

**Transportation Funding Task Force (TF2)**  
**Northern Michigan University**  
**September 29, 2008**

**Final Meeting Minutes**

Meeting began at 9:00

**Members Present:** Sen. Glenn Anderson, Rep. Pam Byrnes, Cindy Elliott, Sen. Jud Gilbert, Dennis Gillow, John James, Rep. Phil LaJoy, Ann Jousma-Miller, Mike Nystrom, Roger Salo, Peter Varga, Susan Zehnder, Rich Studley

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Studley and the task force members introduced themselves for the benefit of the audience. The agenda for the meeting and the minutes from the September 8<sup>th</sup> meeting were unanimously approved. Public comment was offered in the morning, noon and late afternoon sessions.

**Public Comment**

Bob Struck (Marquette County Commissioner and CAC Member representing the Michigan Association of Counties), welcomed everyone to Marquette and members of the CAC Highway, Road and Bridge technical subcommittee in the audience.

Representative Steven Lindberg (Marquette) welcomed everyone to Marquette and praised the work the TF2 is doing.

Representative Michael Lahti (Hancock) welcomed the group to the Upper Peninsula and spoke about the value of the TF2s work.

Keith Kaspari (Marquette County Sawyer International Airport) spoke in the morning about the importance of aviation to the UP, and the needs of Sawyer Airport in particular. He spoke again at the end of the day about Sawyer's importance and the need for roads to get to it. He suggested the TF2 consider a seasonal gas tax, from November through April when gas prices are lower, that could be used for winter maintenance. On the idea of an airport parking tax, he noted that there are a number of airports throughout the UP and Michigan that do not assess a daily parking rate. He suggested that the TF2 look at how Minnesota and Tennessee handle their aviation fuel taxes, as they are, like Michigan, predominantly served by Northwest Airlines.

Jim Sodergrin (representing taxpayers), pointed out that property millage may not be a good way to finance roads because property tax revenue is not keeping pace with costs. He noted 50 percent of land in the Upper Peninsula is not on the tax roll. He suggested the TF2 consider instead increasing the gas tax 10 cents per gallon, and that people would accept that if the road taxes are used for transportation.

Scott Carlson (Regional Interagency Coordinating Committee, RICC) spoke the need to make transit in Escanaba more efficient, and urged the TF2 to keep the Ticket to Ride (T2R) program that provides vouchers for taxi service for transit dependent residents.

Bonnie Champeau (RICC) told the TF2 that 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue South in Escanaba needs a stop light, as it is difficult to cross and she is afraid of someone will be hurt, particularly nearby school children.

James M. Iwanicki (Marquette County Road Commission) told the TF2 that drastic steps may be called for, that safety is an issue due to lack of funds, that County Road Commissions have been downsizing, that they have been working to be more efficient, but cannot make up for a lack of funds. He also noted that he had with him two snowplows in the parking lot, 1984 and 1986 models respectively, that are used every day in Marquette in the winter.

John Marshall (Lake Superior Community Partnership) spoke about the need for enhanced north-south travel so those in the Upper Peninsula could get to Green Bay, Wisconsin. He praised the passing lanes that have been constructed on highways in the UP, but noted that Wisconsin is building a four-lane highway that end at border with Michigan.

Peter Djupe (Iron County Road Commission) told the TF2 that Iron County has a problem with access to Marquette. He noted that the existing corridor is crowded, and that it's a safety issue, particularly for emergencies and ambulances, and for truck traffic to Sawyer Airport. Marquette is the big city in the UP and residents from all over the UP need to be able to get there.

Randy Girard (Marquette Charter Township) said that all townships rely on the county road commissions as their road agency. He noted there are dramatic differences between roads in cities and townships, because the county road commissions need more money. In the past, his township has raised the money to do road work, and contracted with the county road commission to accomplish it. He also pointed out that snow clearance is an issue for emergency vehicles like ambulances and fire trucks.

Arnold Sirtola (Ewing Township) noted that county road commissions are continuously playing catch-up. Ewing township, 30 miles from Sawyer Airport, is one of the poorest townships in the state. He told the TF2 that Ewing township residents can't afford to keep paying road millage, but that the township cannot get needed road improvements unless they participate financially.

Bob Sweeney (Mackinac Bridge Authority) made a brief presentation on the structure of the bridge authority and its tolls. When the Bridge Authority looked at their revenues and needs into the future, they anticipated a shortfall 15 years out which prompted them to implement a stepped increase of tolls every two years over 6 years, after much public involvement. He also noted that because of higher gas prices, traffic at the bridge is down 8.8% over last year.

Delynn Klein (Marquette County Transit Authority) noted that some communities in the UP no longer have grocery stores or pharmacies, and that transit is needed to help them meet their most basic needs. Many transit agencies are downsizing service, providing just the basics, due to lack

of funds. When asked, she noted that 15 percent of Marquette County Transit Authority's revenue comes from fare box revenue.

Rochelle Cotey (Alger County Public Transportation Authority) noted that her transit agency has always been underfunded. In a county of less than 10,000 people they provide 110,000 rides per year. They serve a vital function and are widely supported by local government and business. She also pointed out the need for more commuter carpool lots.

Bob Lindbeck (Alger County Road Commission) told the TF2 that his agency is downsizing in order to decrease overall costs in the face of rising costs for fuel and construction materials.

Dave Hall (Marquette County Road Commission) noted that transportation providers are all in this together, working together, but the public doesn't understand how dire the situation is.

Douglas Mills (Baraga County Road Commission) told the TF2 that his county is the state's 4<sup>th</sup> lowest recipient of Michigan Transportation Funds, and that 75 percent of the land in the county is not taxable. He noted that they do have a rural millage for transportation, but still struggle just to provide day to day operations. He told the TF2 members to structure recommendations to achieve a catch-up phase, an enhancement phase, and a sustainability phase.

Jeremy Nelson (general population) suggested some solutions for the TF2's consideration, including redirecting some portion of the money from moving violations to transportation or raising the taxes on alcohol and tobacco to generate revenue for transportation. Finally he suggested increasing the state gas tax 5 cents per year for 5 years with a sunset clause implemented at the end of that time.

Senator Michael Prusi (Ishpeming) welcomed the group to Marquette and expressed his interest in hearing the public comment being shared.

### **Work Sessions**

Connie Morrison (MDOT) led the task force through a facilitated work session to verify the guiding principles for recommendations and to develop and prioritize a list of potential funding recommendations for state transportation funding. During the afternoon session, the results of the facilitated work session was summarized for the task force and additional comments solicited.

Polly Kent (MDOT) discussed the initial draft sections of the TF2 report, seeking feedback from TF2 members over the next two weeks. In the afternoon session, she worked with the task force to clarify some recommendations that had been made at the September 8 meeting.

Reports on efficiencies, best practices and reforms developed by the Highway, Road and Bridge and Aviation technical subcommittees were also distributed to the TF2 members.

### **Follow up**

*Michigan Department of Transportation Action Requested*

- Find out how much revenue is generated annually for the Natural Resources Trust Fund
- Determine the federal limitations for tolls on pass-through trucks
- Find out how much MDOT spends annually on wetland mitigation
- Identify any other states that have a commission to increase transportation revenue

County Road Association of Michigan Action Requested

- Find out how much money county road commissions spend annually on wetland mitigation