

# RATS

**Rockford Area Transportation Study  
Metropolitan Planning Organization**

## **POLICY COMMITTEE**

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Board Chairman Kristine Cohn, Winnebago County  
President Stephen Kuhn, Village of Machesney Park  
District Engineer Roger E. Rocke, Illinois Department  
of Transportation, District 2*

## **Meeting Minutes – RATS Technical Committee**

**Meeting Date: February 22, 2001  
Winnebago County Highway Department**

**Members Present:** **Bob Martin**, Loves Park Transit/Public Works; **Steve Thompson**, Loves Park Planning; **Mary Allen Verdun**, IDOT District 2; **Steve Ernst**, Rockford Public Works Department; **Michael Zonsius**, Greater Rockford Airport; **David Noel**, Winnebago County Planning; **Carlos Molina**, Winnebago County Highway Department; **Denny Hendricks**, Rockford Mass Transit District; **Chad Atkinson**, Village of Machesney Park.

**Others Present:** **Boyd Lawrence**, State Line Area Transportation Study; **Bob Soltau**, Illinois Department of Transportation (Springfield); **Gary McIntyre**, RATS staff; **Russ Petrotte**, RATS staff; Dan Jacobson, Developer (arrived after the start of the meeting); a representative from Channel 23 also arrived after the start and attended part of the meeting.

**1. CALL TO ORDER / APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** At 10:10 A.M. and with a quorum present, Steve Ernst called the meeting to order. With regard to the January 18<sup>th</sup> meeting minutes, Denny Hendricks noted that he and Joe Vanderwerff were not late for that meeting. Only Chad Atkinson was late. **With the above correction noted, Mary Allen Verdun moved to approve the January 18<sup>th</sup> minutes. The motion was seconded by Denny Hendricks and approved unanimously.**

**2. AGENCY REPORTS:** Agencies present reported on the progress of their ongoing highway projects. An updated TIP Status Report listing highway improvement projects was presented, discussed and updated at the meeting. An updated report will be mailed, with these minutes, to all on the RATS mailing list.

Mary Allen Verdun reported significant progress on 10 major IDOT projects in the area. Carlos Molina reported significant progress on four major Winnebago County

projects including the Harrison Avenue extension project. Steve Ernst reported that the cost of engineering on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Bridge (over Whitman) has increased from \$185,000 to \$250,000 and significant progress on three other Rockford projects. Chad Atkinson reported progress on all of the Machesney Park projects.

Bob Martin reported that Loves Park's bridge program has increased in cost from \$100,000 to \$675,000. They are applying for Federal HBRRP funds to assist with the Riverside Bridge rehabilitation. Mr. Martin said the pedestrian bridge over the Rock River will be completed by April 15<sup>th</sup>. At that time, and if funds are approved, work will commence on the Riverside Bridge. As part of that project, the sidewalks will be removed and the lanes widened.

He asked the Committee's opinion regarding extending Bell School Road as a truck route all the way to Harlem Road and whether IDOT or the County has any plans to improve Harlem Road to a truck route.

Steve Ernst said many agencies have requested time to consider and comment on the proposed RATS Comprehensive Truck Route Map. Therefore, RATS staff has decided to delay the publication schedule for the map.

Denny Hendricks reported that RMTD is continuing to implement the Regional Service Center project, at the request of IDOT. RMTD will be the second major public transit provider in the State to take on this responsibility. They will perform major vehicle repairs for more than 50 not-for-profit agencies within a 60-mile radius of Rockford. These agencies have all been awarded vehicles under the State/Federal 5310 and 5311 programs. In the past these smaller agencies have had difficulty finding qualified services for their paratransit vehicles. A similar program in the Springfield area has resulted in an average of 10 vehicles per month needing repair. The State is considering funding a loaner vehicle as part of this project.

Mr. Hendricks also reported that Cherry Valley (both the Village and the Township) have requested that RMTD provide paratransit service in the area and have expressed willingness to pay for the service. RMTD has asked IDOT if they will provide operating subsidy to assist with the cost of this service.

