

## **Monitoring the MPO Reform Process in Hampton Roads**

### **Preamble**

- An MPO Reform Committee was established in May 2008 to manage the MPO reform process and to manage the MPO federal audit response process.
- A national level MPO Best Practices consultant provided assistance, September through December 2008, in sorting through the initially required reform measures.
- A day-long, formal and facilitated MPO Retreat session designed to promote understanding of federal transportation planning and programming requirements was conducted in February 2009.
- As it has occurred nationwide, significant MPO reform measures have required, on average, two to four years of learning and effort to complete. Following the adverse Federal Quadrennial Review Final Report in February 2008, the Hampton Roads MPO embarked on such a reform process in May 2008.
- Now, sixteen months later, the reforms that have been accomplished so far are listed below. This is an impressive accomplishment warranting much acclaim, and the reform process continues. The especially important next set of reform measures to be addressed in the coming year will be those designed to develop procedures for, and then to produce revised and objective-based MPO “Plans” and “Programs” that have rigorously used MPO Board-approved weighted, project selection criteria. These criteria must include, among other factors, the eight required federal transportation planning factors. In addition, new metropolitan Plans and Programs need to be prioritized and adherent to federal fiscal constraint and other regulatory requirements.
- These reforms accomplished so far are listed below by categories, an effort to put them into useful order. In several instances, however, a given reform measure could be easily listed in a different category. Lists of accomplishments for the five categories follow:

### **A. Reforms Related to MPO Policy**

1. Numerous administrative actions have been taken to ensure “distinction” between the MPO and the PDC and to adopt a clear and visible MPO identity both internally and externally.
2. The MPO Board agreed, and the MPO and PDC Board meetings have been separated.
3. MPO Board actions are no longer ratified by the PDC.
4. The MPO Board terminated the prior illegal practice of conducting “letter” and “telephone” ballots on MPO matters. State Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requirements refer.

5. MPO Bylaws were developed over a period of ten months and approved in May 2009. These are the MPO's first Bylaws in 36 years. It can be said that these new MPO Bylaws are up-to-date and very mature, to the extent that they are probably one of the best 20 sets of MPO Bylaws among almost 400 MPOs in the nation today. Of course, it is important that the new tenets in these Bylaws be implemented and that the Bylaws be used reliably.
6. The MPO has taken steps to decrease the number of important topics being addressed in "consent agendas" thus enabling considered and useful discussion for these important MPO topics and MPO decisions.
7. The MPO Board has decided to develop an MPO-PDC Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which will clarify the MPO and PDC working relationships. At this time the MOU document is being developed.
8. The MPO's Bylaws have clarified that the PDC shall support the MPO in acting as the financial manager and accountant for MPO matters "subject to the approval of the MPO Board".
9. The MPO Bylaws have clarified that the PDC "shall provide staff to the MPO".
10. A separate MPO budget was approved by the TPO Board in June 2009 for the first time.
11. A separate MPO financial audit is under consideration and may occur later this year.
12. The MPO Retreat session initiated valuable discussion concerning the development of an MPO Vision Statement and an MPO Mission Statement. The final MPO Board-approved versions of these Statements remain pending.
13. The MPO Board has started a process of issuing Chairman-signed MPO Resolutions to document its especially important decisions, to add discipline to its work and to have an MPO document that could be transmitted to external policy makers, as may be beneficial.
14. The total length, time wise, of MPO Board meetings has, on its own accord, expanded considerably to both accommodate new reform measures needing discussion but also to enable meaningful debate and discussion of real-world transportation matters at hand.

## **B. Reforms Related to MPO Structure**

15. The MPO Board has adopted a new three-tier voting procedure designed to ensure that the voice of either its large or small jurisdictional members can be accommodated fairly.
16. The MPO Board has decided to elect separate Chairpersons for the MPO and the PDC Boards of Directors, an action that is expected to occur soon.
17. The MPO Staff structure has been modified to now include a dedicated MPO Deputy Executive Director position.
18. The Virginia Port Authority (VPA) has been added as a voting member of the MPO Board.

19. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT) has been added as a voting member of the MPO Board.
20. Four members of the Virginia General Assembly, two Senators and two Delegates, have been added as voting members of the MPO Board. This makes Hampton Roads the second MPO in Virginia to have legislative representation on the MPO Board.
21. The MPO Board has approved the formation of a Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC) to function as a “public body” and to report directly to the MPO Board. Hampton Roads is the last MPO in Virginia to have established this type of organization.
22. The MPO Board has approved the formation of a Freight Transportation Advisory Committee (FTAC) to function as a “public body” and to report directly to the MPO Board.
23. Four new, non-voting members have been added to the MPO Board including the CTAC Chair, the FTAC Chair and representatives from the region’s two principal airports.
24. The MPO Board has approved the formation of an MPO Nominating Committee, separate from the PDC Nominating Committee, when required, to nominate prospective MPO Officers.
25. The MPO Board has tasked the MPO Nominating Committee to nominate members for the MPO’s newly established Advisory Committees in lieu of others appointing members to these MPO Board-established Advisory Committees.
26. The MPO Board has approved the formation of a Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) to be populated by the region’s CAOs and other transportation professionals as described in the MPO’s Bylaws.
27. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) representative has been allowed to return to the table during MPO Board meetings as a federally-required non-voting member of the MPO Board.
28. The Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) has been re-titled as the Transportation Technical Advisory Committee (TTAC), a step that recognizes its “public body” status as an MPO Board-established Advisory Committee which was its older original status.
29. The TTAC’s membership has been modified to add a VDOT Central Office representative as a TTAC voting member and to shift the Virginia Port Authority (VPA) representative from a non-voting to a voting member.
30. The MPO Board has invited military services to appoint military representatives to serve as non-voting “liaisons” to the MPO with authority to sit at the MPO Board table and to participate in discussions at hand. Final arrangements for this measure remain pending.

