



**MINUTES OF THE ABILENE  
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION  
TRANSPORTATION POLICY BOARD**

**April 20, 2021**

The Abilene MPO Transportation Policy Board met at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 20, 2021, utilizing Zoom Video Conferencing.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Glenn Allbritton, P.E., TxDOT Abilene District Engineer  
Judge Downing Bolls, Taylor County (*Policy Board Vice-Chairman*)  
Councilman Shane Price, City of Abilene (*Policy Board Chairman*)  
Judge Dale Spurgin, Jones County  
Mayor Anthony Williams, City of Abilene

**Members Absent:**

None

**Staff of Member Agencies in Attendance:**

Mr. Jamik Alexander, FHWA, Transportation Planner  
Mr. Scott Chandler, P.E., City of Abilene, City Engineer  
Mr. Billy Dezern, TxDOT, Transportation Specialist  
Ms. Nellie Doneva, City of Abilene, Videographer  
Mr. Don Green, City of Abilene, Transportation Director  
Mr. Michael Haithcock, P.E., TxDOT, Abilene TP & D Director  
Mr. Jay Hardaway, for Representative Stan Lambert  
Ms. Kelley Messer, City of Abilene, First Assistant City Attorney  
Mr. Paul Norman, P.E., TxDOT, Abilene Area Engineer  
Mr. Glen Pugh, for Senator Dawn Buckingham  
Mr. James M. Rogge, P.E., City of Abilene, Traffic Engineer  
Mr. Bobby Sharpe, CityLink General Manager

**MPO Staff in Attendance:**

Ms. E'Lisa Smetana, Abilene MPO Executive Director  
Mr. Benjamin LaBorde, Abilene MPO Transportation Planner I

**Others in Attendance:**

None

**1. Call to Order.**

Chairman Price called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. A quorum was present. He announced that public comment could be taken on any item appearing on the agenda. Since this is a Zoom meeting if anyone would like to make a comment they just need to use the raise your hand option and they will be taken off mute.

**2. Consideration and Take Action on the minutes of the March 5, 2021 meeting.**

Judge Bolls made a motion to approve the March 5, 2021 minutes as presented, with a second by Mayor Williams. *Motion carried (4-0).*

**3. Receive a Report, Hold a Discussion, and Take Action on the DRAFT FY 2022-2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).**

Ms. Smetana presented the item and explained that the DRAFT FY 2022-2023 UPWP represents the budget and funding as calculated by the current year's spending. She clarified that these numbers are an estimate and therefore could potentially change in reaction to the number of MPOs as affected by the U.S. Census. Ms. Smetana then stated that the draft is due by June 1, 2021 and the final is due by August 1, 2021. Referring to the provided packets and on-screen presentation, Ms. Smetana named all four subtasks of task one; she highlighted the inclusion of 1.4 Transit Planning Management, and pointed out the potential presence of consulting work under this subtask. After this, Ms. Smetana continued her overview of the subtasks. She stated that 4.2 Long-Range Transit Planning is done by CityLink. After moving on to 5.1-3, Ms. Smetana pointed out the recent change made to the UPWP; CityLink/Consultant was added under 5.3 Transit Multimodal Facility. Turning to the Budget Summary, she again emphasized the changes made by the addition of the Special Studies as reflected by \$550,000. She listed the totals under each year as \$1,133,000 for 2022 and \$445,000 for 2023.

Ms. Smetana informed the Board of the TAC's recommendation for approval, then described the changes and updates made to the draft that were not seen by the TAC, including the addition of the date on the cover sheet and to Appendix A Summary and the update of Appendix B Technical Committee Members. The April 15, 2021 addition of 5.3 Transit Multimodal Facility was also pointed out. Chairman Price asked for questions. Ms. Smetana pointed out the opportunity for the Policy Board to add other studies or apply changes under Task 5. She then mentioned the current three studies, including Loop 322 and State Highway (SH) 36, adding that Mr. Green was available for questions over that particular study. The other two studies listed were the MPO Boundary Expansion (which could potentially require demographic help from a consultant) and the already-mentioned Multimodal Study.

