

Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS)

Policy Committee Meeting

Friday, February 17, 2017

10:00 a.m.

TCL New River Campus, Conference Room

Policy Committee Members Present:

Chairman Lisa Sulka, Mayor Town of Bluffton
Vice Chair Paul Sommerville, Beaufort County
Council Chair

Barbara Clark, Jasper County Council

Sen. Tom Davis, Beaufort County Leg.

Delegation

Harry Williams, Mayor, City of Hardeeville

Samuel E. Murray, Mayor, Town of Port Royal

Richard Hamilton, Board Member, Lowcountry

Regional Transit Authority

Policy Committee Designees Present:

Michael McFee, City of Beaufort Council, for
Mayor

Craig Winn, SCDOT Project Manager, for Robby
Robbins

Policy Committee Members Absent:

David Bennett, Mayor, Town of Hilton Head
Island

David Blauch, Chairman, LRTA Board

Sam Glover, SCDOT Commission

Clifton Parker, SCDOT Commission

Robby Robbins, SCDOT Commission

Rep. Bill Herbkersman, Jasper County Leg.

Delegation Chairman

Technical Committee Members:

Colin Kinton, Chair, Beaufort County

Shea Farrar, Town of Hilton Head Island

Katie Woodruff, City of Hardeeville

Mary Lou Franzoni, LRTA Executive Director

Kevin Icard, Town of Bluffton

Lisa Wagner, Jasper County

Kraig Gordon, Chair, Beaufort County CTC

Technical Committee Members Absent:

Lauren Kelly, City of Beaufort

Linda Bridges, Town of Port Royal

LCOG Staff Present:

Sabrena Graham, Executive Director

Ginnie Kozak, Planning Director

Lawrence Holdsworth, Regional Planner

SCDOT Staff Present:

Mike Sullivan, Statewide Planning Chief

Michael Pitts, Program Management

Jim Frierson, Office of Public Transit

FHWA Staff Present:

Yolanda Morris, Community Planner

Others Present:

David Spisso, Mayor Pro Tem, City of
Hardeeville

Anne Cyran, Senior Planner, Town of Hilton
Head

John Salazar, USCB

Lamar Mercer, Thomas and Hutton Engineering

Mark Wilkes, Interim Executive Director Coastal
Region MPO

Don Kassel, City of Hardeeville Planning
Commission

Frank Turano, Engineer, Alliance Consulting

John Gage, Moffatt and Nichol Consultants

Carolyn Kasser, Council, City of Hardeeville

Timothy Smith, CDM Smith Consulting

Jenny Humphreys, CDM Smith Consulting

1. Call to Order.
 - a. Pledge of Allegiance

- b. Invocation
- c. Introduction of Members, Guests and Staff
- d. Designees
- e. Action on January 8, 2016 and January 13, 2017 Meeting Minutes (Draft minutes attached.)

2. Old Business.

- a. SCDOT Project Update—Craig Winn
(SCDOT staff will review progress on the US 17 highway widening (including bicycle and pedestrian facilities) and bridge replacement project in Jasper County near Savannah and other projects underway in the MPO area.

Also SCDOT Environmental Assessment of US 17 Widening and Public Meeting on February 23, 2017.

<http://scdot.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=ac753af0677a423ea950f19023187d55>

ACTION: information

Mr. Winn described the US-17 project as moving forward with the Georgia DOT on the second phase which is the Back River Bridge. April will start the right-of-way acquisition. Army Corps permits will be submitted in the spring.

Mr. Winn said that the Jarvis Creek Bridge on HHI was approximately 31 percent complete and will be completed by November of this year. The SC 802 at Holly Hall and Brickyard Road roundabout is currently under construction. The US 21/SC 170 intersection improvement is scheduled for June of 2018 construction. The I-95 reconstruction from mile point 23 to 33 is currently under design for construction letting in January 2019. There was recent public hearing for a statewide interstate safety project for I-95 mile points 0-33 for tree clearing and grading in the clear zone. The letting is scheduled for May of 2017.

- b. Beaufort County Project Update—Colin Kinton

ACTION: information

Mr Kinton said that the Boundary Street project, jointly managed by the County and the City, is at 50% completion and is expected to be complete in February of 2018. The project is ahead of schedule and under budget.

