Madison Area Transportation Planning Board (an MPO)
August 1, 2012 Meeting Minutes

1. Roll Call

Members present: Mark Clear, Ken Dahl, Ken Golden, Jeff Gust, Steve King, Paul Lawrence, Jerry Mandli, Al Matano, Ed Minihan, Mark Opitz, Chris Schmidt, Robin Schmidt

Members absent: Chuck Kamp, Paul Skidmore

MPO Staff present: Bill Schaefer, Mike Cechvala

2. Approval of July 11, 2012 Meeting Minutes

Moved by Lawrence, seconded by Golden, to approve the July 11, 2012 meeting minutes. Motion carried with R. Schmidt abstaining.

3. Communications

Schaefer said there was one communication, a letter from WisDOT approving Amendment #3 to the 2012-2016 TIP. Matano distributed a flyer regarding the second Capital Region Sustainable Communities conference, Partnering for Healthy Communities, to be held November 14.

4. Public Comment (for items not on MPO Agenda)

Royce Williams introduced three rail advocates in attendance: Mike McCoy, President of the new All Aboard Wisconsin organization; Ron Wolfe, President of Pro Rail; and Keith Plasterer, who is a member of both and also on the Midwest High Speed Rail Association board.

5. Presentation on Wisconsin & Southern Railroad Company (WSOR) Operations, Plans, and Projects

Ken Lucht first thanked the MPO for its support of WSOR’s unsuccessful TIGER IV application for track improvements to the rail line to Prairie du Chien. Lucht then provided a presentation on WSOR starting with its system map. He said WSOR operates about 600 miles throughout southern Wisconsin. Over 90% of the track is owned by the State of Wisconsin. WSOR has four primary terminals: Milwaukee, Horicon, Madison, and Janesville. The company has interchanges with other national railroads where cars can be delivered that need to go other areas across the country and throughout North America. WSOR transports about 55,000 total carloads annually. The public-private partnership that WSOR is involved with began in the late seventies and early eighties when WisDOT began acquiring the railroad corridors shown on the system map, which preserved freight rail to the region’s local communities as an economic development tool. Rail transit commissions were created that represent a total of 20 counties that WSOR operates through in southern Wisconsin. WSOR has a long-term operating agreement with three rail transit commissions to provide railroad service to the communities within their regions. WisDOT contracts with WSOR to provide freight rail service and also to maintain the tracks. WisDOT and the railroad share in the cost of track maintenance, including the structures and crossings. The crossing warning devices are under the purview of the Office of Commissioner of Railroads. WSOR also coordinates with local units of government and economic development organizations throughout its operating territory to attract more rail users to the freight rail system.

Lucht discussed the economic benefits of freight rail. It saves companies such as grain haulers and fertilizer companies money and preserves the highway system. WSOR has almost 200 customers throughout the 20-county region of southern Wisconsin and they employ almost 25,000 people. Almost two-thirds of WSOR’s shipments are related to grain, aggregates (sand and gravel), and chemicals. Fertilizer is another big category, which has been increasing because of market demand for ethanol and liquid fertilizer. Steel is 5% of the total now, but is expected to double because of the demand for food-grade products and canned goods, particularly
in Sauk County. He said there was a new focus on transloading, which enables businesses that aren’t located directly on rail to still utilize the benefits of rail. He noted that WSOR had attracted 40 new businesses in the past five years, employing over 2,000 people. He showed some examples of facilities served. In terms of trends, he said the rail industry had been growing nationally in traffic and that was reflected in WSOR’s numbers. Dane County is considered a rail hub and WSOR has an active rail yard on Madison’s north side off Johnson Street. He reviewed the seven rail lines into that yard that serve thirteen communities throughout the Madison region and Dane County. He said most people don’t realize the high volume of locally originated and terminated traffic in Dane County. Almost one-quarter of WSOR’s customers (43) are in Dane County. Over half of all shipments in the county are aggregate- and grain-related. There is also a large amount of steel that originates in the City of Madison and inbound consumer products—a growing industry. About 800,000 tons of freight was shipped in 2011 or 8,200 carloads. WSOR dispatches 36 trains weekly out of the Madison rail yard, amounting to 1,900 annually. Lucht highlighted two current projects in the Madison area: (1) a tank car loading terminal in McFarland; and (2) a transloading facility at the rail yard that loads plastic pellets for a customer located in Windsor.

Lucht concluded by reviewing the rail infrastructure investments that have been made as part of a multi-year plan developed in 2000. The goal is to get the track compatible with today’s industry standards. The plan includes tie replacement, continuous welded rail, and bridge improvement programs with improvements targeted in key areas. About 75% of the rail system still needs to be upgraded. Some major improvements are planned in western Dane County between Middleton and Lone Rock. He explained the reasons for welded rail. It improves safety, allows higher operating speeds, and is easier to maintain. Clear asked if welded rail was quieter, and Lucht said much quieter. Lucht reviewed some recent rehabilitation projects between Madison and Milton, Milton to Stoughton, and Stoughton to Madison. In response to a question from Clear, Lucht said the cost was typically about $650,000-$700,000 per mile for completely new rail infrastructure (ties, rail, ballast, new crossings). Once completed, it will last 50-70 years.

