

NCC Transportation Advisory Committee Meeting
Granite State Room
at North County Resource Center
629 Main St B, Lancaster, NH 03584
Thursday April 21, 2022
1:00-3:00PM

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Welcome and Introductions

Clayton MacDonald, Stratford, Chair
Michelle Cormier, Randolph selectman
Stan Judge, Shelburne
Chuck Henderson, Senator Shaheen's Office
Paul Robitaille, Gorham
Philip Beaulieu, NHDOT (District 1)
Robin Irving, Lancaster,
James O Gorman, Colebrook
Ray Gorman, Colebrook
Carl Martland, Sugar Hill
Rob Larson, Whitefield
Doug Damko, Littleton
Bill Watson (NHDOT)
William Rose (NHDOT)

2. Call to Meeting

Meeting Called to order, 1:02PM

3. Approve Meeting Minutes: November 10, 2021 **

The Chair presented the meeting minutes from the last meeting on November 10, 2021. Paul Robitaille mentioned that there is no U in his name. Nick will amend the minutes with that amendment.

Paul motioned to approve the minutes from November 10, 2021.
Stan Seconded.

Motion Carried.

4. Ten Year Plan Process

Nick provided an update on the TYP process and where we currently stand. He will be meeting with William at NHDOT to get fully up to speed for

5. North Country Connections (2021 Regional Transportation Plan) **

Nick provided a brief update to the RTP. Including providing an update draft to the committee with improved formatting and content and mapping updates. Will have a draft by Late summer and finalize it by October/November.

Clayton: the mention of climate change and global warming is barely mentioned in the text. More emphasis should be placed in the fact that we are in a crisis. The IPCC report just came out and its warnings are very dire.

Carl: Do you have my comments? Sugar Hill is on the Rt 116 corridor but is left out of the 116 Corridor description.

Want to note that almost every corridor mentioned is part of a designated byway. It should be mentioned in the beginning of the plan that they are scenic byways and have intrinsic beauty and assets. I have some another verbiage to add.

6. Discussion: OHRV Road Use

James provided a brief description of his wanting the agenda item included. He wanted to gain input from other communities about the issue if possible. In the long run, a court decision being made about OHRVs could possibly lead to other cases and circumstances.

Clayton: the state generally absolves liability on roadways, the general behavior of users on town roads may lead to accidents. This doesn't cover full liability for accidents on local roadways so there could be additional court costs. This is on the minds of the Stratford town leadership as OHRVs and snowmobiles continue to impact properties. Our recreational users are using town roads for their sport, rather than for transportation. Although people can use them for general use, there is something different with OHRVs and Snowmobile use that sets them apart. There are the vocal club activities. And there is unofficial chatter with complaints and other comments.

Robin: Lancaster right now does not have any connectivity to the wider network. Previous experience at Northumberland: they had opted to close roadways and routes for its use. Northumberland placed restrictions above and beyond the state regulations. Older age restriction to OHRV use. Also have often thought: Snowmobile use on a property get a DRA. It is an incentive for the landowner to get the credit. Perhaps there could be something like a site

plan review or public hearing when someone wants to allow this type of vehicular travel across their lands. That way abutters are noticed and allowed to come to the hearing to weigh in on the issue. That is the local control perspective.

Michelle: What about appealing to the state to rethink the age limit for OHRV and snowmobile users? What if the Department of Safety or Trails Bureau received comment?

Robert: Do we have demographic information on OHRV and snowmobile users?

Paul: State legislature is working on that right now.

Robert: It seems to be a waste of time to build regulations on 0.5% of users when we should be looking at the wider issues. Question would be, where do we get those numbers and reevaluate our priorities?

Robin: The minority is clearly the young operators, but what James was addressing was the liability situation. Northumberland required 16 yo and to have valid license. And to be travelling with a responsible adult. We might be talking about a really small group, but the implications can have massive impact on a community.

Carl: a study of the recreational uses in the North Country in general is a worthwhile topic but there all other kinds of opportunities throughout the region.

Paul: there are a lot of misconceptions that are going on here. I have been involved since the beginning. This is about State Roads, not town roads. The state is exempt from all town planning. The trail head they are talking about is an old B&M railroad station. That was later turned into a rail trail. The town was approached by local people about gaining access to the rail trail. The town held a public hearing, the state was there. The public was invited. The people named in the lawsuit were invited. I called on each of those named in the lawsuit to speak at the meeting. So, the project came through. There have been no burglaries, some littering.

