

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Webex Virtual Meeting, June 15, 2020

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Tom Fruehstorfer, City of Newark (Chair)
Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
Bill Lower, Committee of 100
Givvel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission
Ken Potts, Delmarva Rail Passenger Association
Kevin Racine, City of Wilmington
Gail Seitz, City of New Castle
Vic Singer, Civic League for New Castle County

Absent:

Mark Blake, GHADA
Kevin Caneco, SNCC
Katherine Caudle, Pike Creek Civic League
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Mario Gangemi, Cecil County Chamber of Commerce
Dick Janney, Southern New Castle County
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Jawann Saunders, Simonds Gardens Civic Association
Barry Shotwell, 7/40 Alliance (Vice Chair)
Dave Tancredi, Milltown-Limestone Civic Alliance
Norman Wehner, Cecil Board of Realtors

Staff Members:

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner
Heather Dunigan, Principal Planner
Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager
Bill Swiatek, Principal Planner
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Guests:

Pam Sherman

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

Tom Fruehstorfer, PAC Chair, called the meeting to order.

1. Approval of the February 24, 2020 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Ken Grant and seconded by Carlos de los Ramos the PAC approved the February 24, 2020 meeting minutes.

2. Public Comment Period:

None.

3. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Tigist Zegeye said the WILMAPCO Council meeting was held on May 7, 2020. Council re-elected John Sisson as chair and Eric Sennstrom as vice-chair for the upcoming fiscal year. The Council also adopted the FY 2021 Work Program and endorsed the New Castle County Bicycle Plan. Presentations were made about the US 202 Master Plan, Traffic Impacts of COVID-19, and Transit Impacts of COVID-19.

Ms. Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- Staff participated in a kickoff meeting for developing Cecil County's 2021-2025 Strategic Highway Safety Plan.
- Staff participated in a New Castle County All-Hazards Mitigation Plan Update Stakeholder Workshop on March 2nd.
- Staff is supporting the planning of the American Planning Association of Delaware's annual meeting that is set for October and will be held virtually.
- Staff is developing articles for the next edition of Delaware's Journal on Public Health regarding the pandemic and the impact it has on planning.
- A \$100,000 grant was awarded from Healthy Communities Delaware for the Route 9 Corridor and Southbridge to support the planning and implementation of the Route 9 Master Plan Monitoring Committee and the South Wilmington Planning Network.
- Air Quality Partnership is working to reschedule Air Quality Awareness Week for the fall. This will take place with Bike to Work Week, September 7th to the 11th.
- Staff continues to work on WILMAPCO's videos and is currently working to schedule interviews and collect aerial and community footage.
- Every Friday in June, a Freight Friday session about freight planning programs is presented by IPA. This is in partnership with the Delmarva Freight Working Group which includes DeIDOT, the Dover/Kent MPO, the Salisbury-Wicomico MPO and WILMAPCO.
- The Governor Printz Project Virtual Management and Advisory Committee Meeting to review draft scenarios was held on June 1st.
- Staff presented the New Castle County Bicycle Plan to the Delaware Bicycle Council on June 3rd.
- The US 202/Concord Pike team is working to finish up draft document.
- Staff is working with the Route 9 Health Subcommittee to develop outreach strategies for the Route 9 Paths Plan.
- A draft of the transportation report for the Southern New Castle County Master Plan is under review and was distributed to the partner agencies, New Castle County and DeIDOT. A final workshop will be held to present the results of the traffic analysis and project recommendations.
- Staff is working on preliminary recommendations for pedestrian and transit improvements for the Newport Transportation Study based on comments received from the advisory committee, stake holders and the public workshop. A Management Committee Meeting is being planned for June 25th.
- The FY 2021 Unified Planning Work Program has been approved by the Federal Highway Administration. We are waiting for Federal Transit Administration

approval. There are five new projects in the FY 2021 UPWP; the Statewide Parking Study, Port of Wilmington Circulation Study, the First and Last Mile Freight Network Development Study, the City of New Castle Transportation Plan Update, and the Union Street Configuration and Streetscape Improvement Study. Staff has been working on requests for proposals, some of which have been released and some will be coming soon. Proposals are due in July, then consultant interviews are tentatively scheduled for late July and early August.

