

## MINUTES

### **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL December 14, 2023**

The Regional Transportation Council (RTC) met on Thursday, December 14, 2023, at 1:00 pm in the Transportation Council Room of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG). The following members or representatives were present: Daniel Alemán, Bruce Arfsten, Steve Babick, Rick Bailey, Adam Bazaldua, Elizabeth M. Beck, Gyna Bivens, Alan Blaylock, Joel Burns (representing Raj Narayanan), J.D. Clark, Ceason Clemens, Michael D. Crain, Theresa Daniel, Jeff Davis, Andy Eads, Michael Evans, Gary Fickes, TJ Gilmore, Raul H. Gonzalez, Barry L. Gordon, Ron Jensen, Brandon Jones, Brad LaMorgese, Cara Mendelsohn John B. Muns, Matthew Porter (representing Chris Schulmeister), Manny Ramirez, Jim R. Ross, David Salazar, Gary Slagel, Andy Sommerman (representing Clay Jenkins), Jeremy Tompkins, Scott Turnage (representing Oscar Trevino), William Tsao, Chad West, and Cheryl Williams (representing Duncan Webb).

Others present at the meeting were: Jason Abair, Angela Alcedo, Vickie Alexander, Matthew Amend, Micah Baker, Natalie Bettger, Lauren Betz, Brandi Bird, Alberta Blair, Molly Carroll, Don Carroll, Angie Carson, Curt Cassidy, Lori Clark, Dina Colarosa, Jeff Coulter, Dawn Dalrymple, Caryl DeVries, Elijah Dorminy, Mike Eastland, Chad Edwards, Colby Frantz, David Fruth, Eve Gersh, Donzell Gipson, Rebekah Gongora, Christie Gotti, Iris Gutierrez, Heather Harrington, Tony Hartzel, Joel James, Amy Johnson, Devia Joshi, Maya Joyner, Dan Kessler, Gus Khankarli, Ken Kirkpatrick, Chris Klaus, Dan Lamers, Bradley LeCureaux, Eron Linn, Stanford Lynch, Dillon Marony, Frances Mascarenas, Gabriel Medina, Erin Moore, Michael Morris, Jenny Narvaez, Jeff Neal, Mark Nelson, Donald Parker, Michael Peters, John Polster, James Powell, Vercie Pruitt-Jenkins, Andrei Radu, Randy Richardson, Sarah Rogers, Kelly Rouse, Connor Sadro, Toni Stehling, David Tidwell, Jonathan Toffer, Glen Whitley, Kylie Wieden, Amanda Wilson, Brian Wilson, Karla Windsor, Glennis Woolridge, and Susan Young.

1. **Opportunity for Public Comment on Today's Agenda:** This item allows members of the public an opportunity to comment on agenda items. Regional Transportation Council Chair Gyna Bivens asked if there were any public comments. No members of the public chose to speak at the meeting or provide written comments.
2. **Approval of November 9, 2023, Minutes:** The minutes of the November 9, 2023, meeting were approved as submitted in Electronic Item 2. Cara Mendelsohn (M); Adam Bazaldua (S). The motion passed unanimously.
3. **Consent Agenda:** The following items were included on the Consent Agenda.
  - 3.1. **Modifications to the Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025 Unified Planning Work Program**  
A recommendation for Regional Transportation Council (RTC) approval of modifications to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 and FY2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) was requested. Direction for staff to administratively amend the Transportation Improvement Program and other administrative/planning documents, as appropriate, to reflect the approved modifications was also sought.

**3.2. Dallas-Fort Worth High-Speed Rail Additional Funding for National Environmental Policy Act Consultant**

**3.3 Regional Transportation Council Local Funds for North Texas Innovation Alliance Urban Resilience Fellowship Program**

Staff requested a recommendation for Regional Transportation Council (RTC) approval of \$18,000 in RTC Local funds to support three problem statements submitted through the North Texas Innovation Alliance (NTXIA) Urban Resilience Fellowship Program.

Michael Morris pulled Consent Agenda Item 3.2 at the request of Councilmember Mendelsohn and a motion was made to approve Items 3.1 and 3.3 as provided in the packet. Jeremy Tompkins. (M); Theresa Daniel (S). The motion passed unanimously.

