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SOMERSWORTH
STRAFFORD
WAKEFIELD

April 28, 2011

Commissioner George N. Campbell, Jr.
New Hampshire Department of Transportation
PO Box 483
Concord, NH 03302-0483

Dear Commissioner Campbell:

Over the past several months Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization has met with 19 of 22 local communities, District 6, and transportation providers in the region to attain a clear vision of Strafford Region's transportation needs for the near and long terms. Through our bottoms-up approach we have captured a snapshot of the region's transportation system's current conditions, and through our meetings we have a clearer vision of the changing needs in our region. Additionally, we have used our meetings as a chance to communicate and educate local officials about the current funding realities facing NH's transportation system. This news was met with mixed reactions, but overall the responses could be classified as frustration undergirded by Yankee pragmatism.

Over the last several Ten-Year Plan cycles, Strafford Metropolitan Planning Organization has used a survey to help identify common transportation needs locally and regionally. This survey has been extremely helpful in creating a strong regional voice and ensuring the projects that go forward in our region reflect the top priorities of our region. The results of this year's surveys provided telling insights about the transportation priorities for our region and have been helpful in understanding the future needs.

SAFETY

Intersections:

Intersection safety came up repeatedly as the top priority across the region. Many of the intersections cited had a number of similar factors that compounded the risk associated with them, usually including: high posted speed limits, poor sight distance, poor intersection alignment, lack of left hand turning lanes, and levels of traffic that exceed the original design capacity of the roads. Adding to the risk are increased traffic volumes and higher incidence of "distracted driving" taking place on our roads. While only a few of these intersections are listed on NH's 5% list, the general consensus across the region is that intersections are more dangerous than ever.

Throughput Capacity:

A common issue throughout our discussions was balancing the need for throughput capacity on major arterials with development pressures in corridor communities. State routes 125, 108, 11, and 9, and United States routes 4, and 202 all run through communities in our region. Land use

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development patterns along these corridors (mainly strip type development) are turning the roads most appropriate for carrying high volumes of traffic into congested strip areas. This creates a seemingly endless cycle for new capacity building transportation projects. Some routes are beyond our ability to plan our way out, while others could be preserved through the creation of meaningful standards to limit access on designated state corridors.

Increased Traffic on Local Roads:

The traffic pressure on our major corridors is also being felt by residents of our more rural communities as people avoid congested roads by using local routes as bypasses. All communities in the region have been noticing a shift of traffic, specifically heavy truck traffic and commuters, from congested corridors to local roads. This presents a number of safety issues on roads that were not originally designed to accommodate the impacts they are now seeing. New technologies, like smart phones and GPS systems, have increased the use of local routes to circumvent traffic by making them much more accessible. The cost of maintenance on local roads (now being used as bypasses) has gone up, while the levels of service and safety for system users have decreased.

Economic Development:

As we come out of the recession there is no better time for the state and regions to undertake a significant effort to create design standards around main arterials that provide a structured development process to manage access (conflict) points for new developments. By taking these measures the state and municipalities will save significant money down the road that will otherwise be necessary for capacity expansion projects. More importantly, it will create safer driving conditions on our major state roads.

Pedestrians and Bicyclists:

In the urbanized areas of our region there is strong ongoing support for making densely built and populated areas, and specific roadways safer for bikers and pedestrians. Support for safety improvements such as designated bike lanes, improvements to sidewalk infrastructure, and projects that encourage multi-use all remain priorities in our region.

FUNDING

Traditionally funding is an issue municipalities and transit providers bring up as their top priority. This year there was a slightly different emphasis regarding funding. First, communities were very sensitive to the financial climate in the state, and fewer listed funding as a top priority. Interestingly though, communities wanted increased funding for maintenance and operations.

Many of the communities in our region, especially those bordering Maine, have a high number of red list bridges. This fact is backed up by the “Bridge Deficiency Study” conducted by Transportation for America, which ranks NH as having the 11th highest percentage of red list bridges in the country, and names Strafford County as the “worst” county in the state with 19.4% of all bridges deficient.

Many of the communities bordering Maine have economies that rely heavily on the bridges for inter-state commerce and as commute routes to work. With some communities having all of their inter-state bridges labeled as structurally deficient or with weight limits, they are feeling a serious

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impact from the aging infrastructure. Because of this, local officials expressed the critical importance of protecting and maintaining the transportation infrastructure investments we have already committed to, rather than investing projects to create new infrastructure.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

In the last two Ten-Year Plan cycles expanded regional public transit has been Strafford's #1 regional priority. Our providers in the region have responded to the call for expanded service and have designed specialized services for our more rural communities. After the completion of new projects like, the CMAQ funded Park n' Ride in Rochester, the CMAQ funded Wildcat Transit route serving Lee, Barrington, and Rochester, and the COAST study investigating the feasibility of creating an intra-city loop in Rochester, some service expansion needs will be met.

However, regional public transit still remains a priority in Strafford with a different focus. The coverage by the transit routes in the region has improved; the next barrier to overcome is improving the frequency of service and duration. With COAST and other providers in the region starting to reach their ceiling for available federal funding, further investment and state financial support for these systems will be critical as we move forward.

