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M-119 TUNNEL OF TREES SCENIC HERITAGE ROUTE COMMITTEE

DRAFT Minutes

Tuesday, June 10th, 2025

Readmond Township Hall

6034 Wormwood Ln, Harbor Springs, MI 49740

Present

Dale Scott, Friendship Township (Chair)
Naomi Singer, Cross Village Township
James Fisher, Friendship Township
Laurelynn Harris, Cross Village Township
Garon Gopigian, West Traverse Township
Joey Arbaugh, West Traverse Township
Sue Rentrop, Cross Village / Emmet County Lakeshore Association
Jim Anderson, Friendship Township
Carolyn Sandford, West Traverse Township
Don Schaplowsky, Readmond Township

Tammy Doernenburg, Emmet County Planning and Zoning Director
Laura Moreau, Emmet County Assistant Planning & Zoning Director
Rob Hall, MDOT North Region TSC
Matt Radulski, MDOT North Region TSC
Bill Sutton, Readmond Planning Commission
Chuck Laughbaum, Emmet County District 1 Commissioner
Jim Lamerato, Resident
Tom Rowland, Resident
Jason Dryja, Resident
Ceci Bauer, Resident
Carmen Bosch, Resident
Ami Woods, Resident
Isha Pithwa, Networks Northwest
Cassidy Robarts, Networks Northwest

Online presence – Clayton Sigmann, MDOT

Absent

Larry Wallen, Readmond Township; Jerry Root, Readmond Township; Franz Neubrecht, Emmet County Lakeshore Association;

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 9:33 by Chair Dale Scott. Attendance was recorded for those present and of online participants.

II. Review and Adoption of Minutes from May 13th, 2025

Motion by Joey A., supported by Naomi S., to approve the May meeting minutes. All in favor. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

III. Agenda Review

No changes.

IV. Chair Remarks

Dale Scott, Chair reported with opening remarks. See attachment with the meeting minutes.

V. Public Comment

- a. Jason D. raised concern about a developer's modular home project and potential tree canopy cutting threatening the Tunnel of Trees. He questioned existing tree cutting restrictions and plans. Tammy D. clarified ordinance guidelines and past proposals for specific regulations. The group discussed permit requirements, reaching out to the developer, and requiring cut plan approval before home permits. Dale S. suggested updates be forwarded to him, and Naomi S. proposed adding an agenda item discussion for next M-119 TOT meeting in July. Ami W. emphasized determining authority and enforcement of tree cut plan requirements, noting past unresolved issues and potential for a bigger problem with a developer. Tammy D. agreed on the need to identify authority. Clayton S. commented that the committee can only advise and support ordinances and that the townships and county need to create them.
- b. Chuck L. expressed support for the proposal to install restrooms, parking, trash receptacles, and emergency landlines along the Tunnel of Trees. He stated he had communicated this proposal to fellow county commissioners and requested their backing, but has received no response to date.

VI. Subcommittee Updates

- a. Subcommittees did not meet. No Updated at the moment.

VII. Committee Member Comments

- a. Carolyn S. reported some committee members didn't receive the previous minutes or today's agenda and had printing issues. Isha explained documents are attached to the calendar invite and reminded members that the documents are uploaded on the Tunnel of Trees and Networks Northwest websites. Isha offered to also email them separately, though initially only Google invites or either invite or just an email was preferred. Joey A. suggested minutes and the agenda be emailed to each committee member moving forward. Isha noted that NN only uses google/gmail for sending invitations and that they do not use Microsoft products such as outlook etc.
- b. Garon G. said he distributed 10 to 20 reading documents to West Traverse Township. Dale S. asked if anyone needs additional prints to distribute there are copies with him to collect.

