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Chicago Urban Partnership Meeting Notes from the Committee February 23rd, 2007

In attendance:

Luann Hamilton, CDOT
Claire Bozic, CMAP
David Zavattero, OEMC
David Seglin, CDOT
Duana Love, RTA
Kevin Stanciel, CTA
David Simmons, CTA
Sid Weseman, CTA
Jeff Hochmuth, WSA, consultant for the Tollway
Jose Rodriguez, CMAP
Tom Murtha, CMAP
Tom Kness, Chicago Office of Budget and Management
Juliet Azimi, Chicago Office of Budget and Management
Ellen Partridge, CTA
Sarah Kreamsner, City of Chicago, Mayor's Office
Rich Hazlett, CDOT
Heather Tarczan, IDOT
John Loper, DuPage County
Chuck Sikaras, IDOT
Susan Stitt, IDOT
David Kralik, Metra
Erin Willrett, Kane County
Mary Wells, ISTHA
Kamran Khan, WSA, consultant for the tollway
Dave Tomzik, Pace

1. UPA

Tom Murtha called the meeting to order. Mr. Murtha provided an overview of the purpose of the meeting. He described the Congestion Initiative recently announced by the US Department of Transportation. A key aspect of the initiative is called the Urban Partnership program. This program will select a limited number of urban areas to focus policies, programs and projects on congestion reduction. Urban Partners applications would describe a program endorsed by the region to reduce congestion utilizing the “4 T’s” – tolling, transit, technology and telecommuting. The CATS Policy Committee (MPO) had directed CMAP to develop Northeastern Illinois’ Urban Partners Program

application and assemble the candidate projects. For selected regions, the result should be an increased likelihood of successful applications for discretionary funding for the Value Pricing Program, FTA Small Starts transit program, ITS Operational Testing, Public Private Partnerships, as well as technical assistance and some additional regulatory flexibility.

This program is an opportunity to work towards an ITS and transportation management program that has been developed over time but could not be implemented due to lack of funding. This stands in contrast to the capital program, for which the region has a good history of implementation.

Mr. Murtha stated that the region acknowledges through the RTP that it needs to implement management and operations strategies, including technology, to improve system performance. The application of value pricing can be a potential funding source for ITS operations and transportation management on a systems and demand management level.

Mr. Murtha explained the application procedure. The application has to contain a lot of information but still be concise.

RTA (Mr. Weseman) asked if the region had been solicited to make an application by USDOT. CDOT (Ms. Hamilton) responded that Cheri Heramb, CDOT's Acting Commissioner had been in Washington and had spoken to the Transportation Secretary who encouraged northeastern Illinois to apply. Mr. Zattero also said that some the conversations he had at the Transportation Research Board Conference this winter also led him to believe Chicago should apply and had a good chance of being selected based on its size and amount of congestion. RTA (Ms. Love) said that based her work on transit technology with FTA, she also felt the region was being encouraged to apply.

Mr. Murtha continued by saying the region would have to assemble a compelling program. The ideas should be substantial and effective, and value pricing should be one element. He felt that USDOT was really focusing on this strategy and a successful application would probably have to contain some value pricing strategies.

Pace (Mr. Tomzik) asked if the application would contain multiple small projects or one defined project. Mr. Murtha responded that it would be a program of multiple elements. Mr Zattero agreed that it would be better to be a program, not a project. Mr. Seglin warned the group the UPA would result in preferential treatment, but would not mean the region would get all the additional funding.

Mr. Murtha continued by saying the CATS Policy Committee continues to stress that the region needs additional capital funding. Mr. Murtha suggested that we have to talk about collecting capital funding in a strategic way that impacts the transportation system in a beneficial way. Identifying "strategic collection" methods can simultaneously fund additional transportation projects and reduce congestion.

The discussion moved on to a single regional program of projects vs. competing projects. Mr. Hochmuth (WSA) asserted that anyone from the region could apply independently for these grant programs and be identified as a participating member of the Urban Partners. Mr. Zavatiero said there would be 300 million dollars available over the next 3 years and that we have to be cautious about competing applications because that strategy has been unsuccessful in the past. The USDOT is interested in a coordinated regional program. Ms. Hamilton (CDOT) added that the feds are looking for a broad partnership, which should include private sector participation.