Judge Bolls asked a question concerning the effect of the Census on the UPWP. Ms. Smetana replied, explaining that the Census has yet to distribute numbers, but they are evaluating MPO areas. As such, the budget cannot be certain until these numbers are known. Chairman Price noted the building of the Great Lakes Cheese Factory as a factor of impact for the Loop 322/SH 36 study.

Ms. Smetana then opened it up for questions concerning the Loop 322/SH 36 study to be directed to Mr. Green. Mr. Green explained that they are close to finalizing the land use plan that has been worked on over the last few years and will come to council in late May. This includes areas for the economic development of the airport, described as an area along SH 36 across from Tige Boat. Mr. Green discussed the potential of this area, as well as the need for the traffic study to address the area around SH 36. He then mentioned the in-house suggestion of building a connecting road through the development area, adding that the study could help make a case for a controlled intersection with a traffic light in that area. Mr. Green

next described the meeting with AISD, TxDOT, and Public Works to discuss the impact of the Lift High School on traffic near the 322 access road. Mentioning Chairman Price's previous comment, Mr. Green agreed that the addition of a new food processing facility will add up to 500 jobs and have a big impact on traffic in the area. Chairman Price then asked if there were further comments or questions in regard to Item #3. Ms. Smetana brought up the need for a UPWP amendment should the study be accelerated or updated. Chairman Price asked Mr. Green if there were concerns that the study would require acceleration before October. Mr. Green mentioned that, with the high school opening in August, there might be a need for acceleration. Chairman Price asked Ms. Smetana if there was room for flexibility concerning the UPWP and potential amendments. She said there was an unused study in the plan, though she was unsure of how much money was in it that could get the study started before October. Chairman Price asked the Board if there were any concerns with accelerating the SH 36 portion of the study, and stated that this would potentially be brought forward as an action item in June. He brought up another point in regard to the study, saying that, should there be new projects or studies brought forth, the consultant might be able to be in-house. He also included that anything else that the Board wishes to bring forward may be presented in June for discussion, and that the UPWP will be reviewed and added to at that time as well. Chairman Price asked if there were any final questions, comments, or concerns. Hearing none, he called for a motion.

Judge Bolls made a **motion** to approve the DRAFT FY 2022-2023 Unified Planning Work Program as presented, with a **second** by Mr. Allbritton. *Motion carried (4-0).*

**4. Receive a Report and Hold a Discussion on the Administrative Amendment of the FY 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).**

Ms. Smetana presented the item and expressed that, after this amendment, it is hoped that the FY 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) will be approved, though the Transportation Commission is still working on it. She then informed the Board that the TIP was submitted administratively amended on May 14, 2020, with a second amendment on June 24, 2020, and a third approved by the Policy Board at the December 15, 2020 meeting. Ms. Smetana explained that the provided packet contained the updates from March 18, 2021 that were submitted to TxDOT. These only applied to grouped CSJ projects, as the Federal Highway Association (FHWA) amended the grouped projects listing. Ms. Smetana clarified that the changes and amendments made to the TIP have been made in order to be in compliance with the new guidelines. Referring to the packet in more detail, Ms. Smetana stated that the first part contains the information from FHWA and shows their revisions. Asking the Board to turn to where the TIP starts in the packet, Ms. Smetana said that the information provided was about the changes made and also included the full revised document for viewing. The described changes were: the amendment of the first page to reflect the March 18, 2021 date; the updated Table of Contents; the amendment of the history of the TIP; and the updated Grouped Projects Listing and guidelines. Ms. Smetana informed the Board that, due to these amendments being administrative only, there was no recommendation from the TAC (Technical Advisory Committee). After reminding them that this item was for information purposes only and required no action, Ms. Smetana then invited questions. Hearing none, Chairman Price closed the item and moved to the next. *Discussion only — No vote taken.*

**5. Hold a Discussion on meeting procedures related to COVID-19.**

Chairman Price opened the item for discussion by describing the Board's current practice of meeting virtually, although other groups have resumed in-person meetings. He expressed his opinion in favor of in-person meetings if possible, or a hybrid virtual/in-person meeting in which members meet in person at City Hall and, if allowed, a laptop is set up to provide a virtual option for those that can't or choose not to meet in person.

