

Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) Meeting
Saint Cloud Public Library Bremer Room
Oct. 1, 2019

Attendees

- Alison Voigt, Chairperson.
- Mariah Schyma.
- Janine Foggia.
- Allison Dudek.
- Sarah Weed.
- Kim Pettman.
- Kurt Franke.
- Nate Keller.
- Doug Diedrichsen.
- Jenny Lezer.
- Brian Gibson.
- Alex McKenzie.
- Vicki Johnson.

The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. Chairperson Alison Voigt presided.

Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Active Transportation Plan

Ms. Voigt introduced Saint Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) Executive Director Brian Gibson. Mr. Gibson stated the APO is responsible for developing a long range transportation plan for the region. He said the APO's draft plan is out for public comment through Oct. 23. Mr. Gibson said the intersection between this committee and the APO's plan is he felt staff did what they could with active transportation – painting it with broad strokes. But he felt that the MTP did not get into a specific level of detail when it comes to active transportation.

Ms. Voigt said this is why she and APO staff are looking at developing an Active Transportation Plan. She said it the hope to be able to dive deeper into the details of active transportation in the Saint Cloud metropolitan area.

Mr. Gibson continued that the APO must update its long range plan every five years. He said the document contains regional priorities. Mr. Gibson stated that any project identified within the MTP would be eligible to receive Federal funds. Currently there are no specific active transportation projects identified in the plan. Mr. Gibson said the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) understands that organizations like the APO cannot acknowledge every bike path. He said if a bike path or active transportation project is consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the MTP it would also be eligible for Federal funding.

Ms. Pettman asked Mr. Gibson to explain funding for bike/pedestrian projects.

Mr. Gibson explained that the APO is tasked with developing a transportation plan on a regional level. Within this plan, member jurisdictions are asked to identify priority projects that would be eligible for Federal funding. With the limited amount of Federal funding available, this list of project priorities would assist local leaders in spending funds for the best purpose. Mr. Gibson said while the plan doesn't identify every project, if a potential project is identified, it could still receive funding if it is consistent with the goals in the plan. This allows for some flexibility.

Ms. Pettman asked about bike lanes in downtown Saint Cloud. She also asked about safer intersection crossings.

Mr. Gibson said the Active Transportation Plan would be the place for identifying specific needs and coming up with prioritizations for funding. He said this plan will help inform the next update of the MTP.

Mr. Franke said bike lanes and intersection projects don't get submitted very often for consideration of funding.

Ms. Voigt said this is why the APO is doing the Active Transportation Plan. She said this is because there is a need for more active transportation projects to be funded. She said she hopes to provide the individual cities and counties in the area with a packet of recommended projects for active transportation infrastructure by doing this process.

Mr. Gibson said this process can go both ways. He said during the planning process APO staff will be able to identify needs. He said it is important to get public input to also complement the data in hopes to uncover more needs.

Mr. Keller said with larger pots of money trails and intersection projects often get incorporated into larger street reconstruction projects.

Mr. Franke said that to him it felt like larger pots of money for larger projects often exclude active transportation infrastructure since many of those roadway maintenance projects were never originally designed for active transportation infrastructure. He asked about participating municipalities and encouraged complete streets policies.

Ms. Voigt said APO staff is working with jurisdictions on complete streets. She said APO staff cannot force a jurisdiction to adopt the policy, but they can encourage it. She said she is in the process of sitting down with each jurisdiction to identify what their goals are for active transportation.

Ms. Pettman asked that when APO staff are having these meetings if there was any way other users of the system can be included. She said she feels like if walkers and other users voice their opinions in front of jurisdictions and if they knew how many people used the system it would help make this a priority.

Ms. Voigt said she is planning on hosting pop-up events and open houses where users of the system can gather to talk about these issues. But she is unsure of when this would happen.

Ms. Pettman said a lot of times at open houses no one shows up. She said it would be good for other people to hear this, particularly if there is an already existing meeting.

Mr. Gibson said there are also additional possibilities for members of the public to come to the APO's Technical Advisory Committee meetings or Policy Board meetings. He said those would provide good opportunities for discussion with technical staff and political leaders.

Mr. Franke said he felt frustrated that not a lot of people were coming out for bike and pedestrian issues. He felt for roadway projects there is no trouble getting people to care about building multi-million dollar projects. He said bike and pedestrian projects are taken for granted. He said without any more public input or buy-in around these projects it makes it harder.

Mr. Gibson said part of that could be related to the data gathered on active transportation. He said there are millions of dollars spent on tracking roadway traffic and roadway conditions. He said there isn't a similar type system developed or in place for active transportation. Mr. Gibson said one of the things that could come out of the Active Transportation Plan would be recommendations on what types of data should be collected. He said APO staff are currently talking about bike path pavement data collection.

Ms. Voigt said she understands the frustration. She said she feels that if there was a more formalized plan for the jurisdictions to take action on this would help.

Ms. Pettman asked about bike counts and how many times per year they are done.

Mr. Gibson said bike counts are done twice a year for two hours per time. He said when staff looked at the data it was so variable. He said APO staff have since relied on automatic counters.

Ms. Voigt discussed the early layout of the Active Transportation Plan. She said she was looking to create a regional plan, but not like the one RALAG did. Ms. Voigt said she was in the process of reviewing local level policies and plans. She said the reason she was sitting down with local officials and staff was to review existing plans and ask if those topics/projects/issues identified were still valid. She wanted to review what the cities goals are.

