

Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC) Meeting
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
May 6, 2020

Attendees

- Fred Sandal, Chairperson.
- Alex McKenzie.
- Brian Gibson.
- Chelle Benson.
- Kurt Franke.
- Nate Keller.
- Vicki Johnson.

Meeting was called to order at 2:10 p.m. Chairperson Fred Sandal presided.

Active Transportation Plan Development

Mr. Sandal began the ATAC meeting with a presentation about the ongoing work APO staff have been doing to develop the region's Active Transportation Plan. Mr. Sandal stated staff are in the first phase of plan development which includes the primary focus of data collection. Mr. Sandal said he is hoping to have this completed with an initial draft report available by fall 2020.

Mr. Sandal defined active transportation as referring to any form of human powered, non-motorized transportation. Among the goals of the new study are to seek opportunities to improve facilities that serve active transportation needs such as off-road facilities (shared use paths, unpaved trails, sidewalks) and on-road accommodations (shared lanes, paved shoulders, dedicated bicycle lanes). He said that identifying regional priorities will help guide cities and counties with future investments in active transportation. Mr. Sandal said obtaining good information with the development of this plan will assist APO staff with updating the next long-range plan (the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)).

Mr. Sandal presented a map of the existing active transportation facilities. This map also included the location of Metro Bus bus shelters. He said knowing where bus shelters are located is important since the APO's Active Transportation Plan will also include information about access to transit.

Mr. Sandal said he was working with an ATAC subcommittee – the Small Advisory Group – on developing the process and vision for the plan. He indicated the desired goals and outcomes for the Active Transportation Plan include the following:

1. Promote mode options: Bicycle, pedestrian, and transit trips as a reasonable transportation choice.
2. Better regional connectivity: Reducing gaps, improving connections to and from transit stops.
3. Equitable access: Offering comfortable facilities for people of all ages and abilities in accordance with Title VI and the Americans with Disabilities (ADA) Act.
4. Improved safety: Reducing the number and severity of crashes involving pedestrians and bicyclists.

Mr. Franke stated fatalities in general have increased statewide this year, even though motor vehicle traffic has been severely reduced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Gibson suggested that the increase in bicycle and pedestrian fatalities could be because there are more people out biking and walking. Ms. Benson said growing fatalities this year may be due to bad drivers (i.e., speeding and other factors).

Mr. Sandal stated the APO's first task in the development of the Active Transportation Plan is to identify the current conditions and issues. He said staff have been looking at this in several different ways, among them crash data analysis, the ongoing pedestrian and bicycle count program using the portable automated counters. Of relevance are regional plans and studies including the Regional Active Living Advisory Group (RALAG) action agenda from 2015, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) District 3 Bicycle Plan from 2019, and several studies looking at level of service and comfort for bicyclists.

Mr. Sandal showed comparison data showing fatal and serious/minor injury crashes involving bicyclists and pedestrians are on the rise within the APO's planning area. This is especially true when it comes to crashes involving pedestrians. He said this trend is also what is being seen statewide.

Mr. Sandal said staff is reviewing the APO's 2016 Bicycle Level of Service study that assessed and rated the comfort of area streets and roads for bicycles. He also said in 2019, APO staff had hired a consultant – GoodPointe – to provide data on pavement condition on the area's roadways. GoodPointe also collected data on the pavement condition for on-road bicycle facilities. In addition, APO staff is working with the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota this summer to complete a pavement conditions study on all of the shared use paths in the planning area.

Mr. Franke asked for a status update on the smartphone application that was being developed to identify specific issues related to the active transportation network. Mr. Gibson stated the app from the Parks and Trails study only looks at the pavement condition of the shared use paths. Ms. Johnson said the app is still in the process of being developed by GoodPointe. Mr. Gibson said he sees the use the app in tandem with the pavement studies.

Mr. Keller asked if the ultimate goal with this information would be to bring it to the cities and counties with the hopes of having them build in active transportation projects into their capital improvement plans (CIPs). Mr. Sandal said the data would be shared. He said the Parks and Trails Council is planning on segmenting out the paths. Mr. Gibson said the primary reason the APO is doing this is to address the need for maintenance. He said the purpose of the Active Transportation Plan is to identify needs and priorities for investments. He said he trusts that with the information, cities and counties would use this information to program into CIPs.

Mr. Sandal said in addition to data collection, he is looking at the MnDOT District 3 Bicycle plan that identifies connectivity for high priority regional corridors like the north/south Mississippi River Trail (MRT), the east/west Lake Wobegon Trail, and the ROCORI Trail from the south. He is also reviewing the Statewide Pedestrian System Plan priorities, various Safe Routes to School plans in the APO's planning area, and Metro Bus's planning efforts. He said staff has also been reviewing local plans and CIPs. He said the effort is not only looking at the region, but at needs in the specific cities and counties in the planning area.

