



BOSTON REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Jamey Tesler, MassDOT Secretary and CEO and MPO Chair
Tegin L. Teich, Executive Director, MPO Staff

TECHNICAL MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 3, 2022
TO: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
FROM: Michelle Scott, MPO Staff
RE: Transit Working Group Pilot Findings

In 2020 and 2021, Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff conducted a pilot of a transit working group to provide a forum for coordination among transit providers in the Boston region and to inform the MPO's planning and decision making on matters related to transit. This memorandum provides background information about the [MPO's Transit Working Group \(TWG\)](#) and describes participation in TWG events, feedback collected about the group, and lessons staff learned while conducting the pilot. It also discusses proposed plans for the TWG going forward, as MPO staff, MPO members, and TWG participants have found the group to be a valuable way to engage transit stakeholders and see its continued potential to help improve transit service in the Boston region.

1 TRANSIT WORKING GROUP BACKGROUND

The Boston Region MPO endorsed a pilot of a transit working group in November 2019, following a series of discussions with the MPO board and outreach to transit providers and the public. The idea for the group emerged from discussions about whether and how to represent the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) and the Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA) on the MPO board, and about the need for improved coordination between the numerous transit providers operating in the Boston region. For more details about the history of the TWG pilot, please see the November 2019 memorandum titled "[MPO Transit Committee Outreach Results and Staff Recommendations.](#)"¹

When proposing a pilot transit working group to MPO board members in November 2019, staff noted that such a group may be advantageous to the MPO

¹ Boston Region MPO Staff. "MPO Transit Committee Outreach Results and Staff Recommendations." November 7, 2019. Available at https://www.bostonmpo.org/data/calendar/pdfs/2019/MPO_1107_Memo_Transit_Committee_Outreach.pdf.

Civil Rights, nondiscrimination, and accessibility information is on the last page.

for several reasons beyond possible transit provider representation on the MPO board:

- Feedback from outreach participants indicates that various transit providers and other stakeholders in the transit space would find it valuable to connect and discuss issues and ideas through such a body.
- When gathering input for the *Destination 2040* Long-Range Transportation Plan's Needs Assessment, staff identified a need for better coordination of transit services across agency and municipal boundaries. A transit working group could provide a venue to begin discussions on such coordination efforts.
- Input from participants of a transit working group could inform MPO research, initiatives, and investments intended to support transit services and non-single-occupant-vehicle travel.

MPO staff proposed conducting the group in a pilot format at first. During this initial period, staff would explore how the group might function, who would attend its meetings, and what it could accomplish in terms of generating feedback for MPO consideration and advancing action on other topics of interest to participants.

Both the MPO and transit working group participants would learn about the value the group could generate and how the group could be structured to maximize its benefits. The proposed mission of a pilot transit working group was to

- advise the MPO board on matters pertaining to transit to inform MPO transportation planning and decision-making; and
- provide a forum for the region's transit providers to discuss topics of mutual interest and concern.

Staff sought to involve a core group of participants made up of transit operators and transit supporting agencies, including the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), regional transit authorities (RTAs), municipalities that operate transit service, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), and the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport). MPO staff anticipated that other organizations working in the transit space would be interested in participating in these meetings, which were open to the public. These additional groups include

- municipalities that regularly interact with transit agencies (but that do not provide service for the general public);
- Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) that do not operate transit service;

- the MBTA Advisory Board;
- the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC);
- the Human Service Transportation Office in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services and human service transportation organizations;
- the Regional Transportation Advisory Council;
- for-profit transit providers, such as intercity bus companies;
- advocacy groups; and
- interested members of the public.

Staff proposed that TWG meetings include a mix of the following activities:

- Presentation and discussion of upcoming MPO activities and decisions related to transit to gather feedback from transit providers and affiliates
- Information sharing among transit providers and affiliates about their upcoming projects and initiatives
- Focused discussion of issues shared among transit providers and affiliates, along with possible solutions
- Discussions that affirm expectations surrounding the transit working group pilot and consider the pilot's progress and potential outcomes

When conducting initial outreach about creating a transit working group in the summer of 2019, MPO staff found that there did not appear to be a strong demand for representation on the MPO board from potential participants besides MWRTA and CATA. Other transit providers seemed to be more interested in opportunities for coordination relative to opportunities to provide input on MPO decisions. MPO staff proposed adopting a flexible structure for the TWG during the pilot phase and to monitor whether demand for board representation increased among participants during that time. This information could inform decisions about whether to formalize the group's structure and membership or to keep the group focused on coordination and maintain a flexible structure to encourage diverse participation.

