

SAINT CLOUD AREA PLANNING ORGANIZATION POLICY BOARD
Thursday, March 13, 2025 – 4:30 PM

A regular meeting of the Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization Policy Board was held on Thursday, March 13, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. Chair Jared Gapinski presided with the following members present:

Mayor Jake Anderson	City of Saint Cloud
Mike Conway	City of Saint Cloud
Tim Elness	City of Sartell
Dottie Seamans	City of Sauk Rapids
Frank Theisen	City of Waite Park
Michael Kedrowski	Metro Bus (Alternate for Ryan Daniel)
Kevin Kluesner	City of St. Joseph (Alternate for Adam Scepaniak)
Joe Perske	Stearns County
Raeanne Danielowski	Sherburne County
Jeff Westerlund	Le Sauk Township

Also in attendance were:

Brian Gibson	Saint Cloud APO
Vicki Johnson	Saint Cloud APO
Alex McKenzie	Saint Cloud APO
Trina Ness	Saint Cloud APO
Anne Buckvold	Member of the Public

Absent:

Scott Brodeen	City of Saint Cloud
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- 1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- 2. INTRODUCTIONS**
- 3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Ms. Seamans motioned to approve the agenda. Mr. Westerlund seconded the motion. Motion carried.

- 4. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:** There were no members of the public present.
- 5. CONSIDERATION OF CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS:**
 - Approve Minutes of February 13, 2025, Policy Board Meeting
 - Approve February Bills Lists
 - Approve Administrative Modification to the 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
 - Receive Staff Report of February 27, 2025, Meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee

Mr. Conway motioned to approve the consent agenda items. Mr. Theisen seconded the motion. Motion carried.

6. CONSIDER APPROVING PUBLICATION OF THE REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT PLAN (RIIP)

Ms. Johnson presented the Regional Infrastructure Investment Plan (RIIP) which is a compilation of local Capital Improvement Programs (CIPs) and the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) District 3's Capital Highway Investment Plan (CHIP). This document provides a regional overview of all roadway projects occurring on an annual basis. Changes made to approved CIPs or the CHIP after mid-January 2025 (including projects within the APO's 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program) may not be included in the RIIP. The RIIP text explicitly states for the most up-to-date information on projects to contact the respective jurisdiction sponsoring the project.

Ms. Johnson presented the 2025 APO regional transportation projects located in the 2025-2029 RIIP. She presented the regional map, completed projects, budget to actual financials, and delayed projects for 2025. She then presented Benton County's 2026 construction season projects, showing a map of jurisdictional projects, and other local projects, a project overview, and a funding overview.

Ms. Johnson proceeded to explain the difference between the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the Regional Infrastructure Investment Plan (RIIP):

Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP)	Regional Infrastructure Investment Plan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federally required • Contains only projects receiving federal funding or MnDOT projects. • Must be aligned with the state document – frequent amendments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APO-specific document • Contains ALL projects regardless of funding source • Not subject to state/federal overview

The purpose of the RIIP is to provide a document for all transportation infrastructure projects occurring within the planning area, to inform commuters of potential construction projects, and to facilitate better interjurisdictional coordination of project development and construction in hopes of minimizing travel delays.

Ms. Johnson presented the 2025-2029 RIIP 2024 construction season transportation projects. She reviewed the regional map, completed projects, budget to actual financials, and delayed projects.

Ms. Johnson went on to state that all projects contained within the RIIP are already included in approved jurisdictional programming documents, and any changes that occur to these projects will not be reflected in the annual document (RIIP).

The RIIP is designed to provide jurisdictions and residents with a more complete picture of the transportation improvement projects occurring within the planning area over a five-year time frame.

Mr. Theisen motioned to publish the Regional Infrastructure Investment Plan (RIIP) as recommended by the TAC. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

7. CONSIDER COST-SHARING AGREEMENT

Mr. Gibson started by stating that the APO Board set a goal to establish a regionwide cost-sharing agreement for future beltline roadway projects. The direction from the previous board was to have a holistic conversation regarding the beltline vision and how to fund it.

