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Tri-County Regional Planning Commission

913 West Holmes-Suite 201
Lansing, Michigan 48910
Telephone (517) 393-0342
Web Page: www.mitrpc.org
Email: tcrpc@acd.net
Fax (517) 393-4424

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Regional 2035 Transportation Plan Public Information Meeting

DATE: January 7, 2010 (Wednesday)
TIME: 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
PLACE: **HANNAH COMMUNITY CENTER**
Executive Conference Room
819 Abbot Road
East Lansing, MI 48823

Attendance: Leonard Provencher, Cycling Community
Mike Sobocinski, Citizen
Tim Potter, Cycling Community
Bill McConnell, Citizen

Staff Present: Jon W. Coleman, Executive Director
Paul Hamilton, Chief Transportation Planner
Steve Skinker, Transportation Planner
Hary Prawiranata, Transportation Analyst
Maria Habba, Executive Assistant

I. Welcome and Introductions

Jon Coleman called the meeting to order at approximately 7:15 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance. He said the presentation tonight will be a high level overview of the Plan. Coleman mentioned the series of upcoming meetings for the Grand River/Michigan Avenue Corridor Study. An errata sheet was made available.

II. Regional 2035 Transportation Plan

A. Staff Presentation: Hamilton said this Plan is a federal requirement. The Plan is updated every four years. Hamilton provided an overview of the transportation process (Page 1-5) and explained each chapter of the Plan. Hamilton also explained portions of the Plan supplement and requirements of the federal law. Hamilton also explained the Supplement which deals with other federal mandates. The Supplement contains approximately 300 maps in the environmental mitigation section. Hamilton said it's a federal requirement to identify system level mitigation issues, not project level environmental analysis.

(Over)

B. Questions and Answers:

Leonard Provencher asked if socio economic data gets beyond numerical things and reflects changes in type of employment within the region from a very basic view of less manufacturing to more technical professional orientation and more service economy employment. He thinks that will have a dramatic effect on people's types of transportation needs.

Hamilton said that is a really good point. He doesn't know of many places around the country that are that advanced in their demographic forecasting process.

Leonard Provencher said that he brings this forth at this time for future consideration, since he isn't a sociologist or demographics or numerical type person or statistician, but he thinks it should be something that should be looked at.

Hamilton said the models aren't sensitive to those kinds of things. To the extent that there are some of those factors embedded in the data sources that we draw from, like the REMI model which is the national econometric model, which looks at all the interplay between many different employment categories and state to state and county to county interaction and other stuff that happen within the borders of the U.S. , there might be some of that embedded in control totals and some of the source data. In our case we only do two categories of employment – retail and non retail – because the trip rates are dramatically different between those categories. There are some areas around the country that do life cycle or life stage kind of forecasting. I don't know that they get any better travel forecasts out of it. TCRPC spends much more time doing demographic data than many MPO's and the question is whether adding another layer of complexity will lead to any real improvements in the travel forecasts. He understands the point and commented that the travel models and trip rates would need to become more sensitive to be able to do that, or we arguably could get into activity based forecasting in the future – there may be more ways to consider that in a microsimulation model. Essentially you start simulating each individual in the community and then you have a lot more data that goes in. That is probably where the state of the practice will go in 20 years or so, but right now it is still an experimental model. Ours is a fairly sophisticated forecast model.

Leonard Provencher asked Hamilton to go back to the previous slide. He is seeing a section of Marsh Road and basically Haslett Road north to the county line approximately that was just redone by the ICRC within the last two three years, and even if you go back the slide before this you show it as being deficient today. Does that mean that what they did there two or three years ago was not sufficient for today, just two to three years later?

Hamilton said this is an excellent question.

Leonard Provencher said that he came across some others in the document where they are proposing things, another is right in his neighborhood, the intersection of Okemos Road and Haslett Road where they said we had two through lanes and a left turn lane and now they are proposing in just a few years a roundabout through there. Are the authorities, whether they be the municipality or the road commission, are they doing fixes that it seems are quite extensive and up to date, and the models show they are still deficient either today or in the very near future.

Hamilton said that in any modeling, calibrated or not, engineers and planners do have to make judgments about the results and they do have to look at things in terms of priorities and needs and budgets and resources and whether the output makes sense. The Plan reflects deficiencies based on the view of the model and we are essentially reporting what it is showing. This is a PM peak period only. Hamilton's own opinion is that he suspects is that what the model is showing there is some odd traffic and intersection issues or patterns that need to be further evaluated. What they did was a resurfacing/reconstruction, they didn't do any new lanes out there – it was essentially falling apart. By 2035 if the traffic does continue to build up out there based on the growth forecast and so forth than maybe more needs. That is why you do a plan every 4 years.