EMERGING CORRIDOR

Strafford has included measures that will allow MPO staff to develop a Salmon Falls Corridor Collaborative along the border of Maine in our 2012-2013 Unified Planning Work Program. We intend to take an inventory of bridges and roads, assess their status, capture information about commuting patterns within the corridor and across state boundaries, and establish a more complete picture of the role this corridor plays in Maine's and our own region's economy. We plan on using this study to compile a list of recommendations for transportation improvements, use elements of the study to help guide our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, and to use design recommendations generated by the collaborative as a basis for establishing access management standards along the corridor.

One of the first areas of investigation is the Somersworth NH –Berwick ME, bridge rehab on Route 9, connecting the two downtowns and a major commute route (project #12228). The project is very important, as it is one of the few routes across the Salmon Falls River. Route 9 in Somersworth is highly congested (specifically at the PM peak), the five-way intersection immediately on the Maine side of the bridge creates conditions that are dangerous for pedestrians and bicyclists, and there is currently no alternate way to cross the Salmon Falls River in downtown Somersworth. At this time both communities are beginning major downtown revitalization and brownfield redevelopment projects that coincide with the rehab of this bridge. Strafford MPO sees this as an opportunity for the state and municipalities to work together to ensure project #12228 is designed in a way that recognizes the importance of this gateway and ties design decisions to the revitalization projects happening in the respective communities.

PRIORITIZATION OF PROJECTS

With the uncertainty regarding future state transportation funding, planning for the 2013-2022 Ten-Year Plan (TYP) has been challenging. The Strafford region has total of around \$21 million

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dollars¹ authorized for projects using federal funding in the 2011-2020 Ten-Year Plan. If projects from 2011 and 2012 go ahead as planned, our funding for the 2013-2022 period is approximately \$11 million in federally funded projects. This amounts to about \$1.1 million per year.

These numbers do not take into account the additional \$4.7 - \$8.7 million worth of federally funded projects in the Strafford region that appear on the list of projects that would be dropped from the Ten-Year Plan if the \$30 Motor Vehicle Fee is not replaced by another revenue source. (“Ten Year Plan Budget Project Impacts” January 10, 2011)

NH DOT has given clear guidance to the MPOs and rural RPCs that under the current funding scenario another round of cuts from the Ten Year Plan will be necessary in order to keep the 2013-2022 Ten-Year Plan fiscally constrained. Their guidance was to review projects in the Ten-Year Plan to establish which remain priorities. In addition, NH DOT instructed that costs for any new projects recommended to the Ten-Year Plan must be the financial equivalent of projects currently on the list.

With the guidance for Ten-Year Plan project solicitation and prioritization as they are, and with regard for the funding realities facing NH, it has been the Strafford MPO Policy Committee position to consider all of the projects currently on the Ten-Year Plan as priorities as shown, but to add no new projects to our list. The Policy Committee’s reasoning has been that projects from the Ten-Year Plan have been scavenged repeatedly over the last few cycles of the Ten-Year Plan. Our region is currently authorized around 14% of our “theoretical share” of federal funding² for projects over the 2013-2022 period. And without a replacement for the \$30 Motor Vehicle Fee our region stands to lose an additional 25-50% (based on the list in the “Ten Year Plan Budget Project Impacts” January 10, 2011) of our federal funding for projects.

Moreover, the TAC and Policy Committees understand the list of project priorities will be used to rank which projects are least important to our region in order to guide NH DOT in making rescissions necessary to create a financially constrained Ten-Year Plan, not to determine which projects to add. With the list of MPO projects already picked clean, the Policy Committee is uncomfortable with choosing between equally critical safety projects. This was based on the level of detail they had regarding the condition and risk associated with the projects on our current Ten-Year Plan list. Initially it was the Policy Committee’s position that they must respectfully decline attempting prioritization of our project list at this time.

During the resulting discussion NH DOT reiterated the importance of establishing priorities for transportation projects stating, “there is not enough funding to do all projects, and communities should identify projects that are most important.” NH DOT representatives further stated that, “not prioritizing is not productive, as it will not establish true regional priorities.” After further discussion a second motion was passed establishing the Policy Committee’s position and priorities for projects on the Strafford MPO list for the 2013-2022 timeframe.

It is the majority decision of the Strafford MPO Policy Committee that the Durham-Newmarket project #13080 is the top priority of the region, if they have to formulate a priority listing. The

¹ This figure was calculated using the most recent information, accounting for amendments and minor revisions passed up to this point, from the 2011-2014 TIP and 2011-2020 Ten-Year Plan as of 4/20/11.

² Calculations were made using the “Federal Aid – Planning Level/Theoretical Distribution Estimates 2011” Excel document provided by NH DOT for metropolitan planning organization use in showing financially constrained 2011-2014 Transportation Improvement Programs. This document was made available 8/9/2010.

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Policy Committee also established by majority decision that all projects on the list for Strafford region are priorities of equal importance, siting that the projects are on the list primarily due to safety factors. The Policy Committee felt that they did not have adequate detail to make potentially critical safety decisions.

