

Minutes of the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland

October 10, 2017

Special Session

Madison J. Bunting, Jr., President
Diana Purnell, Vice President
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
James C. Church
Theodore J. Elder
Merrill W. Lockfaw, Jr.
Joseph M. Mitrecic

The Commissioners met with Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) officials, including Deputy Secretary Jim Ports, Jr., Field Operations Director Rhashad Johnson, State Highway Administration (SHA) Office of Planning and Preliminary Engineering Director Greg Slater; SHA District #1 Engineer Jay Meredith; Maryland Aviation Administration Regional Aviation Assistant Director Ashish Solanki, A.A.E.; Maryland Transit Authority (MTA) Planning and Program Development Director Melissa Williams; and Office of Governmental Affairs Director Jeff Tosi to discuss the draft FY18 - FY23 Maryland Consolidated Transportation Program (CTP), as part of the MDOT/SHA Annual Capital Program Tour Meeting.

Deputy Secretary Ports thanked the Commissioners for meeting with them and provided an update on the \$14.7 billion transportation budget over the next six years for transportation projects, with 16 of 22 projects totaling \$9 billion currently underway. This budget includes \$5.5 million in Highway User Revenues (HUR) to come back to Worcester County during that same timeframe. He stated that Governor Larry Hogan, who has promised to repair all deficient bridges in Maryland and lower tolls and fees, has allocated \$2.69 billion in the Maryland Transportation Authority (MTA) budget for additional investments in Maryland's toll roads and bridges. Maryland drivers have saved \$122 million as a result of toll reductions since 2015. He stated that lower toll rates result in increased transportation on toll roads, which drives up revenues. He advised that the \$5 million Tier 1 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) study that will take 48 months to complete is underway and will identify the location and explore potential funding options for a new Chesapeake Bay crossing.

Deputy Secretary Ports also stated that the container business is up by 10% at the Port of Baltimore, where the first post Panama Canal larger container ship arrived in Maryland carrying about 8,400 containers. BWI Marshall Airport set a new record of 25.7 million passengers in FY17, and the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) is offering new services that continue to improve customer service and reduce customer wait times, including electronic tablets to greet customers and verify their information, extending Customer Call Center service hours to 5:30 p.m., offering a stand-alone vision screening test station where customers can complete their transaction at the kiosk or go home and complete the transaction online, or schedule a driver's license test online. Additionally, MDOT has won 167 local and national awards for introducing key initiatives to deliver the best transportation network possible. For example, MDOT now

offers Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) fishing and crabbing license services, and TSA Pre-Check and Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) cards at MVA locations throughout the State, including Salisbury where 76 TWIC cards have been issued to date. Furthermore, thanks to the increased availability of electronic and online services, wait times at the MVA office in Salisbury have been reduced by 4 minutes for an average wait time of 13 minutes.

He stated that, sadly, there were 522 roadway fatalities in 2016 that were largely due to impaired and distracted driving, and pedestrians failing to utilize crosswalks. He stated that these numbers are way too high, and he applauded the 11 Maryland jurisdictions that have followed MDOT's lead and developed highway safety plans. He urged the County Commissioners to develop such a plan or adopt the MDOT plan for Worcester County, noting that MDOT officials are available to assist the County in this endeavor.

Deputy Secretary Ports provided an update on grants of \$880,000 to municipalities and police organizations in the County for safety improvements; and funding of \$87.9 million for major projects in Worcester County, including a \$1.5 million General Aviation Airport Grant for improvements at the Ocean City Municipal Airport; \$59.9 million for Phase 4 of the U.S. Rt. 113 dualization project from north of MD Rt. 365 (Public Landing Road) to Five Mile Branch (4.3 miles), with construction to begin in fall 2017 and be complete by fall 2019. Bicycle and pedestrian related projects in Worcester County include the shoulders of 4.6 miles of U.S. 113 from Massey Branch to Five Mile Branch (Phase 3) at a cost of \$690,000, and 4.3 miles from Public Landing Road to Five Mile Branch at a cost of \$645,000; \$13 million in support of Ocean City Transit; \$1.75 million in support of Shore Transit; a study to replace the U.S. Rt. 50 Bridge into Ocean City, and a study for improvements to the existing MD Rt. 589 corridor from U.S. Rt. 50 to U.S. Rt. 113 (4.7 miles). Planned projects include rehabilitating the MD Rt. 90 bridges over the St. Martin's River and Assawoman Bay at a cost of \$2.4 million. Other local projects include milling, resurfacing, and rehabilitating roads in various County locations; urban reconstruction on Coastal Highway in Ocean City from 62nd Street to Convention Center Drive for pedestrian and bicycle elements; and miscellaneous Coordinated Highways Action Response Team (CHART) projects on U.S. Rt. 50 and MD Rt. 90.

