

Rural Planning Organization Meeting
September 26th, 2019
Central Baldwin Annex, Robertsdale, AL

Members Present:

Arelene Mack – Poarch Creek Indians
Richard Spraggins – Mobile County
Brad Wittman – Mobile County
Phillip Mack – Poarch Creek Indians
Vince Beebe – ALDOT
Edwin Perry – ALDOT
John F. Rhodes – SARPC
Jeb Bell – Baldwin County Commission
Katina Taylor – Eastern Shore MPO
Sarah Sislak – Eastern Shore MPO
Jo Davis – Baldwin County Commission

SARPC Staff Present:

Kevin Harrison
Tom Piper
Monica Williamson

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Joe Davis.

The second item on the agenda was the approval of the minutes from the September 21, 2018 meeting. Motion was made by Mr. Richard Spraggins with a second by Commissioner Joe Davis.. Motion passed.

The next item on the agenda was the review and adopt the Fiscal Year 2019 Work Program.

Mr. Piper said this is the Fiscal year 2020 Work Program. This was sent out to everyone a couple of weeks ago. It's basically our budget for what we do for rural areas as far as transportation planning. The purpose of the RPO is to foster communication between ALDOT and local elected officials in the rural areas outside of the MPO areas of Eastern Shore and Mobile. One of the things we do is develop a transportation plan that has a list of projects. Other things we do, recently, we helped the state with the State Transportation Improvement Program. The state does the Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan. Just like the MPOs are doing the 2020-2023 TIP, the state is doing theirs at the same time and we've had public involvement meetings in Mobile, Baldwin, and Escambia Counties. There was a whole long process to go along with that. Montgomery came down and did presentations. That was something that was in our work program. That is in this year's work program. In 2020, there's really no changes except for we're trying to initiate some rural transit in Mobile County outside the urbanized area. We've added that to this work program. We are doing a feasibility study now to see if it's possible to do

something similar to BRATS and we will be able to charge our time on that. That is the only change to the work program this year. Does anyone have any questions?

Mr. Harrison said we do have a potential to do a safety plan for the rural areas and we do have a safety conference at the Grand Hotel next week. ALDOT's Safety Conference. One of the things we have a problem with is that we have access to CARES data, but one thing we have a problem with is how do we publish it and what we would like to do it is create hotspots for our rural communities and then let y'all know where accidents are and what might be able to be done to correct those accidents.

Mr. Piper said that is actually in here also, one of the items addresses that.

Mr. Harrison said we just legally are not allowed to publish where the accidents are.

Mr. Piper said we try to keep the products generalized so there is a lot of flexibility with how we charge our time.

Someone asked is the source of those accidents, first responder reports?

Mr. Harrison said it is called CARES, Critical Analysis Reporting Environment housed by the University of Alabama. Any first responder when they report the accident, they report it and all that data goes immediately into the CARE System which is one of the better in the country and our problem is that we can't publish it. If there's a lot of left turn collisions at an intersection, we can't publish that there is a lot of left turn collisions, we need to do something about that because of the legal issues. We do that for the urban area for Mobile for rear-end collisions for the urban area. For the rural areas, we would like to do that also, what's happening, where are the crashes, how severe are they and how do we fix that.

Mr. Piper said one thing that we can do is we can provide you guys with the information. We just can't make it public.

Mr. Harrison said when we do provide you with the information, that goes into the HSIP, the Highway Safety Improvement Plan. There's 90% federal/10% match money for those projects. There's money available to help with safety issues. I don't know how much. It's competitive. If we identify some of the spots in Escambia County, rural Baldwin and rural Mobile County, that only helps you get funding to fix those problems.

Motion was made by Mr. Richard Spraggins to adopt the work program with a second by Ms. Sarah Sislak. Motion was approved.

The next item on the agenda was to amend the Transportation Plan List of Projects.

Mr. Piper said this was sent out to you. Every four years we update the entire plan. Every year, we update the list of projects in the plan. Usually, we hear back from the cities and county engineers, they tell us what changes they want to make. We did have a few changes this year and they have been added to the list. If there is anything you want to add or see something you want to change, we can amend this subsequent those changes. That's how we usually do this, a lot of people see this and then go back to

their office and say, we really need to change these. We then let everyone know of the changes. There is no funding tied to the project through the RPO so it is basically a for your information. This the locals telling ALDOT, this is what we want to do.

Mr. Harrison said this list is provided to the state as the rural consultation process. In theory, this is what the state should use because it is the community coming together to prioritize the projects. It doesn't always happen, but in theory, that is the idea.

