



POLICY BOARD

Meeting Minutes

June 21, 2023 • 12:00 – 2:00 P.M.

FAST Planning Office, 100 Cushman Street, Suite 215, Fairbanks, AK

Web Conference at: <https://fastplanning.us/keepup/zoom/>

Zoom Meeting Telephone Number: 1 (253) 215-8782 Meeting ID: 879-5738-5913

1. Call to Order

Mayor Bryce Ward, Chair, called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

2. Introduction of Members and Attendees

Attendee	Representative Organization
*Bryce Ward, Chair	Mayor, Fairbanks North Star Borough
*Jerry Cleworth	Fairbanks City Council
*Joe Kemp	Acting Director, DOT&PF Northern Region
*Jason Olds	Director, DEC Air Quality
*David Pruhs	Mayor, City of Fairbanks
*Brett Rotermund	FNSB Assembly
*Michael Welch	Mayor, City of North Pole
**Jackson Fox	FAST Planning
**Olivia Lunsford	FAST Planning
**Corey DiRutigliano	FAST Planning
**Deborah Todd	FAST Planning
**Randi Bailey	DOT&PF Planning
**Don Galligan (absent)	FNSB Planning
+Kellen Spillman	FNSB Planning
+Danny Wallace	City of North Pole
Megan Flory	RESPEC
Tania Clucas	Morris Thompson Cultural & Visitors Center
Carter DeJong	Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

**FAST Planning Policy Board Members, ** FAST Planning Staff Members, + FAST Planning Technical Committee Members, • Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC) Members*

3. Approval of the June 21, 2023 Agenda

Motion: To approve the June 21, 2023 agenda. (Cleworth/Rotermund).

Discussion: No discussion.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

4. Approval of the May 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion: To approve the May 17, 2023 Meeting Minutes as recorded.
(Welch/Rotermund).

Discussion: No discussion.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

5. Committee/Working Group Reports (including the Chair's Report)

a. Staff Report and Technical Committee Action Items

- Mr. Fox attended the second meeting for the Interior Alaska Transportation Plan update. The focus of that meeting was the vision, goals, and objectives and a debrief on some of the open house events DOT has been holding throughout the Interior. The Plan is not exclusively focused on the road network, but also the aviation at our rural airports, rail connections, and barge landings. Everything that moves people and goods throughout interior Alaska will be studied in the Plan.
- The Transit Plan Update has gone through the request for proposals process and three proposals were received. R&M Consultants was chosen as the prime consultant with ALTA and DOWL as the subconsultants. The scope and fee negotiations have wrapped up and we anticipate a kickoff meeting for those plans in July.
- A Joint Seasonal Mobility Task Force and Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee Meeting (BPAC) meeting was held on May 14, 2023 to discuss how winter operations went, staffing levels, and budget issues. Alaska DOT Maintenance & Operations is understaffed and some contracts that were put out to private contractors received no bids. The FNSB Parks & Recreation Department is also experiencing staff shortages and contract issues. There does not appear to be any good solution in the foreseeable future for these challenges.
- The FFY25 FAST Improvement Program Subcommittee Meeting was held on May 5, 2023 to put together a bundle of priority projects and had full representation from all member agencies.
- A meeting was held with DOT Right-of-Way and the City of Fairbanks for the Chena Riverwalk Project appraisal and initial offer for the portion of land to build a path on the north side of the Chena River. The appraisal and offer have been sent to the Alaska Railroad. This offer is likely going to be lower than what the Railroad expects but provides a starting point for negotiations. We have only authorized \$250K in our FAST Planning budget but through negotiations the price may be higher and may come back to the Policy Board for a vote on that increase.
- The annual Bicycle/Pedestrian Counts were held May 23-25, 2023 and had record volunteer participation this year. It was a very successful event.

