Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC)
600 East Main Street, Richmond
July 31, 2019
10: 00 am

Minutes

Members Participating:
 John McGlennon, Chair
 Brad Sheffield (Arrived at 10:07)
 Brian Smith
 Cindy Mester
 Kate Mattice
 Tom Fox

Members Not Present:
 Jim Dyke
 Marty Williams

1. Call to Order / Introductions (10:03 am) –Chairman John McGlennon called the meeting to order and said that the purpose of the meeting was to provide the TSDAC with a briefing on the implementation on the formulas. Jennifer DeBruhl told the TSDAC that the video streaming was not working but that those participating on line should hear the audio and be able to see the presentation. She said that the presentation would provide a recap of FY20 and give a look ahead to FY21.

2. Recap of FY20 Process Outcomes and Recommendation for FY21-Jennifer DeBruhl, DRPT

   Jennifer DeBruhl gave her presentation. The following discussion points were noted.

   a. Jennifer DeBruhl reviewed the scoring of the State of Good Repair projects and asked if there were any questions.

      i. Kate Mattice asked about the number of applications submitted, which was lower than expected. She asked if the lower number could be attributed to a packaging issue. She asked if applicants had put too much into one application. She asked if the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) had any feedback, good or bad, on the packaging of applications. Jennifer DeBruhl said that DRPT expects package applications and is prepared to break them into line items. She said that in the next cycle of applications, applicants will be able to input the VIN number for a vehicle which would populate applications.

ii.   John McGlennon asked about the total number of applications and if that number reflected the number of applications received, or the total number of line items received from all applications. Jennifer DeBruhl clarified that it was the total number of line items.

iii. John McGlennon said that Jennifer DeBruhl had said that applications were down this year but expected to be higher next year. He asked her how DRPT knew to expect more applications next year. Jennifer DeBruhl said that DRPT looks at the TransAM data set. She said that the lower number of applications could be attributed to a lull in the cycle, or that transit agencies were waiting to see what happened with the first round of applications through MERIT.

iv.   Tom Fox asked if DRPT had done a comparison of this year's grants over last year's. Jennifer DeBruhl said that Cambridge Systematics had applied the new methodology to the FY17 applications when the program was being developed. She said that they did not have as much information as they had with the actual applications but that it came out about the same. Jennifer Mitchell said there was a very clean line this year in what got funded and what didn't, with 87% of what was applied for being awarded.

v.   John McGlennon asked if there was "roughness" to the program. Jennifer DeBruhl said that there was. She said that a shortfall of the current system is that it does not tie grants back to the asset management system and that is something DRPT is working on that will help with predicting future needs.

vi.   Cindy Mester asked if there was a way to get a scatter graph of the projected SGR needs, with the actual needs superimposed. Jennifer DeBruhl said that DRPT could provide something that reflected that graphically.

vii. Tom Fox noted that it was tough for administrative technology to score high. Jennifer DeBruhl agreed that it is hard for those assets to score well under this program, but that agencies may be able to pick those up since other assets are being funded at a much higher match rate.

viii. Brian Smith said that technology continues to be a challenge because some of the measures are harder to define. Brian Smith said he would like to see information on the mix of applications that were funded. He said that he was surprised that a score of 44 was the cutoff for funding and thought it would be much higher.

ix.   Jennifer DeBruhl said that all scores are posted on the website for transparency. She said that there was a very obvious break this year, but that could be in a different place in a different year. Major Expansion projects scores are posted using a score card, similar to SMART SCALE.

x.   Brian Smith asked if there was room in the program to deal with "equipment failure" or other unexpected needs when an asset has not technically reached the end of its useful life. Jennifer DeBruhl said that there was an example of that in this year's applications. A transit provider had purchased cameras from a company that closed and the onboard cameras could no longer be serviced and were therefore obsolete before the end of their useful life. This was taken into consideration in their score. She said that DRPT is willing to work with transit agencies to document those unique needs.

xi.   John McGlennon asked if the 36 applications that were not funded were spread out across different agencies. Jennifer DeBruhl said that they were generally

spread out, but that Greater Lynchburg Transit Company had the most that were not funded. She said that GLTC had applied early for replacement buses, but those buses will do well in the next cycle. Once the SGR backlog is cleared then the scoring methodology can be adjusted to support "just in time" applications.

xii. Kate Mattice said that it was great that no substantive changes were being suggested after the first round. She thinks agencies didn't know what data was needed, which may have been why they did not apply. Director Mitchell said she thinks it is also a reflection of the availability of SMART SCALE and other sources of funds that have been used to fund projects that DRPT was expecting to fund.

