

Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority

Board Meeting Minutes

October 28, 2020

- **Certification of Quorum**

Voting members present were Tedi Ellison, Chair, Presiding; Dennis Christiansen, Vice Chair; Jason Bienski, Board Member; Veronica Morgan, Board Member; and Alan Munger, Board Member. The minutes were taken by Lisa Lyon, RMA Administrative Assistant. Additional participants included Steve Aldrich, Prarthana Banerji, Jayson Barfknecht, Bart Benthul, Nancy Berry, Doug Bramwell, Michael Copeland, Matt Dawson-Mathur, Brent Hairston, Sandra Jackson, Paul Kaspar, Taslima Khandaker, Tim Lomax, Doug Marino, Rob Maxwell, Karl Mooney, Curtis Morgan, Andrew Nelson, Duane Peters, Troy Rother, Dan Rudge, Jason Schubert, and Lance Simmons.

- **Welcome and Open Meeting**

Ms. Ellison called to order the regular meeting of the Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority Board at 9:00 a.m. on October 28, 2020. Due to continued COVID-19 constraints, the meeting was held via Zoom. The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States and Texas flags followed by an invocation given by Ms. Tedi Ellison.

- **Public Comments Regarding Items Not on the Agenda**

There were no public comments.

- **Consider adoption of Minutes from September 10, 2020, RMA Board Meeting**

Minutes from the September 10, 2020, Regional Mobility Board Meeting were considered for adoption. **A motion to approve the minutes was made by Dr. Christiansen. The motion was seconded by Ms. Morgan. There was no discussion. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.**

- **Consider adoption of Minutes from September 23, 2020, RMA Board Meeting**

Minutes from the September 23, 2020, Regional Mobility Board Meeting were considered for adoption. **A motion to approve the minutes was made by Dr. Christiansen. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bienski. There was no discussion. The motion passed by a unanimous vote.**

- **Status Update on the University Drive Project**

Doug Marino, P.E., Director of Transportation Planning and Development for the Texas Department of Transportation Bryan District, gave an update on the University Drive project. University Drive has become one of the area's busiest thoroughfares. The roadways east-west alignment along the A&M campus and expanding residential and retail developments mean there are high concentrations of bicycle and pedestrian activity. There have been improvements made by the City of College Station; however, further improvements are needed for pedestrian and bicycle safety. When the RMA was formed, this project was chosen as the initial project under consideration for further development.

As a result of a study of the corridor in 2018, the concepts provided take a unique approach to safety by grade separating a portion of the corridor. Mr. Marino showed pictures of some the concepts developed from that study. In late 2019, TxDOT held meetings with local stakeholders to decide on the scope. TxDOT has hired a consultant to take the next step to determine the feasibility of these concepts. There are six tasks for the feasibility study: Traffic Study, Engineering Feasibility Study, Market Study, Funding Mechanism Study, Bicycle & Pedestrian Study, and Traffic Management Plan.

The consultant is currently developing Task One which includes traffic data collection which has been completed, VISSIM Model for existing conditions which has been completed, and future traffic projections for 2025 and 2045 which have been completed. They are currently awaiting TxDOT TPP approval for VISSIM Model and traffic projections before proceeding. Once approved, the next step is to develop a VISSIM Model using projected traffic.

- **Presentation regarding how the MPO and RMA can work together to be the most efficient and effective**

Dan Rudge, Executive Director of the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization, gave a presentation on how the MPO and RMA can work together efficiently and effectively.

The MPO does a good job of long-range planning and programming, identifying potential influences on the Brazos County transportation network, interaction with citizens on transportation issues, and serving as a resource on transportation in Brazos County. The MPO's greatest weakness is the MPO does not have a large enough budget or enough staff to do everything needed for Brazos County.

Every five years, the MPO updates the Metropolitan Transportation plan. It's during that process that projects are prioritized through a data driven ranking system. The MTP that was just completed used a software called Decision Lens for the first time where a series of data bases are combined. The Technical Advisory Committee answers questions to determine which data base is more important to consider. Decision Lens takes all of those and scores the four main criteria and ranks them. Safety was considered the most important and it made up 38.33% of the score. Congestion reduction was 35.46%, connectivity was 13.42%, and economic development was 12.79%. The MPO also

completed the 2050 Major Thoroughfare Plan and is currently working on regional access management standards. The MPO cannot fund all high priority projects and cannot lobby for them. A major role the RMA could play is to help lobby and fund some of the region's high priority projects.

