



Rockford Area Transportation Study
Metropolitan Planning Organization

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Meeting Minutes – RATS Technical Committee

Meeting Date: July 13, 2000 – Loves Park City Hall

Members Present: Dan Jacobson, Loves Park Planning; Mary Allen Verdun, IDOT District 2; Jim Ryan, Rockford Public Works Department; Chad Atkinson, Machesney Park Planning; David Nord, Village of Cherry Valley; Denny Hendricks, Rockford Mass Transit District; David Noel, Winnebago county Planning.

Others Present: Bob Soltau, Illinois Department of Transportation (Springfield); Gary McIntyre, RATS staff; Russ Petrotte, RATS staff; Vance Hultgren, Illinois State Toll Highway Authority; Charles Bloomingdale, Scott Township; Kirk Fauver, Federal Highway Administration

At 10:16 A.M. and with a quorum present, Jim Ryan was appointed to Chair the meeting in the absence of Steve Ernst. The meeting was called to order.

1. RATS LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN: The main purpose of this special meeting was to discuss comments made by John Holmstrom of William Charles, Ltd. and Kirk Fauver of the FHWA on the recent draft of the Long-Range Transportation Plan update that had been recently released to the public. Another purpose of the meeting was to provide further opportunities for public input into the development of the Plan update.

Most of the meeting was devoted to the comments received from John Holmstrom. General consensus was reached on how to address most of the concerns and staff was instructed to prepare changes and addendums to the Plan as appropriate. The comments themselves and the resulting staff responses will be included verbatim in the final version of the LRP. A summary of the discussions at the meeting is as follows.

4. The suggestion that the economic and demographic impacts of alternative improvements should be

Mr. Petrotte led the discussion. All members of the Committee participated and the summary recommendations were discussed point-by-point.

1. The suggestion that the IDOT funding levels should not be based on the average of the last six years was rejected for several reasons: the trends appear to be reasonable representations of total funding; while IDOT funding is declining slightly, State and Federal funding combined is increasing slightly; it is beyond the scope of the LRP to evaluate the equity of the mix of funding, this could be the subject of another study; and Federal law requires the development of a constrained plan and consideration of historic trends.
2. The suggestion that IDOT funding should reflect the IDOT 2000-2004 5-Year Plan appears to be a matter of confusion. The Plan does contain all the projects IDOT has programmed, and more. Also, the funding forecast base years include the Year 2000 which is the highest year of IDOT contribution in the last decade.
3. The suggestion that infrastructure improvements necessary for industrial development should be at the public expense was regarded as worthwhile. Some of this is already done. The problem is finding the funding. Other infrastructure improvements should also be considered; again the lack of a dedicated funding source is the problem. Also, it is very important to coordinate the timing of all the infrastructure improvements.

studied and described is considered valid depending on the improvement and the situation.

Some projects deserve special consideration in this way, others have such obvious benefits that their study could be a waste of limited research dollars. RATS has to be careful with projects that are aimed at promoting economic growth. The “build it and they will come” approach is often not successful and not often supported by the taxpayer even when it appears to have a good chance of success. Also, planning agencies that succumb to the approach can easily be barraged with requests well beyond their research capabilities. To a limited extent, RATS does this type of work. The economic analysis in conjunction with the last Woodruff/Wallenberg Study is one example. The periodic Title VI and Environmental Justice assessments to guard against discrimination, is another example.