ACTION ITEMS:

4. None

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

5. Traffic Impacts of COVID-19

Mr. Dan Blevins said the impact of COVID-19 on traffic in Delaware continues to evolve. How day-to-day traffic has changed can be measured using various tools such as StreetLight, advanced data collection from our permanent counters, and archived travel time data. This data is important for estimating revenue forecasts from tolls and fuel taxes, timing for traffic studies to see how turning movements have changed and what the new normal will be for future traffic analysis. Mr. Blevins delivered this presentation for a Freight Friday, and participants had many questions about what a “peak hour” looks like now, how strong our supply chain is and what are we learning about it, if the work-at-home trend will continue, and if essential deliveries will become everyday deliveries. Delivery options that were new have become everyday habits. In some sectors there are surveys being taken about delivery trends. For example, people are doing curbside delivery out of necessity now, but a large percentage of people are now saying they will continue using curbside delivery in the future. This response was seen in different demographics. Millennials tend to use these deliveries. Those fifty and over said they are likely to subscribe to a delivery service after the pandemic. Even among those seventy years old and over, 59% said they prefer to shop in store, which means 40% would prefer delivery.

Using StreetLight data, the county-wide total Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) for each county was collected. New Castle County typically has about 19,000,000 VMT per day. The daily VMT declined steeply after the emergency was declared on Friday, March 13th. Easter weekend, April 12th, was the peak low, and VMT has been slowly climbing since then. In looking at weekly percentages, by Easter traffic was at 24% of normal vehicle travel in New Castle County. Even though we are building volume, it is still at 56%, of normal volumes. Cecil County experienced a very similar curve. Traffic in Cecil County was reduced to roughly a third of normal traffic, but has rebounded more quickly, increasing to about 75% of normal volumes by Memorial Day weekend. One factor in this increase is that the weather is nicer. Traffic volumes on Fridays are approaching normal. In rural areas volumes have increased more quickly. Sussex County looks very similar to Cecil County in this respect. In New Castle County as a whole, there are bigger job centers and retail centers, which are largely still shuttered, so many peak hour shifts have not increased as quickly.

Measuring travel time was of particular interest to the freight community to see the reliability in how quickly you can move from one place to another. A year over year comparison of 2019 and 2020 was compiled, focusing on weekday peak periods, 7-9 a.m. and 4-6 p.m. on specific roads throughout the region. I-95 from the Maryland line to the Pennsylvania line typically took about twenty-nine minutes for the twenty-two-mile distance. Weekdays travel times were down three to five minutes in the AM and six to eight minutes in the PM. US 202 shows a similar pattern, but the rebound has been slower. The PM peak travel time is three or four fewer minutes. Kirkwood Highway is another arterial that shows much the same thing, it has not seen that v-shaped recovery. The travel time to Newark from Wilmington is eight or nine minutes shorter than it was. This is affected by signal timing as drivers are not waiting through many cycles now.

We will continue to plot this data as it comes in, focusing on those hourly peak period changes, particularly with DeIDOT's TMC, because they have the loop data changes. In the end, questions remain about whether people will go back to mass transit due to the closed quarters and close proximity. Does the need for capital projects change if the peak periods change? US 40 at Scotland Drive shows that change at peak periods is more significant than off-peak periods.

6. Transit Impacts of COVID-19

Mr. Bill Swiatek presented the bus access and connectivity analysis as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the connectivity in vulnerable populations. There has been debate regarding public transportation. On the one side, public transportation has been called a channel for the spread of virus. The CDC came out with recommendations that employers should encourage employees not to use public transit. This triggered a response from a number of public agencies that public transit is an essential form of transportation for many Americans, and it has not been shown to be a channel for spread of the virus in studies where contact tracing was done. There is a balance that public transit agencies have to maintain, and it is not the first time. One hundred years ago at the last major pandemic, transit agencies were doing the same thing as today with trying to keep buses sanitized and keep the buses less crowded to make customers more comfortable with riding the bus and reduce the spread.

DART implemented pandemic-related measures, some of which are still in place. At the height of the pandemic, the daily runs were reduced. In April, DART was operating at about 38% of normal service. For fixed routes, it was basically a modified Saturday service. At first fares were cashless, then it was free to ride. Today, pay service is used, but cash is discouraged, so fares are discounted if customers do not use cash. DART has increased its normal operations since June 1st. Still in place are physical distancing requirements as well as face coverings on the bus. Early on, it was difficult to maintain physical distancing while still letting everyone at the stops onto the bus, so along the popular routes extra "timing" buses were in use to help with physical distancing. Then, different restrictions for riders were put in place such as riders who have been out of state were asked not to ride the bus prior to June 1st, and people who have potentially been exposed to the virus are asked not to ride the bus. Cecil Transit also reduced service, but is getting back to normal. It has been near capacity since June 8th, but during the pandemic there was no Elkton to Newark nor Commuter Connection lines. The Glasgow Connection was demand response only, so customers had to call to use that line. No Saturday service is still in place as it has been throughout the pandemic. Face covers are required and riders that had potentially been exposed to the virus were banned prior to June 8th. Cecil

Transit is really now focusing on some of the physical distancing requirements on their buses.

