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SPECIAL MEETING NOTES DOT Planning and CLT

DATE: 9/9/24

WHERE: Video Conference

TIME BEGUN: 9:00 a.m.

PURPOSE: Debriefing on CLT TAP Proposal to understand failings and improve future applications

PRESENT: Romorenzo Marasignan, DOT Planner, Ben White, Regional Planning Chief DOT, Joselyn Biloan, Kenai Area DOT Planner, David Story, CLT Chair, and Janette Cadieux, CLT Secretary, Erica ? from DOT sat-in

DISCUSSION:

RM: Some high scoring applications may not get funding. Funding is limited and competition is high.

BW: We have a lot of really good projects that we'd like to put forward but the funding is tight.

DS: After initial intake, there seemed to be a selection process of projects that are encouraged to apply. Perhaps this step is the most important? After November intake, we had no communication. How can we take advantage of the knowledge base of the person who is doing this intake?

BW: We regionally go through intake apps. Make sure they're complete. Do an internal scoring that results in a threshold of score that will determine which apps will move forward. In the future, we will reach out to the communities at this point.

DS: What is the process for the project intake surveys? The follow-up didn't occur. Application had also been well underway before we finally stopped waiting and contacted the department. How do you ensure that an intake survey is responded to? How does the department respond to intake surveys?

BW: Most of the people involved at DOT are new. They changed the process that AK DOT had never seen before. That was run out of Juneau. It was not a regional planning department thing. DOT has since had reorganization. The former director is gone. The process is changed and lessons learned. When it became statewide there were problems engendered. Regional and community communication was not what it should have been. Assistance to ensure good apps was not done. They do not know if that (run out of Juneau) step is going to occur in the next app phase. There was a problem of good projects being dropped for lack of good regional input.

DS: We are a bottleneck for the entire Kenai Peninsula (KP) travel corridor. Many of the problems will remain even after the MP 45-60 Project opens (ten years out from now). The KP is interested in advancing our project in a general sense but they cannot always direct funding exactly where they'd like. Normally a FLAP or TAP app are completed by entities other than a 501C3 entity even though we are legally allowed and have done so. We need to convey the importance of this project for the whole KP and all transportation other than active transportation. All of the deficiencies will continue to exist e.g. no place to pull an emergency vehicle over. How do we raise that importance in the regional transportation planning? This has been important locally since the 1970s. We're now post-Bypass determination. Our roadway is back burner to the MP 45-60 Project but we're still going to have significant traffic. Traffic will grow on both pieces of roadway. It may be representative of what the State encounters all over. There are reasons why it should be elevated in the app process. We would like to find champions of the project within regional planning.

RM: Have a champion within KPB to push this project including match funds to elevate the score. It seems that all apps were high in the last round. He recognizes this project is supported but partners should be sought (strengthened) to elevate this project.

BW: Matsu did well because they had the match identified up to 20% (above the 10% required). This brought their projects higher. 1. We need to find out if KPB will match and provide maintenance. 2. Look at long term planning for the project area. They've done the Seward Hwy long-term planning but now need to look at the Sterling Hwy. Figure out long-term investment plans. At this point, we need to advance some plans because federal funding scores so much higher when there's a plan that points out project or needs.

DS: That's basically what we're asking for. Our app was not a construction grant. It was planning. We need to figure out the problems and what the remedies might be. How can we ask KPB to take on maintenance when we don't even know what the state of the project will be? It's been over a decade since all of the stakeholders gathered and came up with a plan. That plan was adopted by KPB in its Transportation Plan. The CLTRPP is an advancement of the original Walkable Plan. Some of the Walkable items have been achieved. We still have to address the sloughing bluff at MP 50 and the Cooper Creek bridge, the MP 47 rock face where the bike path will end from the mitigation for MP 45-60 Project, etc. How do we move forward on construction without planning? TAP seems ideal for funding. We have been told we'll be a part of the SS4A funding with KPB though we still don't know how much. Can ROW survey be done with the resurfacing project? What can be done on State vs Federal lands? We need a DOT partner as well as a KPB partner. If our small CLT group is the only one advocating we are not as loud a voice. Kenaitze tribe is supportive but they want a specific project to come on board for full effort.

RM: I agree.

BW: Romo will be your partner.

DS: Great, let's find out what our app looks like now and can improve on.

Last TAP application by section

RM:

Match: Other match than dollars wasn't as important. BW: Cash is important but the department is getting more familiar with other match options as federal departments stretch

beyond cash amounts. The communities with cash in hand did better on the last round but there should be an option for other matching inclusions next time. DS: Go above 15%? BW: Yes. Our last app was a 1 for this. When regional directors get together they rank that Match and can better defend if there's some cash involved.

Health and Quality: Everyone gets that part. Most will get a 5 on that.

Safety: We have no fatalities but that may be a latent error. Our section of the highway is second in KPB for crash. It's pretty high on the list. BW: What about projects trying to prevent fatalities? We try to give credit for those trying to mitigate possible deaths. This project did score better because of the documentation of crashes. This is not likely the problem area in our application.

Maintenance and operation: This is a difficult area. BW: If there's an agreement with e.g. a municipality like KPB that they'll maintain the facility that would score a 5. In the Matsu they score high because they agree to maintain both the sidewalk and the road. If the community says they cannot maintain or operate they get zeros. DS: How should we manage this for planning apps specifically? BW: If you get an email or letter from KPB that they will consider or affirm that they will take on the maintenance that should suffice. Most communities score lower than a 5 outside of the Matsu borough. RM: There's only one maintenance person in Bethel. The whole YK area didn't get funded either because of this section of the app.