Dan Lamers of NCTCOG presented Item 3.2, Dallas-Fort Worth High-Speed Rail Additional Funding for National Environmental Policy Act Consultant. Dan noted that staff was requesting approval from the Regional Transportation Council to adjust the scope and budget on the consultant contract for the high-speed rail connection study between Dallas, Fort Worth and Arlington. The adjustment would allow staff flexibility throughout the process to respond as needed regarding various refinement and alignment alternatives as it pursues a finding of No Significant Impact through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. The study is entering phase 2 of the NEPA process. Once the formal process for Phase 2 begins, staff will have 12 months to complete the phase and it will be necessary to respond quickly when issues arise. Dan requested Regional Transportation Council approval for additional funding (not to exceed 10 percent of current contract or \$1,099,657 million in Surface Transportation Block Grant Program funds) for a consultant contract to complete preliminary engineering and environmental documentation required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The request also included direction for staff to administratively amend other planning documents as necessary. Cara Mendelsohn expressed concern regarding the depiction of the high-speed rail project in the presentation being shown as elevated in the city of Dallas, but below grade in the cities of Fort Worth and Arlington. She noted that Dallas wants the project to be below grade in Dallas and that the area planned for the project is in an area of significant investment with the planned new convention center costing several billion dollars. She added that the area must be walkable and Dallas will not accept trains running through the area. She explained that she asked for the item to be pulled from the consent agenda because she feels that if over \$1.1 million is needed for engineering to determine below grade for Dallas, it is unnecessary. Councilmember Mendelsohn stated that she would be happy to amend the agreement if more money is needed because it is a very complicated area with utilities and other transit, and tunneling expertise is needed. She reiterated that the project must be below ground, and it is unacceptable for it to be at grade. Regarding the Trinity Railway Express (TRE) line which already connects Fort Worth and Dallas, Councilmember Mendelsohn noted that previously an amendment was made by a former Dallas Councilmember and RTC member that would not permit a stop in Arlington on the TRE unless Arlington has a significant transit investment as a member of a transit agency and to date that has not happened. She asked how it could be called high speed rail when it's not possible for a train to get to a high speed between Dallas and Arlington, and the next segment from Arlington to Fort Worth, when there are not enough miles to get to a high speed. Michael Morris suggested that the discussion stay on the agenda topic. He noted that Dallas seems to be interested in a tunnel option. He noted that he has asked the Hunts several times over the last four to six months for a formal request regarding a tunnel option but has yet to receive it. Michael noted that under State law the most the

contract could be amended would be is 10 percent, anything above would be in violation of State law. Because Councilmember Mendelsohn's request is asking staff to get tunnel experts to answer the question of can and how to get a tunnel beneath the Trinity River, Michael noted that if staff's request is approved and a request is received, staff will be able to pursue an answer regarding a tunnel. The votes of the Regional Transportation Council require a one-seat ride between Fort Worth and Dallas. For a one-seat ride, the City of Dallas by definition, has a high-speed rail station to Houston that is seven stories off the ground. Also, it was recently stated that the Amtrak Hub will come into Union Station and NCTCOG staff has been instructed to get people from the high-speed rail station to the Union Station to interface with a new Amtrak line to Atlanta. With approval of staff's request and a request regarding a tunnel option, the monies will be available to get the tunnel experts to determine the viability of a tunnel beneath the river. Michael explained that all other questions have previously been answered at least once and suggested that staff bring back a comprehensive presentation that will update everyone regarding the history of the project, including a recent presentation to the City of Arlington on this topic. Councilmember Mendelsohn requested that the project line on the first page of the presentation (Electronic Item 3.2) that indicates an elevated station in blue between Grand Prairie and Dallas be changed to red so that there is an understanding of what the City of Dallas is requesting. Michael explained that the color cannot be changed because that was not the topic on the day's agenda. He added that the color would change in 12 to 13 months when the Environmental Impact Study is completed but the study has not started yet. Following much discussion, a motion was made to approve \$1,099,657 million in Surface Transportation Block Grant Program funds (as a "not to exceed" amount) and Transportation Development Credits to increase the consultant budget (not to exceed 10 percent of original contract budget) for the Dallas-Fort Worth High-Speed Transportation Connections Study to complete preliminary engineering and environmental documentation required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The action included direction for staff to administratively amend other planning documents as well.

