

**SOUTHEAST TN RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RPO)
EXECUTIVE BOARD & TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 29th, 2024

11:00 a.m. Eastern Time

TDOT Region 2 Auditorium | 7512 Volkswagen Drive, Chattanooga, TN 37416

In Attendance:

EB: Gary Davis, John Gentry, Robby Hatcher, John Myers, Eddie Jewell, Hurley Marsh, Lois Preece, Jim Vincent

TCC: Jake Battles, Tom Collins, Cheryl Farley, Dan Evans, Eric Higgins, Chuck Hammonds, Linda Hixon, Tom Trotter, Roy Thomason, Tobe Smith, Glen Varner

Others in Attendance: Rohan Thompson (SETD), Jonathan Rush (SETD), Greg Maloof (Monteagle), Emmalyn Porter (SETD), Chris Kleehammer (SETHRA), Garrett Haynes (SETD), Kelly Puckett (SETD), Audra Kelly (SETD), Shelby Hammonds (SETD), Chad Reese (SETD), David Shinn (City of Dayton), Erin Woodson (TDOT), Kelly Ware (DOH), Melissa Taylor (City of Chattanooga), Le-An Thomason (Polk County Road Department)

- 1) Welcome & Introduction.....Emmalyn Porter, RPO Coordinator**
Emmalyn Porter welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2) Executive Board / Call to Order / Roll Call.....John Gentry, EB Vice-Chairman**
John Gentry called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. Sign in sheets indicated sufficient attendance for quorum for EB.
- 3) Technical Committee / Call to Order / Roll Call.....Dan Evans, TCC Chairman**
Dan Evans called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. Sign in sheets indicated sufficient attendance for quorum for TCC.
- 4) Approval of Previous Minutes EB Meeting.....John Gentry, EB Vice-Chairman**
Motion to approve with addition from Linda Hixon made by Jim Vincent, seconded by Lois Preece. Motion carried.
- 5) Approval of Previous Minutes TCC Meeting.....Dan Evans, TCC Chairman**
Motion to approve with addition from Linda Hixon made by Tom Trotter, seconded by Roy Thomason. Motion carried.
- 6) RPO Accomplishments for FY23/24.....Emmalyn Porter, RPO Coordinator**
Emmalyn reminded everyone about the SETD RPO website, www.sedev.org/rpo, which is a convenient resource for all things RPO. The Southeast region was awarded 3 grants recently: The City of Lakesite was awarded the Traffic Signal Modernization Program, and the Town of Walden and the City of Etowah were awarded Transportation Planning Grants. The Transportation Planning Grants have recently begun kick-off meetings to define the scope of the project and source project data with consultant WSP.
- 7) Adoption of the RPO Workplan for FY25/26.....Emmalyn Porter, RPO Coordinator**
Emmalyn presented the budget requests for each task of the workplan. Task 1, Rural Planning & Program Management, consists of 13% of the total budget at \$38,010. Task 2, Community Outreach & Engagement, 17% of the total budget at \$50,680. Task 3, Transportation Grants Coordination, 13% of the total budget at \$38,010. Task 4, Rural Planning Program Administration, 19% of the total budget at \$54,300. Task 5, RPO Focus, 38% of the total budget at \$110,000. Historically, tasks 1-4 have remained the same for the budget as well as the associated activities. However, the budget for task 5 is higher this year because we plan to offer the Southeast Transportation Planning Grant for our local communities. Chad mentioned that funding for Task 5 may fluctuate depending on what we're allotted for the contract, and Emmalyn mentioned that we do have a secondary option for Task 5 if our funding is not what we anticipate.

Task 1, Rural Planning & Program Management, is about engagement, cooperation, and collaboration with our local partners and planning agencies. We achieve this with our bi-annual meetings, providing TDOT project updates, maintaining and modifying the bylaws as needed, and participating in local and regional transportation plans.

Task 2, Community Outreach & Engagement, is about communication and involvement. We achieve this by offering our up-to-date RPO website, hosting 1-on-1 meetings with highway superintendents and local officials to learn about the transportation needs of the community and how we can best address those. We also do this by providing knowledge of TDOT tools, conducting surveys as needed and participating in local and regional meetings.

