

# Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization Special Work Session Summary

## CAPCO Conference Room Friday, December 7, 2001

### Participants:

Michael Aulick	Executive Director, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Walt Bailey	City Planner, City of Marble Falls
Ronald Bohac	City of Schulenburg
Eric Carlson	Mayor, City of Elgin
Ed Collins	Advanced Transportation Planning Director, TXDOT-Austin District
Maureen McCoy Daniel	Principal Planner, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization
Howard Falkenberg	Austin Area Research Organization
James Fisher	Village Administrator, Village of Bee Cave
William Garbade	District Engineer, TXDOT-Austin District
Bill Hamilton	Councilmember, City of Rollingwood
Lewis Hayes	VISTA, Williamson County & Cities Health District
Ronny Hibler	Commissioner, Burnet County
Neal Kocurek	Austin Area Research Organization
Dave Marsh	Executive Director, Capital Area Rural Transportation System
Tex Middlebrook	City Manager, City of Smithville
Mark Miller	City of Georgetown
Lowell Moore	Mayor Pro Tem, City of Cedar Park
Jane Noble	Councilmember, City of West Lake Hills
James Oakley	Commissioner, Burnet County
Maurice Pitts, Jr.	Commissioner, Lee County
Ed Polasek	Chief Long Range Planner, City of Georgetown
Randy Robinson	Candidate for State Representative – Hays, Blanco, and Caldwell Counties
Herb Schulze	Commissioner, Caldwell County
Daniel Sowada	City Administrator, City of West Lake Hills
Robert Stuard	Director of Transportation, Planning, and Development, TXDOT-Austin District
Hector Tellez	Commissioner, Blanco County
Dwight Thompson	Mayor, City of West Lake Hills
Jason Townes	VISTA, Williamson County & Cities Health District
Marge Tripp	Community Health Promotion Division Director, Williamson County & Cities Health District
Tom Word	Traffic Engineer, City of Round Rock
Betty Voights	Executive Director, Capital Area Planning Council
Jeff Kaufman	Research and Planning Analyst
Erin Toedtman	Comprehensive Planner

### **I. Call to Order – Chairman Ray Sanders, Mayor of Lockhart**

Mayor Sanders thanked everyone for participating in the meeting, and led introductions.

### **II. Introduction – Betty Voights, CAPCO Executive Director**

Ms. Voights provided an overview of the last CARTPO workshop, at which participants identified organizational goals and formed subcommittees based on these goals. The four initial subcommittees included the following: Planning and Technical Assistance; Project Development; Legislation and Policy Initiatives; and Alternative/Supplemental Transportation. She noted that CAPCO staff has

recommended that the Planning and Technical Assistance subcommittee be merged with the Project Development subcommittee because they deal with overlapping issues.

Victor Tellez, Commissioner of Blanco County, inquired about the advantages that would be gained by breaking into subcommittees. He was concerned about whether or not subcommittees would be heard by the major players in the transportation arena, such as TXDOT and State Legislators. He was also concerned about a lack of funding, adding that people tend to lose interest when they plan but cannot act. He wondered if it would be more effective to identify some priorities as a group and work from there.

Ms. Voights responded by saying that it would be rather difficult and time-consuming to address all of the issues as one large group. She said that local officials are already asked to spend a lot of time at the meetings, but that staff is willing to do whatever the group decides would work best. Mayor Sanders added that breaking into subcommittees helps individuals focus on the areas and issues that they find most interesting. Funding is certainly an issue that everyone should look at together, but the group could spend hours going through every issue listed under each subcommittee.

### **III. Discussion of Proposed Changes to the Unified Transportation Program (UTP) – TXDOT**

Mayor Sanders said that TXDOT seems to be moving in a different direction, possibly stemming from recently passed constitutional amendments that will allow the organization to function a little differently. He then welcomed William Garbade, District Engineer for the TXDOT Austin District, who agreed to provide some information about changes at TXDOT.

