

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Zoom Virtual Meeting, December 14, 2020

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

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

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Mark Blake, GHADA
Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Tom Fruehstorfer, City of Newark (Chair)
Mike Kaszyski, Delaware State Chamber of Commerce
Bill Lower, Committee of 100
Ken Potts, Delmarva Rail Passenger Association
Gail Seitz, City of New Castle
Barry Shotwell, 7/40 Alliance (Vice Chair)
Vic Singer, Civic League for New Castle County

Absent:

Kevin Caneco, SNCC
Katherine Caudle, Pike Creek Civic League
Patricia Folk, Cecil County
Mario Gangemi, Cecil County Chamber of Commerce
Ken Grant, AAA Mid-Atlantic
Dick Janney, Southern New Castle County
Givvel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
Kevin Racine, City of Wilmington
Jawann Saunders, Simonds Gardens Civic Association
Dave Tancredi, Milltown-Limestone Civic Alliance
Norman Wehner, Cecil Board of Realtors

Staff Members:

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner
Dave Gula, Principal Planner
Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager
Jake Thompson, Transportation Planner
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

2. Approval of the October 19, 2020 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Carlos de los Ramos and seconded by Mr. Ken Potts the PAC approved the October 19, 2020 meeting minutes.

Motion passed

(12-14-20-01)

3. Public Comment Period:

None.

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Tigist Zegeye said the WILMAPCO Council meeting was held on November 12th.

Ms. Tigist Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- WILMAPCO is continuing to support the Healthy Communities Delaware grant projects along Route 9 and in Southbridge. Both studies have selected consultants and are moving forward.
- Staff presented on the Route 9 Master Plan and implementation efforts at a UD Sociology course on the Environment and Health on November 9th.
- Staff participated in the NCC@2050 Workshop Series on November 9th.
- Staff attend the I-95 Project public meeting on November 12th.
- Staff participated and presented at the 2020 Northern Transportation Air Quality Summit on November 17th.
- Staff attended DART's virtual hearing on November 18th.
- The Newport Transportation Plan Advisory Committee met on November 30th to review recommendations and estimated costs. A final virtual workshop will be held on December 16th.
- The Churchman's Crossing Study Advisory Committee met on December 2nd.
- Staff met with West Side Grows on December 3rd to discuss new Safe Routes to School.
- The rail connection to Delaware was a subject of discussion at the Maryland Statewide Transit Plan Roundtable. The Eastern Region Roundtable was held on September 18th and again on December 7th. More discussion is expected at the Maryland State Rail Plan Advisory Committee meeting on December 16th.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan Steering Committee meeting was held on December 9th.
- Staff conducted outreach for the Route 9 Paths Plan at a William Penn High School AP Geography class on December 10th.
- Staff continues to collect survey responses for the Route 9 Paths Plan. We are partnering with the Colonial School District to engage students on the corridor and plan to collect a sample response from each neighborhood via a local community liaison.
- The draft Governor Printz Boulevard Corridor Study report is online for public comment through January 7th.
- Staff will present the City of New Castle Transportation Plan to town council on January 12th.
- Staff will be presenting on the intersection of health and planning at the Mid-Atlantic Public Health Partnership Conference in mid-January.
- New Castle County Transportation Alternatives Program applications will be accepted through January 15, 2021.
- The project team for the Union Street Reconfiguration is planning to have their first Advisory Committee meeting in early January, and a public workshop at the end of the month.

ACTION ITEMS:

5. PAC Chair Nominating Committee Appointment

Mr. Tom Fruehstrofer, Mr. Carlos de los Ramos, and Mr. Mike Kaszyski volunteered to be on the committee.

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Barry Shotwell the PAC approved the PAC Chair Nominating Committee appointments.

Motion passed

(12-14-20-02)

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

6. Route 9 Paths Plan

Mr. Jake Thompson said this plan proposes a network of walking and biking paths in the Route 9 corridor. The Paths Plan expands and refines recommendations from the Route 9 Corridor Master Plan and develops new recommendations for a network of paths in and around the corridor. A map was created of bicycle and pedestrian recommendations from recent plans in the corridor. Background data was collected including demographics; transportation facilities; and socioeconomic and health factors. That background data was used to prioritize all the road segments in the study area to determine which parts of the corridor would benefit from these types of recommendations. The team is currently working on public outreach through an online survey. A paper version of that survey is also being distributed to make sure all neighborhoods and demographics are included.

A map of bicycle and pedestrian recommendations from recent plans will be updated as the plan progresses, and the final version will propose a network of neighborhood paths for the Route 9 corridor. A prioritization of road segments was completed. The higher-scored areas are in the center of the study area around Dunleith, Oakmont, and Rosegate so these neighborhoods would benefit the most from these types of improvements, though all neighborhoods would benefit.