Task 3, Transportation Grants Coordination, is about knowledge and access by providing local officials with transportation information for their communities. We aim to provide knowledge and assistance with grant funding opportunities, application and administration assistance, publishing recent transportation plans, and inviting successful grantees to present at our meetings.

Task 4, Rural Planning Program Management, is about providing accurate and timely contract fulfillment by way of weekly activity reporting to TDOT, quarterly reporting and invoicing, local, state, and national trainings, and other administrative duties as required.

Task 5 is our RPO Focus category where we plan to offer and award 4-5 Southeast Transportation Planning Grants at \$20,000-\$25,000 per community. There are a variety of different transportation studies that could be conducted through this grant such as a road diet analysis, corridor study, and other creative ideas. This is similar to the Rural Planning Initiative Grant that was offered in 2020, so we want to bring it back as a beneficial option for our communities.

The secondary option for Task 5 is an Electric Vehicle Education Day. Emmalyn recently attended Northwest RPO's EV Education Day in Martin, TN. It was a half-day educational event hosted by the RPO with Drive Electric Tennessee. There were several speakers, learning opportunities, success stories, and even a show and tell with several electric vehicles.

Linda Hixon asked when we will know what the funding will be for the upcoming contract period. Emmalyn responded that the funding and contract will be finalized in August.

Mayor Gentry asked how we would work with the local governments to offer the Task 5 grant opportunity. Emmalyn explained that we would offer an application, select the awarded grantees, release an RFQ and select a consultant, then begin the study. The grant follows a 12-month timeline. There could be one consultant for all projects, or several consultants.

Motion to approve the workplan from the Technical Committee made by Chuck Hammonds and seconded by Linda Hixon.

Motion to approve the workplan from the Executive Board made by Gary Davis and seconded by Lois Preece.

8) Bylaws Discussion.....Chad Reese, SETD Planning Director

Chad discussed the possibility of combining the Executive Board and Technical Committee into one board. The RPO has met jointly for years. The Executive Board consists of 21 members, and the Technical Committee consists of 39. Bylaws state our quorum is 1/3 majority. If we combined boards, we propose to have one chairman and one vice-chairman, and make sure we allow for all voting members to remain. We would have an alternating chair and vice-chair. Originally, the Technical Committee was supposed to generate projects across the region and recommend to the Executive Board. However, we have worked together jointly for years, and it makes more sense to combine. For restructuring, we discussed who should be representatives so we can give informed recommendations on the things we vote on. We have 9 county mayors serving currently, and each can appoint one municipal mayor. There are two for McMinn County due to size. There are two state representatives or senators selected by the Development District. The Technical Committee is all 9 highway superintendents, county appointments and municipal appointments, bike and pedestrian, freight, environmental, etc. We are considering removing some of the citizen membership, however this is open for discussion because we do not want to take away any community votes. We do propose to combine the boards regardless even if we keep all members.

Dan Evans vocalized his support in combining the boards. John Gentry mentioned that TDOT has always had aviation separately, and this may not be a need to keep on the board. Stacy mentioned other areas of Tennessee

have aviation active in the RPO, but this is not applicable to our region. Dan suggested we could reach out to freight or aviation if we had an item specific to those areas on the agenda. Chad said at the fall meeting we can bring our proposed bylaws to further explain the new structure.

Chad called everyone’s attention to the QR code at the top of the agenda to take part in a Slido poll. The first question was “Are you in favor of combining the Executive Board and Technical Committee?” All members who voted in the poll were in favor of combining. The second question is “What ways can the RPO help with your transportation issues, needs, and funding?” This question was left open during the duration of the meeting to receive ample feedback on potential transportation needs to address.

9) Urbanized Area Adoption.....Stacy Morrison, TDOT OCT Planning Manager

Stacy Morrison presented on behalf of Bently Thomas. Every 10 years, the census resets the urban areas across the state. Small urban areas are 5,000 to 50,000 for the smaller rural areas not classified as an MPO. There was some discrepancy in the 2020 census from using population density instead of housing density. This created hops and skips in the maps showing some heavier populated household data right outside an urban area. This urban area adoption is adding discrepancies into the urban area, through a process called boundary smoothing. This prevents a classification from being urban, going to rural for a small portion of road, then back to urban. It affects us for functional classification purposes and helps create consistency.

