

**Greater Madison Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)<sup>1</sup>**  
**December 2, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Virtual Meeting hosted via Zoom

---

Wood called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

**1. Roll Call**

**Members present:** Samba Baldeh, Margaret Bergamini, Yogesh Chawla, Steve Flottmeyer, Grant Foster, Patrick Heck, Dorothy Krause, Tom Lynch, Jerry Mandli (joined during item #5), Mark Opitz, Mike Tierney, Doug Wood

**Members absent:** Paul Esser, Ed Minihan

**MPO staff present:** Bill Schaefer, Zia Brucaya

**Others present in an official capacity:** Diane Paoni

**2. Approval of November 4, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Tierney moved, Baldeh seconded, to approve the November 4, 2020 meeting minutes. Motion carried.

**3. Communications**

None

**4. Public Comment (for items *not* on MPO Agenda)**

None

**5. Presentation on East-West Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project and Proposed Refinements**

Mike Cechvala with the City of Madison Department of Transportation provided a presentation on the status of the East-West Bus Rapid Transit project. The MPO and Common Council adopted the locally preferred alternative (LPA) earlier this year, allowing the city to enter the Small Starts project development phase in August 2020, which puts the project in the pipeline for FTA funding. They are now working on modifications to the LPA. The schedule calls for completion of the environmental analysis in 2021, construction in 2023 and possibly early 2024, and start of operations in fall 2024. The operating plan now calls for running three routes with BRT buses at once, adding a north-south route and one from downtown to Middleton. The overlapping service in the east-west BRT corridor would provide the needed service levels. The city plans to provide a 50% funding match, based on comparable projects in the past five years.

Cechvala said the east-west route will include a mix of center-running, side-running, and mixed traffic lanes. The addition of center running is one of the major proposed changes to the LPA. Center running provides a number of advantages for safety, operations, construction time, and costs. They are looking at removing some left-hand turns on East Washington Ave. and Mineral Point Rd. to fit wider stations, and have received some concerns about that, particularly on Mineral Point Rd. They are also investigating parking and travel lane conversions on Whitney Way and East Washington to accommodate center-running lanes. Plans no longer include a Rosa Road extension to the West Transfer Point. The recommendation at Madison College Truax campus is to use the Mendota Street cut-through to get back to East Washington. The east terminal is now located at East Washington and

---

<sup>1</sup> Formerly named Madison Area Transportation Planning Board

East Springs Drive instead of on a property within the East Towne Mall, due to ownership complications and redevelopment uncertainties. The total number of station locations has increased from 27 to 31, to provide more uniform spacing. Public engagement is ongoing, including several community meetings.

Baldehy asked about the impact of the new center lanes on trees. Cechvala said that for the most part they will not have to remove trees for center lanes, as construction will only happen at intersections for the stations, which mostly uses the existing left turn lanes. Baldehy asked how the city is keeping track of community feedback and incorporating it into the design. Cechvala stated that Urban Assets is tracking all engagement. They have not heard many major concerns; most of the concerns relate to the west side, including loss of left-hand turns and loss of parking on Whitney Way. They have also heard concerns about the impact to bikes along East Washington, and how this project can help with speeding and reckless driving. The city feels that this project should have a positive impact on that. They have also heard some concerns about pedestrian safety when accessing the median stations. With respect to this, many other cities are using this model, and stations will be wide and located at intersections, which will help with safety and visibility. Center lanes also allow pedestrians to cross only half of the roadway, instead of the entire roadway if they need to switch directions. Baldehy asked about tracking the impacts of BRT to the community and environment if people are driving less. Cechvala noted that it is hard to tie a loss in traffic volume to a new transit project alone. The city's expectation is not to see significant reductions in traffic volume, but rather to accommodate future growth through better options. The pandemic is helping the city feel more comfortable with removing lanes in some areas.