During the pandemic, many people stayed at home and the transit agencies cut their service. As a result, transit ridership was down about 70% across the region. In New Castle County, ridership was about 500,000 rides per month before the pandemic, 163,000 in April and began to increase in May to 182,000. In Cecil County the numbers continue to decline. There were 5,500 rides per month before the lock down and 1,500 rides in May.

To determine the coverage to vulnerable groups, food deserts, which are low-income areas located too far from supermarkets, were evaluated for the frequency and access of buses to supermarkets. Areas of Social Determinates of Health Concern, which are areas that public health departments consider of concern because of underlying demographics were also evaluated for the access and frequency of the bus network there. This is important because the lockdown affected low-income populations differently than higher-income populations. Cell phone data from a firm called Cuebiq shows the percentage of people that sheltered in place. The data shows that prior to the lockdown higher-income populations were more mobile than the lower-income populations, but as the lockdown took effect, higher-income populations were better able to shelter in place. The percentage of people who were staying close to home increased for everyone, but perhaps because higher-income populations had jobs where they could stay at home, more did so. So low-income populations were more likely to be out during the lockdown.

In terms of food deserts, the methodology used is based on USDA criteria, but also looks at a tighter geography than the U.S. Department of Agriculture in defining these places. Basically, a lower-income residential area that is more than a mile away from a supermarket was considered a food desert. In New Castle County, it was found that 80% of households in food deserts are within walking distance to a bus with direct access to a supermarket. There are a few areas, primarily in the suburbs, where people live outside of that threshold. Good frequency was defined as a bus that ran every thirty minutes. It was found that about 65% of households in food deserts had both accessibility and good frequency bus service to supermarkets. In Cecil County, one food desert was identified just to the west of Elkton. It is a very low-density area just south of Route 40 and most of the households there were far from the bus stops on US 40, so a majority of the people do not have walking access to those stops. Murray Manor is a trailer park along Kirkwood Highway, where the Route 6 bus operates. The people who live in the back of that trailer park have to walk about a mile to get to the bus stops on Kirkwood Highway. Certainly, an able-bodied person may be able to walk the distance, but somebody who is carrying grocery bags or has trouble walking may find it too difficult.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) are conditions that people are born into and raised in that have a negative impact on their health. WILMAPCO put together an index working with the Route 9 Master Plan and expanded it to the regional level in order to look at some of these areas that have been identified by public health professionals as having SDOH issues. It looks at poverty, education, the segregation of minorities, employment rate and so forth to identify these areas. With this transit analysis these areas of concern were evaluated related to total bus service to see if residents can walk to any bus services, not just food access. It was found 91% of households in local areas of SDOH concerns were within walking distance to some type of bus service. There were some issues in the suburbs of Wilmington particularly in the back of some subdivisions along Kirkwood

Highway, Route 9, and US 13. It was found 86% of households in areas of SDOH concern have both access and adequate frequency. One exception is the Route 55 bus, along Old Baltimore Pike, which has service every hour, rather than every thirty minutes. In Cecil County, 30% of households in areas of SDOH concern were in walking distance of the Cross-County bus service that was operating during the pandemic, but the addition of the Glasgow bus service, which was operating on-demand service, raises that percentage to 78% of these households.

During the pandemic, WILMAPCO provided these updates to both Cecil Transit and DART for consideration with routing adjustments. Staff continues to look at ways this type of analysis can be used to follow up on some of the recommendations in our Transportation Justice Plan, which asked us to look at connections by bus from vulnerable areas to key destinations like supermarkets and employment.

7. Nonmotorized COVID-19 Impacts

Ms. Heather Dunigan presented the impacts on biking and walking during the pandemic. Unlike transit and driving, there was a surge in biking and walking during the pandemic. Walking and biking are not only safe forms of transportation where physical distancing is possible, but as the gyms are closed, they are a form of physical fitness and as activities are closed, they are a form of recreation. As people are telecommuting, without their commute to work people have more time for walking and biking.

Issues of transportation during times of pandemic are not new. During the flu of the 1918-1920 time period, biking was seen as way to keep healthy and have transportation in an open-air atmosphere and it still is. Local communities and government agencies have been encouraging people to go biking and walking to keep our immune systems healthy, give people a break from the monotony of staying home, and keep people's spirits up though with the reminders to do it safely by keeping physical distance while in the facilities. Driving was down, but it is increasing again. Transit ridership is down as well. People feel unsafe riding transit as there is anecdotal evidence from transit systems that a number of their drivers have contracted COVID-19 and tragically some deaths of drivers from exposure. Being enclosed in a vehicle with a group of people may not be an ideal form of transportation.