Mr. Gibson went on to present the origins of the beltline, which began in the 1992 St. Cloud Comprehensive Plan and has been reinforced in subsequent comp plans, as well as the APO transportation plans.

The purpose of the beltway is to have roadway continuity, congestion reduction/mitigation, as well as to provide the public with a roadway to circumnavigate the urban core. The beltway would be a minor arterial roadway with a speed limit of 40-45 mph.

Mr. Gibson presented potential beltline impacts regarding functional class, Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), Vehicles Hours Traveled (VHT), potential Vehicle Hours Delayed (VEH-Hour), along with LOS and Lane Miles.

Mr. Gibson presented the project development steps which consist of:

- Planning & Concept Development (Usually APO's role is limited to this step)
- Environmental Assessment (Detailed review of potential environmental impacts, final alignment cannot occur until this step has been completed)
- Final Design (Environmental Assessment must be considered)
- Right-of-Way Acquisition
- Construction

In 2024 the Board set a goal of developing a region-wide agreement on cost-sharing for future beltline projects. The key questions were:

1. Which part(s) of the project development process would be cost-shared regionally, and
2. How would the cost sharing be distributed among the APO members?

The Board asked APO staff to solicit a recommendation from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

At its August 28th meeting, the TAC approved the following recommendations:

1. The cost of the planning phase of any beltline project should be cost-shared among the jurisdictions according to the normal APO cost distribution formula, as usual.
2. When Federal or State funds are being used for a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the local-match costs should be shared among the jurisdictions, with the implementing jurisdiction paying 50% of the local match, and the other 50% being distributed among the jurisdictions according to the normal APO cost distribution formula.
3. Tier 2 EISs and all other aspects of project development should be the sole

responsibility of the implementing jurisdiction.

Mr. Gibson went on to define a Tier 1 EIS versus a Tier 2 EIS:

- Tier 1 EIS
 - A broad analysis of environmental consequences of alternatives. It focuses on general issues like location, air quality, and land use. A Tier 1 EIS provides the foundation for future project-level studies and can move forward without funding for future steps being identified.
- Tier 2 EIS
 - A more detailed environmental review that focuses on specific projects and improvements. It addresses site-specific details like project impacts, costs, and mitigation measures, and usually results in 35% design plans. By the time a Tier 2 EIS is submitted for approval, funding for “meaningful progress” needs to be programmed.

Mr. Gibson presented the TAC discussion and considerations:

- Consideration 1
 - City A is developing its portion of the beltline
 - Cities B, C, and D contribute to a Tier 2 EIS
 - City A does not move forward with development
 - Are cities B, C, and D responsible for paying the federal government back?
- Consideration 2
 - Design is a very local decision based on context and land use
 - City A does not want Cities B, C, and D to tell them how to design their facility
- Consideration 3
 - City A would pay 50% of the local match plus its normal share of the other 50%.

Below are the TAC’s recommendations:

TAC Recommendations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning • Environmental <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1 EIS (Fed \$) • Or any other “scoping” work (Fed\$) 	} Regional	<p><i>Cost-Sharing per APO’s normal distribution formula</i></p> <p><i>50% for implementing jurisdiction; 50% per APO’s normal distribution formula (inclusive)</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tier 1 EIS (Non-Fed \$) • Tier 2 EIS • Final Design • Right-of-Way • Construction 	} Individual	

- TAC Vote
 - 6 in favor; 2 opposed; 1 abstention

At the October meeting, the APO Policy Board felt that no decision should be made until after the (then upcoming) elections, and for Mr. Gibson to brief the Board at the March 13, 2025, meeting.

Mr. Perske asked Mr. Theisen if the gravel mining operation is in the way of bringing the beltway to 33rd Avenue South. Mr. Theisen replied that it's a 2-year license and the project will be done before the City of Waite Park would begin construction on the beltway.

Mr. Perske asked if we should really be bringing Le Sauk Township to participate in the funding for beltway projects as St. Wendell Township is not in the APO and is not included in the funding projections.