Mr. Simmons (CTA) asked whether CMAP intended to present a consensus program to the CATS Policy Committee before April 30th. Mr. Murtha responded yes, and that the Policy Committee had intended to start meeting monthly but with the new secretary in place it was unclear whether that would happen. Mr. Zavatiero reiterated that the 3 applications (Urban Partners, Intelligent Transportation Systems Operational Testing to Mitigate Congestion, and Value Pricing Program) were due at the same time.

2. Process

Mr. Murtha then began a discussion of forming a permanent committee by reconstituting the AQTF as a Congestion Mitigation Task Force (CMTF), but the group decided that there wasn't time for any organizational design in the face of a short deadline and that the people currently involved in this meeting would have to move ahead with this task. Mr. Murtha said that, with that in mind, we probably need 4-5 people for each of the applications to pull information together.

Mr. Simmons (CTA) asked whether there was a target budget for the applications. Mr. Murtha responded that there was no set budget, and that the total amount would be dependent on how aggressive the program was.

3. Approach to UPA

Mr. Murtha asked what were IDOT and ISTHA's views of Value Pricing opportunities. Ms. Wells (ISTHA) responded that they were interested in using their toll collection technology to more fully take advantage of its capabilities and that they had only touched the surface of value pricing to date. They had already used value pricing on trucks, but that other ideas discussed during this meeting had not been vetted with the ISTHA board. Mr. Khan (WSA) continued by saying that the tollway already has a system that can implement value pricing, and that if the region proceeds with a value pricing program it should be seamless. The tollway technology is already integrated with the east coast "E-Zpass" and can be used on the Chicago Skyway too. 80% of ISTHA's customers already use transponders. ISTHA brings technology and knowledge to the table. They hope their assets can be incorporated into this program moving forward.

Ms. Tarczan (IDOT's) responded that IDOT did not support value pricing on IDOT facilities. They were unsure of whether it would be legal to change IDOT highways from

freeway to tollways and that the Governor is not interested in pursuing this at this time. However, they would like to listen.

Mr. Weseman (RTA) inquired whether the application would be corridor based or regionwide. Mr. Zattero said that value pricing was key to a successful application and that the application would have to be a system of corridors or regionwide. He did not believe a single corridor would lead to a successful application.

Mr. Tomzik (Pace) wondered what the impact of tolling would have on parallel arterials and whether they would be included in the programs, with perhaps other improvements or discounts. Mr. Murtha restated that it has to be a comprehensive approach.

Ms. Hamilton (CDOT) said that truck traffic was a big contributor to congestion in the city, and that California has an interesting program for trucks called "Pierpass" which is used to give incentives to ship on nights or weekends.

All of these ideas, Mr. Murtha said, were important but they have to be made saleable to the public and political leadership. IPASS was an excellent example, because it allowed system users to avoid a toll increase by purchasing the IPASS, and the perception was that open-road tolling was really a big improvement over manual toll collection. So, with any of the strategies developed, we have to be mindful of the impact of public support.

Mr. Tomzik (Pace) asked about the specific TM&O strategies listed in the TM&O plan CMAP was currently working on and whether they'd be included. Mr. Murtha said yes, and that these were projects that the region did think were valuable but that couldn't be implemented because of lack of funding.

Mr. Murtha enquired if the county representatives felt they were interested in the program. County representatives were unable to confirm interest at this time.

Mr. Simmons (CTA) stated that because of capacity issues on the CTA, making congestion pricing on the city's public transportation system was difficult and impractical, and that value pricing was primarily a highway congestion issue. Kevin Staniel (CTA) said they had other ITS projects in the pipeline but that they were in their infancy and were probably not ready for full implementation at this time. In addition, they were very costly.

Mr. Simmons went on to say that there is some perception that tolling disproportionately impacts the working poor, and asked if we should be concerned about that. Mr. Murtha responded said that some have maintained that the cost of congestion disproportionately impacts the poor, and that anecdotal evidence suggests congestion reduction programs were helpful to them.

