ROCKINGHAM PLANNING COMMISSION
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March 31, 2023

William Cass
Commissioner
NH Department of Transportation
7 Hazen Drive
Concord, New Hampshire 03302-0483

RE: Rockingham Planning Commission Prioritized list of Projects for the 2025-2034 Ten Year Plan

Dear Commissioner Cass:

The Rockingham MPO has completed the regional project ranking process with respect to the 10 Year Plan update (per RSA 228:99) and is pleased to submit to you two project priorities for this cycle:

- **Portsmouth Circle Engineering and Feasibility:** The reconfiguration of the Portsmouth Traffic Circle is the top ranked project in the RPC region and the operational and safety issues at the location are of great concern to the MPO. Based on feedback from NHDOT's project review committee, consensus was reached by the MPO that additional study is necessary to better understand workable options for improvements at the site. In that regard, the MPO recommends that an update to the (circa 2000) Portsmouth Circle feasibility study is the necessary step for this project and *requests including $1,100,000 for design engineering in the 2025-2034 Ten Year Plan*. NHDOT's review indicated engineering programmed for 2029 however the MPO would request earlier funding to allow for a full operational assessment and alternatives analysis and a solid basis from which make decisions regarding programming construction funding. The cost estimate for this project as scoped by RPC for the Ten Year Plan process and NHDOT's review are attached.

- **Ashworth Avenue Complete Streets ($6,904,497 inflated cost):** This project was highly ranked in the region, will continue to enhance the safety and function of the bicycle and pedestrian network in Hampton Beach, and will complement the work occurring on Ocean Boulevard as part of Hampton 40797. The full scope and cost estimate for this project and NHDOT review are attached.

This new set of RPC project priorities is based on the assumption that any projects currently in the Ten Year Plan remain so and that new projects will be programmed for construction in fiscal years 2033 and 2034. The process that the MPO followed to develop our priorities is detailed below.

Project Solicitation & Selection Process

The development of regional Ten Year Plan recommendations began in April 2022 with the scoping of the overall process, the setting of project selection criteria, and a request to our stakeholders to identify transportation needs in the region. The need to send projects to engineers for scope and cost development required an earlier start on the solicitation process and setting selection criteria weights.

Solicitation for Projects (April-July, 2022): The scope and schedule for the process began in April 2022 and was set in May 2022. The weights for selection criteria were set in June 2022. The project solicitation resulted in several new projects proposals received from communities and nearly thirty other projects added from other studies. This brought the total number of identified transportation improvement projects in the region to nearly 170, including those currently in the TIP and Ten Year Plan.

Project Development and Classification (June-July, 2022): Staff reviewed the projects in the Long Range Transportation Plan and updated details as necessary. After removing projects that have been completed or are already in the Ten Year Plan or Transportation Improvement Program, this left **100 potentially eligible projects** for prioritization (estimated current cost of greater than $200 million).

Initial Project Scoring and Development of Short List: Eligible projects were scored against the selection criteria and a short list of 15 projects was presented to the MPO TAC at the July 2022 meeting. Based on budget limitations for engineering services, the TAC reduced the list to 8 projects to be sent to the engineering consultants for scope and cost development.

Scope and Cost Development (August-October, 2022): Hoyle Tanner Associates (HTA), the RPC's on-call engineering consultants, developed scope and cost estimates for each of the 8 projects after discussions with RPC staff regarding expected scopes.

Selecting Candidate Projects (October-November, 2022): The scope and cost estimates were reviewed at the October TAC meeting and that committee recommended a list of 5 projects to be sent to NHDOT for scope and Cost review. Those five projects were approved by the MPO Policy Committee at the November 9, 2022 meeting and submitted to NHDOT on November 10, 2022 for scope and cost review.

Finalize list of Ten Year Plan Priorities (February-March, 2023): NHDOT reviewed four of the five candidate projects and forwarded the results to the MPO on February 27, 2023. Prior to receiving the feedback from NHDOT, the MPO TAC met and recommended that the MPO prioritize the top ranked regional project (Portsmouth Circle) for the Ten Year Plan with the understanding that final estimated costs were unknown at the time. At the March 8, 2023 meeting, the MPO Policy Committee reviewed NHDOT comments on the scope and cost of the Portsmouth Traffic Circle and determined that additional analysis and study was needed prior to moving forward with that project. The result of this was the current priority of

- **Portsmouth Circle Engineering and Feasibility: The** operational and safety issues at the Portsmouth Circle remain of great concern to the MPO and this project remains the top priority of the region. There was consensus that the scope for this project was uncertain and that an update to the feasibility study conducted in the early 2000s is necessary to make progress and determine the best approach for resolving the problems at the site. *The MPO requests including $1,100,000 in engineering funds in the Ten Year Plan (programmed as soon*

as is feasible) for this project to move forward a full operational assessment and alternatives analysis. The cost estimate for this project and NHDOT review are attached.