R. Schmidt asked if the infrastructure being installed could accommodate passenger trains. Lucht said yes for commuter or excursion trains, but not inter-city rail which requires heavier (136 lb. vs. 115 lb.) rail. Golden asked about the economics of transporting waste to landfills. Lucht said it would take a lot of volume, but it was possible. Matano asked about the possibility of converting rails to trails projects back to rail or rail with trail. Lucht said it depended upon geography and the width of the right-of-way as well as agreements put in place when the trail was built. He said there weren’t many cases of this around the country. Asked about the Sauk City bridge, Lucht said WSOR had been working with the communities for a long time on that issue, and the compromise was that WSOR would concentrate on the line that goes to Reedsburg through Merrimac for now. R. Williams asked about the impact of the WATCO acquisition of WSOR. Lucht said the WSOR corporate identity and management would not change, and that WATCO could help support investments in Wisconsin. Therefore, WSOR was happy with the transaction and looking at some acquisitions elsewhere in the Midwest. Gust asked whether the trend towards more transloading facilities would make rail more viable. Lucht said transloading was a very cost-effective way to connect a business that’s located off-rail to the rail corridor. He said there are currently five sites on the WSOR system, which was adequate for now. There are challenges to funding and building new sites. Dahl asked about the average rail right-of-way width. Lucht said about 100 feet. Dahl then asked about WSOR’s support of trails with rails projects. Lucht said WSOR would review these on a case-by-case basis, but has been supportive, citing the path in the Village of Shorewood Hills and the planned Lower Yahara River path project between Madison and McFarland. He noted that the liability laws were not very friendly for private corporations. Dahl asked about the difficulty in building a rail spur for a new business, and Lucht said it wasn’t difficult as long as there was adequate land. He said WSOR sometimes provided labor and materials as an incentive. C. Schmidt asked about coordination on rail infrastructure upgrade projects in terms of possible parallel trails and other issues. Lucht said he looked forward to coordinating more in the future with the MPO. To date, the communication has mostly been with WisDOT and the rail transit commissions. He said he thought WSOR had a good relationship with local communities in terms of emergency responses and trespassing.
6. Election of Officers
Schaefer asked for nominations for Chair. Opitz nominated Matano. There were no other nominations. Moved by Opitz, seconded by King to close nominations and cast unanimous ballot for Matano for Chair. Motion carried.
Matano asked for nominations for Vice Chair. R. Schmidt nominated King. There were no other nominations. Moved by Golden, seconded by R. Schmidt, to close nominations and cast unanimous ballot for King for Vice Chair. Motion carried.

7. Appointment of MPO Representative to Dane County Specialized Transportation Commission
Matano asked if there were any volunteers. R. Schmidt asked about the meeting schedule, and Schaefer said the commission meets the fourth Thursday of the month at 5 p.m. R. Schmidt said she might be interested in serving, but didn’t have her calendar. It was decided to defer the appointment to the next meeting.

8. Appointment of MPO Representative to Beltline (USH 12/14/18/151) (USH 14 to CTH N) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Study Policy Committee
Schaefer said this was a new committee for the major study of the Beltline. A technical committee would also be created. He said the first phase of the study was getting started now, a “planning and environmental linkages” study that would feed into the EIS. Golden expressed interest in the appointment.
Moved by King, seconded by Clear, to appoint Golden as the MPO Representative to the Beltline (USH 12/14/18/151) (USH 14 to CTH N) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Study Policy Committee. Motion carried.

9. Appointment of MPO Representative to Interstate 39/90/94 (Madison to Wisconsin Dells) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Study Policy Committee
Schaefer said this was also a new committee for this major study. The first part of the study was being initiated now. It is a “traffic impact analysis” that is looking at potential new interchanges or crossings of the Interstate. Several requests have been made by local communities for potential new interchanges. FHWA asked WisDOT to evaluate all possible interchanges together in a systems approach. This effort will screen out those that don’t work or make sense and carry a small number (if any) forward as part of the EIS. Gust added that WisDOT was generally not in favor of new interchanges, but would consider them if there was a strong need at a particular location and it was the right spot from a regional traffic operations standpoint. Gust added that the overall study is to look at capacity expansion from Madison up to the Dells with the study being divided into two sections. C. Schmidt volunteered to serve on the committee.
Moved by Mandli, seconded by Golden, to appoint C. Schmidt as the MPO Representative to the Interstate 39/90/94 (Madison to Wisconsin Dells) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Study Policy Committee. Motion carried.

