



Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

September 12, 2018, Meeting Minutes

3:00 PM–4:30 PM, State Transportation Building, Conference Room 4,
10 Park Plaza, Boston

Tegin Teich, Chair, representing the City of Cambridge

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

Chair Tegin Teich called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. (For attendance list, see page 8.)

2. Chair's Report—*T. Teich, City of Cambridge*

T. Teich welcomed Advisory Council members and reminded everyone that the Council last met in June. (Members went on a field trip to Logan Airport in July. The Advisory Council did not meet in August). T. Teich introduced Jennifer Rowe as the new Advisory Council coordinator, succeeding David Fargen who retired in July.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes

T. Teich asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the June 13, 2018. David Montgomery noted that he could not find the minutes online. T. Teich delayed approving the meeting minutes until the Advisory Council's October meeting.

4. Update on Focus40, the MBTA's 25-Year Investment Plan, *Jennifer Slesinger, Senior Transportation Planner and Focus40 Project Manager, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)*

T. Teich introduced J. Slesinger and explained that, while the Advisory Council does not expect to submit a comment on the Draft Focus40 Plan, individual members are encouraged to provide comment.

J. Slesinger explained that Focus40 is the long-range plan for the MBTA through 2040. The MBTA's enabling legislation requires that a long-range plan feed capital planning at the agency. While Focus40 is not fiscally constrained, the MBTA is working to create clear connections between Focus40 and the MBTA's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Focus40 is also an umbrella for many other plans already underway or about to begin at the MBTA. Focus40 will be the one document connecting all of these plans. J. Slesinger encouraged

members to visit the Focus40 website for more information about these plans, trends in transportation, state of the system reports, and descriptions of metrics in use at the MBTA.

Focus40 arose from data collection and external engagement. A street team spent a hundred hours at MBTA stops and stations, proportional to ridership. Over 3,000 ideas were analyzed to inform the plan. The street team heard about the need for reliability and frequent service, including on the commuter rail. Ideas around expansion came in primarily from web-based outreach and stakeholder outreach.

The Focus40 team identified four needs: contributing to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving the quality of life with better transportation options, supporting affordable housing by providing better access to high quality transit in lower-income neighborhoods, and supporting economic prosperity. The MBTA believes the foundation for addressing all four needs is a transit system that is reliable, robust, resilient, and safe with the capacity to serve a growing region.

The Focus40 team used scenario planning to understand how to plan in the face of uncertainty and develop robust strategies that make sense across a range of potential future conditions. Based on an analysis of trends, four scenarios were identified of how technology might evolve, how urban and suburban growth might occur, and how policies will affect climate change and affordability in the region. Stakeholders were asked to brainstorm about the types of investments that would make sense in different future conditions and used this input to determine Focus40's core investment strategies.

There are two elements of Focus40: programs and priority places. Programs describe major investments in the transit system and priority places are locations for transit improvements identified to generate conversation about transit expansions. Focus40 identifies three types of priority places where new and improved services are likely to generate ridership and address an identified need—and where transit demand is likely to grow.

The first place type is major employment centers outside the hub of the rapid transit network, such as Longwood Medical Area and Logan Airport. These places are on the rapid transit network but are less accessible than Downtown Boston, where all the rapid transit lines intersect. Focus40 proposes to improve services in these areas to promote economic prosperity in the region.

The second place type is Inner Core communities that are between rapid transit lines and primarily served by buses. Because buses can be slow and unreliable these communities have less access to jobs.

The third place type is urban gateways—densely populated places on the commuter rail system and outside the rapid transit network. Places like Lynn, Salem, and Waltham have MBTA-operated bus services, a high percent of low-income riders, and a mix of land uses.

