

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

1. TTC in the MPO Bylaws

The current text that pertains to the TTC in the MPO's Draft Bylaws follows:

“7.04 Transportation Technical Committee. The Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) shall be an advisory committee to the MPO Board. Its voting membership shall be comprised of three members of each locality in the MPO, two members from the Virginia Department of Transportation, one member from the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, one member from the Virginia Port Authority, and one member from each public transit agency. The Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration shall be non-voting members. The representatives of each locality shall be appointed by the Chief Administrative Officer of the locality, the members from the state agencies shall be appointed by the State Secretary of Transportation and the members from each public transit agency shall be appointed by the respective executive director. On an as needed basis, the MPO Chair may invite additional persons to participate in committee meetings in a non-voting capacity. The committee shall maintain a regular meeting schedule.

7.04.1 Duties. The TTC shall provide technical review and assistance in transportation planning and transportation-related air quality planning. Members are responsible for providing, obtaining, and validating the required latest official travel and social-economic planning data and assumptions for the regional study area. Members are to ensure proper use of the data and assumptions by the MPO with appropriate travel forecast related models. Additional and specific responsibilities may be defined from time to time by the MPO Board.”

Recommendations:

- a. Consider changing the acronym from TTC to TTAC. Pursuant to 23 CFR 450.316, the state letter of October 28, 1996 forwarded the initial and still effective Metropolitan Planning Agreement to FHWA and FTA. The letter stated that “The MPO has established a Technical Advisory Committee to provide review and recommendations on items referred to it by the MPO”. When formed by a public agency, the word Advisory has important state and federal legal implications, to wit, it is a “public body”. Consistency and clarity in the use of terms is vital to the ongoing MPO (and TTAC) reform process. Even the current draft Bylaws text uses the term “advisory”, but only in the text where it seems, thereafter, to get lost. In addition, the MPO is in the process of forming a CTAC and an FTAC, thus the new acronym, TTAC would fit right in.

- b. Consider changing the voting membership. Currently, there are 45 voting members which, it seems, is too large a number and which is overly cumbersome when, for example, recorded or roll-call votes are required.
- c. Consider expanding the TTAC's voting member representation to include a military representative.
- d. Take steps to clarify the TTAC's position and authority in the MPO Bylaws. The TTAC reports to the MPO Board, not to the MPO Staff, and this needs to be made clear.
- e. Take steps to better describe the roles and responsibilities of the TTAC to include its responsibilities to forward its regionally-based TIP, CLRP and RSTP/CMAQ document and project list recommendations.
- f. Take steps to describe the Chair of the TTAC and how that is determined.
- g. Be it in the MPO Bylaws or not, take steps that will permit the TTAC to more directly report to the MPO Board. Options for this may include (1) the regular attendance of the TTAC Chair at MPO Board meetings where he or she may be called upon or given tasks by the MPO Board, or (2) a written monthly report to the MPO Board (the TTAC's meeting Minutes may suffice), and/or (3) a monthly briefing by the TTAC Chair to the MPO Board that addresses and highlights the most important issues that need attention. Effective two-way linkage between the MPO Board and any one of its Advisory Committees (here, the TTAC) needs to be developed.
- h. It is recognized that the TTAC will soon have its own Bylaws, but still, there are some minimum upgrades about the roles, mission and structure of the TTAC that need to be inserted and included in the MPO Bylaws. Then, with the TTAC's functions well clarified in the MPO Bylaws, the TTAC's Bylaws can go into further detail.

2. Objective Criteria and region-based recommendations for the MPO Board's decision making process.

The TTAC has effectively used an objective process in the past when developing the region's RSTP and CMAQ Plans and project lists, and so, there is something here that we can build upon and something, also, that has a positive national reputation.

Recommendations:

- a. Consider, at the TTAC level, the merits of dramatically expanding the scope of this objective process and using such an expanded scope to address, as a first priority, the region's quadrennial TIP development process and a new regional Tip Update process on an annual basis. The TIP is the MPO's very key Programming document. It is where "the rubber hits the road" and, arguably, the TTAC's and MPO's most important of all documents.

- b. Consider, at the TTAC level, a follow-on extension to this new objective criteria approach. Specifically, extend it to the CLRP process. Also be prepared to apply it to pop-up new funding opportunities that may (and will) arise such as the recent ARRA exercise where we produced a transportation project list in alphabetical order that was not mindful at all of the likely value of funds scheduled to come to our region. New pop-up funding events will arise. The federal highway transportation fund may get an infusion some day from the current administration (will we be better prepared than we were for ARRA?) Or, there may be big budget reduction events such as the state's recent three-step SYIP reductions where, relatively speaking we lost much more than other regions, a result that could have been tamed if we had used more clear objective criteria and thus had a more clear set of project priorities.
- c. Consider, at the TTAC level and for starters, that there are the eight federal transportation planning factors which must be a central part of the objectives based process. One can then add a few state-based requirements as criteria, and the MPO Board could provide any additional Board-approved regional criteria that need to be satisfied. True, lots of criteria, and they need to be given relative weights. Such weighting should be TTAC developed and MPO Board approved. This is not easy, and it will require considerable discussion that should transpire, first of all, at the TTAC level.

3. Programming.

Programming is both a technical and a policy process, and it is an incredibly important process. Only the TTAC can address the technical part of the programming process, and this it must do.

This topic—programming—is a natural follow-on topic to the need-for-objective-criteria topic addressed above. Having used a region-based objective process to develop the TIP and to annually develop the TIP Updates, the MPO and the region will be much better positioned for the other programming tasks that follow.

The MPO-approved four year TIP Program is entered, unchanged into the state's four year STIP Program which is in turn approved by the feds, whence their approval legally "obligates" federal resources to the transportation projects listed therein. Virginia moves those approved projects into its SYIP (currently the FY 2009-2014 SYIP), and the SYIP's financial tables display this funding in two columns. For example, at the present time those two columns are FY-2009 Allocations and FY 2019-2014 Allocations. For programming technical professionals, there is great importance and important differences to these two columns. Programming tactics and strategies need to be applied, and on this point we now have (or should have) some important lessons learned from the ARRA and the state SYIP reduction procedures, cited above, that we recently and unfortunately experienced.

Recommendations:

- a. Consider, at the TTAC level, developing new methods for prioritizing the region's transportation project lists. These methods can build on the objective criteria process discussed above. They also need to be methods that give great, unequivocal and no-longer-doubted clarity to the prioritized list such that it is no longer subject to change (except through a formal annual TIP Update process) and will no longer be contradicted by individuals. For the TIP, this requires the will to decide on what is the first, the second and the 100th priority transportation project. This, then, of course, leads to the tactics of which projects should be placed in which column in the TIP/STIP/S YIP (the FY-09 Allocations or the FY 10-14 Allocations columns).
- b. Consider, at the TTAC level, whether it is worth it for Hampton Roads, and if so, just exactly how should the TTAC crank in, launch and manage an Annual TIP Update process. Suggest, for starters, a review of Northern Virginia's TPB process that annually starts a TIP Update procedure in January of each year and that by May comes to a decision of whether or not a TIP Update will be needed that year or not.

4. The MPO's Vision Statement

The MPO Reform Committee and the MPO Board are currently examining options for both an MPO Vision Statement and an MPO Mission Statement. The process of discussing these statements, alone, is valuable.

Recommendations:

- a. Consider, at the TTAC level, also discussing these draft Statements, and as appropriate, providing a formal Sense-of-the-TTAC opinion to the MPO Board.

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