

RAHAB Board Meeting Minutes

Date: November 5, 2024

Time: 1:01 PM

Location: Alaska DOT&PF Central Region, Anchorage, Alaska / Zoom

1. Opening and Roll Call

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 1:01 PM by Chair Dan Hall.

Attendance: All members were present (quorum established):

- Dan Hall (Chair, in-person)
- Jon Fuglestad (in-person)
- Kodi Long (in-person)
- Jason MaComas-Roe (online)
- Andrew Guy (in-person)
- Patrick Kemp (online)
- Aves Thompson (in-person)

Approval of Agenda and Minutes:

- The agenda and previous meeting minutes were reviewed and approved after corrections.
- **Corrections to Minutes:**
 - Name spelling adjustments requested by Fuglestad, Long, MaComas-Roe, and Thompson.
 - Jason MaComas-Roe requested his absence from the May meeting be recorded as excused due to lack of notification.

Chair's Remarks:

Dan Hall welcomed members and introduced Pat Kemp, a new board member with experience as a former DOT Commissioner.

2. Public Comments

The floor was opened for public comments via phone (by pressing star-nine) or Zoom hand-raising.

- **Outcome:** No public comments were received.
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3. Buy America Requirements Update

Presentation by Chris Goins:

- FHWA plans to remove the **Manufactured Product Waiver** by the end of 2024.
- This could delay utility-related projects significantly, as many utilities are unable to source compliant domestic materials.

Challenges:

- Difficulty sourcing domestic metals, glass, lumber, and polymers.
- Pre-purchased non-compliant materials cannot be used, potentially delaying projects.

Mitigation Efforts:

- DOT is working with AASHTO and drafting a letter requesting an Alaska-specific waiver.
- Plans are underway to engage Alaska's congressional delegation for support.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Aves Thompson:** Asked if the decision was administrative or congressional (it is administrative).
 - **Dan Hall:** Expressed concern over the delays this would impose.
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4. Workforce Development and Recruitment Challenges

DOT Report:

- Success in obtaining FHWA funds for training programs to secure CDLs and certifications.
- Partnerships are being formed with rural schools to provide highway-related credentials to students.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Andrew Guy:** Emphasized the need for robust efforts to mitigate workforce shortages.
 - **Kodi Long:** Suggested more aggressive strategies to attract and retain workers in Alaska.
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5. Year-End Obligations and Awards

Presentation by Director Pannone:

- **\$662.7M in federal funds** were obligated for FY2024, with **\$417.4M awarded over 53 projects**.
- Awards decreased compared to previous years (63 projects in 2022, 73 in 2021).

Discussion Highlights:

- **Dan Hall:** Asked about differences between obligations and awards (obligations secure federal funds; awards are contractor agreements).
 - **Kodi Long:** Inquired about timelines for spending obligated funds.
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6. STIP Amendments and Planning Findings

Deputy Commissioner Keith's Presentation:

- Overview of STIP approvals and amendments, noting delays caused by public comment requirements and FHWA interpretations.

Key Issues:

- Ambiguities in federal regulations causing inefficiencies.
- FHWA declined to provide written clarifications, causing project uncertainties.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Aves Thompson:** Expressed surprise at FHWA's lack of clear written guidance.
 - **Dan Hall:** Suggested that frequent amendments disrupt project timelines.
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7. Dalton Highway Maintenance

Challenges:

- Ongoing issues on a critical commercial route.
- Proposed actions: form an ad hoc group, consider user fees, and establish an advisory committee.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Andrew Guy:** Stressed the highway's importance to rural communities.
 - **Kodi Long:** Suggested partnerships and state funds to address these issues.
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8. Manh Choh Mine Haul Route

Presentation:

- Recommendations included policy improvements, safety actions, and capital projects to address concerns.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Dan Hall:** Highlighted safety concerns, especially regarding school bus routes.
 - **MaComas-Roe:** Suggested local involvement in safety initiatives.
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9. School Bus Safety

Recommendations:

- Launch public awareness campaigns.
- Explore ITS solutions and apply for grants.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Andrew Guy:** Supported efforts to educate the public on interacting with school buses.
 - **Chris Goins:** Emphasized ITS improvements for school zones.
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10. Bridge Posting and Load Monitoring

- Monthly monitoring of the Manh Choh haul route bridges shows no observed damage.

Discussion Highlights:

- **Kodi Long:** Inquired about long-term plans for monitoring and maintenance.
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Action Items

1. **STIP Process Flowchart:** DOT Staff to develop a flowchart clarifying STIP processes.
 2. **White Paper:** Leadership to prepare a white paper addressing federal regulatory challenges.
 3. **Dalton Highway Funding:** Ad hoc group to explore solutions for Dalton Highway maintenance.
 4. **School Bus Safety:** Safety Division to implement awareness campaigns and seek grant funding.
 5. **Bridge Monitoring:** Maintenance Division to continue monthly bridge assessments.
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Next Meeting

Date: March 6, 2025

Location: Juneau, Alaska

Invited Guests: Dan Smith and Carlos Rojas from MS/CVC

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 4:25 PM.