Commissioner Davis asked I see the word improve in Gulf Shores along 59 1 mile east. What does the word improve entail? Adding lanes or improving shoulders?

Mr. Piper said that came from Gulf Shores and they are not here. I don't know exactly, but that is the language they sent.

ALDOT said it could be signals or a turn lane or access management.

Mr. Piper said a lot of times, there will be a corridor study done and that is when they will work out the details.

Mr. Harrison said a lot of these are a wish list like the Mobile Bay Passenger Ferry. It is listed as a potential project, but we've studied that in the past, but until there is an adequate funding source to fund it, it's going to be a visionary type project.

Mr. Piper said again, if you take this back to your office and see something you want changed, we can always add it and then let everyone know that there is a change.

Mr. Spraggins said I am on the last page for Mobile County, that third one down paving Lott Road has already been done.

Mr. Piper said okay.

Mack said Poarch Creek is making some headway on a couple of the projects. In Atmore where you are widening Highway 21. Actually, we don't have any maintenance responsibilities but is something that we would be interested in talking partnerships about and working on grant projects through the tribal grants that some of the other entities are not eligible to apply for. Widening County Road 1, that's called Jack Springs Road locally. It runs right by the Tribal Trust Land, we're in the process of hiring an engineer to design the widening of County Road 1. Also, we would be up to partnerships on that. ON Bell Creek Road, there's a Bell Fork east of 21, but there is a Bell Creek that is north of the reservation, runs close to the hunting club, we are about to have a request for qualifications for an engineer to access the road and the bridge that is on the list here. They are

Mr. Piper asked if that to improve or widen?

Ms. Mack said they are actually going to hire an engineer to look at the entire thing and possibly improve it, widen it and fix that bridge. I don't know exactly until we get someone on board with it.

There are some tribal transportation funds, but will not cover the whole project, but it is something we are actively involved in.

Someone asked what page are you referring to.

Ms. Mack said this is under the Escambia list, page 8.

Mr. Piper said last year there was some talk on the County Road 1 project, that was when Larry White was Commissioner and Vince Calametti was the Southwest Region Engineer, about the county and the state partnering on that project, now that they are both gone, I think it has fallen to the wayside so we need to try and get that set up again. Let Matt know and talk to a commissioner from Escambia County. Who replaced Larry White?

Mr. Rhodes said Wiggins on our Board, not as Commissioner.

Commissioner Davis said two new ones I know because they have been through all of the training.

Mr. Rhodes said Wiggins is on our Board.

Mr. Harrison said Tom, there is a project needed on the Escambia County projects which is the paving of the road at State Lake. If y'all have ever been to State Lake in Escambia County there is a mile of unpaved road to State Lake. It's in a National Forrest, Conecuh National Forrest, but it is a county-maintained road and it is extremely long. We're looking for funds right now to pave that road.

Mr. Rhodes said I have a question. In Escambia County, the Poarch Creek Indians, I think, donated property for the proposed new hospital. Isn't it out there close to the interstate? Could you tell us approximately where it is?

Ms. Mack said it is near the casino. I don't know the exact location. I am here for Amber Alvarez who couldn't be here. The best I know, it is at the interstate close to the hotels and casino.

Mr. Piper said I didn't know that. They are going to build a hospital?

Ms. Mack said my opinion, I have worked in the healthcare field there over 34 years, the best location for it would be where the clinic is. It's a little bit off of I-65 but it is actually reservation trust land. You have more federal funding that could come to a hospital like that, but they are not entertaining that at the moment. That's just Arlene Mack talking. I primarily do grants for the tribe so I know where the funding could be. Poarch Creek is blessed to be a land-based tribe. Some tribes don't have this much land but from a federal standpoint, that would be an optimal site.

Mr. Piper asked if there were any other changes to the list of projects or safety needs that anyone knows about.

Motion to amend the Transportation List of Projects was made by Mr. Edwin Perry with a second by Mr. Richard Spraggins. Motion passed.

The next item on the agenda was a presentation by Mr. Vince Beebe from ALDOT on the update of current and future transportation projects sponsored by ALDOT.

