

The MPO Reform Committee

Background:

At the April MPO Board meeting and following eleven months of tireless and challenging work, the MPO Reform Committee and the MPO Board reached a significant first-stage culmination point:

- Numerous structural reforms were approved: MPO Board membership was expanded to include professionals; a new voting method was adopted; an increased distinction between the MPO and the PDC was achieved; MPO Bylaws were approved; and much more. This total effort will prove to be exceptionally constructive.
- This first-stage of MPO reform addressed the basic, brick-and-mortar issues associated with MPO structure, and it addressed some of MPO's external working relationships and MPO administration in general. Some of those involved look back and recall these as the dog meat issues, but they also realize that this full range of reform discussion was, without doubt, a necessary first-stage of MPO reform.

What Comes Next? There are two choices:

1. Continue with a sustained MPO reform effort, and, in particular, continue the process of conducting monthly MPO Reform Committee meetings with its continued challenging agenda.
2. Do not continue with these MPO Reform Committee meetings.

The Case for the continued, formal and sustained management of MPO reform follows: (not in a priority order)

1. **Quadrennial Review Response.** The MPO has not yet finished responding to the list required corrective actions cited in the Federal Quadrennial Review Report. The Report's deadline dates have been extended twice so far, and work remains before we can adequately respond to the pending required corrective actions. This issue is not in automatic, and it is not simply an administrative matter. As just one mere item, the effective performance of the new CTAC needs to be demonstrated before we can have a sufficient response to this Advisory Committee issue that was addressed by the feds. The cost of non-response or insufficient response to any one required corrective action is unacceptable. This topic needs continued, steady MPO Reform Committee oversight.
2. **Public Involvement.** The MPO will soon have the new MPO Public Involvement Administrator staff position filled. This will open a floodgate of activity all aimed at achieving new, required goals—Title VI procedures; broad new public information awareness and public involvement procedures; new literature that explains the MPO's purpose, procedures and products to stakeholders and the public; designing the procedures and schedule for the CTAC, and perhaps, largest of all, writing an entirely new ***MPO Public Involvement Plan*** (PIP) in accordance with federal regulations (also a required corrective action). This latter task is so immense that we owe it to the MPO Staff involved to provide a sounding board and an oversight mechanism to their efforts. This work is not just administrative, and it cannot be put in automatic. Questions will arise, and the continued MPO Reform Committee will serve as the outlet for those questions.

- 3. The MPO's next Long Range Plan.** The next Hampton Roads 2034 Constrained Long Range Transportation Plan (CLRP) has been in development since 2007, and it continues to move steadily forward along its four year development schedule. So far, the socio-economic data necessary for this plan has been harvested and several other early day steps have been completed—TAZ-related displays are available, TEAM 2034 has been assembled, etc. This 2034 Plan development process is now beginning to move into a phase that will definitely need very new reform-minded guidance and oversight. We cannot afford the risk of falling back to business-as-usual. This time, we must build a financially constrained and prioritized Plan that has had the benefit of open public and professional input. This time, our MPO will be more visibly using (and documenting the use of) transportation evaluation criteria, performance factors and objective methods more than ever before. This will not be easy, and the MPO Staff and TEAM 2034 personnel will need the direct support, assistance and guidance that a sustained and active MPO Reform Committee can provide. Iterating this effort between the MPO Staff and the MPO Reform Committee on a regular basis will provide the checks and balances that will increase the credibility and confidence of this work. This work needs MPO Reform Committee oversight. As a cautionary note on this topic, no one should expect the MPO Reform Committee (in any way) to take over the 2034 Plan development process. The MPO Reform Committee's role here should be limited only to guiding the design of those new objective based measures that will cause the MPO to "transition" from the previous methods to the new set of objective Best Practice methods that are required.
- 4. MPO Performance Measures.** The MPO's next UPWP (Task 1.1, item B.7) has funded and scheduled work that will research and develop performance measures for our MPO. This is one of those hard tasks that will, when completed, put us in the major leagues. This is one of those topics that is particularly important to the nation's largest MPOs. And, for our MPO this subject was addressed in the federal audit and especially addressed in the recent consultant's report. The development of both internal and external performance measures will need healthy discussion, something that could be accomplished perfectly with a continued MPO Reform Committee.
- 5. MPO Vision.** The recent MPO Retreat launched new and useful discussion about an MPO Vision Statement, an MPO Missions Statement and new lists of MPO Objectives and MPO Goals. The MPO's work during the Retreat provided an excellent start, but this effort needs to be completed. The MPO Reform Committee may be the only kind of focus group that could continue this work for the MPO Board at large.
- 6. MPO Training.** Recently, the MPO Board approved an MPO Resolution 2009-1 to generate an MPO Training Program for MPO Board members, the region's CAOs and the members of the TTAC. This will not be as easy as it sounds. This will require much planning, and it will require many months of effort. MPO training is more than inviting (importing) a series of federal speakers. Our MPO organization will need that, but it will also need to develop an MPO Handbook (proofread many times). The MPO needs to address and plan for other MPO training venues as well—MPO benchmarking trips absolutely need to be scheduled. In addition, the next Annual AMPO Conference will be conducted in Savannah this coming October for which a good cross section of attendees needs to be organized (Board members, Staff, TTAC, etc.). For this total MPO training effort, the MPO Reform Committee could evaluate the MPO Staff's set of plans in this regard and ensure an organized, cost-effective and optimized approach is adopted.

