

PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, May 27, 2020

via GoToMeeting

5:33 to 6:34 P.M.

MINUTES

1. WELCOME

Mr. Eric Norton, Chair, and Ms. Monica Haines Benkhedda thanked everyone for taking time to join the virtual PAC meeting in the midst of very challenging times. Ms. Haines Benkhedda provided an overview of the agenda and meeting facilitation.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Norton asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Sharon Smith made a motion to approve and Mr. Mark Lotz motioned to second. The PAC voted by roll call to approve the March 2020 minutes.

3. PRESENTATION: EVALUATION OF BRTB PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Ms. Pamela Lebeaux and Ms. Catherine Smith from WSP as well as Ms. Tracee Strum-Gilliam from PRR provided an update on the project to evaluate the current public involvement activities of the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB). The WSP/PRR team is currently in the process of completing its overall assessment with the focus of their presentation today a discussion of options for the future of the (PAC).

The team provided an update on Task 1, including a review of two key documents, the Public Participation Plan and Limited English Proficiency Plan. Both documents were found to comply with federal requirements. Work is underway to document the other findings and recommendations of the task, which include review of the website and social media platforms and new and modified outreach strategies. The majority of Task 2, which consists of meetings, interviews, and an assessment of the PAC, has been completed.

Next, the team summarized the core issues identified for the PAC assessment and described the results of research on other MPOs' practices regarding the use of citizen/public advisory committees. Looking at similarly sized MPOs that are known for strong public involvement programs, the team found a mix of practices, with some using citizen committees and others without. A survey is underway in partnership with the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) that will provide additional information.

The team identified two options for the PAC. In Option A, the PAC would be retooled to address some of the issues identified in the assessment and implement suggested improvements. Changes could include reducing the frequency of meetings, offering a virtual meeting option for some or all meetings, and focusing on issues in which the PAC can have the most meaningful input, such as the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), long-range plan and policy topics. In Option B, the PAC would be replaced with other forms of public engagement, such as a virtual panel and the addition of seats for public representatives on other BRTB advisory committees.

PAC members provided feedback on the two options. Several members expressed strong support for Option A, seeing continued benefit to keeping the PAC with some of the changes outlined. Others leaned strongly toward Option B, which could provide “more change, more energy,” especially given the amount of time the PAC has spent discussing “how the PAC is not working.” One member pointed out that the choice need not be seen as either/or but could include elements of both.

- Benefits of the PAC include its ability to represent different sectors of the community that might not otherwise have a voice at the BRTB and the knowledge of transportation that the PAC brings.
- One member stated that it is challenging to get community members to play an active role: “committees like PAC stand in the shoes of those whose voice does reach BMC/BRTB” and if the PAC disbands, we could “lose the community foothold.”
- One thought Option B was “too similar to existing outreach, which is not usually very successful.”
- Some would prefer to keep meetings monthly or close to monthly (8-10 meetings per year) to maintain momentum.
- Members expressed strong support for a call-in option for PAC meetings, which would be especially helpful to those in outlying counties. One suggested that meeting time and location could be varied, while always providing a call-in option. However, it was noted that in-person meetings remain valuable.
- One member provided the perspective that a few years ago, PAC members’ expectations for what could be accomplished increased, and this is when frustration set in.
- Regarding PAC areas of focus, one member suggested that “less is more” and the PAC should focus on just two areas, such as the UPWP and long-range transportation plan. However, it was mentioned that the PAC has previously tried to focus on one or two areas, such as the UPWP and equity.
- Surveys might be used to get the larger community involved.
- The National Transit Institute’s online courses in statewide and metropolitan planning are potential resources for the PAC.

The consultants will consider this feedback in developing recommendations for consideration by BMC staff and the BRTB. Mr. Norton asked members to review the report prepared by the consultants and provide any further comments to Ms. Haines Benkhedda by Wednesday, June 3, 2020.

[Presentation: Evaluation of BRTB Public Involvement Activities]

4. DISCUSSION: GOALS AND STRATEGIES FOR NEXT LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

Mr. Eric Norton reported that he attended a recent meeting of the Technical Committee and learned that the committee was considering a review of the goals and strategies for the next regional long-range transportation plan (LRTP). Ms. Haines Benkhedda confirmed that Mr. Terry Freeland, BMC staff, will present to the Technical Committee on Tuesday, June 2 at 9:30 a.m. on the topic of the next LRTP and some initial thoughts on updating the goals based on staff review and recommendations. Mr. Norton will attend the June Technical Committee meeting as a liaison to the PAC. He will update the PAC members about the presentation and any action items for the members to consider.

Ms. Haines Benkhedda also confirmed that she will work with BMC staff to develop a Public Participation Plan (PPP) for the next LRTP and let the PAC know the ways in which they and other interested parties may participate in a review of the goals and strategies, as well as other steps in the development of the LRTP.

5. UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECT UPDATES, AND OTHER BUSINESS

- Ms. Haines Benkhedda reported that the comment period for the 2020 Federal Certification Review of the BRTB concluded on May 1. Staff shared all comments with the federal review team at the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA). A copy of comments is available on the Certification page of the BMC website.
- The BRTB will hold a comment period for the 2021-2024 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the associated Air Quality Conformity determination from June 16 through July 17. Staff will share details via email and the BMC website.
- The May 26 BRTB meeting featured a presentation by MDOT MTA to share the draft Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan. The draft plan is open for comment through June 18, 2020. Visit rtp.mta.maryland.gov to view the draft plan and get full details on how to comment.
- Staff are continuing to monitor the public health emergency and the possibility of doing an Every Voice Counts Transportation Academy as planned for Fall 2020.

ATTENDANCE

Members

Celeste Chavis – Morgan State University
Michael Davis – Resident, Carroll County
David Drasin – Member, Howard County Multimodal Transportation Advisory Board
Benjamin Groff – Resident, Baltimore City
Tafadzwa Gwitira – Resident, Baltimore City
Yvette Hicks – Resident, Baltimore County
Paul Kowzan III – Resident, Baltimore
Mark Lotz – Resident, Harford County
Ian Moller-Knudsen – Howard County Sierra Club
Eric Norton – Central Maryland Transportation Alliance

Audrey Sellers – Accessible Resources for Independence, Inc.
Sharon Smith – Partners in Care
Michael Thompson – Turner Station Conservation Teams
Paul Verchinski – Howard County Citizens Association (HCCA)
Cynthia Wyatt – Resident, Anne Arundel County

Staff and Guests

Regina Aris – Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)
Monica Haines Benkhedda –BMC
Todd Lang – BMC
Pamela Lebeaux – WSP
Tracee Strum Gilliam – PRR