VIII. Partner Reports

- a. **Networks Northwest** - Isha reported on signage repair proposals, needing one more quote to proceed; completion is needed before September 30th. She also discussed website SEO (Search Engine Optimization), editing challenges, and issues with large document uploads. She also

mentioned looking for a new web host. The committee requested an image removal from the website (Private business images to be removed from M-119 TOT website). It was suggested this topic continue in old business.

b. MDOT -

- **North Region** - Matt R. reported the ice storm cleanup is complete. MDOT will begin wedging on M-119 in mid-July, lasting a month, to prepare for next year's chip seal. Carolyn S. inquired about MDOT announcing these plans in local newspapers. Matt R. explained MDOT issues announcements for all projects, but media coverage is not guaranteed. Garon G. asked for a definition of wedging; Matt R. clarified it's to reduce road edge steepness and prevent water pooling. The wedging will occur as needed between Cross Village and West Traverse. Dale S. asked about brush clearing along the highway; Matt R. responded it was complete as far as he knew. Garon G. praised Kent County's brush cleanup efforts.
- **Pure Michigan Byways** - Laurelynne H. raised concerns about the requirement for committee members to route inquiries about tree or road work through the committee or Networks Northwest, expressing that it adds an unnecessary layer and hinders direct communication. In response, Matt R. clarified that committee members are always welcome to contact him or the MDOT TSC directly with any road-related questions or concerns.
- Laurelynne also voiced concerns regarding the accuracy of information on the Pure Michigan M-119 Tunnel of Trees Byway website. Naomi S. requested that Isha escalate this matter to MDOT. To assist with this, Isha asked Laurelynne to provide a detailed list of inaccuracies so she can effectively address them with Clayton S.
- Clayton S. noted that the update to the Pure Michigan website link is still pending but is expected to be completed by the next meeting. He also shared that the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is currently open for public comment and will forward it to Isha. Additionally, he announced that the 2025 Pure Michigan Byways Workshop is scheduled for November 3rd in Gaylord at the University Center.

c. County Representatives -

- **Emmet County Planning and Zoning** - Tammy D. reported that they are beginning a master planning process and encouraged participation from committee members, either individually or as a group. Naomi S. confirmed that public comment is required for committee recommendations regarding tree removal, which Tammy verified.

d. Municipal Representatives - Dale S. asked the townships if there had been any discussion about Readmond Township's recreation plan proposal.

- **Friendship Township** - James F. said that there was discussion about Readmond Township's recreation plan and there was a request for funding, but there wasn't specification as to what the funding was for. Ultimately the Friendship Township board said no.
- **Readmond Township** - None.

- **Cross Village Township** - Naomi S. said the township meeting recently had a full discussion of the Recreation Plan and that they voted no on joining the plan.

Naomi S. also informed the group that there was a large discussion about restrooms along M-119 and that it has been turned down due to concerns about encouraging development, increasing traffic, and creating unsafe road conditions from turnoffs.

- **West Traverse Township** - Garon G. reported that West Traverse hasn't discussed the recreation plan, suggesting the partnership focuses on Cross Village and Friendship. In response to Dale's question about a letter to West Traverse, Garon was unaware of one. He will ask about the recreation plan at the next meeting, though it hasn't been on the agenda.

e. Organization Representatives –

- **Little Traverse Conservancy** - None.
- **Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians** - None.

IX. Public Comment

- a. Isha introduced Cassidy to the group, the new transportation planner for Networks Northwest who will eventually be taking over for the byways and transportation work plan items.
- b. Ami W. mentioned that she had proposed the idea of a scenic turnout with restrooms along M-119 and asked Naomi S. to confirm whether that idea had been rejected. Naomi clarified that the topic had been part of a broader discussion at a Cross Village Township meeting regarding participation in a linear recreation plan that included restrooms. Ami responded that the idea had never been discussed at Readmond or Friendship Townships, noting she had spoken directly with their supervisors. James F. stated that the idea had been discussed. Naomi reiterated that Cross Village was approached about participating in the linear recreation plan that included restrooms.