Leonard Provencher said he can understand if you said in 2035 it is going to be deficient, but if you are saying that it is deficient in 2010, just two to three years afterwards, it seems like the time, money and effort put into it wasn't correct.

Hamilton said you have to make a judgment about the accuracy of the modeling and then you have to let the public and the road agency make the judgments about whether other kinds of fixes are needed. Hamilton said he doesn't see that much congestion in that location by 2010, will he by the end of this year, he doesn't know, but he suspects the model is showing some unusual results and perhaps some intersection issues which influence that link showing up as deficient – this may indicate a more detailed analysis is warranted for the intersection.

Leonard Provencher asked if it ADT that contribute highly to modeling deficiencies? Hamilton said they are capacity deficiencies.

Mike Sobocinski said that regardless of how many lanes that road has, it is simply one road that goes through a developed area and that is the thing, we have one expressway access point and that is the most direct route between about 10,000 people. So, the fact that it's one road, maybe the reason why even if it were six lanes, it is still likely to be a bottleneck if the demand to go between those two points is high.

Hamilton said that it may be very well that what is needed is intersection treatments and not new lanes.

Leonard Provencher asked if the TCRPC makes the call as to the deficiency, or is this information from the actual road authority.

Hamilton said this is information we provide from the model to the road authority to make decisions about what they wish to program. So we apply our judgments along with the MDOT staff as to what the model is showing and we provide those to the engineers and they look at it in terms of the traffic conditions and what their design decisions might be.

Coleman said that it might be worth mentioning that the Michigan Avenue/Grand River corridor study is not just a transit study, but it is looking at complete streets and looking at how that corridor performs in terms of the roadway as well as the adjoining buildings.

Tim Potter asked if the freight issue is driven by deficiencies of bridges or seasonal load problems.

Hamilton said no – what is shown is just a highway capacity issue. There is a bridge management system that is referenced in the management systems chapter, and it is basically used statewide to identify priority bridges for the bridge committees and takes into account structural deficiencies, functionally obsolete bridges, traffic loads and various other factors. He noted restricted bridges do have impacts on freight, which has not been shown on this graphic.

Leonard Provencher asked what the basis is for determining priority corridors. Is it recreational or is it community? What elements come into determining the priority?

Hamilton said what we have been dealing with relative to the planning process is looking at things that make long distance connections, cross jurisdictional boundaries, provide opportunities to leverage additional facilities where is growth or economic development that may occur, so that decisions about what goes in there are being made when land use decisions are being made. It also reflects a lot of input from the public.

Bill McConnell asked if these are paths.

Hamilton said these are priority corridors and they are truly corridors. It says roadways, but it doesn't say what we are going to build. It says someplace in this corridor we need a facility, it is a priority to do that, we need to do a design study to figure out where to put it. Corridors are not limited to the roadway surface, it could be off road or on road or even an adjacent road, but the priority is the need to get people through that area and that is the issue.

Leonard Provencher said that living in Meridian Township, and looking at the neighborhood he is in, that dates from the mid 1950's, what is in the sidewalk maps is incomplete.

Hamilton acknowledged the sidewalk inventory is a work in progress and is not yet complete for the Township or Lansing and East Lansing and is being done based on 2005 aerial imagery. The township pathway program describes their primary non-motorized facilities. Sidewalk maps were based on 2005 aerial imagery and/or to the extent that we have inventory data from local agencies, we have used it, but we still need to take that other step once it is all done and send it all back out and get feedback to make it more current. We will have the region flown this year. Hamilton noted some parts of the Lansing/East Lansing/Meridian sidewalk inventory remains to be completed, and that work is continuing.

Bill McConnell asked what the red dot was.

Hamilton said that is a bridge project.

Tim Potter asked if the red dot on that map was because it is important for that connection.

Hamilton said it is a red dot because it is a bridge that is going to be under construction.

Mike Sobocinski asked if we have a regional inventory of pipelines.

Hamilton said that he does not believe we do. If we did, he doesn't think he could put it on there, due to Homeland Security considerations. Pipeline administration under the USDOT regulations goes to Washington. Hamilton said a lot of that information isn't mapped, but what may exist, may now be confidential.