2 TRANSIT WORKING GROUP ACTIVITIES

MPO staff have hosted six general TWG meetings—approximately once per quarter—since January 2020. The next one is scheduled in February 2022 (as of the writing of this memo). Staff sent out notices about these meetings through the MPO's general email distribution list, posted notices on the MPO's social media channels, and announced them at MPO board meetings. MPO staff have also emailed event invitations to a TWG-specific email list. Information about TWG events is also available on the [MPO's Transit Working Group webpage](#), along with past meeting materials and general information about the group.

The first TWG meeting in January 2020 focused on a general overview of MPO activities and background about the Transit Working Group and topics the group could discuss at future meetings. This meeting was held in the State Transportation Building in Boston and was attended by representatives of transit providers and transit-supporting agencies, advocacy groups, and members of the public. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, all TWG events have been held virtually over Zoom. TWG meetings held since this time have typically included a main presentation on a transit-related topic from a guest speaker. Speakers have included MBTA staff discussing pandemic response plans and regional rail improvements, a transit executive from central Pennsylvania discussing regionalization efforts, and a transportation consultant discussing federal infrastructure legislation. In addition to these main presentations, TWG meetings have featured shorter presentations about technical assistance, funding opportunities, study products, or resources provided by the MPO or other organizations in the Boston region. Appendix 1 provides details on TWG MPO meeting topics.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the TWG in terms of the format of the meetings and the topics discussed. The impacts that the pandemic has had on the transit industry—such as decreased ridership, workforce availability, and the need to implement new public health measures—shaped MPO staff's decisions about meeting topics. MBTA staff presented at two TWG meetings in 2020: first to share information about their pandemic response planning and service modifications, and later to discuss their Forging Ahead planning process. The group also served as a venue to notify transit providers and others about resources to address pandemic-related needs and issues. In 2020, MPO staff presented about the availability of COVID-19 transit planning technical assistance, and MAPC staff provided information in November 2020 and June 2021 about the Taxicab, Livery, and Hackney Transportation Partnership Grants Program, a program that was initially created to support the taxi industry while meeting essential trip needs.

Attendance at TWG meetings was higher than staff's expectations prior to the pandemic, likely because people could participate remotely using Zoom. (Section 3 and Appendix 2 provide more information about participation in TWG events.) The shift to virtual meetings may have also increased the diversity of participants and made it easier for transit providers outside of the Boston region's Inner Core to attend. One challenge staff faced, given both virtual meetings and higher than expected attendance, was that it was difficult to create space where transit providers could connect and converse with one another. MPO staff found that while people could get information and engage speakers in question-and-answer sessions, agenda items meant to support open discussion did not generate much

conversation, a pattern staff has also noted at other online events not hosted by the MPO.

