

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WILMAPCO Zoom Virtual Meeting, April 19, 2021

Minutes prepared by Dawn Voss from recording.

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

1. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Mark Blake, GHADA
Bill Dunn, Civic League for New Castle County
Kathryn Economou, University of Delaware
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
Ken Potts, Delmarva Rail Passenger Association
Glenn Pusey, Bear Glasgow Council
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
Carlos de los Ramos, AARP
Mario Gangemi, Cecil County Chamber of Commerce
Dick Janney, Southern New Castle County
Givel Marrero, Delaware Hispanic Commission
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:

Dave Gula, Principal Planner
Randi Novakoff, Outreach Manager
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Guests:

Jade Clayton, MDOT
Robert Hicks
Steven Overbay, Cecil County Office of Economic Development

2. Approval of the February 22, 2021 Meeting Minutes

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Ken Potts the PAC approved the February 22, 2021 meeting minutes.

3. Public Comment Period:

None.

4. Executive Director's Report:

Ms. Tigist Zegeye reported on the WILMAPCO Council meeting, which was held on March 11th. The Council approved certification of the Metropolitan Transportation Planning Process for FY 2022. The Council approved New Castle County Prioritization of Transportation Alternatives Projects for FY 2021 and the addition of Ms. Kathryn Economou as a new Public Advisory Committee Member. Ms. Zegeye presented on the FY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Mr. Dan Blevins presented a demographics update. Ms. Heather Dunigan presented a City of New Castle Transportation Plan update. Ms. Randi Novakoff presented the Route 9 outreach video.

Ms. Zegeye shared the following public outreach information:

- Staff is working with the City of Newark and Bike Newark to plan Virtual Bike Month activities.
- Staff is working with a coalition to plan a series of Open Streets events in Wilmington. The first one is planned for May 15th on Market Street.
- The City of New Castle Transportation Plan survey and Wikimap are still available on the WILMAPCO website.
- Maryland Transportation Alternatives Program applications will be accepted from April 1st through May 17th, 2021.
- Staff participated in two Maryland State Rail Plan meetings in February and one on March 9th.
- Staff participated in the New Castle County @ 2050 deep dives sessions in March and April.
- The Port of Wilmington Study had a meeting on March 15th. Staff is working on an outreach strategy to get engagement from more minority participants and the March meeting had 30% minority registration when it is normally less than 5%.
- Social justice outreach training for planners began on April 16th. This will be a series of five training sessions held in partnership with Delaware APA and the University of Delaware.
- Staff has been working with Air Quality Partnership and the Urban Bike Project for Wilmington Earth Week and Arbor Week from April 19th to 23rd. Each day will have different activities and themes. Tuesday will be Transportation Tuesday, where there will be a story book on bicycle safety and air quality at 10:00 a.m. and a panel discussion with Delaware Commute Solutions, formerly known as Rideshare Delaware, in the evening.
- An Advisory Committee Meeting for the Churchmans Crossing Plan is scheduled for May 3rd. A public workshop is tentatively scheduled for June 16th.
- The first Advisory Committee meeting for the Union Street Project will be held on April 22, and a public workshop is planned for May 19th.
- MTA has begun the outreach tasks outlined in the Maryland State Bill for the MARC/SEPTA Commuter Rail Service Extension Ridership Analysis, presenting to WILMAPCO's TAC last week and to PAC today.
- Staff met with representatives from Townsend in March to plan a Walkable Community Workshop this summer.

- WILMAPCO will be hosting a Master of Public Health student intern this summer to support our efforts to incorporate public health into planning and our work in Southbridge and along Route 9. Their salary will be covered by Healthy Communities Delaware.
- Door-to-door field surveys are underway as part of the Southbridge Neighborhood Plan. There will be a presentation about that effort at the next PAC meeting.

ACTION ITEMS:

5. UPWP Public Outreach Section

Ms. Randi Novakoff said the UPWP is WILMAPCO's budget, and it outlines the tasks the staff plan to undertake during the upcoming fiscal year. She outlined some overarching strategies. Outreach to the general public includes public meetings, workshops, and conferences. This also includes making sure that meetings are held in locations that are accessible and ADA compliant. A variety of techniques are used to reach out to the general community. Strategies for public outreach are tailored based on the target audience. After the adoption of the Transportation Justice Plan in 2019, transportation justice outreach was added as a new category. This is outreach to racial minorities, low-income populations, those with disabilities, female-headed households, as well as populations with limited English proficiency. When working in these communities, additional strategies will be employed including coordinating with local leadership, acknowledging past harms, and working to strive for equitable participation in planning.

