

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



September 13, 2011

David Mohler, Chair
Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
State Transportation Building
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4150
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Draft FFYs 2012-15 Transportation Improvement Program

Dear Mr. Mohler,

The Regional Transportation Advisory Council (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 and its TIP Committee participated throughout the development of the draft federal fiscal years 2012-15 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). In this letter we outline our priorities, offer comments, and express concerns that we would like to see addressed through greater investment in future TIPs.

The Advisory Council set forth five priorities for TIP programming in 2009. The priorities listed below continue to guide our evaluation and decisions related to the TIP.

- Mobility improvements for people and goods
- Regional benefit and connectivity
- Safety
- Modal split balance
- Support of economic development

We believe the draft TIP addresses each of our priorities to varying extents. However, we have several concerns. The Clean Air and Mobility Program advanced our priorities of mobility improvement and modal split balance through innovative and low cost projects. It enabled several improvements to the transportation system and our environment in recent years through improved traffic signal timing, cleaner taxi cabs, new suburban transit services, and the bike share program. Unfortunately, the Draft TIP eliminates funding for the Program in the 2014 and 2015 elements of the TIP and diverts the funds to projects that do little to improve air quality. We urge the MPO to restore funding to this program in order to help MassDOT achieve its greenhouse gas emissions reduction goals expressed in the GreenDOT policy directive. The

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Clean Air and Mobility Program should be funded at a level at least \$2 million per year in 2014 and 2015, and the funding should certainly be increased beginning in 2016.

In future TIPs we urge the MPO to do more to address the region's freight distribution needs. The State Freight Plan released in September 2010 projected a 70 percent increase in freight volume by tonnage moved in Massachusetts between now and 2030. The MPO should prepare for the increase by identifying projects that will improve the distribution of freight and increase the mode share of rail and other alternatives. We urge the MPO to give freight benefits greater weight in future project evaluations.

The mode split for personal travel is another major concern of the Advisory Council. The region's residents are highly dependent on automobiles. During the next four years a large majority of the funds at the MPO's discretion will be spent on highway modernization and expansion projects that do little to support other modes. While we are not disputing the merits of any individual project in the TIP, we urge the MPO to invest in a manner that will produce a better balance among the modes, which will help reduce harmful emissions and provide healthy transportation options.

One way for the MPO to gauge its success at improving alternative modes for personal and freight transportation would be to model greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation system. The MPO should set a target for annual greenhouse gas emissions that it strives to meet within the four-year time period of the TIP. This target should decline over time and help the MPO focus on projects and programs that will reduce vehicle miles traveled and emissions.

We understand that addressing our concerns requires funds and that the MPO is facing severe fiscal constraint that limits the TIP and Long-Range Transportation Plan. We stated in our comments last year that reform of the state's transportation agencies is not enough to address the financial gap between available resources and what is needed to simply maintain the transportation system. Additional revenue is clearly needed now.

In conclusion, the Advisory Council commends the MPO for the difficult work and decisions that went into developing the TIP. While we have offered some policy directions for the future, we realize your work is difficult and there are many stakeholders involved. We look forward to working with you soon on the next TIP and are prepared to support the difficult choices necessary to move us towards a more sustainable future.

Sincerely,



Laura Wiener, Advisory Council Chair



Monica Tibbits, TIP Committee Chair