

MPO Meeting Minutes

Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

August 5, 2021, Meeting

10:00 AM–12:30 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

David Mohler, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) agreed to the following:

- Approve the work program for MBTA Rider Oversight Committee Support
- Release Amendment One to the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) for a 21-day public review period

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance on page 8.

2. Chair's Report—*David Mohler, MassDOT*

There was none.

3. Executive Director's Report—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff*

T. Teich provided a review of recent MPO staff outreach efforts, including a UPWP Open House on July 20, 2021.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports—*Benjamin N.W. Muller, MassDOT, Chair, UPWP Committee, and Eric Bourassa, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), Chair, TIP Project Costs Ad Hoc Committee*

B. Muller reported that the UPWP Committee met prior to the MPO board and voted to recommend that the MPO release Amendment One to the UPWP for public comment.

E. Bourassa reported that the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee met the week prior to

consider several options for changes to TIP project policies. E. Bourassa stated that the goal for the next meeting on August 19, 2021, is to reach consensus on a draft recommended policy to bring to the MPO.

6. Regional Transportation Advisory Council Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair, Regional Transportation Advisory Council*

L. Diggins stated that the Advisory Council would next meet on August 11, 2021.

7. Action Item: MBTA Rider Oversight Committee Support—*Bradley Putnam, MPO Staff*

B. Putnam stated that the schedule for this project is four years, the budget is \$31,342, and the project is paid for by MBTA contract. The purpose of the project is to continue providing ongoing support to the MBTA Rider Oversight (ROC). Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) will participate in the ROC's discussions, respond to technical questions posed by other members, and perform technical analyses that will assist the committee in developing recommendations and supporting its objectives.

Vote

A motion to approve the work program for MBTA Rider Oversight Committee Support was made by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the At-Large Town (Town of Arlington) (Daniel Amstutz). The MBTA Advisory Board (Brian Kane) abstained. The motion carried.

8. Action Item: FFY 2021 UPWP Amendment One—*Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [Recommended Revisions to Certain 3C Budgets \(FFY 2021\)](#)
2. [Draft FFY 2021 UPWP Amendment One](#)

S. Johnston stated that the proposed adjustments in Draft Amendment One of the UPWP account for actual spending in the first three quarters of FFY 2021 and fourth-quarter needs. The adjustments have a net zero impact on the UPWP budget.

S. Johnston stated that at the end of the third quarter, MPO staff complete a thorough assessment of the spending patterns in the FFY to date and propose a slate of budget adjustments for the final quarter. Adjustments are needed due to staff attrition and project or line-item needs that evolve after the UPWP is developed. In addition to the changes proposed to the MPO budget for work conducted by CTPS, this amendment includes a minor change to work conducted by MAPC using UPWP funds.

Vote

A motion to release Amendment One to the FFY 2021 UPWP for a 21-day public review period was made by the Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville) (Tom Bent) and seconded by MAPC (E. Bourassa). The motion carried.

9. Central Business District Phase 2 Study Update—*Betsy Harvey, MPO Staff*

B. Harvey provided an update on the Central Business District Phase 2 study. This project will create a guidebook to pandemic recovery for local central business districts (CBDs). B. Harvey stated that stakeholders from the twelve municipalities in the case study have provided input on the challenges each CBD has faced during the pandemic, the transportation investments the municipalities undertook to support businesses, and the goals for recovery. The guidebook will include a recovery framework, case studies, and resources for municipalities.

Identified themes include higher demand for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, the importance of new funding programs, a focus on supporting changing business models, and the importance of creativity. B. Harvey stated that the research shows an opportunity to capitalize on changes brought on by the pandemic through policy. The proposed recovery scenario framework identifies transportation trends, unknowns, driving forces, and possible interventions. B. Harvey used the example of the rising popularity of active transportation, noting lasting changes in commuter rail ridership, employer work-from-home policies, and new residential preferences as driving forces. Potential strategies could involve more investment in quick-build projects to support transit and active transportation. B. Harvey asked that the MPO board provide feedback on the identified themes, proposed recovery scenario framework, and any other information that would be helpful to include in the guidebook.

Discussion

David Koses (At-Large City) (City of Newton) asked whether interviewees largely expressed the desire to preserve or remove parking to support local businesses. B. Harvey stated that the majority of interviewees reported removing parking and experiencing surprisingly limited pushback doing so. D. Koses stated that it would be very helpful to clearly spell out in the guidebook what communities said regarding parking and their plans for replacing or permanently removing parking.

D. Amstutz stated that the Town of Arlington conducted surveys of residents to get reactions to changes, such as the addition of parklets. The majority of respondents were in favor of keeping the changes permanent. He offered to share the survey results.

D. Amstutz then asked whether the interviews for the study revealed that residents are

intentionally shopping more locally while they are working from home. B. Harvey stated that there is a lack of survey data on this topic, but interviewees did report anecdotally that communities with high numbers with residents who can work from home are shopping more locally. In communities with high populations of essential workers that cannot work from home this observation was less common.

