

Minutes of the Fifty-Third Meeting of the
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE

DATE: December 16, 2021

TIME: 4:30 p.m.

PLACE: Virtual Meeting

Members Present

Aloysius NelsonCommissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;
Chair Director, Division of Veterans Services, Kenosha County
Yolanda Adams Board of Education Member, Kenosha Unified School District
Ella Dunbar Program Services Manager, Social Development Commission, Milwaukee
Brad Holz Board Member, IndependenceFirst
Fabi Maldonado Racine County Supervisor, District 2
N. Lynette McNeely..... Legal Redress Chair, Waukesha County NAACP
Andrea Mendez Barrutia.....Director of Community Engagement, Hispanic Collaborative
Sandra Rubin..... Equal Opportunity Specialist (retired), Milwaukee HUD
Field Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity
Jacqueline Schellinger Indian Community Representative, Retired Judge
Theresa Schuerman..... Walworth County Bilingual Migrant Worker Outreach

Members Excused

Keith Martin..... Engineering Specialist - Advanced 2, Wisconsin Department of Transportation,
Southeast Region

Liaison to Advisory Committee on Regional Transportation Planning

Donna Brown-Martin.....Commissioner, Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission;
Director, Milwaukee County Department of Transportation

Guests and Staff Present

Deborah Blanks..... Partner, Kairo Communications
Liz Callin Senior Transportation Planner, SEWRPC
Carrie Cooper..... Principal Transportation Planner, SEWRPC
Eric Lynde.....Chief Special Projects Planner, SEWRPC
Benjamin McKay Deputy Director, SEWRPC
Kevin Muhs..... Executive Director, SEWRPC
Nakeisha Payne..... Public Involvement and Outreach Manager, SEWRPC
Karyn Rotker..... Senior Staff Attorney, ACLU of Wisconsin
Jennifer Sarnecki..... Principal Transportation Planner, SEWRPC
Bruce Wiggins Member of the Public

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Nelson called the meeting of the Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) to order at 4:30 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance.

APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 13, 2021, MEETING MINUTES

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any questions or comments on the October 13, 2021, meeting minutes. Mr. Nelson then asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. Schellinger moved, and Ms. Brown-Martin seconded the approval of the October 13, 2021, meeting minutes. The motion was approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any public comments. There were none.

REVIEW OF 2022 PRIMARY ORGANIZATIONAL CONTACTS

Mr. Nelson asked Ms. Payne to review the Commission's draft 2022 primary organizational contacts list (available [here](#)). Ms. Payne noted that Commission staff was proposing to add two organizations, Teens Grow Greens and Tosa Together, for 2022. Task Force members did not suggest any additional primary organizational contacts be added.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND OUTREACH DIVISION OUTREACH UPDATE

At Mr. Nelson's request, Ms. Payne gave a presentation that provided an update on outreach being conducted by the Commission's Public Involvement and Outreach Division (available [here](#)). The following discussion occurred during Ms. Payne's presentation:

1. Mr. Nelson asked about the Governor's Conference on Minority Business Development and supported spreading the word about this type of event. Ms. Payne noted that the conference, called MarketPlace, is held annually and celebrated its 40th Anniversary in 2021. She described the event, which includes an expo, educational workshops, Governor's Awards, and one-on-one sessions for current and aspiring business owners.
2. Mr. Nelson noted in regard to youth engagement that Dr. Eric Gallien, Racine Unified School District Superintendent, is working with a national program called the Parity Project, which provides scholarships for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to African American high school students. Ms. Payne noted that there is also a local effort to start an HBCU fair and that she would follow up with Mr. Nelson after the meeting. Ms. Adams expressed support for including Kenosha Unified School District in that effort.
3. Ms. McNeely asked for more information on surveys conducted by Commission staff using iPads. Ms. Payne explained that staff had used iPads at meetings and events to collect input through online surveys for the Regional Food System Plan. Ms. McNeely expressed support doing more resident engagement like this in the future.

