

## Minutes of Meeting

POLICY COMMITTEE

DATE: February 17, 2021

TIME: 9:30 pm

PLACE: ZOOM Virtual Meeting

\* This meeting was held via ZOOM conference call in accordance with the Open Meetings Act due to the coronavirus pandemic.

**Members Present:** City of Saline – Brian Marl, Chair  
Eastern Michigan University - Leigh Greden, Vice Chair  
WCBOC – Jason Morgan, Treasurer  
Ann Arbor Township – Diane O'Connell  
City of Ann Arbor – Erica Briggs  
City of Chelsea – Charles Wiseley  
City of Ypsilanti – Jennifer Symanns  
MDOT Region - Kari Martin  
Northfield Township - Ken Dignan  
Pittsfield Township – Mandy Grewal  
TheRide – Matt Carpenter  
Washtenaw County Road Commission – Doug Fuller

**Members Absent:** City of Ann Arbor DDA – Vacant  
City of Dexter – Shawn Keough  
Dexter Township - Vacant  
City of Milan - Dominic Hamden  
Scio Township - Jane Vogel  
Superior Township – Ken Schwartz  
SWWCOG – Ron Milkey  
University of Michigan – Hank Baier  
Ypsilanti Township – Brenda Stumbo

**Others Present:** WATS - Ryan Buck, Nick Sapkiewicz, Suzann Flowers, Emily Lake  
RTA - Alma Smith, Ned Staebler, Ben Stupka, Elias Fischer  
WWAVE - Julia Roberts  
SEMCOG - Christina Ignasiak

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### POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

City of Ann Arbor • Ann Arbor DDA • Ann Arbor Township • City of Chelsea • City of Dexter  
Dexter Township • Eastern Michigan University • Michigan Department of Transportation • City of Milan • Northfield Township •  
Pittsfield Township • City of Saline • Scio Township • Southwest Washtenaw Council of Governments • Superior Township • The Ride  
University of Michigan • Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners • Washtenaw County Road Commission • City of Ypsilanti • Ypsilanti Township •  
• Ex Officio: Federal Highway Administration • Southeast Michigan Council of Governments •

TheRide - Caitlin Conway  
Scio Township - Steve Wzygoski  
Stantec - Maranda Miller

1. Call to Order/Introductions

Chair Marl called the meeting to order at 9:36am. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Agenda

**Mr. Fuller made a motion to approve the meeting agenda, Ms. Martin supported the motion, motion approved.**

3. Approval of Minutes

**Mr. Morgan made a motion to approve the January 20, 2021 minutes as presented, supported by Mr. Carpenter, motion approved.**

4. Public Participation

There were none.

5. Communications and Announcements

Mr. Buck provided the following updates:

- WATS received notification of approximately \$2.5million in additional funding that will be available from now until FY 2024. WATS staff will look to the Policy Committee for direction on how to allocate these funds.
- Washtenaw County has updated their Opportunity Index and has released the data to WATS and other stakeholders in a soft launch. WATS uses the index as a geographic layer for analysis of the TIP and LRP. Thank you to Washtenaw County for all the great work that has gone into that tool.
- The state is expected to receive approximately 1.5-2% less in obligation authority this year. A reminder to obligate projects early to ensure funding is available.
- MDOTs five year plan is available for comment until February 25th.
- The state has released recommendations for the development of the new 2023-2026 TIP. WATS will be reviewing the TIP application scoring process but does not anticipate major changes.
- Reaffirmation of the 2045 LRP will take place over the next several months. The new plan will include a modified public participation plan, with particular focus on making online interactions as inclusive and accessible as possible.

6. Bills over \$500

There were none.

7. Old Business

**A. 2021 State of Good Repair for Rural Transit Targets - Action**

Ms. Flowers provided the 2021 state of good repair targets for rural transit providers across the state of Michigan. These targets are for section 5311 and 5310 federal funding sub-recipients, which in Washtenaw County include the WAVE and PEX. Statewide targets and goals are based on a useful life benchmark for revenue and service vehicles. There is approximately \$22million of section 5311 and 5310 funding available that will be allocated for revenue vehicle replacements until statewide goals are met, and then for facility

upgrades/replacement and equipment. The WATS Technical Committee has recommended support of the rural transit targets for the state.

**Mr. Marl made a motion to approve the MDOT 2021 State of Good Repair targets for rural transit, supported by Ms. Symanns, motion approved.**

**B. Bridge Performance Measures - Action**

MDOT has updated the 4-year NHS bridge performance measures based on a mid-year bridge condition inventory that showed faster decline than expected. The WATS Technical Committee has recommended support of the new 4-year bridge performance measures for the state.

**Mr. Fuller made a motion to approve bridge performance measures, supported by Ms. Briggs, motion approved.**

**C. FY 2021 First Quarter Financial Statements - Action**

Mr. Buck reported that there are no concerns with the budget or with the local funding match amount.

**Mr. Greden made a motion to approve the financial statements as presented, supported by Ms. Grewal, motion approved.**

8. New Business

**D. FY 2022 Draft Unified Planning Work Program - Action**

Mr. Buck explained that the FY 2022 work program will begin in July and noted that \$57,536 is recommended for planning funds to TheRide to assist with coordinated transit planning activities. The administrative budget for FY 22 will be brought before the Committee in June.

**Mr. Fuller made a motion to approve the Unified Planning Work Program for FY 2022, supported by Ms. O'Connell, motion approved.**

**E. RTA Discussion Part Two - Discussion**

Mr. Buck welcomed Mr. Stupka for a second round of discussions between representatives of the RTA and the WATS Policy Committee. A letter that was sent from TheRide to the RTA was provided by Mr. Carpenter to help identify some of the potential challenges of the project and how it compares to existing bus services.

Mr. Stupka provided a presentation on the RTA's master regional transportation plan process, which will be broader and more aspirational than previous plans, with visions and goals for staging out investments across large corridors, etc. A briefing book is available on the RTA website that outlines the plan's work in progress.

For Washtenaw County, commuter rail has long been the primary focus for the regional transit program. The commuter rail project would provide connections between Ann Arbor and Detroit (and possibly Chelsea) and has the potential to provide economic development around transit stations. The project also represents approximately half of the regional transit investment for Washtenaw County, making Washtenaw County the only County with such a large amount planned for one project. The projected ridership numbers for commuter rail do

not make the project competitive for state and federal funding to cover capital costs (estimated between \$22-64M), presenting a funding risk. There are potential state and federal funding sources to cover a portion of operations and maintenance costs, and local funds coming from a potential County millage would cover approximately 50% of operating costs.

Mr. Stupka asked the Policy Committee to consider two questions, which may not be mutually exclusive, as they discuss the RTA's master plan:

1. Would the WATS Policy Committee like the RTA to continue framing commuter rail as the priority regional transit investment for Washtenaw County?
2. Would the WATS Policy Committee like the RTA to start to develop some alternative projects and approaches?

The Policy Committee expressed appreciation to the RTA and to Mr. Carpenter for the information they provided regarding commuter rail in Washtenaw County. Discussions ensued regarding the importance of equity and context sensitive design as cornerstones of the new master plan, how commuter rail would fit into the transit services already offered, and how commuter rail would benefit Chelsea and the surrounding area. There was agreement on the need to look at alternative options for rail, and alternative approaches to rail, while also continuing to pursue the potential of commuter rail.

Mr. Stupka and the RTA will research alternative options to commuter rail while continuing to pursue commuter rail strategies. RTA representatives will be available at the next Policy meeting on March 17 to continue the RTA master plan discussion.

#### 10. Adjournment

Chair Marl adjourned the meeting at 10:39 am.