Mr. Beebe said like Tom said, these are our current projects that are either in the planning phase or currently under construction. To give you some background, the urban areas are everything inside the blue area, if there is a project in there, we are not going to talk about it today. We are focusing on projects that are in the Mobile, Baldwin, and Escambia County outside urban areas. Some fall within both and those have a star on the presentation. We did bring some maps today. Believe it or not, going through the office and collecting all the projects in this area, is a task. There are just so many different sources and status sheets that every program has whether it is HSIP, or Maintenance Resurfacing or any other program out there. Trying to accumulate all those programs, I may have missed a project or a few. I hope and didn't miss too many, but if you have any in mind, we can talk about it. Probably be best at the end of the presentation. I have the status sheets and we can see if maybe it is in the urban area or something like that. I am happy to try and answer questions on any of these in a generic sense because of all the different information. Project schedules, I have some dates on here but they are subject to change. We have some construction projects and we can some rain or hurricanes come through and those dates may be moved. Also, on the planning side, we don't know what we are going to run into. We can run into an environmental issue or on top of that, budgets moving or the simple fact of does the area want it. All of that comes into play. Keep in mind, this doesn't include our local transportation and city and county sponsored projects. Projects led by the county or cities, those are not being shown on here. Those projects a lot of time are ATRIP or TAP program funds. You will not see those on here because we are assuming the local agencies know about those inside of their areas.

We will start with our planned projects in Mobile County. The way I divided the presentation is by the County. In the past, we've done it by the funding source, but I realized that because there are so many funding sources, it's not a good way to do it. I can elaborate on some of that. For instance, resurfacing, this is the planning phase. We are looking to do a resurfacing project from State Route 188, Franklin Road to Lakeland Drive and we are hoping to get that in our January letting. When I say that, you will see construction about two to three months after that letting date. That gets it out of the planning phase, gets our steps together, and get the money in the budget, get it through Montgomery, get it let, get it the field and let the contractor build it. That is the current letting date for that one.

Mr. Harrison said the 188 and Franklin Road is in the proximity of Bayou La Batre.

Mr. Beebe said it is to the west and we actually have a project, that one falls partially inside the urban area and we have another project that connects to that that is in the urbanized area that goes to the Bayou La Batre area.

Mr. Harrison said does that have widened shoulders.

Mr. Beebe said I will have to check. I think it has the 2 feet widening on there.

Mr. Piper said that is on the National Bike Route.

Mr. Beebe said questions like that, I may not have all the details, but I have some status sheets and I can check. We have a bridge replacement project with BR funds on US 45 over XXXX Creek. That is going to be interesting job. It's very rural up there so we are going to do an onsite detour. We couldn't detour everyone on dirt roads. We just got that settled how to detour and replace that bridge and get it back on line.

Someone asked if that was moved to a later date.

Mr. Beebe said we are active on that one. I don't think it was moved. We are starting to look at the environmental side of things.

Commissioner Davis asked if you know the age of the bridge.

Mr. Beebe said I don't.

Commissioner Davis said my point is you may need to look at other bridges of the same age to see how many need to be replaced.

Mr. Perry said we have bridge priority list that looks at how bridges are holding up and if it's a structural issue or can still be maintained. We try to keep it current to design standards.

Mr. Beebe said we have our 98 and 158 connection. We've been working on that for several years and it is still on going. It gets into the urbanized area but will go all the way over to the Mississippi line. We are working to get two lanes open right now. That is the priority, but this is the whole project as an overview of 158. We have a lot of those projects on the right-hand side in construction now. We've had some pieces further to the west and we are working to make that connection all the way with at least two lanes. We have basically seven projects. Some are in construction now. Those say let. We have others that we are working on to get plans completed. Acquiring right of way has been a challenge on some of these. That can move those letting dates. Funding, because this is overall, a pretty expensive job. This will hopefully help alleviate and relieve some pressure on the existing 98 if we at least get two lanes going. Then we've got one that kind of falls right in the middle between Mobile and Baldwin County around the Causeway area. I think the urban area had just been updated so I think this may be in the urban area know. We've got that bridge replacement. It's basically just the west bound bridge that we are replacing and we are going to build another bridge to the South of the existing Eastbound. This is a picture of what it will look like at the end. We are excited about that one. We are working right now to hopefully get that one going early next year into letting. We are trying to get our environmental and design wrapped up on that. A very sensitive area for environmental stuff.

We will move to Baldwin County. About Mobile County just in general, if you remember that first slide of the urban area, a lot of projects are in that urban area. In this presentation by far, Mobile County has the fewest number of projects. You will see Baldwin County has more and Escambia County as more in this presentation. A lot of what you will see if resurfacing that we get funds for every year. A lot of times, the way that operates in our office, we're allocated a certain amount of federal funds for resurfacing. We work hard to get those out early in the fiscal year. That's a lot of what our personnel in

our office does. We leave some of the more complex, difficult long-term projects go to consultants, but we are able to get these projects out in 6 to 9 months from when we know about them and get them out to the job. A lot of time, at the end of the year, there is leftover maintenance resurfacing funds around the state. They let us know that. We've been good in our office about pulling another project up and having it ready to go so we can get a few more projects in our area. That's why you see a lot of these projects resurfacing, State Route 181 from South of 98 down to Quail Creek. Resurfacing 59 from north of the Intercoastal Canal Bridge to County Road 12. We've got them all listed at the end of this year. The 31 job to Escambia County Line, we are looking at February. Another 59 job in North Baldwin County at the end of the year there. Then we've got one of our major projects ongoing, this is the Waterways Connector from Foley Beach Express down to 180 and it is going to have our new roadway and a bridge. We are starting, right now the plan is just for a two lane with the ultimate idea of four lanes in the future. Hopefully we can get a two-lane route going connected to State Route 180 to hopefully alleviate some of the pressure on the Island.