Mr. Kinton described the safety and access improvement underway at Jenkins Island at 70% design completion. According to the current

schedule, they hope to go to bid and begin construction by the end of the year. There are 3 signal upgrade projects in the city of Beaufort, SC 170/ US 21, Boundary and Bladen Street, and Carteret and Craven Streets which are expected to go to bid in April.

c. LRTA/Palmetto Breeze Update—Mary Lou Franzoni

ACTION: Approval of 5307 (Small Urban Area) grant budget allocations

Ms. Franzoni said that Palmetto Breeze has been working since the beginning of her tenure to become the direct recipient of 5307 funds for the urban area. At the start of February, they received a letter from the FTA stating that they had received this designation. Changes to the TIP are necessary as they look toward the new grant money that is available to them. Up until this point, all federal grant monies supporting Palmetto Breeze operations have come from rural programs. The new funding stream by contrast, will only be available for services within the urban area. Based on input from communities in the urban area, capital expenses emerged as the greatest priority. For grant years 14-15 and 15-16, Palmetto Breeze is applying for funding for three trolley busses, six cutaway busses, a modular office building for operations staff, and an emergency generator. During and in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew, Palmetto Breeze was without power for a week without phones and computers.

With additional urban services, funds are being allocated for planning assistance, which will be coordinated with the LCOG planning staff to facilitate community engagement. Some funding will also be allocated for the operation of seasonal routes. This summer Palmetto Breeze will apply for 16-17 funds which will pay to operate new services.

Mr. Sommerville asked about the potential of a study that investigated the feasibility of running shuttles to Charleston and Savannah. Ms. Franzoni said that it may not be supported by the urban funds but she would look to see if it could be accomplished with rural funding. Ms. Franzoni indicated that local funds could be an option for funding these types of services and that the potential does exist but planning would be required to assess the demand. Employers could be included in planning as tax credits exist for employers to defray the cost of transit fares for employees.

Mr. McFee inquired as to the technical definition of the urban area. Ms. Franzoni responded that it is population based, and that following the 2010 census, the Hilton Head/Bluffton area exceeded 50,000

residents which resulted in the formation of the MPO. Ms. Sulka asked whether Palmetto Breeze needed any action from the committee for receiving next year's grant. Ms. Franzoni responded that making amendments to the TIP would be the only action necessary. Ms. Sulka asked what the time frame would look like for acquisition of the new fleet. Ms. Franzoni replied that once the STIP is approved, Palmetto Breeze can submit the grants which is a 30-90 day window for approval. During this time RFP's will be prepared so they can be sent out as soon as the grant money is approved. The trolleys will take one year to be built while the cutaway busses will take three to four months.

The Policy Committee took action by approving the TIP amendments.

- d. LATS Policy Committee membership composition
ACTION: Change *ex officio* members to voting members

Ms. Kozak explained that the DOT Commissioners and state legislators were made *ex-officio* due to lack of attendance at meetings. Mr. Davis said that he understands the rationale for the change in status and how it's needed to insure a quorum. Mr. Davis offered that whether he is a voting member or not, he has made a commitment to attend the meeting of this body as it represents the voice of advocacy for transportation improvements in the area.

Ms. Sulka listed the *ex-officio* members as Senator Davis, Sam Glover, Clifton Parker, Bill Herbkersman, and Jim Rozier. With five members having this designation, Ms. Sulka asked how many could be absent to prevent a quorum. Ms. Sulka asked the committee if it was necessary to grant voting status to all *ex-officio* members, as opposed to selecting one or two. Mr. Davis stated that he didn't want to create problems for the committee operationally and that he thought he would be heard by the group whether or not he was a voting member. Mr. Davis suggested that the committee hold over the decision until it could be determined whether the other *ex-officio* members were likely to attend. Mayor Sulka agreed and suggested that the Committee reach out to the *ex-officio* members and urge them to attend. At the next meeting a revised list of committee members will be developed. Ms. Sulka asked if it were possible to move the elected officials to voting members while retaining the SCDOT commissioners as *ex-officio*. Ms. Kozak offered that the bylaws were not very specific on this point. Mr. McFee made a motion to move the two elected officials, Senator Davis and Rep. Herbkersman, to voting members. The motion was approved.

e. Jasper Ocean Terminal Update—staff

(1) January 31 Army Corps of Engineers EIS Public Meeting. [link](#)

ACTION: Possible Policy Committee Submission to Army Corps of Engineers

Mr. Gage from Moffatt Nichol said that the attendance at the public scoping meeting was around 160-180 and thanked those from the group who attended. Mr. Gage said that the public comment period for the scoping process will end March 2nd and urged everyone to submit comments. The comments will contribute to the scoping document, expected at the end of April, which will identify what studies are needed to prepare a draft Environmental Impact Statement. At the end of June alternatives will be evaluated along with the proposed concept for the JOT.

