

**SOUTHERN ALLEGHENIES
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**

**RURAL TRANSPORTATION COORDINATING COMMITTEE AND
RURAL TRANSPORTATION TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

April 14, 2021

12:00 PM

Zoom

Virtual Meeting

ACTION SUMMARY

The following are the major actions taken by the Rural Transportation Coordinating Committee (RTCC) at this combined meeting held on April 14, 2021, on Zoom.

1. Approved the February 24, 2021, RTCC Meeting Minutes as presented.
2. Approved the submission of an application to the Community Project Funding Program listing the US 219 Salisbury Rockfall project as the top priority and the Addison Resurfacing project as the second priority.

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MEETING MINUTES

I. Welcome

The following RTCC members were present at the meeting:

- Commissioner Jeff Thomas, Huntingdon County
- Commissioner Randy Bunch, Fulton County
- Commissioner Colleen Dawson, Somerset County
- Mark Tobin, PennDOT Central Office
- Tom Prestash, PennDOT District 9-0
- Brandon Carson, SAP&DC
- Steve Howsare, SAP&DC

The following RTTC members were present at the meeting:

- Donald Schwartz, Bedford County Planning Commission
- Rick Suder, Bedford County Planning Commission
- Debra Clark, Huntingdon County Business & Industry
- Brad Zearfoss, Somerset County Planning Commission
- Josh Boland, Somerset County Economic Development Council
- Donald Hedge, Broad Top Township
- Karl King, Central PA Rails to Trails
- Ron Rabena, Huntingdon County Rail Authority
- Frank Hampton, PennDOT Central Office
- Vince Greenland, PennDOT District 9-0
- Brandon Peters, SAP&DC

Others in attendance included:

- Commissioner Pamela Tokar-Ickes, Somerset County
- Nolan Ritchie, Senator Langerholc, Jr.'s Office
- David Lybarger, PennDOT District 9-0
- Anne Stich, PennDOT District 9-0
- John Pecze, PennDOT District 9-0

- Zachary Lee, SAP&DC
- Matt Bjorkman, SAP&DC

Each participant received a meeting packet that included:

- Agenda
- February 24, 2021 RTCC Meeting Minutes
- Community Project Funding Program Letter
- Earmarks Email
- List of Potential Projects
- PennDOT Budget Information
- Pennsylvania's 2021 Transportation Funding Options

II. Review and Approval of the February 24, 2021 RTCC Meeting Minutes

Tom Prestash welcomed the committees to the meeting and Brandon Carson conducted roll call. Tom asked everyone to review the February 24, 2021, RTCC Meeting Minutes included in the meeting packet.

With no further discussion, Commissioner Jeff Thomas made a motion to approve the February 24, 2021, RTCC Meeting Minutes as presented. Brandon Carson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

III. Community Project Funding Program (Congressional Earmarks)

Tom informed the committee that PennDOT has been working through list of potential projects for the congressional earmarks and wanted to get input from the committees. Brandon Peters added that they received word from the Secretary that they should consider projects for earmarks and were given guidance on eligibility. Brandon reached out and let them know the RPO will be submitting an application for the program. The RPO needs to submit an application for one or all five of the eligible projects by April 23rd. He reviewed the eligibility requirements with the committee noting that the projects must happen in FY 2022 and require a 20% match. He reviewed the list of eligible projects noting that anything that is funded will free up space on the TIP for additional projects. One of the five projects was on the Interstate TIP and the remaining four are on the Southern Alleghenies TIP. Projects added to the TIP to replace the projects would have to be eligible for the same type of funding as the project that was removed.

Brandon asked the committee if they preferred to pick one or two projects to submit or submit all five in a prioritized list. Commissioner Jeff Thomas recommended selecting a project from the Southern Alleghenies TIP. Applications for the program will be submitted nationwide. The committees discussed submitting two prioritized projects. There is a possibility projects can also be partially funded but that has not been confirmed. After much discussion, the committees agreed the US 219 Salisbury Rockfall project should be the top priority. The Addison Resurfacing project was selected as the

second priority. Tom agreed to submit the two projects unless guidance comes out that only allows one.

Debra Clark made a motion to rank top three by dollar amounts. There was no second.

