



FAST POLICY BOARD

Meeting Minutes

February 28, 2024 • 12:00 – 2:00 P.M.

FAST Planning Office, KeyBank Building, 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: 816-3293-4524

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, Vice Chair	Fairbanks City Council
*Scott Crass	FNSB Assembly
*Joe Kemp	Director, DOT&PF Northern Region
*Jason Olds	Director, DEC Air Quality
*David Pruhs	Mayor, City of Fairbanks
*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
+Kellen Spillman	FNSB Community Planning
+Alexa Green	Eielson Air Force Base
+John Netardus	DOT&PF Preconstruction
Trisha Levasseur	FNSB Parks & Recreation
Michael Bredlie	FNSB Rural Services
Adam Moser	DOT&PF Program Development
Ivet Hall	DOT&PF Preconstruction
Jack Barnwell	Fairbanks Daily News-Miner
Donna Gardino	Gardino Consulting
Mary Farrell	Participant
Sean Maguire	Anchorage Daily News
John Perreault	DOT&PF Public Information
Peggy Fox	Participant

Kaitlin Williams DOT&PF Public Information
Lance Smith Participant
Cliff ? Participant

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

3. Approval of the February 28, 2024 Agenda

Motion: To approve the February 28, 2024 Agenda. (Welch/Crass).

Discussion: No discussion.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

4. Approval of the January 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Motion: To approve the January 17, 2024 Meeting Minutes. (Cleworth/Crass).

Discussion: No discussion.

Vote on Motion: None opposed Approved.

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

☞ Three meetings were held regarding the Air Quality Conformity Freeze. One meeting was an informational meeting about the ramifications of an Air Quality Conformity Freeze followed by two Interagency Consultation (IAC) Meetings for specific projects. One IAC was held February 5, 2024 for the Steese Milepost 5 Bridge Replacement, Richardson Highway Milepost 346 Bridge Replacements, Steese/Johansen Interchange, and the Old Steese Highway Reconstruction projects. The other IAC was held February 26, 2024 to determine whether the Richardson Highway Milepost 346 Bridge Replacements project was 'Exempt' for Air Quality Conformity.

☞ Mr. Fox met with the DOT&PF Commissioner's Office on February 23, 2024 to discuss the new revenue estimates that DOT&PF provided in the latest version of the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). DOT&PF has recalculated the revenue that FAST Planning is expected to receive for local projects based on the results of the 2020 Census and the split in funding with the new MatSu MPO. Mr. Fox noted that the numbers have changed and there is uncertainty about the formulas that were used so they were modified based on recommendations from the MPOs.

☞ FAST Planning received the draft Needs Assessment and is continuing work on the Transit Plans Update.

☞ Mr. Fox drafted a Letter of Support for the FNSB Parks & Recreation Department for their grant application to plan and design a segment of the Alaska Long Trail from Fairbanks to Nenana.

☞ The audit has been wrapped up with Alliance, Inc. CPA Firm and will present the audit results at the March 20, 2024 meeting.

☞ All member dues payments have been received.

- ❖ The second round of interviews for the new MPO Coordinator for the MatSu Region has taken place. An offer has been made and the new employee is anticipated to start work on April 1, 2024.
- ❖ FAST Planning received a proposal from the landlord, Usibelli, Inc., to extend the office lease in the KeyBank Building. Before renewing the lease, FAST Planning staff will perform their due diligence and look at other spaces downtown to make sure this location is cost-effective.
- ❖ Mr. Fox gave a joint presentation with ADEC staff to update the FNSB Assembly on the status of the Air Quality Plan and insight into what it means to be under a Conformity Freeze.
- ❖ Mr. Fox prepared FFY2023-27 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Administrative Modification #2 to delay the construction year of Yankovich/Miller Hill Road Reconstruction and Chena Riverwalk, and accelerate Phase I of the Cowles Street Reconstruction project.
- ❖ At the January 4, 2024 meeting, the Project Enhancement Committee:
 - ❖ Reviewed the Roles & Responsibilities document and recommended removal of committee member term limits.
- ❖ At the February 7, 2024 meeting, the Technical Committee:
 - ❖ Recommended approval of FFY2024-27 TIP Administrative Modification #2.
 - ❖ Recommended adoption of the revisions to the Roles & Responsibilities document regarding term limits for the Project Enhancement Committee.
- ❖ FAST Planning received an official response from Ryan Anderson, the DOT Commissioner, regarding FAST Planning's comments on the Draft STIP.

6. Public Comment Period (Non-Action Items)

- ❖ **Barbara Schuhmann, 520 Marshall Drive, Fbks., AK (comments from an email sent to Policy Board members 2/2/24)**

At the most recent meeting of your Policy Committee, the DOTPF representative was critical of Mr. Fox, your executive director. I fear that any complaints from DOTPF about Mr. Fox are motivated by retaliation for FAST's own decision not to support the two ore haul route bridges DOTPF wants to add to the STIP, or for Mr. Fox's participation on the Technical Advisory Committee ("TAC") studying the ore haul route, or for his cooperation with the public or with other entities involved with DOTPF business. One of those is FHWA, whose job it is to assure that DOTPF meets federal requirements for the federal funds it wishes to spend. Mr. Fox should not be censured for performing his job well.

