

Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Board Minutes March 20, 2025, 3:00 p.m.

Rockingham County Administration Center
20 East Gay Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22802

	Voting Member		Alternates		Staff
	City of Harrisonburg	✓	Dylan Nicely, Rockingham	✓*	Ann Cundy
✓	Laura Dent, Chair		Rachel Salatin, Rockingham	✓	Paula Melester
✓	Dany Fleming		Cheryl Spain, Harrisonburg	✓*	Garreth Bartholomew
✓	Gerald Gatobu	✓	Alex Wilmer, Bridgewater	✓	Zach Beard
✓*	Nasser Alsaadun		Robert Taylor, Mt. Crawford		
	Ande Banks		Libby Clark, Mt. Crawford		Others
	Rockingham County		Jeff Lineberry, VDOT	✓	Kim Sandum, Shen. Alliance
✓	Sallie Wolfe-Garrison	✓	Adam Campbell, VDOT	✓*	Kyle Lawrence, SVBC
✓	Casey Armstrong	✓	Don Komara, VDOT	✓*	Shane McCabe, VDOT
	Town of Bridgewater		Matt Dana, VDOT	✓	Jeremy Mason, VDOT
	Jay Litten		Non-Voting Members	✓	Tom Hartman, Harrisonburg
	Town of Dayton		Kevin Jones, FHWA	✓*	Brad Reed, VDOT
✓	Brian Borne		Chelsea Beytas, FTA	✓*	Brent Finnegan
	Town of Mt. Crawford		Rusty Harrington, Aviation		
✓	Neal Dillard, Vice Chair	✓*	Grace Stankus, DRPT		
	VDOT		Bill Yates, JMU		
	Todd Stevens	✓*	Valerie Kramer, JMU		

*Indicates virtual attendance

Call to Order

The March, 2025, Harrisonburg-Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization (HRMPO) Policy Board meeting was called to order at 3:00 p.m. by Chairperson Laura Dent. Pursuant to §2.2-3708.2 of the Code of Virginia, HRMPO Board members and attendees may participate in HRMPO meetings through electronic communication. Those who attended virtually are indicated by an asterisk; all others attended in-person.

Approval of Minutes

Chairperson Dent presented the minutes from the February 20, 2025, Policy Board meeting.

Mr. Dany Fleming moved to approve the minutes; seconded by Vice Chair Dillard. The motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment

Ms. Kim Sandum with the Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley provided comments on two issues. First, Ms. Sandum mentioned a recently released VDOT phase one study about the Shenandoah Rail Trail. Ms. Sandum noted that the study raises serious questions about the rails with trails concept, including concerns about railroad bridges, stormwater issues, and significant engineering challenges. Ms. Sandum noted that the study indicated that there is not a strong viable rail customer base for rails with trails and that implementing rails with trails would be more impactful on historic and archaeological resources.

Ms. Sandum's second comment concerned Interstate 81. Ms. Sandum noted that the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) will be renewing a study to add to the list of projects on the Interstate 81 corridor plan. Ms. Sandum expressed that the first round was well done with extensive public input and data-driven processes, but expressed concern with a potential shift from focusing on safety to economic development projects.

Presentation and Discussion: HRMPO Overview with Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) Member Mr. John Good

Ms. Paula Melester welcomed Staunton District CTB member Mr. John Good. Ms. Melester provided an overview of the HRMPO region, noting key differences from the SAWMPO region. Ms. Melester highlighted that the HRMPO region is home to three institutions of higher education which creates unique transportation challenges with student population fluctuations throughout the year, and noted that the region is the largest agricultural area in Virginia and one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the state.

Ms. Melester described HRMPO studies since 2017 and noted that the MPO also provides support and funding to the Harrisonburg Department of Transportation (HDPT) for transit planning.

Town of Bridgewater

Mr. Alex Wilmer presented for the Town of Bridgewater and emphasized the importance of bicycle and pedestrian planning for the town. Mr. Wilmer summarized the Town's recent bicycle and pedestrian projects, and noted that since 2020 the town has received about \$6 million in transportation funding, which is significant for a town with an annual budget of approximately \$11 million. Mr. Wilmer expressed appreciation for CTB support and outlined plans to continue building on these projects, with the goal of extending the Town's Riverwalk to about two miles in length.

Town of Dayton

Mr. Brian Borne presented for the Town of Dayton. Mr. Borne explained that the Town experiences heavy tractor trailer traffic causing congestion and safety concerns at intersections along Route 42 and Huffman Drive and Mason Street.

The surrounding Mennonite farming community extensively uses bicycles, pedestrian paths, and horse-drawn buggies, adding complexity to the transportation network and creating a strong need for multimodal transportation options. Mr. Borne noted that according to a 2018 MPO study, the Town lacks adequate avenues for bikes, pedestrians, and buggies. Mr. Borne noted that Route 42 runs directly

through Dayton, and that the Town is within five miles of I-81 and also experiences different traffic patterns during interstate closures.

City of Harrisonburg

Mr. Tom Hartman presented for the City of Harrisonburg, noting that the City is the fifth fastest-growing city in Virginia and the metro area including Rockingham County is the third fastest-growing in the state. Mr. Hartman said that this growth creates both opportunities and challenges for transportation infrastructure. Mr. Hartman noted that recent projects emphasize both vehicle volume and multimodal options, recognizing that approximately 5-6% of citizens don't have access to a vehicle.