Schaefer said no changes had been made to the priority project listings reviewed with the board at the last meeting, just one minor funding correction and the addition of a note that funding for 2015-'17 was uncertain. At the interagency staff coordination meeting on the TIP, it was mentioned that the final cost estimate for the first phase of the Mineral Point Road/CTH M/Junction intersection project had increased $400,000. The project will be let in two weeks so it was decided to wait until the September board meeting to process the TIP amendment adding STP-Urban funds for the University Avenue and Fish Hatchery Road projects. The board expressed support for that at the last meeting. If the intersection project comes in at a higher cost, the available funding—about $960,000—would be allocated proportionally to that project as well. Schaefer said the MPO technical committee didn’t meet in July and staff hadn’t received any additional comments from members on the draft project scoring and listings.
11. Consideration of Release for Public Review and Comment the Draft 2013-2017 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the Madison Metropolitan Area & Dane County

Schaefer said staff had reviewed the projects submitted for consistency with the regional plan and held the annual interagency staff coordination meeting to work out issues with any discrepancies in project submittals. He said staff would be ready to release the draft TIP for comment the following week.

Moved by Mandli, seconded by Clear, to release TIP for public review and comment. Motion carried.

12. Discussion on Issue of Financial Support of the MPO

Schaefer said staff was asked to bring this issue to the board for discussion. He reminded the board that the MPO designation agreement provides that the City of Madison will provide the staff and also provide the local share funding to support the MPO. However, the agreement also says that other communities are strongly encouraged to contribute their proportionate share of the local funding based on population. A letter was sent out last year asking communities to budget funds for this year to contribute to the MPO budget. No additional communities indicated they would be providing financial support. Schaefer said he had a discussion with Golden about the issue. Golden suggested a possible way to provide an incentive for support would be to institute a fee for STP-Urban project applications. Schaefer said he was uncertain whether that would be legal. Another possible incentive would be to prioritize planning assistance to communities based on whether they supported the MPO. The MPO has in the past provided travel modeling and other assistance. Another option would be to change the agreement. There are some Wisconsin MPOs—LaCrosse and Wausau—that are staffed by the county where financial participation by communities is required, but that is in the agreement. Communities that don’t contribute aren’t given a seat on the board. That wouldn’t work as easily here because the small city/village and town appointments represent multiple communities. The consequence of not contributing funding would perhaps be that the community couldn’t vote on the appointment. Schaefer said a change to the agreement addressing the board structure might be necessary anyway due to the addition of new communities to the planning area and/or the new transportation bill, which requires the major transit operator to have a representative on the MPO board. Metro Transit is currently represented as a City of Madison Mayor appointment, but the agreement doesn’t require a Metro representative.

Golden suggested members could react to the ideas Schaefer just mentioned. Otherwise, it would be more efficient to defer discussion until a proposal was developed for members to respond to. Golden said he didn’t want to “use a club”, but felt it was a matter of municipal responsibility for communities to contribute since they are represented on and benefit from the MPO. Golden suggested the simplest was to require a contribution before getting funding for a project. Dahl suggested that another option would be to add this to the project scoring criteria so communities would get negative points for their project if they hadn’t contributed to the MPO. The communities could be invoiced each year and be required to pay all invoices, perhaps with a penalty, at the time a project is funded. Matano suggested possibly seeking a legal opinion from the City Attorney’s office. Gust asked Steven Coons, WisDOT Planning Section Chief, if he had information on what other MPOs do for local funding. Coons said his staff could look into that. Schaefer noted that it depended upon the agreement. The MPO can’t require a contribution if the agreement doesn’t provide for that. King asked about the process for changing the agreement. Schaefer said it was the same for a re-designation, which was passage by the board and adoption of resolutions by communities making up at least 75% of the population in the planning area. Golden said that if it was built into the point system for project scoring or made a condition of application, the agreement wouldn’t need to be amended. King said he thought amending the agreement was the simplest, and
then they could just be billed each year. Schaefer agreed it would be the cleanest, and then the issue would be the consequence for not paying. One might be the community wouldn’t be eligible for STP-Urban project funding. Golden added they would also not be represented on the board. Matano said he’d like to see the issue rolled into future RTA legislation. Also, he noted that the City of Madison had control over the budget and the hiring of the manager so he wasn’t as sympathetic regarding this issue. Schaefer said the issues Matano raised were also part of the agreement.

Schaefer said he was looking for direction from the board on whether to pursue this issue further. Golden said he thought it would be constructive to look at options before the possible reopening of the agreement came up. Clear suggested in the interim that the letter seeking financial support be sent out again.

Moved by Clear, seconded by Golden, to send a letter asking communities in the MPO planning area to budget funding for support of the MPO in 2013. Motion carried.

13. Discussion of Future Work Items

Schaefer said a check-in meeting of the oversight committee with the BRT study consultants was scheduled for the next day to go over a revised public involvement plan and review information on the screening analysis of the BRT alignments. Some planning work would also be done for the public meeting and workshops in September. Regarding the Transit Development Plan, staff had put together a prioritized list of transit service changes and would be reviewing those with the TDP committee. Staff was almost finished putting together draft 2010 adjusted urban area and planning area maps to send to WisDOT staff for comment. After receiving WisDOT comments, staff would then review the maps with the MPO advisory committees and the board.

14. Announcements and Schedule of Future Meetings

The next meeting will be held September 5, 2012 at 7:00 p.m. at the City-County Building, 210 MLK Jr. Blvd., Room 354.

15. Adjournment

Moved by Opitz, seconded by Dahl, to adjourn. Motion carried. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:40 PM.