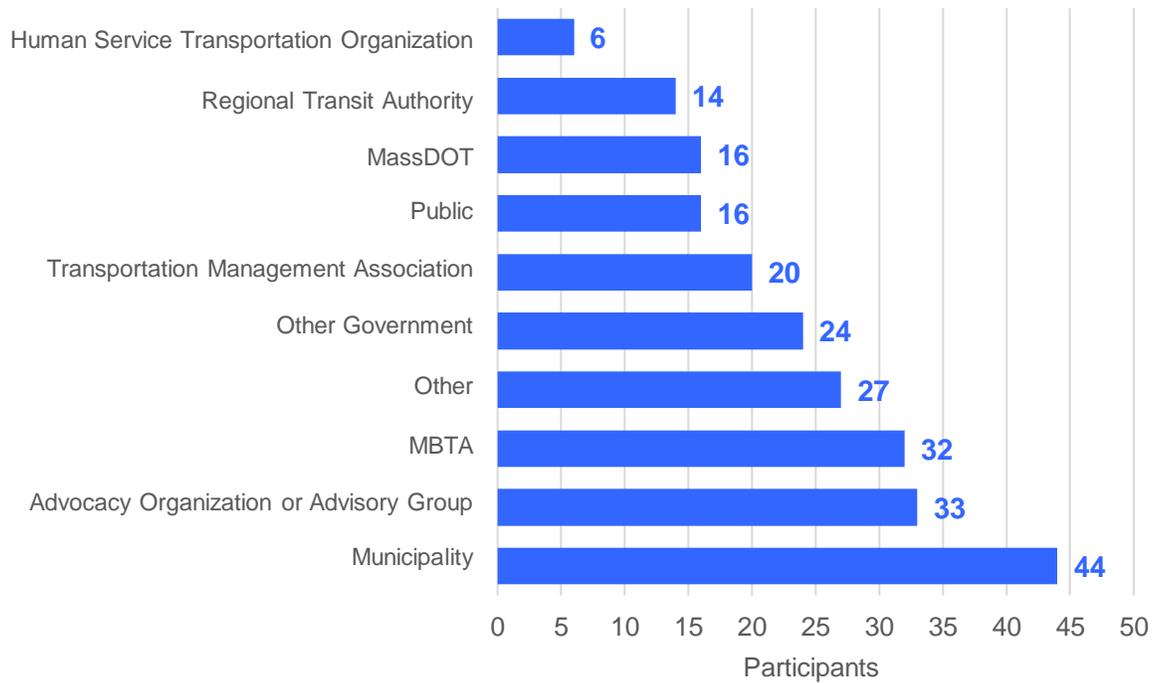
To address this issue, in May 2021 MPO staff organized a test round of Transit Working group “coffee chats.” These are hour-long open-conversation sessions where MPO staff provide facilitation questions to help attendees discuss a specific transit-related topic. Several coffee chats were invitation-only or restricted to transit providers and supporting agencies while other chats were open to anyone. These sessions were initially capped at approximately 15 to 20 attendees; transit providers were given priority for spots, but people from advocacy organizations or members of the public could also participate if space was available. MPO staff found that these coffee chats were successful in generating conversation and information exchange among participants and have held additional sessions starting in October 2021. Coffee chat discussion topics have ranged from microtransit to driver shortages to medical and human service transportation concerns. Appendix 1 lists Transit Working group coffee chat topics through December 1, 2021.

3 TRANSIT WORKING GROUP PARTICIPATION

3.1 General Participation

Between January 2020 and November 2021, 232 people participated in one or more TWG meetings or coffee chats. Figure 1 classifies these people by affiliation type. Attendees from municipalities made up approximately 19 percent of total TWG participants. When combined, attendees from the MBTA, RTAs, TMAs, and human service transportation organizations made up approximately 31 percent of Transit Working Group participants.

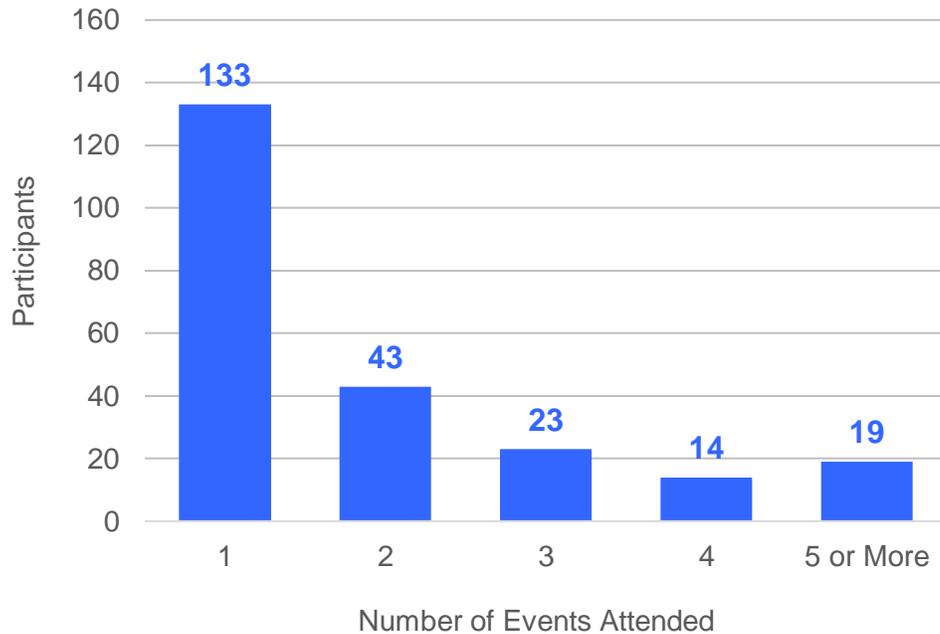
Figure 1
Transit Working Group Participants by Affiliation Type