He advised that the \$3.3 million U.S. Rt. 113 resurfacing and rehabilitation project from north of U.S. Rt. 13 to south of U.S. 113 business was recently completed; and Phase 3 of the U.S. Rt. 113 dualization project from Massey Branch to Five Mile Branch (4.6 miles) will be completed this year. He concluded that there are \$75 billion in transportation needs and wants, but only \$14.7 billion to work with; therefore, he strongly encouraged the Commissioners to carefully prioritize their next transportation projects. He further advised that a revised project-based scoring system to evaluate, score, and rank certain major capital projects for inclusion in the CTP, will be unveiled at sessions during the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) Winter Conference and the Maryland Municipal League (MML) Conference, and he urged the Commissioners to attend these sessions to learn more.

In response to concerns raised by Commissioner Bertino regarding when the State will address the need to dualize MD Rt. 589, Deputy Secretary Ports advised that Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and other phone and online mapping applications that direct travelers through already heavily-traveled roadways are a relatively new problem Statewide, which State officials are grappling with because they have not developed a method by which to discourage the use of these applications. He again strongly encouraged the County Commissioners to evaluate their

roadway needs and to continue to prioritize their top tier projects accordingly. Mr. Slater advised that SHA has worked with local officials to implement small changes that help to reduce traffic, including installing turn lanes. Commissioner Bunting stated that the County requires developers to set aside right-of-way (ROW) when developing projects along MD Rt. 589 to assure land is available in the future to dualize this congested roadway. In response to comments by Commissioner Bunting, Mr. Slater advised that the original design plans to dualize MD Rt. 589 had included a number of community wish-list items that inflated project costs. He stated that, when they revisit plans to dualize this road, they will pair down certain aspects to develop a more cost-effective project.

Commissioner Lockfaw publicly thanked the Eastern Shore Delegation for acting as the County's voice at the State level, and he thanked MDOT officials and Governor Hogan for their work to restore HUR funding and for their work to resurface U.S. Rt. 13 in Pocomoke, but sought their assistance to rectify traffic control, extensive detours, project delays, and the vehicle damage and traffic congestion caused by the construction. In response, Mr. Meredith advised that the State is aware of issues with this contractor, and he will be meeting with them next week to rectify the issues Commissioner Lockfaw addressed.

Commissioner Church commended Mr. Meredith on his outstanding job performance, noting that he has been able to quickly and fully address each concern he has brought to him.

Commissioner Purnell thanked MDOT and SHA officials for their continued commitment to complete the U.S. Rt. 113 dualization project, which has drastically reduced the number of roadway fatalities.

Commissioner Bunting thanked MDOT and SHA officials for their investigation into reducing the speed limit on certain sections of Bishopville Road (MD Rt. 367), and he sought their assistance to extend the right turn lanes at the intersection of St. Martin's Neck Road at MD Rt. 90 to help relieve traffic congestion.

Senator Jim Mathias likened the State officials in attendance to a team that is dedicated to addressing concerns at the local level. He also commended Governor Hogan for providing outstanding fiscal oversight to improve Maryland's transportation infrastructure.

Delegate Charles Otto thanked MDOT and local SHA officials for understanding and working to meet the unique needs of rural transportation, in particular their support of Shore Transit initiatives. He invited the Commissioners to contact him with any need, transportation or otherwise, that comes up.

Delegate Mary Beth Carozza recognized Governor Hogan for prioritizing transportation funding and in particular for working to restore HUR funds to Maryland jurisdictions. She also thanked Mr. Slater for his efforts to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety in the West Ocean City area. She pointed out that, with the U.S. Rt. 113 dualization project coming to a close, the Commissioners are now at a critical point and must carefully consider their top priorities for roadway improvements, specifically with regard to dualizing MD Rt. 589 and U.S. Rt. 90. In closing, she pledged to continue to work cooperatively with State and local officials to assure the best use of limited resources to address transportation needs.