Ms. Kozak suggested that the Committee could develop a statement to the Army Corps which addresses their perspectives on the JOT. Ms. Sulka asked for Mr. Gage's opinion. Mr. Gage suggested that it was a good opportunity to discuss the interface between the JOT and regional transportation planning, and address any potential concerns. Mr. Gage said that this process was addressing the scope of the transportation impacts of the JOT, and if areas like I-95 should be included in the analysis, then this would be an opportunity to include that perspective. Ms. Sulka suggested that the Technical Committee would guide the drafting of this statement.

Ms. Clark said that with the existing problems related to I-95, and the potential port impacts, it was very important to communicate this perspective. Ms. Clark suggested that I-95 needed to be six lanes. Ms. Sulka said that with the Committee's intent to increase advocacy for regional infrastructure improvements, drafting a statement was in keeping with that. Ms. Kozak said that the statement could refer to the improvements approved in the LATS LRTP, to demonstrate that these improvements are targeted in LATS planning.

Mr. Williams suggested that the statement could include existing plans for the proposed Exit 3 interchange on I-95. Ms. Kozak said that this was in the LATS LRTP, has been sent to the FHWA, and has a legal status.

A motion was approved for the technical committee to draft a statement on behalf of LATS which incorporates the perspectives of the Policy Committee on the scope of the JOT transportation enhancements, and which draws on the LRTP recommendations.

Ms. Kozak said that Matt Ball, who is coordinating the EIS process for the Army Corps, wanted to attend the meeting but could not. He communicated to Ms. Kozak that he looks forward to working with the Policy Committee, and wants to make sure that the work of the Corps is in agreement with LATS planning. Ms. Kozak said that the Corps wants to use the Lowcountry TDM in their analysis.

(2) Lowcountry Travel Demand Model—current output and update to incorporate schedule and other changes since previous update completed.

ACTION: Information

Ms. Kozak introduced Jennifer Humphreys from CDM Smith and gave details on her long history of working on Transportation Demand Modeling in the Lowcountry. Ms. Humphreys described the scope of CDM Smith's work in South Carolina, including with SCDOT developing the statewide transportation plan, as well as developing a regional model for the LATS. Ms. Humphreys touched on some of the industrial development scenarios developed for the Lowcountry TDM, and expressed the desire to incorporate their experience with the NEPA process in developing the model.

Ms. Humphreys described the Lowcountry TDM as an industry standard tool to predict trip generation and distribution based on population, employment, and development forecasts.

Ms. Humphreys explained that the JOT is not an assumption in the Lowcountry TDM, based on the previous uncertainty surrounding its development. TDM's are typically conservative estimates, only incorporating development which is very likely to occur. Taking this factor into account, CDM Smith incorporated the JOT into a standalone industrial buildout scenario which assessed the demand resulting from JOT operations and the development of nearby industrial parcels in Riverport and adjacent to a proposed Exit three. Ms. Humphreys explained that CDM Smith had been involved in TDM for the Exit three study, and therefore very familiar with the future land use in the area. CDM Smith estimates the addition of 20,000 new jobs in the area, with 400 of those located at the JOT. 4,900 new truck trips are expected to be added per day as a result of this employment. Ms. Humphreys explained that this is a conservative estimate, having seen a broad range of freight estimates for port facilities in the past. This scenario did not assume any new infrastructure that is being explored in connection with the JOT, rather only what was included in the STIP. Ms. Humphreys showed the resulting level of service maps, demonstrating that, in her opinion, the results were not cataclysmic albeit impactful. Ms. Humphreys explained level of service as an

indicator, saying that roads designated as "E" or "F" would be the targets for capacity or operational improvements. Ms. Kozak suggested that she would email the presentation to the Policy Committee for further review.

Ms. Clark asked whether intersection improvements were being considered at 315/17 due to the long delays. Mr. Kinton explained that those improvements would be included in the 17 widening project.

Ms. Humphreys offered that the TDM model does provide peak time estimates in addition to the average daily numbers. Looking at peak time would show more congestion in the network. Further study at the ground level will be incorporated in the NEPA process to make specific engineering decisions. Ms. Humphreys suggested that looking from the regional perspective, the realm of influence from the JOT extends to I-95 and anywhere the trucks are traveling.

Mr. Kinton asked if the impact on network performance of a truck is considered equivalent to that of a car in the model. Ms. Humphreys pointed out that it was. Mr. Kinton said that in terms of congestion and traveling speeds, trucks have a different impact than that of cars, and that they also cause 600 times more wear to the roadway.