We'll move to the Escambia County projects. This is the area that I know the least about as far as roadways, but I did bring some maps if we need to pinpoint some of these.

Ms. Sislak asked if the letting dates were for construction or if some were for design.

Mr. Beebe said those are the dates that we hope to have them let to construction. The plans will be done. They will be bid and let by the contractor. After that, two to three months, you will actually see construction. That is kind of our end goal deadline inside our office, trying to meet these letting dates as best we can. We are always adjusting those schedules based on what is happening inside the project. It is good bit of balancing schedules to make sure we are hitting letting dates and moving projects as we need to. Here again, more resurfacing jobs. State Route 21 near the casino, a very short piece right there. Apparently, they have identified that as a heavy traffic area. We see that pretty regular where there is a short piece that needs resurfacing. Resurfacing US 29 from South of Finley Lane to William Cook Road and then the next project ties right on to that from William Cook to the Covington County line. A lot of time we do that if the project is long, it will have a very large cost to it and then we realize that when we bid those, if we have two contractors we might get a better price. On top of those we might can get a tie in and build those quicker. That's the logic behind splitting them. Resurfacing 29 and State Route 41 from about ½ mile north of East Brewton to 31 and then resurfacing 31 from Burnt Corn Creek to Old Castleberry Road.

Mr. Harrison asked in Escambia County most of these projects are on state routes. Does ALDOT have any, does the region have any money to pave county roads in Escambia County? Do y'all ever do any of that kind of work.

Mr. Beebe said not that I am aware short of a fire project, we might do tie ins or something.

Mr. Harrison said that is one thing we here from Commissioners in Escambia County There are dirt roads that need to be paved.

Mr. Piper said can safety money be used on a heavily traveled dirt road?

Mr. Beebe said with the Safety Program, if you can justify it. I think with the way that the HSIP money is right now and I can talk about that a little bit. The state has about \$44 million total of the HSIP program. They've allocated the regions a certain amount. I think ours is the \$3 to \$5 million range. That program is just kind of getting footing underneath it. You will see a lot of projects being shuffled around on that. The way that we are getting that program going is looking at the accident data, cost to benefit ratios and ranking the projects by that and prioritizing them on that. I brought our latest HSIP program funding. A lot of times when we are doing our resurfacing jobs, there might be some safety needs like guard rail updates. Those safety needs have to be put into those projects and HSIP will be pulled into those projects to shore them up. Then we have to rebalance. That is an example of how things that can move around based on budget. Anything can be brought up to be entered when they do a call for projects. They can be sponsored locally with the limited amount of money that we have or through the State in Montgomery. They have a larger pot, but a lot more people to service. Right now, I have not heard of any unpaved roads being paved through safety funds, but that doesn't mean that it can't happen. You are competing right now with a lot of other things. Once the program was developed, you are seeing a lot of projects competing with each other so they are looking for ways to stretch that dollar the best they can. That goes back to the ratings and cost ratios.

Mr. Beebe said that is about it for our planned projects. I am going to move into our construction projects. These are the ones that are out there in the field right now. You might see some of them that look complete, but according to our status sheet, we still have to go out and inspect one last time before the project is accepted completely. We've got our 98/158, we've got some of those projects in various stages of construction. Resurfacing I-65 to US 43 to State Route 225, we're hoping to start that one really soon. I put the amount of time that we give the contractors. The important thing to know is that when you see 60 working days, our construction section is typically giving 20 working days per month to the contractor. Use that as a rough number so you can figure about three months once they get started. In Mobile County, most of them are in the urban area. Moving to Baldwin County, we've got a pretty good bit of resurfacing that are close to completion. Resurfacing I-10 from 59 to County Road 64, for all purposes, you are going to ride on it and think it is done. We are 99% complete. We are cleaning up the books, making sure everything has been paid legitimately and all the forms are filled out to get reimbursement from the feds. Same thing with the next job, from I-65 from 225 to Dyas Creek Bridge. It is basically complete. We have another resurfacing of I-65 from Dyas Creek Bridge to the Escambia County Line. We're hoping that will be complete in December, 85% complete right now. Hopefully we will be up and out of the road in December. Resurfacing 31 from Pine Street to Crosby Middle Road, that will start here soon. We have some various cable guide rail installation all over. You will see that more all over. It's been identified as a way of keeping crossover head-on accidents from occurring. You will a lot of that on 65.

