

**SOUTHEAST TN RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION (RPO)
EXECUTIVE BOARD & TECHNICAL COMMITTEE**

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

11:00 a.m. Eastern Time

TDOT Region 2 Auditorium | 7512 Volkswagen Drive, Chattanooga, TN 37416

In Attendance:

EB: Keith Cartwright, Gary Davis, John Gentry, Robby Hatcher, Clint Huth, Gregg Ridley, Ron Travis, Jim Vincent

TCC: Jake Battles, Tom Collins, Mary Cookston, Chuck Hammonds, Linda Hixon, Linda Hooper, Janis Kyser, Winston Pickett, Roy Thomason, Tom Trotter, Glen Varner, Ron Wilson

Others in Attendance: Ashley Gates (SETD), Jonathan Rush (SETD), Amy Anderson (SETD), Landon Castleberry (TDOT), Mike O'Donnell (TDOT), Danny Oliver (TDOT), Adam Casteel (TDOT), Greg Maloof (Monteagle), Bently Thomas (TDOT), Chanel Hippix (TDOT), Emmalyn Porter (SETD), Shannon Millsaps (Thrive Regional Partnership), Rachel Hackworth (SETHRA), Kevin Layne (TDOT), Curt Duncan (TDOT), Chad Reese (SETD)

- 1) Welcome & Introduction Chad Reese, SETD Planning Director**
Chad Reese welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2) Executive Board / Call to Order / Roll Call.....Clint Huth, EB Chairman**
Clint Huth called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. Sign in sheets indicated sufficient attendance for quorum for EB.
- 3) Technical Committee / Call to Order / Roll Call..... Roy Thomason, TCC Vice-Chairman**
Roy Thomason called the meeting to order at 11:00 am. Sign in sheets indicated sufficient attendance for quorum for TCC.
- 4) Approval of Previous Minutes EB Meeting.....Clint Huth, EB Chairman**
Motion to approve made by Keith Cartwright, seconded by Jim Vincent. Motion carried.
- 5) Approval of Previous Minutes TCC Meeting.....Roy Thomason, TCC Vice-Chairman**
Motion to approve made by Chuck Hammonds, seconded by Glen Varner. Motion carried.
- 6) Regional Project Updates & CoordinationTDOT Staff**
Danny Oliver, TDOT Region 2 Director, begin discussing organization charts, budgets, and an update on the TMA. TDOT is undergoing a reorganization with employee changes in several positions: Adam Casteel, Director of Operations, with Robert Harville in District 28, and David Wagner in District 29. Rachel Gentry is the Director of Pre-Construction, Michael O'Donnell, Director of Project Management, and Jeff Blevins, Director of Alternative Delivery. Changes in the organization and delivery of projects have placed an even higher importance on sticking to the budget. TDOT is prioritizing Integrated Program Delivery (IPD), as well as the Project Delivery Network (PDN), and forming a team of key players at the initial conception of the project. 50% of the budget from the State (of 1.2 billion dollars total) goes to maintenance, and the other 50% goes to projects. With rising costs, this may limit the amount of projects for the year. TDOT will be revealing the 10-year fiscally-constrained transportation project plan within the next few weeks.

Michael O'Donnell, TDOT Director of Project Management, started with project updates. There are 11 resurfacing projects in FY24 for Bledsoe, Bradley, Marion, McMinn, Meigs, and Rhea counties. There are 9 safety projects currently in the design phase for Bledsoe, Bradley, Grundy, Marion, McMinn and Sequatchie counties. Project updates from the 3-year plan include Bledsoe/Sequatchie SR_28 (US-127), Grundy SR-50 (Pelham Rd), Rhea SR-30 (Old Washington Hwy), and Polk SR-40 (US 64/Corridor K).

Linda Hooper asked about potential plans for Highway 283 from Powells Crossroads to Whitwell, and the safety improvements of Suck Creek, specifically the Western side of the road. Griffith Highway had a recent update, however there have been no improvements to Suck Creek, which is the lifeline of the area. Michael responded that he was not aware of other projects in this area at the time. TDOT did a roadway safety audit review on the section of road from SR-27 up the mountain from Powells Crossroads a few months ago with Mayor Jackson's input. TDOT is still working with a consultant to finalize the improvement scope. TDOT is also working to improve communication with truckers throughout the state especially when alternative routes are sought to avoid backups on the interstate.

