

Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

Transit Working Group Meeting Summary

October 12, 2021, Meeting

3:00 PM–4:45 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDGvuwBUr4g&list=PLT37eeNGYpCHBb_9LJp6xBrmCvTrjURYN&index=4

Meeting materials available at: <https://www.bostonmpo.org/calendar/day/2021-10-12>

Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

1. Welcome—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff, and Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff*

T. Teich gave a brief introduction of the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Transit Working Group. S. Johnston reviewed the meeting agenda.

2. MPO Activities Update—*Michelle Scott, MPO Staff, Paul Christner, MPO Staff, and Matt Genova, MPO Staff*

M. Scott presented updates on the Transit Working Group Pilot, including a summary in preparation for a report that will be released later in fall 2021. P. Christner gave a brief introduction on the Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Support Program. M. Genova gave an overview of and updates to the Community Connections Program, which is now in its third year under the Transportation Improvement Program.

3. Transit Provider Items

There were none.

4. Implications of Federal Legislation for Transit—*Sarah Kline, SK Solutions*

S. Kline presented a summary of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Reconciliation Bill (or Build Back Better Act). A bipartisan effort, IIJA was proposed to take the place of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act. The bill aims to provide a historic level of investment in surface transportation programs. New programs will be created as part of the bill while existing programs will see modest policy changes. Anticipated changes include 2,000 percent increase in Low or No Emission Vehicles program, increase in thresholds for the Small Starts Process (under the Capital Investment Grant [CIG] program), creation of a project bundling process for transit projects, and transit safety provisions.

While the implications of the IIJA remain to be explored, concerns have been raised on preliminary features of the bill. First, the success of existing programs, which have been around since 1991 and remained largely unchanged in the new bill, is not clear in a post-pandemic world. Second, operations funding will be kept the same as before, while CIG programs will receive double the amount in funding. This will create a substantive problem with messaging, making it difficult for transit agencies to provide better services and meet people's expectations. Third, since most of the funding will be distributed to the Federal Highway Administration, outcomes will depend on the flexible use of funding appropriated for highway programs. Interagency coordination is crucial to this outcome as states and MPOs will have a lot of discretion on how to spend the money, while transit agencies are not directly involved in making those decisions.

Complementary to the IIJA, the Reconciliation Bill is aimed at advancing demographic priorities, such as healthcare, childcare, and community colleges. It provides funding on a competitive basis for programs focused on transit, high speed rail, emissions reduction, and equity. While the IIJA alone provides the unprecedented level of support for transit, passing both IIJA and the Reconciliation Bill will guarantee a maximum funding for transit.

In concluding the presentation, S. Kline encouraged transit agencies to coordinate with the state and MPOs on formula programs and to participate in public comment processes while the United States Department of Transportation develops and distributes new criteria, rules, and guidance under the new bill.

Discussion

Franny Osman (Town of Acton) asked about ways to ensure the use of highway funding for transit under the IIJA. S. Kline stated that the state and MPO have discretion in deciding how to allocate the funding within program categories.

F. Osman asked about desirability of mega projects in relation to the IIJA (with reference to the North-South Rail Link project). S. Kline stated that \$5 billion will be available under the National Project Assistance Program for projects that would cost more than \$500 million and make a significant regional economic impact. The New Starts Process, under the CIG Program, will also have an increased budget for intercity passenger rail projects.

Wig Zamore brought up a question on the incentives for 100 percent electric buses under the IIJA. S. Kline explained that besides the Low or No Emission Program, the New and Small Starts Processes fund bus projects. She added that the IIJA does not specify whether it will combine both programs.

Judy Shanley (National Center for Mobility Management) asked about the incentives for cross jurisdiction collaboration under the IIJA. S. Kline brought up an ongoing Federal

Transit Administration pilot program on coordination between human services and transit services providers, which is likely to continue in the IIJA and with the existing guidelines.

Ben Muller (Massachusetts Department of Transportation [MassDOT]) shared a concern about equitable distribution of funding among states because of new and expanded discretionary grant programs. S. Kline stated that some of the new programs would have funds set aside.

Brian Kane (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority [MBTA] Advisory Board) asked whether the IIJA will change provisions of the Buy America Act for large transit systems on procurement. S. Kline stated that she does not recall the act being either relaxed or strengthened under the new bill.

5. Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Discretionary Grant Program—*Ellie McCarthy, MassDOT Rail & Transit Division*

E. McCarthy gave an overview of the RTA Discretionary Grant Program, a state funded competitive program that provides operating funds for RTAs to assist with technological improvements, service evaluation, and program design. Past projects included marketing campaigns, evening express service pilots, route enhancements and adjustments, online paratransit trip reservation systems for same-day or next-day Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) customers, and mobile ticketing options. RTAs have successfully augmented the operating funds with capital funds to implement their projects.

Discussion

Jennifer Glass (Town of Lincoln) asked about system integration across the state and linking parking and toll collection to mobile ticketing. E. McCarthy stated that these ideas have been articulated in the RTA Task Force in the past, although no conclusion was made.

Marisa Janeczek (Commonwealth of Massachusetts) brought up about the tracking system among RTAs. E. McCarthy stated that the system varies among RTAs.

F. Osman asked about providing medical transportation through the Human Services Transportation Office. E. McCarthy explained that a new task force has been formed to address the matter.

