



Richland County Council  
Transportation Ad Hoc Committee  
**MINUTES**  
May 7, 2024 – 2:00 PM  
Council Chambers  
2020 Hampton Street, Columbia, SC 29204

COMMITTEE COUNCILMEMBERS PRESENT: Overture Walker, Chair; Paul Livingston, Don Weaver, and Jessica Mackey.

Not Present: Yvonne McBride

OTHERS PRESENT: Allison Terracio, Chakisse Newton, Cheryl English, Gretchen Barron, Jason Branham, Michelle Onley, Michael Maloney, Angela Weathersby, Anette Kirylo, Patrick Wright, Ashiya Myers, Susan O’Cain, Stacey Hamm, Tamar Black, Lori Thomas, Kyle Holsclaw, Leonardo Brown, Jackie Hancock, Jennifer Wladischkin, Nathaniel Miller, Wayne Thornley, Aric Jensen, and Todd Money

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Councilman Overture Walker called the meeting to order at approximately 2:00 PM.

2. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. March 26, 2024 – Ms. Mackey moved to approve the minutes as distributed, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

3. **ADOPTION OF AGENDA** – Mr. Weaver moved to adopt the agenda as published, seconded by Ms. Mackey.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

4. **ITEM FOR DISCUSSION/ACTION**

a. Penny Matters: Duration, Amount, and Allocation to Categories – Mr. Ray Jones, Parker Poe, stated since the last ad hoc committee meeting, the Transportation Penny Advisory Committee (TPAC) has been busy. They received a presentation earlier today from the COMET regarding the COMET’s needs from the Penny. He noted the COMET has requested approximately \$960M (30% of Penny proceeds). In addition, they have been working through the Projects and Principles document. Now, it is coming before this committee.

The document is designed to guide how things on the Transportation Needs Assessment list prepared by Stantec will be managed and unfold. Council has divided the projects to be addressed in the referendum into three categories: Community Investment Projects, County Advancement Projects, and COMET Enhancement Projects. As you recall, there were a number of unresolved questions in the ordinance presented at First Reading. Namely, how long the Penny would be in effect and the costs tied to projects. We also talked about how the project categories would be divided. For discussion purposes, we had 40% allocated to Community Investment, 40% allocated to County Advancement Projects, and 20% allocated to COMET Enhancement Projects.

Mr. Jones reminded the committee there is a long and intentional period between the Second and Third Readings. The intent is to allow Council to have another work session in June and also to allow TPAC to continue to do its work. The touchstone of the work will be to finish the document before us.

The Penny will yield \$2.2 Billion in 15 years, \$3.1 Billion in 20 years, and approximately \$4 Billion will be collected in 25 years. The recommendation is for Council to have the option to issue bonds approved by the voters in the referendum to jumpstart the projects. Once the duration of the Penny has been decided, the committee can discuss how much to bond.

Mr. Weaver stated for clarification, the 20% for COMET Enhancements would include operations.

Mr. Jones responded in the affirmative.

Ms. Mackey indicated she was inclined to recommend a duration of 20 – 22 years. She does not want the duration to be less than what we presently have.

Ms. Terracio stated during the COMET meeting that there was a comment about not collecting the Penny for less time than we did with the first Penny.

Mr. Walker shares Ms. Mackey's sentiments about not going with fewer years. He suggested looking at the collection of Penny funds for 25 years. He noted he would work with Ms. Terracio to identify a more sustainable funding source for the COMET.

Ms. Newton concurred with collecting funds for an extended period because many transportation projects take time to complete.

Mr. Branham expressed that we need to be motivated to be responsive to the concerns voiced regarding the existing Penny so the voters feel like their concerns have been heard. As noted, most Council members were not serving when the existing Penny was passed. It is an opportunity for us to learn from others' experiences and present something viable in the eyes of the public. Part of his analysis is looking at how would the new Penny be different than the existing Penny.

Mr. Walker pointed out that as a part of the existing Penny, we ended up with TPAC, which was designed for oversight from citizens. At their meetings, updates are given by the Transportation Department and the COMET. He noted the existing Penny ordinance enumerated specific projects. From speaking with Mr. Livingston, it was done intentionally to assuage people's concerns about the Penny. This time, we are deviating somewhat from having specific projects enumerated since that tied the hands of Council when it came to making changes should a need arise. He inquired if there were concerns about the dollar amount during the deliberations on the existing Penny.

Mr. Livingston responded there were concerns expressed. They started with 15 years but were concerned there would not be adequate funding to sustain the COMET. He indicated there were twice as many projects as funding; therefore, they had to make significant cutbacks and create a priority list. What slowed the projects down had to do with community engagement and ensuring there was local and minority participation. He acknowledged concerns regarding the Program Development Team and whether there was a better way of providing services.

Ms. Mackey stated she believes that Council has worked hard to "right the ship" and ensure we do not repeat the previous mistakes. Her district is fast growing, and many of her constituents did not live here when the existing Penny was passed, but they know they need widened roads and sidewalks, and Hardscrabble Road has taken too long. She noted the Program Development Team is gone, and we have brought the Penny in-house. The website is updated regularly so residents can find out what is happening. The Transportation Department is going out into the community to speak. Going forward, we will have to prove that we will not make the same mistakes. The key piece to the future Penny is the "Priorities and Principles" we have been discussing.

The County Attorney, Patrick Wright, stated the Department of Revenue came out with guidelines in 2022 that did not exist when the Penny was passed.

Mr. Livingston indicated the statement that projects were just put on a list is not true. There was a 39-member commission that worked with a consultant to establish the list of projects. Council did not decide on any of the projects. Council adopted the commission's recommendation, which garnered the public's trust since those projects were chosen by an independent group of citizens, not Council.