Mr. Garbade said that the biggest change will be related to the funding of highway projects: TXDOT is proposing changes to the UTP that will simplify the highway selection process by paring down the number of funding categories from thirty-four to twelve. TXDOT will also be changing the terminology used to describe the three phases of project development. Currently, projects fall under “Priority 1,” “Priority 2,” and “Long Range Plan” levels of development authority. This terminology is somewhat confusing, and will be redefined as the following: “Planning,” which goes beyond ten years; “Development,” which includes design, right-of-way acquisition, and so on; and “Construction.”

These changes will take some of the burden off of the Transportation Commission, which currently has to put transportation money into thirty-four separate pots. While the amount of money will not change, how and where it is spent will be more flexible - the changes will give TXDOT more discretion in the selection of projects. Under the current process, we compete for funding for specific projects that are selected based on some type of index (e.g., cost efficiency, traffic, etc.). Under this system, we may receive funding to fix a particular interchange, but may not have the money to fix anything on either side of it. With the new proposal, we will receive funding for an entire corridor (e.g., U.S. 183 in Austin), and will get to decide which projects along that corridor will be funded and the order in which they will be funded.

Mr. Garbade said that corridors will be defined using a “collaborative” process. Pots of money will be designated for “Metropolitan” corridors, “Urban” corridors, and “Statewide Connectivity” (rural) corridors. Representatives from each of these areas will have to work together to define the corridors in their jurisdictions, as well as decide upon how the money should be split. For example, the corridors in Austin would be I-35, US 290, and US 183. Houston might have to give up some funding one year so that Austin can obtain all of the funding needed for a particular corridor, while Austin might have to give up some of its funding the next year for a Houston corridor.

Mr. Garbade thinks that the new process will work, but will not happen right away: we will have to phase it in over a two-year period. To further complicate things, we will have a new transportation

bill in about two years that will start the preliminary writing on the next Transportation Efficiency Act (“TEA-3” or “Next-TEA”).

Maureen McCoy Daniel, Planner for the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), added that the comment period for the proposed UTP changes opened up in November, and will close on January 29, 2002. If the Transportation Commission approves the concept, some changes will be incorporated into the next year’s funding cycle: the money will be lumped together and distributed to the districts using the existing funding program. The new procedures should be entirely in place in fiscal year 2004.

Mr. Garbade said that CARTPO might provide an excellent opportunity for local governments to get involved in or learn more about this process. CARTPO could make a statement to the Commission or provide comments on behalf of the region. Perhaps one of the first things we should do as a group or by committee is to identify what is currently on the books for our region – identify what we know is going to happen in the future. We can identify corridors that are on the Texas Trunk System, National Highway System, etc. From here, we can work our way down to the project level. With a lot of participation, we can enhance the educational process and make people feel more comfortable about the way TXDOT approaches project development. The Commission might look to a body like CARTPO for input to help them make decisions.

James Oakley, Commissioner for Burnet County, inquired about the additional latitude given to the district engineer in choosing projects. Mr. Garbade said that the district engineers would indeed have more latitude in picking the right projects, as opposed to always using formulas. They will still be restricted to using formulas in some cases, though, and the Federal Highway Administration will still dictate where some of the funding goes.

Mr. Garbade then addressed the Farm-to-Market Program: money that is pumped into FM roads goes only towards rehabilitation – there is no hope for adding new roads to the system under this program. The Transportation Commission would like to place more emphasis on getting people from San Antonio to Austin, and from Austin to Dallas-Fort Worth, etc. because these corridors significantly impact state and national commerce; therefore, what little money there is for FM roads will go solely towards trying to hold the existing system together.

Commissioner Oakley commented that this means that the counties will have to bear the burden of making county roads into FM roads, which is a major step for some counties. Dave Marsh, Executive Director of CARTS, added that the counties are left holding the bag in those areas that are becoming somewhat urbanized, and asked if there would be a way to allow them to levy some kind of optional gas tax. Mr. Garbade suggested that the Legislation and Policy Initiatives Subcommittee look at this as a possible funding strategy.

