

MEETING MINUTES
MARICOPA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS
TRANSIT COMMITTEE

April 8, 2010

Maricopa Association of Governments Office
302 North First Avenue, Suite 200, Saguaro Room
Phoenix, Arizona

MEMBERS ATTENDING

Phoenix: Lauri Wingenroth
#ADOT: Mike Normand
Avondale: Rogene Hill
#Buckeye: Andrea Marquez
Chandler: RJ Zeder
El Mirage: Pat Dennis
*Gilbert: Tami Ryall
Glendale: Cathy Colbath, Chair
Goodyear: Cato Esquivel
Maricopa County: Mitch Wagner
Mesa: Mike James

*Paradise Valley: William Mead
Peoria: Maher Hazine
*Queen Creek: Wendy Kaserman
Scottsdale: Theresa Huish
Surprise: Michael Celaya
Tempe: Robert Yabes for Jyme Sue McLaren
*Tolleson: Chris Hagen
Valley Metro Rail: Wulf Grote
Regional Public Transportation Authority:
Carol Ketcherside

* Members neither present nor represented by proxy. + - Attended by Videoconference
- Attended by Audioconference

OTHERS PRESENT

Kevin Wallace, MAG
Alice Chen, MAG
Marc Pearsall, MAG
Kristen Sexton, Avondale
Jenna Goad, Glendale
Jeff Martin, Mesa

John Holman, Mesa
David Moody, Peoria
Jorie Bresnahan, Phoenix
Ken Kessler, Phoenix
Jim Swanson, Surprise
Lauren Neu, Strand Associates
Kammy Horne, URS

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 1:32p.m. by Chair Cathy Colbath of the City of Glendale. Chair Colbath welcomed everyone in attendance and announced that a quorum was present. She introduced two members of the Transit Committee, Committee member Andrea Marquez (Buckeye) and Mike Normand (ADOT) who were participating via teleconference. Chair Colbath proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

2. Approval of Draft March 11, 2010 Minutes

Chair Colbath asked if there were any comments or corrections to the March 11, 2010 meeting minutes. Mr. Mike James from the City of Mesa requested a small correction to page 4, paragraph 7, the agenda item on 'Park and Ride Mixed Use'. He requested to change the wording to 'contrary to FTA guidelines or direction' from 'counterproductive to FTA guidelines or direction'. Hearing no further comments or corrections to the meeting minutes, Chair Colbath called for a motion to approve the draft minutes as amended. Mr. RJ Zeder from the City of Chandler moved to approve the minutes as amended. Mr. Robert Yabes (Tempe) seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

3. Call to the Audience

Chair Colbath stated that she had not received any request to speak cards from the audience and moved onto the next item on the agenda.

4. Transit Program Manager's Report

Chair Colbath introduced Mr. Kevin Wallace, MAG Transit Program Manager, for the agenda item. Mr. Wallace explained that there were two items to report. The first was the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) development process, which was underway. One component required in the TIP Financial Plan was the reporting of 'Reasonably Expected Revenues' for operations and maintenance as there was added scrutiny at the federal level, particularly at the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for funding availability for any projects that are included in the TIP. He announced that MAG would send out letters next week to MAG Transit Committee Members with projects in the TIP. He added that MAG was requesting basic program level information regarding funding sources and amounts for individual city/agency transit programs, specifically in relation to operations and maintenance. Mr. Wallace explained the information would be incorporated into the TIP's Financial Plan.

Mr. Wallace also explained the second item was that the federal discretionary project requests had been submitted to the Federal Government. The FTA had recently requested from MAG to provide additional information on a number of these projects. MAG staff is coordinating with the City of Phoenix, which is working with various city contacts to obtain the follow-up information that the FTA has requested. Once this information is completed and compiled, it will be submitted to the FTA by MAG.