PRESENTATION ON MILWAUKEE COUNTY NORTH-SOUTH TRANSIT ENHANCEMENT STUDY

At Mr. Nelson's request, Ms. Callin gave a presentation (available [here](#)) that provided an update on the North-South Transit Enhancement Study being conducted by Milwaukee County and the Southeastern

Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. The study is exploring ways to enhance transit service along and near 27th Street, focusing on benefiting underserved residents and supporting the local commitment to racial equity and social justice. The study team recently completed the final round of public engagement in partnership with several community organizations and will release final recommendations in early 2022. The following discussion occurred during Ms. Callin's presentation:

1. Mr. Maldonado asked whether the recommended transit service would be multilingual given the non-English speakers in the corridor. Mr. Muhs indicated that communicating to non-English speakers has been an important consideration of the study, with translation provided during public engagement and community partners assisting in communication to non-English speaking residents. He noted that the Milwaukee County Transit System would ultimately be the service operator and has significant experience communicating to non-English speakers.
2. Ms. McNeely asked how the 27th Street corridor was chosen for the study. Mr. Muhs responded that Milwaukee County specifically requested the Commission study this corridor, noting that the corridor is among the highest-ridership corridors for MCTS and that the demographic and socioeconomic makeup of the corridor's population align with County priorities around racial equity. Ms. Brown-Martin added that a primary reason the County chose the 27th Street corridor to benefit areas that are disproportionately of minority or low-income population.
3. Ms. McNeely asked about rail alternatives. Ms. Brown-Martin indicated that the study explored multiple alternatives for improving transit service and indicated that alternatives were eliminated based on feasibility and public support. Mr. Muhs noted that bus rapid transit was chosen for multiple reasons, with cost being a significant factor as rail alternatives were far more costly. Ms. McNeely asked whether there would be transit investment in the 30th Street rail corridor. Mr. Muhs responded that the study concluded that passenger rail service could be beneficial in that corridor, but that it should be part of a service that uses existing tracks traversing to areas outside the 27th Street corridor. He noted that the study will include an appendix dedicated to this topic.
4. Ms. McNeely asked whether bus rapid transit vehicles would be electric. Mr. Muhs indicated that battery-electric buses are expected to be used, but the determination would be made at a later date by the County. Ms. McNeely indicated that younger people are tending to favor greener technologies. Ms. Brown-Martin noted that the County has been supportive of greener technology.
5. Mr. Nelson asked about input received from residents, specifically about support for rail. Ms. Callin explained the various feedback methods used for the study and noted that there were comments both in support and opposition of rail and many commenters recognized the cost difference was a limiting factor related to rail feasibility.
6. Ms. Schellinger noted the importance of considering the needs of a growing population of impoverished elderly individuals. She suggested that the Commission take into consideration the rate at which the population is aging and the impact having more seniors with lower incomes will have on transportation, housing, and utilities. She requested that the EJTF include representation from those advocating for seniors. Mr. Muhs noted that Commission planning efforts have regularly considered the needs of seniors, including through housing planning and VISION 2050, and that Public Involvement and Outreach has been very focused on outreach to seniors and groups representing seniors. He noted that Commission staff would consider how to enhance senior representation on the EJTF. Mr. Nelson asked that this be added to the action item list.

UPDATE ON COMMISSION WORKFORCE TRANSPORTATION EFFORTS

Mr. Nelson asked Mr. Lynde to provide an update on ongoing workforce transportation efforts. He described a pilot on-demand transportation program being conducted in partnership with UW-Milwaukee utilizing a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation. That pilot service, called FlexRide Milwaukee, is focused on testing a new transportation service connecting Milwaukee residents to jobs in the Menomonee Falls and Butler area. FlexRide is scheduled to run from February through fall 2022. Mr. Lynde also noted that Commission staff has been working with MobiliSE (formerly the Regional Transit Leadership Council) on a last-mile transportation study focused on accessing jobs beyond the reach of current transit service in communities in eastern Waukesha County and southern Milwaukee County. The study is planned to be completed in spring 2022.

The following comments occurred after the update by Mr. Lynde:

1. Ms. McNeely asked what local vendors are being used for FlexRide Milwaukee and whether drivers would come from the same neighborhoods as the riders. Mr. Lynde replied that the provider is Via, a global company, and that local drivers would be hired to provide the rides. Mr. Muhs added that a key reason Via was selected is due to its route-matching algorithm that is not available locally, but there is potential for developing the capacity of local vendors in the future. Ms. Adams asked if staff could provide data on drivers by race/ethnicity. Mr. Muhs indicated that staff would check to see if Via collects that information and report back to the EJTF. Mr. Lynde noted that he did not believe Via collects information on race/ethnicity.

[Secretary's Note: Following the meeting, Via indicated they have hired a total of 18 drivers and do not collect information on race/ethnicity. However, anecdotally the vast majority of drivers appear to be people of color.]