Bob Soltau said the Illinois Tomorrow grant needs to be integrated into the Unified Work Program. Application for the next round of Illinois Tomorrow funds is scheduled to begin May 1 and the funding requests are due no later than June 29, 2001. The IDOT Fall Planning Conference is scheduled for October 25 and 26, 2001, and will be held at the Starved Rock State Park. The draft Unified Planning Work Program is due in March and Mr. Soltau asked that the final UWP be submitted and approved in April. This is slightly earlier than usual because of the significant additional funds being requested this year. IDOT's TIP schedule is also somewhat accelerated this year, and he asked that RATS aim for developing the draft RATS TIP by April with the final in July. He also asked that formal action be taken by the Policy Committee on both the draft and the final.

Steve Ernst suggested that SLATS be included in future RATS agendas under the list of non-voting agencies providing progress reports.

### **3. RATS UNIFIED WORK PROGRAM FOR FY 2002:**

Russ Petrotte distributed copies of the first rough draft of the FY 2002 UWP (dated 2/22/01). He said this is a working draft that has not been proofed. He asked the members to scrutinize it carefully.

Mr. Petrotte noted that during the last Federal Certification Review of the RATS Planning Process, the content of the UWP was cited several times and there appears to be greater emphasis to assure that the UWP reflects the goals and requirements of TEA-21 and that the UWP is a comprehensive account of proposed transportation planning in the area. He asked that Committee members assist in refining and embellishing the document so that it includes all of the major transportation planning work proposed, even work that is being funded with local funds. If developed this way, the document can provide a forum for valuable information exchange and brainstorming about transportation problems and issues throughout the urban area and among the local agencies.

Mr. Petrotte called attention to numerous items in the draft UWP. Chart A defines the broad Planning Goals of the Metro Area. These are synonymous with the Seven Planning Factors of TEA-21. Chart C identifies the sources of planning funds available to the area. Chart D summarizes the funds being applied for in 2002 and the funds being carried over from previous years. Chart E

summarizes the major planning activities proposed for FY 2002. Mr. Petrotte asked the Committee members to review this table and the following table of special corridor studies to determine if he had picked the items that should be emphasized.

Charts G and H show the tentative WinGIS line item budget for FY 2002 and a cost rationale for RATS participation in the WinGIS effort. Mr. Petrotte said he may have over complicated the rationale and he would be discussing this with Mr. Soltau to determine a simpler way to justify and document RATS participation.

Mr. Petrotte mentioned the need to conduct a Title VI Assessment of public transit but noted that Year 2000 Census data is needed to make any analysis more valid than previous assessments. He said a letter has been sent to the FTA Civil Rights Officer requesting an extension of the deadline. With regard to the assessments for planning and highway activities, Mr. Petrotte said the work done last Spring remains valid. The same is true for Environmental Justice assessments. However, the Work Program mentions the need for staff to keep abreast of any changes in the law or guidelines that might come about over the next year and the need to attend training if offered.

The proposed program mentions the Winnebago County Smart Growth Initiative (Element 12.5) that is to be funded with Illinois Tomorrow funds. Mr. Petrotte said he is assuming that the County will not be expending any of the funds prior to July 1, 2001. Mr. Molina said this may not be the case – the County is working diligently to get the project underway. Mr. Molina said he would talk with Mr. Vanderwerff about the effort. Mr. Petrotte said that the FY 2001 Work Program will need to be amended if the County intends to spend any of the funds prior to July 1. That can be done in March, if necessary.

Mr. Petrotte called attention to Element 13.3, the Cooperative Planning Agreement. When the U.S. Census Bureau fully releases Year 2000 Census data and identifies the new urbanized area boundaries, new municipalities (or counties) may be within the boundaries. In turn, this may necessitate revising the RATS Cooperative Agreement to add new members to the Technical and/or Policy Committees. The RATS Cooperative Agreement will have to be revised accordingly. David Noel said urbanized area boundaries may not be out until the Spring of 2002. Therefore, it is uncertain when the Cooperative Agreement might have to be revised – it may be FY 2003 before this work materializes.