Notes: The “Other Government” group includes people representing federal, county, or regional agencies, the Massachusetts state legislature, and Massachusetts agencies besides the MassDOT or the MBTA. The “Other group” includes people representing private sector consulting organizations, organizations outside of Massachusetts, and other groups not reflected by the other categories.
 MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. MassDOT = Massachusetts Department of Transportation.
 Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

Figure 2 categorizes participants by the number of events they attended. Approximately 57 percent of TWG participants attended one meeting or coffee chat. Another 19 percent attended two events, and the remaining 24 percent attended three or more events. Table 2-1 in Appendix 2 to this memorandum categorizes participants by affiliation category and number of events attended. MPO staff analyzed who attended three or more TWG events to identify the group’s most frequent participants. Of the people that participated in three or more TWG events, approximately 27 percent were from RTAs or TMAs, 21 percent were from municipalities, and 14 percent were from advocacy organizations or advisory groups.

Figure 2
Number of Events Attended by Transit Working Group Participants

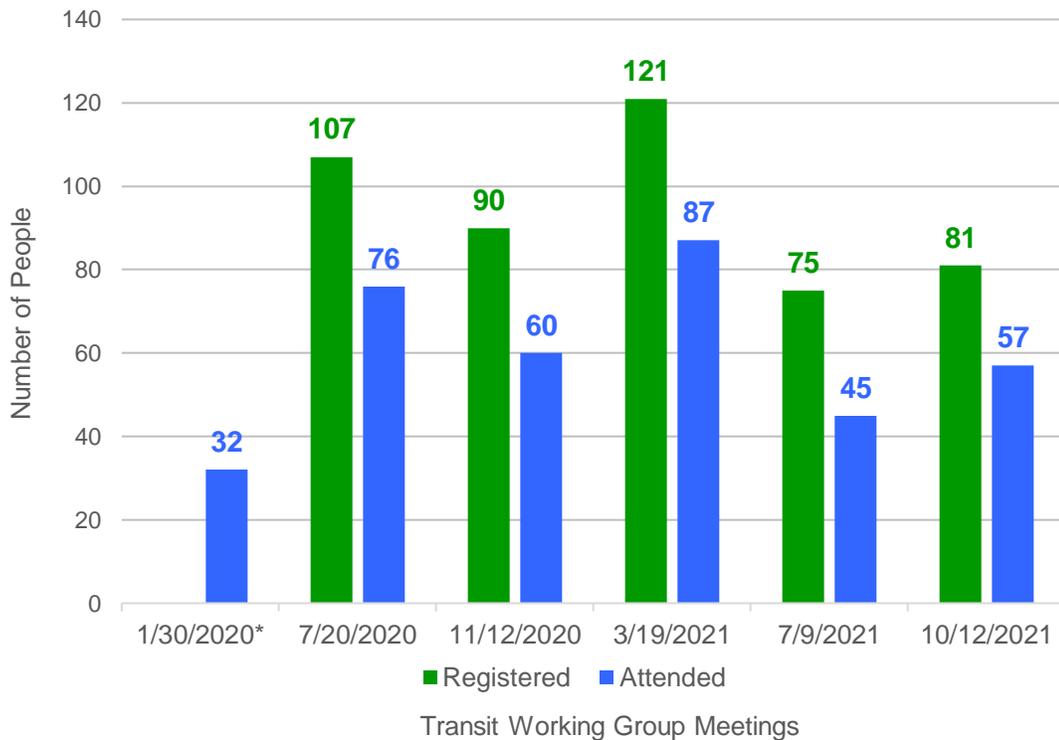


Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

3.2 Transit Working Group Event Attendance

Figure 3 provides information about registrations for and attendance at general TWG meetings held between January 2020 and October 2021. Attendance at TWG meetings has ranged from 32 people in January 2020 (an in-person event) to 87 people in March 2021. Once TWG meetings shifted to a Zoom format starting in July 2020, MPO staff tracked registrations in addition to attendance to gauge broader interest in the TWG, including interest in accessing meeting recordings, notes, and resources. (MPO staff have generally required online registrations for TWG events held over Zoom.) Table 2-2 in Appendix 2 to this memorandum shows information about event registrants and attendees by affiliation category.

