

H-GAC Technical Advisory Committee meeting notes

H-GAC 2nd Floor Mtg Room - April 15, 2009, 9:30 am

Development of the 2010-2013 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Pat Waskowiak of the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) noted that under normal circumstances, H-GAC would already be developing the 2010-2013 TIP. However, she noted that only 43 percent of projects and 35 percent of funds scheduled for Fiscal Year 2008 were actually let to contract. The remaining projects were pushed back into 2009, 2010, and 2011.

She noted that contract letting has fallen short of expectations since 2006, and that due to a funding shortfall at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), 2008 was the [worst year yet](#). The letting deficit is expected to grow to over \$1.2 billion by 2011. Waskowiak said there are two main reasons for this: Letting caps are lower than anticipated in 2007, when the 2008-2011 TIP was being developed; and because of the reduced lettings, many projects have been pushed back into later years. She also noted that projects usually become more expensive in later years.

Waskowiak pointed to several major issues affecting TIP projects: uncertain funding, revised priorities, readiness for contract letting, funding status, tolling schedule, compliance with the federal environmental process, and air quality standards.

She provided the following timeline for the 2009-2013 TIP:

March-May: Assessment of project readiness

May 22: Transportation Policy Council (TPC) approval of draft 2010-2013 project ranking

June 1: TxDOT issues funding targets

June 26: TPC approval of draft TIP, public comment period begins

August 28: TPC approval of TIP

September 1: H-GAC submits "fiscally constrained" TIP to TxDOT

Waskowiak said that H-GAC may end up developing a TIP that looks like the current TIP and includes no new projects. The TIP could then be amended later if the funding situation improves.

One TAC member asked if the local option bill passed Tuesday by the Texas Senate would put the Houston region at a disadvantage. Waskowiak said she did not know, but

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that it could affect the region's ability to leverage state and federal dollars. Ashby Johnson of H-GAC agreed, saying that if cities such as Dallas are able to raise money locally, they may be able to get more government matching funds. Johnson said he was told the Houston delegation has been discussing inclusion in the bill, and noted that it had been amended 17 times in the Senate before passage. He also noted that the bill would also require a constitutional amendment to take effect.

Legislative Update

Johnson introduced a new H-GAC staff member to give the legislative update. The staff member noted five particularly active pieces of legislation. He confirmed what had been said about [Senate Bill 855](#) (the local-option bill), noting that the constitutional amendment would require all gas tax revenue to be spent on transportation. Currently, 25 percent of the motor fuels tax goes to the Available School Fund. [Senate Bill 16](#), he said, which would offset some greenhouse gas emissions through increased energy efficiency and carbon sequestration, had also been heavily amended in committee, and he said its provisions and mandates could not be enforced until a funding mechanism was provided. [Senate Bill 17](#) would repeal the market valuation process established two years ago by Senate Bill 792. [Senate Bill 220](#) would limit TxDOT's ability to convert freeways to toll lanes, although roads such as the Grand Parkway that were designated as toll roads before September 1, 2005 would be exempted. [House Joint Resolution 54](#) would restrict vehicle registration fees and fuel taxes to transportation expenditures.

Report on status of transportation planning activities from member agencies

Jeff Taebel of H-GAC, who sits on the TAC, said that the H-GAC board would hopefully approve a new program called Plan Source on Tuesday. Plan Source would help local governments contract for community and comprehensive planning services. He told members to keep an eye on the H-GAC website and said that perhaps H-GAC could give a presentation on Plan Source at a future TAC meeting. Taebel said that 39 firms responded to H-GAC's [request for proposals](#).

Marlene Gafrick noted that the next TAC meeting is on May 7, which is a Thursday, not a Wednesday like usual.