- Mr. Fox prepared the first draft of the Funding Plan for the Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) and Carbon Reduction Program, and the Technical Committee recommended approval without amendments.
- Mr. Fox applied for the Charging & Fueling Infrastructure Grant in the amount of \$2.5M. At this time, the U.S. DOT has not advertised when they intend to award the grant. The grant is offered to all 50 states and there are at least five grant applications from Alaska. If received, the grant would free up CMAQ funds for use on other air quality projects.
- The BPAC was held on May 25, 2023 and the BPAC provided a list of their priorities for the FFY25 FAST Improvement Program.
- At the June 7, 2023 Technical Committee meeting, the 2024 Safety Performance Measure Targets set by the State were also recommended for approval by the Policy Board.

6. Public Comment Period (Non-Action Items)

No public comment.

7. Old Business

a. Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) and Carbon Reduction Program (Action Item)

Consideration of Approval of Funding

Mr. Fox explained that the meeting packet included the Funding Plan for the CMAQ and Carbon Reduction Program and he explained each project.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Motion: To approve the Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) and Carbon Reduction Program Funding Plan. (Cleworth/Pruhs).

Discussion: Mr. Cleworth commented that he had concerns about the ranking methodology they have been using for the projects and how certain projects ranked higher than others. Mr. Cleworth commented that if you are converting to LED that saves energy, has infrastructure to it, and makes a big difference so to him it fills all the boxes. Mr. Cleworth commented that we put a heavy weighting on the air quality in the wintertime, but the auto component of the air quality problem in the wintertime is minor and to him the problem is woodsmoke and that is where the emphasis should be. Mr. Cleworth commented that he looked at the gravel to pavement projects, and if you live on or work on a road that is covered in dust all the time, that is a problem. Mr. Cleworth commented that to him as far as air quality goes, that is a big thing. Mr. Cleworth commented that he would like to take a closer look in the future at how we rank these projects. Mr. Cleworth commented that at the end of the day, all the other projects help the infrastructure and have longevity, but the subsidized ticketing does not. Mr. Cleworth commented that the Borough buses are already heavily subsidized.

Mr. Cleworth commented that he thought the amount they charged was no comparison to auto ownership. Mr. Cleworth continued that you can buy a bus token for \$1.50, or you can buy a car for tens of thousands of dollars plus the insurance and maintenance. Mr. Cleworth commented that he thought there needed to be some ownership even though it is nominal.

Amendment to the Motion: To eliminate the [MACS Transit] Subsidized Ticketing Program. (Cleworth/Rotermund).

Discussion: Mr. Cleworth commented that his understanding is that the way it would work that the Borough would get \$200K for the University students and faculty to ride the bus. Mr. Cleworth commented that he thought it would be a complicated system for MACS Transit. Mr. Cleworth commented that it should come to an end and go back to the normal situation.

Mr. Olds commented that he thought that was the largest single emissions benefit item on the list and benefits the non-attainment area, which is a major issue. Mr. Olds noted that road dust is primarily comprised of PM10 which is not an issue in the non-attainment area. Mr. Olds commented that the Technical Committee and this Plan put forward what those benefits are, and he is in support of the Technical Committee and the rankings.

Mayor Welch commented that, in reference to having this transportation back and forth from North Pole for those seniors he represented, which was approximately 34. For them to be able to have some way to ride the bus into town and had it subsidized, it could save them \$300-\$400 dollars a year and that is their only way to get around. Mayor Welch commented that \$300-400 a year may not be much to us, but to some of us it is a huge deal. Mayor Welch commented that the seniors got to the point where they wanted to know if the City of North Pole could afford to go out and buy a 15-passenger van to go back and forth. To those seniors that he talked to, they like the idea that there is somebody subsidizing the cost for them to ride the bus.

Mr. Cleworth asked Mayor Ward if seniors rode the bus for free or if there was a discounted rate for seniors.

Mayor Ward commented that he believed the rate for seniors was \$0.75 cents.

Mr. Cleworth commented that when the program was fully subsidized or free, the documentation with this project nomination noted that there was a five percent gain in ridership and statistically speaking that is nominal. Mr. Cleworth commented that at the end of the day, we should show that we have done something for the infrastructure of the Borough and cities rather than subsidize something that is already for the most part subsidized already, and you are nowhere near covering the cost of that program.