Focus40 programs are divided into three categories: (1) “We’re doing,” commitments in the current five-year CIP; (2) “We’re planning,” investments that proved robust across scenarios in meeting the needs of the region between now and 2040; and (3) “We’re imagining,” potentially transformative investments to be further studied and assessed. Each program has an objective and investment highlights under the three categories. There are programs for each of the MBTA’s modes: bus, silver line, commuter rail, and each of the rapid transit lines. There are also three cross-cutting programs: Customer Experience, Resiliency, and Paratransit and Accessibility. J. Slesinger walked members through two program examples: Bus 2040 and Customer Experience.

There are several follow-on studies to Focus40, including a bus network redesign and Rail Vision. Such studies will continue using the Focus40 framework and focus on priority places. The MBTA also aims to conduct special planning processes for some of the priority places.

Focus40 will be implemented through the MBTA’s CIP. Identified priorities will be designed, scoped, costed, and prioritized for the CIP process. MassDOT’s Office of Transportation Planning will also conduct an annual review of progress on the implementation of Focus40, including a reassessment of trends and factors shaping near-term needs.

At the conclusion of the public comment period for the Draft Focus40 Plan, feedback will be incorporated into the final plan, which is expected to be released in the fall of 2018. There is a survey on the MBTA’s website asking for feedback about the Focus40 framework, as well as about specific ideas in the plan.

Discussion

John McQueen asked how the MBTA would respond to feedback from the Boston Globe and others, suggesting that many projects be advanced along faster timelines, in particular Route 111 improvements and West Station construction. He also asked whether there would be a presentation to address such feedback. J. Slesinger noted that there were ongoing conversations about how to accelerate implementation and that the MBTA’s Fiscal and Management Control Board raised similar questions during a recent presentation.

Ana Cristina Fragoso inquired about how Focus40 addresses issues of transit capacity. J. Slesinger described plans to increase the capacity of the Green, Blue, Red, and Orange lines and the bus system, noting that ridership on the Orange line might still exceed capacity by 2040 given development in the area.

A. Fragoso asked whether Focus40 considered additional water transportation service and the North South Rail Link to address capacity constraints. J. Slesinger explained that the Draft Focus40 plan does include a water transportation program. While its investments are less concrete than other programs, the MBTA awaits recommendations from a water transportation study being completed by Boston Harbor Now.

John Businger clarified that the North South Rail Link is a federal project, not an MBTA project. He felt this to be an important distinction in relation to the project's financing.

T. Teich shared the City of Cambridge's interest in the universe of projects considered for Focus40 and the selection of projects from that universe. She noted the power of the ideas contained within the draft plan and the tension between being fiscally unconstrained and yet selective.

David Montgomery suggested that the Focus40 team consider new transit-oriented developments (TODs) as a fourth priority place so that the MBTA can plan for subsequent increases in capacity. J. Slesinger noted the MBTA's desire to promote TODs and ensure enough capacity to support them in the future. She also spoke of the MBTA's increased up-front involvement with the development process and municipal partnerships.

T. Teich noted how D. Montgomery's comment echoed conversations at the Advisory Council around regional core capacity constraints, development mitigation, and modeling. She noted the complexity and interrelationships between these topics.

Franny Osman expressed the importance of considering the North South Rail Link in planning for Focus40. She cited plans that found the economic development of the region dependent on connections between north and south systems and more frequent transit service. F. Osman also questioned whether planning for a 2040 timeline was a worthwhile endeavor given major changes in technology. She asked how well plans 20 years ago predicted conditions today. J. Slesinger shared that recent conversations about autonomous vehicles and new mobility options prompted the scenario planning exercise. Their analysis determined that high capacity rapid transit will continue to be the most efficient way to move people, regardless of how technology changes. Accordingly, Focus40 focused on similar robust investments.

T. Teich asked J. Slesinger to comment on the Focus40 team's outreach and analysis of trends. J. Slesinger described how meetings with subject matter experts and the exploration of data informed the four scenarios.

T. Teich explained her belief that planning is crucial, even in the face of a rapidly changing transportation landscape. She noted the importance of acknowledging uncertainty and selecting strategies that are robust across various planning scenarios.

