



Cherokee County Comprehensive Transportation Plan Update

Stakeholder Advisory Committee Meeting #3

June 10, 2015 | 4:00 – 6:00 PM | Cherokee County Administration Building

Attendees

Committee Members

Dennis Burnette, City of Canton Representative

Jack Staver, Commission District 3 Representative

Jennifer Stanley, Northside Cherokee Hospital

Lee Lusk, City of Ball Ground Representative

Mike Herman, City of Holly Springs Representative

Misti Whitfield Martin, Cherokee County Office of Economic Development

Pamela W. Carnes, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce

Robert Chambers, Commission Chairman Representative

Project Management Team

Geoff Morton, Cherokee County

Maggie Maddox, MPE

Nilesh Deshpande, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Claudia Bilotto, Parsons Brinckerhoff

John Palm, Parsons Brinckerhoff

Jen Price, Sycamore Consulting

Summary

Geoff Morton opened the meeting by welcoming attendees and thanking them for their participation in the planning update process. He stated that the purpose of this meeting will bring committee members up to date on the project since the last meeting and what's upcoming for the project. Geoff led the group through introductions and turned the meeting over to the Consultant Team Project Manager, John Palm.

John reviewed the agenda and began with an overview of the first round of public meetings. SR 20 was a popular topic of discussion among other issues. Many residents who attended the meeting in Canton/Bluffs were interested in this project. From the CTP perspective, the SR 20 project details are beyond the scope of this project. Geoff mentioned that GDOT is expected to distribute a media release soon that will update the public on that project.

The results of the prioritization showed interest in spending funds on Capacity Improvements, System Preservation and Ped/Bike Improvements. Transit Expansion received the least amount of support, however, the project team was surprised in the amount of support it received. This input was used to project how much the County should spend on certain types of projects.



Maggie Maddox discussed the current transit study. Its purpose is to present a clear implementation plan for transit that is sustainable and that considers demographic changes within the County. The transit study tasks are very much in line with what is being achieved through the CTP. It examines every demand response trip provided by CATS and the land use to understand needs, who is in Cherokee and where they need to get when they do not have a car.

Maggie gave an overview of existing services and a summary of transit needs identified through the study. Woodstock shows a great need based on population. There is a potential to provide connection or connected service between Canton, Holly Springs and Woodstock. Other needs include real-time customer information to improve rider experience and stop amenities such as shelters to attract choice riders and make waiting for the bus more comfortable. Most riders are transit dependent; the County should begin focusing on attracting choice riders as well.

Maggie then talked about how transit scenarios are evaluated by discussing the evaluation framework which looks at performance as well as funding and affordability. The three transit scenarios - no change, moderate investment and high investment were presented as well as their performance for each evaluation factor. This is the current phase of the transit study. The team will do a more detailed analysis and cost analysis before closing out the study.

John talked about the conceptual trail planning effort. While it will not be a very detailed component, the team will collect information from previous trail and greenspace plans and will also look at publically controlled land to understand where new opportunities could be supported. Destinations are being identified to understand connectivity needs and then conceptual alignments will be developed. Information from this component will be given to the Parks and Recreation Department who will pick up where this study leaves off.

John then talked about the Plan Development Process and the final product of the CTP, which will be a recommended projects list. A funding strategy is another very essential part of the process that will be addressed since there is a wide range of projects from those that are easy to fund to more expansive, hard to fund projects.

The Project Identification Process was also discussed. This is an essential piece as there are 236 total projects. John talked about the breakdown for the projects by category/project type. Project funding is anticipated from a variety of sources including SPLOST funding at approximately \$300M. Funding estimates and project costs are in 2015 dollars. The increase in SPLOST funding is assumed to equal the inflation expected for project costs. GDOT funding (LMIG funds) is also expected to be available for CTP projects at approximately \$40M. Potential changes in funding availability will be closely monitored during the next Legislative session.