Hearing no further comments, Chair Colbath proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

5. Update on High-Speed Rail Planning Activities

Kevin Wallace introduced, via teleconference, guest presenter and Executive Director Tom Skancke of the Western High Speed Rail Alliance. MAG is a member of the Western High Speed Rail Alliance(WHSRA) and Mr. Skancke offered to give an update on the Alliance.

Mr. Skancke thanked Chair Colbath and the MAG Transit Committee for allowing him to give an update on the history and latest efforts of the WHSRA.

Mr. Skancke explained that in June 2009, MAG joined the Western High-Speed Rail Alliance. The WHSRA's purpose is determining the viability of developing and promoting a high-speed rail network to provide high-speed rail connections throughout the Rocky Mountain region with eventual possible connections to the Pacific Coast and other regions of the United States. He directed attendees to refer to attachment one at their place as well as visiting the Western High-Speed Rail Alliance website (www.whsra.com) for additional information.

Mr. Skancke added that the members of the Alliance have agreed to work jointly for the acquisition of funding to conduct studies of high-speed rail options, to develop plans for high-speed rail infrastructure, and to construct high-speed rail facilities throughout the region as is considered appropriate. He added that at the time of this application the alliance is investigating the procedure by which a multi-state compact would be formed for long term operation and maintenance of the High Speed Rail (HSR) system.

Mr. Skancke explained The WHSRA began formal activities in December of 2009. He announced that the WHSRA's initial membership included (Phoenix), RTC-Regional Transportation Commission (Las Vegas), RTC-Regional Transportation Commission (Reno), Utah Transit Authority (Salt Lake City) and DRCOG-Denver Regional Council of Governments (Denver). He explained that The Alliance came together after the USDOT announced the High Speed Rail Corridor Map with 11 corridors throughout America, yet no Intermountain West (Rocky Mountain and Southwestern states) corridors were represented in that system proposal. He added that the five MPOs COGs and transit authorities formed the WHSRA in order to work with the federal government so that a national high speed rail system would include the Intermountain West.

Mr. Skancke stated that one of the Alliance's goals is to acquire funding to study the Intermountain West corridors as High Speed Rail corridor options. The Alliance did not qualify for \$8 billion in federal funds released in late 2008/early 2009 due to the requirements that the applications be submitted by December 2009. He stated that The Alliance had then agreed to move forward with an FY11 appropriations funding request for \$5 million to study corridors from Reno to Salt Lake and Denver, and Salt Lake to Vegas and Phoenix, with corridors connecting Los Angeles to both Las Vegas and Phoenix. He announced a multi-year request for \$25-30 million over 6 years to further study corridors and would be submitted by the WHSRA in the future. Mr. Skancke added that The WHSRA was also working with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on a new multi-state planning proposal aimed at assisting states with their required 'State Rail Plans'.

Mr. Skancke added that there was significant private sector interest in the WHSRA. He announced a 2-day Conference was planned and would occur in Vegas in fall 2010, with 200-300 attendees expected. He mentioned the tentative title of the conference was “Western High Speed Rail Alliance: A National System and its Partners.”. Invitations to FRA, FTA and Congress as well as worldwide operators, manufacturers, firms as well as national high speed rail partners.

Mr. Skancke explained that WHSRA plans to extend its membership to the states of New Mexico, Nebraska and Missouri in order to connect to Midwest High Speed Rail system planning efforts. He reported there has been much progress and national exposure in the last four months.

In closing, Mr. Skancke reported that the WHSRA was working with FRA/USDOT to have the rail corridors in the WHSRA Plan adopted and designated as official High Speed Rail corridors by late 2010.

Chair Colbath thanked Mr. Skancke on his presentation and the exciting opportunity for High Speed Rail. She added that MAG looks forward to hearing about the progress in the future.

Chair Colbath asked if there were any questions for Mr. Skancke.

Mr. Wulf Grote (METRO) asked what the dates were for the conference.

Mr. Skancke replied that the conference would occur from Wednesday, evening October 13 until Friday, Oct. 15, 2010.