Figure 3
Attendance and Registrations at Transit Working Group Meetings

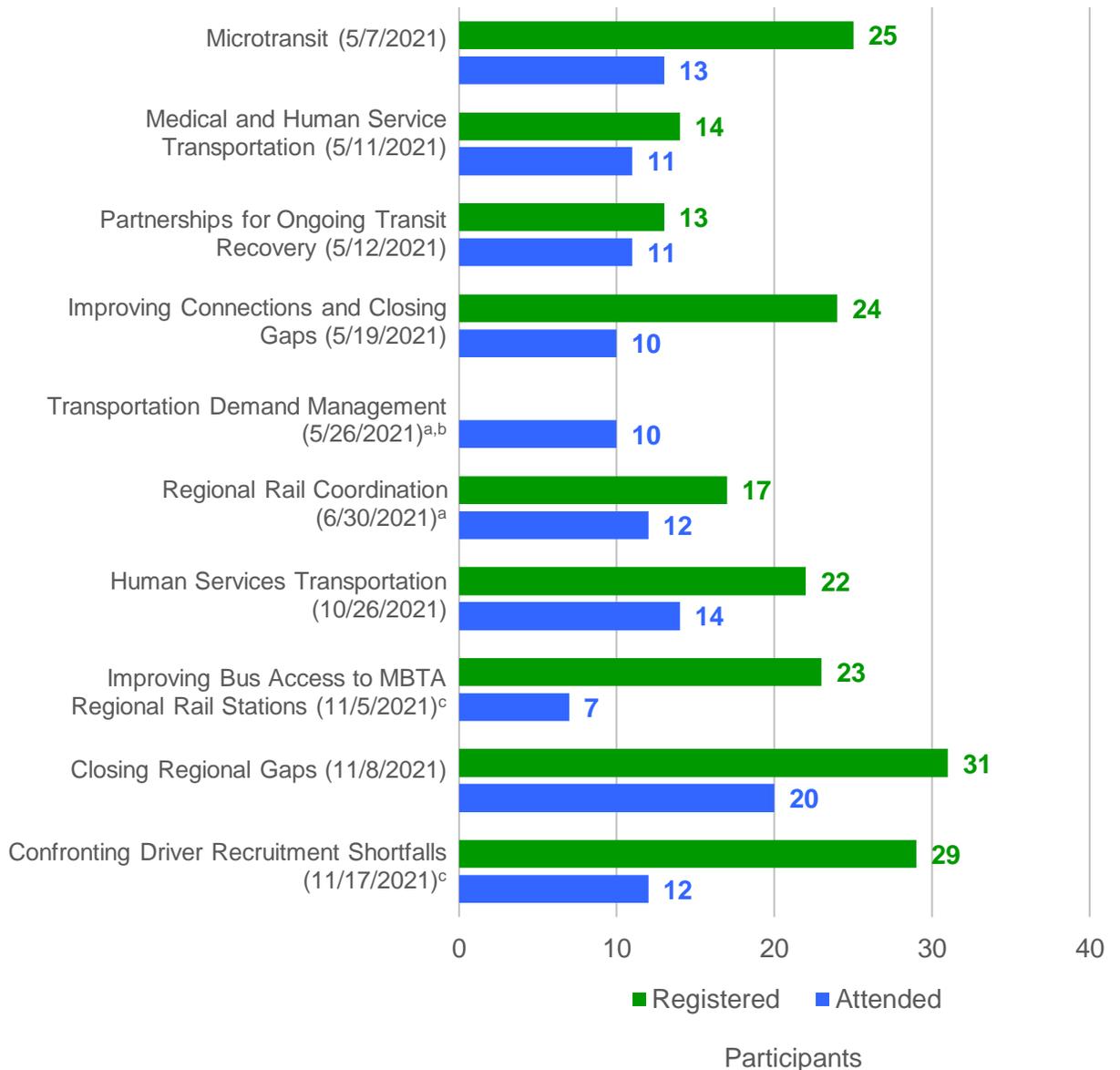


*The January 30, 2020, meeting was held in person. While RSVP's were requested, no advance registration was required.

Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

Figure 4 provides information about registrations for and attendance at general Transit Working Group coffee chats, which were held in May, June, October, and November 2021. As previously mentioned, some coffee chats were invitation only, attendance at open coffee chats was typically capped, and registrants were not always able to participate depending on space availability. As with the general Transit Working Group meetings, MPO staff also tracked registrations to gather broader interest in these events. Tables 2-3 and 2-4 in Appendix 2 to this memorandum shows information about coffee chat registrants and attendees by affiliation category.

**Figure 4
Attendance and Registrations at Transit Working Group Coffee Chats**



^a This coffee chat was invitation-only.

^b Advance registrations were not required for this coffee chat.