One of the criteria for prioritization is Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress (LTS), which is an analysis that measures the level of traffic stress people experience while biking on each road based on traffic and infrastructure conditions. The scores range from 1 being the least stressful to 4 being the most stressful. A Level of Traffic Stress 1 road is often a trail and is generally safe for everyone to use. An LTS 4 road is a high-speed, high-volume traffic road that is only tolerated by fearless riders. Most of the streets in the area have a low LTS Bike score as they are residential streets. Many of these neighborhoods are surrounded by higher stress roads, which limits how far people can comfortably walk or bike for transportation. This leads to low-stress biking islands which are comfortable for everyone to walk or bike but are divided by higher-stress roads. The goal of the Paths Plan is to connect as many of these islands as possible, reducing the total number of islands, and making it possible for more people to walk and bike for transportation outside of their neighborhoods.

The team is currently working on public outreach. Information is being distributed on the website, wilmapco.org/route9pathsplan. The plan is being promoted through Facebook ads, the WILMAPCO newsletter, and Colonial Clippings, which is the school district's newsletter. On the website there is an online public survey which offers a drawing for a \$25 Visa gift card to encourage participation. Also on the website is an overview presentation in lieu of a public workshop. There was a class session with an AP Human

Geography class at William Penn High School. These students have coursework with GIS and civic engagement, so this was an opportunity for them to see some GIS in the real world and learn about planning. Students took the survey and helped distribute it to other students in the school. The survey asked questions about how often people bike for transportation in the Route 9 area, if people would walk or bike more often if there were more car-free pathways between neighborhoods, what destinations would respondents want to access via walking or bicycling if there was a safe and convenient route to get there, and which neighborhood respondents live in.

Mr. Vic Singer asked where cost enters into the discussion. Mr. Thompson replied that costs enter the discussion later in the planning process when the recommendations are finalized. Mr. Singer asked if the State Senators and Representatives will be asked what proportion of their local traffic budgets, they would devote to improving the circumstances for bicycles. Ms. Zegeye said all the projects WILMAPCO puts together go through funding resources via the TIP, the Transportation Alternatives, or elected officials, so eventually it is the community who will be reaching out to elected officials for funding. The project team intends to look at how all funding resources can be utilized, including funding from elected officials.

Mr. Fruehstorfer asked how the number of responses compare to non-COVID times. Mr. Thompson replied that it has been lower. It has been a struggle to find ways to reach out to people remotely. The team cannot meet with people at grocery stores or community centers or post the survey on bulletin boards. Many people in this area do not have internet access, so it is helpful to have someone go door to door. The quota is at least five responses per neighborhood, with more than twenty neighborhoods in this area.

7. Churchman's Crossing Plan

Mr. Dave Gula said the Churchman's Crossing Plan update began in September. WILMAPCO is working with DelDOT and the New Castle County Department of Land Use. This plan is building off of a 1997 plan. Since then, there have been changes to the Unified Development Code (UDC) to balance transportation and development as well as put some guiding principles into place. To illustrate the growth in the area, in 1997, there were 3.7 million square feet of non-residential development planned, and in 2019 there was also 3.7 million square feet of non-residential development planned. Twenty-five of the sixty-one projects that were recommended were completed including interchange and intersection improvements; a new SEPTA station; bus service improvements; and new sidewalks and bicycle lanes.

This study will be guided by the three goals for the original study, which were enhance quality of life, plan for sustainable growth, and provide transportation choices. This project will also determine if the unfinished projects from the first plan are viable, if there are new projects and technology to achieve these goals, if new land use tools and policies can help achieve these goals, and if the vision for the area has changed.

Over the summer there was a listening tour. The stakeholders interviewed included elected officials, community groups, the business community, larger institutions, environmental advocates, bike advocates, and emergency services. Topics stakeholders identified as important include retaining businesses and institutions while supporting job growth; limiting sprawl and preserving open space; prioritize transportation safety, reduce congestion, and provide alternate routes; control flooding and focus on clean

waterways; create bike and pedestrian connections to MARC and SEPTA. The first workshop was an information session on September 16th with one hundred and thirteen attendees. Live polling during the workshop and feedback during the Q&A showed that people find jobs, flexibility, greenery, and transit opportunities valuable. People want to see mixed-use development, better traffic flow, interconnectivity, green space, and clean water in the future. The first Advisory Committee meeting was on December 2nd. Forty stakeholders were invited and twenty-nine attended. There was also a briefing at the New Castle County Chamber of Commerce Economic Development Committee meeting on November 18th.