Ms. Seamans motioned to approve the cost-sharing agreement as recommended by the TAC for the beltline. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion carried.

8. CONSIDER CHANGES TO REMOTE ATTENDANCE POLICY

Mr. Gibson presented the current remote attendance policy, stating that the APO follows Minnesota's Open Meeting Law (OML). Due to Covid, meetings went to online, and post pandemic we are advised that all meetings return to in-person only. The legislature updated the OML in 2021 and 2023 allowing more options for mixed meetings. Many of our jurisdictions allow mixed meetings.

The OML requires that all members of the Board participating in the meeting, and all members of the public wherever their physical location, must be able to see and hear one another as well as hear and see all discussion and testimony presented at any location of which at least one member is present.

There are technical challenges in going to a mixed meeting format. Cameras, microphones, speakers, screens, and stable reliable internet connections are required to have successful mixed meetings. The library offers only a projector and a screen. To continue meeting there we would need to invest in portable A/V equipment. Another challenge is the library has public WiFi that is used by others.

Another option would be meeting at a different location that is already equipped with A/V equipment. Stearns County Public Works (455 28 Avenue South, Waite Park) has non-public WiFi, built in A/V equipment, and is served by Metro Bus Route 3. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meets at Stearns County Public Works and APO staff are familiar with the equipment and requirements. Stearns County Public Works must have at least one staff member present for the duration of our meetings (available starting August).

There are requirements to move forward with mixed meetings. At least one member of the Board must be physically present at the regular meeting location. All votes must be roll-call votes. Each location at which a member of the Board is present is also open and accessible to the public. For instance, if a Board member wants to attend a Board meeting from home, they would need to open their home to the public to also attend from their house (there are exceptions for members serving in the military, at drill, or deployed on active duty), as well as if a public health professional has advised against members being in a public space. Members of the public must be allowed to monitor the meeting remotely. The APO must provide public notice of all locations from which members will be attending (3-day notice of alternate locations), and minutes must state the name and reason(s) for remote attendance by any Board member.

Mr. Anderson motioned to continue with the current practice of in-person meetings held at the library. Ms. Seamans seconded the motion. Motion carried with an 8-2 vote. Ms. Danielowski and Ms. Seamans were nays.

10. OTHER BUSINESS & ANNOUNCEMENT

Mr. Perske stated that the Blatnik Bridge in Duluth is a concern as the Congressionally Directed Spending has not been appropriated as of yet. This could affect us in a couple of different ways.

1. If the Blatnik Bridge is not appropriated with IJA funds, the money will have to come from the state of Minnesota, which will ultimately affect the APO's projects.
2. If Congressionally Directed Spending is appropriated and the Blatnik Bridge is funded, that could position the APO for receiving federal funds for our proposed river crossing.

Senators Klobuchar and Smith stated that if funding is not appropriated, they would be willing to take our projects and add them onto FY2026. However, we proposed \$1.5 million for construction upgrades for Townline Road. If the funding is not appropriated, we would not get the \$1.5 million requested and thereby would have to turn away the \$7.5 million already programmed.

Mr. Perske stated that State Senator Howe is proposing one-to-one replacement for wetlands for transportation projects. Currently the ratio for mitigation/wetland replacement is two-to-one. His proposal consists of two potential ways mitigation could be carried out. Either one of these proposals could be passed individually, or preferably both proposals would be signed into law.

1. Safety upgrades, which would be for improving current roadways in wetland areas. The mitigation or replacement would be one-to-one
2. All transportation projects across the board would also have a one-to-one ratio.

Mr. Perske asked if the APO Board members would be willing to support this legislation. Individual Board members responded in the affirmative. He stated that Senator Howe would like to get it passed in Minnesota, then take it to Washington D.C. and try to get the legislation passed in the federal government. He stated that this would come through the Corp and would require an act of Congress to make it happen. He went on to state that should only the first proposal be implemented, a lot of our wetlands are small pockets or ditches of water with cattails. If we were able to get funding, we would put in a quality wetland elsewhere.

11. ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Gapinski adjourned the meeting at 5:42 p.m.