to gather input on project priorities, goals, and challenges.

Mr. John Sisson expressed admiration for the progress made in bicycle infrastructure and inquired about data regarding reductions in bike crashes or increases in bike utilization. Ms. Dunigan explained that while Newark boasts high bicycle use for commuting, collecting precise data on bike usage is challenging. She highlighted the need for improved data collection methods, including incorporating bicycle and pedestrian counts into traffic assessments.

Mr. John Sisson also inquired about clarification on ongoing studies such as the Newark to Wilmington and Newark to Newport routes. Ms. Heather Dunigan clarified that these are separate studies, with the Newark to Wilmington study conducted about 10 years ago, while the Newark to Newport route is part of a more recent, comprehensive analysis.

Ms. Charuni Patibanda mentioned an important and relative podcast discussing pedestrian and bicycle accidents due to distracted driving, particularly at night. Mr. John Sisson emphasized the importance of educating both drivers and cyclists about road infrastructure and rules. Ms. Dunigan noted Newark's relatively low bicycle crash fatality rate but acknowledged the need for ongoing education, especially among young cyclists.

The conversation expanded to the need for comprehensive education programs, including incorporating bicycle safety into school curricula and driver education courses. Mr. Dave Gula suggested a multimodal educational course, while Mr. Sisson highlighted DeIDOT's efforts to educate foreign exchange students about road rules. Ms. Patibanda offered to connect the group with the Newark Free Library for further outreach opportunities.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

13. DeIDOT's Administrative Modification Request Letters

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting adjourned at 3:17p.m.

ATTACHMENTS: (0)