Mr. Grote asked if the appropriation request was FRA railroad funds. Mr. Skancke responded that the appropriation request was a congressional request for highway funds, due to the fact that only state agencies could obtain rail money. He added that WHSRA was working with the Congressional Banking Committee to allow alliances, coalitions and organizations made up of MPOs, COGS and Transit Agencies to qualify for rail money through the Federal Railroad Administration.

Mr. Skancke reported that the primary goal of the study work was to focus on ‘the first and last 25 miles’ of the line, which were traditionally the most difficult to build. He said the 25 miles referred to how difficult it usually was to build new High Speed Rail (HSR) systems into the established urban cores of large cities and communities and that failed to plan for the connections. Mr. Skancke explained that many European HSR systems have noted that available right-of-way was very difficult to acquire, and the introduction of elevated or underground corridors could be cost prohibitive. He stated that rural trackage could be cheaper to build because of the available land. MPOs and the State DOTs were crucial to allow good planning to proceed, especially with the importance of connecting to other local and regional bus and rail transit systems. He explained that many of the Federal Programs in regards to High Speed Rail were created in the 1950s-1970s. He stated that programs had not been updated to reflect today’s challenges and requirements, especially the 21st Century technology of 200 mph High Speed Rail.

Ms. Rogene Hill from Avondale asked with the first and last 25 miles reference, which corridor on the map would these first miles, Phoenix, Reno, Denver, Salt Lake, Los Angeles or Las Vegas?

Mr. Skancke replied that one of the recommendations out of the nation's High Speed Rail vision was that cities-pair distances of 500 miles or less were ideal candidates for rail service. This issues affecting the 'first 25 miles' was applicable to each city and corridor within the WHSRA map and could likely be applied to all of the proposed lines serving Phoenix, Reno, Denver, Salt Lake, Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Ms. Hill noted that Tucson was not listed on the WHSRA map. Mr. Skancke responded that the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) had shown interest in joining the WHSRA, but that Tucson was not yet reflected on the map. He added that Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) had also shown interest in the WHSRA.

Mr. Wallace thanked Mr. Skancke for his initiative with the effort and stated that the WHSRA had benefitted greatly from his knowledge and experience on a national scale. Mr. Skancke thanked the Committee and offered his participation and service in the future.

Chair Colbath thanked Mr. Skancke and stated that the committee looked forward to learning more information as it became available.

Chair Colbath asked if there were any further questions or comments. Hearing no further comments, Chair Colbath proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

6. Acceptance of Commuter Rail Planning Studies

Mr. Kevin Wallace, announced that three studies were brought before the Transit Committee for acceptance. He explained the studies were all conducted in concurrence over the previous year.

Mr. Wallace informed the committee that since November 2008, MAG had engaged in developing three commuter rail studies. He stated that the Grand Avenue Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan provided a detailed evaluation of the feasibility of implementing commuter rail service along the Burlington Northern/Santa Fe (BNSF) Phoenix Subdivision between Phoenix and Wickenburg, a distance of approximately 54 miles. He reported that the study identified elements necessary to successfully implement commuter rail transit service in the Grand Avenue corridor. Mr. Wallace explained that the Union Pacific (UP) Yuma West Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan provided a detailed evaluation of the feasibility of implementing commuter rail service along the Yuma West rail line between Buckeye and Union Station in downtown Phoenix, with a conceptual evaluation of the issues associated with extending the corridor to the Tempe Branch line in Tempe. He added that the study identified the elements necessary to successfully implement commuter rail transit service along this corridor.

Mr. Wallace explained that the Commuter Rail System Study provided an evaluation of commuter rail options for the MAG region and potential connecting routes immediately adjacent to the MAG region. He stated that the study established priorities for implementing commuter rail service through an evaluation of ridership potential, operating strategies, and associated capital and operating costs. He referred members to Attachment Two for additional information adding that the item was on the agenda for action with a request to accept three studies: Commuter Rail System Study Grand Avenue Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan Yuma West Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan

Mr. Wallace discussed various attributes of commuter rail technology in the PowerPoint presentation. He explained that commuter rail featured traditionally larger, heavier passenger cars with higher maximum speeds, slower acceleration and deceleration than light rail, but with competitive travel time and reliability. He explained that some systems are also using the latest in clean diesel technology. Commuter rail typically features longer station spacing (every 3-5 miles on average) than light rail (1-2 miles) with emphasis on park-and-rides and can share right of way and track with freight as it does not need exclusive right-of-way like light rail. He explained that for these reasons, averages a lower capital cost per mile (\$10-\$20M) than light rail (\$60-\$80M).

