

December 6, 2017 GACIT Meeting in Concord, NH
NHDOT JO Morton Building 2:00 pm in Room 114

Executive Councilor Wheeler opened the meeting and welcomed all in attendance.

Roll call: Councilor Pappas, Councilor Volinsky, Councilor Prescott and Victoria Sheehan, NH Commissioner of Transportation.

NHDOT in attendance: Chris Waszczuk, Deputy Commissioner; Bill Cass, Assistant Commissioner; Pete Stamnas, Director of Project Development; William Watson, Glenn Davison, Sharon Allaire, Lucy St. John and Tom Jameson, Bureau of Planning and Community Assistance; Kathy Mulcahey-Hampson, Senior Hearings Examiner; Marie Mullen, Director of Finance; and Patrick Herlihy & Shelley Winters, Bureau of Aeronautics, Rail and Transit.

Regional Planning Commissions in Attendance: North Country Council- Greg DiSanto; Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission- Meghan Butts; Southern NH Planning Commission Sylvia Von Aulock and Nate Miller; Nashua Regional Planning Commission- Jay Minkarah; Rockingham Planning Commission- Tim Roache; Strafford Regional Planning Commission- Colin Lentz; and Tim Murphy, Southwest Region Planning Commission.

Others in Attendance: Alex Koctrubal, Dave Solomon, Larry Major, Julie Chizmas, Paul Worsowicz and Gary Abbott.

Chair Councilor Wheeler began the meeting at 2:17 pm. He asked everyone in attendance to introduce themselves. Councilor Kenney arrived after the introductions were completed. Chair Wheeler proceeded to the items on the agenda.

Pete Stamnas and Chris Waszczuk provided an overview of the handout materials. Commissioner Sheehan explained that NHDOT would like direction and confirmation from GACIT regarding the Draft Ten Year Plan so staff can be prepared for the December 20th GACIT meeting. She asked if the draft plan should be prepared with the proposed turnpike toll increase projects and accelerated schedule, sound wall program, corridor study program, and the proposed CMAQ application projects which will be discussed in the meeting today.

Motion by Councilor Prescott, seconded by Volinsky to direct the Department (NHDOT) to prepare the draft Ten-Year plan based on the proposed turnpike toll increase.

Discussion on the Motion:

Councilor Kenney asked if the vote would be binding or non-binding.

Commissioner Sheehan explained it would be non-binding. The purpose is to provide direction to staff on what to include or not include in the draft Ten Year Plan. The Draft Plan would also include the CMAQ projects selected. The CMAQ application will be discussed later in the meeting. The Draft Plan

would be prepared and distributed in advance for review and discussed and voted on at the December 20th meeting.

Councilor Prescott asked for a summary of the comments heard at the Portsmouth GACIT hearing on Monday, December 4th in his District which he was unable to attend due to health reasons. He thanked Councilor Volinsky for attending and presiding over that meeting. Councilor Prescott heard that about 75 people attending the hearing, with 20 people speaking in support of the toll increase and 14 speaking in opposition of the toll increase. He noted that at several of the previous GACIT public hearings, there were lots of comments about the need for sound walls.

Chris Waszczuk then provided a recap of the Dec 4th public hearing in Portsmouth. He commented that from his notes, there were 34 comments, 20 in support and 14 in opposition of the proposed toll increase; four Senators spoke in opposition commenting that more public input and Legislative involvement is needed; those who spoke in opposition including business owners and trucking firms noted this would be a cut to their bottom line; comments or letters of support were received from Dover, Portsmouth, Nashua, Merrimack, Concord, Manchester, and Nashua and Strafford Regional Planning Commissions; and there were many comments in support of sound wall especially along the seacoast.

Councilor Volinsky commented that he was struck by the nature of the comments offered at the December 4th public hearing in Portsmouth. He commented that he appreciated and is respectful of the comments relating to the trucking industry. He noted that he asked business owners providing testimony to comment in the context of the recent tax decreases (BTP & BTE), as there is some advantage there. He also noted that toll expenses are deductible pre-tax dollars. He also comments about the Pannaway neighborhood in Portsmouth and that these residents have been without sound walls for over 40 years.