To answer a question from the previous presentation, the FM 60 Bicycle and Pedestrian study is being undertaken because several years ago the MPO voted on its top five unfunded or underfunded priority projects, and the five projects that they chose were: 1) widen State Highway 6 to six lanes; 2) construct an outer loop to accommodate I-14; 3) replace obsolete buses at Brazos Transit District and Texas A&M; 4) the Bush and Wellborn grade separation project; and 5) the Bicycle and Pedestrian project on FM 60. Because Highway 6 was listed as one of the priorities and there was some MPO funding put toward it, additional funds were received from the Texas Transportation Commission to make substantial improvements. Obsolete buses were replaced at Brazos Transit District, as well as some (but not all) at Texas A&M. The Bush/Wellborn grade separation is still on-going and then there is the University Drive project. The RMA could help lobby and fund high priority projects for which the MPO does not have funds.

The MPO's Go-Fund-Me Page includes:

- Widen State Highway 6 to six-lanes, improve frontage roads, and other improvements - \$240,000,000+;
- Construct outer loop freeway to accommodate I-14 - \$495,000,000+;
- Replace obsolete buses at Brazos Transit District and Texas A&M - \$36,000,000+;
- Bush and Wellborn grade separated interchange - \$103,000,000;
- Construct bicycle and pedestrian grade separation facilities on FM 60 - \$?????.

Potential influences on the transportation network in our region include:

- Interstate 14 through Bryan/College Station which is a project that TxDOT is currently looking at potential alignments for.
- Houston to Fort Worth freight corridor - Freeport has become the deepest deep water port in the State of Texas and there is discussion that in the Houston area they are looking at a new alignment called 36A which would connect to State Highway 6 in Hempstead, come directly through Bryan/College Station, and then connect over to I-35 or an extension of the Chisolm Trail Parkway to take it up to the Alliance Railyard in Fort Worth. The MPO is currently working on that corridor study.
- This region has the potential for a High-Speed Rail Station nearby.

- The region's population is growing, which is a good thing, but at a rate that may not be sustainable. There are some estimates that predict a population of about 500,000 by 2050.
- Bryan/College Station is the fourteenth largest metropolitan area in Texas. Funding received for transportation projects in Brazos County is based on that ranking. When Texas A&M is in session, this region actually has the fourth largest downtown in the state.
- RELLIS Campus is growing.
- Aging baby boomers, the people who attended Texas A&M and others, are coming back to Bryan/College Station to retire. The "three-hour rule" says that baby boomers are telling people in polls when they retire, they want to be within three hours of their grandchildren. The location of Bryan/College Station would put them within three hours of places like Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and Dallas/Fort Worth. Because of this, we are becoming a magnet for retiring Texas A&M graduates as well as others because of its central location.

The MPO, with a budget of about \$400,000 a year, cannot study all of these influences so this would be a potential role for the RMA. The MPO feels as though some studies are important such as how to get customers from the high-speed rail station to Brazos County, impacts of a built-out RELLIS campus on the transportation network, impact of all users on the Brazos County transportation network, accommodating baby boomers, and an integrated transit system.

In some instances, the MPO does a really great job in interacting with citizens. During the Major Thoroughfare public meetings, several hundred attended and the MPO received thousands of comments. Citizens suggestions were then incorporated into a final concept. The MPO put together a congestion survey to ask what level of congestion people were willing to accept and how much in additional taxes and fees they would pay to achieve that level. Over 5,000 responses were received and 71% were willing to pay at least \$1,200 per year to stay at current congestion levels. When developing the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, there were six public meetings and only eight people attended. Public meetings were held for the Transportation Improvement Program and only three comments were submitted online with no one attending the public meetings. Brazos Transit District completed a Transportation Development Plan and held two public meetings with only four or five participants. The MPO has discovered that through their website's "Leave a Comment" form, more interesting comments come from these random submissions as opposed to other public involvement activities. The MPO does not have a large enough budget to advertise public meetings other than the required legal posting.

The MPO is used as a resource for transportation issues in Brazos County. About two years ago, the MPO developed a “Leveraging Our Local Resources” document which is available at BCSMPO.org. This document highlights current issues for which the MPO and local municipalities are utilizing their own funds to try and address some of these transportation issues. Before the pandemic, Mr. Rudge was a featured speaker at multiple civic and special interest groups. After the pandemic there are fewer presentations and are mostly done via Zoom. Information requests are also received from KBTX and WTAW regarding transportation issues. The MPO employs two full time staff, the Director and Principal Planner, and one part-time Administrative Assistant. The Director and Planner both serve on transportation committees for other organizations to make sure the MPO is represented and their priorities are understood; however, with the MPO’s budget, it cannot afford an outreach program.