Chanel Hippix, Senior Community Transportation Planner with TDOT, discussed Transportation Planning Grants. Since TPG started in 2015, 70 projects have been awarded resulting in \$70 million additional funding based on planning documents. The 2024 planning grant application packet will be due on January 19. Applicants can choose the specific need for the project such as resurfacing and restriping, corridor studies, community mobility plans, or any other creative transportation planning ideas. Chanel strongly advised to detail the implementation and funding plans. This grant requires an approval for a 10% match from the community, and having the match check ready and available is key. TDOT intends to select consultants and start in April of 2024, and closeout in March of 2025. The TDOT Office of Community Transportation webpage has more information regarding the Transportation Planning Grants and helpful examples. [Transportation Planning Grants \(tn.gov\)](https://www.tn.gov/transportation-planning-grants)

- 7) State Aid Funding UpdatesChanel Hippix, TDOT Planning Specialist**
Chanel presented State Aid Funding Updates on behalf of Lisa Dunn, TDOT Transportation Manager 1 with State Aid Road, Bridge Grant, and Off-System Bridge Programs. Chanel detailed state and regional funding obligations for Marion, Meigs, Polk, Rhea, and Sequatchie counties. Over 111 miles of roadway will be resurfaced in Bledsoe, Bradley, Grundy, McMinn, Marion, Meigs, Polk, Rhea and Sequatchie counties. Lisa Dunn and Curt Gibbs are points of contact for more information. The State Aid dashboard (arcgis.com) is mobile friendly and shows what routes are state aid, which is up to 20% of county roadways. Lisa recommends soliciting your annual bids for spring resurfacing now and relaying them to Kurt, so they are ready to get started. Staggering bids as much as you can allows for lower bid amounts. Also, pay attention to the type of products contractors are bidding on and make sure it is consistent with the bid package specifications. Contractors need to be finished by the end of May for invoice submission.

8) Regional Freight & Truck Parking.....Shannon Millsaps, Thrive Director of Programs, Transportation & Infrastructure

Shannon Millsaps, Director of Programs with Thrive Regional Partnership presented freight updates. Thrive is a nonprofit organization working to build coalitions around the 16-county area with an emphasis on conversation, collection, and collaboration with non-traditional planning partners. Thrive thinks of transportation regionally, with regards to the workforce and the labor shed. Thrive is looking at 3 impact areas through Thrive 2055 – community prosperity (Thrive in Communities program), working within natural treasures, and transportation and infrastructure. A recent FHWA grant with TDOT and Thrive yielded large volumes of heavy truck data on roadways. Additionally, the study found that this is expected to increase heavily by 2040. The Thrive Regional Infrastructure Portal (TRIP) with an interactive map is now up and running. Thrive discovered that the Port of Savannah had 5.9 million shipping containers pass through in 2022 which greatly impacts our area because most of this freight passes over the state line and heads our way. Data shows that about 80% of the freight that moves through this area is just passing through to reach its end destination. 39 million tons of freight is projected to pass through in 2035 and this estimate is expected to grow. Electric vehicle infrastructure and charging stations are growing also. Another result of this study was information on current truck parking and where it exists in the region. Drivers continually note congestion and truck parking as major issues, and this demand is continuously increasing. Thrive is trying to aggregate data to make it easier for truck drivers to access and looking at undesignated parking areas to be used for large trucks. Such opportunities could be a medley of public-private partnerships, identifying unused places with potential space, expanding on and off ramps, and updating zoning to allow for truck parking. Thrive coordinates with TPIMS (Truck Parking Information System) to get this information out to drivers, as well as coordinating with NEVI (National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure) Program.

Linda Hixon asked what affect the expansion of the Chickamauga Lock (i.e. the completion of the Chickamauga Lock Replacement Project) may have on the projected volume of heavy truck traffic on area roadways. She also inquired about the potential of a “Chattanooga Bypass”. Shannon responded that she has not seen any indication of higher truck volume in relation to the Chickamauga Lock, however it will increase the number of barges coming through which will result in lower truck volume on the roadways. Shannon noted that the river is the most sustainable, environmentally friendly, and cheapest way to move bulk goods. Additionally, Thrive views the Bypass solution in a non-traditional way by increasing the use of other modalities such as river, rail, and runway as the answer. Thrive is actively working on increasing and modernizing the use of these assets to alleviate congestion.

Shannon reminded everyone that the Freight Mobility Coalition meets quarterly and all are welcome to come and discuss benchmarks and provide data updates.

9) Other Properly Presented New Business.....Clint Huth, EB Chairman

There was no other properly presented new business.

10) Executive Board Adjournment.....Clint Huth, EB Chairman

Meeting adjourned at 12:33 pm

11) Technical Committee Adjournment.....Roy Thomason, TCC Vice-Chairman

Meeting adjourned at 12:33 pm

Chairman, RPO Executive Board

Chairman, RPO Technical Committee

RPO Coordinator

