



COUNCIL OF MAYORS

MEETING MINUTES - FINAL

Tuesday, August 15, 2023

9:30 AM

**Cook County Conference Room
433 West Van Buren Street, Suite 450
Chicago, IL 60607**

Representing agencies present:

DuPage Council of Mayors: Mayor Joe Marchese, Darien

Central Council of Mayors: President Mark Kuchler, La Grange

Kane Council of Mayors: Mayor Jeffery Schielke, Batavia

Lake Council of Mayors: Mayor Leon Rockingham, North Chicago

Lake Council of Mayors: President Glenn Ryback, Wadsworth

North Shore Council of Mayors: Mayor George Van Dusen, Skokie

Northwest Council of Mayors: President Karen Darch, Barrington

South Council of Mayors: President Mike Einhorn, Crete

Southwest Council of Mayors: President Mary Werner, Worth

Southwest Council of Mayors: President Dave Brady, Bedford Park

Staff present: Erin Aleman, Jesse Altman, John Carpenter, Karly Cazzato, Teri Dixon, Kama Dobbs, Doug Ferguson, Jon Haadsma, Kasia Hart, Craig Heither, Jaemi Jackson, Aimee Lee, Amy McEwan, Jared Patton, Stephane Phifer, Russell Pietrowiak, Sarah Stolpe, Blanca Vela-Schneider, Lee Skuby, Mary Weber, Laura Wilkison

Others present: Jessica Abdelnour, Emily Berendt, Len Cannata, Eric Czarnota, Drew Duffim, Michael Fricano, Mary Hartegan, Neil James, Kendra Johnson, Terry Kernc, Mike Klemens, Brian Larson, Heidi Lichtenberger, Brittany Matyas, Jada Porter, Leslie Rauer, Joe Surdam, Kyle Whitehead

1.0 Call To Order**2.0 Approval of Minutes****Minutes from the Council of Mayors Executive Committee, July 18, 2023**[23-374](#)

PURPOSE & ACTION: Approval of minutes from the Council of Mayors Executive Committee meeting on July 18, 2023.

ACTION REQUESTED: Approval

Attachments: [Council of Mayors EC Draft Minutes 2023.07.18](#)

A motion to approve the minutes from July 18, 2023 was made by President Darch and seconded by President Ryback. The motion passed.

3.0 Updates**3.01 Executive Director's report**[22-438](#)

PURPOSE & ACTION: CMAP leadership will provide an update on recent agency actions.

ACTION REQUESTED: Information

CMAP Executive Director Erin Aleman began her report by welcoming Mayor Marchese to the Executive Committee. Ms. Aleman then highlighted the importance of the PART initiative which will go to the Board for approval in October. Ms. Aleman emphasized that closing the region's transit funding gap will require hard decisions and cooperation, which is why CMAP has been seeking input and buy-in from organizations and leaders from all parts of the region throughout the planning process. Ms. Aleman encouraged the committee to provide honest and candid feedback during today's discussion.

There were no questions.

3.02 Plan of Action for Regional Transit (PART) update[23-372](#)

PURPOSE & ACTION: Staff will provide an update on recent work related to the Plan of Action for Regional Transit (PART).

ACTION REQUESTED: Information

CMAP Senior Director and Policy Advisor Laura Wilkison provided an overview of the Plan of Action for Regional Transit (PART) project, including a summary of the development process and a detailed overview of the preliminary plan structure and strategies.

The plan is organized into three sections: The system we want, How to pay for it, and How to Implement it.

Ms. Wilkison first described the recommendations for how to pay for the system. The plan includes a suite of possible actions for achieving different funding goals, based on the level of service the legislature chooses to pursue. Those strategies range from new efficiencies and fare increases to increases or expansions of the RTA sales tax, and are organized into three scenarios: Minimum viable, Meaningful change, and Transformational investment. Ms. Wilkinson also highlighted the need to reform how paratransit services are funded. The paratransit system is relatively expensive and is federally required to be fully funded.

