



Northeast Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership Meeting

October 9, 2024 @ 10:00 am*
Aitkin County Board Room-3rd Floor / MS Teams
307 2nd St NW, Aitkin, MN 56431

Meeting Summary

Members in attendance: Bryan Anderson, Taylor Blakeman, Ron Chicka, Sarah Ciochetto, Sandra Davey, Jason DiPiazza, Jim Foldesi, Derek Fredrickson, Karin Grandia, Stephen Hallan, Robert Hass, Duane Hill, Jason Hollinday, Michael Kearney, Mark LeBrun, JinYeene Neumann, Trent Nicholson, Brandom Nurmi, Gary Peterson, Penny Simonsen, Cindy Voigt, John Welle

Guests in attendance: Jason Fisher, Paige Holte, Travis Houle, Scott Johnson, Michael Kalnbach, Jeff Madill, Prescott Morrill, Tina Neary, Anna Pierce, Michelle Pierson, Elinor Roseberg, Beverly Sidlo Tolliver, Fay Simer

1. Call to Order – Attendance

Travis Houle welcomed attendees and introduced himself as a new Senior Planner at ARDC. Houle welcomed meeting attendees and reviewed protocols. Michelle Pierson reviewed attendance procedures. Chair Robert Hass called the meeting to order and welcomed attendees at 10:03am.

2. Committee Business

Chair Hass noted that minor changes to the agenda may be needed to accommodate presenters' schedules. It was also noted that an additional agenda item would need to be added to allow the membership to offer nominations and selection of a Vice Chair for the 2025 calendar year.

Hass asked Travis Houle to show the list of past chair and vice chairs. A matrix was displayed to those in the room and on MS Teams. Discussion included looking at who all in the past had served, and it was noted that NEMNATP operating guidelines allow for any member of the ATP may serve as Chair and Vice Chair, and it was noted that a Vice Chair serves one term, and then ascends to Chair in the second year of their term. There was some recognition that county engineers had most often served in this capacity. Jim Foldesi volunteered to serve as Vice Chair.

A motion to approve Jim Foldesi, St. Louis County Engineer, to serve as NEMNATP Vice Chair in calendar year 2025 was made by John Welle/Trent Nicholson. Motion carried.

The membership extolled thanks to Chair Hass for serving, congratulated Vice Chair Nicholson on his upcoming role as Chair, and thanked Jim Foldesi for serving next year.

Chair Hass then asked the membership to consider the meeting summary from the April 14, 2024 meeting of the NEMNATP and offer any corrections or clarifications. None were brought forward.

A motion to approve the April 14, 2024 NEMNATP Meeting Summary was made by Jim Foldesi/Stephen Hallan. Motion carried.

3. Comments from Citizens Present

No comments were brought forward.

4. Presentation: CRP/PROTECT (Anna Pierce, MnDOT, Carbon Reduction Program Coordinator)

Anna Pierce gave an overview of the Carbon Reduction Program (CRP), and the Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program. Pierce noted the timelines for each of these programs, discussed some minor changes, and highlighted that MnDOT would be holding open office hours for applicants for both of these programs during the application open period. Slides presented will be distributed following the meeting, and Pierce may be reached with any questions via phone at 651-366-3793 or via email at anna.m.pierce@state.mn.us.

5. Approval of CRP, PROTECT, and TA (Attachments #2-5)

Travis Houle, ARDC Senior Planner, reviewed slides for CRP, PROTECT and TA. Houle noted that while current NEMNATP Operating Guidelines outline a process for reviewing, scoring, and recommending applications through the Transportation Alternatives Taskforce process, a process would need to be developed to review portions of all three of these federal funding programs. Discussion included slight expansions to the current Transportation Alternatives Taskforce with the recognition that task force members would need to be approached to consider serving as the reviewing body for applications to all three programs. Houle also reviewed the TA process, and that the TA Taskforce last year had asked for some minor changes to the full application and to the scoring rubric to better address equity in project selection. Houle described using Justice-40 initiatives to add one question to the full application for Transportation Alternatives, and noted a minor shift to the scoring rubric to call out 5 points that scorers may use to reflect needs, barriers and challenges in regard to how these federal funds can impact disadvantaged communities.