Mr. Allbritton mentioned he was unaware of TxDOT's official stance on Governor Abbott's COVID rule suspension, though he believed TxDOT employees would be available for in-person meetings. The TxDOT guidelines had changed recently, but masks and social distancing were still being encouraged. Mr. Allbritton stated that he would vote for a hybrid meeting format to allow others to have the choice, though he personally would be attending in person. Mr. Allbritton explained that he would like in-person meetings, especially as he is new to the area. Judge Spurgin voiced his vote for in-person meetings. He pointed to the potential complications that hybrid meetings could bring, encouraging the Board to be mindful that a lost virtual connection could affect public participation and stop the meeting. Mayor Williams concurred with Judge Spurgin in favor of in-person meetings, should there be no objection from the other members.

Chairman Price asked Ms. Messer to address the questions brought forth by Judge Spurgin in regard to potential meeting stoppage due to a lost connection in a hybrid meeting. Ms. Messer said that the current requirement is that all members be in the same place, but that that requirement has been waived for the time being. She explained that if there was a lost connection and the virtual participants were the only source of a quorum, then the meeting would have to be adjourned. However, she continued, if all Board members were in one place and a connection was lost with a Board member, then the meeting could continue. Ms. Messer emphasized that, regardless, a quorum must be present.

In reply, Chairman Price requested clarification for Judge Spurgin's specific hypothetical scenario: in which the meeting is available for public participation through both virtual and in-person means, but while the virtual connection is lost, the in-person is still available. Ms. Messer answered, saying she was unsure, but that she would check. She said she thought it would be okay, but would make sure before giving a concrete answer. Judge Spurgin expanded on his point, saying that he was worried that complications would arise if a previously posted option became unavailable.

Chairman Price noted that there appeared to be a consensus among the Board for in-person meetings. He asserted that no vote was needed, and that the next meeting would be in person.

As there was no action for the item, Chairman Price moved on to the next. *Discussion only — No vote taken.*

**6. Discussion and any recommendation of action on scheduling a combined Policy Board and Technical Advisory Committee Workshop.**

Ms. Smetana presented the item, informing the Board that their packet included information on previous workshops. Ms. Smetana stated that the date for an in-person, combined workshop for the Board and TAC will need to be decided. The next meeting of the Policy Board is August 17<sup>th</sup>. Chairman Price opened it up for thoughts or feedback.

Mr. Allbritton expressed that he was in favor of a workshop. Judge Spurgin suggested that the workshop be scheduled on the same day as the MPO Board meeting and incorporated into the meeting. Ms. Smetana mentioned that she thought Mr. Haithcock was in attendance, if there were plans he wished to discuss. Mr. Haithcock said that at the meeting three years ago, the topics included different components that go into an MPO project such as environmental concerns, right of way, utilities, design, and more. He indicated that, at the upcoming workshop, he would want to have a refresher on those topics. Mr. Haithcock also noted that, once Buffalo Gap Rd. is let in August, they would look at the next ten years of programs and go from there. Mr. Haithcock remarked that there was a meeting with Brownwood on the morning of August 17, 2021, but that afternoon would work. Chairman Price observed that the currently scheduled MPO meeting would begin at 1:30, and could combine with the TAC for the workshop afterwards.