Ms. Humphreys explained that the TDM results were at a planning level, without insight from more detailed engineering plans occurring at the JOT site. Ms. Humphreys offered that for the North Charleston Marine Terminal EIS they had estimated 10,000 trucks per day based on peak time and peak season freight movement. October is the peak season for international shipping to ports in this region. More accurate counts would result from a more detailed assessment of phasing and operations at the JOT, and collaboration between these partners is essential.

Mr. Gage explained that 8 berths are planned for the largest vessels with 2 phases split half and half. Ms. Humphreys suggested that the planning team consider a 50% buildout scenario in addition to a 100% buildout with an approximate timeframe. Modal split between rail and truck will also need to be taken into account. Mr. Kinton asked about how the operation of the inland ports would affect the modal split. Ms. Humphreys said that the inland ports are doing very well, but it will be hard to predict how much business they will draw from the JOT. The marine terminal in Charleston estimated a 20/80 split between rail and truck based on historical data. Ms. Humphreys added that the design of the JOT is important in determining the split, such as the presence of near dock rail. Mr. Gage offered that there is on dock rail included in the concept. However, where the rail goes after leaving the JOT, to a nearby satellite facility or inland port, is more difficult to predict.

Ms. Sulka asked if rail from the JOT would pose a concern in creating traffic bottlenecks. Ms. Humphreys explained that those concerns would be addressed as part of the NEPA process and the examination of alternatives. If an at-grade crossing was determined to be especially detrimental to the transportation network, then alternatives would evolve to let the project proceed. Grade separation is expensive and avoided for that reason, but will be considered during the permitting process.

Mr. Sommerville asked what time of day would be peak activity for port facilities. Ms. Humphreys replied that truck peak time typically does not coincide with that of average motorists, but the hours of operation vary widely from facility to facility. For this area, with the combination of industrial activity outside of the port, truck traffic would likely be 24 hours.

Mr. Hamilton expressed the concern about the traffic impacts of the potential redevelopment of Hilton Head National Golf Course. Mr. Kinton said that Hilton Head National was incorporated into the TDM. Ms. Sulka emphasized that there is a lot of potential development happening to be aware of, and said that the Policy Committee needed to be providing the best information possible to their respective councils. Ms. Humphreys stated that a measure of caution needs to be used in communicating the TDM results, and she rarely uses maps for traffic volumes. TDM is not an exact science, although the distribution of trips is fairly predictable in the Lowcountry because of geographical limitations. Ms. Kozak suggested that it might be useful to have CDM Smith come again to present the TDM results to more elected officials in the area, so that they could also have an explanation of the proper context to understand the model.

Mr. Wilkes said that a large percentage of the truck trips from the Savannah Port are drayage, or short trips that serve nearby distribution facilities. Mr. Wilkes asked what assumptions the model makes about how many truck trips are internal, versus the number that leave the region. Ms. Humphreys replied that the truck model is built around different classifications of employment, and the projected manufacturing employment around Riverport is generating many truck trips. If the model was designed for a NEPA document, it would be developed to account for more short trips.

Mr. Kinton said that the distribution facilities in Savannah would be a likely destination for the short trips from the JOT. Mr. Wilkes said that Savannah had been experiencing land use conflicts between industrial development and other uses in the vicinity of the port. Ms. Kozak said that planning now would help to get ahead of those conflicts.

Ms. Humphreys emphasized the need to coordinate with the NEPA team on traffic forecasts because competing numbers would cause confusion for the public and during federal review. Ms. Kozak indicated that the Army Corps wanted to use the Lowcountry model for that reason.

Mr. Gage said that one of the items in the scoping document at the end of April would be the transportation study. Following this time they will be looking toward how to best accomplish the study. From May to June the consultants will be creating the plan for the coming fiscal year, and therefore reaching out to regional partners to identify resources, making certain that everyone is working with the same data. Ms. Sulka said that by the fall of 2017 the Policy Committee would have updated data and would decide at that time to distribute the findings.