John then talked about the funding approach. It is important to note a local match is required for state/federally funded projects. Usually, state/federal dollars can be used on highway



system projects while SPLOST dollars are allocated to local and smaller projects. However, SPLOST funds can be used to leverage state/federal funding as appropriate. Also, important to note is that state route/interstate projects must compete regionally for funding. John explained the need for the project prioritization process to be based on county transportation goals. Some key factors in project prioritization include congestion relief, cost-benefit ratio, and deliverability.

John provided some detail of the Key Needs: Capacity and Operational improvements. He reminded the committee that while some projects are quantitatively sound, they may create some quantitative issues that should be considered and balanced. While some project will seemingly work on a pure transportation level, they may not work politically/qualitatively.

Lastly, John talked about the project's next steps which include developing a draft program to present to the public; a second round of public meetings to be held in two weeks in Canton and Woodstock; and finalizing the plan. There will be a final committee meeting in September with the final CTP to go for Board of County Commissioners adoption in the October timeframe.

Questions/Comments

Q: Where does CATS funding come from?

A: Funding for CATS comes from a variety of sources. Federal funding is administered by GDOT (over \$200k for operations) and CATS has contracts with many service providers such as DHS which pays CATS per trip for their clients. The Cherokee training center and the Cherokee senior center are also paying clients. Contracts provide money needed to match the federal sources, as many federal funding sources require a match. About 15% of the County's general fund (\$200K) goes to CATS. Fares also contribute to CATS, especially for the fixed route service. Future funding sources also exist, including a GRTA bond that will go towards transportation.

Q: What are the primary drivers of transportation use?

A: The study shows that demand response trips make up the majority of CATS trips. Most riders (over 80%) are seniors and disabled persons traveling to doctor appointments and to the Cherokee Training Center.

Q: Is there more rider demand in Woodstock?

A: There is a greater demand in south Cherokee, which includes Woodstock and surrounding areas.

Q: How is GDOT's rural versus urban funding formula developed?

A: GDOT's formula used to determine funding allocation for rural and urban projects is based on census tracts. GDOT 5311 funds are for basic operations in rural areas. However, the allocation of this funding for the county is changing because the overall rural/urban mix is changing. Woodstock and the area south of SR 20 is very urban and it skews the overall



numbers. GDOT is supposed to be working on a new formula to address this issue which is also happening in other counties, to determine how places like Cherokee can benefit from both urban and rural funds. They are not mutually exclusive pots of funding.

Q: Is the growth and density in Woodstock pushing the county into an 'urban' designation?

A: It is more than just the growth and density in Woodstock. On the other hand, there are portions of Cherokee considered urban that are clearly not urban. We need a greater understanding of how the census determines what is urban and what is not.

Q: What are the Golden Belt Trail termini?

A: For now, this is an undefined trail that came about recently, however we know that it is a multi-county project. The Board of County Commissioners and City of Canton have been working on this only for the past two months. For now it is just represented by a swath of land that will possibly connect to the current trail in Etowah.

Q: Does the Plan Development Process include trails? These are 'wants' and not 'needs'.

A: We will identify the bigger pieces of the trail, but the Park and Recreation Department will take a closer, more detailed look at trails and will be the funding source for that.

C: I disagree that trails are just 'wants'. They are an important part of lifestyle/quality of life and provide health and therapeutic benefits.

C: I agree, trails are probably more of a 'want' than a 'need' but if we are smart about it, they can be both. Around Big Creek in Forsyth, they took property in the floodplain and turned into a park and now developers are trying to tie into it. It has become a destination.

R: That is why we the County is taking these proactive steps. We need to have directives in an approved plan so that when the time comes we can benefit from it. We are trying to cover all of the bases.

Q: Regarding funding, is this plan based on 6 years?

A: The SPLOST is an 18 year program that has 3 years left in it. The CTP is a 25 year plan.

Q: How is economic development weighed?

A: An example of how economic development is weighed may be to consider if a new transportation project will provide access to an industrial park or if it supports a new office development. We may consider whether or not a new interchange may impact an opportunity zone by provide greater access to it. Projects that provide an economic development impact are weighed more heavily/receive more points.

The meeting was adjourned to review the project list and maps.