I was the last to submit a letter of submit to the state on the roadway access.

Michelle: I attended that meeting. 90/10 in favor. Some people appeared afraid to speak up.

Paul: I spoke to them prior to the meeting and insured their protection. When you take an oath as a selectmen, you have a duty. Have seen the entire population of the valley reduced by half. 4 businesses were due to close. So, we proceeded. People now claim that site plans should have been prepared, but there was no power to do that due to it being state land and a state highway. All the other cases brought to Gorham has been dismissed and this is the only one to go through. It will be appealed.

I believe that there are people who are interested in impacting the entire economy of the eastern part of the valley. Now the question is how do we proceed? The entire situation could

have been relieved 8 years ago if they were not tied up in legislation. I just reviewed the plans for Route 16 to relocate traffic. This will take activity from one area to another. This will be a better way to alleviate traffic and noise and dust. I believe that this is not about those issues. I believe we are at with OHRVs where snowmobiles were 50 years ago. Lawsuits are definitely an issue to be addressed.

2020 took everyone by surprise. I was surprised by the amount of recreational use, motorized and non-motorized. So much abuse on the trails and littering. I don't think its one segment of tourism, it's the entire tourism economy. We can't afford to get rid an entire segment of the tourism economy.

A committee has been put together to study motorized use throughout the entire state. Up here we cannot keep doing the same old same old. I don't have a problem discussing this.

Ray: Thank you Paul for what you had to say. I can say that your parallel about the economic impacts. Both Paul and I started years ago trying to get help get the numbers to accurately understand the situation. I previously worked at a tavern and it was noticeable the improvement of the economy and activity. We have worked with our community to establish ordinances and regulations. The meetings we've had, we have had 80-90 people. We have had consistent numbers at our public hearings. We have had significant changes with our ordinances due to input.

I hope we don have to get into the issue, and I hope one lawsuit doesn't change everything. I know we need to tend to the business of strengthening our communities.

Paul: One thing our committee can do is to strengthen the information sharing and the planning that needs to be done.

- getting exact counts of how many people are using the highways to get to the trails.
- Getting accurate counts of registrations
- Trying to keep track of local use, motel use, rentals.

How do we get a grasp on motel use? Or AirBnB use, etc. Clubs and other groups have information on this. But the town does not have it.

We are starting to see the cowboys are the people who are getting information second hand from rental agencies and other sources.

North Country Council can help get information and data to improve our activities and better plan for the future. I propose that we a way to work with NCC, the Trails Committee, and other groups. Help them all get the information shared (data, zoning ordinances, rules, regulations), And then we provide people with all the trails that exist, the rules that need to be followed, etc.

If we can get to that point, we can alleviate some of the tension and headaches. Let's figure out a way to work on this together.

Robert: NCC should be able to help with these efforts. What I would like to propose is a collective of towns to do impact studies, economic studies and not depend on the federal level.

Fully agree about the comparison to the early days of snowmobiling. There is a natural attrition with any industry. We are leaving the juvenile stage of OHRVs and getting more mature with how they are used. Some of this will go away on its, what we need to do is capitalize, determine how our communities will benefit from this.

As a community of Coos (North Country), how can we pool our resources.

Michelle: One additional point: lets talk about global warming, how do we make machines that don't pollute the environment.

Chuck: Was at a committee of the non-motorized users. Big discussion about the trash and impacts that have been brought on by the pandemic. They were craving data to better understand the situation and manage it.

7. Regular Updates
 - a. NCC Projects

Nick provided a brief update: TYP projects, Traffic Counts, And getting up to speed with some of the prior projects.

- b. Scenic Byways

Carl: Byway enhancement awards are happening again. Be sure to nominate projects for your community.

For the first time in 7 years, the Federal government has released funding for enhancing and improving our byways. Letter of Interest has been submitted, and the grant application is being prepared. Mike Bruno from Bethlehem is the new Chair of the byways committee. He literally wrote the book on North Country Byways.

- c. Communities

Michelle: We have discussed with local DOT, improvement to the top of Gorham Hill, where there is difficulty making a left turn on/off Randolph Hill Road. Not a lot of headway thus far. It is a hazardous intersection. Could possibly be fixed by repainting of lines.

DOT Regional: Bureau of Highway Design has been contacted and they did a tabletop review of MUTCD regarding lane striping and widening (AASHTO). They analyzed it a bit. Given the truck lanes, there was not enough room to provide for a turning lane. They should have contacted

someone at the town with that information. Might be good to consider it for TYP application. It has to do with the merging tapers and the proper lengths.

