

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
September 19, 2024

An in-person only meeting of the Joint Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Air Quality Subcommittee (AQS) was held on Thursday, September 19, 2024, at Lums Pond, 1068 Howell School Rd, Bear, DE 19701, Area 4.

1. CALL TO ORDER: Mr. Cooper Bowers, from Delaware Department of Transportation, and TAC Chair, brought the TAC meeting to order at 10:12 a.m.

2. TAC Members present:

Cooper Bowers, Delaware Department of Transportation
Samantha Bulkilvish, Delaware Office of State Planning
David Dahlstrom, Maryland Department of Planning
Taylor Englert, Department of Natural Resources and Environment
Michael Fortner, City of Newark
Dan Janousek, Maryland Department of Transportation
Matthew Rodgers, New Castle County Department of Land Use
Catherine Smith, Delaware Transit Corporation

TAC Ex-Officio Members present:

TAC Members absent:

City of Wilmington Department of Public Works
City of Wilmington Planning
Cecil County Division of Planning and Zoning
Delaware Division of Small Business, Development, and Tourism
Delaware River and Bay Authority
Maryland Department of the Environment
Maryland State Highway Administration
Town of Elkton Planning

TAC Ex-Officio Members absent:

Amtrak
Diamond State Port Corporation
Federal Highway Administration
Federal Transit Administration
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Guests and Invitees:

Stacey Dahlstrom, EPR
Lauren Dykes, City of Newark
Jared Kauffman, DTC
Tina Merrill, DNREC, AQS member
Bill Williamson, DTC, AQS member

Staff:

Dan Blevins, Principal Planner

Sharen Elcock, Executive Assistant
Elizabeth Espinal, Administrative Assistant
Dave Gula, Principal Planner
Jake Thompson, Principal Planner
Dawn Voss, Outreach Coordinator
Tigist Zegeye, Executive Director

Minutes prepared by: Elizabeth Espinal.

3. MINUTES

Approval of the August 15, 2024, TAC Meeting Minutes.

ACTION: On motion by Mr. Matthew Rogers and seconded by Mr. Michael Fortner, the August 15th, 2024, TAC Minutes are approved.

4. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

None.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

None.

ACTION ITEMS

None.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

6. Ozone Designation Bump-up Discussion

Ms. Tina Merrill, representing the Division of Air Quality, delivered a presentation on the Philadelphia-Wilmington-Atlantic City nonattainment area, covering Delaware's status and recent updates from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Accompanied by Taylor, Ms. Merrill outlined key topics for discussion, including background information on Delaware's nonattainment status, the ozone State Implementation Plan (SIP), current EPA updates, and next steps for the Division of Air Quality. Ms. Merrill began by explaining that New Castle County, Delaware, is part of the Philadelphia-Wilmington-Atlantic City nonattainment area, which is currently in violation of the 2015 Ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) set at 70 parts per billion (ppb). On April 13, 2022, the EPA proposed reclassifying the area from marginal to moderate nonattainment, with an August 3, 2024, attainment deadline. The EPA's ruling became effective on November 7, 2022, and Delaware's state SIP submission deadline was January 1, 2023. In response, DNREC submitted two revisions to the EPA on March 4, 2024: one demonstrating attainment of the 2015 moderate ozone standards, including the 2023 mobile vehicle emissions budget, and the second certifying the basic inspection and maintenance programs.

Ms. Merrill continued by providing updates on further actions. On April 9, 2024, the EPA completed a completeness review. Earlier in 2024, states in the Philadelphia nonattainment area submitted exceptional event demonstrations to the EPA, requesting a one-year extension to account for the impact of Canadian wildfires on the area's air quality. However, this request

was rendered moot as the pre-2024 design values for the region failed to meet the ozone standard. On August 14, 2024, the EPA officially denied Delaware's extension request.

Ms. Merrill then shared Delaware's current air quality status. On July 18, 2024, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey jointly requested the EPA to reclassify the Philadelphia nonattainment area from moderate to serious. This reclassification was approved by the EPA on July 30, 2024, under section 181(b) of the Clean Air Act, which allows for voluntary reclassification. The area is now required to meet the 2015 ozone standards by August 3, 2027, nine years after the original nonattainment designation. The region must demonstrate compliance by the end of the 2026 ozone season, which concludes just before the attainment deadline.