Ms. Smetana reminded the Board to bear in mind that one of the suggestions from a previous meeting was that the workshop be more informal so that the Board and TAC could ask questions, thus fostering a back-and-forth discussion environment. Chairman Price stated that prior workshops in 2018 and 2019 were held in the South Branch of the Public Library. Ms. Smetana said she would attempt to reserve the same space for the August 17, 2021 workshop. Chairman Price mentioned that, though the format would be more informal, it should be confirmed that the location is still able to record and have a live broadcast. Chairman Price asked for further questions or comments, and, hearing none, he closed the item. *Discussion only — no vote taken.*

**7. Discussion and review of transportation projects.  
(By TxDOT Staff, City Staff, CityLink Staff)**

**TxDOT** - Mr. Paul Norman briefed the Board on the following projects:

*Current Construction:*

- Sites 1-5 are part of the same overall project, while 1-4 are specifically parts of FM 707. The project is going well and is on schedule. A final seal coat is needed; they are waiting on asphalt seasoning, repairs, and signs.
- Sites 6-7 involve the overpass at Clark/Remington Rd. and FM 204. Although behind schedule, the project is progressing well. Paving has now started, and the bridge rail will be worked on next week. The bridge is completely constructed.
- Site 8 is the sidewalk on Ambler. The project is behind schedule due to impacts from COVID and weather, but due to finish in late spring. They are currently widening two bridges and starting a third soon. Most of the sidewalk widening is already in place, while widening of bridges and structures still needs to be completed.
- Site 9 is the new location of Frontage Rd. by way of FM 707 and Antilley. The project is progressing well and ahead of schedule. The base work is completed, and they are paving now. There will hopefully be a final surface in a few weeks, and they

should be seeing new traffic signals soon.

- Site 10 is the flashing beacon at FM 1750/Industrial and Loop 322. The project is ahead of schedule due to its short duration. It is expected to finish within the next couple of months.
- Sites 11-12 are mill and fill contracts on FM 1750 and SH 36 at E. South 11<sup>th</sup> St. and Oldham Ln. The project is scheduled to begin in June. The roads were let earlier this year, but there were contractual issues that pushed the start time back.

Chairman Price asked if the widening of the sidewalk and bridge at Ambler would be on both sides, to which Mr. Norman replied yes. Chairman Price opened it up for further questions. Mr. Allbritton asked Mr. Norman to go over projects that were about to let in the next few months.

Mr. Norman briefed the Board on the following projects:

*Planned Projects:*

- Buffalo Gap Rd. is scheduled to let in August. Start on the project was delayed until January in order to avoid the holidays.
- A project for new lanes at Maple St. and FM 707 will let in August. This intersection project will add both a left and a right turn lane onto Maple St. from FM 707.
- A project to install a flashing beacon at Business 83 and North of Hill St. will also let in August. This project is similar to the one on FM 1750 and Lee.
- There is another FM 89 widening project at Iberis Rd. just south of town. This project will install a left turn lane off FM 89.
- At FM 3438 and Arnold Blvd. there is another mill and fill maintenance project for which all letting will be in August.
- On FM 600 in Jones County near the Taylor County line going north towards FM 1082 there will be a mill and fill project starting this fall.
- After that, the next upcoming project will be a bridge construction on US 83 in 2023.

Chairman Price asked if there were any more questions; hearing none, he then turned it over to Mr. Chandler with the City of Abilene.

**City of Abilene** - Mr. Scott Chandler briefed the Board on the following projects:

- Construction on S. Willis and Sayles has wrapped up. They are now mainly working on the downtown concrete restoration project. There will be bidding next week for a striping contractor to come in after downtown work is finished in June/July to restripe parking areas and repair damage on buttons and stripes due to construction.
- The Griffith Rd. from EN 10<sup>th</sup> to Marathon has started. The Water Department installed the water line and a contractor is now rebuilding the road. The project is progressing quickly.
- The TASA (Transportation Alternatives Set Aside Program) sidewalk project is 30% complete. They are primarily using DBEs and constructing straight sidewalk sections. Recently there has been work done in front of apartments on FM 277 within the last week or so. The project is a little behind and may need more time, but it is

- progressing well.
- The Work Zone project, the Pine St. Rehabilitation project, the Southwest Dr. project from Sharon to Clack, and the Airport project were all designed and ready to begin contractor work in May.
  - The result of bidding by those contractors accumulated savings that will be used for additional work zone projects (which are in design now) in order to use the funds given for resurfacing.

