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Wildlife Linkages Working Group

Minutes of September 11, 2009, Meeting

Committee Members

Ann Audrey, COT
Paula Bluemer, Town of Marana
(for Jennifer Christelman)
Rafael Cancino, Town of Sahuarita
Rick Ellis, Pima County, Chair
Phil Trenary, Town of Oro Valley
John Windes, AZGFD

Public/Agencies

David Grandmaison, AZGFD
Siobhan Nordhaugen, ADOT Natural
Resource Mgmt-Enviro Services
Geoffrey Soroka, SWCA

Staff

Jim DeGrood
Steve Matthews
Joan Reedy
Teresa Ruiz

1. Call to Order and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Rick Ellis at 9:01 a.m. Introductions were made.

2. Approval of Minutes of Aug. 14, 2009

Motion was made by Phil Trenary to approve the minutes of the Aug. 14, 2009, meeting, seconded by Rafael Cancino, and unanimously approved.

3. In-Kind Contribution Form

An in-kind form was routed for member participation.

4. RTA Board Update (Jim DeGrood)

Jim DeGrood reported that the RTA Board has not met since the last time this group met, but is scheduled to meet Sept. 24. The following items will be brought before the Board: the four of five requests that have been approved by the Working Group; the Houghton Road Deflection and Culvert Wildlife Movement Study, the upsizing of structures on the second phase of Sahuarita Road (La Villita to Country Club), the Pre and Post Construction Monitoring for those structures, and the Wildlife Movement and Crossing study for Pima Mine, Old Nogales Highway and Quail Creek Connection Crossings. Mr. DeGrood said he presented to the TPC and Management Committee that the Working Group had approved

the crossings on State Route 77 and that the Working Group was continuing to refine the proposal and look at the surrounding issues that will be dealt with in Item #5 today; where we are going with the overall use of funds. There is a CART meeting Thursday, Sept. 17. He said other than the standard quarterly update they will be talking about the modern streetcar.

5. General Committee Topics

Topic #1: Discussion by the Working Group on the topic of increasing allocation of funds for previously approved projects.

Mr. Ellis asked Mr. DeGrood how the Board, as a general rule, responds to cost increases or request for cost increases. Mr. DeGrood said there is some history with dealing with these kinds of issues and policy has been put into place.

The IGA says that we have agreed to a price and we expect to deliver it for that price. Any overages are the implementing agencies obligation to address. For the most part projects are coming in just under the requested amount. Where project costs exceed the programmed amount, RTA Executive Director Mr. Hayes has the authority administratively to approve the lesser of, 10 percent or \$200,000 over the amount that was programmed. Requests that exceed this amount must be taken before the RTA Board for consideration. The experience of the jurisdictions that have asked for additional funds from the RTA Board has not been a pleasant one, and in one case staff recommended denial

Mr. DeGrood said when they start looking at the 35 road projects they have a different set of constraints. They also allow for a 10 percent increase, however, the State Legislature required that any increase in funding greater than 10 percent constitutes a significant change to the RTA Plan, requiring that the change be returned to the voters for approval. Mr. Ellis expressed that cost estimates need to be as solid as possible or have a backup plan.

Ms. Bluemer asked if money in one category can be moved into another category. If funding was approved for fencing and we want to move it to some other portion that still fits within what was approved by RTA. Mr. DeGrood said they would look at the total dollar amount not the distribution between the cost components within a project. There has been an expression on the part of the RTA Board and the committees that were involved in forming the RTA; that they really look at trying to minimize soft costs. There might be some challenges if you start moving construction dollars into soft cost areas, so make appropriate distribution of expenditures.

Topic #2: Presentation and discussion by the Working Group on the revised prioritization/allocation of funds for wildlife Linkages.

Mr. Ellis reminded the Working Group that about a year and a half ago a document of guidelines was drafted to address what our strategic investments should be; what dollar allocations should be broken out to, and whether they should go to new construction or studies. At the last meeting Ms. Campbell and Mr. DeGrood provided feedback from other levels questioning how something as big as SR77 ties into our strategic investment plan and does that correlate to the dollars allocated for prioritization. Mr. Ellis met with Ms. Campbell and Mr. DeGrood and revised the priority guidelines making them broader. The revised guidelines document was distributed to the group for comment. He explained the original version was broken down into new construction, retrofit and general studies. The

revised guidelines are focused on priorities such as 1) allocation for restoring connectivity (defined as reconnecting and re-establishing connection between significantly protected areas and providing high biological value which includes enhancements and new construction as well as retrofits), 2) maintaining permeability (defined as maintaining existing ability for various wildlife to move back and forth which is more localized biologically and is most of what we have been working with and covering the same general areas listed earlier), and 3) general research (defined to show the investments such as culverts, fencing and the workshop that is being talked about).

