

Policy Committee

**Commission Meeting Room, 2nd Floor, Hall County Government Center
Draft Minutes of December 10, 2024 Meeting**

Voting Members Present:

Commissioner Jim Hix, Jackson County, Chair
Commissioner Jeff Stowe, Hall County
Mayor Ed Asbridge, City of Flowery Branch
Bill Nash for Commissioner Kathy Cooper, Hall County
Chris Rotalsky for Mayor Sam Couvillon, City of Gainesville
Megan Weiss, GDOT

Voting Members Absent:

Chairman Richard Higgins, Hall County Board of Commissioners
Mayor Lamar Scroggs, City of Oakwood

Others Present:

Corey Jones, City of Gainesville
Dan Branch, City of Buford
Chris McCrary, City of Flowery Branch
Justin Lott, GDOT
Elizabeth Johnson, GDOT
Zach Propes, Hall County
Casey Ramsey, Hall County
Katie Crumley, Hall County
Jason Skarda, Hall County

Brent Cook, Hall County
Beth Garmon, Hall County
Phillippa Lewis Moss, Hall Area Transit
Gina Roy, Jackson County
Steve Cote, RS&H
Joseph Boyd, GHMPO
Michael Haire, GHMPO
Denise Etheridge, Gainesville Times

1. Welcome – Commissioner Jim Hix, Chair

Commissioner Hix opened the meeting at 11:00 AM.

2. Approval of August 13, 2024 Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Mayor Asbridge made a motion to approve of the August 13, 2024 meeting minutes, which received a second from Commissioner Stowe, and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

3. Update from the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)

Mr. Boyd provided the committee with a brief recap of the most recent Technical Coordinating Committee meeting, which took place on December 3, 2024. The TCC unanimously recommended approval of all agenda items.

4. Update from the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)

Mr. Boyd provided a brief recap of the recent Citizens Advisory Committee meeting, which took place on December 5, 2024. The CAC unanimously recommended approval of all agenda items.

Mr. Boyd informed the Policy Committee of several comments made by members of the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Mr. Sammy Smith, who represents the City of Gainesville, asked if Hall County or the Chamber of Commerce were going to do an in-depth analysis of the TSPLOST referendum results in order to determine what could be done differently.

Mr. John Rudio, who represents the City of Flowery Branch, asked if, in the absence of TSPLOST funding, Flowery Branch or Hall County could look at installing a traffic light at Blackjack Road and Hog Mountain Road in order to make some improvements there while waiting on funding for a more expansive widening.

Ms. Berlinda Lipscomb, who represents the City of Gainesville, asked about potholes along EE Butler/US 129 near the intersection of Ridge Road in Gainesville. GDOT has taken a look and did not see anything major, but Ms. Lipscomb received GDOT's contact information for further discussion. Additionally, Ms. Lipscomb also raised concerns about the Railroad regularly blocking the at-grade crossing on Athens Street in Gainesville, and how disruptive that has been for the surrounding community. Mr. Boyd notified her that he would reach out to Gainesville to pass along these concerns. Ms. Weiss mentioned that there is a grant opportunity for improvements at railroad comments, to which Mr. Boyd said he would take a look.

Commissioner Stowe and Mayor Asbridge echoed Mr. Rudio's comments regarding the intersection of Blackjack Road and Hog Mountain Road, with Mayor Asbridge specifically noting that left turns were especially difficult due to the lack of visibility past the curve on Hog Mountain Road.

5. Approval of the Draft 2025 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Fiscally Constrained Project List

Mr. Cote provided a presentation on the 2025 MTP development process, recapping the developments so far, discussing the results of the public engagement process, and provided an overview of how the draft MTP Fiscally Constrained Projected List is organized.

