



**MINUTES OF THE ABILENE METROPOLITAN
PLANNING ORGANIZATION
TRANSPORTATION POLICY BOARD
August 16, 2022**

The Abilene MPO Transportation Policy Board met at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, August 16, 2022, in the City Council Chambers, Abilene City Hall, 555 Walnut St., Abilene, Texas.

Voting Members Present:

Mayor Anthony Williams, City of Abilene

Councilman Shane Price, City of Abilene (Policy Board Chairman)

Judge Downing Bolls, Taylor County (Policy Board Vice-Chairman)

Judge Dale Spurgin, Jones County

Voting Member Absent:

Mr. Glenn Allbritton, P.E., TxDOT Abilene District Engineer

Staff of Member Agencies in Attendance:

Mr. Scott Chandler, P.E., City of Abilene, City Engineer

Mr. Michael Rice, CoA, Assistant City Manager

Mr. Billy Dezern, TxDOT, Transportation Specialist

Mr. Michael Haithcock, P.E., TxDOT, Abilene TP&D

Mr. Max Johnson, City of Abilene, Director of Public Works

Ms. Nellie Doneva, CoA, Videographer

Ms. Kelley Messer, City of Abilene, First Assistant City Attorney

Mr. Bobby Sharpe, CityLink General Manager

Mr. Bryce Turentine, TxDOT Abilene Area Engineer

MPO Staff in Attendance:

Ms. E'Lisa Smetana

Others in Attendance:

Mr. Juan Flores

Mr. Preston Smith, Dyess AFB

Mr. Justin Morgan, FHWA

Mr. James Condry

Mr. Glen Pugh, Senator Buckingham's Office

Commissioner Randy Williams, Taylor County

1. Call to Order.

Chairman Price called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. He announced that public comment could be taken on any item appearing on the agenda during discussion of that item.

2. Consideration and Take Action on the minutes of the April 19, 2022 and July 7, 2022 meetings.

Judge Bolls made a **motion** to approve the April 19, 2022 and July 7, 2022 meeting minutes as presented, with a **second** by Mayor Williams. *Motion carried (4-0).*

3. Receive an Update, Hold a Discussion, and Take Action on the Comprehensive Transportation Corridor Study: Loop 322/SH 36 (Traffic Impact Analysis).

Ms. Smetana introduced information on the traffic impact analysis study. She advised that the total cost for the study is \$60,700 with the MPO paying \$48,700 and the City of Abilene adding the intersection at SH 36 and FM 18 for an additional cost of \$12,000. Ms. Smetana advised that the Technical Advisory Committee subcommittee had a meeting with the consultants on August 1 to discuss the status of the study. As part of that discussion, the neighborhood in the Lytle Lake area were concerned about the traffic flow patterns. She indicated that the consultants recommended looking at more traffic counts and analysis of that area as an amendment to the study. Ms. Smetana advised that traffic counts took place back in April by TxDOT. As part of this proposed amendment additional traffic counts would be needed at South 27th, Expo Drive, Lytle Way, and SH 36. Ms. Smetana indicated that the consultants suggested initially that TxDOT do these counts, but TxDOT cannot do all these counts at once because they do not have enough counters. The resulting fee for the additional analysis (if TxDOT could do the counts) would be \$15,000 added onto the current cost of \$48,700 that the MPO is already paying.

Ms. Smetana advised that the MPO saved \$40,000 on the Boundary Expansion Study because TxDOT resourced with the Texas A & M Transportation Institute (TTI), using an interagency contract mechanism, to help the MPO with that study. She further advised the Policy Board that the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is due December 17, 2024 (which would start late next year) at an estimated cost of \$135,000. The Travel Demand Model would start around June of 2023, with a due date of January 1, 2024, for an estimate of \$30,000. She further explained that these are estimates and could run more than the amounts relayed. Ms. Smetana advised that the MPO staff recommendation would be not to spend an additional \$15,000 for this amendment given uncertainties in costs for upcoming studies and plans. Chairman Price clarified that the study would be at least \$15,000 assuming TxDOT did all the traffic counts, and Ms. Smetana advised this is correct. Chairman Price inquired if we know what the cost would be if the consultants do the traffic count as well? Ms. Smetana indicated an estimated range of \$20-30,000 as listed in the original study proposal. Chairman Price advised that there has not been much change in the traffic patterns. Ms. Smetana agreed, advising further that this all came about as of August 1st, so the MPO was not able to present it to the Technical Advisory Committee to get their opinion on the request.

Mayor Williams made a **motion** not to pursue the additional cost and traffic counts at this time, with a **second** by Judge Spurgin. *Motion carried (4-0).*

4. Receive an Update, Hold a Discussion, and Take Action on MPO Staffing.

Ms. Smetana advised that a part-time office assistant position has been inconsistently filled for the last year and a half. The latest employee left on May 26, 2022. She stated that in the last stream of applications most were looking for full-time employment with benefits even though it was posted as part-time. She indicated that there is enough funding to employ an office assistant full-time for five years using carryover funding to fill in any gaps over the current budget and with enough left over to deliver on studies and anticipated plan development needs.