X. Ongoing and Unfinished Business

- a. **Use of Zoom for meetings** – Committee members discussed challenges with using Zoom, specifically audio issues during the last hybrid meeting. Isha mentioned limitations faced by partners like MDOT and Zoo-de-Mack in attending all in-person meetings. Carolyn suggested MDOT reviews agendas and send their comments to the chair prior to meetings, as well as try to attend at meeting in person. While acknowledging technological hurdles, the committee considered hybrid meetings for inclusivity. Don suggested participant controls on Zoom to manage interruptions from varying internet quality. Garon stressed the value of in-person township representation when feasible. Isha explained past audio problems were due to hall echoing, and Laurelynne proposed exploring other platforms – Google Meet.
- b. **2025 Work Plan** -
 - **Signage repair proposals** - Dale said that Isha had brought up how MDOT wants the committee to institute the concept of having at least three bids for their projects. Isha clarified that it is a contracting process for Networks Northwest. Dale said this request is coming a little late and that he would like to leave it with the two bids that they have

received till now. Dale proposed that the committee accept the most recent bid received. Isha said that the invoice for signage improvements is needed by September 30, 2025.

Joey asked if there is a specific monetary amount threshold they should be aware of for future project proposals. Isha said she will check – it is usually \$25,000.

A motion was made by Dale S. to approve the most recent bid for signage repairs, supported by Carolyn S. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

- **Remaining 2025 funding** - Isha asked if any more printing was needed as there is still \$600 of funding left for the 2025 fiscal year. Dale said no more printing was needed this year. Garon proposed using funds for private property or no parking signs along M-119 for fall colors. Isha noted leftover funds could also be used for an arborist presentation or saved for FY26. Tammy stated the need to consult zoning administrators on sign ordinances. Ceci B. expressed concern that the proposed signs would be ineffective.

The committee discussed increasing law enforcement presence along the Tunnel of Trees. Dale proposed inviting local law enforcement to the August or September meeting. Ami suggested townships hire more deputies during peak tourist seasons.

Clayton S. suggested that if there are no outstanding items or additional printing needs, the remaining \$600 could be returned to MDOT for use on other initiatives. The committee discussed options for a presentation; Joey will check with West Traverse Township for potential dates, and Naomi proposed a joint presentation with the Lakeshore Association later this year, noting that it would not incur any costs. Isha added that any administrative support needed could be covered by Networks Northwest using Byways Admin funds. The topic was tabled.

c. DALMAC & Zoo-de-Mack updates -

- **Zoo-de-Mack** - Isha provided an update on behalf of Zoo-de-Mack (see attachments). Naomi noted yard signs were more effective than banners due to visibility, early placement, and quantity. Joey praised the sheriff's department. Naomi and Joey requested feedback be sent to Zoo-de-Mack and the sheriff's department, respectively.
- **DALMAC** - Dale asked the group to direct any questions for DALMAC to him or Jim and they will contact the appropriate people for a response so that they do not need to attend the meetings.

d. Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Work Plan/Activities -

- Isha reviewed the FY26 Annual Work Plan/Activities, including a tree health assessment, dark sky initiative, new website host, and educational summit. She will send a draft to the committee, and the plan is due to MDOT by July 1, 2025.

A motion was made by Naomi to approve the content of the FY 2026 Work Plan and its following changes, supported by Joey A. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

Leadership discussion -

- Dale suggested that the committee scraps the chair and vice chair rotation. Naomi also

agreed to scrap the rotation but that they should try to keep the leadership fair amongst the townships.

A motion was made by Naomi to nominate and approve a chair and vice chair from the current board in July and August for the upcoming year, voiding the current township rotation, supported by Jim A. None opposed. Motion passed unanimously.

e. Website updates -

- Isha fixed the Committee Member hotlinks on the webpage. Garon questioned their purpose, and Isha clarified they linked to township pages. Garon proposed changing the list to a committee member list or revising the wording to "member entities."
- Isha sought committee clarification on which images to remove. Garon specified deleting all private business images. The committee also requested an image be removed from the Pure Michigan website. Isha will contact Clayton about this change. Ami noted she has already initiated the revision with Pure Michigan.
- Messaging not marketing – re - moving towards messaging and not marketing our byway in a conscious way.

XI. New Business

- a. None.

XII. Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 11:27. Next meeting on July 8, 2025 West Traverse Township Hall - 8001 M-119 Harbor Springs, MI 49740 at 9:30 AM.