^c Participation in this coffee chat was restricted to transit providers and supporting agencies. MPO staff reviewed registrants against this criterion before admitting participants.

MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority.

Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

4 TRANSIT WORKING GROUP PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK AND STAFF LESSONS LEARNED

4.1 Feedback Collection Methods

MPO staff have collected feedback about the TWG from participants in two main ways: through post-event surveys and through a focus group and survey about the pilot in general. Post-event surveys were made available to people who participated in TWG meetings or coffee chats. These surveys focused specifically on what people liked or would improve about that specific event and whether they would participate in TWG or other MPO-hosted events in the future. Seventeen people completed post-event surveys following general TWG meetings or coffee chats during 2020 and 2021.

To collect feedback about the general progress of the pilot, MPO staff held a virtual focus group in September 2021. Staff invited transit providers, agency representatives, and MPO board members who had attended TWG meetings or had been involved in MPO staff's outreach collection process in June 2019 to attend. Appendix 3 includes the list of discussion questions prepared for discussion at the September 2021 focus group, which staff also incorporated into an online survey format for invitees who could not attend the scheduled meeting or who wanted to provide additional feedback in writing. These questions addressed whether the TWG has helped providers to better coordinate with one another; whether they better understand or are more inclined to engage with the MPO; or what suggestions they have for the group in the future, among other topics. Sixteen people either attended the focus group or submitted comments via the survey or emails to staff.

4.2 Feedback Summary

Appendices 4 and 5 to this memorandum describe the feedback MPO staff received through surveys and the focus group. Key themes from this feedback are highlighted below:

- Participants generally described the topics at TWG events as interesting and informative. Some expressed appreciation for learning about technical assistance and funding opportunities that are available through the MPO. Others said they found that staff presented information in a digestible way and appreciated that it was targeted to transit providers specifically. One participant noted that the TWG has been helpful for understanding who to talk to for resources and ideas.
- Coffee chats have been particularly valuable because they have allowed for more focused discussion and coordination than the general meetings.

These events have created opportunities for providers to share their experiences and lessons learned related to various transit issues.

- Several participants noted that the coordination needs they have as providers are still not being met and requested that the TWG focus on more action-oriented activities. Several attendees suggested that the TWG support the mapping of all available transit services in the MPO region and use that as a basis for identifying opportunities for making transit connections or for addressing inefficiencies or duplicative services. Other suggestions include coordinating on providing resources and information for passengers, improving General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) feeds that detail transit schedules, and finding ways to fulfill the goals of the MPO's Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan. One person suggested that taking a refreshed look at the TWG mission and the benefits of coordination could be helpful. As explained in Section 5, staff will be evaluating the TWG's capacity to do this kind of work over the coming months.
- Participants would like this group to serve as a venue to engage with the MBTA on transit-related issues in their service areas and communities, as well as ways to complement services that the MBTA provides.

4.3 Other Staff Impressions and Lessons Learned

In addition to gathering feedback from participants, MPO staff have developed their own impressions about the TWG and how it functioned during 2020 and 2021. As previously mentioned, staff needed to explore alternative ways to facilitate conversations between transit providers beyond what seemed to be possible at general TWG meetings, which led to the coffee chats described in Section 2. Other staff findings are listed below:

- MPO staff have found that discussions at TWG events, particularly the coffee chats, have generated information that will be helpful to Long-Range Transportation Plan and Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan development, and may potentially be helpful for Unified Planning Work Program development as well.
- MPO staff have also been able to strengthen their relationships with the region's transit providers both by seeking speakers for TWG events and at the events themselves. This relationship-building may also improve the quality and value of MPO planning products and decisions.
- The TWG also provides a way to communicate the tools and information generated through MPO studies to a larger audience. Transit providers who might not necessarily come to MPO meetings have an additional way to learn about and potentially benefit from transit-related study products. MPO staff presenting studies can customize presentations to prioritize the

transit-related elements of their findings, and TWG meetings can provide more time for discussions than may be possible at MPO meetings.

- In general, using a flexible participation model for the TWG (as opposed to a formal membership structure) has brought diverse participants and perspectives to TWG discussions. Many different actors participate in the regional transit space to varying degrees, and being able to bring new stakeholders and constituents into discussions easily can support coordination and information sharing. MPO staff have been able to support helpful discussions by offering a range of meeting styles to meet the needs of a particular discussion topic, including the general meetings, the open coffee chats, and some coffee chats that were invitation-only or restricted to transit providers and supporting entities. Also, because the TWG structure can accommodate varying levels of participation, transit providers can participate based on their capacity or interest in different topics.
- Staff did not receive feedback from the focus group or surveys indicating that transit providers who have participated in the TWG are interested in direct representation on the MPO board. Transit providers seem to be more interested in information about funding or technical assistance and opportunities to connect and work together to solve shared issues.