Bergamini asked whether the city has checked in with Madison College about future development plans and class locations, noting that their use of the bus pass program had been diminishing prior to COVID; she wondered whether the Mendota connection is justified in light of that, if it will cause houses to be lost. Cechvala clarified that the Mendota Street connection will not cause the houses to be lost, but rather they would just be on a bus line, whereas previously they were not. The city has talked with Madison College and their plans point to more student consolidation at Truax. If this changes, the city could remove the Mendota Street connection. Opitz asked whether the different BRT routes will always have the same stops and endpoints. Cechvala said the blue and green lines will always be the same, but the yellow line would sometimes have a different pattern, either stopping at the Eau Claire station or heading to Middleton. Schaefer asked whether the public understands that with the current operating plan and center-running lanes, local buses will no longer run in the BRT corridor. Cechvala said the city has been open about this during public engagement and received questions, but has not had a lot of resistance so far. Schaefer asked how the issue of the West Transfer Point will be dealt with between the BRT project and the network re-design study. Cechvala said they are working on a couple of alternatives. One option is to remove the transfer point; another is to relocate it to the Rosa Road BRT station; a third option is to run multiple BRT route patterns, with some routes going to the transfer point and some not. The consultant for the network redesign study is asking the city for an answer, rather than working it out as part of that project.

#### **6. Brief Update on Beltline (USH 12/14/18/151) Dynamic Part-Time Shoulder Use Project**

Schaefer stated that the project is proceeding and scheduled to be let on December 8, 2020, with construction beginning in 2021 and operation beginning in late 2021 or 2022. WisDOT will make an announcement within the next few weeks and will continue to provide information after that. They acknowledge that there is less of an immediate need right now from a capacity standpoint, but that it makes sense to do it now in light of other necessary improvements happening in conjunction, and in anticipation of an eventual return to more typical traffic volumes.

## **7. Presentation on Analysis of Impacts of COVID-19 on Traffic and VMT**

Schaefer provided a presentation on the impact of the pandemic on trip distribution, VMT, and bicycle travel in Dane County. StreetLight converts big data to transportation metrics. Traffic volumes have returned fairly close to pre-pandemic levels, but weekday peak volumes have not. The analysis looked at five roadways in the region and compared transportation metrics between April 2019 and April 2020, and September 2019 and September 2020. Staff compared the StreetLight data to continuous counts on the Beltline and Atwood Ave. and found that it was very accurate, only slightly over-estimating volumes during the evening peak. StreetLight's VMT estimates were also very close when compared to WisDOT data. The analysis also included comparisons of VMT by census tract, highlighting significant differences in the impact based on location.

Foster asked for clarification of what is counted for household VMT by census tract, wondering whether the significant reduction in his district could be due to less driving to and from the schools there. Schaefer said that the household count is based on the VMT of residents of that census tract. Lynch said it is concerning to see that some census tracts have experience twenty percent more VMT than last year, and wondered whether this is because the data is better this year. Schaefer noted that most of the areas that show a big increase in household VMT are rural, but that there could be an issue with how the household VMT vs. total VMT is calculated. He agreed that the results appear somewhat suspect and staff is looking into that with StreetLight. Bergamini suggested that there could be a relationship between the areas with higher household VMT and the areas where there was a drop in student bus ridership paired with an introduction of more free parking for students, such as in the Eagle Heights area.

Lynch asked whether the data accounts for people in buses. Schaefer said he believed that bus riders were excluded, but they would check on this. He noted that StreetLight will be coming out with bus/rail transit metrics early next year. Lynch said he asked about how bus passenger trips are treated as the VMT and traffic volume data could help the city understand whether BRT was impacting VMT. Lynch also wondered if the VMT data excludes cyclists based on their speed. Schaefer said yes, noting StreetLight has separate bicycle and pedestrian travel metrics. Foster asked whether the MPO could dig further into what the data is showing in the Lake Edge/Glendale area, which is very similar demographically to the Eastmorland area, but shows a significant decrease while Eastmorland shows a significant increase.