Mr. Wallace explained that funding for the commuter rail studies was initially included in the 2004 voter approved Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The Commuter Rail Strategic Plan began in 2006 and was accepted by MAG Regional Council in April 2008. He stated that a recommendation from the study was for further conceptual analysis on steps needed to implement commuter rail on a regional level was granted by the Regional Council. Mr. Wallace reported that the Grand Avenue study was initiated in November 2008, with the Yuma West and System Study both initiated in April 2009. He added that studies featured extensive public involvement processes, four stakeholder events, study review teams and constant input from the MAG member agencies.

Mr. Wallace also discussed the MAG commuter rail map, which details existing railroad ownership by Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and BNSF Railway, as well as potential future passenger/freight rail corridors linked to future freeway corridors and former railroad rights of way throughout the MAG region. Further discussion on lessons learned from other peer cities, stations, access to stations/transit Inter-connectivity and transit oriented development followed.

Mr. Wallace explained that a recommendation list of near term and long term steps for Commuter Rail Implementation is featured in the Commuter Rail System Study: (1.) Continued coordination with ADOT and railroads; (2.) Determine liability and indemnification statutes with ADOT in the lead; (3.) Regional Sustainable Transportation and Land Use Integration Study; (4.) Identify local funding; (5.) Develop and implement governance plan; (6.) Railroad agreements; (7.) Design and construction; and (8.) Operation.

Mr. Wallace mentioned that traditionally once a region had an identified and committed local funding source for operations and capital, the industry average was usually 3 to 5 years to begin operation of the commuter rail system. Mr. Wallace added that the ADOT Phoenix-Tucson Intercity Rail Alternatives Analysis (AA) was currently out for bid. He stated this study would assist the MAG region to determine options for East Valley rail service.

Chair Colbath thanked Mr. Wallace for his report. Then Mr. Wallace introduced Mr. Marc Pearsall, MAG Transit Planner. Mr. Pearsall presented an overview of the Commuter Rail System Study objectives, results and recommendations.

Mr. Pearsall announced that the Commuter Rail System Study objectives were to: (1.) Evaluate commuter rail options and potential connecting routes immediately adjacent to the MAG region; (2.) Establish priorities for implementing commuter rail service, through the evaluation of ridership potential, operating strategies, and associated capital and operating costs. (3.) Evaluate existing freight corridors and possible rail extension areas identified in the Commuter Rail Strategic Plan. The Grand Avenue and Yuma West Studies Objectives were to: (1.) review and document existing and forecast demographics, land use, and travel characteristics; (2.) Identify barriers and opportunities for implementation of commuter rail service; (3.) Assess alternative implementation or operating scenarios and associated costs and ridership and; (4.) Recommend a conceptual path forward for funding and implementation.

Mr. Pearsall clarified the phased implementation approach to commuter rail. Phase A was opening day service, peak hour, peak direction, Phase B. was hourly service and more reverse commutes and Phase C is considered 'Chicago/NYC style' service 15-30 minute frequency in both directions. Phase C was a service nearing light rail level of frequency.

Mr. Pearsall explained that the MAG model used for the Commuter Rail System Study was based upon the model approved by the MAG Regional Council in April 2007. He stated the model methodology assisted in analyzing daily boardings per revenue mile for stand alone corridors; stand alone corridors capital cost per mile; daily boardings per revenue mile for interlined corridors; 2030 daily boardings per revenue mile for interlined corridors; comparisons to other commuter rail systems in the USA; and the recommended overall most productive system, a four-line, X-shaped system. One of the study recommendations and Action Items was that MAG may periodically run new Socioeconomic model results in order to see if there are any changes in ridership and population in our Overall Most Productive System.