Mr. Sandal said staff is collecting data from portable automated counters and from Streetlight – a software that uses data gathered from smartphone applications to geolocate travel patterns. Mr. Sandal also stated the APO is planning to do a regional travel survey in 2021 as well. Currently, APO staff is soliciting public input on the system from an online survey and interactive map as another means of collecting data.

Mr. Gibson asked Ms. Benson her opinion on the development of shared use facilities around environmentally sensitive areas. He asked if there were areas that would present a good

opportunity for something like this. Ms. Benson said such work would need to be balanced in a way that is responsible but also helps people make connections to the natural environment. She explained, for example, that paving a shared use path through a wetland would be a bad investment not only for the environment, but also due to the continued maintenance involved to preserve path. She provided the example of the boardwalk in Quarry Park as being both respectful of the natural environment and responsible in allowing people to travel through the area. Ms. Benson said the same rules and requirements for environmental mitigation are in place for active transportation facilities as are for roadway facilities.

Plan for Public Engagement

Mr. Sandal discussed how the current COVID-19 pandemic has had to alter the way APO staff proceeds with public engagement. He said data gathered during this emergency does not represent typical travel behavior. In addition, the lack of public events and venues (like Earth Day and Summertime by George!) and adhering to social distancing guidelines makes it more challenging to reach out to the public. Mr. Sandal said with the lack of face-to-face interactions due to the ongoing pandemic, online or virtual meetings may be introduced. He does not want to slow down the process and is open to find other ways to engage members of the public.

Mr. Sandal discussed the current efforts APO staff have been using to engage the public in the development of the Active Transportation Plan. The first is the online user survey. Responses will better identify typical bicycle and pedestrian usage, trip purposes, barriers, and types of facility needs and desires. Mr. Sandal said the survey has been available since March 30 and so far, 90 people have taken the survey. He is hoping to see a wider area response representative of APO demographics and diversity. Key demographics missing and/or underrepresented currently include people 25 and younger, people of color, people with low-income – those demographic groups that are typically underrepresented. Mr. Sandal said the online survey has been translated into Somali as well.

Ms. Benson asked if Mr. Sandal had reached out specifically to the Somali task force or the Latino community. She also suggested APO staff reach out to the City of Saint Cloud for contacts for some of these communities. She said she has noticed an increase of active transportation activity around Oak Hill and Discovery elementary schools so targeted outreach to residents in those areas – by reaching out to apartment managers to distribute/hang flyers – might be another avenue. Ms. Johnson suggested using sidewalk chalk in those communities might also help in getting outreach.

Mr. Sandal talked about the APO's interactive Wikimap. He said the map is linked and intended to be completed along with the active transportation survey. He said the purpose of the map is to get specific information from bicyclists and pedestrians about their routes and destinations and allow them to pinpoint specific issues or barriers. He said Mr. Gibson had developed a demonstration video that has been placed on the APO's Facebook page, website, and YouTube channel.

Mr. Franke said he used the Wikimap a few times and really liked it. He said taking the survey is one thing, but the map is a really good way to actually have people see the concerns he is noticing.

Mr. Sandal thought this map would be a good idea to display at face-to-face events. But without that opportunity, he said APO staff have to rely on providing it online.

Mr. Sandal is looking for assistance from ATAC members to improve the response to the surveys and gather more public input. He said APO staff have publicized the outreach opportunities on the APO's website, social media, and through press releases. Mr. Sandal is looking at exploring online meetings. He is also looking for assistance from regional and local partners and stakeholders to share the information out to their contacts. Mr. Sandal said the APO has a webpage dedicated to the [Active Transportation Plan](https://stcloudapo.org/current-plans/current-mtp/active-transportation-plan/) (<https://stcloudapo.org/current-plans/current-mtp/active-transportation-plan/>) that will be updated with the status of the plan.

Mr. Gibson asked about when a draft document would be ready for review. Mr. Sandal said he was hopeful this would happen in fall, ideally once the information about the shared use path pavement condition was completed.

Mr. Franke said the COVID-19 situation has proven to be a great experiment for the active transportation facilities in the fact that it makes people think about what other options they would use if they had to. Mr. Gibson said he and Mr. Sandal had a discussion once COVID-19 hit about the increased number of people walking and biking. He said while the data will not be useful for long-range planning, this is a great time to ask people about their experience using the system.

Mr. Keller said with more people out walking and biking, more people are realizing the importance of the system. He also said he was happy the APO deployed the Wikimapj product. He said a lot of people don't rely on street names so the map is a useful tool in helping those who use more landmark directions (the example provided was the McDonald's near County Road 1 and Highway 15). He said the map is a useful tool and could provide valuable feedback.

Safe Routes to School

Mr. Sandal provided an update on the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) planning effort. APO staff are working on developing plans for Oak Hill Community School and Kennedy Community School within the Saint Cloud School District. Mr. Sandal said APO staff met with district administration on March 11 to develop a timeline for these plans. That timeline has since been adjusted since COVID-19. He said staff have worked with the district to obtain what information they could, however, most of the data collection will have to be pushed out to fall 2020. He believes that the plans can be completed by spring 2021. APO staff will continue to work with the district to develop the remaining site-specific plans.