Kristine Gorman (Jacobs Engineering Group) asked about the state of electrification among RTAs. E. McCarthy explained that RTAs are in varying stages. A MassDOT study will be available within the year to provide RTAs with a road map for battery electric bus transition.

6. Taxicab, Livery, and Hackney Transportation Partnership Grants Program—*Marah Holland, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)*

M. Holland presented on the background of MAPC's Taxicab, Livery, and Hackney Transportation Partnership Grants Program and the breakdown of the current program cycle. The program was created in spring 2020 because of a 2016 act regulating Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) and supporting traditional transportation businesses, such as taxis and liveries. The grant program funds come from TNC rides collected by the state and channeled through the Massachusetts Development Finance Agency (MassDevelopment). In the program's inaugural year, approximately \$1 million was given to 25 grantees to serve nearly 18,000 individuals. The 2021 grant program started in the spring and has supported non-emergency medical trips, trips to senior centers, and daycare transportation across the state. The program has received high ratings from grantees in terms of overall satisfaction, importance in addressing community issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and relevance to meet transportation needs.

Discussion

F. Osman asked how MassDevelopment uses the rest of the revenue collected from ride-hailing services. M. Holland stated some of the money is used to procure new equipment and dispatch services for taxi programs.

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) asked about the procurement and payment of services. M. Holland explained that MAPC handles procurement as a prequalification for individual grantees to handle day-to-day relationships with partner companies. She stated that the program enabled RTAs to expand services without increasing hours or geographic scope.

S. Barrett asked whether grantees enter into a contract with a specific vendor and receive set rates. M. Holland explained that as part of the procurement process, MAPC asks companies to determine a price that would be valid for a full period of the grant to allow applicants to see a range of price proposals.

Rachel Fichtenbaum (Commonwealth of Massachusetts) asked how MAPC views program successes and challenges. M. Holland stated that marketing the program was a challenge due to limited staff capacity. Also, the grantees struggled to meet the needs of the community when the companies they partnered with became increasingly busy. Qualitative feedback from grantees highlighted different ways the program served the community.

7. Public Comments

Jim Gascoigne (Charles River Transportation Management Association) asked about recruitment and retention of truck drivers. In response to this question, S. Johnston mentioned a public engagement opportunity that will feature freight.

8. Closing and Next Steps

S. Johnston discussed upcoming coffee chats and meeting follow-up.

Attendance

| Other Attendees | Affiliation |
|---------------------|--|
| Abigail Adams | Brockton Area Transit |
| Adam Kamoune | MBTA |
| Alexandra Kleyman | City of Somerville |
| Allison Simmons | Ease Consult |
| Amira Patterson | MBTA Advisory Board |
| Amitai Lipton | MassDOT |
| Andrea Leary | NorthEase Consulting Group |
| Benjamin Muller | MassDOT District 6 |
| Brian Kane | MBTA Advisory Board |
| Christopher Dilorio | Town of Hull |
| Colette Aufranc | Town of Wellesley |
| Darren Shaffer | Department of Transportation |
| David Donahue | |
| David Kucharsky | City of Salem |
| Derek Krevat | MassDOT |
| Donlyn Cannella | Springwell, Inc. |
| Elizabeth McCarthy | MassDOT |
| Franny Osman | Town of Acton |
| Geordie Enoch | Massachusetts Legislature |
| Glenn Ann Geiler | Brockton Area Transit |
| Jay Monty | City of Everett |
| Jeff Bennett | 128 Business Council |
| Jennifer Gelinas | Town of Burlington |
| Jennifer Glass | Town of Lincoln |
| Jim Gascoigne | Charles River TMA |
| Jon Seward | Regional Transportation Advisory Council |
| Judy Shanley | National Center for Mobility Management |
| Kelly Forrester | Brockton Area Transit |
| Kristine Gorman | Jacobs Engineering Group |
| Laura Wiener | City of Watertown |
| Lenard Diggins | Regional Transportation Advisory Council |
| Lisa Weber | Human Service Transportation Office |
| Marah Holland | MAPC |
| Maria Foster | Town of Brookline |
| Marisa Janeczek | Commonwealth of Massachusetts |

| Other Attendees | Affiliation |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Martha Collins | Town of Wellesley |
| Matt Card | Benesch |
| Matthew Petersen | TransitMatters |
| Tom McGee | City of Lynn |
| Michael Garrity | MassDOT |
| Michael Lambert | Brockton Area Transit |
| Michaela Boneva | MassDOT |
| Nathan Brackett | Tetra Tech |
| Perry Grossman | |
| Rachel Fichtenbaum | Commonwealth of Massachusetts |
| Ray Hayhurst | AECOM |
| Sarah Kline | SK Solutions |
| Shayna Gleason | University of Massachusetts Boston |
| Shona Norman | Cape Ann Transportation Authority |
| Sophia Galimore | TransAction Associates |
| Stacy Forte | Greater Attleboro Taunton RTA |
| Steven Olanoff | Three Rivers Interlocal Council |
| Susan Albright | City of Newton |
| Susan Barrett | Town of Lexington |
| Travis Pollack | MAPC |
| Wig Zamore | |
| Zary Amirhosseini | Mass General Brigham |

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

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Róisín Foley

Matt Genova

Matt Archer

Sandy Johnston

Michelle Scott

Rebecca Morgan

Paul Christner

Jonathan Belcher

Ryan Hicks

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- **Relay Using Voice Carry-over:** 866.887.6619
- **Relay Using Text to Speech:** 866.645.9870

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