

Mobile Area Transportation Study

**TCC/CAC Meeting**

**Wednesday, July 29th, 2020 10:00 a.m.**

**GoToMeeting Virtual Meeting**

**TCC/CAC Members Present**

Mr. John Murphy  
Ms. Kim Sanderson  
Mr. Nick Amberger  
Ms. Margie Wilcox  
Ms. Shayla Beaco  
Mr. Tom Briand  
Ms. Mary Beth Bergin  
Mr. John F. Rhodes  
Mr. Logan Anderson  
Mr. Richard Spraggins  
Mr. Ricky Mitchell  
Mr. Edwin Perry  
Mr. Dennis Sullivan  
Mr. Jeff Zoghby  
Ms. Jennifer White  
Mr. Gerald Alfred  
Mr. Jim DeLap

**TCC/CAC Members Absent**

Mr. Donald Watson  
Mr. John Blanton  
Ms. Casi Callaway  
Mr. James Jacobs  
Ms. Essie Montgomery Johnson  
Ms. Jennifer Denson  
Mr. Bob Harris  
Mr. Fernando Billups  
Dr. Laura Cepeda  
Mr. Logan Anderson  
Ms. Christienne Gibson  
Mr. Jason Franklin  
Mr. Brian Harold  
Mr. Merrill Thomas  
Ms. Shilo Miller  
Mr. Jason Wilson  
Ms. Nancy Hewston  
Mr. Frank Williams

**GUESTS:**

Mr. Daniel Driskell  
Mr. Cathal O’Gorman  
Mr. Daniel Berkowitz

**STAFF:**

Mr. Kevin Harrison  
Mr. Anthony Johnson  
Ms. Monica Williamson  
Mr. Tom Piper

The meeting was called to order.

The second item on the agenda was to recommend approval of ALDOT requested modification to the 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program with National Highway Funds, Resolution 20-009.

Mr. Harrison said anytime there is a project that goes over a certain amount of the cost estimate it requires an MPO Resolution. The first one is US 98, EB lanes from MS state line to .5 Mile East of Glenwood Rd. The old estimate is \$18,200,000 with a new cost estimate of \$23,918,000. The second one is adding a lane

on I-10 from CR-39 to Carol Plantation. It had an original cost estimate of \$33,394,000 and the new estimate is \$41,047,000. Both of those had an increase of over \$5 million so requires a resolution. ALDOT is on the call if anyone has any questions.

Motion was made by Mr. Nick Amberger to recommend approval of Resolution 20-009 with a second by Ms. Margie Wilcox. Motion passed unanimously.

The next item on the agenda was to recommend approval of ALDOT requested modification to the 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program; STP Any Area Funds; Resolution 20-010.

Mr. Harrison said STP Any Area funds are spent at the State's discretion. There are two projects to be added to the TIP with these funds. The first one is engineering for independent review of Austal's proposed road improvements over the Wallace tunnels and Bankhead tunnel for \$170,000. The second one is engineering for a five-year regional traffic operations (RTOP) TSMO for 130 Signalized intersections along SR-59, SR-16 (US-90), and SR-42 (US-98) for \$2,631,200. This is actually a two-county resolution. The Eastern Shore MPO will be doing the exact thing for this project. Daniel Driskell and Edwin Perry are on the line. If one of you could go over these projects.

Mr. Perry said I will handle the tunnel one and Daniel can go over the RTOP project. Austal is looking at doing some work moving across Dunlap that is going to weigh more than what they are currently moving. We are going to review their proposal so we can issue a permit and work with the City of Mobile on that proposed work.

Mr. Harrison said is there any construction with Federal funding tied to this?

Mr. Perry said not currently. We anticipate this is something that Austal is going to implement. As we finish the review and get the permit, if there is a project that we have to be associated with, we will let everyone know.

Mr. Amberger said the City currently has a permit with Austal to move the component that they are already moving. Our thoughts are that we would like to be revising our agreement with them and probably issuing them another right of way permit. They basically have to reinforce the road is what we understand. Probably a concrete structure that helps distribute the loads of the heavier components.