Mr. Hartman explained that as a constrained city, Harrisonburg faces unique challenges when implementing transportation projects, and that many needed projects fall into an "unfundaible middle" – too small to compete in Smart Scale but too large for TAP or similar programs. Mr. Hartman emphasized that the City focuses on transportation planning to address the City's multi-modal needs, and that the City has three studies on-going.

Mr. Hartman also mentioned concerns about proposed changes to the Safe Routes to School program, which would sunset in four years. Mr. Hartman emphasized the importance of this program in connecting schools while teaching bike education and walking to school.

HDPT

Mr. Gerald Gatobu provided updates on HDPT, noting that the Department is working to maximize ridership but faces challenges with hiring drivers. Mr. Gatobu highlighted the Department's efforts with micro-transit pilot programs using smaller vehicles. Gatobu mentioned that HDPT provides service to the hospital outside the city limits and offers paratransit services for people with disabilities, with all services currently being free.

Mr. Gatobu noted that HDPT has rebranded its buses and is transitioning to electric buses, with five already in service or on order. Gatobu emphasized that HDPT is unusual in having both transit and school buses under the same department, along with a maintenance garage serving all city vehicles.

Mr. Dany Fleming added that multimodal transit is particularly important in Harrisonburg because of JMU's 20,000 students representing about a third of the city's population. With only about 25% living on campus, most students commute east-west across the city. Providing multimodal options helps reduce strain on streets and improves safety, particularly along corridors with high accident rates. Mr. Fleming also expressed concern about potential changes to federal funding for transportation projects, noting that since many grants are reimbursement-based, the City needs certainty about funding before committing to expenditures.

Town of Mount Crawford

Mr. Neal Dillard presented for Mount Crawford and explained that the town will experience about a 30% increase in housing and a 40% increase in population over the next two years, which will burden the Town's roadway network. Mr. Dillard also noted the challenges due to the proximity of homes to Route

11 in regard to improving the existing network. The Town experiences significant congestion and delays when I-81 traffic diverts to Route 11 due to interstate incidents.

The Town's primary concerns include traffic management when I-81 closes and drainage problems during heavy rain.

Rockingham County

Mr. Dylan Nicely presented for Rockingham County, emphasizing that the County relies heavily on VDOT for all transportation needs since the county does not own or maintain its roads. Mr. Nicely noted that U.S. Route 33 serves as the County's major east-west corridor, and many of County Smart Scale applications have been addressing the corridor. Mr. Nicely said that rural localities face challenges with the Smart Scale program, which prioritizes urban areas with higher congestion and safety issues. Mr. Nicely acknowledged understanding the prioritization of urban areas, however emphasized that rural areas have significant needs, particularly along corridors like Route 33 where the County has designated an urban development area.

Mr. Don Komara from VDOT added comments about I-81, highlighting the importance of the North River bridge at mile marker 239 just south of Mount Crawford, which has frequent accidents due to alignment. Mr. Komara noted that the interchange at Exit 240 was designed with a bridge wide enough to accommodate future widening in the median, suggesting this represents "low-hanging fruit" for improving I-81 capacity. Mr. Komara emphasized the importance of Route 11 as an alternative when I-81 is closed and mentioned how congestion from I-81 bleeds over onto other roads like Route 42, 276, and 256. Mr. Komara suggested that widening shoulders on some two-lane facilities could improve safety for bikes and buggies while increasing capacity without requiring four-lane expansions and expressed concern that funding for modest but important improvements can be difficult to secure through programs like Smart Scale, which tend to favor more extensive projects.

Ms. Sallie Wolfe-Garrison added that multimodal transit is important in the County, with horse and buggies and bicycles used by Mennonite farmers. She noted a fatal accident involving a Mennonite farmer on a bike and suggested that wider shoulders would help.

Comments from Commonwealth Transportation Board Member John Good

Mr. John Good thanked the group for their presentations. Mr. Good noted that his comments would address the central issue of funding and the challenges facing transportation projects across the Commonwealth. Mr. Good clarified that the CTB does not review every transportation project. The CTB is generally involved with larger projects and program-level decisions rather than every individual project.

Regarding funding uncertainty, Mr. Good acknowledged that the situation remains fluid. Mr. Good emphasized the impact of maintenance costs on the transportation budget, citing the recent hurricane damage in Southwestern Virginia and winter weather impacts across the state. Mr. Good noted that snow removal alone is costly without adding any transportation capacity, and these maintenance expenses reduce funds available for new construction.

Mr. Good addressed the inflation challenges affecting transportation projects, noting that construction costs have risen dramatically. Mr. Good stated that there is not enough funding to cover all the shortfalls being experienced across numerous projects statewide. Mr. Good encouraged localities to be selective and pragmatic about transportation studies, focusing on high-priority projects that have a realistic chance of being funded. Mr. Good noted that projects with local financial contributions tend to receive more favorable consideration. Mr. Good also observed that projects presenting clear safety benefits or supporting economic development generally receive higher priority.

In closing, Mr. Good said that by carefully selecting high-priority projects localities can secure funding for the most important transportation needs, but he cautioned that the overall funding environment is likely to remain limited.

Upcoming Meetings

Chairperson Beard announced that the next TAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 3, 2025, at 2:00 p.m., and that the next Policy Board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 17, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:27 p.m.

Respectfully,



Paula Melester, Director of Transportation