Mayor Williams asked for clarification that the MPO wants to make the position full-time due to the workload or the inability to hire part-time employees. Ms. Smetana replied that there is enough work for a full-time employee because we were not able to complete many of the tasks and work deliverables to the preferred degree. She indicated that the part-time assistant spent much of her time doing public involvement, Facebook, letters, minutes, and that type of work. Ms. Smetana indicated that she worked 29 hours a week, almost full-time, so with these additional hours, it is likely the MPO could actually get to tasks like digitizing files that were sidelined because the MPO didn't have enough hours in the week to get to those things.

Judge Spurgin stated that it was his impression that having three full-time employees has always been a budget issue not a workload issue. He stated that he is concerned with using carryover fund balance

to budget for a third fulltime employee because it eventually will be depleted unless there is more revenue coming in. He asked if the \$20,261 is salary and benefits. Ms. Smetana advised that the figure represents salary and benefits including retirement. She indicated that the City has a cost calculator, and that she plugged in the hourly amounts and it then calculated all the other amounts.

Judge Bolls asked if the proposed amount would be enough to get the MPO a full-time office assistant with requisite skills and ability to deliver on what the MPO needs. Ms. Smetana indicated that if she had the funds she could have employed them this cycle. She advised many initially thought they were receiving full-time benefits (especially the health benefits) and declined to be interviewed when they realized it was part-time.

Judge Spurgin stated that they think the question is going to be when your fund balance runs out, can we retain them. Ms. Smetana indicated that this five years is based off the study costs and those other things figured in there which factors in the worst-case scenario looking at how it would be if nothing changed on the revenue side. She stated that staff may be able to contribute work to the studies so that might lower those costs.

Mayor Williams advised that due to lack of funds he is uncomfortable putting someone into the position with inadequate funding five years down the road. Chairman Price inquired whether there are hybrid options to qualify for 40-hour workweek benefits while only employing at 30 hours. Ms. Smetana advised she could look into this. Mr. Rice explained there are multiple categories of employees. He said that there are options of hourly employees working 32 hours and being full-time. Chairman Price asked staff to look at scenarios that allow not dipping into the carryover fund balance. Judge Spurgin said look at ways to retain employees so they are here to stay and make it a career choice and to find ways to fund it with the budget by maybe offsetting the cost of the studies. Mayor Williams asked staff to look at funding options where money is set aside for this position.

Mayor Williams **moved** to table the discussion until the next meeting, with a **second** by Judge Bolls. *Motion carried (4-0).*

5. Receive a Report, Hold a Discussion, and Take Action on the Election of Officers.

The bylaws require the Transportation Policy Board to elect a chairperson and a vice chairperson from the voting members. Current positions expire September 30th. Ms. Smetana stated that we need an election of the chairperson and vice chairperson to serve a two-year term starting October 1st. Currently, the chairperson is Councilman Price, and the vice chairperson is Judge Bolls. This item is for the election of a chairperson and vice chairperson for October 1, 2022 through September 30, 2024.

Chairman Price asked Judge Bolls if he would be willing to continue to be vice chair. Judge Bolls advised he is here until the end of the year and is willing to serve until the end of the year. Judge Spurgin made a **motion** to keep the current slate of officers in their positions, with a **second** by Mayor Williams. *Motion carried (4-0).*

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

TxDOT – Mr. Bryce Turentine presented on behalf of TxDOT. He advised all nineteen listed planned projects are on track and schedule. Project 11 has let with a delayed start of 90 days for an illumination project. Mayor Williams requested coverage on project number 6 and 18 in the list of projects. Mr. Turentine advised a public meeting was held for project 6 (FM 1082), and TxDOT is doing evaluation of all items and it is scheduled for a let date in 2024. He advised on project 18 to expand FM 1750 south of Industrial down to Colony Hill road to five lane with continuous left turn lane. Mayor Williams commented that there is a lot of new traffic on that road. Mr. Turentine responded it will improve operations and safety as part of the expansion to accompany that new traffic. Mr. Turentine

advised project 19 (IH 20 at Judge Ely Blvd.) is on track for the overpass project. On current construction updates, Mr. Turentine indicated that SH 351/Ambler Avenue will finish things with signs and signal upgrades, and most of the sidewalk construction is complete. The best timeframe is mid-September to complete. He stated that for FM 3438 it is near completion. On Buffalo Gap, he indicated that TxDOT is a few years from completion and entered conflicts with utilities and needed adjustments which has slowed the project. He indicated on FM 600, supply chain issues and anchor bolts that had to be galvanized along with the rain slowed it down. Now it is proceeding at pace. Mr. Turentine said that project 7 and 8 are now combined with the paving and grading now complete. They received signs and the biggest activity is illumination on FM 89. Mr. Turentine advised the 18th Street project is now complete. He advised the I-20 mill and overlay project hit supply chain snags and that they will get hot mix started on September 18th.