Mr. Driskell said the Regional Traffic Operations Program (RTOP) that we are proposing to do is kind of mimicking what has already been done in Tuscaloosa. It has been in place three years there and they have seen some really good travel time reductions, anywhere from 20 to 60% on their corridors. RTOP is kind of transforming how we operate signals and take us from just solely doing maintenance which is what we've been doing to actually operating these signals and optimizing them, basically looking at them and touching them on a daily basis to get as much capacity as we can on our roadways. It's a five-year program, 130 intersections are what we will start with and we hope to expand from that and show how much increased capacity we can get out of these signals and how much we can reduce travel times and improve safety. The SP designation for the scope is a Special Project because it encompasses several aspects. There will engineering, operations and maintenance all lumped together. That is why we are changing it from a PE to a SP. There will be an RFP that goes out. This project is to hire a consultant to provide a team of individuals to do the work. They will work alongside ALDOT and our local municipalities to do the best they can for all these signal networks.

Mr. Harrison asked if there is a future phase for construction for this project?

Mr. Driskell said no. It's all lumped into one. Year one will be boots on the ground going out in the field to repair signals that are not working, retiming and optimizing all the signals. There is going to be a lot of hands on work upfront in year one and two. Then years three, four, and five and more of just the monitoring and optimizing. It's kind of all lumped into one project.

Motion to recommend approval of Resolution 20-010 was made by Ms. Margie Wilcox with a second by Mr. Nick Ambeger. The motion passed unanimously with one abstention by Mr. John Murphy.

The next item on the agenda was to recommend approval of FY 2021 Unified Planning Work Program; Resolution 20-011.

Mr. Harrison said I sent you all this link a couple of times. It has been advertised. It has been in our newsletter. This is essentially our budget each year. It's a 63-page document. A couple of things, I want to thank Richard Spraggins for getting a type-o. Nothing has really changed from the budget. We have a little bit more federal funding this year. This is the table of contents and it has several tasks of what the staff does throughout the year and allows us to purchase computers and equipment as well. This is online. I sent y'all the link and ya'll are welcome to read it and give me any feedback on it. The Wave Transit also has planning dollars in 5307 that are in here as well. Normally, I send ya'll the table with the funding first which is this table right here. If y'all can see, we do receive XXXX federal that is apportioned to us. I want you to pay attention to here. These are our carryover funds. This is the match required. A lot of this from 2017, 2018 and 2019 carryover is predominantly unmatched federal dollars that come to the MPO. Right now, that equates to about \$102,000. We will have some carryover in 2020. We don't spend all of our apportioned amount and that kind of sets us up for another 3<sup>rd</sup> party study in the future. That will be in the next UPWP. We did have some leftover planning dollars. Not all of our members pay their dues to the MPO and that leaves some extra funding. That is what provided funding for these two projects here. If you recall last year, ALDOT put a call for projects statewide. Throughout the state, a lot of MPO is there was carryover and the MPO members did not pay their dues, the money couldn't be spent so it went back to the State and ALDOT put out a call for projects to help spend that pot. It can only be used for planning, not capital or operating. The City of Mobile was awarded one for out at South for the new stadium. That was in the last UPWP, but I don't think that project has started yet. Likewise, the US 90 Access Road, a signal optimization study was also awarded. I don't think those have started yet. I have included those in the 2021 UPWP. Daniel, Jennifer and Mary Beth, have those projects started yet? Where are y'all on those projects?

Ms. White said on the City's project, we are getting ready to put out the RFP. It took awhile for us to get our agreement back from ALDOT so we are issuing the RFP for that project. We are doing a transportation project with a school now that has had no classes and no traffic to measure.

Ms. Bergin said I don't know if Daniel is still on the phone or not, but the ALDOT project on 98 on has started. They selected Kimberly Horne and they have been collecting some data and getting official work done on the project.

Mr. Driskell said we foresee that being completed in the Spring.

Mr. Harrison said our current UPWP has the Demand Response Transit Feasibility Study. It will be done this fiscal year. The US 45 study is listed as a previous project in the previous year. Does anyone have any questions?

Motion was made to recommend for approval the Draft FY2021 UPWP by Mr. Nick Amberger with a second by Ms. Mary Beth Bergin. Motion was approved.