Mayor Pruhs commented that we are supposed to be ranking items on Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Program, and what he heard is that we are asking for a subsidy. This is not addressing what we are supposed to be doing. Mayor Pruhs commented that he found out that the total revenue for the Borough Bus System is \$175K a year and using this program to get people to ride these buses with the \$200K subsidy would not fix that.

Mr. Rotermund commented that the numbers Mr. Olds pointed out have some pretty high PM2.5 numbers which is probably why it scored so high, and he wondered how they quantified that because every time a MACS bus drove by him, it was empty. Mr. Rotermund commented that it seems like that is a lot of cars that came off the road.

Mr. Fox explained that they funded this back in 2010 over a period of about five years and then the University of Alaska kept the program going for another three years after that. Mr. Fox explained that the program ended before Covid hit. Mr. Fox explained that the program went from 2010-2018 and the Borough had about a 5-8% increase in ridership per year when this program was being subsidized. Mr. Fox explained that translated to less single vehicle trips throughout the community and the predominant increase was from students and faculty at UAF. Mr. Fox explained that pre-COVID, the revenue from ticket sales at MACS Transit was about \$375,000 per year. Since Covid ridership numbers have been down. Mr. Fox explained that the hope is that we can get that ridership back through this program.

Mr. Rotermund asked Mr. Fox if we were basing some of these numbers based on older vehicle emissions used during that time because modern vehicles used less emissions.

Mr. Fox explained that we used old ridership counts but current vehicle data.

Mr. Kemp asked what the cost was to ride the bus before Covid.

Mayor Ward responded that the cost was \$1.50.

Mr. Kemp asked what the \$200k per year did and if it just kept the rate down to \$1.50.

Mr. Fox responded that the program would make it free for students and faculty with an eligible ID card to ride the bus.

Mr. Kemp asked Mr. Fox if that meant it was free to all riders?

Mr. Fox explained that it would just be free for students and faculty.

Mr. Cleworth commented that was a problem because it discriminated between certain user groups. Mr. Cleworth commented that to automatically assume that we were taking a car off the road by riding the bus was incorrect. Mr. Cleworth asked how they would stop this system when you started it and when you draw

that line. Mr. Cleworth commented that we are subsidizing it already and there needs to be some minimal prior user ownership.

Mr. Kemp asked Mr. Fox if we go with Mr. Cleworth and say that we are not going this program, what happened to the \$200K for this year.

Mr. Fox explained that he would go through the funding plan with the existing projects and see what projects could be accelerated using those funds and transfer those funds, keeping it fiscally constrained.

Mr. Rotermund commented that he thought he was going to support Mr. Cleworth with this motion and thought that many of Mr. Cleworth's points were valid. Mr. Rotermund commented that we cannot assume that we pulled one vehicle off the road per person that rode the bus because they may be walking, riding a bicycle, or skiing so we may be basing our PM2.5 data on flawed numbers. Mr. Rotermund commented that if we assume that we get rid of one car for every rider, that is flawed.

Mr. Olds commented that, again, he revisited the idea that this is our largest emissions benefit based on historical pre-Covid data based on vehicle emissions in the past, whether that data is perfect or not. Mr. Olds commented that he thought there is a wide range of data despite sociological arguments about inertia or otherwise he thought there was empirical data to support this emissions reduction. Mr. Olds commented that whether the goal here is to subsidize and to strike it for other reasons, or because it seems like there is some play with some of that data, is a dangerous assumption to make.

Mayor Welch commented that one reason that the cities got behind this at the Technical Committee is that we had anticipated what it was worth and approximated approximately less than \$100,000 to have this subsidized. Mayor Welch commented that what was behind this was that this was not taking a vehicle off the road and for some of these people you are making a valid point. Mayor Welch commented that you cannot say that this is taking a vehicle off the road is not true, because some of these people do not have vehicles and they may have to have someone take them to where they want to go. Mayor Welch continued that, if they can do it on a bus and it is subsidized, then he is for that. Mayor Ward commented that he thought there were some questions about the PM2.5 amount, and we brought a consultant on board to do those calculations who used some conservative numbers and, in many cases, compared to some of our other projects, it is 10-20 times more emissions reductions. Mayor Ward commented that the only projects that come even close are transit-related and reducing the amount of time vehicles are idling in our transit system.

