

**2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan  
Research and Technical Assistance (RTA) Committee Meeting  
Squirrel Board Room, Soaring Eagle, Mount Pleasant,  
1:30-4:30pm, October 26, 2015**

**Agenda**

1. Welcome and Introductions – All
2. Updates from other Implementation Committees – Sarah Nicholls
3. Review of RTA Goal/Objectives – Sarah Nicholls
4. Review/Discussion of Results of CVB Survey + Identification of Action Items for RTA Committee – All
5. Next Steps and Next Meeting – including prep for Nov 9 MTSP Summit – All

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**Meeting Notes**

**In attendance:** John Madigan (Co-Chair), Melisa Thom-Brown (Co-Chair), Greg Ayers, Sarah Nicholls.

**Absent:** Linda Freybler, Heather Khan, Dan Sippel.

**Review of September 17 2014 Meeting Notes** – Notes reviewed and approved, no changes or additions made.

**Update from September 24 Travel Commission Meeting –**

The September 24 meeting was preceded on the afternoon of September 23 by a two-hour presentation/discussion led by MEDC about recent US and Michigan travel research. This was the first meeting under the new TC Chair (Christian Øverland, The Henry Ford) and new TC Vice Chair (Stephen Kircher, Boyne), and new Travel Michigan VP Dave Lorenz.

Two new TC members were announced on August 19 and both attended the September 24 meeting: Charles Burns, of Novi, and Sammie Lukaskiewicz, of Jackson ([http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/0,4668,7-277-57577\\_57657\\_59871-362774--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/snyder/0,4668,7-277-57577_57657_59871-362774--,00.html)).

“Burns is general manager of the Chevrolet Detroit Belle Isle Grand Prix. Previously, he served as director of security for the IndyCar Series and the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Burns is the treasurer of the Detroit Metro Convention Visitors Bureau Board, where he also serves on the executive committee. He sits on the boards of MotorCities National Heritage Area and Challenge Detroit. He replaces Susan Sherer.

Lukaskiewicz is senior director of communications at the Michigan International Speedway where she oversees the integrated marketing communications team responsible for public relations, media relations, advertising, marketing, consumer marketing, promotions, and social media. Lukaskiewicz is on the board of directors of Brooklyn Irish Hills Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the Automotive Press Association. She earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Texas and a master’s degree in management and leadership from Webster University. She replaces Roger Curtis.”

TC members Mike Busley and Jon Nunn were also reappointed to the commission.

Agenda items included: an update from the Highway Hospitality Committee (by Bill Wahl, MDOT); MTSP updates by Sarah and each of the eight committee co-chairs; a presentation about the role and responsibilities of the Travel Commission by MEDC Senior Corporate Counsel; and, a brand marketing update by McCann Erickson. Also discussed: need to start planning in 2016 for development of next MTSP (to begin 2018); second joint meeting of the TC with the Natural Resources Commission's Marketing, Partnership, Youth and Outreach Advisory Committee (tentatively scheduled for January 2016); reissuing of michigan.org website redevelopment RFP; and, budget issues at MEDC ("The Michigan Economic Development Corporation today announced 65 layoffs and a 27 percent cut in funding, effective Oct. 1, according to multiple news outlets and confirmed to MiBiz by an MEDC spokesperson" <http://mibiz.com/item/22891-medc-announces-layoffs.-budget-cuts>).

### **Fall 2015 MTSP Summit – Monday November 9 9:30am–2pm – Lansing**

The second annual meeting of all implementation committees took place immediately following the March 22 Travel Commission meeting. This meeting was open to all industry members and provided the annual opportunity for committee Co-Chairs to present their (i) progress in the prior year and (ii) plans for the coming year. Attendance in 2014 (when the meeting was placed on the Tuesday afternoon of the conference, following the closing luncheon) was ~ 100; attendance this year was ~ 35, with especially low TM participation. Room size, layout and location were also not ideal. After discussion of how to increase attendance at this meeting, suggested by Sarah to organize a ½ day MTSP Summit in the autumn, without the distraction of the conference, in a central location such as Lansing (for all committee members + any interested industry members); Travel Commission discussed and approved this idea at their June meeting.