Developing public information documents includes documents like the TIP Quick Guide or the Public Guide to Transportation Planning, which attempt to explain the transportation planning process in a way that is easily understood by the general public. Staff works closely with the PAC on developing documents like this when needed. The use of acronyms and jargon in these documents is minimized to make them as easily understood as possible. Real-world examples are used whenever possible to demonstrate how the public impacts transportation planning.

Newsletters are published. "The Transporter" is an eight-page newsletter, which is being transitioned from print to an electronic newsletter. Printed copies will still be available to those who request it, but we have requested that people provide email addresses to receive it electronically. About six thousand people subscribe to the printed version, so we will see how many continue. A monthly electronic newsletter is sent to about four thousand people. To sign up for these newsletters, visit the WILMAPCO home page.

A variety of presentations and videos are developed to help explain the planning process and how and why someone might become involved in it. For example, when we do outreach for the Regional Transportation Plan, every civic organization in our region is invited to have a WILMAPCO staff member make a presentation on the RTP at their meeting and about thirty do.

The website is an important outreach tool. The website summarizes everything WILMAPCO does in an organized and easily understood way. Every study and all the events are listed on the homepage for the public to easily see current work and how to get involved. Different staff members maintain different pages, so it stays up to date.

Educational programs for school children such as Safe Routes to School and Safe Kids Delaware invites children in the region to be involved in the transportation planning process, provides bicycle and pedestrian safety education in schools, and helps schools find funding for sidewalk and infrastructure projects. Staff works on coordinated events like walk to school days and bike to school days. This year has been an unusual year for schools so not much could be

done in schools this year, but hopefully in September things will get back on track. We work with several groups including Safe Kids Delaware, which is a statewide group including DelDOT and many others who work to develop educational programs for schools.

The Urban Bike Project is a nonprofit organization in Wilmington that is like a bike repair shop, but they show people how to repair their own bikes. They also do a lot of youth programming and education and show youth how to repair bikes and safely ride them. One program in particular that WILMAPCO supports is their Build a Bike Program, where kids get a box of bicycle parts and Urban Bike Project shows them how to assemble the bikes. Then they get to keep the bikes at the end of the program. We also support the Newark Bike Project, which has similar youth programs including a Youth Empowerment Program.

Coordinating with other agencies and organizations is an important part of every study and plan. To make the best use of resources we may partner for events or public outreach. In doing so, the partners will ensure all the messages are amplified by sharing information on each other's websites, social media, and newsletters. A good example of that collaboration is our air quality outreach with the Air Quality Partnership of Delaware, which is a public and private partnership of those interested in educating about simple steps that can be taken to improve air quality. The list of partners includes DNREC, DART, Delaware Commute Solutions, Chesapeake Utilities, and many others. We have several initiatives including our mascot, Tropo, which is a big furry alien from outer space who pairs well with our Safe Routes to School Program and helps educate about bicycle and pedestrian safety. The Air Quality Partnership was involved in coordinating the Wilmington Earth Day events and also coordinates Air Quality Awareness Week, which is a social media campaign to be held in September this year.

Transportation Justice Outreach is something we are striving to increase now, to make sure that the outreach that we do is equitable, and everyone has a fair chance to participate in the planning process. One thing that we are doing this year is holding social justice outreach training. The first session was last Friday, and four more sessions are scheduled. We have many state partners that are participating in that training, which was done in partnership with APA Delaware, the University of Delaware, and the Dover/Kent MPO.

Social media and video outreach includes many social media tools that are used to reach out and amplify our messages including Facebook, YouTube, and Nextdoor. We are creating some videos that will be shared on social media and via other avenues. The UPWP is available for public comment through May 3rd.