Ms. Merrill outlined the next steps for the Division of Air Quality. By January 1, 2026, the SIP must be submitted to the EPA, which will issue a separate notice in the Federal Register addressing applicable SIP requirements and deadlines. States are beginning to prepare serious nonattainment SIPs to demonstrate attainment by the end of the 2026 ozone season and meet other serious SIP requirements. This process will include establishing new mobile vehicle emissions budgets for 2026, with new conformity determinations required no later than two years after the EPA approves the budget. The EPA may take up to a year to review and approve SIP submissions, including moderate nonattainment provisions currently under review.

Ms. Merrill concluded the presentation by inviting any questions from attendees and offering to provide further information via email. She acknowledged the complexity of the issues but assured the audience that efforts were ongoing to ensure progress in addressing the region's air quality challenges.

Mr. David Dahlstrom inquired whether it is typical for an area's classification to be elevated from marginal to moderate, as it was in April 2022, and then to serious in 2024.

Ms. Taylor Englert explained that Delaware was reclassified from marginal to moderate because it failed to attain the required ozone design value by the deadline. Despite efforts by DNREC to meet the standard by 2023, the design value remained above the limit. Delaware attempted to account for this by conducting an exceptional event analysis, attributing the excess levels to wildfires, and requesting a one-year extension. However, by 2024, the state's design value was still over the threshold. As a result, the EPA denied the request, and Delaware was faced with either voluntarily requesting a reclassification to serious or being automatically elevated. By opting for voluntary reclassification, the state gained additional time for compliance, with neighboring states also agreeing to move to the serious classification, as they were on track to do so anyway.

Ms. Tigist Zegeye added to the presentation by stating that the process for Cecil County is very similar to what DNREC has undertaken and presented. She explained that WILMAPCO must have its conformity determination completed by March 2027, effectively that it must be ready by 2026, regardless of whether we are amending our 2025 TIP or long-range plan. The main concern is if the EPA takes longer than 18 months to review, which could cause delays. Otherwise, the process in Cecil County closely mirrors that of New Castle County.

7. DART Reimagined- Reshaping Transit Services

Ms. Cathy Smith from DART provided an update on the DART-Reimagined project. She began by referencing a previous presentation, noting that since then, public hearing workshops and extensive community outreach took place throughout the summer. The outreach involved pop-

up events, digital and hard copy surveys, and public engagement, gathering substantial feedback on the transit services that better meet the needs of the community. The feedback was collected through 27 outreach events, including 4 employee events, operator focus groups, and community surveys that garnered approximately 2,500 plus responses. Additionally, there were 5 public workshops and over 5,000 website views.

Ms. Smith explained that several agencies, including WILMAPCO, were involved in the technical and executive advisory committees. The advisory groups were integral to the project, with 19 executive members and 79 technical members providing input. The focus groups, especially with DART's operators, who serve as ambassadors and have direct interaction with customers, were particularly valuable in shaping the project.

DART-Reimagined is a comprehensive study evaluating the supply and demand for transit services in Delaware, particularly considering the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Smith shared data showing a significant recovery in ridership from the pandemic's low point. In 2019, weekly ridership was approximately 612,000 statewide, and while the number dropped dramatically in 2020, it has now rebounded to about 484,000.

The project has synthesized community input and developed a final report, outlining the reconfigured and reimagined transit network. Key themes and goals include optimizing resources, promoting fair and equitable access, enhancing service quality, and increasing mobility, particularly for vulnerable populations. Recent service changes have focused on streamlining fixed route services and eliminating unproductive trips and segments of routes. Ms. Smith highlighted a presentation at the University of Delaware, where students were informed about their eligibility to use DART services for a reduced fare, resulting in increased ridership for the DART Connect Newark which experienced the highest week in ridership last week.

The reimagined transit system aims to shift focus away from traditional 9-to-5 commutes and instead prioritize areas of high demand based on ridership and density. Phase 1 of the project involved significant service cuts to make necessary improvements, including the discontinuation of Route 52. Phase 2, currently in progress, is centered on modernizing and creating new routes, particularly in areas south of the canal and Sussex County, with an estimated completion for Phase 3 between 2027-2029.

Looking forward, the next steps include marketing and educating riders about modern technologies such as the DART Connect app. Ms. Smith explained that the previous system, VIA, was designed for high-density areas like New York City and was not suitable for Delaware's rural regions. The new system, Q-Ride, has been successfully integrated into the paratransit service. Further steps involve budget modifications, policy presentations to the Department of Labor, the Delaware Office of State, and the Office of Disabilities and Visually Impaired.