5 FUTURE TRANSIT WORKING GROUP ACTIVITIES

For the remainder of federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022, MPO staff intend to generally maintain the TWG in its current format—hosting quarterly full-group meetings, one or two coffee chats per month, and other events as opportunities arise (such as the January 2022 microtransit forum co-sponsored with MAPC and the MBTA Advisory Board). Staff proposes to maintain this structure for the foreseeable future while continuing to collect feedback about the TWG from participants and to report to the MPO. Depending on interest, staff may host regular coffee chats about certain issues, such as human services transportation, while continuing to vary other chat topics. Staff are already finding valuable ways of engaging transit stakeholders through these venues to help shape the MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan, the Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan, and other MPO activities and plans, and staff look forward to doing so more in the future.

MPO staff appreciate and will explore TWG participant suggestions about supporting more action-or-project oriented activities within the group. As discussed in Section 4, participants highlighted mapping, creating information resources (such as GTFS feeds), and identifying ways to achieve Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation plan goals as possible activities.

While MPO staff could facilitate additional discussions of specific transit issues through the TWG in its existing form, more time and resources would be needed from both MPO staff and TWG participants to advance specific actions or projects. MPO staff also need to consider and communicate the role of the MPO in facilitating action-oriented activities, particularly since action or implementation would likely depend upon other agencies or organizations. Staff plan to spend the near future continuing to collect needs and gather feedback before exploring future action-oriented possibilities.

MPO staff are grateful to all those who have presented or otherwise participated in Transit Working Group events and who have shared their feedback and suggestions about the group. Staff also appreciate the participation of MPO members who have attended events and who have provided their thoughts about the group. Staff welcome feedback and questions about the Transit Working Group at the February 3, 2022, MPO meeting or at any time in the future.

MS/ms

Appendix 1: Transit Working Group Events as of December 1, 2021

Appendix 2: Transit Working Group Event Participant Affiliation Details

Appendix 3: Questions Used for the September 2021 Transit Working Group
Focus Group and Survey

Appendix 4: Feedback Themes from the Transit Working Group Survey and
Focus Group (Summer and Fall 2021)

Appendix 5: Feedback Themes from Transit Working Group Post-Event Surveys
(July 2020 to November 2021)

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) operates its programs, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives federal assistance. Related federal nondiscrimination laws administered by the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, or both, prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. The Boston Region MPO considers these protected populations in its Title VI Programs, consistent with federal interpretation and administration. In addition, the Boston Region MPO provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

The Boston Region MPO also complies with the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law, M.G.L. c 272 sections 92a, 98, 98a, which prohibits making any distinction, discrimination, or restriction in admission to, or treatment in a place of public accommodation based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or ancestry. Likewise, the Boston Region MPO complies with the Governor's Executive Order 526, section 4, which requires that all programs, activities, and services provided, performed, licensed, chartered, funded, regulated, or contracted for by the state shall be conducted without unlawful discrimination based on race, color, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, disability, veteran's status (including Vietnam-era veterans), or background.

A complaint form and additional information can be obtained by contacting the MPO or at http://www.bostonmpo.org/mpo_non_discrimination.

To request this information in a different language or in an accessible format, please contact

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

By Telephone:

857.702.3702 (voice)

For people with hearing or speaking difficulties, connect through the state MassRelay service:

- **Relay Using TTY or Hearing Carry-over:** 800.439.2370
- **Relay Using Voice Carry-over:** 866.887.6619
- **Relay Using Text to Speech:** 866.645.9870

For more information, including numbers for Spanish speakers, visit <https://www.mass.gov/massrelay>.

APPENDIX 1: TRANSIT WORKING GROUP EVENTS AS OF DECEMBER 1, 2021

General information about the Transit Working Group is available on the [Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization \(MPO\) website](#). The list below includes links to meeting recordings and materials, where available.

