



**Southwest Rural Planning Organization
Joint Executive Board and Technical Committees Meeting Minutes
December 5, 2024**

Call to Order

RPO Coordinator Chris Pate called the December 5, 2024, Joint Executive Board and Technical Committee Southwest RPO meeting to order at 10:30 a.m. Shelton Merrell, Brownsville Planner led opening prayer. Tom Skehan, SWTDD Regional Planner, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

RPO Coordinator Chris Pate provided a roll call with the following members present:

Executive Board members –Mayor Jeff Griggs and Mayor Todd Pulse

Technical Board members – Shelton Merrell, Brownsville Planner

Others in attendance were Chris Pate, RPO Coordinator, OCT; Ashley Owens, TDOT OCT; Sam White, TDOT; Cody Roberts, TDOT, John Paul Saalwaechter, Director of the Aeronautics Division of TDOT

Keith Cotton, Beech River Regional Airport; Ron Pirtle, Hardeman County Zoning Compliance Officer; Tom Skehan, Southwest Tennessee Development District, Bryan Collins, RPO (remotely) and TDOT OCT; Thiera Taylor (remotely)

Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the May 15, 2024 meeting were approved.

Tennessee Department of Transportation Updates

Ashley Owens, TDOT OCT explained that Hurricane Helene had delayed may road projects and has caused changes to the 10-year plan. The Statewide Partnership Plan announcement will be delayed until the Spring, but the applications are being reviewed.

2025 Bylaws for an Executive and Advisory Board

Chris Pate, the RPO Coordinator, provided an overview of the consolidation of the Executive and Technical Committee into the Executive and Advisory Board. The coordinator explained that a position was being provided for a municipality with a population between 5,000 and 49,999 that qualifies for Surface Transportation Block Grants as part of the Board.

Following the presentation, the bylaws were approved following a motion by Mayor Griggs, second by Mr. Merrell, and approved by the members present.

Drones and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) for Rural Tennessee, Aeronautics Division, TDOT

John Paul Saalwaechter, Director of the Aeronautics Division of TDOT provided a presentation about the use of drones for commercial deliveries. He also alluded to the use of drones in disaster recovery. Mr. Saalwaechter explained that there are several partnerships and commercial companies operating in Texas and other states. There is a design company in Crossville that is developing parts for drones.

Mayor Pulse noted that a missing persons case had been solved by using a drone in Hardeman County. He explained that Tennessee Risk Management would not cover drones through insurance used by local governments. Mayor Pulse hoped that the State of Tennessee could adopt legislation to change this situation.

Land use and Height zoning ordinances around aeronautical facilities Aeronautics Division, TDOT

Mr. Saalwaechter explained that the Division was now in the Planning section of the Department. He explained that public use airports require TDOT review and that the FAA reviewed more uses than public aeronautic uses. He gave a brief description of the various airport zones. He explained that he would provide models following some research. He explained that there are federal applications and notifications needed for various construction activities in the vicinity of airports. He discussed the fact that population density and uses are especially discouraged in approach zones.

Other Business

None.

Public Comment

None.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned around 11:45 AM.