As the Plan moves forward, the three “Ds” of land use, density, diversity, and design will be considered. Increasing the number of people living in the area could influence vehicle miles of travel, affordability, and land value. Single-use development leads to peaks in travel demand as people arrive in the morning and leave in the evening. Mixed-use development may have slightly more traffic all day, but less extreme traffic during the peaks. The team will use the EPA’s MXD (mixed use development) trip generation tool to test the changes in trip generation with variations in single-use and mixed-use development. Traffic operations in the area show congestion in the morning and afternoon peaks. A time lapse map is available on the project website.

The SEPTA station and the Christiana Mall are high-usage areas for the transit system. A multimodal inventory will evaluate if people can walk to the bus stops. The team also looks at the transit ridership, and the highest usage is around the Christiana Mall, because that is a major Park & Ride so many buses leave there to go into Wilmington. There is also high usage at Delaware Park and the Fariplay Train Station.

Bicycle Level of Traffic Stress is a DelDOT analysis tool to rate roads not only according to traffic, but also based on how confident the rider is. The analysis identifies islands where cyclists have a comfortable ride but would need to traverse a higher level of stress roadway to get outside of their area. A multimodal network would help people who want to bike to work or to a trail outside of their neighborhood.

A sensitivity analysis evaluates the transportation needs versus future growth at varying levels. The team will look at projects that are already programmed, uncompleted projects from the 1997 Plan, and some new ideas to see how they affect traffic currently and in the future. The project team will apply comments from the listening tour and first workshop as well as the data analysis of current conditions to work on land use and transportation scenarios. Once the scenario planning is done, they will go back to the Advisory Committee, then to the public with the results of the modeling.

Mr. Ken Potts said he understands that at Delaware Park and the Churchman’s Crossing Rail Station, DelDOT and the developer are going to construct a parking garage with a minimum of 250-300 spaces and the developer is going to open a retail center. He thinks that should be discouraged because there is enough retail in this area. Apartments, condos, and residences are needed. The station opened in 2000 anticipating that it would be a reverse commute area. JP Morgan Chase has used it as a reverse commute station. They employed buses for a while and now use DART for service at Churchman’s. If workers are encouraged to get to their jobs by other means than their POVs there would be progress for this area with congestion. In the study the build out of the Churchman’s Rail Station should be encouraged. Mr. Gula agreed if more people used the station to commute, the vehicle miles traveled, and congestion would be better.

Mr. Singer asked if TIDs in general are used as the basis for a district where a surcharge tax will be imposed to pay for transportation improvements. Mr. Gula replied it would be a fund that developers pay into with their projects to supplement public funds to build transportation projects that are necessary to accommodate growth. Mr. Mike Kaszyski said that he was involved in projects in the Southern New Castle County TID and the developers have agreements with DeIDOT to pay a fee per unit for different types of residential units, commercial square footage, etc. They are also responsible for improving the roads to DeIDOT's classifications along their own road frontage. It works well in southern New Castle County. Mr. Gula said after this study, a TID may be considered. That is a public process with DeIDOT and New Castle County. Mr. Blevins added that it needs to be determined if many of the projects in the old plan are still viable. Then, the implementation strategy can be the TID if all parties agree.

Mr. Kaszyski asked if the Churchman's Connector and the Road A Extension, have been discussed. Mr. Gula said yes, and a map on the website illustrates ideas from the original plan that were not completed. Mr. Blevins added that there are connections on the map that represent some of the things that were not done and some additional ideas that have come out since then. Mr. Kaszyski said that he just recorded the Cavalier's Country Club Plan, and they are building the first three-quarters of a mile of that stretch. Mr. Gula said the team is looking for ideas from the Advisory Committee, public, and the development interests to test them and see what the impact is going to be.

Mr. Shotwell commented that clean water and flooding were grouped together in the presentation, but they are totally different issues. It floods a lot during heavy rains and with talk of more building, he would like to know what is being done to mitigate that. Mr. Gula explained that flooding and clean water both fell under the heading of environmental issues, but they are not otherwise connected. There are problems with both of them currently. The area is the Christina River flood plain. Mr. Shotwell said it is the White Clay Creek as well. Mr. Fruehstorfer said that for any new development, state stormwater regulations require that water going off the site post development will be less than water going off the site pre-development, so anything new being constructed should improve the situation. Mr. Shotwell said over the past twenty years it has gotten worse. Mr. Fruehstorfer replied that the state regulations are new, so things have gotten worse in the last twenty years, but when new stuff is developed there are stormwater ponds and underground detention areas to hold that water.

Mr. Kaszyski asked if there is are going to be regular updates to this plan. Mr. Blevins said there was a monitoring committee until 2004 that mainly monitored intersection updates with traffic counts, intersection level of service, and some updates. On the website there is a current condition report that bridges the gap between 2004 and 2019 for transportation conditions and the status of projects. The idea is to do something similar to Route 40, where a little funding is available to do updates annually or every couple of years to see where projects stand and keep the community involved.