xiii. John McGlennon asked if there was any indication that localities were thinking about expanding transit. Jennifer DeBruhl said that it varies across the state. There has been discussion about it in Richmond. She said there are still areas of the state where ridership is good, but that don't have local support for transit. Director Mitchell said that the WMATA bus transformation project, that would shift transit away from metro buses and to the localities, would be interesting to watch.

xiv. Kate Mattice asked why a transit agency would apply for funding through Smartscale instead of MERIT, given that it is way more competitive and oversubscribed. Jennifer Mitchell said that SMART SCALE projects are funded at 100%, and funding through MERIT is 68% for SGR and 50% for major expansion. Jennifer DeBruhl said that some agencies apply for both. DRPT works with OIPI to weave both applications together and make funding recommendations. The CTB has used the transit capital program to free up SMART SCALE funding. Jennifer DeBruhl said that agencies are looking for the best fit for what they are trying to do with a specific project. Jennifer Mitchell encouraged CTAV and VTA to encourage transit agencies to apply for Federal funds, to help free up state funding. Jennifer DeBruhl said that DRPT can help agencies apply for Federal funding. Cindy Mester said that is important because the applications are complicated.

b. Jennifer DeBruhl reviewed the recent outreach activity to address Cindy Mester's question earlier in the presentation about outreach. She said that 6 or 7 workshops were done around the state when the agency was rolling out the capital program, along with follow up webinars. She said that the agency is looking for ways to reach out to the broader transportation community between now and February 1st. She said that DRPT has become more engaged up front in what is being applied for and is planning to continue doing 6 or 7 workshops that will be more targeted and focused.

i. Cindy Mester asked what message is being given to transit providers so that there are not the same data cleanup issues in the next round of applications. Jennifer DeBruhl said that DRPT is currently going back to agencies asking them to clean up their asset management data and is reaching out to those agencies specifically that had issues. Agencies are now going into the system to do their regular updates of age and mileage. Cindy Mester said it is good so they will not update things incorrectly.

ii. Director Mitchell said that DRPT decided not to move up the deadlines for applications. She encouraged agencies with major capital applications coming to start working with DRPT now.

c. Jennifer DeBruhl reviewed the recommendations beyond FY21. She said that DRPT hopes that asset scoring will become more automated. As the State of Good Repair backlog decreases the agency hopes to get to a point of "just in time" funding. The following discussion points were noted.

    i. Cindy Mester asked if there was an estimated guess for when the backlog could be cleared. Jennifer DeBruhl said that the agency has five years to get through the strategic plans, which will focus on asset management and should begin to provide more information on the backlog. Cindy Mester asked if that means that in the next 5 years we should be closer to looking at "just in time" replacement.

d. Jennifer DeBruhl reviewed the Operating Process and Outcomes. The following comments were noted.

    i. Brian Smith said that ridership is down around the country. He said that performance is about efficiency and effectiveness and what you are putting out on the street for service. He said HRT cannot control how many riders they have. He said that HRT had actually reduced their budget. He said that through the strategic plan they will focus on design and performance to go to the right places and focus on ridership.

    ii. Jennifer DeBruhl discussed the commuter rail sizing metric PMT (Passenger Miles Traveled). Kate Mattice said that she did not remember anyone other than VRE having to provide PMT. Jennifer DeBruhl said that no one, including VRE, has had to report PMT to DRPT. DRPT used information from the National Transit Database (NTD). She said that agencies required to report PMT to NTD will now have to report it to DRPT to use for the commuter sizing metric to compare VRE's PMT to other agencies.

    iii. Brian Smith asked if there are service characteristics of commuter rail that make PMT overweight and asked if PMT is going to be off the charts for VRE because of their service characteristics. Jennifer DeBruhl said that is how PMT ended up in the commuter rail sizing metric to begin with. Director Mitchell said that is not the only commuter rail sizing metric, representing only 1/3 of the calculation.

    iv. Brian Smith asked if there was anything that DRPT could do that it isn't doing already to help provide predictability, such as providing ridership data on a quarterly basis. Brad Sheffield said that DRPT used to share ridership data but has not done so since November of 2017. Jennifer DeBruhl said that technically that data is supposed to be shared by transit agencies every month but they are not always doing that. The data used to be pulled out of OLGA and sent out. It was not a good data set. Jennifer DeBruhl said that DRPT doesn't get consistent reporting and can't validate the data monthly so it is not in anyone's interest to put something out there that is inaccurate.

    v. Kate Mattice said that the three year rolling average helps to smooth out bumps in the program. In Northern Virginia transit will be very impacted by the shutdowns which will affect ridership numbers.

