

H-GAC Transportation Policy Council notes

March 27, 2009, 9:30 am

Agenda item #6: Resolution for Approval of Amendments to the 2008 – 2011 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Update on TIP Implementation

Pat Waskowiak of H-GAC told the council that fewer and fewer TIP projects are being let to contract. During Fiscal Year 2008, only 43 percent of projects and 35 percent of the money was let, while the remainder was delayed. She said that most of this had to do with the severe funding shortfall at the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), noting that 90 percent of TIP projects belong to TxDOT.

Waskowiak said that project letting slightly exceeded project programming from 2003 to 2005, but that the funding situation has deteriorated since then. 2008 was the worst year yet, with a shortfall of over \$1.1 billion. Only \$604 million was let to contract, while \$1.126 billion was delayed. She said that the situation will improve somewhat in 2009 and 2010 due to stimulus spending, but that severe deficits will return in 2011.

Between now and May, Waskowiak said that H-GAC will review all TIP projects to determine their readiness, and that on September 1 a "fiscally restrained" list will be submitted to TxDOT.

Agenda item #7: Nominating Committee Recommendation for Vacant TPC At-Large Position for "Other Transportation Interests"

The TPC Nominating Committee recommended Joe Adams of Union Pacific Railroad fill Tom Kornegay's seat. Kornegay retired recently from the Port of Houston, and Adams is his alternate.

Judge Ed Emmett asked if it was acceptable to have a private interest group as a voting member. He said he had the utmost respect for Adams and wanted him to serve as a full member of the council, but that he did not want to run afoul of any guidelines. Chairman James Patterson thought the issue needed to be researched and noted that if Adams is ineligible for a full voting position, he would also be ineligible for the position of alternate that he currently holds. The TPC unanimously approved Adams, but added instructions for H-GAC to research the issue.

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Agenda item #8: Resolution for Approval of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funded Transit Projects

Alan Clark of H-GAC noted that the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) is still unsure how much money it can spend on the light rail project. Last week, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) ruled that METRO could not use its money for the light rail, only to reverse its decision on Tuesday and allow METRO to use \$29 million for the North and Southeast lines. Clark said he would suggest approving all funds except for the Houston Urbanized Area, which includes \$87.2 million for METRO, \$2.7 million for Fort Bend County, and \$922,000 for Harris County.

A METRO representative said that METRO had identified the North and Southeast lines as its priority projects, although the list before the TPC did not include those lines. He said METRO has asked Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood to make a ruling on whether or not METRO can use all of its funds for the light rail. A ruling is expected next week.

Emmett wanted to move forward with the Harris County and Fort Bend County portions, saying he was getting the impression that METRO thought it had higher priority than the two counties and wanted the entire \$90.9 million for itself. He and Chairman Patterson said that if the numbers were renegotiated, the counties would press hard for more funding. Patterson said that while the counties currently received just five percent of the Houston allocation, they might come back with more, leaving METRO with a smaller share.

Emmett said it was his understanding that the Houston Urbanized Area allocations had to be voted on as a whole, and that TPC could not vote on the county allocations while tabling METRO's share. Clark agreed with his interpretation. Another TPC member asked if the METRO projects added up to \$87 million, or if they would cost more than that. He was informed that METRO's projects would exceed \$87 million.

A motion was made and seconded to table the Houston Urbanized Area allocation, including Harris and Fort Bend Counties, until next month. The motion failed, with seven in favor and 12 against.

Councilwoman Sue Lovell made a motion to approve the list [as presented](#). Emmett noted that the list did not include the North and Southeast rail lines, and that he did not want to exclude those projects if they were METRO's top priorities. He amended the motion by adding the North and Southeast corridors as METRO's top priority projects. The amended project list passed with one dissension.

Agenda item #9: Legislative Report

Ashby Johnson of H-GAC provided an overview of several transportation-related bills in the Texas legislature. He said he was mentioning the bills now because bills might appear to be stuck in committee only to move quickly toward the end of the legislative session.

According to an agenda handout:

The most significant [bill relating to TxDOT] is HB 2589 filed by Representative Pickett of El Paso that would realign the 25 TxDOT districts to match the geographic boundaries of the 24 councils of government boundaries. It would also create 24 rural planning organizations (RPOs) that would have standing with TxDOT similar to that of existing metropolitan transportation planning organizations (MPOs). Under Representative Pickett's bill, RPOs and MPOs would have more authority to program projects on both the state and local transportation networks.

Johnson also noted Senate Bill 1019, which contains many of the Sunset committee recommendations and would replace the Texas Transportation Commission with a single commissioner appointed by the governor. The bill would also establish a legislative oversight committee. Chairman Patterson said there is also another bill that would replace the commission with a single commissioner, but the commissioner would not be appointed by the governor.

Agenda item #10: DWI Documentary for Teens

Assistant Police Chief Vicki King of the Houston Police Department (HPD) discussed a proposed documentary aimed at preventing teenagers from drinking and driving. She noted that 63 percent of Houston traffic deaths in 2007 were alcohol-related, and that drunk drivers killed more people per capita in Harris County than in any other county nationwide.

King said that HPD is trying to promote education over incarceration by creating the documentary. The department will invite selected teens to ride along in patrol cars, filming

their reactions and interviewing them before and after. The documentaries would then be shown at local schools, and the participants would be encouraged to discuss their experiences with classmates.

Agenda item #11: Report on Status of Transportation Planning Activities

Clark told the TPC that H-GAC finished its quarterly transportation public meetings over the last three days. Art Storey, executive director of the Harris County Public Infrastructure Department, asked him if there were any comments regarding the use of stimulus funds for toll roads. Clark said there were some comments against the Grand Parkway, but that he would have to defer to Pat Waskowiak, who had left to prepare for another meeting. Chairman Patterson suggested that at the April TPC meeting, Storey and Emmett could give a report on where the seven counties involved in the Grand Parkway project stand.