Chris Waszczuk explained what the proposed toll increase would be good for the state. The increase would allow some Turnpike projects to be started and completed sooner and free up future federal funds. At the various meetings people thought this would be a good strategy to address our needs elsewhere across the state.

Councilor Volinsky asked if this approach has been done before.

Chris Waszczuk commented that the NH Legislature had deemed it prudent back in 2009, when I-95 was extended 1.6 miles (added to the turnpike system), from the Portsmouth traffic circle to the Stateline.

Councilor Kenney asked if the proposed toll increase is permanent and if there is a sunset clause considered, and what will the \$36-\$46 million be used for in the future years.

Chris Waszczuk commented that turnpike funding would be used for improvements to other sections of the Turnpike System. He further explained if there were no other needs, the turnpike toll rate could be reduced, as an option. He discussed three segments of the Turnpike System where future Toll funds are needed:

1. Dover from - Exit 6 up to Rochester. This is the last unimproved segment of the Spaulding Turnpike (circle to North of Rochester), the existing interchanges are substandard and a feasibility study is envisioned.
2. High-level bridge connecting NH and Maine. There is considerable congestion in the summer. A feasibility study is included to address issues related to cost and what type of improvements could address the current and future issues related to the traffic congestion and long lines of traffic which extend for ¾ mile. A Feasibility Study is a useful planning tool to look at what could be done to correct this situation.
3. Manchester 293 (once Exit 6 & 7 are completed), the last remaining unimproved section is then then south of Exit 5 to Route 101. Suggest a feasibility study is included to look at the section from south of Exit 5 to Route 101.

He further explained that as turnpike revenue is built-up it would be used for other needs, and if there were no other needs, the turnpike rate could be reduced, as this is certainly as option.

Councilor Kenney commented that he is concerned about low-income residents, single-moms and others with limited resources as any toll increase is a concern to them. Some people from the North Country area of his District have two tolls during their commute. He referred to Old Dover Road and asked if there was an increase in traffic along secondary roads when tolls are increased as a result of toll avoidance. He noted that to many of his constituents and increase of \$50-\$75 a month can be an issue.

Chris Waszczuk commented that in 2007 they looked at this issue, and noted that for a brief time following a turnpike toll increase there is some diversion to secondary roads, but it is short-lived. He then discussed the proposal for discount to frequent toll users (40 trips). He commented that the Legislature will be involved in any proposed frequent user discounts and anticipated there will be lots of debate and whether this is the most appropriate approach. He noted that the discount would have an impact on the toll revenue. For example an option of 20 free trips would reduce potential revenue by \$2.8 million, and a potential loss of revenue of \$4.6 million if unlimited.

Councilor Pappas commented that he heard that people are avoiding tolls and diverting to Brown Avenue since the airport access road has been completed. He also asked about the location of the Bedford toll plaza.

Chris Waszczuk commented that there is not benefit in using Brown Avenue to avoid the tolls. He noted that the airport access road was built with federal funds and FHWA would not allow this project to include a toll location; however the Department will considered revisiting this discussion with FHWA. He noted there has been some discussion about the location of the Bedford tolls. There has been a loss of \$ 2 million dollars of uncollected revenue because the toll plaza location is south of the airport exit ramp. The location of the Bedford toll is a topic that will need to be revisited, to recapture the current loss in revenue.

Councilor Wheeler asked for clarification on how the \$36 million dollars would propose to be spent, the debt service, and the \$50 million dollar bond which is proposed.

Chris Waszczuk referred to the detailed numbers presented in the Power Point presentation from the Dec 4th GACIT meeting in Portsmouth. He further noted that over a 10 year period \$400 million would be added to the capital programed; however the various projects such as the Bow-Concord, Exit 6 & Exit 7, the F. E. Everett and other projects exceed \$600 million. A \$50 million dollar bond is proposed to advance projects in FY2022. Cash flow would be “negative” for a period of time, and then after FY 2027 the turnpike dollars would flow in the positive.