Commissioner Jeff Thomas made a motion to approve submitting an application to the Community Project Funding Program listing the US 219 Salisbury Rockfall project as the top priority and the Addison Resurfacing project as the second priority. Brandon Carson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

IV. Alternative Revenue Options

Tom reminded the committees that at the last meeting they decided to send letters of support to the legislators on alternative funding measures. There is a lot going on including the formation by the Governor of the Transportation Revenue Options Committee (TROC) in March, which is discussing different alternatives for funding. He turned it over to Brandon who noted that some information on the different funding options was included in the meeting packet. He thought it would be good for the committees to discuss how these options would affect the region and decide which ones they would support. TROC is actively seeking this input now. He would like to add what the committee decides today to the letter to the legislatures, which has not yet been mailed. He reviewed the list of funding options and asked Nolan Ritchie if he had any comments before the discussions began. Nolan stated that Senator Langerholc is the Chairman of the Transportation Committee and an ex-officio member of TROC and they are also conducting their own analysis of different ideas to legislate. They are not just looking at ways to generate revenue but also looking at ways PennDOT can cut costs.

Spot Tolling – This collects fees at specific locations, usually a bridge or tunnel. There are tolls on a number of bridges in Pennsylvania but none in the RPO.

Con – Brandon Carson said this is expected to divert traffic to alternate routes leading to concerns on that alternate route.

Pro – Brandon Carson noted that funding does stay in the planning region.

General Comment - Tom noted that this has been rolled out of Pathways P3 program and we do not have any in our District 9.

General Comment - Nolan Ritchie added that Senator Langerholc submitted SB 382 which aims to void PennDOT's P3 bridge tolling initiative. However, the way it is written it does not preclude PennDOT from resubmitting the initiative to the P3 Board following a more transparent process outlined in SB 382. There is a general consensus for tolling, but it needs to be transparent and PennDOT needs to be accountable.

Managed Lanes – Additional lanes on a highway where traffic is managed for faster travel. Can be managed by charging a toll or encouraging carpooling.

Con – Steve Howsare said that this would not provide much benefit in the Southern Alleghenies Region as there is not that much traffic.

Con – Nolan Ritchie said that we need to recognize how high they would set the rates. This would need to be controlled as well. What is a fair amount to charge?

Congestion Pricing – Charges a fee based on congestion of the roadway encouraging users to carpool or use alternative routes when traffic gets heavy creating a reliable speed and trip.

General Comment - Brandon Peters noted that this is a bigger revenue generator in urban areas but is not favored there as indicated by comments thus far.

General Comment - Brandon Carson suggested that those in the rural regions may have more concerns about VMT tax, this could make it more equitable overall if both were done together. There are not many transit options in the region.

General Comment – Nolan Ritchie suggested a variable VMT rate making it higher in the urban areas and lower in the rural regions to find the right mix.

General Comment - Matt Bjorkman noted that 60,000 commuters from the region commute out of region for work and 40,000 coming in.

Question - Commissioner Jeff Thomas asked if this would be just the mileage traveled within Pennsylvania or all mileage. Brandon Peters said when he did the trial it did not charge for toll roads or out of state miles. He also asked what about others coming into state and traveling?

General Comment - Don Hedge stated that it's hard to do one thing to fix all. He likes the congestion pricing but it will take a mix to make it work district/statewide.

Corridor Tolling - Similar to turnpike, tolls interstates and expressways based on the distance traveled along that road.

General Comment - Nolan added that for this option to gain any type of interest there needs to be equity. If you toll one, toll them all unless there is local support to toll the interstate in a particular region.

Road User or Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) – This is tied to GPS technology and charges a fee based on the number of miles you drive.

Con - Don Hedge said he did not like this method because of the distance traveled in the rural areas. You drive a farther distance to work every day.

Con - Commissioner Jeff Thomas commented that in Huntingdon County there are a lot of commuters traveling to construction jobs. He puts several hundred miles per week on his car. He is not opposed to it, but it must be affordable for the residents.

Question - Brandon Peters asked what everyone would think of it if there were different rates for urban and rural areas.

General Comment - Matt suggested each county having a different rate.

Question - Don Hedge asked what it costs PennDOT per mile to maintain the roads. Tom responded that they would have to define that. There is maintenance, repair, and replace. Tom will try and get some data for him. Don would like cost per year per vehicle.

Question - Ron Rabena asked if the weight of the vehicle was being considered. A large truck would have a bigger factor in road costs than a regular vehicle.

General Comment - Nolan Ritchie just to play devil's advocate, if an individual lives in a rural part of the state and they travel to work he would imagine they are paying more in gas tax. This should be a consideration when looking at the VMT option. The VMT option may put a heavier burden on them but they are paying more in gas tax now anyway. Ron Rabena agreed and added that once there are more battery powered vehicles it will change.