Steve Olanoff noted the difficulty in measuring the accuracy of past plans when only a small subset of projects has been implemented. S. Olanoff also expressed his belief that most investments described in Focus40 are needed immediately. J. Slesinger acknowledged that much of the plan is addressing current, unaddressed needs.

Chris Porter expressed interest in an analysis of how different levels or rates of investment would affect the system and performance metrics, such as travel time savings, reliability, and economic growth. J. Slesinger shared the MBTA's desire to track its progress towards implementing the plan and achieving a state of good repair.

Lenard Diggins expressed the need to articulate the goals for improving the regional transit system. This would allow planners to design policies and projects to ensure new technologies advance those goals. He also asked how the public can engage in the annual implementation of Focus40. J. Slesinger explained that the annual CIP process would be the mechanism for implementing Focus40 and for engaging stakeholders in that implementation.

J. McQueen asked how the Focus40 team used data and demographic projections to identify and rank priority places over time. J. Slesinger explained that priority places would be reviewed on an annual basis.

J. Businger raised concerns about the capacity of South Station to absorb increases in commuter rail traffic from South Coast Rail, expressed doubts about the feasibility of the proposed South Station expansion, and urged the Focus40 team to analyze the situation. J. Slesinger indicated that the implications of South Coast Rail Phase 1 are being analyzed and that the Rail Vision study would address South Station's capacity going forward.

T. Teich acknowledged the difficulty in analyzing interactive complexities while planning so far into the future.

Dee Whittlesey recommended increasing the number of commuter rail zones from six to ten. T. Teich recommended addressing D. Whittlesey's idea in the context of the Rail Vision study, which is on the agenda for the Advisory Council's meeting in October.

Jeffery Zupan asked whether Focus40 is based on assumptions about capital and operating revenue sources. J. Slesinger explained that Focus40 had only made very general assumptions about revenue, and instead it focused on the most cost-effective strategies to address identified needs. She noted that these assumptions would be an important consideration when implementing Focus40 through the CIP.

S. Olanoff asked whether all scenarios assumed increases in ridership and investment. J. Slesinger acknowledged that there continues to be uncertainty about projected commuter rail ridership and ongoing debate surrounding levels of investment in the rapid transit and commuter rail networks.

A. Fragoso asked whether the MBTA had considered a fare structure in which the fares would decrease based on distance from North and South Stations. J. Slesinger said that proposal had not been considered, though the MBTA's new fare collection system would facilitate new fare models. T. Teich noted an interest in providing better access to dense urban gateways located farther out on the commuter rail system. She also noted that it is more expensive to provide service to people farther away from the system's core.

L. Diggins asked whether it was within the purview of Focus40 to work with municipalities and the state legislature on policies for bus rapid transit, better buses, and mode shift.

J. Slesinger explained that the Better Bus Project is a top MBTA priority that will involve coordination regarding state- and municipality-owned right-of-ways.

L. Diggins asked whether the Draft Focus40 Plan was an opportunity for people to advocate for pricing congestion on roadways. J. Slesinger responded affirmatively.

Barry Steinberg asked whether Focus40 planning considered expanding the bus system as far as Interstate 495. J. Slesinger explained that Focus40 did not consider expansion beyond the MBTA's service area. At the same time, the ongoing bus network redesign is evaluating all of the MBTA's bus routes in relation to future demand centers, including those distant from the region's core.

Patricia Mendez inquired about online access to the Draft Focus40 Plan and expressed the importance of considering equity in the transportation system, particularly as it relates to pedestrians. J. Slesinger indicated the availability of the Draft Focus40 Plan online.

5. Election Committee, Jen Rowe, Advisory Council Coordinator, Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Staff

J. Rowe recapped the annual process for electing officers, described in a handout entitled "Elections Timeline." Because neither of the two former Advisory Council chairs were available to serve on the Elections Committee, T. Teich agreed to attend so that the committee would have the perspective of someone who has served as chair. The other members in attendance were Schuyler Larrabee of the Boston Society of Architects and Paul Nelson of MASCO.