5. The Technical Committee somewhat supports the suggestion that infrastructure for industrial development be constructed at public expense but points out that there is currently no funding dedicated or consistently available for such purpose. The suggestion will be posed to the RATS Policy Committee for their consideration. Ideally, local governments would also fund the construction of new collector roads in new residential subdivisions. This would reduce some undesirable situations that occur when such roads are funded and constructed by the private sector. Again, however, the problem is finding a consistent funding source for this purpose.
6. Regarding the future economic / demographic impacts of alternative improvements identified in the plan, we are unsure of what specific alternative improvements this comment pertains to or what WCL is attempting to achieve. Any and all of the proposed and alternative transportation projects mentioned in the plan are likely to have, to varying degrees, combinations of both negative and positive economic and demographic impacts. If the comment is aimed at stimulating greater transportation expenditure forecasts because of potential positive impacts of more elaborate projects, we have to respond that Federal regulations do not allow us this option within the 25-year framework of the main body of the Plan. In other words, high growth forecasts based on speculative aggressive economic development projects aren't allowed by the federal regulations. We can propose more elaborate projects if we define them as “illustrative projects” but we must single them out as projects for which additional funding will be needed (beyond the forecasted funding). In a slightly different way, we have included such projects by (1) placing them in a category that will be funded and constructed after Year 2025, and (2) citing them as projects to be studied or discussed more in the future (i.e., the Northwest ByPass and commuter rail). With regard to the Wallenberg, the most recent “Wallenberg Parkway Feasibility Study, June 1996, does an excellent job of discussing many of the costs, benefits and impacts of this proposed facility but was less than conclusive. Moreover, the project was not extensively mentioned in the Plan because of the extremely high cost and unlikelihood of funding in the foreseeable future. It is also debatable whether the adverse impacts in adjacent Rockford neighborhoods can be adequately mitigated. The Guilford Road Crossover has received little attention in recent years and was thought not to be important enough to belabor at this time. The Northwest ByPass is mentioned a number of times but until the RATS/SLATS traffic simulation model is completed we cannot evaluate its potential traffic impact, let alone its demographic and economic impact. Serious considerations regarding commuter rail have just recently surfaced; feasibility, and economic and demographic analysis is warranted and will be considered within the near future. Generally speaking with regard to other projects in the Plan, to varying degrees, the analysis of demographic and economic impact is already a part of the RATS Planning Process.
7. The demographic impacts of projects are assessed in conjunction with Federal Title VI and proposed Environmental Justice requirements. In accordance with Title VI we must periodically examine our proposed and implemented improvements to determine if they are adversely impacting (or ignoring) the needs of minorities. Environmental Justice extends these considerations to low-income persons. With respect to highway projects, these assessments are more subjective and

anecdotal than quantitative. With regard to public transit projects, the assessments are both subjective and quantitative, in accordance with detailed Federal guidance. Copies of these assessments are available at the RATS offices. Further extensive demographic analysis is not recommended at this time because the primary source of data, the 1990 Census, is out-of-date. When Year 2000 Census data becomes available, within the next 12-24 months, demographic analysis will be renewed.

8. Economic impact analysis is complicated, expensive and often controversial because of the multitude of factors that must be considered, difficulties in forecasting, and differing values of community leaders and citizens. Major highway projects are subjected to more in-depth analysis than smaller
9. Currently, as part of the development of the RATS/ SLATS traffic simulation model, alternative land use and economic development scenarios are being developed. These scenarios will range from low-growth to high-growth options and will be tested against various roadway network configurations. In conclusion, Federal law and concern for simple justice dictates that projects should be evaluated with respect to demographics to assure that minority groups and low-income groups are not being disproportionately adversely impacted or that the transportation needs of these groups are being disproportionately ignored. Where obviously needed, analysis of the cost and benefits to the area's economy should also be part of the process of setting priority to proposed transportation improvements. However, funding for research and study is limited. Consequently, it is recommended that the use of such funds should continue to be selectively applied to the evaluation of improvements that are controversial and/or complicated and where such analysis has a reasonable chance of resolving the controversy and aiding in the decision-making process.

At the meeting staff also presented several items to be added to the Plan. These included:

1. A table listing Congestion Management Strategies Considered & Utilized in the Rockford Area;

improvements. But even where extensive, as noted with regard to the Wallenberg, the results are not always conclusive. The expected economic benefit of other major projects is so obvious that extensive economic analysis is not needed and would be a waste of research funds. Examples of such projects are the improvements to State Street east of Alpine Road, the construction of Perryville Road and the proposed construction of the Springfield/Harrison Connection. The latter project will provide access to large areas of land planned for industrial and commercial uses, complete a ring road that will improve access to all areas of west Rockford and stimulate the revitalization of Rockford's economically-depressed west side.

2. A new map illustrating Significant Commercial Areas in the Metro Area;
3. A new map illustrating Significant Industrial Areas in the Metro Area;
4. A revised Map 14 showing the correct location of the proposed interchange of I-90 with Irene Road in Boone County.

Other instructions to the RATS staff, some in response to comments from Kirk Fauver and by the consensus of the Committee, were as follows:

1. Greater explanation should be added to the Plan text describing the area's compliance with Congestion Management System requirements, especially with regard to the Capacity Expansion Projects listed in Table 21.
2. Verbiage should be added to the Plan discussing why the Metro Area Boundary is not being expanded as part of this Plan update. If the Boundary is not to be expanded, all maps should be checked for the correct date.
3. Verbiage should be added to the Plan regarding system maintenance indicating that although the area's roadways are being adequately maintained from a safety standpoint and a system preservation standpoint, optimal or the most cost-effective maintenance is not as easily definable.

2. OTHER BUSINESS: None

3. ADJOURNMENT: With no further business to conduct, David Noel moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Dan Jacobson and approved unanimously at 11:56 AM.