Ocean City Mayor Meehan stated that the Town of Ocean City's priority project is to repair and dualize MD Rt. 90. Ocean City officials also in attendance to support the town's priority project included City Council President Lloyd Martin and City Council members Mary Knight, Dennis Dare, and Tony DeLuca, City Manager Doug Miller, Fire Chief Chris Larmore, Emergency Services Director Joe Theobald, and Public Works Director Hal Adkins. Mayor

Meehan thanked MDOT and local SHA officials for their work on local projects to improve pedestrian safety. He pointed out that the Commissioners and SHA officials had understood that the dualization of U.S. Rt. 113 was essential to public safety and had made the completion of that project their number one priority. He stated that dualizing MD Rt. 90, a major artery that crosses U.S. Rt. 113 and MD Rt. 589, is essential to assure public safety. Mayor Meehan advised that dualization would address the following public safety hazards: the number and frequency of head-on collisions on the two MD Rt. 90 bridges; drawbridge mechanical failures that have paralyzed the use of U.S. Rt. 50, making MD Rt. 90 the most viable route of island ingress and egress for motorists and emergency vehicles; traffic congestion that blocks MD Rt. 90 during the summer months, hindering the ingress and egress of emergency vehicles responding to police, fire, and ambulance calls; and dramatically increase public safety officials' ability to evacuate the island in times of disaster, specifically when flood waters at the east-bound foot of the U.S. Rt. 50 bridge in Ocean City make that evacuation route impassible. Mayor Meehan stated that evacuating 350,000 plus visitors and residents from the island during a disaster is challenge enough, but when coupled with these public safety concerns it could be a recipe for disaster. Therefore, for the reasons stated and with the U.S. Rt. 113 dualization project nearing completion, Mayor Meehan urged local and State officials to re-prioritize their road projects and make the dualization of MD Rt. 90 their next priority project.

In response to questions by Commissioner Bunting, Deputy Secretary Ports stated that the project to rehabilitate the deck of the MD Rt. 90 bridges across St. Martin's River and the Assawoman Bay are intended to extend the life of those bridges, not to dualize or widen MD Rt. 90 at this time. Mayor Meehan pointed out that the ROW is available for the dualization, public utilities are located outside ROW areas, and he suggested that such a project could be completed in stages, starting with dualizing the roadway between U.S. Rt. 50 and MD Rt. 589. Deputy Secretary Ports stated that the first step would be for the County to revise their priority letter to identify the project as the top priority.

Chief Larmore advised that Ocean City ambulance transports about 3,000 patients to area hospitals each summer, with the vast majority of ambulances traveling MD Rt. 90. He advised that 2001 transport study projections had forecast a 30% increase in ambulance transports over a 10-year period, and a 25% increase over the next 10 years. However, the town's ambulance transports have exceeded those projections, and this increase coupled with the frequency of vehicle accidents and impacted traffic on MD Rt. 90 have sharply increased the length of time it takes Ocean City and other responding fire and ambulance vehicles to respond and to transport patients. He stated that ambulance response times are crucial for transporting patients to healthcare facilities, the gridlock on U.S. Rt. 50 and in particular MD Rt. 90, a single-lane highway, impact public safety by decreasing the navigability of emergency vehicles into and out of the resort, and this leaves ambulances responding to calls with no option but to push traffic to the shoulder and oncoming traffic to the left.

Mr. Theobald confirmed that there has been a 60% increase in daily traffic in the area, which significantly impacts MD Rt. 90, and this road is more important to emergency officials during mass evacuations than U.S. Rt. 50, as the presence of flood waters at the foot of the U.S. Rt. 50 bridge in Ocean City can severely or entirely restrict access to that highway.

Following much discussion, the Commissioners thanked MDOT officials for meeting with them.

Following a motion by Commissioner Mitrecic, seconded by Commissioner Bertino, the Commissioners unanimously voted to meet in closed session at 11:23 a.m. in the Commissioners' Conference Room to discuss a personnel matter permitted under the provisions of Section 3-305(b)(1) of the General Provisions Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland. Also present at the closed session were Harold L. Higgins, Chief Administrative Officer; Kelly Shannahan, Assistant Chief Administrative Officer; Maureen Howarth, County Attorney; Kim Moses, Public Information Officer; and Stacey Norton, Human Resources Director. The topic discussed and actions taken involved a personnel matter.

The Commissioners answered questions from the press, after which they adjourned to meet again on October 17, 2017.