

DATE: March 25, 2018
TO: RVTPO
FROM: Transportation for America
SUBJECT: Summary of T4America Workshop #2 on March 13, 2018

On the morning of March 13, 2018 T4America facilitated the second of two half-day workshops for the Roanoke Valley Transportation Planning Organization (RVTPO). T4America staff also participated in a Steering Committee meeting that afternoon led by EDR Group to discuss the region's Transportation Economic Development study. The following memo provides notes from the half-day workshop and summarizes the feedback submitted from participants through evaluation forms distributed at the end of the morning session.

Workshop Notes

- 1. Why transportation performance management?** Chris Zimmerman, Vice President of Economic Development for Smart Growth America, presented a recap of the economic trends he presented during Workshop 1, discussed why the transportation field is moving toward a more performance-based approach, and presented on how the region can stay competitive amidst these changes. (No questions).
- 2. Lessons from a peer community:** Following a presentation by Leigh Holt from the Sarasota/Manatee MPO about how her region is using performance management to access all available funding, engage new stakeholders, and prioritize projects that support regional goals, participants raised the following questions and comments.
 - Question: What happens if the public isn't bought into a project VDOT is ready to build? A: It becomes a matter of engagement and making the case; part of the challenge is how long it takes for transportation projects to move forward (sometimes multiple decades); need to expedite the process.
 - Question: How long did it take Leigh to do all of the studies referenced in her presentation? A: A little over a year; she made a point of using readily available data that was consistent across jurisdictions; working with partners was key (ex. public health).

3. SMART SCALE and the Roanoke Valley Region: Chad Tucker, the Manager of Smart Scale, presented on the background and rationale behind Smart Scale, the project scoring criteria, and tips for making projects more competitive, including by considering innovative lower-cost solutions like intersection treatments rather than widenings. Participants raised the following questions and comments:

- Question: How is “person reliability” measured by the state? A: Time Index and Planning Time Index are used.
- Question: Are projects scored compared to other projects statewide, or just the region? A: They are scored statewide, but there is also a funding allocation specifically for the region (so both).
- Question: Is Roanoke at a disadvantage in scoring compared to NOVA or other regions? The congestion this region experiences would not stand up to the northern part of the state, yet it is still a problem for the region. A: Chris Zimmerman argued no; it was a political game before, and now there are transparent ways to make the Roanoke region’s projects more competitive (ex. focus on economic development and accessibility, which are weighted most heavily within the overall project score for this region).
- Question: This part of I-81 has the most crashes, which seems like a safety issue, but the state treats it as a reliability issue. How to tap into that? A: Chad explained that the state has looked at this as a reliability issue in the past because when there is an incident on I-81 it becomes a regional issue. Crashes are not occurring in the same location each time, so on a segment-by-segment basis it does not look like a major issue. The state is figuring out how to better account for that in their methods.
- Chad’s tips for scoring more successfully:
 - Widenings tend not to score well by themselves (not a good value for the cost).
 - Look at short-term fixes, intersection improvements, and reduced access points to optimize traffic flow: these produce results for delay at much lower cost.
 - Do not leave the economic development score blank; it is the only part of the score that relies entirely on local data, so if you leave it blank you will get a zero in that category.
- Themes from Cristina Finch, RVTPO:
 - How we think about land development is important
 - Need to use performance measures to tell the region’s story, and get ‘other people’s money’ as Leigh said. Engage more of the business community.
 - Economic development measures are big for this region, but accessibility is even bigger

4. **Exercise: Evaluating proposed transportation projects to address regional needs**

Participants walked through two projects as a group that had previously been proposed through Smart Scale but did not receive funding: I-81 Auxiliary Lanes Exit 150 to Weigh Station & Ramp Extensions; and Orange Avenue Improvements: widen U.S. 460 from 4-6 lanes between 11th Street and Gus Nicks Blvd.

Participants compared how they would expect the projects to score against how they actually scored, and then brainstormed ways to make the projects more competitive:

- There was general surprise that projects did not score better in the “congestion” category. Chad reiterated the point that widenings tend not to score well and lower-cost innovative intersection treatments would likely do better.
- Chad Tucker also reemphasized that the region should always include information in the “economic” category of the submittal (left blank in at least one case; project could have scored higher if that was included).

5. **Closing remarks:** The T4America team each provided some final thoughts at the conclusion of the workshop:

- Chad Tucker reiterated key points for how to make projects more competitive in Smart Scale, including looking at lower-cost improvements, and suggested the state’s [STARS](#) (Strategically Targeted Affordable Roadway Solutions) Program as a resource.
- Leigh Holt emphasized using performance measures to tell the region’s story and reiterated the importance of developing a good understanding of all of the available funding pots.
- Chris Zimmerman emphasized that the region will ultimately need to think beyond how to make previously proposed widening projects more competitive. Consider what kind of economic future the region wants and base the projects it pursues on that.

Summary of Participant Feedback Received

Total feedback forms received: 10

Average Scores:

1. How satisfied were you with this event?

Average: “Mostly Satisfied”

2. Has this workshop changed how you will approach your work?

Average: “Mostly Changed”

| PLEASE RATE TODAY'S WORKSHOP | POOR | FAIR | GOOD | EXCELLENT |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------------|
| Location | | | | X |
| Day and time | | | | X |
| Agenda format | | | X | |
| Presentations | | | X | |
| Exercises/Discussions | | | X | |
| Overall rating | | | X | |

3. What was the most useful part of this workshop?

- *Smart Scale pointers – discussion*
- *The importance of understanding the buckets of money and developing projects on that focus*
- *Sarasota/Manatee MPO presentation by Leigh*
- *Smart Scale info*
- *Chris's presentation and comments about how the economic world is actually functioning was great. He provides validity to what a lot of us have already been seeing.*
- *Using actual projects submitted; perspectives from someone from another locality*
- *Smart Scale discussion*
- *More exposure to the process. Who are the players in the process?*
- *Exercise could have been*

4. Is there anything you would change about the focus or structure of this workshop? Any topics you wish had been covered?

- *A few more of our projects discussed*
- *No*
- *We need to continually focus on what is actually happening in the world. The old mindset needs to go away.*
- *Dig deeper into the individual categories of a submittal.*
- *No*
- *All good*
- *Talk less. Let us talk more.*

5. What is the most important next step for the region?

- *How do we get more funding sources to leverage state/federal funding?*
- *Prioritize projects with needs and our priorities*
- *Finalizing our list of projects and moving forward to Smart Scale; also generally better data for our use in Smart Scale*
- *Re-evaluate projects that scored low.*
- *We have to realize that good money chasing bad projects will not work. We need a reality check and a broader perspective. Our projects are not special just because they are ours.*
- *Tying funding opportunities with regional priorities.*
- *A unified voice.*
- *Further commit to its identity; de-suburbanize.*

6. Please provide any additional ideas you think should be addressed in the follow-up recommendations T4America will be developing for the region.

- *Emphasis on private/public partnerships to address interstate concerns.*
- *Look at more local projects*
- *Keep the recommendations realistic. Avoid some of the theoretical issues that were focused on at the previous meeting.*