Mr. Franke asked if Ms. Voigt was looking at the whole counties (Benton, Sherburne, and Stearns) when doing this.

Ms. Voigt said she is only concentrating on those within the APO's planning area.

Ms. Pettman said she was glad APO was doing this. She said that is was very important to get this done.

Mr. Franke said APO has had a bike plan for years.

Mr. McKenzie said the APO has had an active transportation section (bicycle and pedestrian) within the APO's larger Metropolitan Transportation Plan. He said this plan will be its own separate document.

Mr. Franke said that he wants this plan to stay alive. He said he felt that plans often just sit on the shelf. He wants a way to make sure that they are updated.

Mr. Gibson said that over the next four years APO and jurisdictional staff will work on implementing the ideas and projects outlined in the MTP. He said this is where the APO's programming document, the Transportation Improvement Program, comes into play.

Ms. Voigt said one of the things APO staff needs is help from the committee to spread the word about this plan. She said that this plan will be a community plan and needs to incorporate a community perspective. She said that for the APO's MTP public engagement staff hung up posters, did pop-up events, open houses, online surveys, and social media. She agreed with early comments made by Ms. Pettman that word of mouth is huge in this area. She said that also needs to be included.

Ms. Pettman asked if APO could make postcard size bits of information for committee members to hand out to people. She also recommended exploring the possibility of getting involved with Saint Cloud's weekly town hall meetings. She also asked members of the committee to talk with people in their cities not just as a professional but from a constituent perspective as well.

Mr. Keller also recommended reaching out to schools.

Mr. Franke also recommended cities help push this out on their website and social media.

Mr. Gibson said the active transportation plan is not just about school kids or avid riders. He said it is also about helping public health. He also said active transportation tends to be cheap transportation. Mr. Gibson said based on the data gathered for the MTP he found that a lot of people in the community are struggling financially. He said people are often backfilling transportation with walking and biking. He said active transportation cuts across a lot of different silos and is a very broad topic.

Ms. Pettman requested that the committee members who were working for the city or county to get their council members or commissioners to be champions for this effort. She said a lot of times the area's decision makers have to get it or want it in order for it to happen. She also asked if we have talked with the media about this.

Ms. Voigt said she has not talked to the media yet. She is starting to bring this up with the APO's Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Board.

Ms. Voigt presented a list of possible survey questions for the initial public input phase. She asked for feedback.

Ms. Pettman said the questions were not in the language members of the public use regularly.

Ms. Weed said there were too many questions and a lot of the questions ended up repeating themselves.

Ms. Lezer asked about the questions being open ended.

Mr. Franke said he would opt to not use the term active transportation. He said people understand walking or biking.

Ms. Voigt said there potential to put clarifying language at the beginning of the survey to explain what active transportation is.

Mr. Franke felt that people who drive should not get a vote in this. Mr. Gibson, Ms. Johnson, and Ms. Voigt stated that all public comments are welcome and should be logged and used to inform the decision.

Ms. Pettman encouraged the use of open ended questions because they prompt people to think about how active transportation affects them.

Mr. Franke suggested using Saint Cloud State University Survey to assist in developing the survey and getting a wide range of respondents.

Ms. Voigt asked for participation from the committee in a small advisory group that would meet once or twice a month to discuss the development of the plan. Ms. Voigt said she would like to have a meeting in October and then possible meetings in November and December.

Ms. Pettman said this would be a good idea to get in the paper.

Committee Name Change

Ms. Voigt said the name of the committee will be changing from BPAC to Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC).

Ms. Pettman said she has noticed in a lot of different circles that people still say bike and pedestrian. She said APO staff will need to assist in that translation. She asked if there was another phrase that would be easier for members of the public to understand.

Mr. Gibson said APO staff is open to suggestions.

Ms. Voigt said her goal was to be more in line with the inclusionary language coming down from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT). She said by including the word transportation that people will look at biking and walking as transportation related instead of just recreational.

Ms. Pettman asked if it could be non-motorized.

Ms. Voigt said active transportation includes transit as well. This is because a lot of transit riders are users of the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure for their first and last mile connections.

Ms. Pettman said she is OK with the name change but there needs to be a lot of promoting and education to inform people of what this is.

Mr. McKenzie suggested developing a logo with different modes of transportation to help with the education piece.

Intersection and Automatic Counts

Ms. Voigt discussed the changes in the data collection system APO staff used. She explained APO staff evaluated the current system of bicycle and pedestrian counts. Ms. Voigt explained how staff wanted to look at urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the Saint Cloud metro to get a wider range of biking and walking activity. Ms. Voigt said APO staff redid the count locations and went out for two weeks to count at intersections.

Ms. Pettman asked if several locations could be added to this list.

Ms. Voigt said the manual counts were done on intersections only. She said all summer APO staff have deployed automatic counters at various trail locations. These counters included a pyro counter which recorded pedestrian activity and tube counters which collected bike data. Ms. Voigt presented the data collected from the summer automatic counts.

Ms. Voigt also provided information about the pavement assessment data. She said APO staff is working with a consultant – GoodPointe – on possibly developing an app that would assess the pavement conditions of trails. This work would happen more than likely in November.

Meeting adjourned at 2:43 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Vicki Johnson.