

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

INTER-DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION

2013 – 2022 Ten Year Plan Public Hearing

November 15, 2011

**NH Department of Transportation – Room 114
7 Hazen Drive, Concord NH
2:00 PM**

Councilor Ray Burton opened the meeting at 2:00pm. This meeting's purpose was for GACIT to review information collected from 27 Public Hearings throughout the state to make recommendations on an updated of the Ten Year Plan for the years 2013-2022. Once adopted, these recommendations will be sent to the Governor by December 15, who in turn will review and present a plan to the Legislature in January for their action. By June 2012, there should be a legislatively approved 2013-2022 Ten Year Plan.

NHDOT Commissioner Chris Clement noted that through 27 public hearings held to review the Draft 2013-2022 Ten Year Plan, the Department's message from the start was consistent and firm. Based on conversations in Congress, there is a real potential for a 30-35% cut in federal funds for all of the states, and the Department continues to bring forward that message. The prior Ten Year Plan, funded at about \$150M per year now looks more realistically like a plan that should be funded at about \$100M per year. The State's priorities continue to be preservation and maintenance of the existing infrastructure, addressing red listed bridges, and the completion of improvements along I-93. In order to meet these top goals, cuts were made throughout the entire program including deferral of I-93 projects, reducing funds for Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), Transportation Enhancement (TE), Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP), and flexible funding previously used to provide point of service transit opportunities for elderly and disabled citizens.

Bill Watson, NHDOT Bureau of Planning and Community Assistance, highlighted a number of specific projects that were discussed throughout the hearing process. These included: Walpole-Charlestown (NH 12 Reconstruction); rail projects in Plaistow, transit funding statewide, NH 125 through Plaistow and Kingston, the deferral of I-93 projects, the Broad Street Parkway in Nashua, the deferral of Hinsdale Brattleboro bridge work, Keene pedestrian bridge delays, NH 101 widening delays in the Bedford area, Sewalls Falls bridge in Concord, and others. In addition, there were a number of common themes heard throughout all of the meetings. These included: Though funding reductions are disappointing, DOT's approach to the Ten Year Plan is prudent; Projects deferred from the Ten Year Plan should be prioritized in anticipation of additional funding; Flex funding for transit should be restored, TE/CMAQ/HSIP funds should be restored; and someone needs to take up the cause of additional revenues. Written testimony submitted to the Department through November 10 supported all of these

concepts. Bill also noted that it was also recommended that the Department should keep track not only of the Ten Year Plan and deferred projects, but should also work with the Regional Planning Commissions to develop a comprehensive list of additional unmet needs.

Bill Cass, NHDOT Director of Project Development noted that there is not sufficient state revenue to support projects through matching funds and direct funding to projects. The federal government is trying to help, but current revenue streams do not support the spending levels that are in place today.

Representative Candace Bouchard spoke in support of the Sewalls Falls Bridge in Concord. The City has raised its matching funds for the project, and the project is an important route for east-west traffic and safety services.

Representative Lucy Weber spoke in support of the restoration of the Walpole-Charlestown reconstruction project to the Ten Year Plan.

Representative John Cloutier spoke in favor of providing transportation funds to cities, including the continued support of projects in Claremont. He also spoke in favor of restoring the Walpole-Charlestown reconstruction project.

Senator David Boutin asked GACIT to consider whether the Capital Corridor rail projects should be included in the Draft Ten Year Plan. He noted that there may not be taxpayer support for the efforts and that any rail efforts would have to be highly subsidized. He also noted that, in contrast to rail projects, it makes sense to move forward with park and ride projects in Manchester and Windham where transit makes more sense.

Councilor Sununu noted his agreement with Senator Boutin's assessment of the rail projects not being economically viable. However, he is interested in having a larger conversation about the place for rail in NH. He also noted that he supports the Department's efforts to address red listed bridges.

Brenda Ferland, representing the Town of Charlestown, spoke in favor of restoring the Walpole-Charlestown reconstruction project. She also noted that the Ten Year Plan should be a highway plan, not a rail or transportation plan.

Guy Scaife, Town of Milford, spoke in favor of a number of projects affecting his community and urged support for a new full interchange to the NH 101 Bypass, addressing safety concerns at the NH 101/NH101A intersection in Amherst/Milford, and noting that the town of Milford supports the NH 101 widening through Bedford as it is really a regional issues.

Steve Henninger, City of Concord, noted that the Capital Corridor rail project is about freight rail services, which should not be forgotten in larger conversations. He also noted his support for three park and ride projects that had all been deferred in the Draft Ten Year Plan: Concord, Manchester and Windham. Though maintenance costs may be difficult to deal with, transit services are very important to the I-93 Corridor.

Nate Miller, representing Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC), noted that the UVLSRPC TAC spoke that no new projects should be added to the Ten Year Plan until all existing projects move forward, that the priority for the region is preservation and maintenance, and NH 12 is at the top of this list.

Bob Wright, Town of Sutton, spoke in favor of making improvements to NH 114 in Sutton.

Ricia McMahon, Town of Sutton, also spoke in favor of making improvements to NH 114. She noted that the RCI numbers provided by NHDOT showed the poor condition of this road. The Town is concerned about NH 114 being used as a bypass to I-89 in bad conditions, and is concerned about the road with the Kearsarge Regional School District relying on the road for school transportation.

Ed Roberge, City of Concord, echoed previous support for red listed bridges and Sewalls Falls Bridge specifically. Ed also noted that there are not many projects on routes for with Cities have the responsibility for maintenance. He suggested that the State should look into some sort of urban betterment funding in creative and innovative ways to help large communities that have state routes running through their towns.

Paul Roberge, representing the Bedford Planning Board, spoke in favor of moving up NH 101 in the Ten Year Plan. The current situation is negatively impacting the quality of life for the town and its residents that live in neighborhoods adjacent to the Corridor.

Barbara Annis, Town of Warner, spoke in support of funded state aid highway project on NH 103 near Exit 9 in Warner.

Councilor Wieczorek noted the very large turnout and support for the NH 101 widening project through Bedford. He spoke in favor of rail and train efforts, tempering those thoughts with the concerns of funding them. He did note that the larger Chamber of Commerce groups in the State, including Manchester and Nashua, both supported rail activities.

Commissioner Clement noted that there are no highway dollars or any other funding currently authorized for the Capital Corridor projects. These projects in the Draft Ten Year Plan are predicated on stimulus or other funds for both capital and operating costs. He also noted that Legislative changes would be necessary to support rail. He also added that now is the perfect time to invest in Interstate 93. Cost of capital continues to drop, bid prices continue to come in lower than estimates, and materials prices are stabilizing. It is important to find a way to get this project done sooner.

Councilor St. Hilaire made a motion to advance the Sewalls Falls Bridge project from 2016 to 2013/2014. After some discussion, the motion was withdrawn.

In response to a question from Councilor Burton, the Department indicated that a nickel added to the gas tax each year of the Ten Year Plan would address all of the deferred list projects. It was also noted that a nickel added to the state gas tax could address all of the I-93 needs.

Councilor St. Hilaire noted the great work done by the Regional Planning Commissions. He echoed concerns heard throughout the Hearing process, which is that if the RPCs' top priorities are not being funded, then what the point of the process is. The Councilor felt that the top regional priorities should be looked at by GACIT in their final deliberations.

Councilor Burton thanked all of the staff involved in keeping the GACIT process moving forward. The next meeting is scheduled for November 30, 2011 at 2pm at the Executive Council Chamber Offices at the State House. With that, the meeting was adjourned at about 3:45pm.