

# Draft Memorandum for the Record

## Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

### Transit Working Group Quarterly Meeting Summary

#### May 31, 2022, Meeting

1:00 PM–2:30 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform. Recording available at

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MsHM6Kxt1w&list=PLT37eeNGYpCHBb\\_9LJp6xBrmCvTrjURYN&index=17](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MsHM6Kxt1w&list=PLT37eeNGYpCHBb_9LJp6xBrmCvTrjURYN&index=17)

## Meeting Agenda

### 1. Introductions

Sandy Johnston (Central Transportation Planning Staff) invited attendees to introduce themselves using the Zoom chat function.

Tegin Teich (Central Transportation Planning Staff) provided an overview of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), including its primary functions, board members' affiliations, and goals. T. Teich explained the purpose of these Transit Working Group meetings is to build connections between transit providers and MPO members.

### 2. MPO Activities Update

Matt Genova (Central Transportation Planning Staff) provided an update on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), the MPO's five-year capital plan for transportation projects in the Boston Region. The TIP for federal fiscal years 2023–27 was endorsed by the MPO on May 26, 2022, and includes the following four new items:

1. Increased funding for the MPO, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), MetroWest Regional Transit Authority, and Cape Ann Transportation Authority through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
2. Six new MPO-funded shuttle/microtransit projects
3. Two new MPO-funded MBTA station projects
4. Increased annual funding for the MPO's Community Connections and Transit Modernization programs

M. Genova encouraged those on the call interested in receiving funding for projects through the Community Connections and Transit Modernization programs to reach out to the MPO with questions.

Srilekha Murthy (Central Transportation Planning Staff) provided an update on the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the MPO's one-year budget and planning document that lists research projects, technical assistance, and discrete studies that the MPO plans to undertake over the next federal fiscal year. Staff are currently working on the Universe of Proposed Studies, which contains a list of proposed studies that the MPO will be working on in the following year. Feedback from the public, partner agencies, and MPO members helped staff select 12 proposed studies related to active transportation, multimodal mobility, transit, and transit equity. The MPO will be voting to endorse the draft UPWP in July 2022, and updates can be found on the [UPWP website](#).

### **3. Transit Provider Items**

S. Johnston invited transit providers with updates outside of today's agenda to share any updates with the group. No updates were announced, and S. Johnston invited attendees who may have updates in the future to contact him at [sjohnston@ctps.org](mailto:sjohnston@ctps.org).

### **4. Format of Future Meetings**

Using Zoom's polling feature, S. Johnston posed the following questions to the group related to the format of future Transit Working Group meetings in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. Should meetings return to in-person (with a hybrid element), if and when it is deemed safe?
2. What time of day is best for meetings to start?

Responses for the first question indicated that 30 percent of attendees support returning to in-person/hybrid meetings, 15 percent do not support returning to in-person/hybrid meetings, 36 percent support having in-person/hybrid meetings sometimes, and 18 percent have no opinion.

Responses for the second question indicated that 27 percent of attendees prefer having meetings in the morning (9:00 AM to 12:00 PM), 42 percent prefer the current time of early afternoon (12:00 PM to 3:00 PM), nine percent prefer the late afternoon (3:00 PM to 6:00 PM), and 21 percent have no opinion.

### **5. Transit Regionalization from a Municipal Perspective**

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) and Lispeth Tibbits-Nutt (128 Business Council) presented their work on a Regionalization Action Plan for the Town of Lexington that was funded by a Community Transit Grant from MassDOT.

S. Barrett provided background information and introduced the project's goals of creating a framework to move communities towards regionalization, improve

connectivity, and create a more coordinated system. The Town of Lexington lacks MBTA, Regional Transit Authority (RTA), and rail service, and although it offers limited internal bus service and taxi service for seniors, eligibility and access gaps remain. To address this problem, Lexington officials followed a recommendation from the [2003 Middlesex 3 Community Compact Transportation Study](#) that the towns of Bedford, Burlington, and Lexington combine transportation resources to improve connectivity. While doing so has improved transportation coordination among the three municipalities, overall coverage and service reliability did not improve by simply combining services. Securing funding for transportation improvements in Lexington has been a major challenge for planners trying to solve these issues.

L. Tibbits-Nutt presented the [Mobility Management Project](#), a study on connectivity issues and recommendations for the Town of Lexington. This study's major recommendation was for the town to implement a macro-vision to avoid fragmentation and inefficiency of transportation services through strengthened fixed-route services, reduced redundancy among specialized services, and connection of specialized services to the fixed-route network where feasible. Other recommendations include pooling and expanding volunteer driver programs, improving information sharing, expanding the reach of demand-response services without increasing the number of service providers, and others.

The Mobility Management Project also established the "Bus-In-A-Box" pilot aimed at offering fixed-route services as a product to serve the greatest number of residents with the most efficient use of resources. This service would establish a fully coordinated transportation network in the region that offers a uniform and recognizable rider experience. A potential route has been mapped between Lexington and Burlington and will require coordination with local partners.

At the conclusion of this presentation, S. Johnston welcomed attendees to ask questions.

Kristine Gorman (Jacobs) asked if the project leverages the MBTA or RTAs to support the pilot route. L. Tibbits-Nutt replied that connections would be made with both the MBTA and RTAs as the proposed route cuts between two currently underused MBTA routes. K. Gorman asked if these MBTA routes were part of the bus network redesign. L. Tibbits-Nutt replied that they were not part of the bus network redesign, and the routes were not improved.

Judy Shanley (Easterseals National Center for Mobility Management) asked if the Town of Lexington and 128 Business Council have been successful in coordinating with

businesses, major employers, or hospitals. L. Tibbits-Nutt replied that they are in active conversations with these entities right now, so the success of this coordination is to be determined. S. Barrett added that they had looked at places to connect to in Waltham or Newton, but there were more opportunities to coordinate with Burlington at this time.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton) asked about the Bus-In-A-Box program's funding sources, and how the Town of Lexington and 128 Business Council deal with parallel paratransit fixed routes. L. Tibbits-Nutt replied that the goal of Bus-In-A-Box is to take pressure off door-to-door paratransit services for individuals who can leverage fixed route services instead, though it cannot fully replace these paratransit services. Ideally, in the long term, this program would not rely on grant funding, though in the short term, grant funding is being used to get the pilot started and eventually attract partners. S. Barrett added that they are trying to take the financial burden off towns, but eventually towns will have to contribute to expanding transportation services if they want these improvements. Lexington planners may have to explore sharing resources with school bus services, but they will have to think about how to communicate this strategy.

## **6. RTA Discretionary Grants**

Ellie McCarthy (MassDOT) presented examples of regional and interagency collaboration within the RTA discretionary grant program.

The RTA discretionary grant program is a state-funded competitive grant program that provides funds to enable RTAs to test solutions to local mobility challenges through targeted operating assistance, technology improvements, service evaluation, and program design.

An example of a project funded by an RTA discretionary grant is the enhancement of transit service in the Buzzards Bay community in response to new development. Funds were used to launch a new connector service in the community, extend transit routes, increase bus service, and enhance service to new developments. This project was accompanied by extensive marketing initiatives including social media campaigns, stakeholder meetings, a dedicated website, and requests for feedback on the new service. While the initial ridership goal was not met due to COVID-19 impacts, ridership is increasing steadily.

Another example of a project funded by an RTA discretionary grant is the coordinated dispatch program for Councils on Aging (COA) centers in the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) region using a web-based common dispatching application. The goal of this project was to streamline and improve delivery of COA transportation services while creating a centralized reporting system. The dispatch system was tested

in four towns (Bolton, Lancaster, Shirley, and Sterling), where COVID-19 impacts and delays with training created obstacles for the project. A few lessons learned from this project were to leverage stakeholder expertise and prioritize simplicity and usability in software selection.

At this time the speaker lost Internet access, and while waiting for them to reconnect S. Johnston opened the floor for questions or comments.

S. Barrett asked for more information about the six new MPO-funded shuttle micro-transit projects. S. Johnston replied that he did not have this list off the top of his head, but will get back to her.

Travis Pollack (MAPC) stated that he found it interesting that it was difficult to create a coordinated service for seniors within MART's COA centralized dispatch project because in other states this service is provided at the county level. He expressed interest in the factors that hinder transportation coordination for seniors. S. Johnston agreed that is a real challenge especially without a county-level government in the region.

K. Gorman asked if MPOs coordinate with the MBTA on Rail Vision. S. Johnston confirmed that the Boston Region MPO is in touch with the MBTA and does modeling work for them as well, though he was unsure if they are actively working on anything related to Rail Vision. He is in touch with the Rail Vision manager, and has invited them to provide updates at past Transit Working Group meetings, and can organize this again if people are interested.

At this time, E. McCarthy returned to the meeting and continued her presentation on RTA discretionary grants.