The Elections Committee nominated T. Teich as chair and A. Fragoso as vice chair. Both accepted their nominations.

T. Teich acknowledged her three years as chair of the Advisory Council and explained that she did not wish to discourage anyone else from nominating themselves.

S. Olanoff noted that previous chairs had served for one to two years. He noted that the system of the chair preparing the vice chair to take on the chairpersonship worked nicely in the past.

T. Teich reminded the Advisory Council that the previous vice chair left part way through his term. She indicated her intention to help prepare A. Frago to potentially run for chair in the future and to develop other new leaders. Beyond understanding the workings of the Advisory Council, it is important for the chair to become familiar with the Boston Region MPO board. A. Frago indicated her intent to attend more MPO meetings.

L. Diggins asked about the structure of the Advisory Council's Executive Committee. T. Teich explained that it included the chair, the vice chair, the former chair, and the heads of all standing committees (currently, Chris Porter, head of the 3C Certification Documents Committee). D. Montgomery clarified that committee heads are appointed by the chair.

L. Diggins offered that the MBTA Rider Oversight Committee's (ROC) practice has been to elect a new chair every year. Because it takes a new chair half of their term to get up to speed, the MBTA ROC's Executive Committee has had to take on more responsibility. He found this a downside to term-limited chairpersonships.

J. Businger expressed his desire to see an expansion in Advisory Council membership. F. Osman agreed.

J. Zupan recommended distributing a list of topics the Advisory Council had discussed over the past year to prospective members.

T. Teich explained that the vice chair heads the Advisory Council's Membership Committee, which reaches out to prospective members. T. Teich also acknowledged that she has focused on representing the Advisory Council before the MPO board and its partner agencies and that she has been less active representing the group's views to the broader public. She welcomed a conversation about working on the Advisory Council's outward-facing profile and expressed her belief in the value and importance of its role.

A. Frago recommended convening a meeting to discuss a membership drive. She also suggested increasing the Advisory Council's online presence so that people who cannot always attend meetings can better keep up with issues coming before the group.

T. Teich expressed her agreement. She noted that few people have the time to read through meeting minutes.

J. McQueen recommended forwarding minutes to the Advisory Council's email list.

S. Olanoff suggested inviting higher-profile speakers.

T. Teich welcomed S. Olanoff's input and acknowledged that she had been more focused on the content a speaker would bring to the group.

Nominations for chair and vice chair closed after no additional nominations were made from the floor.

6. Old Business, New Business, and Member Announcements

A. Fragoso invited members to attend a workshop about public-private partnerships hosted by the Boston Society of Civil Engineers Section (BSCES) on September 21.

J. Rowe shared information about the MPO's federal evaluation and an upcoming public, on-site review at the State Transportation Building on October 16 and 17.

7. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The motion carried.

Attendees

Member Municipalities	Representatives and Alternates
Acton	Franny Osman
Cambridge	Tegin Teich
Needham	David Montgomery; Rhain Hoyland

Citizen Advocacy Groups	Attendees
Association for Public Transportation	Barry M. Steinberg
Boston Society of Civil Engineers (BSCES)	Ana Cristina Fragoso; Paul Moyer
MassBike	Chris Porter
MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)	Lenard Diggins
National Corridors Initiative	John Businger
Riverside Neighborhood Association	Marilyn Wellons
WalkBoston	John McQueen

Agencies	Attendees
MassDOT Aeronautics	Michael Garrity
Three Rivers Interlocal Council	Steve Olanoff

Other Attendees

Affiliation

Patricia Mendez	City of Boston Disability Commission
Dee Whittlesey	Boston Resident
Ed Lowney	Malden Resident
Jeff Zupan	Wellesley Resident

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Jen Rowe
Matt Archer