The Fall 2015 MTSP Summit will take place Monday November 9 9:30am–2pm in Lansing. It is hoped that all members of all eight committees will attend; also open to any other interested industry members. Each committee will have c. 30 minutes for their presentation and audience questions/discussion; Co-Chairs will be encouraged to make their presentations interactive, i.e., actively solicit input from the audience. This date will represent the approximate half-way mark in MTSP implementation.

### **Updates from Other MTSP Committees –**

Collaboration, Cooperation and Partnerships (CCP): Is focusing on ways in which to (i) help under-promoted niche activities better connect with Travel Michigan and the broader tourism industry, and (ii) connect with industry segments that may not see themselves as tourism industry members but that CCP believes to be important to the industry, e.g., gas stations, convenience stores. As a result of (ii), Sarah wrote an article with a student that appeared in the Small Business Association of Michigan's (SBAM's) Focus Magazine (Nicholls, S., and Woods, M. (2015). "Why Tourism Matters to You and Your Business." *Focus*, 12(1), September/October, 18-19); Sarah also recorded a radio segment with SBAM VP of Communications Mike Rogers that is airing on Michigan Business Network (on the same topic). Sarah also presented on the MTSP during a panel session at the Michigan

Association of Counties meeting in September. In process of redeveloping SBAM article for possible publication by Michigan Retailers Association.

Funding: The MI Tourism Plan Fund balance is about \$54k. The committee would like a list of possible projects for funding from each committee by early November. Funding for the Pure Michigan campaign is projected to increase by \$4 million – to \$33 million – in 2015-16.

Product Development (PD): Primary focus is on trails – two trails-related documents – a best practices case study of the Iron Ore Heritage Trail (IOHT) in Marquette and an IOHT user survey – were presented to the Travel Commission at the September TC meeting. PD is also considering an accessibility/mobility-related award or how-to guide/toolkit.

Promotion, Marketing and Communications (PMC): The MSU international student survey is complete and was presented to the TC at its September 24 meeting. The final version of the Michigan Bicycle Tourism Marketing Plan was presented to the industry during the March 23 MTSP breakout session at the Governor’s Conference. A companion marketing plan template has also been developed, to allow other niches to replicate the process via which the bicycle plan was developed. The committee is currently working to develop a similar plan for the equestrian tourism segment.

Resources and Environment (RE): Is in the process of developing (i) a zero waste toolkit for the organisers of festivals and events, and (ii) a resource stewardship award – The Pure Award – for presentation at the Governor’s Conference. Is also collaborating with the Office of the Great Lakes re. ways in which the tourism industry can assist with implementation of the forthcoming state water strategy, *Sustaining Michigan’s Water Heritage: A Strategy for the Next Generation*.

Service Excellence (SE): Continues to conceptualize a “Pure Michigan Promise” service training program. PMC discussion of how such a program might be delivered – PPT or video? Also of relevance – Dave Lorenz is considering adopting/developing a “China Ready” training program.

### **Review of RTA Goal/Objectives –**

Noted that with the Travel Commission’s development of a funding/governance structure for the implementation of the MTSP in spring 2014, the RTA committee’s role relative to *Objective One Define and prioritize the research and technical needs of the other seven plan goals* has essentially been shifted to the TC. This leaves *Objective 2 Develop a financially sustainable online information system to capture and share relevant industry research*.

Per July 29 2013 notes, “Key elements of good research – timely, reliable, accurate, at an appropriate spatial resolution, and market (place + activity) specific.