3. New Business.

a. Including new LATS Projects on the STIP List—Mike Sullivan, SCDOT

ACTION: Information

Mr. Sullivan said that he as well as Ms. Kozak had been receiving questions about the potential Exit three off I-95 and how to go about getting the project in the STIP. Therefore, Mr. Sullivan said he wanted to explain about the STIP process which would apply to Exit three and other projects programmed by LATS. The STIP is a federally mandated document maintained by the SCDOT Planning Office which lists all federally funded and regionally significant projects in South Carolina. Mr. Sommerville asked if that meant previously funded or projects expected to be funded in the future. Mr. Sullivan explained that the STIP covers all funded projects from 2017 to 2022. The first step to getting a project in the STIP is to have it identified in a LRTP, which has been satisfied for Exit three. The next step is to add the project to the LATS TIP, at which point The Technical Committee would look at how the project is ranked, and if funding has been identified. The LATS technical committee would then make a recommendation to the Policy Committee who would vote to include it in the TIP. SCDOT would double check to insure that LATS followed this appropriate process, and then add it to the STIP.

Mr. Sommerville asked if the Exit three project was being considered as a critical component of the JOT development. Mr. Sullivan explained that funds have been identified for preliminary design and

environmental studies. As part of these studies an interchange justification report is also required by the FHWA as part of this process. FHWA will consider traffic demand as well as how the interchange will function as part of the wider network to determine whether the project is necessary and to insure it does not adversely impact the interstate system. This process is in action and the answer to these questions is forthcoming. If the FHWA makes the determination that it is needed, then funding options will be explored for future implementation.

Ms. Sulka asked if the connection of Exit three to the proposed extension of Bluffton Parkway was being considered in the justification. Mr. Sullivan replied that although he was personally not aware of the finer details of the Lowcountry network, this factor could help in the justification for the project. Mr. Sullivan said that FHWA's priorities would be the function of the interstate system and minimizing adverse impacts before considering the rest of the network.

Mr. Mercer said that the entire network would be considered as they go through the NEPA process, but he didn't think that they anticipated Exit three connecting to the Bluffton Parkway extension. Mr. Mercer explained that there are a lot of network considerations including the JOT, but for purposes of the NEPA document they were better off keeping those factors separate from Exit three. Ms. Sulka offered that this topic could take up an entire meeting, and warned that the Committee might be overloading on information.

Mr. Kinton offered that the Interchange Justification Report did treat the interchange and the parkway extension as separate with different purposes and justifications. Mr. Mercer said that the 2014 IJR did show need and justification, but NEPA has required a separate traffic study.

Ms. Clark said that judging the basic consensus in the room, the Policy Committee would want Exit three back on the STIP, requiring a recommendation from the Technical Committee, and then a TIP amendment action by the Policy Committee. Mr. Kinton said that it would need to be fiscally constrained. Mr. Sullivan agreed that it would depend on the funding source being identified. Ms. Sulka suggested that that this topic could be further addressed at another meeting once the Technical Committee has had the opportunity to look at it. Ms. Sulka said that this issue could be one where broader public input is warranted, and therefore can be explored more comprehensively in the future. Mr. Sullivan offered that while it may be premature to put the project on the STIP, there has been funding identified by the State Infrastructure Bank for the preliminary design.

As a future action the project could be put on the Technical Committee agenda to put the STIB funds back onto the TIP to move that portion of the process onto the STIP. Ms. Sulka suggested that conversations about the TIP could happen in a comprehensive fashion, with careful accounting for impacts to future funding. Mr. Williams offered that the request for 28 million from the STIB would be matched by 28 million from the City of Hardeeville and Jasper County, not the MPO. The inclusion of the project on the LATS TIP was a matter of procedure. Mr. Kinton said that the Technical Committee would examine the project, as well as others recommended in the LRTP to insure that priorities are still accurate. Mr. Mercer thanked the Committee for the information and asked if a reasonable timeframe for action by the Technical Committee was in the range of the next three months. Mr. Kinton said the Technical Committee would meet a week or two in advance of the next Policy Committee meeting. Mr. Mercer said that he would need to provide a report on the TIP at their next evaluation meeting with the STIB. Mr. Sullivan said that it would need a 15 day public comment period following the March meeting of the Policy Committee and then go to SCDOT. SCDOT could have it on the STIP by June.

4. Other Business.

Mr. Davis gave an update on the House roads bill indicating that it passed the House Ways and Means Committee, and would be on the floor of the House next week. Mr. Davis said he expected action from the House after roughly two weeks of debate. Following House approval it will go to the Senate, where Mr. Davis is part of an ad-hoc finance committee to examine the bill. The full Senate vote could begin debate by mid-to-late March.

Ms. Sulka suggested that as the Committee has made a commitment to embrace an advocacy role on behalf of regional infrastructure improvements, it could be useful for the members to consider what they believe to be the most needed projects.

5. Next Meeting

Ms. Kozak suggested the tentative date of March 31st and Ms. Sulka agreed that the Committee could target the last Friday of each month.

6. ADJOURN