Leonard Provencher asked about the point made earlier regarding the red dot, which is the bridge. In relation to priority conservation areas, the right hand side, which is east of there, is upstream from where the bridge is being done, and the less sensitive area, is to the left of the dot, downstream, and how they arrived at that is a bit hard for him to conceptualize.

Hamilton said we have a published report on the web page that identifies the ratings criteria and you can go in and see the scores for that particular parcel and different categories and why it got rated the way it did.

Tim Potter asked what the purple and blue lines represent.

Hamilton said those are road improvement projects.

Coleman wanted to clarify that the study includes two documents, a general assessment at a regional level and a more detailed look. The MNFI won't give specific locations of endangered species for security reasons. Even though you can see where the ratings are, you can't find specific parcel information.

Tim Potter asked if public utilities are ever included on the maps.

Hamilton said we started mapping that, but we don't yet have an overlay of them. In today's world we now have security issues to consider on different levels with planning, implementation and other efforts. They are however clearly visible on aerial imagery and Google maps.

C. Public Comments:

Coleman called on citizens who had filled our speaker request forms asking Bill McConnell to speak. Mr. McConnell declined. Coleman said to please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments in the future.

Leonard Provencher thanked the TCRPC for notifying him by mail about this. He received the CD promptly after calling and requesting it. He would like to speak to the non-motorized part this evening, based on his interest and expertise. Chapter 3, roman numeral 15, objectives A through S, very accurately reflected what transpired in various meetings that members participated in. Where he did come up with some questions, under investment strategies on page 10-105, he is wondering where in the process is a baseline established for some of these things, in reference to like a 20 year strategy, is there an establishment of a baseline where you can get a numerical measurement as to where you have gone. Is there an established number, how can you say whether you have doubled it or what the objective is if you don't have a starting baseline value. At what time, with what organization, on what level are these established? He is glad to see that the complete streets organization part was included.

He came across two things that are in need of correction. He would like to address the I-69 March Road location. He thinks that for safety reasons, based on his two time attendance at the AASHTO presentation on non-motorized design, the fact that the guidelines which were established and published in 1999 and new documents set to be released in 2010, that physical constraints always push what is actually done, but he thinks improvements are needed to make that location more consistent with AASHTO guidelines.

He also noted on the map on Page 13-18, map 13-3, what is illustrated was completed two years ago, the section between Merchant Road by the Meridian/East Lansing Water Plant and Okemos Road has been done for two years. As far as the text, in table 13-2, you are talking about the second phase of that, which goes east of Okemos Road over to Marsh road, so he sees the need for a correction. As much as Ken Howe's map illustrated potential bridges, he thinks some of those he did not physically observe, and

there are road crossings, either physical or artificial, on the pipeline drain where it crosses Haslett Road – there is an adjacent pathway.

Coleman said we can accept additional comments via email up until 5:00 p.m. on the night of the Commission meeting action on January 21st. Coleman said we're also developing an errata sheet for corrections.

Leonard Provencher asked about data to bench mark investment strategies begin and how they will be measured.

Hamilton said that there are specific recommendations that non-motorized data collection programs should be undertaken by local units. The data that Hamilton is aware of has been collected by student groups and is spot specific. People are counting, but there is no base line. There is a specific recommendation in there by Dr. Maleck that would try and address that question. Second part of the question is, at one time that was a much more specific goal. At one point we talked about reduced crashes by 50%, we haven't done a crash analysis, and even where we could do so, Hamilton isn't sure what actually ends up in a crash report for bike and pedestrian crashes is accurate. A lot of that information is never reported, so therefore it isn't going to end up in the system. Crash information for pedestrians and bikes are very under represented. The point is well taken, there isn't a lot of data. Hamilton doesn't agree that we shouldn't set goals, just because there isn't a lot of data.

Leonard Provencher also commented that AASHTO does not use the term “bike paths”, they are “multiuse” or “shared use paths.” He gave a quick definition of shared use paths. It is easier to defend the system when using the term multi use or shared use, to speak to the greater population who does not bike, but would utilize the paths. Hamilton said he would certainly look into that, that for technical reasons some of the ways we classify facilities in the inventory are not completely consistent with AASHTO. Leonard said that in Meridian the pathways are defined as joint pathways. Hamilton said we will look at these definitions.

III. **Other**

Closing Remarks: Coleman thanked those in attendance for their comments.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:55 p.m.