Paul: Question for Phil, you guys did a wonderful job on 116. Will there be any further work along the embankment?

Phil: hoping that the Gorham project is still in there. We did as much as we felt comfortable doing, next step would be for the TYP to go through and provide addition shoulders and drainage.

Gorham is proceeding with Grant application for rebuilding sidewalks on Rt 2 and Rt 16.

Provided a list of 10 historical markers sent to Carl. Actually, will be forwarding it to Mike Bruno.

We are looking at all aspects of tourism for Gorham. Looking at pushing the idea of separating non-motorized and motorized trails. In talks to redesign the 4 trailheads in town. Especially for the non-motorized

Possibly would be a sidewalk project AND a trails project. Link it into the Cross NH Adventure Trail. Want to make Gorham a more friendly EV and non-motorized community. Toyota garage is the first to put a EV charger in place.

Robin: Lancaster will have to do a traffic study to discuss EV charging stations near historical society.

Never finished Summer Street rebuild, should discuss it due to commercial properties on the end of the street.

Northumberland: Not necessarily a project. I wrote the grant for the covered bridge in town. Cannot get state aid funds due to non-vehicular status. Need to find some sort of funding to cover the project. Will be taking over GRAT (Groveton Regional Action Team) to write grants and administer grants.

Chuck: Some interest in funds coming in for Nansen Ski jump.

Carl: Sugar Hill has a red listed bridge, have had previous conversations about this. Excited to see the federal funding (BIL) can help cost construction costs for improvements of red listed bridges. Will plan to relocate the bridge. It is a big deal for a small town.

Clayton: Stratford is economically strapped regarding funding for town roads. But we are putting in a Solar Array (hopefully). If that happens, we plan to put in an EV charging station. Do not have a site that is entirely appropriate for the VW settlement. But still plan on it.

8. Other Business

Phil: Just from a DOT overall perspective, we have a significant shortfall in staffing, much like everywhere else. Last I heard, we have 17% vacancy. Highway maintenance is 20%. At district level, we have about 22% vacancy. It is a significant shortfall and is impacting our operations at this point. We can generally run a 5-10% vacancy rate and maintain productivity but with all time off, etc. Maintain an effective 30% vacancy rate.

Crews are doing their best to pick track and keep up with maintenance operations. If things don't change dramatically, can expect to see substantial impact to highway maintenance (Seasonal especially) for the foreseeable future.

Major projects: Pike won both of our bids, will be doing quite a bit of work throughout our region. Bridge Maintenance crew will be doing work on red listed Bridges. Culverts, underdrain, tree canopy work is underway.

Ray: Are paving plans being impacted by fuel pricing?

Phil: Yes, they are. But contingencies have been built in so there was some foresight. It has alleviated cutting paving sections.

Michelle: In Randolph (route 2). We have a significant parking lot for Appalachia. Have impacts from parking, overuse, etc. Would like to collaborate with WMNF, DOT, Town, etc. to possibly install a outhouse (vault toilet) for the trailhead. The town does not want to overstep and is willing to work with anyone that needs to be involved.

Clayton: Does raise an interesting idea. To include with RTP. The only rest area in Coos County is the one between Stewartstown and Colebrook. Not sure if the state operates any other rest area in the north country.

Phil: The rest stops were turned over to DNCR. Littleton and Colebrook both were shut down for a time this past winter. Shelburne was closed down.

Clayton: It might be worth considering in the plan (rest areas and stops).

Doug: it is a hot button issue in Littleton: people having shut down their bathrooms during the pandemic. Major discussions about Riverfront Park and welcome center/community center having public bathrooms.

Carl: Vancouver Island, rest stop away from towns had bathroom and EV charging stations.

Stan: Shelburne Property has been sold, has not been sold. There is a lot of confusion on this point and contention. There is also deterioration of the quality of the location. We see it as critical for someone coming into the state to have a place to stop and show them what is there.

9. Final Thoughts

10. Adjourn

Clayton motioned to adjourn
Roger Seconded.
Motion Carried.

Meeting Adjourned at 2:40PM.

****Indicates vote of the TAC is required**

An in-person quorum (7) is needed in order to conduct any votes, so please plan to attend if you are willing and able. If this is not possible, please use the information on the following page to attend virtually. While attending in-person, please wear a face covering for the duration of the meeting and keep a safe distance between yourself and others. Thank you.

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