Mr. Haire gave an overview of all projects included in the Fiscally Constrained Project List, engaging with Committee members when clarification or additional information were needed. Commissioner Stowe expressed concern that projects were not being prioritized correctly, particularly with the new widening of State Route 365 receiving pre-engineering funding but did not have construction

scheduled until the long-range project band, while local projects like Phase II of the Spout Springs Road widening still do not have funding. Additionally, Commissioner Stowe was concerned that the funds would be spent on design and engineering and then the project would be delayed further, requiring that additional funds are spent on updated engineering. While the State Route 365 widening was one of Commissioner Stowe's bigger concerns, he stated there were other projects on the project list that raised concern as well, and he would be unable to vote for approval of this project list in its current state. Mayor Asbridge agreed with Commissioner Stowe's assessment and concerns. Commissioner Stowe and Mayor Asbridge discussed the widening of I-985, and expressed dismay at that not being funded. Ms. Weiss cited a study from 2020 that determined that improvements were not feasible and resulted in the project being shelved, but that the project would be reevaluated in 2025 once the results of a current I-85 study are completed

Mr. Boyd and Mr. Haire discussed how projects often receive funding for right-of-way, utilities, and construction phases once pre-engineering is completed, and it is unlikely that the State Route 365 widening will remain a long-range project. Mr. Boyd also discussed that funds are usually set aside for specific projects and purposes, and the funds would likely not be able to be transferred to another project like the widening of Spout Springs Road. Mr. Boyd cited the Elachee Drive bridge project as an example, as when that project was being developed, the GDOT representative on the Policy Committee shared that those funds were specifically designated for bridges and could not be transferred to other projects.

Ms. Weiss offered some input on the process for GDOT's travel demand modeling, and stated that she would have to engage in a discussion on next steps with other GDOT staff if the project list was not approved at this meeting.

Mr. Haire then discussed next steps, including the public comment period, which will run from April 2, 2025 through May 2, 2025, and the final approval of the MTP at Policy Committee on May 13, 2025.

Commissioner Stowe and Mayor Asbridge agreed that it would be best to table this item for now and discuss the project list at a future meeting. The committee tentatively agreed on January 7, 2025 as the date for the specially called meeting (in late December, MPO staff received guidance that this list could wait to be adopted at the next regularly scheduled meeting on February 11, 2025).

MOTION: Commissioner Stowe made a motion to table the approval of the 2025 MTP Fiscally Constrained Project List, which received a second from Mayor Asbridge. Ms. Weiss abstained from voting. The motion passed with a yes from all other members.

6. Approval of 2025 Safety Performance Measures (PM 1)

Mr. Boyd briefly discussed the 2025 Safety Performance Measures, which are set by GDOT and then adopted by MPOs statewide. These performance measures set goals for the number of fatalities, number of serious injuries, fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, serious injury rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, and the total number of non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries, all operating on a 5-year moving average (2021-2025). These performance measures will be inserted into the FY 24-27 Transportation Improvement Program and the FY 2026 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

MOTION: Commissioner Stowe made a motion to approve of the 2025 Safety Performance Measures (PM 1), which received a second from Mayor Asbridge, and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

7. Approval of Draft Amendment #4 to the FY 2024-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Mr. Haire introduced Draft Amendment #4 to the FY 2024-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which contains all projects receiving funding between the fiscal years of 2024-2027. The updates being made to the Transportation Improvement Program with Amendment #4 are below:

- New Project: GH-023B / PI 0015280: Spout Springs Road Widening Phase II
 - Right-of-Way (ROW) funding added for FY 2027 in the amount of \$20,243,000.00.
- New Project Phase: GH-147 / PI 0016089: State Route 211 Widening – Phase II
 - Construction (CST) funding added for FY 2026 in the amount of \$284,140.29.
- New Project Phase: GH-148 / PI 0020370: NEVI – Charging Stations. Four EV charging stations to be added along I-985 corridor, location TBD.
 - Construction (CST) funding added for FY 2025 in the amount of \$30,000.00.
- New Project: GH-150 / PI 0020731: State Route 365 Widening from I-985 to Belton Bridge Road in Lula
 - Pre-Engineering (PE) funding added for FY 2026 in the amount of \$10,000,000.00.
- New Project: GH-151 / PI 0020735: Widening of State Route 53 from State Route 124 to New Cut Road
 - Pre-Engineering (PE) funding added for FY 2026 in the amount of \$1,500,000.00
- Updated procedures for Administrative Modifications and Amendments on Page 7.
- Updated System Performance Report added to Appendix H.