Mayor Ward commented that the reason we get some of this funding is because we are in a non-attainment area. Mayor Ward commented that if this helps us get

to that non-attainment, then this is a wise investment for us at \$200K a year. Mayor Ward commented that this is a discussion that he had with his Transit Director, and, as it is, we charge less than Anchorage. Mayor Ward commented that Covid provided a blow to the transit system and by providing a subsidy to the transit system where young and elderly are able to gain access to that and get exposure to the transit system and understand that it is not as difficult or challenging as it seems. Mayor Ward commented that we have seen these types of subsidized programs can be a really effective advertising tool and people used the system if they understood how it works. Mayor Ward commented that in the scheme of the program we have where we are talking millions of dollars, he thought that \$200K to advertise this program might be what we need to get to non-attainment. Mayor Ward commented that he thought it was worth it and would say to please keep this in the program.

Vote on Amendment to the Motion: Four in favor. (Cleworth, Kemp, Pruhs, Rotermund). Three opposed. (Olds, Ward, Welch). Approved.

Amended Motion: To approve the Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) and Carbon Reduction Program Funding Plan and eliminate the [MACS Transit] Subsidized Ticketing Program.

Vote on Motion as Amended: None opposed. Approved.

b. FFY2023-27 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Administrative Modification #1

 ***Postponed to Technical Committee and Policy Board Meetings in July***
Mr. Fox explained that the draft Administrative Modification was prepared, but there are pending changes to it. Mr. Fox explained that to be able to add the increase to the 5th Avenue Reconstruction project, the Minnie Street Upgrade construction phase was moved out one year. Mr. Fox explained that the reason for this delay to July for the Administrative Modification is that the FFY23 FAST Improvement Program project bundle went out to bid and may come in higher. Mr. Fox commented that he also received a request to keep the Minnie Street Upgrade final design phase on track so it would not be shelved for a year to 2025. The City of Fairbanks and DOT's idea to fund this final design phase is to remove the funding for the Airport Way/Peger Road Intersection Study and delay the Lacey Street Planning Study.

c. FAST Improvement Program FFY2025

 ***Recap from June 5, 2023 Subcommittee Meeting and Next Steps***
Mr. Fox explained that a meeting was held to identify a bundle of projects to go to construction in FFY25. Mr. Fox explained that these are projects with limited or simple design and no right-of-way acquisition or major utility work.

8. New Business

a. 2024 Safety Performance Measure Targets (Action Item)

☞ **Consideration of Supporting 2024 Safety Targets Adopted by DOT&PF**

Mr. Fox explained that annually FAST Planning is tasked with either supporting the Safety Performance Measure Targets set by the State of Alaska or setting their own targets.

Motion: To adopt the State of Alaska 2024 Safety Performance Measure Targets. (Rotermund/Cleworth).

Discussion: No discussion.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

9. Other Issues

No other issues.

10. Informational Items

a. Metropolitan Planning Area Boundary Development Update

Ms. Lunsford updated everyone on the development of the boundary redraw and process moving forward.

b. Obligations and Offsets

Mr. Fox explained the obligations and offsets included in the meeting packet.

11. Policy Board Member Comments

☞ Mayor Welch commented he was happy for the robust discussion and decisions that we had to make today. Mayor Welch commented that it was a busy construction season which is why he chose to stay in North Pole today, especially with the GARS intersection construction. Mayor Welch commented that he will not be available for the August 16, 2023 meeting. Mayor Welch commented that it looks like we are going to have a nice summer and thanked them for all the hard work.

☞ Mayor Pruhs asked Mr. Fox if he could express to the Technical Committee that they did an exceptional job on the CMAQ and Carbon Reduction Program project list. We accepted 22 out of 23 items, which is very good.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:39 p.m. The next Policy Board Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 19, 2023.

Approved:



Date:

7/19/23

Mayor Bryce Ward, Chair

FAST Planning Policy Board