Mr. Pearsall also explained that Key Sensitivity Tests results included: (1.) if selected highway projects are not built; (2.) applying socio-economic data between through to 2035 and; (3.) looking for differences of 10% or greater and changes of less than 10% are considered nominal and generally within normal model variation. He reported that in these model variations, MAG staff removed projects from network and reran the model and compared results with and without projects. He stated the conclusions were that generally, planned highway projects do not substantially compete with commuter rail service and that the Southeast Valley might experience slightly higher ridership if the SR-802 project was not constructed.

Mr. Pearsall mentioned that MAG staff ran a base model of all five base corridors with 2030 socioeconomic data, then ran the same model with 2035 socioeconomic data and compared the results of 2035 with 2030. He stated the results indicated that Grand Avenue would experience an increase of 17%, Yuma West : would see an increase of 19%. The conclusion was that Grand and Yuma are likely to see a noticeable increase in ridership between 2030 and 2035 if development occurs as predicted. In regards to post-2035 potential corridor extensions, a combination of existing railroads, historic rail corridors and new rights of way would be used.

Mr. Pearsall added that potential extensions forecasting for a post-2035 scenario included another method for analyzing commuter rail corridor extension viability. Based on latest available MAG Future Land Use data (April 2007), each corridor's total projected households were measured within 8 miles and employment within 5 miles of target stations model areas. These were correlated with ridership potential with normalized values (control totals) for comparison across corridors by calculating households per mile and employment per station target area. He added that the results reported higher ridership potential for future extensions in eastern Maricopa County and northern Pinal County, with the Superstition Vistas extension as the most productive corridor. Ridership potential in the far West Valley was more viable in the longer-term, based on available projections and plans. He added that the lowest ridership potential was observed on the Hidden Waters extension to Gila Bend.

Mr. Pearsall detailed the evaluation criteria used for the commuter rail study analysis which included travel time savings, boardings per revenue mile, connections to activity centers, land use compatibility, impact on regional travel and air quality, capital cost per mile, annual operations and maintenance O&M cost per rider, the ease of implementation and compatibility with freight railroads. He also explained details on the evaluation results for stand alone corridors and interlined corridors.

Mr. Pearsall presented the corridor prioritization for the Commuter Rail System Study and the corridor be recommendation for start-up commuter rail service. The first, Segment #1, was the Southeast Corridor. It featured the significantly highest ridership at 6450 daily riders, substantial travel time savings, and is most cost-effective. However, if use of railroad right-of-way is a fatal flaw, due to costs and agreements to get through rail yards in Central Phoenix, than other options included: building Grand Avenue corridor first; or building the Southeast segments between Tempe and Queen Creek and transferring to METRO light rail in downtown Tempe or at the airport. Another option would be to build the Tempe or Chandler segments in lieu of Southeast Corridor.

Mr. Pearsall discussed on Segment #2 of the corridor prioritization. The corridor recommended to interline with the Southeast Line, would be the Grand Avenue Corridor. While Yuma-Southeast may be more cost-effective (low capital cost for Yuma coupled with high ridership on Southeast), the Grand-Southeast is more effective because it carries more riders. The ridership is greatest when most productive East Valley and West Valley Corridors –Grand Avenue and SE –are combined. Therefore, Grand-SE was recommended as first system interline.

Mr. Pearsall explained that the three remaining corridors would be phased for implementation beyond segment 1 and 2. He added that there was no one outstanding performer in other three corridors: Tempe, Chandler, Yuma-West. Considerations for future phasing and system build-out of these lines would include development pattern, changes in travel demand, community support, potential integration with intercity rail, and railroad support.

