

# REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



June 24, 2016

David Mohler, Chair  
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150  
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Draft Federal Fiscal Years 2017-2021 Transportation Improvement Program

Dear Mr. Mohler,

The Regional Transportation Advisory Council is an independent group of citizen and regional advocacy groups, municipal officials, and agencies charged by the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with providing public input on transportation planning and programming.

The Advisory Council has reviewed and discussed the draft Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2017-2021 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and offers the following comments.

The MPO's attention to a robust project evaluation process, applying new criteria consistent with the MPO's goals and objectives, is appreciated.

As in the past, the Advisory Council notes that through 2020, most funds are being directed towards previously programmed projects, including a few large projects, and that the number of deserving projects far outweighs the available funding.

The Advisory Council notes that a few of the programmed large projects are experiencing cost overruns (in addition to the Green Line Extension, which the Council supports). Directing more funding to these projects will negatively impact the MPO's ability to fund other worthwhile projects. The Council would like to better understand the reason for the overruns and asks the MPO to ensure the benefits of these projects still exceed the costs. The Council understands that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the MPO will be looking more comprehensively at ways of addressing and minimizing cost overruns (as well as sharing responsibility for additional costs among the various parties), and would like to be engaged in that conversation. The Council suggests that it would be helpful for all parties to better understand the reasons for differences between cost estimates at each stage of project development, especially when there are major cost changes after the 75 percent design stage, so that cost estimation practices can be improved in the future. In addition, the Council asks whether there are contracting methods (such as fixed-price contracting) that could be used to better control costs after the design phase is complete.

The Council supports programming available funds in FFY 2021 (and earlier, to the extent available – including staff recommended projects in FFY 2019) to smaller projects including complete streets, intersection improvements, community transit, and pedestrian/bicycle paths per the MPO's indicated

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priorities from last year's scenario planning process, and considering the project evaluation score along with cost, readiness, and geographic equity. If major funded projects (such as the Green Line Extension) are delayed, ready-to-go projects should be identified that can be moved up in the TIP cycle.

The Council notes that the new criteria are designed to differentiate among road projects. Off-street paths do not score well on the criteria and transit projects likely would not either. If the intent is to direct a portion of funds to these types of projects, the MPO may wish to move these projects onto separate scoring sheets so that they can more easily be compared against each other. Cross-modal tradeoffs should also be considered in transportation project and program development.

We appreciate the opportunity to express our concerns to the MPO and are looking forward to a response especially to the question of addressing cost overruns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tegin Bennett', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Tegin Bennett, Chair

Regional Transportation Advisory Council