Commissioner Stowe expressed the same concerns about project prioritization – particularly pertaining to the new widening of State Route 365 through Lula. Commissioner Stowe asked if it was possible to conditionally approve of the amendment, approving all items except for GH-150 – Widening of State Route 53 from State Route 124 to New Cut Road. Staff responded that the Policy Committee could make a motion to approve all amendments except for GH-150/State Route 365 Widening.

MOTION: Commissioner Stowe made a motion to conditionally approve of Amendment #4 to the FY 2024-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), approving the amendments to GH-023B, GH-147, GH-148, and GH-151, as well as the updated procedures and System Performance Report, which received a second from Mayor Asbridge, and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

8. Approval of Draft Carbon Reduction Project List for FY 2024-2027

Mr. Boyd led a discussion on the Draft Carbon Reduction Project List for FY 2024-2027, which has been developed in collaboration with local planning partners. This draft list provides several projects

for which local agencies would like to utilize funds from GHMPO's allocation of Carbon Reduction Program funding. The projects that local jurisdictions settled on are below:

- Jackson County: EV Charging Stations in Braselton/Hoschton
- Oakwood: EV Charging in new Downtown/INK
- Hall County: EV Charging at Exit 16 Park & Ride
- Gainesville: Replace Lighting (location TBD) or EV charging at Poultry Park
- Hoschton: Replace lighting along SR 53 and/or Low/Zero Emission Trolley or Bus
- Braselton: EV Charging near Town Green
- Flowery Branch: EV Charging along Downtown Parking Spots

The project list did not receive any objections from the Policy Committee. MPO staff will move forward with programming these projects with GDOT.

9. First Review of Draft FY 2026 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Mr. Haire discussed the first draft of the FY 2026 Unified Planning Work Program, which is the annual operating budget for the MPO, funding all planning activities and any additional studies GHMPO would like to do. This draft of the FY 2026 UPWP contains finalized funding amounts for FHWA's PL grant and FTA's Section 5303 grant. Additionally, a new Work Element (4.6 – Air Quality) has been created to describe the work that GHMPO does with Atlanta Regional Commission regarding air quality conformity. Lastly, Mr. Haire discussed the potential studies listed within the UPWP that GHMPO and local jurisdictions could choose to pursue in FY 2026 – namely, the Oakwood-Flowery Branch Connection Trail Study, which GHMPO could do utilizing the base PL grant, and the State Route 13 (Oakwood) Corridor Study, which would require applying for additional PL funds. The FY 2026 UPWP will be a voting item at the Policy Committee meeting in February.

10. Other

Mr. Boyd provided a brief update on the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, which is being developed parallel to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and is still on schedule to be finalized and adopted at the May 13, 2025 Policy Committee meeting. GHMPO staff are planning to schedule a stakeholder committee meeting for January 2025.

Mr. Boyd then discussed the State Route 13 / Atlanta Highway Corridor Study. The study team held the first public open house for the project on November 12, and are currently in the process of developing the list of potential improvements.

Lastly, Mr. Boyd discussed the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Safety Action Plan, which is still on track to be adopted by May 13, 2025.

11. Jurisdiction and Agency Reports

Representatives shared the status of projects being completed by their jurisdictions: Mayor Asbridge for the City of Flowery Branch, Mr. Jones for the City of Gainesville, Mr. Lott for the Georgia Department of Transportation, Mr. Skarda for Hall County, and Ms. Roy for Jackson County.

12. Public Comment

There were no public comments.

13. Upcoming Meeting Date

Commissioner Hix reminded the Committee of their next meeting date, which will potentially be a specially called meeting, tentatively set for January 7, 2025 (following this meeting, MPO staff confirmed that the specially called meeting is no longer required. The next regularly scheduled meeting is in February 11, 2025).

14. Adjourn

There being no other items of business, the meeting adjourned at 12:10 PM.

Commissioner Jim Hix, Chair

Michael Haire, GHMPO