President Einhorn asked for greater clarification on the types of capital expenses included in the various

funding scenarios. Ms. Wilkison and Ms. Aleman explained that the expenses are related to equipment needed to facilitate operational improvements, such as fare integration, station accessibility, and new sidings to support regional rail operations. President Darch emphasized that it's helpful to think about what improvements are possible before discussing costs.

Chair Schielke then highlighted the need to address the impact that electric vehicles have on Motor Fuel Tax (MFT) revenue and asked if the plan would address the issue. Ms. Aleman clarified that the plan does highlight the need for a transition to VMT fees but does not provide specifics. President Einhorn asked for details about how a VMT fee works. Ms. Aleman referenced pilot projects in Oregon, Minnesota, and other states that have shown the approach is viable and explained some of the different mechanisms these pilots used. President Einhorn shared concern about the approach, including the potential for administrative costs to exceed the revenues raised.

Chair Schielke then asked about possible expansions of the Metra system beyond the current, six-county RTA region, and whether an expansion of the RTA sales tax into those areas would occur. Ms. Wilkison responded that the legislative section of the plan does address this issue, and specifically highlighted that the expansion to Rockford is being funded through state sources, rather than the sales tax. Chair Schielke emphasized that allowing Metra service without paying the sales tax could set a bad precedent.

President Darch then highlighted that several of the funding recommendations would affect people who own and drive vehicles and might not use transit. Ms. Aleman responded that the region has a multi-modal transportation system and that maintaining the transit system benefits all residents, whether or not they use it themselves, by reducing the number of vehicles on the road. CMAP is also engaging in conversations with the counties to ensure that changes to vehicle registration fees do not negatively impact county operations.

Ms. Wilkison then provided an overview of the plan's legislative recommendations, which are covered in the How to implement it section. The plan highlights four scenarios for improving transit governance: two that strengthen the current coordinating agency (RTA), one that creates a regional network manager by integrating the regional entity with committees, and one that creates a new, unified regional entity overseeing all of the region's transit operations. Ms. Wilkison provided a detailed overview of each of these options.

Mayor Van Dusen asked if the City of Chicago would be willing to give up authority over transit to a unified regional entity. Ms. Wilkison said that it is an ongoing question that is being discussed with the various stakeholders. President Einhorn then asked about recent ridership levels on Metra trains entering Chicago. Ms. Wilkison said that ridership is at about 60 percent of pre-pandemic levels and increasing, though it is not expected to return to 2019 levels. President Einhorn said that there is a lot of focus on commuters coming into Ogilvie and Union Station, but less focus on communities south of Chicago, and there are a lot of opportunities to better serve those areas. Ms. Aleman said that new service is difficult without funding. The larger funding packages may make future service expansions possible. Ms. Wilkison added that the fare recovery ratio is also a factor. The high recovery requirement means new service can only be added if there are very strong ridership projections from the start, which limits innovation in the system. President Einhorn noted that this conversation has been happening for decades and studies have shown there is high demand, but no progress has been made. Chair Schielke then said that there has been a lot of construction in Batavia in recent years, and people are overwhelmingly coming from Chicago. This is particularly true for residents in retirement communities. Those residents want and need transit. Ms. Wilkison echoed this concern and highlighted that demand for paratransit and on-demand transit is increasing, and the system cannot support that demand under current structures.

Ms. Wilkison continued her presentation by reviewing the timeline and next steps. The draft plan will go to

CMAP's board for discussion in September and a final vote is expected in October. The deadline for delivery to the General Assembly is January 1, 2024. Ms. Aleman then added that there will be a big push for implementation once the plan is finalized and CMAP will be relying on local and regional partners, including members of the Executive Committee, to discuss the topic with their elected representatives.