Public Support: BW: Another strong one for you. We have multiple layers of local government. Letters from each would raise that. DS: We did have KPB resolution, Transportation Plan, re-iterate support from all supporters but not the federal legislators. Anything specific missing? BW: No none that he can see. State is also seeking planning first on things like wildlife passage. That will make the construction app for them stronger. This makes our effort to get a plan in place will be super helpful in construction app.

Bridging Gaps Removing Barriers: BW: Scored fairly high. 4 or 5. Started 5 and negotiated down to a 4 once regional directors got together.

Tied to An Event: BW: This is the one that is argued between regions. E.g. Fishing season is an event with impacts so it gets scored internally well but when it goes to all-three regions involved, then it can get picked at. Need specific dates that can be applied. DS: We should highlight the sockeye run as important to this section? BW: Include that and any other events that the community has including berry picking, etc. We ended up a 3 on this but can be increased.

Intrinsic Qualities: Almost everyone maxes out on this one.

Historic Transport: BW: Difficult for anyone to get points on unless you have an historic covered bridge etc.

Capital Cost: BW: Hidden costs like utilities, ROW, etc. that drive the cost up. Typically Enstar and others run utilities next to the road so moving them becomes a drag on the score. Communities score better when utilities are moved out of ROW. We should ID where the utilities are and what can be done. DS: We have only Electric and Phone. BW: ROW is tight. JB: DOT must follow fed process regarding ROW. If homeowners or businesses grant and map easement that is best. State is not allowed to do ask this because of the federal process. Local groups can do that. DOT would otherwise have to offer fair market value. ROW needs to be established first. DS: We were in part hoping to get a study of our ROW that is available with this app. Is the ROW delineated on some document somewhere through our whole corridor?

BW: No that would need to be included in the planning app. Let's get that mapped. DS: There's some low-hanging fruit where ROW is available but we need to figure out the tight areas. BW: What things are in the ROW that we cannot address? Cultural resources in a corridor can add to the capital costs. State sometimes has to end a road shoulder abruptly due to Cultural resources or other things similar to that. Kenaitze will ID areas that are okay for infrastructure placement without indicating where specific cultural sights are located. CLT got a low score on this.

Other Factors: Get creative. Include things that don't get a scored in other sections. Don't try to double dip on items already identified elsewhere. This item will look different next time. CLT did get max points on this previously.

Budget: BW: The cost was average with others. It didn't do any damage score-wise.

Match and cap costs are the big areas of scoring that need improvement for any project.

DS: Do you have recommendations for how volunteers move forward on getting KBP to accept costs?

BW:

Tribes can seek funding through federal funds that do not require a match. The State DOT is working with them on Discretionary Grants.

With strictly a Planning Study there is not a high match need. When competing with construction projects, internally we tended to emphasize in the past construction projects. We are doing more planning efforts and the department is wanting to improve (last year or two) construction projects through planning. A planning app will likely be more successful in future than it was even 1-2 years ago.

DS: Next FLAP app is 2025 or 2027. JB: The monies are planned out far in the future like 2027.

DS: Between now and 2027 we would like to have a successful planning effort so we can make a construction app in the next round. When we last applied we were told that we should be a slam dunk but we weren't a construction project. Perhaps we can enhance our relationships with KPB and Kenaitze Tribe, with a good DOT partner, we should be able to accomplish that.

BW: I agree.

JB: Ask your legislative reps for an appropriation under capital. Even \$50,000 might work if added to 50K from KPB, 50K from Kenaitze, etc. soon you have enough to get your planning done.

DS: Our CAP meeting is the 21st. We've tried to step back when CL Emergency Services needed those funds. Our library funding was recently cut too. We won't put ourselves forward till we know we have the wind at our back with other components. If Romo can meet with KPB Planners, including Robert Ruffner, perhaps he can help us there. The SS4A monies might be helpful.

BW: Federal Discretionary Grants apps are being tracked internally at DOT. Romo is watching this. Each applicant can usually only do 3. We have to go through the Commissioner's office and the Governor's office. They then have only a couple of weeks to get the app in. DOT will partner and support any way they can but when others outside of DOT apply it helps. Targeting FLAP in 2027 is good but let's be ready to jump before then.

DS: That's how we went into each of these apps previously. We've re-used parts and segments. We're game for that.

Have either Romo or Ben been to CL to see our area. BW drives through about once a month. We'd like to walk with him the next time he's going through to help him see things that aren't evident when driving.

We've gotten RTCA technical assistance recently. Having them come to CL and see the project area from both the road and river has been helpful. The river was here first. Really makes the connection easier to see between this sensitive area and infrastructure when seen from the river.

DS: Thank you for this time learning what we need to improve upon.

BW: Feel free to reach out to him as well as Romo.

DS: One challenge for any community is that we're volunteers and there's a core group that seem to do all of the core jobs so we appreciate your advocacy. Do let us know when you're here and we can escort you through some of the toughest areas of this project.

TASKS ASSIGNED:

DS:

Make an email connection between Romo and KPB Planners and Kenaitze tribe reps. Possibly include RTCA in this. This may be a good kick-off for the winter planning efforts.

JC and DS:

Host Ben and Romo in CL if/when able to more specifically make them acquainted with the project.

TIME ENDED: 10:23 a.m.