    vi. Director Mitchell reminded TSDAC members that the biggest impact to what agencies get is in the overall size of the program, based on revenues.

    vii. Cindy Mester said she did not want data under reported. Director Mitchell said that DRPT wants to be as transparent as possible but need people to report data. Cindy Mester encouraged VTA to encourage providers to report.

viii. Chairman McGlennon asked about slide 21 which mentioned the increase in available operating assistance by 2.5 million. He asked if that was a trend the agency anticipated continuing. Jamie Motley from DRPT said that DRPT will have better revenue estimates in August. He said that as projects are completed in the capital program, money will be deobligated and added to the operating budget. Jamie said he will have gross revenue estimates at the end of August that can be sent out to the TSDAC.

ix. Chairman McGlennon asked if the 3 million dollars of transition assistance was used. Jamie Motley said about 2.1 million was used. Chairman McGlennon asked if there would be money in the future to deal with unanticipated short falls. Director Mitchell said that deobligated funds can be moved to the operating budget to help buffer against unanticipated short falls.

e. Jennifer DeBruhl reviewed Special Programs. The following comments were noted.

i. Tom Fox asked how the Senior Transportation program fits into the Special Programs. Neil Sherman said that DRPT is currently evaluating the use of the program. They are small grants and DRPT is trying to promote the program more.

ii. Brad Sheffield said that the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation is creating more grants that are senior specific that could tie into DRPT programs. Jennifer DeBruhl said that the state's population is aging and that if funding goes to the same projects year after year there is a broader base of the state without access to the program.

f. Jennifer DeBruhl reviewed Transit Strategic Plans. Tom Fox asked if the MPO should get the state funding for strategic plans or if the transit agency should do that. Jennifer DeBruhl said that it is the transit agencies inventory so that she would recommend that the transit agency probably be the ones applying for funding. Jennifer DeBruhl did confirm that MPOs are eligible to apply for the funding if that makes sense to a region.

3. Wrap Up/Next Steps-TSDAC Look Ahead

Jennifer DeBruhl said that the next meeting will be held in December. DRPT will be working on studies on the Economic Impacts of Transit and a Needs Assessment study that they will be briefed on in December. In Summer 2020 a TSDAC Meeting will be held to review the outcomes of the FY21 application cycle. The following comments were made.

a. Cindy Mester asked if the TSDAC will compare to FY20 as well when they see the FY21 data. Jennifer DeBruhl said that they would.

b. Cindy Mester asked what the next steps were with the studies and if they would go to the CTB. Jennifer Mitchell said that it would. She said that the needs assessment is particularly important to justify continued investment in transit. She said that a lot has changed since the Revenue Advisory Board and there are now a lot more funding sources for transit.

c. Kate Mattice said that transit agencies are putting their legislative agendas now. The earlier transit agencies know the outlook the better. Anything that can be provided so they don't appear to be crying wolf would be extremely helpful. Transit agencies want to ask for the right things, at the right time, with the right data. Jamie Motley said that transit agencies can look at the 5-year capital program which shows anticipated needs and revenue and shows shortfalls in the out years. Jennifer DeBruhl said that the 5-year

capital budget does not account for prioritization. Transit agencies provide their own 5 year budgets.

d. Director Mitchell reiterated to the TSDAC that funding is based on good data and encouraged members to take a role in speaking to industry colleagues to make sure quality of submissions is good. DRPT has ramped up QA and QC, but needs transit agencies to also focus on data quality.

e. Jennifer DeBruhl clarified that all assets need to go into the asset inventory even if DRPT didn't fund the initial purchase, because DRPT may eventually provide funding to replace it.

f. John McGlennon asked if there was any information on how things are going at the Federal level. Kate Mattice said there is a lot of uncertainty. She said that nothing will happen until there is urgency and that extensions are likely.

g. Brad Sheffield asked if the final formula could be run again. Jennifer DeBruhl said that they ran FY20 with the transition formula and recommended formula. DRPT can share that information, but she reminded the TSDAC that those numbers are only as good as the trends that were calculated for FY20.

h. Cindy Mester reiterated how important data was for transit.

4. Public Comment-

a. Danny Plaugher introduced himself. He said that people know him as the Director of Virginians for High Speed Rail. He will begin splitting his time with VTA and assisting with data collection. He will be tracking NTD data and working on calculating PMT to assist with the pro transit message.

b. Director Mitchell announced that Blacksburg Transit was named a Top North American Transit System by APTA for systems under 4 million. They will get the award at APTA's annual conference in October.

5. The meeting adjourned at 12:10.