



## ***TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM***

**DATE:** October 3, 2019  
**TO:** Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee  
**FROM:** Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager  
**RE:** Options for Continuing UPWP Database Data Collection

This memorandum accompanies a staff presentation summarizing progress on collecting data about the implementation of recommendations from UPWP-funded studies to date. It presents the challenges associated with this data collection effort and options for proceeding. Staff seeks the committee's guidance on how to proceed.

### **1 THE CHALLENGE OF DATA COLLECTION**

Staff has been attempting to collect information on the status of recommendations made in UPWP-funded studies and technical assistance memoranda to municipalities, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), regional transit authorities (RTAs), and the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) since summer 2018. Staff contacted all municipalities to which the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) has made recommendations since approximately 2012, as well as the four MassDOT districts in the Boston region. Staff checked the status of some recommendations through other means, such as Google Streetview, MassDOT project review information, TIP documentation, and published bus schedules. As staff has previously briefed the committee, this data collection effort has been challenging, primarily due to a lack of consistent response from municipalities. All municipalities that received recommendations have been contacted at least three or four times, but a significant number have yet to respond.

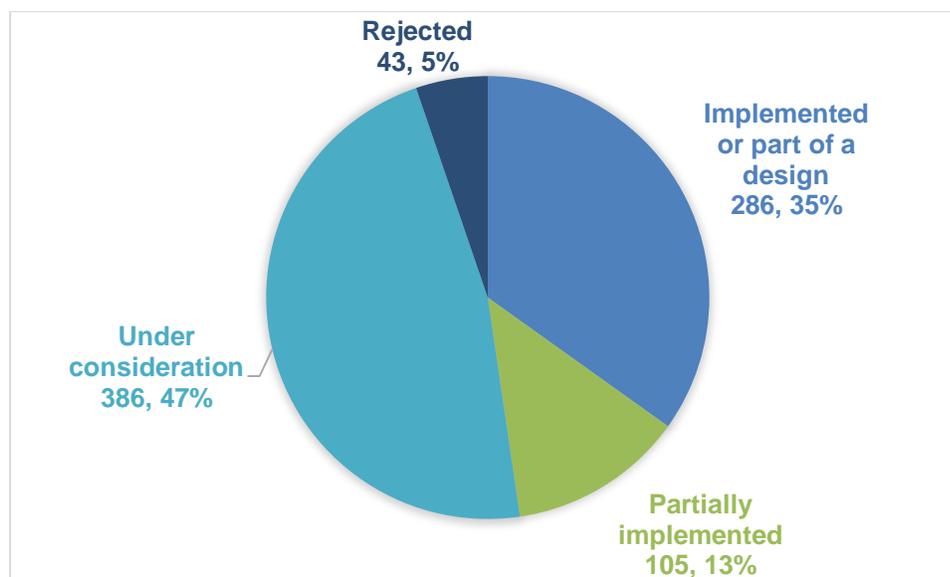
#### **1.1 Status of Data Collection**

The UPWP Study Recommendation Tracking Database currently catalogues 1,860 recommendations made by MPO staff in studies and technical assistance projects between 2008 and 2018. The current implementation status of those recommendations is as follows:

- Staff received full or partial data from **27 of the 63** municipalities, or **43 percent** of the municipalities, to which recommendations were made during this time period.

- From these 27 municipalities and three MassDOT Highway Districts, staff received status updates on **820 recommendations (44 percent of the total coded in the database)**. As shown in Figure 1, the recommendations are at the following stages:
  - Implemented or part of a design: **286 (35 percent)**
  - Partially implemented: **105 (13 percent)**
  - Under consideration: **386 (47 percent)**
  - Rejected: **43 (5 percent)**

**Figure 1**  
**Implementation Status of Recommendations as of September 25, 2019**



Note: These data are based on information from 27 municipalities and three MassHighway Districts and represent 44 percent of UPWP recommendations made between 2008 and 2018.