Roy Thomason asked how this affects the city boundaries. Stacy answered that TDOT ensures all city limits are encompassed during the smoothing, and anything that might be annexed. It doesn’t have any impact on the municipal boundaries.

Motion made for the Technical Committee adoption by Chuck Hammonds, seconded by Roy Thomason.

Motion made for the Executive Board adoption by Gary Davis, seconded by Lois Preece.

10) TDOT Updates.....Stacy Morrison, TDOT OCT Planning Manager

TDOT released their first ever 10-year plan December 18, 2023. This fundamentally shifts the way TDOT prepares and operates. The Governor and General Assembly invested \$3.3 billion from the General fund this past year. Of the \$3 billion, \$750 million was allocated to each TDOT region. An additional \$300 million was sent directly to the counties through our regular State Aid Program. That’s 15x the amount of funding counties typically receive each year. TDOT will also allocate \$6 billion, over and above the \$15 billion, over the next 10 years for multimodal transportation assets as we strive to increase safety and expand multimodal transportation. This includes, but is not limited to, transit, sidewalks and bikeways, rail, park-and-ride lots, and airport infrastructure. TDOT is re-costing and funding all remaining phases of the TDOT 3-year plan, including 3% for inflation, with the following exceptions: (1) increased the resurfacing program; and (2) allocated funds to a dedicated TMA Bridge Replacement Program. Set aside TMA funds in Region 1, 2, and 3 for urban congestion/Choice Lane projects and for the I-55 bridge over the Mississippi River replacement in Region 4. This 10-year program delivers the best scenario for performance, delivery, and cost. It is a road map that informs the 3-year plan submitted to the General Assembly. New commitment from TDOT is “What gets started, gets finished.” There are some infrastructure projects that did not make the 10-year plan, as the outstanding need is over \$30 billion. The General Fund appropriation provided by the TMA funded fully or in-part 46 of the 93 projects. This plan represents 55 percent of the \$15 billion, the remaining 45% is budgeted for projects that TDOT decides annually based on need, such as resurfacing and bridge repair. TDOT is aiming for a 5-year turnaround from planning to construction.

In our Southeast region, there are 10 bridge replacement projects: Marion, 3 in McMinn, 3 in Polk, Bradley, Meigs, and Rhea. Stacy recommended going online to get more details on the 10-year plan and see projects and their specific stages.

Greg Maloof asked about the Marion County rural interchange exit 134 and for clarification on the start date of that project. Stacy said the right of way phase is currently underway and projected to start construction in fiscal year 2025, which would be around the end of 2026. Greg asked for clarification on the bridge removal for the two bridges and if it is included in the interchange as one project. Stacy mentioned that the railroad bridge will be removed, and a new multiuse path will be put in its place. Monteagle received a grant for that portion of funding which will be included in the project. There may be some functional changes at the interchange due to

safety concerns.

An attendee asked about the replacement of a bridge on State Route 5 in McCaysville due for construction in 2026 and wondered if it was correlated to the Polk County bridge replacement project listed. Stacy said the bridge replacement in McCaysville is a Georgia project TDOT is partnering on. The right of way phase is currently underway with construction starting next year.

John Gentry asked about the timeline of multimodal grants. Stacy mentioned that it is open currently and they hold application rounds annually. The first phase is the letter of intent, and they will pull out projects from there. The planning grant rounds occur every 2 years and have a timeline of about 16 months. 19 projects were awarded this year.

11) Other Properly Presented New Business.....John Gentry, EB Vice-Chairman
There was no other business.

12) Executive Board Adjournment.....John Gentry, EB Vice-Chairman
Motion to adjourn made by Robby Hatcher, seconded by Glen Varner. Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

13) Technical Committee Adjournment.....Dan Evans, TCC Chairman
Motion to adjourn made by Eric Higgins, seconded by Glen Varner. Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

Chairman, RPO Executive Board

Chairman, RPO Technical Committee

RPO Coordinator