Mr. Vic Singer said for the PAC meeting it has become customary to send the email announcement several times for each PAC meeting. With the newsletter distribution eventually becoming entirely electronic, if the electronic notification is the identification of the website where you can go and print your own copy, he suggests sending the notification several times like you do for meeting announcements. Mr. Singer asked if there is any substantial cost difference in sending the newsletter along with the notification that it is out. Ms. Novakoff replied that there is definitely a significant cost difference in sending the newsletter out electronically as opposed to sending it via US mail. Mr. Singer said he can appreciate that, but an email that says it is available at a web address so you can go in and print it out yourself is a little different than having it as an attachment to the email. Ms. Novakoff responded that the plan is to send the full newsletter in the body of the email. The monthly newsletter will have a link to the quarterly newsletter. Mr. Singer said that is a good idea because when he receives something that says go to a website, he postpones reading that. Mr. Ken Grant asked that he be on the list

for only one email as he does not need multiple. Ms. Novakoff replied that everyone will receive one email for each new edition of each newsletter.

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Mark Blake seconded by Mr. Ken Pots the PAC approved the UPWP Public Outreach Section.

Motion passed

(04-19-21-02)

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

6. Extension of MARC service to SEPTA

Ms. Jade Clayton said she is a planner from the Maryland Transit Administration. She started at MTA about five years ago and working on connecting MARC and SEPTA service was the first thing she was asked to do. Maryland passed an Act to expand commuter rail service, which includes three projects out of what was House Bill 1236: service to Delaware; the Penn-Camden Connector, and service into Virginia. MARC service is bi-directional with one mid-day trip right now, no weekend service and terminates in Perryville. There is a twenty- or thirty-mile gap from Newark or Wilmington depending on where you are looking to connect. The bill specified connecting at least to Newark, where SEPTA terminates, for two AM trains and two PM trains. The Penn-Camden Connector will provide direct access between two passenger lines that run between Baltimore and D.C. MTA just broke ground on a project in the Riverside Heavy Maintenance Yard. This connection would allow trains from those lines access to that yard as they continue to build capacity for maintenance and operation in south Baltimore. It will also address Penn Line train storage challenges as Amtrak plans re-development around Penn Station. In the bill, service to Virginia is very similar to service to Delaware with two AM and PM trips running through on VRE lines, and two stations connecting to Union Station. The Brunswick Line comes from western Maryland and West Virginia and then the Penn and Camden Lines.

There are anticipated challenges that go with extending commuter rail service along the Northeast Corridor. There are many operating partners and host railroads. A lot of infrastructure is owned, operated, and shared by different agencies. This service needs to be planned in coordination with all of those agencies and aligned with their needs. Any studies or plans that are made need to be approved by them and agreements need to be settled with the different partners before breaking ground. Additionally, there is the question of when commuter rail ridership will return after COVID as ridership dropped most significantly on commuter rail and commuter bus lines compared to core bus services. Also, traffic must be maintained during this planned construction. There are many projects on the Northeast Corridor: B&P Tunnel, Penn Station redevelopment, work at Union Station, and many MTA projects.

Some previous work to connect service through to Delaware includes the MARC Cornerstone Plan, which is a twenty-five-year plan for all of the MARC rail lines, infrastructure and assets to determine what needs to be done to make service extension possible and sustainable. The Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan was also mandated by the legislature. This was published in 2020 and includes many of the projects that are in this bill expanding MARC rail service and determining how to maintain the assets for current service. The Elkton Train Station Feasibility Study would need to be updated again if service were to be extended. It is quite old so costs would need to be reviewed and any costs or feasibility studies would have to be reviewed by their partners to see if they need to expand capacity before adding service. There is the Newark Train Station Study and the ongoing construction of the Newark Regional

Transportation Center, which was built with consideration of MARC service expanding there. There are other capacity-building projects. For example, WILMAPCO has done a lot of transit-oriented development. MTA met with all of the agencies in February to present a schedule of next steps. Then, they came back with a plan on how to address the bill. A modeling effort is being done before the feasibility study. The modelling effort will familiarize them with the methodology that the FTA approves so they will be ready if they apply for grant funding for this effort.

Stakeholder engagement is being done in April and May. The bill specified four overarching groups which are leading employers, labor representatives, rider advisory committees and regional planning boards. There was a meeting with the MARC Riders Advisory Council and there will be a meeting with the SEPTA Riders Subcommittee and their Citizen Advisory Committee soon. Meetings are being scheduled with regional planning boards such as WILMAPCO's Public Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee. These meetings will continue with all of the MPOs served by the projects. In May and June, negotiations to outline agreement to provide these two AM and PM trains proposed in the bill will continue. Then there will be discussions with all of the rail partners, agencies, and counterparts in the affected areas. By the end of December, a report on these efforts must be submitted to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee.