How can the RMA partner with the MPO and best work together to make both organizations stronger?

- Funding/Leveraging Funding – There is an anticipated \$4.5 billion worth of transportation need in Bryan/College Station. The MPO receives about \$400 million over a 25-year period to spend on transportation projects. Because of the gap in available dollars, the MPO can only fund on-system projects which means they have to be on TxDOT roadways. The Metropolitan Transportation Plan has a prioritized list of off-system projects for which there is no funding. Potentially, the RMA could consider some of those projects. When projects are selected, there may be limited funds, so improvements can be made but the roadway may not be enhanced to its fullest potential. For example, there are great plans for the State Highway 6 project; however, the amount of funding does not allow for all of the wanted changes. The RMA could assist with identifying funding streams and help leverage existing financial resources to assist with delivery of projects or even increase the number of projects that are delivered.
- Lobbying for Projects – The MPO is not allowed to lobby because it is state and federally funded. The RMA could help the MPO by being a direct conduit to the Legislature and the Texas Transportation Commission on transportation specific issues. Texas has a mission of having several highly rated research institutions and universities for higher education. Texas A&M certainly fulfills that role, but not necessarily with the transportation funding that it needs to accommodate the students that come from all over the state to attend Texas A&M and have an impact on our transportation network. The RMA could help with pursuing approval for additional revenue streams and be the transportation voice that the MPO cannot be.
- Conducting studies beyond MPO purview – The MPO does long range planning, project prioritization, and selection. Funding is received for the construction phase for whichever does the construction work; however, prior to construction there are typically alignment studies, environmental studies, feasibility studies, and other studies that need to be done. Typically, somebody on the MPO staff may participate on a committee that is overseeing those types of studies, but the MPO does not do

or pay for the actual studies as there are no available funds in the MPO's budget. As an example, the current TxDOT study on University Drive is just the first step in looking at what may potentially be done and the cost of that study is about \$300,000 (4/5ths of the MPO annual budget). Feasibility and environmental studies are a potential role for the RMA. Additional studies that are needed include transportation to and from a high-speed rail station at Roan's Prairie, retiring Aggies returning to College Station to live, and I-14 alignment outside Brazos County. The RMA could fill in the gaps for project development and delivery.

- Marketing and Advertising – The average citizen is unaware of some of the transportation issues in this area and what agencies are doing to address those needs. Some transportation decisions being made without citizen input because they are unaware of comment opportunities. Marketing and advertising is important. The RMA could help spread understanding of the transportation process and how citizens and elected officials can stay involved in the process.
- Outreach Program – An outreach program would provide a point of contact in addition to the MPO for transportation issues. The RMA could work with the MPO to host transportation discussions and develop awareness of what the RMA is and how it differs from the MPO. The RMA could also use an outreach program to inform citizens about its Strategic Plan and how the RMA will work toward achieving the plans, goals and strategies. Most importantly, the RMA could help explain how expensive transportation projects are and the process and time it can take for developing new roads or changes to the system. Projects that don't seem like they should take very long take four to five years in some cases. An educational component would be an important role for the RMA.

- **Legislative Update**

A sample resolution for the Texas Legislature supporting the increase in vehicle registration fees was shown. This resolution does not support approving the \$10 addition to the registration fee; it supports approving the opportunity for Brazos County to ask voters if they will support a \$10 addition to the vehicle registration fee to support our transportation projects. The citizen vote may not happen until 2022 and would give our residents the opportunity to decide.

- **Chairman's Report**


The Chairman thanked everyone for their camaraderie and ability to work together and move forward on area transportation goals. She also thanked Judge Peters and the Brazos County Commissioners for their initial support of the RMA and all they've done to help move the RMA forward.

The RMA Annual Project report is due by the end of the year. This written report must include the RMA background, a list of board members, a write up on the initial project of the RMA and what has been accomplished, and any new projects anticipated. The goal is to adopt the report at the November meeting.

The next RMA Board Meeting will be November 18th at 9:00 a.m.

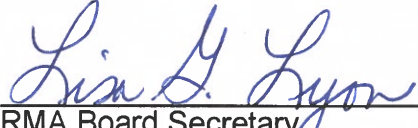
- **Adjourn**

The RMA Board Meeting was adjourned at 10:05 a.m.



RMA Board Chair or Vice-Chair
Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority

ATTEST:



RMA Board Secretary

12-21-2020

Date