Ms. Smith concluded by emphasizing the importance of land-use planning in transit decisions, noting that smart land-use choices are critical to the success of transit services. She reminded stakeholders and riders that transit changes are implemented gradually and incrementally, requiring ongoing outreach, communication, and education.

Ms. Stacey Dahlstrom inquired whether DART is considering air quality compliance and incorporating environmentally fuel-efficient vehicles into its fleet. Ms. Cathy Smith responded affirmatively, noting that DART has acted by implementing air filtration systems in its fleet vehicles and currently operates 26 alternative fuel vehicles alongside 242 buses on fixed routes.

Mr. David Dahlstrom asked if the micro-transit service picks up passengers from their homes or from designated stops. Ms. Smith explained that while it is not a door-to-door service, it operates curb-to-curb, meaning passengers are picked up from a preferred location. This service integrates with paratransit and incorporates bus stops, particularly as it expands. Ms. Tina Merrill raised a question regarding DART's adherence to the Justice 40 Initiative when implementing climate change regulations in its vehicles. Ms. Smith confirmed that DART follows the Justice 40 guidelines.

Ms. Samantha Bulkilvish asked about DART's marketing strategies for paratransit and micro-transit services, especially after receiving feedback from University of Delaware (UD) students. Ms. Smith responded with a smile, acknowledging that collaborations have been established with the City of Newark on this topic. She suggested that changing the bus colors to UD colors might help students identify that the services are available to them and mentioned that schedule adjustments are being made to better accommodate students in the Newark area.

Mr. Dave Gula commended Ms. Cathy Smith and the consulting team for their exceptional work on the DART Reimagined project. He highlighted the invaluable support they have provided to WILMAPCO and its committees and emphasized that the project would have a lasting impact on transit in Delaware. He also stressed the importance of transparency in communicating the project to the public, noting that setting clear expectations was key to maintaining public trust, which Ms. Smith and her team have done flawlessly. Ms. Smith expressed her gratitude and encouraged continued collaboration moving forward.

INFORMATION ITEMS

10. Staff Report

Ms. Tigist Zegeye reported the following updates:

- On September 6th, the Rocky Run Underpass study commenced with a Technical Committee meeting, with an Advisory Committee meeting planned for the fall and public outreach scheduled for January 2025.
- On September 7th, staff attended the Bowers Street Open Streets event.
- On September 9th, the MD-272 Corridor Plan held its kick-off meeting with lead consultant Wallace Montgomery.
- On September 10th, the Newark Bicycle Plan hosted an outreach event focusing on bicycle safety checkpoints.
- On September 12th, the Council met and approved the FY2025 federal funds, PAC reappointments, and endorsed the East Elkton Plan.
- On September 15th, staff participated in Newark Community Day and conducted public outreach for the Newark Bicycle Plan.
- On September 22nd, staff will hold a public outreach event for the Hispanic community at Holy Angels Church regarding the Kirkwood Highway Corridor Master Plan.
- On September 26th, staff will participate in a technical expert workshop for DNREC's Climate Action Plan.
- On October 2nd, the MSA Regional Climate Action Plan Steering Committee will meet.
- On October 2nd, staff will also participate in Walk to School Day at Downes Elementary School.
- On October 7th, the Ardens Transportation Plan Monitoring Committee will meet.
- On October 17th, the Route 9 Master Plan Monitoring Committee will meet, and the Claymont Area Master Plan Advisory Committee will hold a meeting from 6:30 to 8:00

p.m. Additionally, an open house with presentations will be held on October 28th at 4:30 and 6:00 p.m.

- On October 29th, WILMAPCO will host a FHWA Peer Exchange on Effective Coordination of Metropolitan Planning Processes with State DOTs and Transit Agencies. Invitations have been sent by FHWA, and registration is required by October 1st.
- Staff continues to assist with signage for the September 11th National Memorial Trail in Delaware.

OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Dan Janousek from Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) announced that MDOT's Pre-Tour will begin on September 26th at 10:00 a.m. with virtual attendance available, though in-person participation is encouraged. The MDOT Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP) Tour is scheduled for October 8th at noon in Cecil County.

Ms. Stacey Dahlstrom shared that the APA Business Development Conference is scheduled for October 20-22. EPR is a corporate sponsor, and the current registration fee is \$190, with this special rate expiring on September 20th.

ADJOURNMENT:

ACTION: Meeting adjourned at 11:07 a.m.

Attachments (0)