The Penn-Camden Connector is in the Cornerstone Plan and Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan. It connects to the Riverside Yard Expansion. A notice to proceed was just given for a complete feasibility study. A lot of preliminary planning and environmental work has been done, and the advanced feasibility study needs to be done before it can move forward. That would include looking into things like if CSX would share some of the tracks they operate on this segment. A Statewide Transit Plan and a State Rail Plan are currently being updated and will be finalized by the end of this year. Those plans should mention these infrastructure projects which will set things up for expanding the service in the future.

For the bill, the specific requirement was to complete the Penn-Camden Connector feasibility study. We have the preliminary studies, now we want to take a thorough look at everything. MTA just gave notice to proceed with this last week and they are kicking off tomorrow looking at the maintenance requirements, positive train control, signaling, how to configure the Mt. Clare Yard to have rolling stock going in and out and in between the Riverside Yard and two different lines, operational needs of CSX, and any NEPA and environmental strategies needed.

Service into Virginia has pretty similar structure as service into Newark. The MPO on that end is WASHCOG and they have completed a run-through market assessment for MARC to see how many people would want to transfer from MARC lines and which of the three lines would have the most demand. The Greater Washington Partnership is sort of a mega-regional advocacy group and business group that has put together their own rail plan and technical report. MTA is a participant in that report, which covers service into Virginia. The Greater Washington Partnership have been helping MTA reach various stakeholders. Coordination with the Northeast Corridor Commission continues, while they plan all the infrastructure for Amtrak service and the commuter and regional rail operators that use the Northeast Corridor. Then there is continued coordination with the rail operators and state agencies in Virginia. More plans are coming like the Union Station Expansion and various track improvements. Stakeholder engagement is being planned and the Greater Washington Partnership can gather the stakeholders so MTA is co-hosting an event with them in May. MTA is also working with WILMAPCO, DelDOT, and SEPTA to gather contact information for businesses and employers that would be interested in connection in Delaware as part of the stakeholder outreach. An

outline of what it would take to operate the service and feedback from the different partners needs to be reported to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee by December 1st.

Ms. Clayton asked for feedback on what PAC members would like the service to look like. There have been discussions with the MARC Riders Advisory Council about whether they think post-COVID commutes will spread across different days of the week or into the weekend; if it will be overall flat; if it will be more a Monday to Thursday or Tuesday to Thursday instead of the current Monday to Friday, nine to five commute.

Mr. Vic Singer asked if there is an existing link between the Baltimore transit system and the Washington D.C. transit system. Ms. Clayton replied there are quite a few connections between MARC rail lines and the D.C. Metro and also to VRE and Amtrak.

Mr. Ken Grant expressed that he is looking forward to taking a train from the Newark station to Baltimore or D.C. and asked if there is anything they need from the Delaware side to help move this along as far as feedback from employers or legislatively. Ms. Clayton replied that Delaware has been an active partner. They have been getting a lot of requests from Delaware to get this moving, including from WILMAPCO. It comes down to not only funding but figuring out what needs to happen first and what are the enabling projects before MARC extends. The one short term discussion was that Cecil County did a bus connection between Newark, Elkton, Perryville, and made a lot of other stops along the way. It was not a great connection. It comes down to funding and the fact that ridership has plummeted so much in commuter services that that a commuter bus could be a possible short-term solution and can happen a lot faster than a rail connection. That commuter bus would go all the way into Baltimore from points north.

Mr. Tom Fruehstorfer said Ms. Clayton had mentioned commuter service a few times and asked if this is just a weekday proposal or also weekends. Ms. Clayton replied that there is weekend service between Penn Station, maybe Martins, and D.C., but not to Perryville. At the start this would be extending an existing scheduled train up to Newark, but they would love to extend service and allow for more weekend service if funding and infrastructure allows.

Mr. Ken Potts expressed that this has been a long journey, and he gives credit to MTA and Kevin for sticking with this. Everyone has agreed that this should happen, but then it never happened. Between Spotsylvania, Virginia and New London, Connecticut, about four hundred miles that is covered by commuter rail, except for twenty miles between Newark, Delaware and Perryville, Maryland. Wilmington has more SEPTA and DART connections than Newark does, so eventually thought will be given to extending to Wilmington. CSX is going to be very interested in this connection to the Penn Line. Their connection for exchanging cars with Norfolk Southern was at Elsmere Junction and has been discontinued, so he does not know where they are shifting cars around, but they are going to be very interested in combining those two lines. So that is really provocative and far reaching to combine two MARC lines and go north. This is all really great stuff. He cannot speak for his colleagues on this committee, but he knows WILMAPCO and the Delmarva Rail Passengers Association are solidly behind this and will do whatever is requested to make this happen up to and including lobbying officials, representatives, and senators. Mr. Potts thanked Ms. Clayton for coming.