Tom O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council) (Town of Norwood) stated that Norwood also experienced a lack of pushback related to removing parking.

Bill Conroy (City of Boston) (Boston Transportation Department) stated that the City of Boston must be careful about interventions such as removing parking or bike lanes on streets that are connections to the regional system, such as the on- and off-ramps to Interstate 93, because such changes could reduce capacity when workers return to the downtown core and affect the regional system. B. Conroy added that removing parking also removes a major revenue stream for capital improvements and municipalities need to consider whether providing free street space for business makes sense financially.

T. Bent asked whether interviewees discussed the impact of parking removal on older adults and whether municipalities discussed standardization of design for parklets and other interventions due to safety concerns. B. Harvey stated that interviewees had not expressed concern about impacts on older adults, but that staff would look into this issue. B. Harvey stated that there has been less interest in standardization than in consistent funding.

L. Diggins suggested the addition of sustainability and climate change as issues that should be a driving force in the recovery scenario.

D. Mohler expressed the opinion that the proposed recovery framework does not add value to the study given the range of unknowns. B. Harvey stated that MPO staff are hoping to help municipalities understand what strategies have and could work in the future depending on certain trends, while acknowledging uncertainty. B. Harvey stated that the case study themes will inform the scenario framework.

Ken Miller (Federal Highway Administration) stated that most of the interventions listed are standard strategies and asked how they differ as pandemic response. B. Harvey stated that many municipalities have only implemented these interventions in the context of the pandemic due to loosening regulations and more available funding, and there is an opportunity to accelerate the use of these strategies during the recovery period.

D. Mohler noted that there is also the possibility that some interventions may not make sense during the recovery period.

B. Kane underscored the critical nature of commuter rail ridership as part of the recovery scenario framework, and he stated that the framework is useful to include. B. Kane added that the MBTA will experience a massive deficit starting in 2024 if fare-paying commuter rail ridership does not return, and he noted that the repurposing of MBTA parking lots is a possible outcome about which the study could spur discussion.

D. Mohler asked whether the scenario framework would include that level of detail.

B. Harvey stated that MPO staff want to capture as many relevant unknowns as possible.

10. MPO Elections Survey Results—*Roisin Foley, MPO Staff, Eric Bourassa, MAPC, and Brian Kane, MBTA Advisory Board*
Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [MPO Municipal Election Process Survey Results](#)

R. Foley presented the results of a survey conducted between January and May of 2021 to gauge familiarity with and opinions about the MPO's municipal elections process among the cities and towns in the Boston region. R. Foley stated that the survey addressed a recommendation from the MPO's last federal certification report, issued in 2019, that stated, "The MPO should review voting procedures for MPO Board seats to ensure that they effectively engage all communities in the region and result in effective representation."

R. Foley stated that MPO staff received 90 responses from 55 municipalities, or 56 percent of the municipalities in the region. Most municipalities responded once, but staff received multiple responses from some municipalities, including 11 responses from Scituate. R. Foley stated that respondents reported a general lack of knowledge or awareness of the MPO and its role, and a desire for more communication and outreach on the benefits of engaging with the MPO via the elections process. Time commitments were viewed as a large barrier to participation in the MPO's processes, and there was a desire to continue virtual meetings to increase access. Open answer responses indicated that some smaller communities may view the MPO as unaware of their specific transportation concerns, and may not see the benefit of seeking election. When asked about possible changes to the elections process, a majority of respondents indicated a preference for having only the municipalities within subregions vote for their subregional representatives, while 41 percent advocated for term limits, and 29 percent for only cities and towns voting for at-large cities and towns, respectively.

R. Foley asked board members to discuss what, if any, structural changes they would like to make to the elections process.

E. Bourassa stated that one of the key lessons of the survey is a disconnect between the town staff who are engaged with the MPO, planning and Department of Public Works staff, and the chief elected officials who receive elections information.

E. Bourassa stated that MAPC is working with MPO staff to bridge this gap.

Discussion

D. Koses stated that the results seem to indicate a lack of concern about the elections process itself, but rather the issue is with the time commitment required and general familiarity with the MPO process. D. Koses stated that the most important takeaway is the desire to continue virtual meetings.

K. Miller noted that of the 90 responses, about 20 came from MPO board member municipalities, and he asked that staff stratify the results to show the difference between responses from MPO board member municipalities and non-MPO board member municipalities. K. Miller cautioned against drawing conclusions before seeing this data.

L. Diggins expressed support for subregional municipalities voting for subregional representatives but opposition to drawing distinctions between cities and towns by having only cities or towns vote for at-large city and town representatives. L. Diggins expressed generally opposition to term limits and concern about the fact that seven municipalities had run but not been elected. L. Diggins suggested relying more on the MBTA Advisory Board for publicizing the elections and making it clearer that representatives can choose designees. L. Diggins also suggested presenting some agenda topics as standalone events outside of business hours in order to cut down on meeting length. L. Diggins also expressed a desire to improve racial diversity and gender balance on the MPO board.