Chairman Price asked Mr. Chandler if the downtown restriping that was set to begin in June or July had come to council for approval earlier. Mr. Chandler replied that it will. There had been a pre-bid that morning between two contractors. Once it bids next week, they will recommend an award that will then be forwarded to council. Mr. Chandler explained that the contractors have been informed that, should downtown construction not be fully completed, a portion could be done and a second trip would be made to finish after the completion of construction. Chairman Price emphasized that the contractors are to avoid interrupting the events of the CALF (Children's Art and Literature) festival—such as the downtown parade. Mr. Chandler answered that the restriping contractors are planning to work at night to cause less disruption to business activity and traffic.

Chairman Price opened it up for further questions; hearing none, he turned to Mr. Sharpe with CityLink.

**CityLink** – Mr. Bobby Sharpe provided the Board with the following updates:

- CityLink has continued to provide free transportation to vaccine clinics. This project is sponsored and held by the Abilene/Taylor County Public Health District. They have transported over 80 people and will transport several more tomorrow.
- CityLink has been working with the City of Abilene engineers on plans to design concrete pads to install recently purchased bus shelters. He emphasized that now is the perfect time to install, so that the shelters may be used in the hot summer months.
- The redesign of the bus stop signs had been accomplished. They are now working on the purchase and replacement of sign blades. As there are over 425 needed, the project will require planning, but they are ready to go ahead.

Chairman Price asked if the new bus shelters were designed to include advertising space on the sides. Mr. Sharpe responded no, saying that the shelters were purchased a couple years ago before his arrival. Mr. Sharpe pointed to an example of a similar kind of shelter on S 11<sup>th</sup> St. across from the adult education elementary school. He described the new shelter siding as mesh with a powder coating. To include advertising, panels could be installed, but this would be a separate project.

Chairman Price asked if there were any further questions; hearing none, he closed the item.

## **8. Discussion and review of reports:**

### **• Financial Status**

Ms. Smetana said the financial information for FY 2021 was included in the Board

packet. The amount \$263,210.09 was authorized so far and does not include the carryover funds, which we are still waiting on. The expenditure total is \$77,569.64 through the January billing. The remaining balance is \$185,640.45. Ms. Smetana then offered to answer any questions; there were none.

- **Operation Report**

- **Tasks, Training Sessions, Meetings**

- Ms. Smetana stated that the full report was included in the packet. The information had been broken down into specific categories, of which she gave an overview. Ms. Smetana then offered to answer any questions.

- **Director's Report**

- **Future Work Tasks**

- **MPO Office Assistant Job** – The position was opened on March 29<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Smetana informed the Board that the job was posted and open for applications.
    - **MPO Boundary Expansion** – This had been previously discussed in the UPWP. MPO Staff has gathered a committee to look at the data compiled and is ready to move forward.

- **Annual Listing of Obligated Projects & Annual Performance and Expenditure Report** – Year-end reports were due on December 15, 2020. The MPO submitted the APER by the deadline and promptly answered the questions that were sent back. The Annual Performance and Expenditure Report was approved on March 9, 2021. The Annual Listing of Obligated Projects (ALOP) data was received from TxDOT on February 19, 2021. The MPO submitted the completed report on February 25, 2021 and is waiting for approval on the ALOP. Ms. Smetana then offered to answer any questions.

**9. Opportunity for members of the Public to make comments on MPO issues.**

None.

At Ms. Smetana's suggestion, Mr. Alexander introduced himself as the new Federal Highway Administrative Representative and provided some personal background information.

**10. Opportunity for Board Members, Technical Advisory Committee Members, or MPO Staff to recommend topics for future discussion or action.**

None.

**11. Adjournment.**

With no further business, Chairman Price adjourned the meeting at 2:22 p.m.