Staff is confirming the status of as many as **308 recommendations** with MassDOT District 6 and DCR.

## 1.2 Implications of Data Collection Efforts

Staff has had substantial success collecting data on previous UPWP-funded recommendations, but considerable challenges remain. Fewer than half of the contacted municipalities have responded to staff inquiries, and staff has been unable to collect implementation status data on about half of the recommendations. As these municipalities have remained unresponsive after numerous attempts to contact them, the likelihood that staff will be able to collect data from them appears low. Section 2 below presents options for further collection of implementation data and staff requests the UPWP Committee's guidance on how to proceed.

## 2 OPTIONS FOR CONTINUING DATA COLLECTION

Given the current impasse in data collection efforts, staff requests the UPWP Committee's guidance to determine how to move forward with data collection for the UPWP Database. Questions include the following:

1. Is the current amount of information collected sufficient? (That is, can the MPO learn enough from the data already collected?)
2. Should staff continue with efforts to try to collect data from unresponsive municipalities? If so, what mechanisms should we employ?
3. How much staff time and resources should be devoted to this effort?
4. How often should staff undertake this type of data collection effort?

Section 2.1 below presents several options for the continuation of efforts to collect implementation data for the UPWP Database. This list of options is not intended to be comprehensive and staff is receptive to other ideas. In all scenarios, staff will continue to enter into the database the recommendations from each FFY's discrete studies and technical assistance memoranda at the end of that FFY or the beginning of the next one.

### 2.1 Options for Future Data Collection Mechanisms

#### *1. Be satisfied with existing data*

The MPO board directed staff to collect data on the implementation status of recommendations made in UPWP-funded studies with the purpose of determining how useful municipalities and other implementing agencies find those recommendations. Perhaps the current level of data collection creates a large enough sample size for analysis and the MPO board would prefer that staff place emphasis on other areas of exploration. For example, MPO staff could interview municipal staff who are known to have implemented recommendations about how they make use of UPWP recommendations. If staff time and resources allow, staff could also carry out the geocoding of recommendations in the database, a capability that is built into the database but has not yet been explored because of the considerable expense of the task.

#### *2. Continue with current efforts*

Staff could continue efforts to collect data from municipalities that have been unresponsive. CTPS staff has worked to some extent with MAPC subregional coordinators in this effort and could potentially attempt to better integrate data collection into subregional activities.

### *3. MPO staff collects data directly*

In this scenario, instead of reaching out to municipalities to collect data, MPO staff would collect data directly by means of virtual scouting and fieldwork. Virtual scouting would consist of the use of tools such as Google Streetview (which staff has already used in some circumstances, though its utility is limited by the age of imagery); Lidar data to which CTPS already has access; and potentially subscription imagery services such as Nearmap (<https://www.nearmap.com/us/en>).<sup>1</sup> Because any such virtual scouting would almost certainly be supplemented with physical fieldwork this approach would likely require the commitment of additional budget and staff resources. In the past, nearly a decade ago, the CTPS Traffic Analysis and Design group sent staff into the field to do similar work.

### *4. Carrots and Sticks*

The MPO has placed considerable importance on being able to collect data on UPWP-funded recommendations, and on spending money on studies and technical assistance that will lead to implemented projects. Being unable to collect data on the status of recommendations made by MPO staff is an obstacle in the process of establishing clear metrics and understanding how the MPO's funds are best spent. In light of this, the MPO could choose to establish incentives or disincentives within its own process based on the quality of partnership municipalities provide in terms of collecting implementation data. For example, the MPO could choose to prioritize work for municipalities that have been responsive to data requests in the process of selecting UPWP-funded studies and technical assistance projects, or even ban municipalities from receiving UPWP-funded technical assistance projects if they have not responded after receiving UPWP-funded technical assistance (from either CTPS or MAPC) until they have provided the requisite data.

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<sup>1</sup> Nearmap is a frequently updated, high-resolution aerial imagery solution that the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the Chicago-area MPO, used to create a regional sidewalk inventory.