City of Abilene - Mr. Scott Chandler presented on behalf of the City of Abilene. He advised that north and south work zones are under construction with north side complete. S-9C in Elmwood is being finished. He indicated that then they will move to S-9D. North 6th and Cypress Street improvements near the hotel project to redo sidewalks and several concrete panels. Mr. Chandler advised that then they will do a complete rebuild of Cypress Street. He advised that this project has bid, and Bontke Brothers are the contractors. He indicated that there will be additional coordination with the hotel to accompany their access needs.

Mr. Chandler indicated that East North 10th from Treadway to Judge Ely had a rebid for a larger widening project to the loop that is mostly a mill and fill and redoing railroad track crossing to help the alignment with a reduced bump on the crossing. He indicated that the same will take place on the South 14th near the railroad crossing which started as a railroad tie crossing, but they will also work on all the railroad crossings there. He advised that the main one tied to the Abilene Ag business will be worked on in priority. Mr. Chandler advised two other projects on the list are complete with minor work on side ditches and putting a fence in place. He stated that work zone N15A, S-25, and County Road 311 rehabilitation are all complete. He indicated that the 2023 resurfacing project work has begun in design. Most of these projects are in design phase, with some delay where the utility department contractor's work is not complete. Once done he advised they will move into the widening construction. Mr. Chandler advised the North 5th two way conversion has started and this will move the design project into taking down signals that will not be needed, then construct modifications of signals at Pine Street at Grape Street so that the corridor is set up for the two way traffic. Mr. Chandler advised that the Five Points Roadway Improvements are in design at Marigold and Fulwiler Road. He stated that Maple Street from Carriage Hills to the loop will be under construction in the same time frame. Mr. Chandler indicated that there is no real activity on Raindance Circle.

CityLink - Mr. Bobby Sharpe presented on behalf of the CityLink Transit service provider, indicating that architectural and engineering contract was approved to update a feasibility study and perform advance planning and preliminary engineering to take CityLink to conceptual design for a multimodal station and facility. Goodman Corporation is ready to get this project underway, according to Mr. Sharpe. He indicated that two new Dodge ProMaster Frontrunner Cutaway vehicles have been received and will be put into service. Chairman Price inquired if they do not require a CDL for drivers. Mr. Sharpe advised that this is the case.

7. Discussion and review of reports:

Ms. Smetana asked the Board to reference the provided packets and then began to discuss and review the following reports.

Financial Status - Ms. Smetana advised that the MPO Work Order 2 was revised for an additional 16 cents. She advised that Work Order 3 for safe and accessible transportation options for \$69,040.14 has a caveat of getting some of that funding which requires an adjustment to the UPWP to meet those requirements. She further stated that Work Order 4 carryover of \$209,888.36 was received which

brings total authorization to \$496,272.94, expenditure to \$177,415.00, and remaining balance of \$318,857.94. She stated that billings 8 & 9 are in draft format with more information to follow at the next meeting.

Operation Report – Ms. Smetana advised that interviewing is underway to fill positions. She said there are budget updates and updates to the model demographics information to be ready to move on the long-range plan for the following year. She stated that the rest of the report was included in the packets.

Director's Report

Ms. Smetana advised that there is no update to the director's report at this time.

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

Mr. Justin Morgan with FHWA made a comment that he is visiting Abilene and introduced himself as the new FHWA representative assigned to Abilene. He advised if there are any questions regarding federal aid he will be happy to answer.

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

Chairman Price advised that the past few years in August, the MPO had a workshop. This year, because of staffing it was moved to October. He suggested that the MPO have a regular meeting in October and not do the workshop until the following year because there will be a new person in the role of the Taylor County Judge and next year a new Mayor so there will be onboarding needs at that time. He added, that those items along with staff shortage, now is not the best time to conduct a workshop. Chairman Price asked to hold a regular meeting in October and to move the workshop to next year. The members agreed with that suggestion.

Policy Board adjourned into Executive Session at 2:20 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Abilene Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Policy Board reserves the right to adjourn into executive session at any time during the course of this meeting to discuss any item on the agenda as authorized by Texas Government Code Sections: 551.071 (Consultation with Attorney), 551.072 (Deliberations about real property) 551.073 (Deliberations about gifts and donations), 551.074 (Personnel matters), and 551.076 (Deliberations about security devices). After August 16, 2022 MPO Policy Board Meeting Page 2 of 2 discussion in executive session, any action or vote will be taken in public.

10. Receive a Report, Hold a Discussion, and Take Action on the evaluation of the Executive Director.

Mayor Williams left the meeting at 2:35 p.m. **Policy Board returned to regular meeting at 2:46 p.m.**

Chairman Price advised that the Policy Board had a very positive review of Executive Director E'lisa Smetana's performance as the Abilene MPO Director. Chairman Price made a **motion** to adjust the Executive Director's salary to be in-line with the City of Abilene employees' increase, with a **second** by Judge Bolls. *Motion carried (3-0).*

11. Adjournment.

With no further business, Chairman Price adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.