Commissioner Oakley mentioned that a lot of the traffic on our major corridors is induced by NAFTA, and asked if there are any special funds available to address this issue. Mr. Garbade said that there are some earmarked NAFTA-related funds, and that the Commission goes after these with all due diligence. Texas was not very successful, however, in its latest attempt to obtain these funds.

Michael Aulick, Executive Director of CAMPO, suggested that the Legislation and Policy Initiatives Subcommittee also consider the creation of Regional Mobility Authorities (RMAs). This is the other new highway funding proposal that has come out of recent state legislation. It allows counties to come together to build toll roads, and the Commission is currently considering rules for this process. Comments about the broad proposal will be accepted until December 12, 2001, and the rules will be proposed in January or February, 2002. The regular comment period will commence after this. Rules could be on the books as early as Summer, 2002.

Mr. Aulick clarified that the RMA legislation essentially allows county-by-county turnpike authorities, such as those that exist in Dallas or in Houston. It also allows the placement of tolls on existing roads to collect funds and then use those funds to build other projects.

Mr. Garbade then addressed the hypothetical situation of turning US 281 into a toll road: if you collect tolls and make money over and above what it takes to pay for your bonds and maintain the road, then you can divert the excess revenue to the county road system. Even though the money has been generated by a toll road project, it can be applied toward other projects and even different modes of transportation, such as rail. It is not a farfetched idea, and might be something the subcommittees will want to consider.

Mr. Marsh added that the name “Regional Mobility Authority” implies a regional approach. The Texas Transportation Commission has to approve any RMA that is formed, and the Commission would probably want to make sure that the toll roads would have a regional impact.

Eric Carlson, Mayor of the City of Elgin, said that the concept of having piece-meal toll roads and bridges is a Band-Aid approach. As unpalatable as it is, we should increase the tax on gas. He believes that maintaining and staffing tollbooths is costly, and he wonders if it really makes sense to use this approach. Mr. Garbade responded by saying that it makes sense if you want to get projects built sooner than later: the real benefit is quicker delivery of projects. Once the project is paid for, you can either eliminate the collection of tolls all together, or continue to expand the system with the additional tolls collected. Commissioner Tellez added that increasing taxes might actually decrease revenue because some people might avoid purchasing fuel in Texas.

Dwight Thompson, Mayor of the City of West Lake Hills, said that he likes the idea and the cleanliness of trying to do things on a statewide basis with a uniform taxation scheme, but he has two main concerns: first, things are done more quickly and efficiently if control is more localized; and second, the Austin Metropolitan area is currently competing with the larger urban areas for transportation funds. This competition is becoming more and more intense, and making an impression on the Transportation Commission to obtain funding over Houston and Dallas is a formidable task. Anything that we can do to increase the possibility of obtaining more funding is beneficial.

Mayor Sanders proposed that we allow the Legislation and Policy Initiatives Subcommittee to review the proposed UTP changes and draft written comments that could be sent to the Transportation Commission. He then invited participants to break into the three subcommittees, and said that the entire group would reconvene after lunch.

#### **IV. Subcommittee Work**

The three subcommittees (Planning & Technical Assistance, Legislation & Policy Initiatives, and Alternative Transportation) met individually to discuss and refine their goals, organizational structure, and meeting dates and times.

#### **V. Lunch**

#### **VI. Review Subcommittee Work**

The subcommittees reported the following back to the entire group:

##### **Planning & Technical Assistance**

This subcommittee discussed the following goals:

- Develop a long range plan for region-wide mobility
- Facilitate coordinated regional transportation planning and projects
- Assist in State Rail Plan Development
- Refine CARTPO's organizational structure and bylaws

The subcommittee decided that the first step in addressing all of these goals is to examine what plans and projects are "already on the books" in our region. We may actually be well on our way to having an existing region-wide mobility plan and are simply not aware of it. Before the subcommittee proceeds any further, it needs to conduct an inventory of plans and projects that other agencies are already working on. From this inventory, it can determine where any gaps exist.