The next item on the agenda was a review of the Mobile Area Demand Response Transit Feasibility Study with VIA.

Mr. Harrison said Daniel Berkowitz and Cathal O’Gorman are the team that were selected to do the Demand Response Transit Feasibility Study. We have a stakeholder meeting this afternoon at 2 pm. Anybody is welcome to join the stakeholder meeting. To join, email me and I will send you the registration.

Mr. O’Gorman said Dan and I are part of the team at Via so we spent the last several months working on the Mobile County demand Response Feasibility Study. The full report is available to you all. We would very much welcome your feedback if you have had a chance to read through it. We’re just going to talk to a very high level the process of the study and the results. I will try to keep it to around five or ten minutes. The goal of the study was to answer the questions does Mobile County require a rural transit service? If so, what type of service would be needed, who would use it, and how would it be funded? What you see on the right-hand side here is map of Mobile County and the dark blue lines are the current Wave Transit bus routes. As you can see, there’s a pretty limited service area and actually only about 15% of all the trips in the county both start and end within walking distance of a Wave Transit bus. For good reason, pretty much all trips rely on private vehicles and the goal of the service wouldn’t be to significantly change that number. The goal of this service would be about providing an option for people who are unable to drive themselves. There are typically most counties, in fact most counties in Alabama, have some form of rural transit service. Mobile County is one of the few counties who do not. In fact, no one is currently claiming one of the big buckets of money for the services, Section 5311 FTA funding. I’ll talk a little bit more about that, but that is some important context. The project, the first phase of the project was to engage the stakeholders. We had dozen of one on one interviews. We worked closely with Brandon Bias of Goodwin, Mills and Caewood who is based in Mobile and him and Kevin attended a lot of these in person. Dan and myself also flew down for some of the meetings. We also looked at a lot of the data from SARPC and census data and reviewed a lot of socioeconomic data. The conclusion of the data needs assessment task was essentially that most trips are not accessible using Wave Transit and there are significant population of seniors, low income individuals use and those who are just getting a foot in the door with employment who would probably use a service like this. Specifically, people in need of a way to get to healthcare was a need. Dialysis was one example that came up over and over again. There are some transportation services that are designed to meet these needs run by either non-profits or community organizations, but typically they are pretty hard to find out about and are limited to who can use it. For example, for someone with a disability that lives in a particular facility, there may be a transportation service available, but it is not a public transportation service and there are a lot of people who are falling between the gaps. The answer to the first question is yes, there is a transit need. The second question was what would the service look like? The goal would be a county wide system that provides a rural and urban service, but it would be designed in a way that if you could use Wave Transit, you would. This is not designed to replace the buses. This is designed to help people who don’t live near a bus. We recommend a demand response service which means this wouldn’t be a bus that runs on a schedule and runs up and down the county.

There's not enough density for that. This would be a service that you book in advance and a vehicle comes and picks you up. You may book through a smartphone app, you may book through a call center. Ideally, if this service launched, there would be several different booking methods for all individuals. Given the low density, these wouldn't be full size vehicles. It would probably be something like a six-seater van for example a Chrysler Pacifica, Toyota Sienna or Mercedes Metrist. Based on looking at peer counties in Alabama, we think there is demand for about 200 to 500 trips per day across the county. Essentially, we worked out how much this service would cost to provide. Roughly the budget we think would be appropriate is \$1 to \$2 million per year. Because this is demand response, there is not set amount of funding. The less funding you have, the less vehicles, the more funding, the more vehicles. If you don't have enough vehicles, the people who book first, get a trip and the people who book later are sometimes unable to get the desired time they want to travel. Overall, we think \$1 to \$2 million is the right cost. That is largely due to driver wages. There is some vehicle cost, but the main cost would be paying the drivers. In terms of funding, there is an FTA funding source specifically designed for this purpose. It's called the FTA Section 5311 Rural and Small Area Grant. There's usually one recipient per county. Mobile County has no recipients. We've worked with ALDOT on this project and we know there is significant funding for Mobile County. We know this usually covers more than half the service often 60 to 65% of the cost. You do need local funding to help cover the cost. That is one reason this service has never gotten off the ground before is because in Mobile County, there has not been sufficient local funding to get the federal funding. For every one dollar of local funding, you can roughly get two dollars in federal funding. It's typically in most counties in Alabama, the County Commission would provide the majority of the local funding. We spoke with all three County Commissioners, basically the answer is that they are unable or unwilling to fund a project like this so the funding would either come from local municipalities, nonprofits and other agencies who have funding for transportation and maybe some non-profits are already providing transport and bearing those cost and they may be able to reallocate their funding to this service. We did hope for the possibility that private employers may also be able to fund this, maybe some big employers in Mobile County because it would benefit their employees, but through conversations with several of the and attending some meetings, we've concluded that seems unlikely and given the impact of Coronavirus on employers that is even less likely. One point over coronavirus to bring up on this, it's likely to increase a need for this service because as people lose their jobs and as people basically struggle more, they're probably more likely to use a service like this. In the 2008 recession, demand for public transportation increase a lot even though driving and other things dropped because it's basically as people cannot afford their own vehicle, they rely on these services more. In terms of the next steps, we are doing a stakeholder this afternoon, but if there is a desire to proceed with this service, some form of community support is going to be required. Some local funding is going to be require and then an application for the federal funding through ALDOT will need to be submitted and from there, there would need to be a process to decide who would operate the service. If it's going to be outsourced, there would be some kind of procurement process to allow for the service to launce. That is essentially an overview. I'll pause there if someone has questions.