Schaefer moved on to the bicycle data, sharing that between April 2019 and 2020, weekday bike trips dropped and weekend trips increased, indicating more recreational trips. Between September 2019 and 2020, both weekday and weekend trips increased, indicating an overall increase in bicycle trips while VMT stayed down. StreetLight also provides bicycle metrics for trip length, duration, circuitry and speed, and all but speed increased, again indicating more recreational trips. Foster asked whether the MPO has compared StreetLight's bike data to city counts. Schaefer said the MPO wasn't able to do that previously because only 2018 StreetLight bike data was available and the city had issues with their bike counts that year. He said MPO staff would plan to do that now that 2019 and 2020 bike data is available from StreetLight.

## **8. Review and Discussion of MPO Rebrand Marketing**

Brucaya presented on the status of the MPO rebrand rollout and priorities for next steps that were recently identified at a joint committee meeting of MPO and CARPC board members. The rebrand was announced in a variety of ways over the past couple of months. The MPO is now looking ahead to 2021, and considering what materials and activities will be most useful to build the long-term foundation for the new brand. The priorities identified by the rebrand committee include: developing a few succinct introductory materials in coordination with CARPC that profile each agency and

highlight relevant projects; regularly developing press releases that can be paired with a standard media kit to share information about MPO plans and projects; finding specific education opportunities to share in existing forums; and focusing on cultivating relationships with key transportation contacts among local communities and boards. A major goal is to help MPO board and committee members act as ambassadors for the agency, by providing useful tools and resources.

Heck said that these next steps are exciting. As a board member, he understands what staff does to support the board's work, but needs a better understanding of the other services and projects going on with the MPO that the board does not hear about. He hopes that the board can be educated through this process. Schaefer agreed that this is a need and opportunity moving forward. Wood noted that the subcommittee discussed making sure that board members have enough information about what the MPO does so that they can speak intelligently when talking with their local committees and councils. Krause asked whether the MPO would like to get on agendas for local councils and other meetings. Schaefer said yes, but the feedback that we have heard is that it is important for the presentation to have a specific project focus rather than be broadly, "about the MPO." Krause said that considering that teachers are always looking for opportunities, the MPO could build in a youth education component with materials that explain what the MPO does and ask about their interests. Brucaya mentioned that one topic that came up at the joint committee meeting was the importance of clarifying with people what the MPO's powers and authorities are, and how these relate to other agencies within the region, which can be especially confusing for young people. Krause stated that she sees the MPO as helping people see the countywide perspective beyond their individual piece.

#### **9. Discussion Regarding Local Match Funding for MPO's Budget**

Schaefer noted in discussing the 2021 budget the board had asked for information on what each municipality's share of local funding would be if all contributed proportionate to their population, as recommended in the MPO agreement. He showed the table with the numbers.

Lynch said he would like to have this discussion, but preferably early in 2021, due to the late hour. He asked why Madison was not included in the list of communities contributing to the MPO's budget. Schaefer said that the city of Madison is responsible for the local match funding per the agreement so he hadn't listed Madison, but would do that when the item is discussed at a future meeting. Opitz said he would like to have a discussion as well in advance of next year's budget discussions. He said Middleton no longer contributes and he believes that more communities should be contributing. Krause agreed. Foster said he would like to discuss this at the next meeting. Opitz agreed. Schaefer said he would include it on the agenda of the next meeting.

#### **10. Status Report on Capital Area RPC Activities**

Foster said he couldn't think of anything to report. He said there will be no December meeting.

#### **11. Announcements and Schedule of Future Meetings**

Schaefer mentioned that CARPC staff would present to the board early next year on the land use scenario and household and employment forecasts being done for the regional transportation plan update.

#### **12. Adjournment**

Opitz moved, Bergamini seconded, to adjourn meeting. Motion carried. Meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.