Food deserts are largely accessible with a combination of walking and transit, which is important for equitable access. While many people have been enjoying getting food delivered or using curbside pickup, these are luxuries. Not everybody has a vehicle with which to use curbside pickup, and people are paying a premium for delivery service, so having walking or biking access to essential jobs and services is really critical to insure there is safe transportation during the pandemic. Park and Ride use is down except at the two at parks, where you see use dramatically increased during the month of April.

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) has put together a guide on how communities can insure safer transportation during the pandemic. Some strategies include maintaining transportation systems for essential workers and essential goods, which includes providing pop-up bike lanes, keeping bike shops open as essential services, converting signals to avoid pushing buttons, and adjusting signal timing because as traffic volumes drop you see an increase in people speeding. Also, providing clear messaging so users of different transportation know what to expect is recommended. Crowds of people on sidewalks as they are waiting to go into stores or to pick up food

have been observed, so crowding on sidewalks needs to be addressed. Crowded area on trails and in urban commercial areas need to be relieved to support physical distancing. Bike shops were considered essential businesses with some restrictions in both Delaware and Maryland when things shut down. Nationwide there was a surge in bike sales. Many of the big box stores are completely sold out of bikes. Bike shops are sold out of the more affordable bikes. Urban Bike Project distributed 209 bikes in the month of May alone. Newark Bike Project saw a 70% increase in sales in 2020 over 2019 in the months of March to May. Automatic push buttons are being installed at intersections. The City of Newark asked DelDOT to convert signals, so pedestrians do not have to push a button to request the signal to change. Automated signaling is important because people should not be touching high-touch surfaces. This should be accompanied by signage to let people know they do not have to push the button.

Creating clear messages to let people know how to use the facilities is also important. There are a variety of ways to let people know to wear a mask out on the trail. The City of Newark made one of their trails one way so people would not come across people traveling in the opposite direction, which reduces interaction with people on the trail. Battery Park in New Castle and the trails on the VA facilities near Perryville are open to residents only. Some communities outside of our region have added new bike lanes and closed streets to non-local traffic to create space for people to walk and bike within neighborhoods. In the City of Wilmington, some community groups put together a proposal to close some streets on the weekends, but this is on hold right now due to lack of resources. If COVID surges in the fall, this might be a plan that is worth pursuing. Other strategies are relieving crowding in our downtown areas, and the City of Newark is exploring outdoor dining by closing down the street on weekends. The City of Wilmington is expanding curbside access to restaurants and shops and expanding outdoor seating for restaurants by closing down the 800 block of Market Street occasionally for outside dining.

A nationwide study shows that of Americans who own a bike 21% are riding them more since COVID-19. Looking at Delaware State Parks, trail use at is considerably up with the exception of a couple of locations in the City of Newark that normally host large races, which may account for why usage is down in those locations. Ms. Dunigan has found that our trail data is not as reliable as our transit and roadway data. There are issues where batteries are out on trail counters, and some of the counters have stopped working because they were invaded by bees or ants or other environmental issues. Trail data is lacking, but what is reported indicate dramatic increases. On the Jack Markell Trail at the bridge you see dramatic increases in counts from 2019 to 2020. On May 2nd, the bridge across the Christina River on the Markell Trail saw more than two thousand people in one day. We do not know for sure what is next, but physical distancing will probably continue for a while. Motor vehicle use is slowly increasing again. Communities around the country as they open up, want to keep these safe places to walk and bike. A number of these communities that have had these closed streets for healthy transportation have opted to keep them closed because they have enjoyed them. There is the question of whether people will continue walking and biking as much as they have in the last three months. People may have learned to enjoy it and people have learned to enjoy telecommuting, which means they will have more time for recreation in the future as well.

Mr. Ken Grant said all three of these presentations have been interesting. This is fascinating data and he was wondering, in addition to having this information on the website, if there is any plan to put out a press release to get this information out to the public. He suggested that a lot of this information is being seen anecdotally, but to have it

qualified in the way it has been in these presentations is interesting and the public would appreciate seeing the numbers and seeing that this is happening throughout the region. Ms. Dunigan agreed with the idea and said the staff can create something to be released. Everyone is looking for some happy news and seeing improved congestion, more people out biking and walking, and better air quality are happy stories.

8. Other Business

9. Adjournment

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Ken Potts and seconded by Ken Grant the PAC adjourned.

Motion passed

(06-15-20-02)

Attachments: (0)