- **Ashworth Avenue Complete Streets ($6,904,497 inflated cost):** This project will complement the work occurring on Ocean Boulevard in Hampton (40797) and continue to enhance the safety and function of the bicycle and pedestrian network in Hampton Beach. The cost estimate for this project and NHDOT review are attached.

Additional Comments

In addition to the projects proposed for the Ten Year Plan, the MPO has some comments and recommendations regarding the process:

The project engineering and cost review continues to be a valuable addition to the Ten Year Plan process. MPO staff, TAC members, and Policy Committee members all appreciated the time and effort that NHDOT spent reviewing our projects and found the feedback extremely beneficial in the decision-making process. This is something that RPC would like to see continue (and expanded if possible) as they provided a critical perspective on timing, need, and cost, and that furthers our goal of providing quality projects for the Ten Year Plan. The addition of utilizing consulting engineers to develop project estimates was extremely helpful to our process. One additional step that RPC staff feels would be beneficial would be some early input from NHDOT's project review committee prior to the consulting engineers spending time developing cost estimates. Some early consultation and coordination on scopes would have resolved much of the cost difference between the RPC estimates and the NHDOT review estimates.

Implementing the corridor study program. RPC is anticipating the start of the corridor study program and, as previously expressed, has the need for a comprehensive analysis of several corridors in the region. The corridor that the RPC has identified as in need of study are the following (in route number order):

- **NH 1A:** The RPC is currently conducting a vulnerability assessment for NH1A (and other coastal corridors) to assess the areas potentially impacted by Sea-level rise and attempting to identify mitigating improvements. A comprehensive look at the coastal corridors with detailed improvements is needed to understand the true scope and cost of maintaining the transportation network on the coast in the face of climate change.
- **NH33:** Development at Pease Tradeport and along NH 33 in Portsmouth, Greenland, and Stratham has resulted in growing safety and congestion issues along the corridor. Recently, there have been serious crashes that have prompted calls from the community and elected officials for safety improvements as well as a thorough examination of the corridor.
- **NH 101**: The NH 101 expansion was completed 20 years ago and many of the unsignalized interchanges were experiencing significant congestion during peak periods Pre-COVID. The RPC would like to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the unsignalized interchanges to determine if improvements are needed to facilitate improved traffic flow and safety, particularly at exits 6,8,9,10, 12, as well as the NH 101/I-95 interchange.
- **NH 111:** The segment of NH 111 from NH 125 in Kingston to the Shadow Lake Bypass in Salem has experienced substantial growth and development over the last 20 years and the

corridor regularly experiences serious motor vehicle crashes and requests for traffic signals and other improvements. In addition, some areas have been subject to flooding during severe storms. A comprehensive examination of the corridor is needed to develop a comprehensive set of safety and traffic flow improvements and mitigate stormwater and related flooding issues.

- **NH 125:** In Kingston and Brentwood, there is a short section of NH 125 not incorporated in the 1999 Plaistow-Kingston Study or the 2008 Epping-Rochester Study. Growth and development on that portion of the corridor has increased in recent years, including the recent approval of an approximately one million square foot warehouse facility. High travel speeds, the lack of turn lanes, and other factors have resulted in multiple serious crashes, including a fatality at South Road in 2022. The development of a comprehensive plan focused on corridor-wide safety improvements is warranted to determine the needs for this section of this critical state roadway.

Coastal Resilience Planning: RPC is acutely aware of the threats to our coastal roads both in the long term from sea level rise, and the short term from storms like the one that occurred on December 23, 2022. The December 2022 storm tides correlated closely with anticipated sea level rise of three to four feet (See the story map documenting the impacts). The impacts to the NH 1B Causeway and NH 1A corridor warrant a comprehensive strategy to minimize the imminent impacts to the built and natural environments. The scale of the effort that will be required to mitigate the impacts of sea-level rise and coastal storms on the coastal transportation system is well beyond what we can hope to manage solely via RPC's $8 million target programming for each cycle, especially given competing interests of the region. The RPC would welcome the opportunity to collaborate on a comprehensive sea level rise strategy to address infrastructure resilience on the Seacoast.

The MPO supports continued efforts to refine the project identification and selection process and improve transparency in transportation project programming. We look forward to working with the Department and the other RPCs/MPOs on the continued evolution of the Ten Year Plan.

Sincerely,

Tim Roache
Executive Director

cc: Executive Councilor Janet Stevens
Peter Stamnas, NHDOT Director of Project Development
Bill Watson, Administrator, NHDOT Planning and Community Assistance
City Council/Select Boards
RPC Policy Committee Members
RPC TAC Members