Various alternative approaches discussed:

- Conceptualization and acquisition of funding to support a center like the former MSU Travel, Tourism, and Recreation Resource Center (TTRRC, <http://tourismcenter.msu.edu>). The TTRRC was formed in 1985 with a general fund appropriation; it collated and collected a huge volume of data and served as an information clearing house for the industry. Primarily paper based – hard copy reports, etc. – any new version would need to incorporate web-based technology. Listings of activities, publications, etc. available at <http://tourismcenter.msu.edu/buttons/ResearchPrograms.htm>. Recall report from PPGS meeting attended by then Michigan House Tourism Committee Chair Peter Pettalia and Minority Vice Chair Robert Kosowski, at which tourism research and the funding thereof was discussed. Auto manufacturing and agriculture both receive substantial state funding to finance critical industry research – why not tourism too? As is the case for agriculture, many tourism enterprises are very small, family-owned/operated businesses. They are too small to fund their research needs and often lack the skills to effectively use any data or research that may be accessible to them. Unlike agriculture, however, there is no tourism equivalent to USDA or MDARD to support the tourism industry – this could/should be the role of a state-wide tourism center.
- Work with Travel Michigan to ascertain what additional, finer scale data are available from their current data/research providers – this would apply primarily to D.K. Shifflet (spending, volume, satisfaction, value) and Longwoods (brand awareness, ROI); Smith Travel data (hotel occupancy, ADR, RevPAR, etc.) are already available to CVBs at city/county scale. Also need to investigate what data USTA could provide (counties in Illinois receive “estimates” from USTA). In all cases, most critical issue will likely be cost, and willingness of TM to pay that cost vs. need to fundraise via the industry. May also be issues with TM’s ability to share finer scale data vs. requiring individual entities to each contract directly with provider (this has been an issue with Shifflet in the past). *MEDC will be presenting the Tourism Economics data (volume, spending, etc.) for the ten prosperity regions at the Nov 13 Travel Commission meeting; those data will subsequently be released at the county level, but with the caveat that for many of the less visited counties the sample size is extremely small. This means that though it is ok to compare the data across time, i.e., to look at temporal trends within a place, it is less advisable to compare across the different counties.*
- Request that Travel Michigan add a few critical survey questions to the form used for online requests for the travel guide; currently, no consumer info other than name, mailing address and email are asked. Greg suggested Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater as a model – they ask “When do you plan on visiting St. Pete/Clearwater?” (required), “How did you hear about St. Pete/Clearwater?” (optional) and “Have you visited the area before?” (optional): <http://www.visitstpeteclearwater.com/form/free-destination-magazine> *Dave is willing to consider this; also willing to consider follow-up questions at a later time, e.g., could wait six months and then compare intention to travel with actual bookings/trips taken.*

- Install touch screen survey kiosks at a few key Welcome Centres (e.g., New Buffalo, Monroe, Sault Ste. Marie, Ironwood) – Kalamazoo has successfully used these at various venues (estimated cost per unit = \$6k). RTA could request monies from the MI Tourism Plan Fund to pay for these.
- Develop a protocol for a visitor survey, for use by interested CVBs; protocol would contain suggested questions as well as information about how to conduct a random survey. Could be designed in paper and online/app-based form. Would be especially useful to have multiple CVBs employing the same instrument since would allow for comparison across different geographic areas if CVBs would be willing to share their results. Key questions would relate to visitor demographics, information sources, and satisfaction/intent to return and recommend. Sarah could collate responses, at least for rest of current MTSP implementation period. Collecting and analyzing visitor information is much easier – and analysis techniques are far less controversial – than visitor spending/economic impact (these were the two items of most interest according to the CVB survey RTA conducted last year).

Sarah checked with Department of Treasury re. sales and use tax collection numbers for SIC Code 701 (hotels and motels); we currently receive these for the entire state on a monthly basis. These data cannot be compiled by county because there are issues if a taxpayer has properties located in multiple areas, meaning they would file one return from their headquartered county and that county would be overrepresented while the other counties would be underrepresented in terms of collection amounts.

#### **Next Steps –**

- Sarah will schedule conference call for John, Melisa and Greg – with Dave Lorenz – ASAP. We need to know his thoughts re. research, especially given the loss of Lori Langone. *This took place Mon Nov 2 – Dave’s thoughts/responses are included in italics within the notes above.*
- John and Melisa to present at MTSP Summit on November 9.