Moving to Escambia County, we have our Conecuh River Bridge Replacement on State Route 41. That project has been in the works for a little while. It looks complete but we have some legal issues to go through and hoping to get that one open soon. Resurfacing State Routes 113 from 31 to I-65, hopefully that one will be done next month. Resurfacing I65 from Wallace Road to County Road 6, hopefully it will be done in December. WE have interchange lighting at Exit 57. We've just got those plans out of the

office. Hopefully that will be January of 2020 complete. I understand one of the big issues right now is getting some of those procured. We have a hard time getting those from manufactures. There is only one source. We've taken that into account on a lot of jobs. It's hard to get signal poles. We've talked with local municipality and said can y'all go ahead and get those poles and that way we can supply them to contractors as a work around. We have resurfacing on I-65 from State Route 21 to just north of State Route 40. That's a big job. Then we have Bridge Replacements over Murder Creek on the Interstate. Hopefully we will get that done. Right now, it's a little painful to drive through there, but hopefully we can get that open in January of 2020. There again, region wide, we have all kinds of projects that fall in all the different areas. We talked about cable guide installation. Through the HSIP program awhile back, we had money for it, but the program wasn't really up and running as much as it is now, but we had money for it and we were like what can we do, one suggestion was let's redo a lot of our signage and look at our curbs so we went through and looked at our curbs and came up with safety improvements so you might see some of that.

Commissioner Davis commented on the types of signage that can be used for safety improvements especially in regards to the new Divergent Diamond Interchange

Mr. Beebe said DDI, we're definitely doing a lot more signage as well as trying to do more education. That's about it as far as projects go. I don't mind helping by going through maps and status sheets if you have any other questions.

Mr. Rhodes said with part of Baldwin County being in the Pensacola MPO, the question is running in mind, who determines what projects for that area, Orange Beach, and you had some up there, do we get any money out of the Pensacola MPO.

Mr. Beebe said I can explain a little bit of that. What I did, there is a little rural area, down there in Gulf Orange Beach is part of that Alabama-Florida MPO. They do get a portioned amount. The Lillian area, we've been working with the County lately and prioritizing those projects. The amount of money has accumulated over a couple of years, but I think we have a little over \$200,000 so the county has a project to do some pedestrian and cyclist projects in the Lillian area. We do get a little bit of money from the MPO to help in those areas. The hardest thing I think is because the money is such a small amount trying to identify what we can do with money.

Mr. Rhodes said that is Florida Transportation Money?

MR. Beebe said it comes through their MPO so if we go through their process as TIPs and Transportation Plans, it just funnels right on through. The County has a project, they invoice the MPO, then it is reimbursed so that is how the money flows, but we have to let the money build up so that we have a good enough pot to do something with it.

Mr. Harrison said what is missing from the map is 98 in Lillian in part of the MPO.

Mr. Beebe said it is, but it is not in their Urban Area. It is in their study area.

Mr. Harrison said there is Florida Transit Money and they have flexed that over to another pot of money they can use for highways is what I understand.

Mr. Beebe said I am not sure how they use their 5301 funds, but they do transfer that somewhere.

Mr. Harrison said what is interesting to note is that Orange Beach is part of the Florida MPO. The Census designates urban areas based on Census blocks, 1000 people per square mile or adjacent to that 500 people per square mile and you are allowed a hop and a skip. The Gulf State Park, there is no one there. That is prohibiting the urban creep to Gulf Shores and to Foley. The census criteria is impervious data. What that is, if you have a parking lot or rooftop that the rainfall can flow through it is considered urban, but that area has a lot of farms and such that is prohibiting the urban creep.

The next item on the agenda was old business. There was no old business.

The next item on the agenda was new business.

Mr. Piper said the Regional Planning Commissions, all of them, are contracting with ALDOT to do an update of the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan. This is public transportation for the elderly and disabled. We do a plan that is updated every four years and it is time to update it. It identifies projects or unmet needs for the elderly and disabled as far as getting where they need to go. There are two pots of money for buying buses or paying for the operating of those buses for like senior centers and things like that. We're going to be doing that this fiscal year, too. I think we will have two years. It has to be adopted by the RPO once it is complete.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned.