

Draft Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Unified Planning Work Program Committee Meeting Summary

March 25, 2021 Meeting

9:00 AM–9:50 AM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, recording:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOiX04r1V_s

Benjamin Muller, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Acting Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Materials

Materials for this meeting included the following:

1. Summary of March 4, 2021, meeting
2. Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022 Universe of Proposed Studies

Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

1. Introductions

B. Muller welcomed attendees and called the attendance roll.

2. Public Comments

Rachel Benson (Director of Planning and Economic Development for the Town of Wrentham) spoke on behalf of the SWAP (South West Area Planning Council) Warehousing and Logistics study concept. She reported that SWAP and other subregions have seen a steady increase in e-commerce and warehousing facilities, and have a lack of tools to deal with the affects. The study would assess the existing conditions of the area and create a comprehensive mitigation strategy with long-term action items. The developed plan could be transferable to other geographic areas dealing with similar problems. Tom Kadzis (City of Boston) asked if anyone had models or metrics for dealing with such challenges. Eric Bourassa (Metropolitan Area Planning Council [MAPC]) mentioned that MAPC has just released a report on the topic, and noted the lack of reliable data as a key concern. He also highlighted the need for regional collaboration in dealing with this challenge.

Representative Michelle Ciccolo (15th Middlesex District) spoke in support of study concept T-10 in the FFY 2022 UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies, looking at innovative transit financing strategies. She explained that, as members of the MPO

know, many suburban mobility initiatives are able to get off the ground, but fizzle out for lack of stable funding. There is a need for mobility options and to find stable funding. Her concept is to create “Transit Improvement Districts,” similar to the Business Improvement Districts that already exist in many areas. The funding would be additive to what is currently available to regional transit authorities (RTAs), rather than competing. Sandy Johnston (Central Transportation Planning Staff [CTPS] UPWP Manager) said he would distribute a summary Rep. Ciccolo had written to the committee. Rep. Ciccolo also mentioned that there is an item in the recently passed bond bill to authorize spending on this study.

E. Bourassa asked to what extent the study would look at successful case studies from Massachusetts and around the country, and how this concept would gain participation from developers who have already broken ground or built without the expectation of participation. Rep. Ciccolo responded that she intended the concept to examine examples both from around the country and Massachusetts, and that one of the important elements of the concept is that it would be voluntary—but scoping still needs to be done. E. Bourassa also asked how much money is allocated to the study concept in the bond bill; Rep. Ciccolo responded that she is not sure, as it is lumped in with a number of other items at the discretion of the Secretary of Transportation. Len Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) asked how this study concept could relate to other MPO programs, such as the Community Connections funding program. S. Johnston responded that this study could help define future policies for programs, such as Community Connections, and shared the guidebook *Operating a Successful Community Shuttle Program*, completed by MPO staff in 2020, as a related resource. Daniel Amstutz (Town of Arlington/At-Large Town) asked if the guidebook had examined matters of financing. Annette Demchur (CTPS Director of Policy and Planning) answered that staff had looked into startup funding, but not ongoing funding, and so this study concept would to some extent function as a follow-up to the guidebook.

Representative Joan Meschino (3rd Plymouth District) spoke in support of the study concept she had suggested, examining capacity constraints on the corridor between Boston and the South Shore (study concept T-9 in the UPWP Universe). Currently, commuter rail capacity on this corridor is limited by several single-track bottlenecks and the constraints have significant economic effects on her district. She proposes a study that would look at both planning and conceptual engineering for the commuter rail and the whole corridor, especially considering potential changes in travel patterns resulting from COVID-19. T. Kadzis expressed his support for the idea. Rep. Meschino discussed how there has already been significant investment in the corridor, but a perception or reality of unreliability in the commuter rail exists, and is damaging to that investment. L.

Diggins asked how this study would relate to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) ongoing Rail Transformation initiative. Rep. Meschino responded that she sees that as more of a visioning process, and this study would dig into the nitty-gritty on this particular corridor. However, the two ideas fit together. L. Diggins suggested that someone from the MBTA should give their perspective on, and advocate for this study. Rep. Meschino discussed her outreach to fellow elected officials and other stakeholders to support this study. There was a brief discussion of the process for selecting studies.

Johannes Epke (Conservation Law Foundation [CLF]) spoke in support of study concept T-4 on bus electrification. CLF sees bus electrification as a key target, and an opportunity to meet climate goals and achieve public health benefits. There is a need for a lot more information before implementation can start, so the proposal identifies the five key components that the study should include.

Ari Ofsevit (Institute for Transportation and Development Policy) spoke in support of the same study concept, reiterating J. Epke's points and saying he would send full comments in writing later.

Michelle Cook (Urban Outdoors Association) spoke to support study concept T-2, "Addressing Equity and Access in the Blue Hills." She expressed that many Boston residents need and want access to the Blue Hills, and this study is needed in order to achieve that access. E. Bourassa asked S. Johnston if the Community Connections-funded Royall St. Shuttles project could play a role in this kind of access. S. Johnston responded that the current conception of the project is as a weekday commuter shuttle, but the route is geographically convenient for Blue Hills access. E. Bourassa agreed and expressed support for both better transit access and better bicycle access. M. Cook said that bicycling is great, but many people cannot bike all the way, and/or would like to bring their families. There was some discussion on this topic. S. Johnston said staff would engage with the towns of Milton and Canton and the Neponset Valley Transportation Management Association, among other stakeholders, should this study be funded. Mark Abbott (CTPS Traffic Analysis and Design group manager) noted that staff have executed multiple studies in the past several years in the area, including looking at improved bicycle accommodations. B. Muller mentioned that MBTA Route 240 and Brockton Area Transit Route 12 also run through the Blue Hills.

Matthew Petersen (TransitMatters) spoke in support of the bus electrification study concept. TransitMatters believes that this study could provide a useful resource for transportation and transit providers all across the region and in community groups. It could help stakeholders and municipalities better understand bus electrification options

and technologies available, and be able to engage in the discussion about how to electrify. He referenced the CTPS Transit Priority Guidebook as a potential model. B. Muller said that the transit electrification topic has come up at almost every meeting he has been to, so it is certainly a hot topic. M. Petersen said that the study could lay out all of the available options and would be helpful for anyone engaging with the bus electrification process.

S. Johnston drew the attention of members to a written comment from Olivia Nichols of GreenRoots, received just before the meeting. The comment was emailed to the committee, and he would post it publicly before the following meeting.

3. Meeting Summary of March 4, 2021—Approval of this summary

B. Muller suggested tabling this item as time was running short, and the committee agreed.

4. Discussion of the FFY 2022 Universe of Proposed Studies—Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager

Observing the limited remaining time, B. Muller suggested that rather than going through the Universe item by item, as the committee normally does, the committee should spend the remainder of the meeting discussing the process for choosing studies, and handle the discussion of the Universe at the following meeting.

S. Johnston discussed the typical process for choosing studies to fund from the Universe. The committee will hold a second meeting to discuss the Universe, presumably on April 8, and then S. Johnston will send out two surveys to gauge study priorities, one to the committee and one to staff. Staff will meet internally to develop a staff-recommended list of studies using both staff and the committee's survey data, and then present it to the committee at a future meeting.

L. Diggins and D. Amstutz expressed their support for the chair's plan to defer most questions about the Universe. D. Amstutz asked how the MPO could avoid duplicating the MBTA's work on bus electrification, should it pursue study T-4. B. Muller explained that from his perspective at MassDOT, this is indeed a topic that the MBTA has done a lot of work on, and that the MassDOT's Rail and Transit Division is doing a lot of work on for the smaller RTAs. But, because this initiative does have a lot of public support behind it and it is a key priority for stakeholders in the region and statewide, it seems important to at least include it within the Universe and discuss. D. Amstutz indicated that he would like to make sure this concern is addressed should the MPO prioritize this study concept. E. Bourassa asked if there is overlap between study concepts L-4, "Freight, Mode Shift, and Land Use," and M-4, "SWAP Warehousing, Logistics, and

Mitigation Study,” and if there is some opportunity to combine them. S. Johnston responded that there is a degree of overlap, but the studies do have somewhat different focuses, with L-4 being about mode shift from road to rail and M-4 being about e-commerce specifically. The studies could either be combined in some fashion or end up being two different studies. M. Petersen emphasized that, with regard to the bus electrification study, TransitMatters believes that the conversation from the state agencies around this topic has been pretty quick to eliminate some of the options available for bus electrification, and that communities might want to become more familiar with more of the options available. Thus, TransitMatters supports a free and open discussion about the various possibilities.

5. Members Items

There were none.

6. Next Meeting

The committee discussed the possibilities for the following meeting. The committee agreed that S. Johnston would send out an email with several options, asking for the committee’s feedback on the best time for the next meeting.

7. Adjourn

L. Diggins made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Tom Bent (City of Somerville/Inner Core Committee) seconded it. Without objection, the committee adjourned the meeting.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Office of Transportation Planning)	Ben Muller
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Tom Kadzis
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke
Three Rivers Interlocal Council alternate (Town of Westwood)	Steve Olanoff
City of Framingham (Metrowest Regional Collaborative)	Eric Johnson

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Name	Affiliation
Rachel Benson	Town of Wrentham
Rep. Michelle Ciccolo	15th Middlesex District
Michelle Cook	Urban Outdoors Association
Johannes Epke	Conservation Law Foundation
Jon Hamilton	Office of Rep. Joan Meschino
Jarred Johnson	TransitMatters
Representative Joan Meschino	3rd Plymouth District
Christian MilNeil	Streetsblog Mass
Ari Ofsevit	Institute for Transportation and Development Policy
Matthew Petersen	TransitMatters

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Annette Demchur, Director of Policy and Planning

Hiral Gandhi, Director of Operations and Finance

Mark Abbott, Traffic Analysis and Design Group Manager

Jonathan Church, Manager of MPO Activities

Paul Christner, Transit Analysis and Planning Group Manager

Anne McGahan, Chief Planner

Steven Andrews, Transportation Analyst

Betsy Harvey, Transportation Equity Coordinator

Michelle Scott, Chief Transportation Planner

Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager

Kate White, Transportation Planner/Public Outreach Coordinator

Ariel Patterson, Transportation Planner

Matt Archer, Transportation Planner

Emily Domanico, Transportation Planner

Blake Acton, Transportation Planner

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