8. 5-Point Intersection Safety Improvement Study

Mr. Dave Gula said the Safety & Capacity Improvement Study for 5-Point Intersection or the Maryland/Monroe/MLK Study area involves a five-point intersection at Martin Luther King Boulevard, Maryland Avenue and South Madison Street. Congestion on Martin Luther King Boulevard backs up past Jackson Street. There are backups on Maryland Avenue and the ramp from I-95. This is a safety issue at times. The project team met

with stakeholders in May of 2019 and developed some criteria to guide the study. The project team put together a criteria matrix with four alternatives, but none of the alternatives were perfect.

With Alternative A, Monroe Street is made two-way and the fifth leg is removed at South Madison and Martin Luther King. Chestnut Street is extended. A street runs between Maryland Avenue and South Madison. One of the biggest changes is inbound to the city on Maryland Avenue, when vehicles reach Adams Street and the I-95 ramp, motorists are going to be forced to make a left turn onto Adams Street then turn right onto Martin Luther King Boulevard. The challenge for this option is Monroe Street is key to bus operations and two-way traffic may impede bus operations.

Alternative B leaves the five-point intersection intact. A little more traffic is added to Monroe. Chestnut Street is extended. The major change is all traffic coming in on Maryland Avenue is moved to Adams Street so the amount of traffic coming into the five-point intersection is reduced. Madison Street would be one-way southbound, but the five-point intersection is still there, and the same problems may remain in the future.

All alternatives show a multiuse path along the Amtrak Northeast corridor that connects Beech Street to the area. Bicycling experts said a shared-use path from Beech Street would allow people to avoid going through the heavy traffic in the area.

Alternative C changes Maryland Avenue to two-way traffic and removes Monroe Street. DART would have a super-parcel that would allow them to do most of their bus parking and operations. Chestnut Street is extended, but there is still a five-point intersection, which may not mitigate the future traffic with the odd phasing that is needed at a five-point intersection.

Alternative D creates a new ramp from I-95 directly to Monroe Street. This allows a much longer queue, so traffic does not back up onto I-95. Again, inbound traffic on Maryland Avenue would turn onto Adams Street and it normalizes the Chestnut and Monroe Street grid. It eliminates the five-point intersection, but it brings two-way traffic between DTC and some of its parking areas, and this would be a very expensive project.

The criteria matrix shows that making no improvements performs the worst. Alternative A gives the best balance of positives to negatives and is in the lower end of the funding. Alternatives B and C have a few more challenges. Alternative D is too expensive. The greatest challenge is that though Alternative A performs best, it negatively impacts DTC's parking and operations. If something could be done with structured parking that would consolidate bus parking and operations onto one lot, Alternative A would work really well.

In a follow up study to consider changes to DTC's Operations center, four concepts were created with the proposed construction of a 47,900 square foot, two-floor building. The new building would have 2 fuel/wash bays, larger operations office space, and larger breakroom and lockers. Concept 1 is estimated to cost \$99.7 million with covered parking on top. Moving bus parking to the bottom brings the cost down to \$77.8 million. Concept 3 was slightly less expensive, but the property owner said he was advancing hotel plans for the private property that we would need to build the new structure, so concept 3 is no longer an option. Concept 4 is considerably cheaper at \$45 million, but because of the constrained space some kind of structured parking may still be needed, which brings the cost to \$63 million. DTC does not have that money set aside.

So, Alternative A is the best roadway choice, but we cannot build it without impacting DTC's operations, and all of the new Operations Center options cost more than DTC is willing to pay at this time. There has been a Wilmington Initiatives workshop, a kick-off meeting with stakeholders, a second Wilmington Initiatives workshop, a garage feasibility stakeholder kick-off, a stakeholder (DTC) working meeting, and a stakeholder update meeting with the Advisory Committee. Since COVID-19, the congestion at the five-point intersection is reduced. Even now, we are only back to about 85% of normal traffic on average. Also, the Margaret Rose Henry Bridge has opened allowing traffic to come into the Riverfront from US 13, which impacts the traffic in this area, as well. If we had to do something, option 4 would be preferred and most affordable. At this time, this project is not a priority for DTC, DelDOT and the City so the project will not move forward based on the cost of the DTC facility.

Mr. Kaszyski said this reminds him of five points in Townsend where they put the Townsend Town Center roundabout in and asked if that would be an option here. Mr. Gula said DelDOT does not usually support multi-lane roundabouts, and we would need to expand that intersection, but there are the overhead north and southbound ramps from MLK Boulevard to I-95 and Delmarva Power is right up against the intersection, so there is no space for the roundabout.

Mr. Gula said this is going to TAC for action for endorsement of the recommendations and analysis that has been completed and leaves it open ended for DTC, DelDOT and the City to act on it in the future.

7. Other Business

None

8. Adjournment

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

Motion passed

(12-14-20-03)

Attachments: (0)