- 7. Get in the Game.** It seems advisable and it is recommended that the Hampton Roads MPO seek and obtain positions on the national AMPO Board of Directors including, perhaps, an officer-level position. The MPO should also consider seeking positions on one or more of the key AMPO Advisory Committees. This will require research—what do other large MPOs do, and to what extent should Hampton Roads be involved—and it may require a visit to AMPO to flesh out these questions. As a separate matter, the first-stage discussions will start this summer concerning the probable creation of a Virginia Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (VAMPO), and we need to be there. Once again, the MPO Reform Committee could directly assist and help the MPO Staff and others to generate action plans on these topics for MPO Board review and approval.
- 8. Involving MPO Board Members.** During the past year of MPO Reform Committee activities, this topic has been raised several times: Should the MPO appoint Board members, to serve as the Co-Chairs for the MPO’s three individual Advisory Committees? Or, in the same vein, should the MPO appoint a Board member to serve as the Board’s primary point of contact for each of these Advisory Committees? Should the MPO appoint or designate one or more Board members to focus on particular MPO functions or hot topics so as to breed expertise within the Board and in a way, to divide the labor? Topics for this latter thought might include the assignment of one or more Board members to work on matters such as the UPWP Development process (really important) or the MPO’s TIP Amendment activities, for example, why do we always have so many TIP Amendments? Or, they could be assigned to investigate and report on the status of the Federal Transportation Re-Authorization Act and/or on the state-level issues that concern all the MPOs in Virginia which will soon become the topic of scrutiny. In sum, this idea for a more efficient involvement of MPO Board members has been raised but not yet figured out. A continued MPO Reform Committee would be able to keep this idea alive and tumble to a good answer.
- 9. Time to Make Hay.** During the course of the past year of reform activities, Mayor Joe Frank and others have noted that right now, both the feds and the state are broke—there is no money for transportation! And so, the thought is that this is indeed the time to make hay. Fix the MPO now so that we will be ready—so that we will be like lions—ready to more professionally compete when the money for transportation begins to flow again. And, it seems somewhat certain that money will return to transportation, because the pressures have mounted so high at both the federal and state levels on this grave infrastructure problem. With that in mind, this is not the time to shut down the MPO Reform Committee. This is the time to make hay and, if anything, this is the time to double or triple the activities of the MPO Reform Committee—it will at least need to continue with monthly meetings. Addressing the topics above (finish the audit, launch new methods for the 2034 Plan, tackle all the public involvement topics, get in the game, do the training, build Board member experts, figure out how to self-assess, and produce a Vision) will be a major contribution to future of Hampton Roads.

Some say the MPO Staff will not be able to support these many tasks. I completely think just the opposite. This is a talented MPO Staff that has long needed to be visibly supported, challenged and inspired. This work will provide a welcomed professional boost.

Drafted by Ray Taylor