

**The MPO's Transportation Technical Committee (TTC)
The Need for TTC Reforms Concurrent with Ongoing MPO Reform
Comments and Suggestions**

General:

First, this paper will examine TTC procedures used during its recent special meeting intended to develop Economic Stimulus Funding plans for Regional Transportation. One document used at this meeting was a set of Secretary of Transportation Pierce Homer slides described below. It was noted that all funding numbers remained pending but were considered to be close to the final numbers and, therefore, useful for planning purposes.

1. Virginia expects to receive 650M to 700M of the national 27.5B being planned for Highways
2. 30 % (195M to 210M) will go to federal STP projects. For the MPO, this includes what are normally considered to be our RSTP and CMAQ projects.
 - a. The Pierce Homer slides showed that the Hampton Roads allocation in this category would be about 41.4M
3. 67 % will be available for statewide (and regional) projects. This is the category that includes the larger projects that use Interstate maintenance (IM) and national highway system (NHS) funds, for example.
 - a. Using the same ratio as above, Hampton Roads' share in this category would reasonably be expected to be between 85M and 95M.
4. Off the top, 3 % (or 19.5M to 21M) of the state amount will go to Transportation Enhancement (TE) projects.
 - a. Using the same ratio as above, Hampton Roads' share in this category would reasonably be expected to be about 4.1M.

TTC Deliberations:

1. The TTC discussions were limited to the STP category listed above and to the expected 41.4M to be allocated to Hampton Roads. The other funding sources were not discussed.
 - a. The TTC decided to divide the 41.4M by jurisdictions on the basis of population and to require the jurisdictions to submit their respective prioritized list of projects for stimulus funding.
 - b. Several efforts to include region wide transit as a partial recipient of the 41.4M STP funds were defeated.
 - c. Several efforts to urge a regional perspective, at least a regional transit perspective, were defeated.
2. The state representative suggested twice that the TTC (and MPO) produce a recommended list of the larger projects that would use the estimated 85M to 95M in IM and NHS funds, but there was no discussion or action taken on this idea.
3. There was no discussion about regional plans for using the estimated 4.1M in TE funds.
4. The TTC plans to resume discussion and planning for the Stimulus Funding at its next regular meeting on March 4, 2009.

An Assessment and General Recommendations:

1. The meeting opened without useful guidance or direction from the MPO Board or the MPO Staff.
 - a. No regional perspectives, regional needs or regional guidance were presented as a basis for discussion at the beginning of the meeting. The meeting and its discussions were conducted as a room full of individuals. A few efforts to encourage the development of a regional perspective were defeated.
 - b. Multi-modal perspectives were not advanced at the beginning of the meeting and, when introduced into the discussion, these considerations were not supported.
2. The TTC limited its discussion to the narrow category of STP matters and the effort of determining how to best spend stimulus funds that would be allocated to this STP category of projects. The TTC should be the “technical advisory committee” for all of the MPO’s categories of interest. The TTC needs to be more than an STP Committee.
3. Using this stimulus meeting as a single data point, it is clear that the TTC needs to undertake reform measures every bit as comprehensively as is being done in the MPO reform process being followed by the MPO Board and the MPO Staff.
4. TTC is composed of exceptionally talented members. As a vital element of the MPO organization, the TTC needs to conduct its own level of reform; to develop a new level of assertiveness and confidence; and to deliver a higher level of quantifiable and region-based advice to the MPO Board in the months and years ahead. As the Board’s Advisory Committee, the TTC needs to deliver this advice, verbally or in writing, directly to the MPO Board. The current stimulus funding management exercise may be a place to first test these ideas.

Specific Recommendations:

1. As the MPO’s leading Technical Advisory Committee, **the TTC should advise the MPO Board on all stimulus-related matters** (large projects, STP level projects and small TE-like projects) and not limit itself and its advice to the STP level projects.
 - a. Admittedly, this would differ from most normal practices of the past, but the idea of elevating the TTC’s work is consistent with the overall MPO organizational reforms that are taking place and that are needed.
2. **The TTC needs to be given more definitive guidance by both the MPO Board and the MPO Staff.**
 - a. Absent guidance otherwise, the TTC now seeks to produce an STP-level list of projects for the 41.4M stimulus funds expected to be available and to do so by compiling a list of inputs generated by the individual 13 jurisdictions.
 - b. We need to invent or learn ways of providing direction and guidance to the TTC that gives focus and boundaries to their discussions and work, such as:
 - Act in a regional manner: Develop your total stimulus plan (or your STP-level only plan) for stimulus funding as one that is based on “regional” needs and on “regional” priorities. Several TTC members and the state representative urged this course of action, but it did not get developed.

- Be in tune with the times, ensure you consider multi-modal perspectives: Develop your total stimulus plan (or your STP-level only plan) for stimulus funding as one that is multi-modal and as one that, as appropriate, includes both transit and freight-related projects. Basically, this was not done.
 - Be bold, give us clear recommendations: Prioritize your total stimulus plan, your STP-level only plan and your TE plan for stimulus funding on a regional, MPO Area-wide basis, and be prepared to explain the reasons for the priority results. This needs more discussion.
 - Tell us how to think ahead and to be more proactive: Show in your total stimulus plan the next two to three projects in each category that fell below the stimulus funding cutoff line. For these projects, identify alternate options that may be available in Stimulus Legislation. For example, can we apply for funds from the nation wide 1.5B Discretionary Grant Program, and how can we position ourselves to get a second bite out of the apple by capturing funds from other metro areas that blew it and did not get projects under contract within the allotted times to do so?
3. **The HRMPO should develop its prioritized project list for stimulus funding for the larger projects** as well as for the STP-level projects. It was said that the state (VDOT) will produce the statewide list. That may be so, but:
- a. Using its unmatched knowledge of regional needs, there is no down-side to the MPO making its own list of the larger projects that warrant stimulus attention.
 - Indeed, that is what an MPO is expected to do and such an activity would be consistent with the ongoing multiple MPO organizational reform efforts that seek to elevate the MPO's assertiveness, public visibility and professionalism.
 - Or, as was stated by the state representative, at least you should have your own carefully developed and reasoned list to be able to compare it to whatever will be the statewide plan.
 - The state's smaller MPOs, (Lynchburg, etc.) may have to defer to VDOT on these matters, but the larger MPOs have more at stake and need to act.
4. **The TTC and the MPO should ensure that transit (public transportation) is addressed** in their STP-level list of projects (which the TTC is working on) and in their list of larger projects (if our MPO decides to create such a list).
- a. This is definitely one way to advance a regional perspective, for example busses go everywhere.
 - b. It is also a way to advance a multi-modal plan, a major federal objective.
 - c. During the TTC meeting, it was decided in a 7 to 6 vote that transit was adequately funded via the FTA stimulus line and did not need additional STP-level funding.
5. **The HRMPO should develop its own list of Transportation Enhancement (TE) projects.** Federal legislation permits states to delegate TE planning down to some or all of its MPOs, and several states do this, but not Virginia. Still, as the largest MPO in Virginia, someday in the future our HRMPO should seek to conduct its own TE project management chores as it now does for its RSTP and CMAQ chores.

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