Mr. Harrison said our original intent was a commuter response. In talking to some other transit agencies in the state, some of them do receive funding from the County Commission, but most of our local match comes from subscriptions and contracts with employers. At the same time, we've been approached by several members of the SARPC board to investigate. That's why the timing is now. We had SARPC board members ask us to figure out the transit situation outside of the Wave Transit. This is our response to that. The commute portion of it, Brandon and I, we met with a lot of people and we just didn't get the

reaction that I was hoping we would get in terms of commuters. If it costs \$5 for a trip, the employer can take that \$5 out of the employee's paycheck pretax and actually probably be cheaper to go to work in that regard. The only problem is that it would add time to your commute to work. People are not always willing to do that. There is a need. There is a gap that is missing for seniors needing to get to doctors and other medical needs. We get calls quite frequently for people needing trips for dialysis and stuff like that.

The next item on the agenda was discussion of 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program.

Mr. Harrison said let me share my screen. The TIP is y'all's money. As you know, we've had some changes since our last meeting. Ziegler Boulevard from Schillinger to Athey has been authorized as of July 20<sup>th</sup>, that project is authorized. We had a slight cost increase. That project has been on the books for years and it is finally authorized. McDonald Road, I-10 to Old Pascagoula has been moved to 2021. Dauphin Street construction has been moved to 2022. These are the italics. Everything that has been modified since you last saw it is in italics. The utilities for McGregor, \$1.5 million, has been moved to 2021. The right of way for Zeigler, Schillinger to Tanner Williams has been moved to 2021. I imagine utilities will be moved as well. The \$2 million for right of way for Celeste Road has been moved to 2021 as well. Some interesting items down here, the \$48 million that is our carryover from previous years. That is in italics because that has gone down by \$288,000. At some point, we've had a project that was closed out, probably Schillinger Road with some cost changes on that project. Our annual allocation is in italics. That \$10,456,000 is actually the federal portion or \$8,365,000, it's 80% federal, 20% match and it was \$8,244,000 so we've had an increase of about \$120,000 to our annual allocation. The Appropriations Act happened back in March allowed us \$785,000 to our capital projects and that's just going into our pot. We can have a discussion on how to treat that money. Right now, we are fiscally constrained, but I am sure that projects are going to increase in the future. I think Three Notch Road is a candidate for increasing cost. I've had discussion with the county on that. I want you to pay attention to Celeste Road construction. It is not in the current TIP. We are currently about \$20 million in 2024. Even though we are fiscally constrained right now, we are not in 2024. When we do our next TIP, I'm sure we will have to shuffle projects around. We do have three projects that are Congestion Management Projects. Airport, Hillcrest to Cody; University-Old Shell Road Corridor and Moffatt Road Corridor. We need to get the committee to rank these projects and give them a score for prioritization. That is y'all's money. I don't need a resolution for this. I just thought we would go over this with everybody. Are there any questions on the STP Attributable?