The group decided that TXDOT, CAMPO, and CAPCO should get together before the next subcommittee meeting to develop a list of available transportation data. The entire subcommittee will then review this list and determine which information would be the most beneficial and necessary for addressing the previously mentioned goals. After this is done, members can begin collecting information that will allow the group to piece together all of the existing plans and projects in our region. The subcommittee also decided to postpone rewriting the bylaws until after some of the issues have been further refined.

The group agreed to meet again on Friday, January 25, 2002 at 9:30 a.m., at which time it will review the list provided by TXDOT, CAMPO, and CAPCO and consider electing a chairperson.

### **Legislation & Policy Initiatives**

Commissioner James Oakley, from Burnet County, was elected as the subcommittee chairperson. This subcommittee discussed the legislation and policy initiatives goals, and came up with some additional language (shown in bold italics) that would further define these goals and their purposes:

- Seek ***adequate*** funding for the construction of new and maintenance of existing FM roads

The subcommittee discussed funding issues in general, and one of the suggestions was to raise the overall tax and designate a portion of it specifically for the FM system. The group is interested in ensuring that the FM system stays alive, and would like to figure out how to get funding for new FM roads.

- Gain more local control on state highway projects

The subcommittee would like to research any laws or statutes that limit control decisions and interfere with getting funding and rural projects back to the local level. It would like to encourage greater cooperation and communication between local governments and TXDOT district engineers on smaller local projects. In a similar vein, it would also like to focus on increasing the Category 11 (State District Discretionary) funds.

- Seek ~~additional~~ ***federal and state participation*** in funding right-of-way acquisitions, and streamline the right-of-way acquisition process

The subcommittee felt that for state projects, any previous right-of-way acquisition that has been made by local governments should be recognized and used as an in-kind contribution. In short, members would like to see local governments receive credit for what they have already done. The subcommittee would also like to assist in the identification of long-range right-of-way needs, and would like to support quick-take authority for cities and counties.

- Increase county land use control and planning authority *to address transportation issues as part of the development process*

The subcommittee discussed the idea of allowing counties to assess impact fees: it felt that these fees could go directly towards transportation expenses that counties incur as a result of new development. In addition, the subcommittee would like to support mandated acquisition of right-of-way through subdivision regulation.

- Create a Regional Mobility Authority

The subcommittee postponed the discussion of this issue.

- Encourage changes in TXDOT's traffic signal warrant requirements to improve traffic safety

The subcommittee will change the focus of this goal because the traffic signal warrant requirements are federally controlled. Instead, the group would like to encourage a more lenient interpretation of the warrant process and increase sensitivity at the district level to those communities who are asking for traffic signals. It would like to see a more proactive approach in the traffic signal warrant process, as opposed to waiting until certain criteria are met (e.g., number of fatality accidents exceeds a threshold).

The subcommittee would also like to research legislation that limits TXDOT's ability to do its job efficiently and effectively.

The next subcommittee meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, January 9, 2002 at 8:30 a.m., at which time members will formulate a draft response to the proposed UTP changes. This draft will be sent out to the entire CARTPO membership for review and comment. After additional CARTPO responses have been received (CARTPO members will have approximately one week to respond), CAPCO staff will help complete a formal response to be submitted to the Texas Transportation Commission by January 29, 2002.

### **Alternative Transportation**

Commissioner Herb Schulze from Caldwell County agreed to chair the subcommittee, which discussed the following goals:

- Develop and improve upon transportation modes other than single-occupancy vehicles
- Expand the rural public transportation system and services

The subcommittee agreed that the second goal would be the top priority. The members would like to see more vanpools operating from rural areas for commuters; dedicated bike lanes; more park-and-ride facilities; transportation-related social services (i.e., day care facilities associated with transportation facilities); and improved access to rural transportation services. Members were primarily concerned about the following: future population densities and their impact on mobility; quality of life issues; and traffic congestion mitigation.

The subcommittee recognized that achieving its vision would be a formidable task, and decided that an immediate goal would be to develop the technical, policy, and regulatory background information necessary to design a strategy for and provide input to the planning process. Members did not schedule another subcommittee meeting at this time.

## **VII. Meeting Adjourned.**