

SEVIER COUNTY TOURIST CORRIDOR ITS MASTER PLAN WORKSHOP MINUTES

MEETING DATE: April 17, 2012

MEETING TIME: 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

MEETING LOCATION: Pigeon Forge City Hall

SUBJECT: Sevier County Tourist Corridor ITS Master Plan – Workshop 2

ATTENDEES:

Bob Bowers, CDM Smith
David Ball, City of Gatlinburg
Randall Brackins, City of Gatlinburg PD
Buddy Parton, City of Gatlinburg
Jack Baldwin, City of Pigeon Forge
Karl Kreis, City of Pigeon Forge
Mark Miller, City of Pigeon Forge
Rob Ogle, City of Pigeon Forge
Roger Price, City of Pigeon Forge
Tracy Baker, City of Sevierville
Bryon Fortner, City of Sevierville
Jerry Hickman, City of Sevierville
Eric Itzel, City of Sevierville

Don Myers, City of Sevierville
Robbie Fox, Dollywood
Don Brown, East TN Development District
Corbin Davis, FHWA
Kevin Fitzgerald, Great Smokey Mtns National Park
Nathan Benditz, Knoxville Regional TPO
Mike Conger, Knoxville Regional TPO
Perrin Anderson, Sevier County Mayor's Office
John Reed, TDOT Multimodal Transportation
John Benditz, Kimley-Horn and Associates
Tom Fowler, Kimley-Horn and Associates
Alan Childers, Cannon and Cannon
Brian Haas, Cannon and Cannon

Welcome, Introductions, and Project Status Update

Mike Conger of the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO) welcomed everyone to the second stakeholder workshop and thanked the stakeholders for their participation in the development of an Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Master Plan for the Sevier County Tourist Corridor. Mike noted that the ITS Master Plan is being developed as part of a larger overall Regional ITS Architecture Plan by the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), and that plan is nearing completion. The Regional ITS Architecture looks at how various technologies, such as coordinated traffic signals and CCTV cameras, can be used to improve transportation operations in the Knoxville Region. Due to the unique challenges in the Sevier Tourist Corridor, the TPO wanted to conduct some additional meeting with stakeholders in the Region to identify possible ITS solutions to their challenges.

Everyone in attendance introduced themselves.

Tom Fowler from Kimley-Horn provided an overview of the project and the work accomplished to date. Tom noted that the purpose of the project includes the following tasks:

- Identify transportation challenges along the Sevier County tourist corridor;
- Develop a set of ITS projects to address the transportation challenge; and
- Meet the USDOT ITS Architecture conformity requirements to be eligible for federal funding of ITS projects.

Not all of the transportation challenges identified along the Sevier County tourist corridor can be addressed by ITS technologies. The consultant team will consider costs, benefits, and the operational challenges of implementing and operating various ITS technologies when identifying solutions. The goal

is to recommend ITS solutions that are cost effective and beneficial to the corridor if such ITS solutions exist for the transportation challenges.

Some of the challenges in the corridor that were identified included:

- Sevier congestion, particularly during the summer months;
- Unanticipated demand on the corridor (such as traffic departing from Dollywood due to a storm);
- Limited and underutilized alternate routes; and
- Severe impacts on traffic by incidents with extended closure.

Some of the potential needs along the corridor that had been discussed included improved traffic signal coordination along the corridor, particularly coordination that is responsive to fluctuations in the demand on the system throughout the day. The signal system should be as automated as possible because of limited resources for monitoring and operating the system.

The corridor also has a need to provide better traveler information to travelers. This information should be available to them prior to getting onto the corridor so they can make informed choices about travel. Travelers should also have alternate route information available when they enter the corridor. The challenge will be collecting real time traffic data and monitoring that data to provide accurate and timely information to motorists.

Finally, existing ITS systems along the corridor and in the region were discussed. Identified systems include:

- Traffic signal systems;
- Limited CCTV camera deployment;
- TDOT SmartWay traveler information system;
- Gatlinburg Trolley automated vehicle location and real-time information system; and
- Pigeon Forge Fun Time trolley automated vehicle location and real-time information system.

Discussion of Project Concepts

John Benditz from Kimley-Horn provided an overview of the project concepts that were being recommended for the corridor.

John discussed the idea and philosophy behind adaptive signal control systems. On the corridor, John recommended that an adaptive signal control system be implemented in the Sevierville and Pigeon Forge area. The adaptive system will allow the traffic signals to adjust to various traffic patterns that occur throughout the day and special plans would not need to be implemented for the many special events and fluctuations in traffic that occur throughout the year. Adaptive signal systems have proven effective at reducing travel times, delaying the on-set of congestion, and providing the ability to more quickly recover from severe periods of congestion. John discussed the concept of a joint operations center that would include the Cities of Sevierville and Pigeon Forge for operation of the system. One of the largest challenges with this project (and largest costs) is implementing a communication system that provides the necessary reliability and band-width required for adaptive signal control.

John also discussed how the system could be phased in to ultimately include video surveillance and dynamic messages signs that could build off of the existing communication system. The surveillance and traveler information components would only be effective if an agency were identified that could provide the staff necessary to monitor the system.

The City of Gatlinburg was not recommended for the adaptive control system because the consultant team believed that due to other challenges in Gatlinburg, such as heavy pedestrian traffic and limited lanes through the City, an adaptive signal control system would not provide a great enough cost benefit. Rather, John noted that the study could recommend that the signal system in Gatlinburg be reviewed to

see if the existing signal timing could be improved in any way. Alan Childers noted that he had spoken with Cindy Ogle from the City of Gatlinburg and she agreed that some of the potential ITS improvements may not necessarily improve the traffic challenges in the City.

After additional discussion with stakeholders, John agreed that the consultant team would add a recommendation to include a traveler information system for the Region. Real-time information from third party providers would be considered as a way to reduce the cost of deploying a vehicle detection system. John will review costs in more detail and include a recommendation in the draft ITS master plan. It was also noted that the trolley systems for Gatlinburg and the Fun Time Trolley are currently deploying traveler information systems. Real-time bus location information is currently available and the systems are working on ways to reach out to additional travelers, such as deploying displays of the bus locations at hotels and tourist attractions.

Stakeholders asked if the consultant team had reviewed the causes of congestion and ways to address the causes. John noted that the scope was limited to working with stakeholders to identify project recommendations. Although a more extensive study may be of benefit to the Region, the current effort that is being funded by the Knoxville TPO is more limited.

Mike Conger noted that given the Regional ITS Architecture effort, the TPO wanted to take some time during the development of ITS Architecture and focus specifically on the tourist corridor to be sure any potential ITS projects would be covered in the Regional ITS Architecture. Mike also noted that he was hoping that this effort in Sevier County might lead to the area submitting projects for Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds through the TPO. He felt that given the severe congestion along the corridor, a traffic signal project would compete well against other potential projects.

Next Steps

Tom Fowler identified the remaining steps for the completion of the project. These steps included:

- Consultant team will develop a draft of the Sevier County Tourist Corridor ITS Master Plan
- In mid-May, stakeholders will be notified when a copy is available for review on the project website
- In early June, comments will be incorporated and a Final Draft will be posted for final review
- By the end of June, the Sevier County Tourist Corridor ITS Master Plan Final Document will be made available

Mike Conger from the Knoxville TPO and Tom Fowler thanked everyone for their continued participation in the effort.