Continuing the discussion on lessons learned from MART's COA centralized dispatch project, it is important to consider the needs of riders such as seniors who may need longer boarding times, wellness checks, or common trip destinations. This can be done by including older adult focus groups and prioritizing age-friendliness for ride service. Travel training and buddy systems for senior riders are also recommended by MART.

The last example of a project funded by an RTA discretionary grant is the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority's Valley Pass Pilot Program. This project included the development of a proprietary software customization through Bytemark for a universal fare payment platform as well as \$125K in subsidized fares for the Valley Pass Program aimed at supporting businesses by offsetting the cost of commuting. This project met and exceeded performance goals, and its success may have been bolstered by the

public's desire for more virtual payment options as a result of COVID-19 health concerns.

At this time, S. Johnston opened the floor for questions or comments.

S. Barrett asked about the frequency of the Cape Cod Regional Transit Authority route on Main Street in Buzzards Bay. E. McCarthy replied that there is a bus every 30 minutes.

S. Johnston asked if the bullet point on transit authorities needing to use their own vehicles to supplement the COA vans mean people use their own personal cars or vehicles belonging to each agency. E. McCarthy replied that this refers to agency vehicles. There were discussions with MART on supplemental vehicles sharing the same type of branding and sharing vehicles with RTAs may help with that concern.

## **7. Public Comments**

S. Johnston welcomed attendees to provide any additional comments on the content of today's meeting or any other topics at this time.

John Strauss (Town of Burlington) asked if there are visions on having space specifically for riders' packages and other items on the vehicles to be used on proposed routes. S. Barrett replied that the Lexpress vehicles do not have as much room for items as they would like, and some buses have stairs and narrow aisles that may be difficult for riders with shopping carts. There is space at the back of some vehicles for items but that presents other challenges. Vehicles are procured from the State, and it depends on what is available, though having more room for items reduces the number of seats.

T. Pollack asked if there are ways to combine services to reduce overlap in senior transportation and still meet rider's needs. S. Barrett replied that the Town of Lexington is looking at ways to combine and coordinate services through regionalization, though they ran into challenges when asking service providers to consider the bigger picture instead of their individual service. Paratransit is there for individuals who may have trouble with connecting services, though encouraging use of fixed routes can reduce duplication of services.

J. Strauss followed up on an earlier comment and stated that the Logan Airport buses have storage areas for suitcases, which can be a model for having space for riders' items on other vehicles.

## **8. Conclusion and Next Steps**

S. Johnston thanked everyone for their participation and mentioned upcoming Transit Working Group events, including a coffee chat on MBTA Engagement Strategies on June 13, 2022.

## Attendees

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<b>Attendee</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Elizabeth McCarthy	MassDOT
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Marc Older	U.S. Info
Shona Norman	Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA)
Denise Garcia	MassDOT
Victoria Ireton	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Frank Tramontozzi	City of Quincy
Colette Aufranc	Wellesley Select Board
Matthew Dezii	Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Lisa Weber	Executive Office of Health and Human Services – Human Service Transportation (EOHHS-HST)
Angela Constantino	Greater Attleboro and Taunton Regional Transit Authority (GATRA)
Jeff Bennett	128 Business Council
David Koses	Town of Newton
Howard Ostroff	Dedham Active Transportation Working Group
Maria Foster	Town of Brookline
Melissa Dullea	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Sophia Galimore	N/A
Travis Pollack	Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
Stephanie Cronin	Middlesex 3 Coalition
Derek Krevat	MassDOT
Joe Mulligan	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Judy Shanley	Easterseals National Center for Mobility Management
Wig Zamore	Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership
Lisa Stiglich	128 Business Council
Kristine Gorman	Jacobs
Lispeth Tibbits-Nutt	128 Business Council
Perry Grossman	Safe Routes to School – Brookline
Robert Peters	Town of Lexington Planning Board
Jim Gascoigne	Charles River TMA EZRide
Andrea Leary	NorthEase Consulting Group
Jon Seward	MoveMass
Todd Kirrane	Town of Brookline

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Steven Olanoff	Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization; Three Rivers Interlocal Council
Glenn Geiler	Brockton Area Transit Authority
Sheila Page	Town of Lexington
John Strauss	Town of Burlington
Franny Osman	Town of Acton
Laura Gilmore	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)

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**MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff**

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Jonathan Belcher  
Logan Casey  
Annette Demchur  
Matt Genova  
Sandy Johnston  
Stella Jordan  
Tegin Teich

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**Title VI Specialist**

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**By Telephone:**

857.702.3700 (voice)

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