I have been impressed by the work of FAST Planning. You properly notice your meetings and welcome public input. Your website is easy to navigate. You follow federal and state laws and regulations, issue timely notices and reports, and are well organized. Your staff is hard-working, knowledgeable, and professional. They welcome public input and make accessing the website and

meetings easy. It is amazing to see the amount of work they have accomplished. For this, you, your executive director, and staff are to be commended.

I have participated on the TAC with Mr. Fox over the past year. I have found him to be well-prepared for meetings, cautious and prudent in his comments, totally honest, and very knowledgeable about transportation safety, planning, and funding. His professionalism is exemplary.

If the DOTPF's criticism of Mr. Fox arises at a future meeting, I ask that you support Mr. Fox. Additionally, I ask that you follow the Open Meetings Act and your Policies and Procedures. A quick review of OMA requirements and procedures may assist those members not as familiar as elected officials with its requirements.

My concerns about the DOTPF result from how the DOTPF has conducted TAC meetings, the study of the ore haul route, and the decisions it has made about that route. Despite the Governor's and Commissioner's agreement that the corridor committee (TAC) meetings would meet the requirements of the Open Meetings Act, it has failed to do so. The DOTPF recently terminated all meetings of the TAC. Questions from committee members were stifled and public comment was allowed at only one meeting.

DOTPF has made decisions without open meetings, without public discussion, and without sharing information or answering questions. DOTPF has instructed its employees not to answer questions from the public regarding the Manh Choh ore haul. My Open Records Act requests have been denied by DOTPF twice. First, it cited a "decisional privilege" to withhold information until it made a decision - four months later. More recently, it would require \$26,000 before beginning to search for the records requested.

I urge FAST Planning to continue with your open and public process, encouraging public input and cooperating with federal and state agencies, as you have in the past. Please support your staff in continuing to perform an outstanding job. Thank you. Sincerely, Barbara L. Schuhmann

 **Patrice Lee (Letter to the Policy Board)**

I recently listened to the FAST Policy Board meeting held Jan. 17, 2024.

I especially appreciated former Mayor Luke Hopkins' public testimony about the proposed executive session which he stated had been improperly noticed. Later in the meeting I also appreciated comments by Mayor Ward, and Councilman Jerry Cleworth which seemed to take into account the nature of the request for the executive session, ultimately putting it off.

Even as a listener of the meeting I came away with the impression that Joe Kemp, Policy Board member, was trying to position an executive session to deal with matters that were undefined, not voted upon, and not in the best

interest of the community. As you are aware and several board members supported it, the Open Meetings Act is in play for FAST committees and boards. Executive sessions must follow the directive and criteria for such sessions as a means of protecting the public from “behind closed doors” organizing and scheming.

I hope that no attempt is being made by DOT or anyone else to discredit Jackson Fox, Executive Director of FAST. My experience in working with him has been very positive. Even when we have not agreed on an issue, he has listened, exemplified professional behavior, been extremely well informed on the issues, and worked diligently to inform the public in a non-biased way. He is an asset to our community, and we are lucky to have him at FAST, given the huge shoes left by the retirement of Ms. Donna Gardino.

As the difficult job of planning for surface area transportation evolves, I will be watching for any unwarranted or retaliatory actions promoted from within the Policy Board or from higher up that might intend to disrupt the good work of Mr. Fox and his staff. Thank you for your work on this Board, Patrice Lee, Citizens for Clean Air Coordinator, Committee for Safe Communities Director

 **Donna Gardino** commented on the STIP and TIP processes. Ms. Gardino commented that she has been involved in the process for at least 20 years and does not think that she has ever seen a process like this one before.

Ms. Gardino commented that she knows that they all have the same end goal which is to get projects to construction. Ms. Gardino commented that it is a weird time because usually there are lots of comments on the STIP and there is no STIP extension. Ms. Gardino commented that she had heard that people were saying that MPOs have heightened authority and she wanted to clarify that there is no heightened authority for the MPOs. The MPOs have always been required to be included in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan. In Fairbanks that has been a seamless endeavor since 2008. Ms. Gardino commented that there are two projects that are still in the STIP even though they are not in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP). Ms. Gardino commented that it is just about knowing the rules and in her experience the folks in the MPO tend to have a lot more experience than DOT has. DOT may have experience but have run into a lot of hiccups. All three MPOs have received a TIP ledger and there are issues with the TIP ledger as the percentage of money that the three MPOs are supposed to receive is incorrect. Ms. Gardino commented that the MPOs have submitted their comments and all of us have the same goal of getting the STIP approved. Ms. Gardino commented that the MPOs are just bringing the issues they have seen to the attention of the State so they can work to remedy the situation and get the STIP approved.

7. Old Business

a. Ramifications to Transportation Conformity with Air Quality Conformity Freeze

 Summary discussion of January 22nd Training Hosted by Federal Highway Administration and February 5th Interagency Consultation Meeting on Conformity Freeze

Mr. Fox provided an update summary on the meetings and discussions that have taken place since the January 2024 meeting.