Mr. Cancino asked about construction projects and shouldn't that be if it is a brand new road and considered on the general biological assessment of it? Mr. Ellis replied that it may or may not and depends on the document used. Mr. DeGrood suggested looking back at the ballot language which says transportation-related critical wildlife linkages. There would need to be some transportation nexus. Mr. DeGrood said we need to make sure that it maintains that transportation relationship.

Mr. Trenary recalled that two years ago we talked about the possibility of doing corridor studies and projects that weren't close to a road. Mr. DeGrood said what we are trying to accomplish with this is a broad statement of policy; how are we going to be looking at using these funds. Are we looking at addressing these permeability issues in the sub-regional context or are we looking at it as being regional wildlife linkages that are occurring between the major lands preserves that are in the Tucson area. That is what the RTA Board is going to want to look at.

Mr. Windes expressed concern with the description between one and two; regional linkages and localized linkages, not so much the restoration vs. maintenance. He feels they are both going to be restoration and or maintenance, and would argue that maintaining permeability may oftentimes be more important than restoring permeability. He said he would hate to make that the higher priority. The high priority is going to be the regional linkages; maintaining, enhancing and restoring regional connectivity as opposed to localized connectivity, which is important but we have given it a lesser percentage of allocation.

Mr. DeGrood said "given that understanding is the committee comfortable with the relative weight of the two"? Mr. Trenary said it is a well done guideline document, but he also has questions about the percentages. The importance of each project will be evaluated by the committee and that could move the percentage a bit one way or the other.

Mr. DeGrood said when looking at the regional linkage they followed the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan document; these would be the areas we would look at focusing the larger block of money on. Ms. Audrey had questions about this prioritization. She felt that we should be looking at what transportation planning is going to be happening, what timeframe and what they look like when you balance it out. What is the trajectory for the other jurisdictions? How many little roads are we fixing vs. how many of the big roads like I-19, I-10, and SR77. Mr. Ellis feels that what makes this particularly difficult is that we don't have that "laundry list" of needs collectively identified, categorized and quantified. He has tried to accomplish this many times; timing is one method. What's the wildlife benefit compared to the timing of it. Ms. Audrey said she would be more comfortable with wording of "projected" or something that implied that it's a moving target or the ranges were bigger. Mr. Windes said speaking from the Game and Fish perspective that a higher priority would be for regional linkages for wildlife as species in general, rather than within

the urban area. Moving wildlife between large land blocks would be a larger benefit than moving within the urban area. Ms. Audrey said what that implies is that you want to use this to induce projects that aren't on the radar already. If you allocate money this way toward regional connectivity, that implies sometime in the future, you are going to start looking at the problems that are emerging and suggesting roadway projects, eco ducts or whatever are not on the radar yet. Mr. Windes said that's exactly what Game and Fish wants to do on a statewide scale and what we are actually doing on a countywide, county by county basis by looking at wildlife connectivity and will come to Pima County in the near future, hopefully. That's what Ray's proposal is all about, a workshop to get everybody together to talk about regional linkages and sub-regional linkages. We would like to identify all the connectivity needs, existing connectivity, and existing threats, and try to maintain and enhance it.

Mr. Trenary said when this was sold to the public, connectivity was part of it, but the average person out there doesn't have a clue as to what that is. What they know is what happens when they drive their car into a deer or javelina. So even though it is a higher priority for Game and Fish, he doesn't believe, it should be a higher priority for this committee. A higher priority is the safety of the driving public.

Other changes were suggested and Mr. Ellis said he would make the changes noted and e-mail them to the members.

HANDOUT: RTA Wildlife Linkage, Guidelines for Funding Allocation, Rick Ellis, Sept. 11, 2009.

6. Updates and Announcements

Ms. Nordhaugen brought revised copies of the SR77 Proposal for everybody.

Mr. Ellis said he, Mr. DeGrood and Ms. Ruiz went to the various TIP, TPC and Management Committee meetings and gave a basic proposal overview.

Ms. Audrey announced that she will be leaving City services as Sept. 18. Irene Ogata from their office will be the new alternate to this Working Group. Leslie Liberti will serve as the primary representative unless someone from TDOT wants to. The City's priorities for 2011 to 2015 are Silverbell, Houghton, and extending Kolb.

Mr. Windes said he will have a new specialist, Michael Demlong coming in next week. He has a construction background and will be the lead on transportation; they will tag team this meeting. Mr. Windes will remain as the primary.

Mr. Cancino gave an update on Sahuarita Road. He said they are going to go with a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) since the cost is over \$25,000. Now that they are done with the construction phase, they will start doing the prep work to get the RFQ put together and the IGA.

7. Future Agenda Items

No items were requested.

8. Call to the Audience

Ms. Nordhaugen asked for a schedule and dates for all of the upcoming meetings. Mr. DeGrood said they would take the proposal to TIP in October and TPC in either November or January. He expects a resolution by the January RTA Board meeting. The meeting dates will depend on holidays and quorums.

Ms. Nordhaugen said that she will be submitting the monitoring associated with the SR77 Proposal at the next meeting.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:26 a.m. by Chair Rick Ellis.