President Kuchler expressed skepticism that a mayor would be able to support an expansion of the RTA sales tax to include services. Ms. Aleman recognized the challenge, especially after the increase in the gas tax, but explained that the study looked closely at what neighboring states are doing for funding and shows that Illinois is significantly behind. President Kuchler then expressed concern about the state electric vehicle tax credit, noting that EV owners do not pay MFT, and wondered if the money should go to the entities that maintain the roads, rather than consumers. Ms. Aleman stressed the PART discussion a statewide question and a statewide decision. CMAP has worked with consultants to show the financial benefit of modernizing the system, and the numbers are quite compelling. President Einhorn then stated that the region is not homogenous and some areas have to compete with neighboring states that may have lower tax rates. That means what is good for the region might not be good for local communities. President Warner highlighted her opposition to the pop tax for the same reason and questioned the meaning of "modernizing" taxes. Finally, President Warner shared that the Metra parking lots in Worth are now costing the Village money, and questioned whether more funding is the answer. President Einhorn echoed that many of the Metra Electric parking lots are empty. Ms. Wilkison said that CMAP's goal is to get people back on transit and is exploring how to make the system more attractive to riders. President Warner said that people are working from home and don't have to commute, so they won't go back. Ms. Wilkison and Ms. Aleman added that the ultimate decision lies in the General Assembly; CMAP's role is to study and recommend ideas. Ms. Aleman also emphasized that 60 percent of jobs cannot be done remotely.

President Brady then asked if there had been any research into alternative transportation options that don't require as much infrastructure, such as ferries, that could be funded using money currently set aside for highways. President Warner added that the water taxi could be a model. Ms. Wilkison said these kinds of discussions will happen during the upcoming regional transportation plan update.

President Darch said that she supports providing the state with a menu of options, rather than telling them which option to pick. It is the state's job to make large decisions affecting many jurisdictions, not local leaders. President Darch further emphasized that the current data are a snapshot in time and could change. It is important to keep monitoring the situation in case things change. President Warner said that remote work now has less to do with COVID than it does with technology, and that isn't changing. It will only intensify.

Chair Schielke thanked Ms. Wilkison and Ms. Aleman for their work and said that the conversation was among the most important and most fruitful that the committee has ever had.

3.03 Legislative update

[22-406](#)

PURPOSE & ACTION: CMAP legislative affairs staff will be available to answer questions.

ACTION REQUESTED: Information

CMAP Legislative Affairs Senior Kasia Hart provided a brief update on CMAP's recent legislative work. The team has been supporting the PART project through dialogue with various local and state officials. The team is also working to develop a strategy to better share safety-related information with state officials.

Since the Committee's July meeting, the governor has signed several transportation-related bills, including the transportation omnibus bill and a bill requiring certain employers to provide pre-tax transit benefits. The

governor issued an amendatory veto to a bill making changes to public-private partnerships for transportation. The definition of “responsible public entity” now includes only IDOT and the Tollway.

Mayor Schielke asked if future updates could include information on what the state is doing about electric vehicles and MFT and highlighted the governor’s veto on a bill to end the nuclear energy moratorium, which could affect electricity availability for electric vehicles.

3.04 CMAQ, CRP, TAP-L and STP Shared Fund Programs

[23-373](#)

PURPOSE & ACTION: Staff will provide an update on public comments received or proposed changes to the recommended programs, if any.

ACTION REQUESTED: Information

CMAQ Senior Analyst Doug Ferguson provided a summary of how the CMAQ, CRP, TAP-L, and STP Shared Fund Programs have progressed since the last meeting of the Council of Mayors Executive Committee. The programs were released for a public comment period, which ended on August 11, 2023. CMAP received one comment in support of the programs, submitted by the Village of Berkley. Staff does not intend to make changes to the draft programs. They will be submitted to the project selection committees for approval in two weeks.

There were no questions.

4.0 Other Business

There was no other business.

5.0 Public Comment

This is an opportunity for comments from members of the public.

Brian Larson highlighted Salt Lake City as an example for how a community can make improvements to fixed transit service, using existing funding structures, to reduce dependence on paratransit services.

6.0 Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for November 7, 2023

The next meeting will be held on November 7, 2023 and will include the approval of the UWP program to support the continued Planning Liaison program.

7.0 Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55am.