Mr. Franke asked if APO staff is working with other school districts in the area. He also asked about Clearview Elementary and if the Saint Cloud School District's shifting of principals impacted the development of plans.

Mr. Keller said Sartell-Saint Stephen School District has some SRTS plans for the middle school and Pine Meadow Elementary School. He said having those plans in place have helped the city get federal funding for infrastructure projects – one of which has been under construction. Ms. Johnson said Sauk Rapids-Rice School District has some SRTS plans for Pleasantview Elementary School and Rice Elementary School.

Ms. Johnson explained the history of SRTS planning with the district. This has involved a MnDOT grant that was obtained in spring 2018 for the development of a districtwide SRTS plan and five site specific plans for the Saint Cloud School District. This funding was on the good-faith condition that the APO would assist in completing the remaining SRTS plans for

the school district. Since Clearview Elementary is outside of the APO's planning area, another entity would have to take over that planning effort.

Mr. Sandal said the district has been keeping the principals informed and expects continuity with the process.

Transportation Alternatives

Ms. Johnson presented on the Transportation Alternative program – a Federal funding source that is available to provide funding for active transportation infrastructure. She provided information about how the APO works to develop a long-range transportation vision through the development of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). This plan, she said, includes existing data (the current transportation network, population demographics, environmental conditions, and funding), projected future trends, and goals/objectives/strategies for what the region would like to see in its future transportation network. The MTP is designed to be multimodal and provide a comprehensive overview of the area.

Ms. Johnson said within the APO's most recent MTP are a list of projects that are designed to ideally be completed by 2045. These projects will either add to the existing network (through the building of new roadways or the widening of others) or maintain/preserve the existing network. She said these projects have to be reasonably affordable by those cities and counties proposing to complete them.

Ms. Johnson said while the MTP is a list of projects expected to be done within the next 25 years, the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is a list of projects that are going to be done now or within the next four years. The TIP includes projects that have been approved for Federal funding from either the Federal Highway Administration or Federal Transit Administration. Federal funding is very limited, but Ms. Johnson said, it can greatly reduce the costs cities and counties incur for construction projects.

Ms. Johnson said surface transportation projects can receive Federal funding through different ways. The primary way active transportation projects can receive funding is through the Transportation Alternatives (TA) program. The TA programs funding is used for projects that include, but are not limited to, the creation of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles, environmental mitigation or habitat protection as related to highway construction or operations, as well as infrastructure and non-infrastructure related to Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) activities. Projects funded with this program have the potential to be funded up to 80% with Federal dollars.

Ms. Johnson explained the TA funding in Minnesota and how projects are solicited four years out. She said the Federal government makes an educated determination of available funding. She said MnDOT then allocates approximately half of that funding to the Twin Cities metro and the remaining money is split among seven Area Transportation Partnerships. The APO is located in the Central Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership (ATP). This closely follows MnDOT District 3's planning boundaries and also includes the following planning partners:

- Region 5 Development Commission
- East Central Regional Development Commission (7E)
- Region 7W Transportation Policy Board
- Saint Cloud APO

Ms. Johnson said the Central Minnesota ATP had received \$1.6 million in targeted TA funding for fiscal year 2024. She said MnDOT District 3 makes applying for these funds a competition across the ATP. She said this year 13 applicants from across the 12-county ATP applied for funding. Ms. Johnson said the APO plays a minor role in having a say in project selection. However, the APO can assign regional priority points to projects submitted within the planning area. These points – added on to the technical score of a project – can boost that project’s score to help make that project stand out among the TA scoring committee. In years past, the decision on priority points assignment was made by the Policy Board with a recommendation from the APO’s Technical Advisory Committee (TAC).

Ms. Johnson said after this year’s solicitation, APO staff had an internal discussion about the process and felt the ATAC should be involved in the process of recommending the assignment of regional priority points for projects submitted within the APO planning area. Ms. Johnson explained that to do this, given the timing of the larger Transportation Improvement Program development process, ATAC members might not receive the information much in advance of a meeting. She said she would work with MnDOT District 3 staff to get the information, but it might not be provided along with an agenda packet 10 days prior to the meeting date. Ms. Johnson was seeking confirmation among ATAC members that this process would be acceptable.

Ms. Benson said it was a great idea to include the ATAC. She said it provides value to the members to know what projects are being done regionally.

Mr. Keller said it was a good idea but questioned if the ATAC would have to be more formalized (including a chair and quorum) in order to make a recommendation to the APO’s TAC.

Mr. Gibson said he did not believe the ATAC would need to be more formalized. Ms. Benson agreed stating this body is so far removed from the final decision. She said the value that the ATAC brings would be the opportunity to solicit input from the community about what they feel is a priority.

Mr. Keller said that part of the reason the ATAC is such a good group is that it is informal. Mr. Franke agreed and said he appreciated the APO’s commitment to value the opinion of ATAC members and include them in the process.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Vicki Johnson