

Draft Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

Transit Working Group Coffee Chat Meeting Summary: Schools and Transit

April 27, 2022 Meeting

4:00 PM-5:00 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sm-s6hC6454>

Meeting materials posted at: <https://www.ctps.org/calendar/day/20220427>

Welcome and Meeting Guidelines

Sandy Johnston welcomed attendees to the Transit Working Group (TWG) Coffee Chat: Schools and Transit, and invited attendees to introduce themselves in the chat. S. Johnston introduced himself as a Senior Transportation Planner at the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and manager of the TWG. He noted that there were attendees representing transit agencies, smaller transit operators, municipalities, and other sectors, and thanked those in attendance.

S. Johnston explained that this meeting's topic of focus is the intersection of transit and various school transportation concerns, and will be co-facilitated with Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) and Judy Shanley (Easterseals). J. Shanley introduced herself as the assistant Vice President for Education and Youth Transition at the National Center for Mobility Management with Easterseals. This program helps communities build mobility management networks, which are a coordinated approach to providing transportation services across the public and private sectors. The goal is to build a network of transportation options at the state and regional level, which centers the rider.

She then spoke on her work in transportation education, the building of a continuum of services for youth with disabilities to have adequate support when they enter the workforce. Through workshops and job fairs, students and educators learn about the transportation resources available in their community and come away with a better understanding of the transportation system local to them. Some communities integrate transportation-related content into general education curriculum to provide holistic transportation education.

Another program affecting transportation access is the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility, which is a federal-level attempt to bring together those departments that work with transportation issues such as the Department of Transportation, Department

of Health and Human Services, Department of Labor, and Department of Education. J. Shanley mentioned that this work is being mirrored at the state level in Massachusetts. Similar programs include the 5310, or [Community Transit Grant program](#), which is a program administered by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation aimed at expanding transportation access for people with disabilities.

S. Barrett then began her presentation with an introduction about her interest in transportation services centering on equity and sustainability. In Lexington, the town spends more than \$6 million annually for yellow school bus services, yet the town still experiences traffic congestion and residents still may not have adequate access to transit options. S. Barrett offers a holistic approach to transit options that can provide adequate services to schools and employment while aiming to upgrade electric vehicle charging infrastructure and expanding multimodal transit options.

S. Johnston opened the discussion portion of the meeting with a question on planning for the transportation needs of students, school staff, and other community members. Collette Aufranc (Wellesley Select Board) shared Wellesley's work on a sustainable mobility plan. S. Barrett asked how the town is addressing school transportation. C. Aufranc responded that the town does not own and operate its own school bus fleet; they use a contractor. S. Barrett responded that her hope is to offer transit options for all members of a community, and integrate school transit in those options. C. Aufranc responded that Wellesley has just begun piloting a free microtransit option with its regional transit authority, and while it has had some success with the local colleges, there is not yet full buy-in from the schools.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton) expressed a liking for a public transportation plan within Acton, and additionally discussed the visibility of transit options for students. J. Shanley discussed the necessity of transportation planners understanding the needs of educators and including them in public transportation conversations.

Christopher Curry (Lowell Regional Transit Authority) shared the City of Lowell's school transportation plan, which would follow scheduled routes but would also stop and pick up students along the way who have missed a bus. This program has seen great success since its implementation.

Catherine Bowen (Belmont School Committee) raised the issue of financing. Many families may not be able to afford public school buses, and at the same time, the companies that operate those buses are struggling to stay afloat. Belmont is also exploring options for the integration of school and elder transit, yet S. Bowen observed a culture among school parents of idling in front of the school for much longer than

needed to have the best parking spot. S. Johnston agreed that there is a sense of urgency when picking up children from school to get them to their next activity, but it can result in injury or conflict. In addition, C. Bowen shared that after school activities are generally operated by private organizations that do not provide or prioritize transportation, so the onus falls on parents.

J. Shanley observed that in communities that have strong relationships between transit providers and school districts, there are high levels of transportation education and a culture of using public transportation as “cool.” She also observed that some parents have developed an informal ridesharing service to transport their children to various afterschool activities with varying degrees of success.

C. Aufranc shared that the Town of Wellesley is trying to launch an initiative called “Mobility Months” in support of its Sustainable Mobility Plan, but its outreach is not as successful as anticipated. The goal is to expand and advertise multimodal mobility options of getting to school, and encouraging parents to explore those options. S. Barrett stated that while these alternative transit modes work in some situations, there is still a larger concern of inadequate bus and transit connections to make a community more interconnected. S. Johnston raised a question from the chat on limiting parent drop offs and pickups, which would in turn entail a significant increase in funding from the school. As more new schools are built on the outskirts of towns where land is cheaper, mobility options become increasingly limited.

S. Barrett emphasized the need for expanding transit connections beyond existing MBTA or regional transit authority stops and a holistic approach to school transit access.

Olivia Mobayed (MBTA) discussed the MBTA’s Bus Network Redesign, a project aimed at completely overhauling existing bus routes and engaging the public to develop a system that reflects current need.

F. Osman asked what kind of legal hurdles paratransit providers have encountered in relation to school transit. Rachel Fichtenbaum (MassMobility) shared an example from Hopedale, where the town’s Senior Center would contract with the school’s bus provider for its own transportation needs. J. Shanley stated that the Federal Transit Administration is recognizing that rules around what vehicles can be used for which purpose may need to be changed, given the interconnected nature of town services. S. Barrett made a final comment on the need to enhance existing public transportation options and transit options in general to ensure a more connected and accessible community.

Closing and Next Steps

S. Johnston reminded attendees that the slides and contact information would be sent to attendees via email after the meeting. S. Johnston also mentioned some upcoming TWG events, including the quarterly TWG meeting to be held on May 31, 2022. He again thanked presenters and attendees, and shared his contact information in the chat.

DRAFT

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
Robin Howard	Weymouth Public Schools
Judy Shanley	Easterseals
Shona Norman	Cape Ann Transit Authority
Rachel Fichtenbaum	MassMobility
Christopher Curry	Lowell Regional Transit Authority
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Mildred Nash	
Olivia Mobayed	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
John Strauss	Town of Burlington
Collette Aufranc	Town of Wellesley
Lisa Weber	Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Catherine Bowen	Belmont Public Schools
Melissa Massardo	Town of Burlington
Franny Osman	Town of Acton
Larry Link	

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Matt Archer, Transportation Planner
 Sandy Johnston, Senior Transportation Planner
 Jonathan Belcher, Chief Transit Analyst/Planner

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Boston Region MPO
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116
civilrights@ctps.org

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