Mr. Jones maintained when he speaks about the Penny he notes the county has brought the Penny in-house. We manage the Penny according to the guidelines established on the fly, not in advance of the Penny passing. There have been no further issues with the Penny in the last several years. The Transportation Needs Assessment undertaken at the Council's direction has engaged the public in each district. There have been 19 public meetings that resulted in several hundred interactions with the public. The TPAC members meet, actively look at the projects, and ask good questions. He indicated the public hearing would be held independent of a reading of the ordinance to ensure an appropriate pause in the process for public input. Finally, rather than being hamstrung, we are setting up a set of projects and principles to allow the program to be dynamic to address the needs we know about now and to address emerging needs. This is the first time some funds will be set aside in each project category for those needs.

Ms. Mackey stated, for clarification, that the current Penny ordinance does not divide the funds by thirds. In the proposed Penny ordinance, we will allocate a certain percentage to each category.

Mr. Jones indicated that in the current Penny ordinance, there were no percentages, but a maximum dollar amount was assigned to each category.

Mr. Walker indicated "County Advancement" would be projects like Hardscrabble and Blythewood Road, which are primarily South Carolina Department of Transportation roads.

Ms. Mackey indicated the three categories were defined as follows:

- *Community Investment Projects* – These projects target the integrity, safety, reliability, and sustainability of the transportation infrastructure in local communities that impact the day-to-day activities of citizens and local businesses. These projects include road improvements, widening, resurfacing, paving of dirt roads, intersection improvements, bikeways, greenbelts, sidewalks, and other pedestrian-friendly enhancements.
- *County Advancement Projects* – These projects target the expansion of transportation infrastructure to achieve, support, and sustain economic growth on a county-wide basis. These projects include new construction, improvements, and widening for major roadways, intersections, and commuting corridors; and
- *COMET Enhancement Projects* – These projects target the operation and expansion of the COMET. These projects include operational sustainability, establishment of new routes, new construction and improvements to enhance rider safety and comfort, and acquisition of new buses and other modes of transportation.

Mr. Brown specified there is an independent audit of the Penny, which communicates the funds were utilized in accordance with the guidelines. We also certify via letter to the Department of Revenue Director that we are complying with the agreements. We can be financially confident that the county is, and continues to be, in compliance with the guidelines associated with the Penny.

Mr. Walker inquired if the independent audit is available to the public.

Mr. Brown responded the audit is kept internally.

Ms. Barron inquired if the percentage breakdown was provided or if that is something Council is responsible for deciding the percentages.

Mr. Jones responded we proposed Community Investment Projects (40%), County Advancement Projects (40%), and COMET Enhancement Projects (20%).

Ms. Barron requested additional information regarding the COMET's funding request.

Mr. Jones indicated there were five areas the COMET wishes to focus on.

- Multimodal Transportation Center
- Increased Frequency on Existing Routes and Enhanced Paratransit Services
- Microtransit Services (Blythewood, Lower Richland, etc., to supplement existing services)
- Bus Rapid Transit – bus-only lanes along major thoroughfares
- Expenditures for Continued Operation

Ms. Barron proposed that Council receive the same presentation. She has heard that we once had transportation to Blythewood, but it was cut due to the lack of use. She noted she would have a challenge funding something without there being a need.

Ms. Terracio stated that the COMET Service Committee meets monthly to review bus use and where riders get on and off. A federally required process must be observed if a route needs to be changed. During her service on the COMET Board, they have voted on adding or removing services that are responsive to ridership.

Mr. Livingston inquired if we had taken the identified needs and decided which of the three categories they fit into.

Mr. Jones replied that it is in process.

Mr. Livingston inquired if there were any specific changes in the use of the Transportation Penny funding.

Mr. Jones responded that we now have an established set of rules that have been clarified since the inception of Penny.

Ms. Mackey moved to set the duration of the Penny collections at 25 years, with a projected funding amount of \$4.3 billion, seconded by Mr. Walker.

Mr. Weaver recognized that 25 years is a long time, and we would be binding the hands of future councils.

Mr. Walker asserted the current Penny was approved for 22 years, and we will be able to collect that funding by December 2026. While the proposed duration is 25 years, the Penny could come off the books quicker.

Mr. Weaver stated that we do not know what the county may face in the future, but we already know we need to replace several large buildings (e.g., the Courthouse). He would hate for us to box ourselves in too long on the Penny.

Ms. Barron asked if we accomplished what we set out to do with the current Penny in 11 or 12 years before, what is the big deal with staying the same or going lower?

Ms. Mackey understands the concern about the length of time, but she also considers the dollar amount and our growing county. So many projects need to be completed, so for her, this is the solution. If we reduce the years, we also reduce the collection amount.

Mr. Walker recognized that the Shop Road Extension led to Mark Anthony Brewing, and Green Street will open up the riverfront. He acknowledged that residents want to know about dirt roads and their streets or sidewalks.

Ms. Mackey declared that we must decide the duration, amount, and allocation to the categories so the public can digest the numbers and give Council feedback at the public hearing.

Mr. Walker made a friendly amendment to allocate the funds as follows: Community Investment Projects (40%), County Advancement Projects (40%), and COMET Enhancement Projects (20%).

Ms. Mackey accepted the friendly amendment.

Ms. English noted that, for the record, she supports the 25-year collection because she believes it will leave the county in a better position for the future.

In Favor: Livingston, Walker, and Mackey

Opposed: Weaver

Not Present: McBride

The vote was in favor.

5. **ADJOURNMENT** – Ms. Mackey moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Weaver.

In Favor: Livingston, Weaver, Walker, and Mackey

Not Present: McBride

The vote in favor was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:10 PM.