Houle also noted that at the April 2024 meeting of the NEMNATP there were two vacancies in the task force. It was noted that Jason Hollinday (Fond du Lac Band) was willing to serve in the role of Local Government #3, and Andrew Carlstrom (Aitkin County) was willing to serve in the Local Government #2 category. There was interest in adding a member representing other transportation services. Brandon Nurmi of AEOA/Arrowhead Transit was contacted and is willing to serve.

It was noted that the expanded taskforce would be asked to review TA applications for FY2029 funding; CRP applications for FY2027, and FY2028; and PROTECT applications for FY2026, FY2027, and FY2028.

Prescott Morrill of the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council was asked if looking at these program years for CRP and PROTECT would align with MIC practices, and Morrill assented.

A motion to expand the purview of the former Transportation Alternatives Taskforce to review and score applications to the Transportation Alternatives, CRP and PROTECT programs, dependent upon taskforce buy and training of taskforce members on the expanded program applications was made by Karin Grandia/Jason DiPiazza. Motion carried.

A motion to approve the edits to the 2024-2025 NEMNATP Transportation Alternatives (TA) application and scoring rubric to better address equity was made by Jim Foldesi/Duane Hill.

Motion carried.

A motion to approve the inclusion of Jason Hollinday, Andrew Carlstrom, and Brandon Nurmi to an expanded project Selection Taskforce was made by Trent Nicholson/Karin Grandia.

Houle thanked the membership for their contributions. He noted that project pages for each TA, CRP, and PROTECT with important information and letter of intent documents and links would be hosted on the NEMNATP website at each of these links:

<https://nemnatp.org/atp/ta/>
<https://nemnatp.org/atp/carbon-reduction-program-crp/>
<https://nemnatp.org/atp/protect/>

6. Presentation: MnDOT Corridor Planning (Fay Simer, MnDOT)

Fay Simer presented slides showcasing some new strategies and initiatives within MnDOT with a statewide approach. It was noted that this new approach will strengthen the link between the state's transportation goals and MnDOT's statewide plans and project investments. Within the next year there is a goal to develop a Corridor Planning Guidebook and a Corridor Planning Prioritization Process. Simer also noted that this initiative is being further supported by the addition of one new corridor planning staff member hire in each of MnDOT's districts and more funds assigned to corridor planning. Fay Simer invited meeting attendees to visit the project website for this program at <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/planning/program/corridor-planning.html> and to reach out with any questions at fay.simer@state.mn.us or via phone at 651-366-3911. Slides presented will be distributed following the meeting.

7. Local Program Updates (Derek Fredrickson, MnDOT State Aid)

Fredrickson called the members' attention to the matrix of local program projects. He noted that draft project memoranda are due by December 1, 2024. This document will also be included with information distributed following the meeting.

Fredrickson also noted that there is a request for a project change that requires NEMNATP approval for a project revision. Cindy Voigt joined presented slides showcasing two segments of the Duluth Campus Connector Trail that had previously been awarded funds through Transportation Alternatives for FY2026 and FY2027. Voigt showcased both applications, discussed a bridge on the University of Minnesota Duluth campus that, in the application, was anticipated with replacement with an ADA accessible bridge. Complications with cost of bridge replacement have come up, and an anticipated cost of \$125,000 has come in with a preliminary design estimate at \$766,500. Voigt showed members that there is a new desire to amend the project to instead construct a super-sidewalk that will accommodate pedestrians and cyclists along St. Marie Street and not use the previous alignment through campus, which will then not require a bridge replacement. Full connectivity in this area will occur. This change will impact project 118-156-012 and associated project 118-155-009. Voigt noted that 2025 construction along St. Marie Street will even advance portions of the Campus Connector trail in this corridor. Presentation slides will be distributed following the meeting.