Councilor Wheeler asked if the proposed plan did not include the accelerated projects would the \$50 million bond be needed. He also commented that all electronic tolling is not in the news yet and if the intent is to eliminate cash lanes.

Chris Waszczuk commented that NHDOT held a meeting about the toll plazas in Dover- Rochester area some time ago, heard comments in Bedford, and Hooksett. Many people commented that they don’t want NHDOT to put in toll booths, that they wanted open tolling. He briefly discussed the cost of convert to open tolling, and this would require the action of the Legislature. He also discussed using a 10 year bond instead of a 20 year bond (referring to projects in the Dover-Rochester area). He explained that there will continue to be All Electronic Tolling (AET). Currently there are cash lanes at each of the tolling locations.

Councilor Kenney asked about how many jobs would be lost with AET.

Chris Waszczuk commented that through attrition there is about a 12% turnover rate. They don’t fill the full-time positions, but would grow part-time positions. There is a need for seasonal part-time positons. He can’t say for certain but there are about 10-12 positions at each location, and ultimately there would be about 35 full-time positions.

Councilor Kenney commented that the toll booth staff are the friendly faces welcoming travelers to NH, providing directions, and helping travelers. If we don’t have toll attendants, we could lose this friendly helpful element which defines NH and thusly we are culturally eroding our character. The toll attendants do a great job.

Chris Waszczuk commented that he has similar sentiment about toll attendants when he travels as well. He noted that the toll attendants are friendly. The change over from having fewer toll attendants would be a phased approach, and there may be time in the next decade to take out the Hampton and Hooksett tolls attendants.

Councilor Wheeler asked several questions about the tolls, including what happens if someone goes through a toll booth and doesn’t pay; if they go through without paying is there a fee for mailing them a letter, or extra fees added on? Towns are concerned about municipal trash trailer fees. The trucks hauling the trailer are charged a toll but the trail is not.

Chris Waszczuk and Commissioner Sheehan commented that anyone can get a NH EZ pass transponder and remain anonymous but still receive a bill. There is signage telling people if they go through a toll they can submit the fee within 7 days to avoid any additional fees. Other ideas are being explored. He referred to Florida's program which is like a cash payment network (reverse debit card). Commissioner Sheehan commented that summer visitors and others often want to just go the toll and want to pay late. They don't want to get stopped in traffic. He commented that the truck fee is based on the number of axles, and he will have to look into the question about the municipal trash trailers.

Bill Cass commented that we can look at how this issue of the trash truck be addressed in the toll system.

Chair Wheeler asked if any further questions, vote on the motion:

Motion by Councilor Prescott, seconded by Volinsky to direct the Department (NHDOT) to prepare the draft Ten-Year plan based on the accelerated plan as spelled out including the proposed turnpike toll increase. All in favor- Prescott, Volinsky, Pappas, all opposed Kenney and Wheeler. Three (3) in favor and two (2) opposed. Motion carried.

NHDOT staff noted that the minutes of the December 4th GACIT public hearing in Portsmouth and the NHDOT Dec 4th presentation, and the upcoming meetings in Concord and Manchester will be posted to the website.

Councilor Prescott asked if this is a signal to the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) to hold additional public hearings.

Commissioner Sheehan commented that staff will prepare the Draft Plan based on the motion, which includes the proposed toll increase. The Draft Plan will also include the outcome of today's discussion on the CMAQ project applications. She explained that GACIT at the December 20th GACIT meeting will vote on the Draft Plan, which will then be sent on to the Governor. She noted that the Governor will then decide if he supports the plan as presented with the toll increase.

Councilor Prescott reiterated that the Draft Plan will be prepared based on the proposed toll increase, and this draft plan will be voted on by GACIT on Dec 20th and then provided to the Governor and signal to the RPCs to start the public hearing process.

Commissioner Sheehan noted that the Regional Planning Commissioners have been involved throughout GACIT process, hearings and their TAC meetings. Essentially the RPCs can provide input to the Governor and through Legislative process if they support the plan as presented and voted by GACIT before January 15th.