The next item on the agenda was discussion of Human Coordinated Services Transportation Plan (HCSTP).

Mr. Harrison said the Human Coordinated Services Transportation Plan is for anybody that applies for transit funding other than 5307 which is the 5310. You have to apply to us and then Tom makes sure that the projects fit the need in the Coordinated Plan and we send those projects to ALDOT. We do it every year. In order to keep doing that, we have to update the plan. Tom is in the process of updating the plan. We have to have a meeting for this plan. Right now, we're not really sure how to do that. We may have to do some kind of zoom meeting in order to have a public meeting.

The next item on the agenda was discussion of TAP Projects.

Mr. Harrison said we have, at the beginning of the year, we had \$1.3 million available for Transportation Alternative Projects. These are the sidewalk projects. This last call for projects, we had two projects awarded. Mobile County was awarded two projects for sidewalks. The City of Mobile is overloaded with projects and if they don't apply for these TAP funds, we are going to start building a reserve of TAP. We

are awarded about \$530,000 federal a year. We are going to have about another million in TAP funds next year and I just want some discussion now on how you think we should proceed with TAP. One thing we can do is increase our amount to \$400,000. I offered it to ALDOT for when they resurface US 45 to use some of that TAP money to improve that section of 45 with sidewalks and bicycle lanes. ALDOT is not in a position to match any other funding source but theirs at this time. I thought about, we could open it up for schools to be eligible. I really just wanted some discussion. Some thoughts before we start building these reserves, what are your thoughts on this.

Mr. Amberger said from our perspective, if a potential project has a right of way need, they should steer clear of these funds. Jennifer and Mary Beth can explain the challenges of it. The engineering is not hard, the construction is not hard. The real estate component adds a whole extra layer of complication to this money. If you have a project that is clear of that, then it might be a good project, but that makes a project add another two years. Perhaps Jennifer and Mary Beth can give a little more perspective. They are living that dream right now.

Ms. White said it's hard to get a project through in two years if there is real estate acquisition. Personally, I would like to see larger funding because that would open up a lot of the trails into it that are much more expensive than sidewalks to build. I know the city has several projects where the design is covered, but getting funding to actually build is an issue. Other cities and the county may have that same issue. I would like to instead of \$200,000, if we got \$400,000 or even a little more on it.

Mr. Harrison said we have nine eligible applicants. One of the challenges is nine applicants, Mobile County and the eight municipalities and some are not in a position to provide a match for these federal funds right now.

Mr. Murphy said I'm with Jennifer in that larger projects will get more contractors bidding also. That's been a problem, the bigger contractors don't want to bid on these small contracts.

Mr. Amberger said Mr. Murphy's point is well taken. Fewer larger projects are better. The smaller projects with the federal process you are having to follow, are ending up at a cost of about 65% federal and 35% local. The smaller projects cost exponentially more than if the local municipality is doing it with their own dime.

Mr. Mitchell said you stated that smaller entities aren't applying anyway correct?

Mr. Harrison said they are currently are not in a position to provide the match.

Mr. Mitchell said this would limit the smaller entities, but if they are not applying anyway, then I don't have a problem moving forward with a higher number.

Ms. Wilcox made a motion to up the maximum for TAP grants for the next round to \$400,000 with a second from Ms. White. The motion was approved with Mr. John Murphy abstaining.

The next item on the agenda old business. There was no old business.

The next item on the agenda was new business.

Mr. Harrison said our next MPO meeting, I'm going to have to go over our performance measures with y'all. We have to adopt new performance measures every year as data comes in for crashes to the State because it is five year rolling average. Next meeting, we will have to adopt performance measures for

safety, bridge and pavement. Transit performance measures are being to reduced to 10% to 5% of the vehicles. We will have to do that in October. I'm just letting y'all know. Also, the Annual Authorized List of Projects done in the previous year is on the website. We are presenting it to you now and we will present it to the MPO. Finally, about every 10 years, ALDOT and the South Alabama Regional Planning Commission has to review and renew our financial agreement. That is going to happen on Friday. There is no action for the MPO. It is an agreement with SARPC.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.