Mr. Pearsall completed his presentation by showing the overall most productive system, a 4 line, X-shaped system map and a summary of the requested action. To accept the findings of the Grand Avenue Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan, Yuma West Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan, and Commuter Rail System Study and to revise the corridor

ranking included in the Commuter Rail System Study upon the completion of update regional socioeconomic forecasts.

Chair Colbath thanked Mr. Pearsall and asked the committee members if they had any questions or comments.

Ms. Hill of Avondale inquired how the Commuter Rail Studies would coordinate with the Western High Speed Rail Alliance efforts. Mr. Pearsall explained that HSR was another element that may effect commuter rail in the Region. He added that should funding become available to study high speed rail into the Region, then depending on which corridor is used for HSR, it may allow for additional commuter rail services in a shared corridor.

Mr. Wallace also reminded the committee that MAG was a member of the WHSRA and was on the project management team for the study. Mr. Pearsall stated that MAG would coordinate the commuter rail recommendations and information so that it is included and recognized within the WHRSA efforts.

Mr. Pearsall discussed that in Seattle, intercity long distance rail, regional rail and commuter rail all share the same corridor and operate upwards of 36 trains per day in a short, 40-mile segment between Tacoma and Seattle. He added that Amtrak service were to return to the Region (since ending service in June 1996), that the previous line might become a legacy line. He stated that the line would be a potential candidate for commuter rail service as industry experience dictated that it is usually easier to operate different levels of passenger rail service on a common, shared line.

Chair Colbath also asked if grade separations were included in the report due to their impact on safety, noise and congestion mitigation. Mr. Pearsall replied that the report provided detail on Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and MAG Region cities' recommended locations for grade separations, as well as possible candidate locations beyond what may already be planned..

Ms. Hill stated that while she appreciated the detailed work of MAG and its consultants on the Commuter Rail studies, she had mixed feelings on accepting the studies. She explained that the old data undervalued the West Valley in relation to rail ridership, growth and population. She stated that this continues a pattern were the West Valley is not on the map in regards to transportation options. She added that since the MAG recommendations for the Southeast Valley and Grand Avenue lines to begin service first and second, this leaves the West Valley's line to start service at a much later date. Ms. Hill said that this left the region with separate pieces and not a true system. It was because of these reasons that Ms. Hill stated that she would vote no on the acceptance of the three MAG Commuter Rail Studies.

Mr. Mike Normand from ADOT stated that the MAG commuter rail studies were an important step forward and that ADOT endorsed them. He added that the studies will compliment the ADOT Phoenix-Tucson Intercity Rail Study.

Mr. Mike James complimented MAG and URS on their work on the commuter rail studies and stated that he would vote yes to accept the studies.

Discussion followed regarding how often an update of regional socioeconomic forecasts, census and other transit reports results would be revised in the commuter rail model. Mr. Wallace clarified that while there was no fixed date on the updates, there would be a periodic review of new data when it became available.

Ms. Pat Dennis from El Mirage motioned to recommend to: 1) accept the findings of the Grand Avenue Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan, Yuma West Commuter Rail Corridor Development Plan, and Commuter Rail System Study; and 2) revise the corridor ranking included in the Commuter Rail System Study upon the completion of updated regional socioeconomic forecasts or relevant passenger rail studies. Mr. James seconded the motion.

Chair Colbath called for a vote. The motion passed by a majority voice vote of the committee members present, which included 15 in favor and 1 opposed. Ms. Hill from the City of Avondale dissented.

7. Request for Future Agenda Items

Chair Colbath asked the members of the Transit Committee if there were any issues that they would like to add as a future agenda item. Mr. Grote offered to provide the Transit Committee Members an update on the Tempe South Study at the next meeting. Hearing no further comments, Chair Colbath proceeded to the next item on the agenda.

8. Next Meeting Date

Chair Colbath thanked those in attendance for attending the MAG Transit Committee meeting. She announced that the next meeting of the MAG Transit Committee would be held on Thursday, May 13, 2010 at 1:30 pm in the Saguaro Room. There being no further business, Chair Colbath adjourned the meeting at 2:54 p.m.