Mr. Petrotte called attention to Element 21.2, Pavement Management and asked Steve Ernst to elaborate on how the City of Rockford intends to expand this effort. Mr.

Ernst explained that the City has decided to hire a full-time person with extensive pavement management experience to accelerate, maintain and analyze the City's street condition inventory. The City asked for an increase in PL funding allocation to help offset part of the cost of this person. Mr. Petrotte said that the draft Work Program includes provisions for this request. He explained that RATS had been awarded a sizable increase in both PL and 5303 planning funds for FY 2002; together, this amounted to 5 percent more than the area had been awarded in FY 2001 (\$17,607 more). Mr. Petrotte said that, as he suballocated these funds to the RATS participants in Tables 1 through 4, he gave the smaller RATS participants (RCDP, WCHD, WCPD, LPPD and MPPD) only a 3 percent increase (\$500 to \$1,000 more). The remaining funds were allocated to the Rockford Public Works Department, giving them \$14,507 more than last year, or a 5.8% increase.

Mr. Petrotte called attention to Work Element 22.3 and noted that as Year 2000 Census data comes in, increasing amounts of effort on the part of all RATS participants will be devoted to developing demographic profiles and profiles of demographic change.

Turning to Element 42, Mr. Petrotte noted the extensive list of studies that are underway or will be initiated to aid in managing congestions throughout the area. He asked the Committee members to go over this list and advise him if he had missed any particular areas or listed work that was unlikely to be considered in FY 2002. With regard to Element 43, Mr. Petrotte noted a new subelement, Element 43.3, Long Range Project Conceptualization. He suggested this as the appropriate location to identify projects that need to be studied or evaluated but are currently beyond the scope of the Long-Range Plan. These include projects that may not need to be implemented before the Year 2025, projects that may be needed but cannot yet be funded, and projects that may have merit but need further evaluation. Three such projects mentioned specifically in the draft Work Program are the proposed Northwest ByPass, Freight Rail Consolidation, and a Commuter Rail Link to Chicago. Others may be added at the suggestion of the Committee.

With regard to the suballocation of funds among the various Work Elements in Tables 1 through 4, Mr. Petrotte said he based this on his knowledge of the previous uses of funds by RATS participants. He asked the participants to review the suballocations and make suggestions as they feel necessary.

Mr. Petrotte suggested a review schedule for the draft UWP. He asked that the Committee members get back to him with their comments by March 9, 2001. He will then incorporate the comments, publish a second draft and mail it to all on the mailing list on March 16<sup>th</sup>. The draft will be

reviewed again by the Technical Committee on March 22<sup>nd</sup> and by the Policy Committee on March 29<sup>th</sup> and then submitted to IDOT. Revisions to the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft could be accepted through the first half of April with possible adoption at the April 26<sup>th</sup> Policy Committee meeting.

Considering the expanded funding in this UWP, Mr. Soltau said a goal of April adoption is desirable. He commended staff on the development of the document thus far and said he would work with staff in refining key aspects related to funding.

**4.1 PROGRESS REPORT ON SPRINGFIELD / HARRISON:** Carlos Molina reported that only three of the 100+ properties under acquisition remain to be settled. Of the 49 relocations needed, only three remain, and most of the demolitions have been accomplished. They still trying for an April bid letting for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Phase of construction, however, this may be delayed until June. The 1<sup>st</sup> Phase construction is on schedule.

**4.2 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE BOONE/WINNEBAGO/BELOIT MODELING STUDY:** Gary McIntyre reported that the study Steering Committee met last week. Discussion focused on the conversion of the 24-hour average daily traffic counts (ADTs) to peak hour counts. T-Model forecasts peak hour volumes and peak hour percentages are needed for model calibration. It was decided to convert the data via national averages because local ADT to peak hour comparisons are not extensive enough.

Mr. McIntyre noted that the staff person who was in charge of the Tranplan model portion of the study has left the consultant, but a qualified replacement has been found.

He said the study schedule has been revised. We hope to have the study completed by March 2002. At present, we have completed roughly 32 percent of the chargeables to the consultant contract.

