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MEETING NOTES

TRAFFIC SIGNALS AND OPERATIONS WORKING GROUP

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DATE: Friday, September 14, 2001

TIME: 10:00 A.M.

PLACE: COG, 777 North Capitol Street, NE
              First Floor, Room 3

CHAIR: Woody Hood
              Maryland State Highway Administration

ATTENDANCE:

Andre Connerly, Arlington County DPW
Jonathan Gifford, George Mason University
Craig A. Franklin, Trichord
Doug Hansen, Fairfax County DOT
Pat Harrison, Quality Consultants Group
Woody Hood, MD SHA
Frank Miracic, FHWA
Phil Tarnoff, University of Maryland
Kenneth Todd, National Center for Bicycling and Walking
Bob Winick, Motion Maps LLC
Alex Verzosa, City of Fairfax DPW

COG STAFF ATTENDANCE:

Andrew Austin
Michael Farrell
Andrew Meese

ACTIONS:

1.   **Welcome**

Andrew Meese apologized for not putting the meeting off due to Tuesday's events. Chairman Mason, he said, had indicated that traffic signal operations were a high priority, and with his schedule as full as it was Andrew did not feel free to re-schedule. Woody Hood called the meeting to order, and there were general introductions.

2.   **Update on Pilot Arterial Corridor Studies**

On MD 650, New Hampshire Avenue, Synchro is doing the travel runs. Woody Hood will then decide what he needs to do with the timing. Rhode Island Avenue signals are to be managed by Montgomery County, even those that are located in Prince Georges County. Fiber-optic line will be installed. On the US 50 corridor, Alex Verzosa had no information. The Arlington representative mentioned that Arlington planned to do timing runs next week. Andrew Meese suggested that due to the traffic disruption related to the crisis, perhaps we should change the limits of the project. It was mentioned that Baltimore is starting its own traffic signals and operations working group, also with Woody Hood as its Chair.

3.   **Update on the Traffic Signal Problem Reporting System**

Andrew Austin of COG gave a presentation on the traffic signal problem reporting web site. There was some discussion as to who would sponsor this web site. It was more or less agreed that COG would be the sponsor, and not a media outlet. Eventually the site would get linked from others, enabling citizens trying to report traffic problems to find it. Citizens visiting the web site are to identify the problem location and jurisdiction on a map, and then go to the contact information page, which will give them phone numbers, addresses, e-mail, and web sites of the appropriate agencies. Questions were asked about reporting problems with signals on National Park land, but it was pointed out that there are few if any signals on the parkways. The problem of overlapping jurisdictions was discussed, and it was decided that this would be dealt with the old-fashioned way. Citizens would call the wrong agency and get directed to the right one. The Frequently Asked Questions section of the web site was shown, and Kenneth Todd asked why the questions he had submitted earlier were not included. Someone responded that Mr. Todd's questions were not frequently asked questions. Mr. Todd asked why the committee would not address his questions, to which Woody Hood replied that the committee had already spent too much time discussing his questions, and that it needed to stay on task. Michael Farrell suggested that Mr. Todd look for other forums in which to express his ideas, since the differences that he had with the committee on the merits of traffic signals were unlikely to be resolved.

4.   **Update on Traffic Signals White Paper**

Andrew Meese briefed the group on the Traffic Signals White Paper. The White Paper will address what our member jurisdictions are doing. Pat Harrison, the consultant doing the white paper, thought the data from Zia's survey was pretty good. Andrew Meese noted that it was about a year old, and suggested that Michael Farrell help Pat update the survey results. Andrew Meese explained the types of questions the survey contains. The survey will tell us who is doing what with what equipment. There was discussion as to what type of glossary might be incorporated into the web site, and its possible overlap with the Frequently Asked Questions section.

5.   **Update on ITS as a Data Resource Study**

Andrew Meese briefed the group on the progress of the study. COG is to be used as a data depository.

6.   **Discussion of Efforts to Develop Regional Performance Measures**

Andrew Meese briefed the group on performance measures. Chairman Mason has tasked the MOITS task force with developing regional performance measures. The working group of the MOITS technical task force met on September 5 and came up with some ideas for performance measures. On September 19 Andrew was to make a progress report to the TPB Board, and on November 28 make a report to the Regional Meeting at Union Station. Topics for that meeting include the funding crisis, as well as performance measures, which Andrew has divided into six categories, including system quality, safety, impact of traffic management centers and systems, reliability, and customer satisfaction. Surveys would be the source of information on customer satisfaction. We are avoiding using location-specific data, just aggregate regional data. We lack sufficient location-specific information-gathering tools. And we depend on the data that is already available. So we should take a region-wide version first, and save location-specific performance measures for a time when the data improves. A suggestion was made to include a measure of traffic signal failures and response time to those failures. Andrew said that the next step was database mining – looking at the data currently available to see if useful indicators could be found. The point was made that we should be keeping all our data and dividing it into jurisdictional bins. Andrew replied that so far we did not have data with a large enough sample size to yield meaningful customer satisfaction results even at the regional level. Woody Hood pointed out that different jurisdictions did things so differently that it was difficult to compare them, as for example in their chosen signal optimization methods. Andrew added that even creating a regional land use map is difficult because the zoning definitions are different across States. Alex Verzosa said that the TPB would probably be satisfied with our chosen performance measures, even if we did not yet have data to measure them all.
Kenneth Todd asked whether there was a scientific basis for choosing cycle length. Alex Verzosa replied that in Europe cycle lengths were lower than in the U.S. due to prevailing driving patterns.

Someone pointed out that optimization is a values-laden term. Andrew said that we should defer to sovereign political bodies in the definition of optimization.

7.   **Update from Training/Professional Capacity Building Working Group**

Malaika Abernathy was not present so no update from the Working Group was available.

It was mentioned that a new traffic signal course was being offered at George Mason University. University of Maryland also posts upcoming classes on the internet. The reluctance of the federal government to pay for locally-based courses when more generic ones were available was discussed. Local training courses can be targeted to local audiences and discuss specific local projects. Once done, the courses can be repeated very inexpensively, for the cost of a couple of days' salary for the instructor. Andrew discussed possibly producing a report with testimonials summarizing the region's experience with such courses.

8.   **Update from other M & O/ITS Activities**

The next regional ITS architecture meeting was to take place the following Tuesday at 1 p.m. Someone discussed an ADA-signal site, http://www.projectaction.com.