Mr. Mike Kaszyski asked if there is a fundamental difference between the Amtrak service from Wilmington to D.C, and what MARC will be able to offer. Ms. Clayton replied that they would be making more stops. Mr. Kaszyski commented that it provides more options then. Mr. Singer suggested looking at it in terms of the New York City transit system where there are local and express trains. Mr. Kaszyski said having lived on the R-5 on SEPTA's lines you have that one

long continuous run. They are even talking about extending that service back up into Allentown. Ms. Clayton said they were going to extend the service first but there was another request to add a stop in Elkton, which is still owned by Amtrak. Amtrak was asked about serving Elkton and said no. So, still longer-term MARC would extend to Newark first to build up the market and then also find the funding to upgrade the Elkton station with Amtrak's approval.

Mr. Steven Overbay, of the Cecil County Office of Economic Development, said they are following this with great interest and thanked Mr. Clayton for her presentation. He asked if any thought is being given to adding additional scheduling northbound as we look to connect with Newark or Wilmington given that the trains currently deadhead to Perryville, and if that would extend possibilities for people leaving Baltimore travelling northbound. Ms. Clayton replied that she cannot speak to that as they have not built out a schedule as what would be the exact trains that would be part of this service.

Mr. Bill Dunn said he guesses MARC and SEPTA have to use a section of Norfolk Southern's line through the station. He asked if there has been any consideration of extending that quarter or half of a mile shared section so freight rail will not interfere with passenger rail. Mr. Potts responded that the Newark Regional Transportation Center includes work to be done on track realignment. The track that is currently shared by SEPTA and Norfolk Southern will become a gauntlet track in which the track will move away from the platform every time Norfolk Southern wants to use it and will be moved closer to the platform when MARC and SEPTA need to use it. Mr. Dunn asked that since it is less than a half of a mile of track to be added to completely separate the competition for time on that segment, why hasn't anyone pursued it? Mr. Potts replied that money solves everything, and it is the identification of resources to make it a reality that may yet happen. Mr. Fruehstorfer added that maybe with time if the train usage increases then it will be justified, but the train use right now probably does not justify it. Mr. Dave Gula said we tried to work very closely with Norfolk Southern throughout the planning for this station and gave them the option of working with us to separate the freight on that track. There was not enough interest on Norfolk Southern's part to be part of the planning for this station to make that happen. It may still happen in the future. Mr. Dunn mentioned that ten years ago there was little interest by CSX to build an improved overpass by DelCastle High School at Newport Road in the Marshallton-Belvidere area. CSX was not interested until the proper political pressure was applied and suddenly, they recognized the need for that bridge improvement. Mr. Gula replied that vast amounts of political pressure was applied even through the US Congressional offices. Ms. Clayton added that she got the impression right before she began her job at MTA that some of the freight railroads were shedding their properties or thinking that they were not going to use them as much. Then, plans were drawn up and maybe minds were changed in some cases and that has continued to fluctuate over the years

7. Bike/Ped Planning Outreach Video

Ms. Randi Novakoff said WILMAPCO has been developing a series of five public outreach videos over the past year. The cost of the videos is covered by a Federal Highway Administration grant. Staff is working with King Creative, who is located in Wilmington. This video is on Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning and it explains it in a simple way. The video was shown. Ms. Novakoff said that video is about five minutes long. We worked with the nonmotorized committee and they suggested that we shorten it a little bit, so we are going to do that. Spanish subtitles will be added as well. Once it is finished, it will be posted to YouTube, shared via social media channels, emailed to organizations and shared at public meetings.

Mr. Dunn commented that he was surprised that the Civic League was not noted as one of the notable groups that WILMAPCO works with. Ms. Novakoff replied that we work with many different organizations so we picked the ones we work most closely with specifically for walking and biking.

8. Other Business

8. Adjournment

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Vic Singer and seconded by Mr. Barry Shotwell the PAC adjourned.

Motion passed

(04-19-21-03)

Attachments: (0)