2. Mr. Holz asked if the drivers would be full-time employees. Mr. Muhs responded that FlexRide drivers would be independent contractors and the vehicles would be driver-owned with the exception of a wheelchair-accessible vehicle being leased through Via.
3. Ms. Mendez Barrutia asked if the riders would be current employees working at businesses in Menomonee Falls and Butler or if they would be newly employed. Mr. Muhs indicated it would be a mix of current employees and jobseekers interested in working in Menomonee Falls or Butler. Mr. Nelson indicated it was important to get information on FlexRide to individuals seeking employment. Mr. Muhs agreed and noted that the FlexRide team is working with Employ Milwaukee and others to make sure residents are aware of this new service.

UPDATE ON INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND JOBS ACT

Mr. Nelson asked Mr. Muhs to provide an overview of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Mr. Muhs indicated that the House of Representatives passed the Senate's IIJA, also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the President signed the bill on November 15. He explained that the IIJA is an expansion of the federal transportation law that Congress and past Presidents have typically signed every five to six years. It includes \$1.2 trillion in funding, with \$550 billion of that amount being above and beyond typical funding for transportation and infrastructure. In addition to transportation, the bill includes funds related to things like clean water and drinking water, flood management and resiliency,

broadband improvements, and clean energy transmission. Mr. Muhs noted that, related to the work of the EJTF, the IJA includes substantial funding to assist households that cannot afford broadband and to replace lead service lines. For transportation, the IJA includes a number of pilot and smaller programs, including the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program that provides grant funding for planning and projects aimed at removing, retrofitting or mitigating highways that historically impacted the connectivity of communities. Mr. Muhs indicated there are several other programs with the potential for significant equity-related benefits, but noted that the IJA does not represent a substantial change to federal transportation law and that much of the decision-making on how to use funding is still going to occur at the state level. The following comments occurred after the overview by Mr. Muhs:

1. Ms. McNeely noted that bandwidth is a significant issue when it comes to broadband and asked if that is addressed in the IJA. Mr. Muhs responded that the minimum standards for bandwidth were increased to 100 MB/second download and 20 MB/second upload. He pointed out that reliability is also key issue and he has not seen performance standards related to reliability yet.
2. Ms. McNeely asked whether the IJA would provide additional funding opportunities for passenger rail on the north side of Milwaukee. Mr. Muhs responded that the main challenge in Southeastern Wisconsin related to funding passenger rail has not been availability of federal funding, but rather the ability to identify and provide local matching funds.
3. Ms. Adams indicated she hoped there would be coordination regarding new broadband funding in the IJA and funding already provided to school districts to provide access to broadband and related equipment. She also asked if educators and small businesses would be eligible for the new broadband funding in addition to residents and families. Mr. Muhs indicated he was not aware of funding for educators in the IJA, but that there is funding for educators as part of the Build Back Better bill currently in the Senate.
4. Ms. Schellinger asked why certain zip codes received reduced rates for internet service. Mr. Muhs responded that there was a previous covid relief bill that provided reduced rates within zip codes with lower median incomes.

REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TASK FORCE ACTION ITEM LIST

Mr. Nelson indicated that the action item list was linked within the agenda for review (available [here](#)) and, in the interest of time, asked EJTF members to contact staff if they have any questions or concerns. He noted that action items would be added to the list based on requests during the meeting.

OVERVIEW OF COMPOSITION OF APPLICANTS FOR RECENTLY FILLED COMMISSION POSITIONS

Mr. Muhs indicated no positions have been filled since the last update at the October 13, 2021, meeting, but that Commission staff has two current openings and will provide an update at the next meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Nelson asked if there were any public comments. No comments were made.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CORRESPONDENCE

Mr. Nelson thanked Ms. Adams for her efforts in advocating for an equity, diversity, and inclusion coordinator position to be restored as part of the 2022 Kenosha County Budget.

Mr. Muhs reminded the EJTF that the Commission is in the process of updating its website and EJTF members recently received a survey to gather input on the current website and areas for improvement. He also reminded the EJTF that the Commission had created a performance monitoring website, which can be accessed at www.sewrpc.org/performance.

Mr. Muhs informed the EJTF, given previous interest from members, that the grant award winners for EDA's Build Back Better Regional Challenge were recently announced and no awards were granted to applicants from Southeastern Wisconsin.

Ms. McNeely noted that there is a lot of funding available for racial equity efforts and that conversations appear to be happening in silos. She suggested it could be beneficial to utilize some of this funding to help facilitate a more coordinated effort to identify best practices for achieving racial equity.

NEXT MEETING DATES

Mr. Nelson indicated Commission staff will contact EJTF members to identify the specific meeting date.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nelson requested a motion to adjourn. Mr. Holz moved, and Ms. Adams seconded the motion to adjourn. The motion was approved unanimously, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric D. Lynde
Recording Secretary