The next major step for local staff is the development of land use forecasts. Planners from all jurisdictions will be working on this aspect. Mr. McIntyre specifically asked the representatives from Loves Park and Machesney Park to develop an inventory of the vacant lands within their jurisdictions along with forecasted land use types and densities. A tentative deadline for the delivery of the land use forecasts to the consultants is the end of April.

David Noel stated that his office has completed the tabulation of 1999 housing starts and demolitions. The net increase in DUs was 1,046. This is down from 1,300+ in the previous year and a high of 1,700+ for the decade.

He will try to make a more detailed report to the Committee at their next meeting. He said he was not prepared to say whether this is indicative of a downward trend or a more temporary situation.

Mr. McIntyre said the next Steering Committee meeting is scheduled for March 22<sup>nd</sup>. This may, however, be rescheduled because Rich Lundin has a meeting conflict. The primary subject of this meeting will be finalizing the calibration network (the network of roadways that existed when the 1999 ADT data was collected) and determining the committed network (the network that exists on the ground today plus the roadway links that are absolutely certain to be constructed / completed). The committed network includes the network that existed in 1999, the roadways that have been built since 1999, the roadway links that are now under construction, and the roadway links that have committed funding and irrefutable community support or commitment.

David Noel also emphasized the need to carefully select which projects to include on the "committed roadway network."

**5. COMMUNICATIONS:** Gary McIntyre cited a communication from IDOT announcing training in Environmental Justice to be held in Springfield on March 15<sup>th</sup>, starting at 8:30 AM. The announcement stressed the need for MPO staff to attend the session. Boyd Lawrence said a similar session is being held in Wisconsin.

Mr. McIntyre noted a letter issued by Mayor Lindberg endorsing the City of Rockford's application for major bridge funds for the Harrison Avenue bridges over the Union Pacific and Canadian National Railroads.

Mary Allen Verdun requested that all RATS correspondence be directed to her because of recent staff changes at the IDOT Dixon office. She said she would assure that the correspondence was channeled to appropriate staff at the District.

**6. OTHER BUSINESS:** Denny Hendricks distributed copies of the RMTD 2001 Paratransit Plan Update and asked that this document be reviewed and approved at the March meetings. The only substantive change is the deletion of references to LPTS and the assumption by RMTD of responsibilities previously held by LPTS.

He also mentioned that there is a RATS resolution that refers to LPTS and RMTD as "joint coordinators" of paratransit services in the Rockford area. This needs to be changed to single out RMTD. David Noel mentioned that there was also a resolution passed by RATS several years ago declaring LPTS as a designated recipient of Federal

5307 funds. As a cleanup matter, RATS might also want to rescind that resolution.

Bob Martin said Loves Park is working with other jurisdictions to develop a list of "posted roads" for the Spring of this year. (Posted roads are roads that are restricted from heavy truck traffic for a short time, 2-4 weeks, in the Spring because these roads are vulnerable to damage as thawing occurs.) The question was asked whether there is a comprehensive map of these roads published. Currently these roads are merely identified by a listing. Staff will investigate the possibility of creating such a map and the possibility of printing this map on the reverse side of the Truck Route Map now under development. Dan Jacobson made the suggestion that however the information is developed (list or map), the information should be provided to the building permit agencies of the respective jurisdictions because that is the place where all builders and developers frequent on a regular basis. He said a map would be very helpful.

Steve Ernst said 12 proposals have been received regarding the Downtown Entry Study (the West State Street Study in the RATS UWP). The proposals were reviewed and short-listed to four, interviews were conducted and a single firm was selected for contract negotiation, the latter not yet completed. Mr. Ernst said he was impressed by the quality of all the proposals and it has been a difficult selection process.

Mary Allen Verdun said the Stephenson County has developed a Greenways Plan, similar to the Plan that was developed a couple years ago for Winnebago and Boone Counties. Copies are available from Stephenson County.

**10. ADJOURNMENT:** With no further business to conduct, Mary Allen Verdun moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was approved unanimously at 11:30 A.M..