Tim Roache, Rockingham Planning Commission commented on the small window of time to provide comments on the plan, would be from December 20- January 15, 2018.

Commissioner Sheehan noted that NHDOT welcomes RPC feedback throughout the entire process, including through Legislative process.

Councilor Volinsky commented that at the December 20th GACIT meeting, the Draft Plan voted on will be GACIT version of the Ten Year Plan.

Councilor Wheeler suggested that the December 20th GACIT meeting which is scheduled for 2 pm on December 20, be changed. He suggested that it be scheduled to be held immediately following the regularly scheduled Governor and Council G&C meeting (as this is the holiday season). Bill Watson noted that a revised notice will need to be prepared to reflect this change in meeting time of GACIT. .

Chair Wheeler then continued to the next item on the agenda, the CMAQ Discussion.

Bill Watson explained that thirty-one (31) Letters of Intent were submitted, twenty-three (23) applications were received, and one application was disqualified by the FHWA, so now there are twenty-two (22) applications. A committee reviewed the applications and air quality conformity was completed. A handout was distributed showing the 2017 CMAQ Scoring Summary. He thanked the Regional Planning Commissions for their role in the process and for their work in completing the air quality conformity. He noted that this round of CMAQ projects has the best overall results ever. Projects were selected in all regions of the State. He briefly reviewed the five categories of projects and the number in each respective category. Sixteen of the twenty two projects are proposed for funding.

Councilor Kenney asked what happens if a project is awarded funding, and later is not prepared to move forward.

Bill Watson explained that similar to the TAP projects that other projects on the list could move up if a project which is selected for funding is not really ready.

Bill Cass commented that historically this is how the process works. If a projects isn't ready, they would need to reapply in future application rounds. Funding doesn't roll over.

Commissioner Sheehan The request of GACIT today is to ask if the selected CMAQ projects can be included in the Draft Ten Year Plan which will be prepared by staff and presented for the discussion and action at the Dec 20th GACIT meeting. This would also allow time for the RPC to review and comment on the CMAQ projects.

Councilor Volinsky asked if the Somersworth's CMAQ project is the same as another Somersworth project. Bill Watson commented that they are on two different intersections on the same corridor.

Councilor Kenney thanked everyone for their work on the CMAQ application process.

Commissioner Sheehan commented that the selected CMAQ application would need to be added to the Draft Ten Year Plan, and asked for concurrent and a motion.

Councilor Wheeler commented that GACIT just saw the CMAQ summary, and he doesn't think it appropriate to vote on something they just received.

Councilor Volinsky commented that the final vote on the Draft Ten Year Plan would be at the Dec 20th GACIT meeting and suggest that if anyone had comments that they be presented to DOT as soon as possible.

Councilor Wheeler commented that December 1st is the statutory deadline for the Draft Ten Year Plan to be submitted to the Governor, and we need to do it better in the future.

Commissioner Sheehan commented that there are three (3) different RSA related to the Ten Year Plan process. The Department will start the process sooner to meet the prescribed dates in preparing the Draft Year Plans.

Commissioner Sheehan suggested that GACIT could move forward by directing staff to include the selected CMAQ projects in the Draft Ten Year Plan, and could later amend the plan. She suggested that if anyone has comments about the CMAQ project selection to provide comments to NHDOT by December 13th.

Councilor Kenney comments that there are only six (6) CMAQ applications that weren't selected for funding and inclusion in the Draft Year Plan.

Bill Cass commented that a draft transmittal letter to the Governor is included in the packet for review. This letter is similar to other letters submitted to the Governor in the past regarding the GACIT process and submission of the Draft Ten Year Plan. Comments or edits should be directed to DOT staff by December 13th.

Commissioner Sheehan noted that two additional GACIT public hearing are scheduled regarding the proposed toll increase, they will be Tuesday, December 12th in Concord and Wednesday, December 13th in Manchester. These additional public hearings were scheduled at the request of the Executive Councilors Volinsky and Pappas.

Meeting adjourned at 3:27 p.m.