8. New Business

a. Federal Planning Finding on Draft FFY2024-27 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

Mr. Fox explained that the meeting packet included the FHWA response letter to the latest version of the STIP that was resubmitted to FHWA on January 19, 2024. A list of the corrective action items that need to be resolved before the STIP can be approved was also included in the meeting packet. If the State DOT cannot move forward with the projects in the STIP, FAST Planning cannot move forward with projects in the TIP.

b. Pearl Creek Elementary School Access Improvements and Motor Vehicle Plugins

Mr. Fox explained that he recently learned about potential school closures for the FNSB School District. There is a \$3.5M construction project slated for Pearl Creek Elementary School that includes reconfiguration of the existing parking lot and access roads as well as the installation of motor vehicle plugins. This project is scheduled to go out to bid in May of 2024. If this project is closed, these improvements will not serve a need even if this school is repurposed into a community facility. Before this project goes out to bid there is a School Board Meeting on March 18, 2024 to discuss whether Pearl Creek Elementary School will be one of the schools that will be closed. Mr. Fox explained that if this closure happens, there are other projects that the funds can be diverted to in the TIP.

c. FFY2023-27 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Administrative Modification #2 (Action Item)

 Consideration of Approval of Minor Changes to Multiple Projects and Programs

Mr. Fox explained the purpose of TIP Administrative Modification #2 summarized on Page 82 of the Meeting Packet.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Motion: To approve FFY2023-27 Transportation Improvement [TIP] Administrative Modification #2. (Cleworth/Pruhs).

Discussion: Mr. Cleworth asked Mr. Kemp what would happen if DOT&PF did not pursue the right-of-way acquisition on Yankovich/Miller Hill Road Reconstruction project whether they could do the project this year. He hated to pull the money from DOT on that and put it on Cowles if there was an option for DOT&PF to do it this year.

Mr. Kemp commented that he was not sure if the additional right-of-way need was something they had to have, or if they could skinny up or move the road.

Mr. Cleworth commented that his understanding was that it was only three parcels and asked Mr. Kemp if DOT wanted to pursue that project without the right-of-way.

Mr. Kemp commented that he thought that they should keep what Mr. Fox had in the TIP even though it would be nice to have the project done before he retired.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

d. Project Enhancement Committee Roles & Responsibilities (Action Item)

 *Consideration of Removing Term Limits for Committee Membership*

Mr. Fox explained the proposed revisions made by the Project Enhancement Committee regarding term limits that mirror the changes made to the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee Roles & Responsibilities.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Motion: To adopt the changes to the [Project Enhancement Committee] Roles & Responsibilities as reflected on Page 110 of the meeting packet. (Crass/Cleworth).

Discussion: Mr. Crass commented that he thought it was helpful to leverage volunteerism from committee members and thought they should lean on their expertise for as long as possible.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

e. Letter of Support for FNSB Grant Application for Planning & Design of Nenana to Fairbanks Segment of Alaska Long Trail (Action Item)

Mr. Fox explained that he drafted a Letter of Support for the FNSB Parks & Recreation Department to submit with their grant application. The FNSB plans to design the Nenana to Fairbanks segment of the Alaska Long Trail.

Public Comment: No public comment.

Motion: To approve the Letter of Support for Fairbanks North Star Borough Grant Application for Planning and Design of Nenana to Fairbanks Segment of Alaska Long Trail. (Pruhs/Crass).

Discussion: Mayor Pruhs commented that there is a lot of the Alaska Long Trail to be constructed and he is glad that the Borough is doing this project.

Mr. Crass commented that he appreciates that the Borough is getting this trail done for the folks who visit and live here that are interested in doing that kind of activity.

Mayor Ward commented that he believed this section of the trail would be opened for ATV use. Mayor Ward commented that it sounded like a great addition, and he appreciated the support of the Policy Board.

Vote on Motion: None opposed. Approved.

9. Informational Items

a. Obligations and Offsets

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

10. Other Issues

No other issues.

11. Policy Board Member Comments

☞ Mayor Pruhs commented that it was a good meeting.

☞ Mr. Cleworth commented that it was good to have Mayor Welch back.

Mr. Cleworth commented that he went to the Technical Committee to discuss sizing the Committee down and he thought the best comments came from the State Trooper who said he was fine with being made "ex-officio" because due to his job, he was frequently absent, did not have the expertise, and felt that he was not contributing. A vote was 8-8 to make the State Trooper "ex-officio" so he had to remain on the Committee, and the item was tabled. Mr. Cleworth commented on an article written for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner by Corey DiRutigliano regarding the Downtown corridors.

☞ Mayor Welch commented that it was good to be back after a three-month hiatus, but he was only at work on a limited basis.

12. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at **1:47 p.m.** The next Policy Board Meeting is scheduled for **Wednesday, March 20, 2024.**

Approved: _____



**Mayor Bryce Ward, Chair
FAST Planning Policy Board**

Date: _____