Finally, it is the view of the Strafford MPO Policy Committee that it has been and remains the charge of the NH Legislature to find a replacement revenue stream for the expiring \$30 Motor Vehicle Fee.

As is conveyed by this letter, these are challenging and frustrating times for all, particularly for those transportation agencies and municipalities attempting to manage the preservation and maintenance of their systems while attempting to support our nascent economic recovery. MPO staff are encouraged by the resiliency of the businesses, people, and organizations in the Strafford region, and respect their forthright discussions to find a process and priorities that convey their frustrations and also make sense for the region's future infrastructure needs. If your staff has further questions, please contact Marc Ambrosi, Transportation Planner or me at 994-3500.

With our best regards,

Cynthia Copeland, AICP
Executive Director
Strafford MPO

cc: SMPO Policy and Technical Advisory Committees
William Watson

2013-2022 Ten-Year Plan Project Priority List of Federal Highway Administration Funded Projects						
Priority Number	Project Description	On Chopping Block?	Total Project Cost	Year of Construction	Out to Bid?	
Projects Scheduled for Construction Before 2013-2022 Ten-Year Plan Timeframe	1	Durham - Newmarket: project #13080, 13080A- NH 108, CONSTRUCT 4' BIKE SHOULDERS FROM OYSTER RIVER BRIDGE TO DAME ROAD AND SANBORN AVE IN NEWMARKET (3.4MI) STP & [98-17TE] (TE Program)	Yes	\$4,343,760	2012	No
	2	Rollinsford NH - South Berwick ME: project #14241- NH 4, PAVEMENT REHABILITATION AND SAFETY WORK BEGINNING AT DOVER T/L, PROCEEDING EAST APPROX 2.9 MILES TO MAINE S/L INCLUDE REDECKING - 116/086 (Red List) [PRRCS*452] (Statewide Federal Resurfacing Program)	No	\$2,755,850	2011	Yes
	2	Newmarket: project #13878- NH 108, CONSTRUCT 4' BIKE SHOULDERS FROM THE SOUTHERLY LIMIT OF PROJECT 13107 IN NEWMARKET TO NEWFIELDS T/L (CMAQ Program) [02-25CM]	No	\$679,720	2011	Summer 2011
	2	Seacoast: project #14818- SEACOAST COMMUTER OPTIONS - PROGRAM EXPANSION / ACCELERATED IMPLEMENTATION (CMAQ Program) [06-25CM]	No	\$300,000	2011	N/A
	2	Wakefield: project #14824- SANBORNVILLE / PAUL SCHOOL SIDEWALK PROJECT: CONSTRUCT 3,740 LF OF 5' WIDE PEDESTRIAN / BICYCLE WAYS THAT LINK THE ELEMENTARY / MIDDLE SCHOOL WITH THE ADJACENT NEIGHBORHOODS AND TOWN CENTER (TE Program) [06-57TE]	No	\$163,000	2011	No
	2	Milton: project #15905- NH 125, BRIDGE REHABILITATION / DECK REPLACEMENT OVER RR - 212/128 (Red List)	No	\$2,270,400	2012	Yes
	2	Somersworth NH - Berwick ME: project #12228- NH 9, REHAB BRIDGE OVER SALMON FALLS RIVER - 101/114	No	\$513,992	2012	No
Projects with Construction Years in the 2013-2022 Ten-Year Plan Timeframe	2	Newmarket: project #16048- NH 108, ELEVATOR AND SKY BRIDGE CONNECTION WITH HISTORIC MILL BUILDING [09-35TE]	No	\$585,088	2013	No
	2	Somersworth: project #16049- High St., Market St., Main St, PEDESTRIAN / BICYCLE IMPROVEMENT [09-48TE]	No	\$502,341	2013	No
	2	Dover: project #13796 - Washington Street, BRIDGE REHABILITATION OVER B&M RAILROAD - 120/118 (Municipal Bridge Program),	No	\$476,000	2013	No
	2	Farmington: project #16146- NH 153, "REPLACE BRIDGE OVER COCHECHO RIVER - 096/140 (Red List) (Federal Bridge Program) Red List Bridge Priority #36"	No	\$1,808,650	2014	No
	2	Durham: US 4/ NH 108, INTERCHANGE IMPROVEMENTS AND RECONFIGURATION INCLUDING THE INSTALLATION OF TRAFFIC SIGNALS, DEDICATED TURNING LANES, SIGNAGE, ETC. - PHASE 2	Yes	\$599,550	2014	No
	2	Rochester: project #14350- Strafford Square (NH 202A), INTERSECTION IMPROVEMENTS TO IMPROVE SAFETY THROUGH STRAFFORD SQUARE, NORTH MAIN, & WASHINGTON STREETS	No	\$1,326,800	2015	No
	2	Nottingham: project #15720- Deerfield Road, BRIDGE REPLACEMENT OVER BACK CREEK - 102/085 (NEW)	No	\$349,085	2016	No
2	Durham: US 4, BRIDGE REPLACEMENT & APPROACHES OVER BUNKER CREEK - 145/116	"At Risk"	\$4,170,125	2018	No	