A motion to amend project 118-156-012 and associated project 118-155-009 to change the alignment of the Duluth Campus Connector Trail and remove the Tisher Creek pedestrian bridge construction from the project was made by Karin Grandia/Jim Foldesi. Motion carried.

8. Aitkin County Highlights (John Welle, Aitkin County)

John Welle welcomed ATP members to Aitkin and discussed some updates with the 169 and 210 detour. He noted that these projects are nearing completion and the detours should be wrapped up by the end of the month. He noted that these detours led to significant traffic on several gravel county roads due to Google maps re-routing people on alternate routes. The county took some measures to apply calcium chloride to gravel roads that were seeing increased use in the area of 2500 ADT and using a roller to pack the roads. Welle expressed gratitude to MnDOT D1 and D3 for working cooperatively on these projects. He noted an upcoming project would be taking place soon on Hwy 200.

9. ARDC Workplan Updates (Beverly Sidlo-Tolliver, Travis Houle, Michelle Pierson, ARDC)

ARDC staff provided updates on several projects in the regional transportation workplan which included updates on the work beginning now on a transportation planning process in the City of Carlton which has recently kicked off. Additionally, work is beginning with developing a scope of work for a Highway 61 Evacuation plan. Staff provided updates with Gitchi-Gami State Trail assistance and Safe Routes to School efforts. ARDC showcased slides from other projects and will provide more detailed updates on those projects at upcoming meetings of the NEMNATP. Presentation slides will be distributed following the meeting.

10. MnDOT Updates (Bryan Anderson, MnDOT)

Anderson noted that there were not any TED applications submitted from ATP1 this cycle. He noted that there is an effort to disperse these program funds geographically but encouraged members to consider projects for the next solicitation coming up in the spring of 2025. Anderson also noted several other funding solicitations that are open now including the Greater Minnesota Stand-Alone Noise Barrier Program, Active Transportation Infrastructure Grants which have an LOI due date of October 18th, several Safe Routes to School funding solicitations. Links to these programs will be included on the slides sent out following this meeting. Anderson also reviewed current corridor and planning studies underway, targets for ATP CRP funding, and targets for PROTECT funding.

Anderson also noted there is a position posting for MnDOT D1 for the new corridor planning position and invited members to think of good candidates and invite them to apply for the position, it is open until October 14, 2024.

11. Member Concerns/Future Agenda Topics

Members were interested in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening tool that came out of the Justice-40 initiative. <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5> Duane Hill noted that maybe it would be possible to find someone from FHWA to present how to use this tool at an upcoming NEMNATP meeting.

Members were also presented a slide showcasing 2025 meeting dates and tentative location areas. Members noted the 2nd Wednesday of February, April, July, and October were generally good. The 10am-noon time period works well, and members noted the desire to maintain a hybrid meeting option for all meetings.

February 12, April 9, July 9, and October 8th, 2025. ARDC staff will send out placeholder meeting invites for those dates from 10am-12pm, and will follow up those invites with online participation links and meeting locations when those have been acquired and scheduled.

A motion to approve meeting on February 12, April 9, July 9, and October 8th in 2025 was made by Karin Grandia/Duane Hill.

Commissioner Gary Peterson thanked the NEMNATP membership for 12 great years. The Carlton Co. Commissioner did not seek re-election and so this is his final meeting. Commissioner Peterson was thanked for his many contributions to this partnership over the years.

Kristi Kane, Interim Executive of ARDC, introduced herself and provided an update regarding ARDC's recent staffing changes.

12. A motion to adjourn the meeting was brought forward by Jason DiPiazza/Jim Foldesi at 12:04pm. Motion carried.

The next meeting of the NEMNATP will be from 10am-noon on Wednesday, February 12, 2025.

Bold print denotes action items.