Mr. Tomzik (Pace) said that the Pace Transit Signal Priority, bus shoulder riding and arterial express bus are already included in a capital plan. RTA supported that by saying that the Pace TSP program, the travel information center and parking management

programs are all ready to roll out and that they are ITS-based and should be included in the application.

Mr. Zavattero (OEMC) said he had been speaking to the City of Chicago about a few projects because congestion is widespread and a lot of the congestion is focused on the central area. Mr. Murtha said that congested arterials were also a problem in the suburbs. Ms. Hamilton suggested not constraining ourselves to only large projects because a number of small projects could have the same impact as one large one.

Mr. Khan wondered about preparing a deficiency analysis to identify projects. Mr. Murtha suggested that congestion was so widespread that such an analysis could just take more time and not be that beneficial. However, everyone agreed that if we could use information we already had available for this purpose.

Mr. Hochmuth suggested that any of the people listed as partners in the UP application could independently submit applications for funding from the existing grant programs. Mr. Murtha and Mr. Zavattero both reiterated that USDOT was interested in a coordinated approach and the Urban Partners system was developed to facilitate this. It was not desirable for partners to submit independent project applications. Such applications would not be considered supportive of the regional UPA.

Specific projects were discussed next. Ms. Hamilton said the city was considering congestion pricing through use of parking costs. Mr. Zavattero (OEMC) said that education and buy in from the business community has to come from the bottom up. Also, the city already had submitted a CMAQ proposal for a parking lot management system with a pricing component. The group also mentioned:

- Regional Pier Pass for trucks
- Projects from the Strategic Early Deployment Plan Update and the regional ITS Architecture Update
- CTA Bus Tracker
- Mayors Office on People with Disabilities Telecommuting Centers
- CNT expansion of car-sharing and joint CTA/Car Sharing at transit stations
- CDOT Pedestrian advisory projects
- Telecommuting outreach projects for employers
- Regional Guaranteed ride home project
- Bus oriented development
- Public transportation information kiosks
- CTA computer aided dispatch
- Tax credit program aimed at employers to provide flexible hours
- Downtown loading dock expansion

Mr. Zavattero spoke about the London congestion program that is based on a downtown cordon that employees fees to enter by auto. The cordon may be expanded, and he reported that congestion was reduced by 30% and that car travel speeds were increase 20%. This scheme can be implemented quickly with existing technology. Ms. Hamilton

(CDOT) also said that the revenue was dedicated to transit in that example. Mr. Murtha said that tolling revenue might be used to back bonds intended for more transportation system management and ITS programs in the region. Mr. Zattero mentioned that USDOT may allow tolling on facilities and this could be expedited if it is a component of a program to provide congestion relief.

Ms. Wells returned to the discussion of London using the revenue for transit and wondered how successful a program would be if it appeared to funnel suburban tolls to CTA service. She indicated such a system was not likely to be successful, noting that there needed to be a logical nexus between toll revenue ISTHA collects and expends and the construction, maintenance, and operation of the toll facility.

Mr. Murtha addressed another caveat by noting the negative impacts various projects could have on the areas surrounding them and that it was important to consider how those impacts are addressed.

Mr. Murtha began to bring the meeting to a close by saying he would begin to have the projects compiled and drafted into an official list so policy makers for the various implementers could begin to review them. This process will be most successful if the projects are drawn from the plans and projects implementers have already put forward, because they projects will have already undergone internal review.

Mr. Zattero suggested that CMAP ought to start drafting the application right away, beginning with an outline. A number of consultant companies have volunteered their services for this effort, and Mr. Zattero inquired what resources Mr. Murtha needed to get this work underway. Mr. Murtha said that at this point it was mainly a matter of logistics and consolidation. Mr Zattero ended by saying he thought it was important that the application was “glitzy” and we should keep that in mind when the time for production came. His final question was whether the funds came with obligation authority. The answer is unknown at this time.

The group decided to meet again at 2:00 on March 15th.