Question - Ron asked how they collect this data. Brandon replied there is a plug in for your vehicle that tracks it. Currently, the best way to do it is the GPS trackers in everyone's cars.

Con - David Lybarger noted that this has generated a lot of conversation. No one wants the trackers because of the privacy aspect.

Con - Commissioner Colleen Dawson added that her husband travels to Pittsburgh every day for work and this would be triple cost, gas tax, toll roads, and VMT. Combined fees and taxes can be overly burdensome for one individual.

Pro - Nolan Ritchie added it is the most effective user fee option. The more you use the more you pay.

Pro - Brandon Peters noted it is also a larger revenue generator.

Fee and Tax Increases – Increasing vehicle related fees and/or increasing various taxes with the exception of the gas tax.

General Comment - Commissioner Jeff Thomas commented that he like the idea of the State Police funding transitioning back to the general fund more quickly.

General Comment – Commissioner Jeff Thomas said most increase fees should be considered but not a 200% increase.

General Comment - Brandon Carson agreed but at the same time noted that we need to look at how some of these dollars are used. What are driving costs? What are inflating costs from a regulation standpoint? It is important that PennDOT and the Legislators understand what is creating some of those bloated costs. He added that if we are going to hold PennDOT accountable, the State Police also need to be held accountable for how they are spending their funds.

General Comment - Commissioner Jeff Thomas added that the Huntingdon County Commissioners sat down with Senator Jake Corman yesterday and this was one of the topics discussed. He realizes the situation needs a solution; it's just finding that solution. He complimented today's presentation.

Vehicle sales tax and/or State tax increases

Con – Nolan Ritchie added that it is important to consider when discussing taxes and fees that TROC is focused on all modes of transportation. Up to this point the discussion has been on highways and bridges. What are these taxes and fees for, roads and bridges, airports, trails, or mass transit?

General Comment - Brandon Peters commented that at this point, we do not know what percentage of the fees go where. Nolan added that as part of Act 89, the vehicle sales tax goes to the general fund. That will be the source of mass transit's capital improvements moving forward once the Turnpike has completed the transfers of \$450M annually which expires next year.

General Comment - Commissioner Jeff Thomas added raising fees and taxes is a necessary evil that needs to be done in a responsible manner.

General Comment - Brandon Peters vehicle sales tax and vehicle property tax together in Virginia is a significant source of revenue. Someone else added that Virginia also has a luxury tax on vehicles.

General Comment - Brandon Peters noted that at the May meeting we can discuss more about the specifics. At least at this point we have a handful of comments to provide when asked. Tom added that this was what we were looking for. The comments will be put the meeting minutes and be available for TROC and other information.

Gas Tax

General Comment - Karl King added an overall comment that any of the proposed increases are more palatable if there is a reduction in gas tax as well.

General Comment - Brandon Peters stated that the gas tax was on the list to be discussed, whether in a reduced form or gotten rid of all together as the Governor suggested.

General Comment - Commissioner Jeff Thomas noted it is not very valuable to keep anymore. He has spoken for increases in the past but with electric vehicles becoming more popular it is not very valuable.

General Comment - Brandon Carson noted that as stated before the system is broken. The solution is complex and maybe it is a hybrid of the revenue streams that have been discussed here. From what he has heard over the last few years at these meetings he felt it was safe to assume that there is a consensus that the current system with the gas tax is broken and we need to look at other solutions. If a combination of these revenue streams are introduced and we get some specifics on how they will be rolled out it may make sense to get rid of the gas tax.

General Comment - Commissioner Jeff Thomas added it may be hard to get rid of the gas tax but at least don't raise it higher than it already is. It could be decreased as other funding sources come in.

General Comment - Brandon Peters stated the Governor has discussed phasing out the gas tax in favor of the VMT, which could be more effective than the gas tax.

General Comment - Brandon Carson added that a fair and equitable formula for the VMT could do just that and do it more effectively than the gas tax.

General Comment - Josh Boland said that tolling provides the second highest revenue stream listed here. How much consideration has that been given? If we toll all the Interstates in Pennsylvania, it could have an impact on logistics.

General Comment - Mark Tobin added that tolling requires federal authority. At this point there is very limited ability for any tolling of interstates. Tolling all the interstates in Pennsylvania would require legislation.

V. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made at 1:30 PM.

<p><u>NOTE:</u> The next meeting of the RTCC is scheduled for May 12, 2021 at the SAP&DC in Altoona, PA and on Zoom at 10:00 AM.</p>

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ACTION ITEMS

Date Issued	Action Items	By Whom	Due Date
	There were no action items at the meeting.		