

## **PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, March 25, 2020  
via GoToMeeting  
5:30 to 7:00 P.M.

### **MINUTES**

#### **1. WELCOME**

Mr. Eric Norton, Chair, and Ms. Monica Haines Benkhedda thanked everyone for taking time to join the virtual PAC meeting in the midst of very challenging times due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Haines Benkhedda provided an overview of the agenda and how the meeting would be facilitated.

#### **2. APPROVAL OF 2020 PAC MINUTES**

The PAC voted by roll call to approve the January 2020 minutes.

#### **3. PROJECT UPDATES AND OTHER BUSINESS**

- Ms. Haines Benkhedda invited the PAC to participate in the upcoming comment period on the 2020 Federal Certification Review of the BRTB by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). A virtual public meeting is set for Wednesday, April 22 at 6 p.m. The public meeting is part of a 30-day comment period related to a review by FHWA and FTA to certify that the transportation planning process carried out by the BRTB meets federal requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO).
- Staff are also planning for a comment period on the next Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) in May or June. Staff had plans to organize another Transportation Fair to highlight local planning projects, but given the COVID-19 virus, staff are looking to identify ways to conduct public involvement virtually or identify other ways to provide education and opportunities to comment. Staff welcome input from the PAC on this, as well as ideas for another Every Voice Counts Transportation Academy in Fall 2020.
- Ms. Haines Benkhedda shared that the March BRTB meeting was cancelled. The next meeting of the BRTB is on Friday, May 1<sup>st</sup> at 9:45 a.m.
- Update on MDOT MTA's Central Maryland Regional Transit Plan. MDOT MTA is working on a draft plan to be released in late April. Visit [rtp.mta.maryland.gov](http://rtp.mta.maryland.gov) for information.

#### **4. DISCUSSION: EVALUATION OF BRTB PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES**

Ms. Pamela Lebeaux and Ms. Catherine Smith from WSP as well as Ms. Tracee Strum-Gilliam from PRR Biz attended the meeting to provide an overview of the public involvement evaluation project and discuss key issues with the PAC members.

Ms. Lebeaux provided an overview of the study process and the key products to be prepared, which include a communications plan, training, and report of findings and recommendations. She explained that the PAC would be called on to help the study team assess the BRTB's public involvement activities and discuss the findings and recommendations at their May meeting.

Next, Ms. Strum-Gilliam provided an update on work accomplished as well as in progress for Task 1, in which the team is evaluating current BRTB public involvement activities. This includes a review of key documents, current practices for engaging traditionally underserved communities, the website and social media tools, and overall outreach efforts.

Ms. Lebeaux then described the work accomplished to date for Task 2, in which the team is reviewing BRTB public involvement with key participants and assessing opportunities for strengthening the PAC. The team has held meetings and interviews with BMC staff and BRTB and Technical Committee members, reviewed the PAC surveys conducted in 2018 and reviewed minutes of the PAC meetings, starting with the retreat held in July 2019, to get a sense of the key issues and concerns of PAC members. Research is underway on how other MPOs with public advisory committees structure their activities.

Next, Ms. Lebeaux outlined the key takeaways the study team found in the PAC surveys and retreat minutes and the ideas for improvements that members raised in these materials. She asked the group for comments or additions to this list. Comments raised included:

- PAC members could get involved when MDOT does its annual "road show" to localities; members could meet with their county representatives to discuss priorities during this time.
- PAC members from various jurisdictions could be introduced to their respective BRTB member and someone on their county's planning staff to enable dialogue. PAC members should meet those responsible for transportation decisions in their jurisdiction.
- Improving the representativeness of the PAC would help change the culture and allow a pivot to focus on education and grass-roots advocacy.
- The degree to which the PAC is representative of the region's demographics could be quantified to assess gaps.
- Many PAC members do not feel they are having an impact. If comments are not heard, people will feel disenfranchised. One member's experience over many years is that only one of over 200 comments he made was really considered.
- It is important to quantify the way the BRTB process works and where there are opportunities for the public to help "move the needle" despite structural limitations on the PAC's influence.

The meeting then turned to three discussion questions that were sent to members ahead.

1. *Stand-out Public Involvement Activities - When you think about stand-out public involvement activities for BRTB plans or initiatives, what efforts come to mind?*

- Transportation Academy is a standout event and should be held annually. Significant numbers of people participate representing various groups in the area. Enables members to take information back to their constituencies with hopes of engaging them further.
- Unified Planning Work Program – was able to provide input more than in other areas, able to influence outcomes.
- Online Survey – practical and accessible, though not sure if feedback was helpful and not sure if the information was new.
- Suggestion that social media could be used to get more people to participate

2. *Improving Public Involvement - Going forward, what one action would most improve BMC/BRTB's public involvement program?*

- Media outreach – radio, newspaper to increase awareness of BRTB.
- More notification and longer comment periods to allow PAC members to more fully engage with the communities or constituencies they represent and bring their feedback back to the group.

3. *Suggestions for Strengthening the PAC - What one action would most improve the effectiveness of the PAC?*

- Following the retreat last summer, the PAC expressed their concerns to the BRTB directly, and this got their attention and seemed to help. PAC should call out issues when they occur.
- BRTB members attending PAC to hear discussion, setting up opportunities for BRTB and PAC members to meet to build a connection and personal relationships.
- First need to figure out purpose of the PAC before any assessment of effectiveness is possible.
- The PAC could be firing on all cylinders and weighing in on decisions, but if BRTB is not the decision-making body and is not doing actual regional planning, not clear how PAC can have an impact.
- Review FTA, FHWA rules and regulations on transportation planning to see what guidelines affect the PAC's role. Wide range of possible roles.
- Getting involved earlier in the process is key, not sure how to make it happen.

The consultants will review everyone's comments and consider them in developing recommendations. Any additional thoughts or suggestions can be provided to BMC staff.

***[Presentation: Evaluation of BRTB Public Involvement Activities]***

## **ATTENDANCE**

### ***Members***

Michael Davis – Resident, Carroll County  
Benjamin Groff – Resident, Baltimore City  
Yvette Hicks – Resident, Baltimore County  
Bruce Kinzinger – Bike Harford  
Mark Lotz – Resident, Harford County  
Eric Norton – Central Maryland Transportation Alliance  
Matt Peterson – Resident, Baltimore County  
Audrey Sellers – Accessible Resources for Independence, Inc.  
Sharon Smith – Partners In Care  
Paul Verchinski – Howard County Citizens Association (HCCA)  
JedWeeks – Bikemore  
Cynthia Wyatt – Resident, Anne Arundel County

### ***Staff and Guests***

Regina Aris – Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)  
Monica Haines Benkhedda – BMC  
Pamela Lebeaux – WSP  
Catherine Smith - WSP  
Tracee Strum Gilliam – PRR Biz