### **C. Reforms Related to MPO Transportation Planning and Programming Business Practices**

31. The MPO Board and the TTAC have initiated early discussions designed to find and develop rigid objective-based methods that will include the use of weighted project evaluation criteria during the development of the region’s future MPO “Plans” and

“Programs”. This subject is likely to dominate the ongoing MPO reform process activities over the next 12 to 18 months.

32. The MPO Board approved the first-ever separate MPO Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) document in April 2008, one of the strongest issues cited in the federal audit. This was the FY 2009 UPWP document. The UPWP is the MPO’s budgetary (and policy) planning document which, among other things, displays where the MPO Staff’s manpower and financial resources will be invested for the coming year and how those investments may differ from the past.
33. The MPO Board will soon approve the next FY 2010 UPWP document which is expected to document several new working level MPO reforms as concerns the display and presentation of MPO financial information, increased rigor in describing MPO Staff deliverables, etc.
34. The MPO Board approved a major UPWP Amendment in March 2009 that codified new investments in MPO reform measures, increased public involvement activities, and a sharply decreased investment in previously scheduled low level studies, etc.
35. The MPO provided direction and oversight this past year to a region-wide Transit Vision Plan, a large scale public transportation, multi modal project, the kind of project not often addressed in the past by the MPO.
36. The MPO Staff has committed resources to monitoring, assessing and reporting on the forthcoming federal transportation legislation Re-Authorization Act, a major step toward increased MPO and MPO Staff involvement in external and policy matters rather than technical-only matters.

#### **D. Reforms Related to MPO Working Relationships**

37. The MPO Board has added a standard public comment period to the agenda for every MPO Board meeting. Hampton Roads is the last MPO in Virginia to include such public comment periods.
38. The policy of scheduling public comment periods has been extended to the public body TTAC, CTAC and FTAC meetings.
39. The MPO Staff has substantially improved its public-notification procedures, a federal audit topic of concern. The new public-notification procedures have been added to the MPO’s Bylaws. These procedures include the posting in advance of MPO Board meeting agendas and supporting materials, a process that already has proven itself to be a model for other MPOs.
40. The MPO Board approved the addition of one new MPO Staff position, namely the MPO Public Involvement Administrator position. The position was classified as one requiring ten years of prior experience, and this position should be filled next month.
41. The MPO has joined and is now a member of the national Association of Metropolitan Planning Organization (AMPO) for the first time.
42. The MPO sent an MPO Staff member to the most recent Annual AMPO national conference.

## **E. Reforms Related to MPO Administration**

43. The MPO Board has issued an MPO Resolution tasking the MPO Staff to generate and manage an MPO Training Program for MPO Board members, TTAC members and the region's CAOs.
44. The MPO Staff has announced its intentions to develop an "MPO Board Book" for MPO Board members and others with information about federal transportation planning and programming requirements, MPO financial procedures, and MPO best practices.
45. The term "MPO" is now regularly used when referring to the region's transportation planning and programming matters throughout the MPO organization. The term MPO is also now used regularly by the media and throughout Hampton Roads thus diminishing the confusion that occurred with frequent reference to the PDC.
46. It is now regularly accepted that there is an "MPO Staff", a concept and a term which has helped measurably with morale.
47. The MPO Board has begun to examine the MPO's core legal document, the Governor's 1991 Designation document which established the MPO in Hampton Roads. This document will need to be updated and re-issued sometime over the next several months in order to reflect the numerous MPO structural changes that have been adopted.
48. The MPO Board has begun, similarly, to examine the federal required MPO Planning Agreement (MPA) which codifies the working relationships between three partners: the MPO (regional), VDOT (the state), and the region's Public Transit Agencies (intermodal). This document, likewise, needs to be updated and re-issued over the next several months in order to reflect the MPO structural and administrative changes that have been adopted.
49. The MPO Board has approved a change to the MPO's name from HRMPO to HRTPO (Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization). The word Transportation in the title helps the public to more quickly recognize the organization's mission area. With its new name, the HRTPO will be the organization designated as the MPO for Hampton Roads.
50. The MPO has developed a new independent HRTPO website.
51. The MPO has commenced issuing an independent HRTPO Newsletter on a quarterly basis.
52. The MPO has developed an inspirational unique HRTPO logo.
53. The MPO has obtained and now uses independent HRTPO stationery.

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Drafted by Ray Taylor as of July 14, 2009