Elizabeth Beck (M); Jim Ross (S). Motion passed unanimously.

4. **Orientation to Agenda/Director of Transportation Report:** Michael Morris highlighted items in the Director of Transportation Report. Michael Morris announced that NCTCOG won \$500,000 in Planning funds in the Corridor ID program and recognized Dan Lamers and Brendon Wheeler for their efforts. He recognized NCTCOG staff members Jeff Neal and Karla Windsor, and City of Dallas staff members Gus Khankarli and Molly Carroll for their work on East Lancaster and Martin Luther King Blvd. Michael referenced other items on the Director's report. The October 2024 RTC meeting may be rescheduled due to the Texas Municipal League conference. He asked the Council members to send Toni Stehling suggested dates, preferable Thursdays which are best. Regarding the letter Chair Bivens sent to TxDOT on its rulemaking for metropolitan planning organizations, no follow up has been received. Councilmember Cara Mendelsohn asked if transportation dollars normally set for bridges and roads would be offset for broadband initiatives. Michael Morris mentioned that the fear of technical people is money is going to rural and not urban.
5. **Safety Program Implementation of Innovative Ideas to Reduce Youth Fatalities Due to Motor Vehicle Crashes:** Natalie Bettger requested Regional Transportation Council (RTC) approval for \$4 million in Regional Toll Revenue (RTR) funds to be added to the RTC Safety Program for the implementation of innovative ideas to reduce youth fatalities due to motor vehicle crashes. In 2021, only 12 percent of licensed drivers within the State of Texas are under the age of 25 years old and account for nearly 19 percent of fatalities

in motor vehicle crashes. This disproportionate risk can be explained by several causes including inexperience, critical errors in driving decisions, distracted driving, speeding, as well as substance abuse. NCTCOG would like to partner with industry experts to implement innovative ideas to reduce youth fatalities associated with motor vehicle crashes. These funds will be utilized to implement ideas that are generated through a Call for Partners. Elizabeth Beck asked if drag racing and burnouts would be addressed. Rick Bailey commented that because of the lack of Departments of Public Safety in our cities, the cities are struggling. Michael Morris noted that \$7 million has been identified for speed enforcement and \$2 million for speed education, therefore combining education and enforcement.

Elizabeth Beck. (M); Theresa Daniel (S). The motion passed unanimously.

6. **Additional Professional Services for the Cotton Belt Trail:** Karla Windsor requested approval of funds for additional design services associated with the Cotton Belt Trail. The Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Silver Line rail project is coordinating an approximate 26-mile parallel regionally significant Cotton Belt Regional Veloweb Trail that will provide pedestrian and bicycle access to rail stations in seven cities across three counties. Construction of the Cotton Belt Trail is being managed by DART and will occur in phases as funding is available. Engineering design for the Trail initiated in January 2021. Additional design services, which were not anticipated with the initial negotiated consultant scope of work, are required to integrate the trail with the Silver Line Rail project and to adequately complete the plans that will be issued for construction. Staff requested \$4 million of Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funds with 800,000 Regional Transportation Development Credits for contingency funding of additional professional design services. The design process identified additional unanticipated constraints and alternatives needed. Additional engineering design is needed to adequately complete the plans that will be issued for construction. Local governments will coordinate directly with DART and the North Central Texas Council of Governments concerning any changes related to design and ensure there are no unauthorized changes impacting the project budget or timeframe for project implementation. Karla Windsor provided the history and timeline of the project. Cara Mendelsohn will send a letter regarding design concerns on the trail.

Cara Mendelsohn (M); Theresa Daniel (S). The motion passed unanimously.