Steve Olanoff (Three Rivers Interlocal Council alternate) stated that the responses seem to indicate that improvements are needed but that there is no consensus on what those improvements should be. S. Olanoff stated that, effectively, subregions only vote for subregional representatives currently because discussions about who will run happen at the subregional level and then candidates run unopposed.

B. Kane noted the difficulty of engaging municipal officials on regional issues and stated that capacity is a major concern. B. Kane agreed with L. Diggins about diversification.

D. Mohler asked MPO staff to stratify the data to comply with K. Miller's request.

D. Koses also noted that staff should think about the issue of a high number of responses from Scituate when stratifying the data.

11. Addressing Priority Corridors from the Long-Range Transportation Plan Needs Assessment: Route 28 Priority Corridor Study in Milton, MA—Seth Asante, MPO Staff

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [Route 28 Priority Corridor Study Milton, Massachusetts](#)

S. Asante presented the results of the Route 28 Priority Corridor Study in Milton. The study focuses on one of the locations identified in the Needs Assessment for *Destination 2040*, the MPO Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) endorsed in 2019. The MPO prioritized Route 28 in Milton for study after considering a number of factors: the need to address poor safety conditions and traffic congestion; the desire to enhance multimodal transportation; and the potential for recommendations from the study to be implemented. The study focused on four miles of Route 28 from the Boston city line at the intersection of Brook Road and Blue Hills Parkway to the Quincy city line. MPO staff developed short- and long-term recommendations, including three road diet concepts, for safe access to schools, transit, neighborhoods, and recreational areas.

Discussion

S. Olanoff suggested improvements for the intersection at Chickatawbut Road that were not included in the study because of another ongoing study at MassDOT, and he encouraged the two studies to be coordinated. S. Asante stated that the concepts proposed could merge with improvements at Chickatawbut Road that have already been advertised for construction.

State Senator Walter Timilty thanked the MPO staff for the study.

L. Diggins asked whether the proposal for a two-way left turn was in line with previous studies that suggested doing away with this as an option. S. Asante stated that these modifications can be implicated in a safe way depending on the location.

State Representative Bill Driscoll thanked the MPO staff for the study.

12. Members Items

E. Bourassa noted that four seats are up for election this fall: the at-large town seat currently held by the Town of Arlington, the at-large city seat held by the City of Newton, the North Suburban Planning Council seat held by the City of Woburn, and the Three Rivers Interlocal Council seat held by the Town of Norwood.

13. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville) (T. Bent). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
At-Large City (City of Everett)	Jay Monty
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
At-Large Town (Town of Brookline)	Heather Hamilton
	Todd Kirrane
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Bill Conroy
Federal Highway Administration	Ken Miller
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	David Mohler
	John Bechard
MassDOT Highway Division	John Romano
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Jillian Linnell
Massachusetts Port Authority	
MBTA Advisory Board	Brian Kane
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Thatcher Kezer III
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	
North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly)	Darlene Wynne
North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn)	
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland)	
South West Advisory Planning Committee (Town of Medway)	Peter Pelletier
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke
	Steve Olanoff

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Aleida Leza	Belmont resident
Amira Patterson	MBTA Advisory Board
Benjamin N.W. Muller	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Brady Caldwell	Town of Burlington
Cheryll-Ann Senior	MassDOT Highway District 5
Cathy Smith	
Chase Berkeley	Milton
Chris Westfall	Office of State Representative Fluker Oakley
Colette Aufranc	
Derek Shooster	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Eric Johnson	City of Framingham
Frank Tramontozzi	City of Quincy
Gus Norrbom	MassDOT
Heidi Gaul	Town of Hingham
Jennifer Gelinis	Town of Burlington
Johannes Epke	Conservation Law Foundation
Jon Seward	
Josh Klingenstein	MBTA
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Keisha Adarkwah	Office of State Senator Walter Timilty
Mark Smith	
Michaela Boneva	
Michelle Ho	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Mike Garrity	MassDOT District 6
State Representative Bill Driscoll	
Mayor Sefatia Romeo Theken	City of Gloucester
State Senator Walter Timilty	
Sheila Page	Town of Lexington
Summer Ordaz	Office of State Representative Driscoll
Tim Czerwienski	Town of Milton
Timothy Paris	MassDOT Highway District 4
Wesley Lickus	MassDOT

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Mark Abbott

Seth Asante

Paul Christner

Jonathan Church

Julie Dombroski

Róisín Foley

Heyne Kim

Matt Genova

Betsy Harvey

Sandy Johnston

Anne McGahan

Rebecca Morgan

Ariel Patterson

Gina Perille

Bradley Putnam

Michelle Scott

Kate White

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