7. **Update on Dallas-Fort Worth Air Quality Improvement Program:** Lori Clark provided an update on NCTCOG's efforts to develop a Dallas-Fort Worth Air Quality Improvement Plan, including the status of a regional greenhouse gas emission inventory and stakeholder engagement to identify and prioritize regional strategies. NCTCOG received a \$1 million planning grant from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) program, which was created by the Inflation Reduction Act. CPRG planning grants support development and implementation of plans for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other harmful air pollution of local concern. NCTCOG is using this funding to develop a Dallas-Fort Worth Air Quality Improvement Plan that will outline strategies to reduce emissions of ozone-forming pollutants, fine particulate matter, and greenhouse gases across all 16 counties of the NCTCOG planning area. Work is being done collaboratively between NCTCOG's Transportation, Environment and Development, and Workforce Solutions departments. The first major deliverable due to EPA under this grant is a Priority Climate Action Plan, which must be submitted by March 1, 2024. This plan must include a greenhouse gas emission inventory and a quantified list of strategies that will

be implemented to improve air quality throughout the NCTCOG region. NCTCOG is currently seeking input on potential strategies from stakeholders across the region through two surveys, one for organizations who would be in a role to implement projects, and one for residents to convey areas of greatest interest and concern. This feedback will assist staff in prioritizing strategies for quantification and inclusion in the plan submitted to EPA. A series of “open house” style public meetings is underway. Upon plan submittal, NCTCOG intends to begin drafting a grant proposal to seek funding from the EPA CPRG Implementation Grants program, which can be used to help pay for implementation of strategies included in the Priority Climate Action Plan. The Implementation Grants application is due by April 1, 2024. Lori provided the anticipated schedule for this project. Flyers were distributed to the RTC at the meeting, and are also available in English and Spanish. Chair Bivens asked the question that if we had this earlier, would it have helped with the West Dallas smelter. Michael Morris responded that it would have helped with the West Dallas smelter issue. Rick Bailey commented that projects like biosolids farming should be moved further away from here.

8. **Advanced Transportation Technology and Innovation Program:** Natalie Bettger provided an overview of the grant and possible project opportunities for a regional application for the 2023-2024 Advanced Transportation Technology and Innovative (ATTAIN) Program. In November 2023, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) issued an announcement for the ATTAIN program proposals that deploy, install, and operate advanced transportation technologies to improve safety, mobility, efficiency, system performance, intermodal connectivity, and infrastructure return on investment. The USDOT will provide funding of up to \$12 million per grant. A 20 percent local match is required. Applications are due to the USDOT by February 2, 2024. Natalie provided a summary and a brief overview of possible regional project opportunities. Natalie provided ATTAIN technologies, Program Goals, Administrations Priorities, DOT Focus Areas, Opportunity Request for Partners, and a Schedule. Staff anticipates bringing a project for action in January. STTC action will also be requested in January.
9. **End of Ozone Season Recap:** Chris Klaus provided a summary of the 2023 ozone season activity and other air quality updates for the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) region. The ozone season is from March 1 to November 30. The end of November concluded another ozone season for the DFW region. The region continues to work towards compliance for both the 2008 and 2015 ozone National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Staff has been tracking the exceedance days at each monitor and will provide a summary of the 2023 ozone season data for the North Central Texas 9- and 10-county nonattainment areas, compare against previous ozone seasons and what the state has modeled. a letter from Governor Greg Abbott to the Environmental Protection Agency, dated October 12, 2023, requesting a voluntary reclassification from moderate to serious nonattainment for the 2015 ozone standard. Likely a result of the regions 2023 design value landing significantly higher than the required 70 parts per billion. A letter was referenced from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) announcing a public hearing and comment period on the proposed DFW State Implementation Plan revisions for severe nonattainment and a 2026 attainment year to be at or below 75 parts per billion. Chris Klaus provided exceedance trends; Ozone design value trends – preliminary; NOx and VOC emissions apportionment; Monitor locations with associated fourth highest value; timeline and milestones – 2015 ozone standard; 2008 ozone standard, and air quality 2.0 – path forward. Rick Bailey commented that the Johnson County location referred to is a TCEQ permitted human waste field. Steve Babick requested we look at other regions to compare.

10. **Progress Reports:** Regional Transportation Council attendance was provided in Electronic Item 10.1.
11. **Other Business (Old or New):** There was no discussion on this item.
12. **Future Agenda Items:** There was no discussion on this item.
13. **Next Meeting:** The next meeting of the Regional Transportation Council is scheduled for Thursday, January 11, 2024, 1:00 pm, at the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

The meeting adjourned at 2:41 pm.