January 30, 2020, General Meeting

- Pilot Overview
- Transit-Related MPO Activities
 - Overview of MPO activities and resources
- Future Transit Working Group Activities discussion
- Public Comments

July 20, 2020, General Meeting

Recording

- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Service Changes and Pandemic Response Planning
- MPO Transit-Related Activities Update
 - COVID-19 Transit Technical Assistance
 - Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Criteria Update
 - Community Connections Program Update (including Round 1 projects)
- Transit Provider Exchange
- Public Comments

November 12, 2020, General Meeting

Recording

- MPO Transit Activities Update
 - Community Connections Program Update–2020 Application Phase
 - Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Assistance Program
 - Updates on current MPO studies (Future of the Curb Phase 2 and Access to Central Business Districts Phase 2)
 - TIP Criteria Update Process Conclusion
- Taxi/Livery Transportation Partnerships Grant Program
 - Information about a grant program for municipal and state agencies, regional transit authorities, health and human service providers, and nonprofit organizations to partner with taxicab, livery, or hackney businesses to fill transportation gaps and meet transportation and delivery needs
- Transit Provider Exchange
- MBTA Forging Ahead Plan and Service Options

- Presentation of the MBTA's Forging Ahead planning process and proposed service options to be implemented in the spring and summer 2021
- Public Comments

March 19, 2021, General Meeting

Recording

- MPO Transit-Related Activities Update
 - Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2022–26 TIP Process Update
 - FFY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Process Update
 - Travel Demand Management Forum Recap
 - Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Support Program
 - Update on current MPO studies
 - Proposed Transit Chat Series
- Transit Provider Items
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Regional Rail
 - Presentation of the MBTA's plans for regional rail transformation, including a presentation and discussion of upcoming Regional Rail schedules
- Boston Region MPO's MBTA Park-and-Ride and Bicycle Parking Dashboard
 - Presentation of an interactive application describing data about park-and-ride and bicycle parking amenities, capacity, and utilization near MBTA stations
- Public Comments

May 7, 2021, Microtransit Chat

May 11, 2021, Medical and Human Services Transportation Chat

May 12, 2021, Partnerships for Ongoing Transit Recovery Chat

May 19, 2021, Improving Connections and Closing Gaps Chat

May 26, 2021, Transportation Demand Management Chat (invitation only)

June 30, 2021, Regional Rail Coordination Chat (invitation only)

July 9, 2021, General Meeting

Recording

- MPO Transit-Related Activities Update
 - FFY 2022 UPWP Program Process Update
 - Public Outreach Plan Update
 - Update on Access to Central Business Districts Phase 2 study
- Transit Working Group Chats Update
- Transit Provider Items
- Transit Regionalization and Consolidation
 - Presentation and discussion of transit regionalization and consolidation initiatives in central Pennsylvania
- Preview of Interactive Bus Delay Application
 - Presentation and discussion of MPO staff's ongoing work on an interactive bus delay application for the MBTA
- Public Comments

October 12, 2021, General Meeting

Recording

- MPO Transit-Related Activities Update
 - Transit Working Group Pilot Update
 - Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Assistance Program
 - Community Connections Program Update
- Transit Provider Items
- Implications of Federal Legislation for Transit:
 - Summary of the implications for transit of recent federal legislative activity related to the new infrastructure bill, including a question-and-answer period
- Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Discretionary Grant Program
 - Introduction to this state-funded program designed to test innovative solutions to local mobility challenges and to provide targeted operating assistance, technology improvements, service evaluation, and program design that best demonstrate compliance with the Task Force on RTA Performance and Funding's recommendations
- Taxicab, Livery, and Hackney Transportation Partnership Grants Program
 - Information about a grant program for municipal and state agencies, regional transit authorities, health and human service providers, and nonprofit organizations to partner with taxicab, livery, or hackney businesses to fill transportation gaps and meet transportation and delivery needs
- Public Comments

October 26, 2021, Human Services Transportation Chat

[Recording](#)

November 5, 2021, Improving Bus Access to MBTA Regional Rail Stations Chat (restricted to transit providers and supporting entities)

November 8, 2021, Closing Regional Transit Gaps Chat

[Recording](#)

November 17, 2021, Confronting Driver Recruitment Shortfalls (restricted to transit providers and supporting entities)

APPENDIX 2: TRANSIT WORKING GROUP EVENT PARTICIPANT AFFILIATION DETAILS

Tables 2-1 through 2-4 in this document provide details about the affiliations of people who participated in Transit Working Group (TWG) events, including general meetings and coffee chats. In these tables, the “Other Government” group includes people representing federal, county, or regional agencies, the Massachusetts state legislature, and Massachusetts agencies besides the Massachusetts Department of Transportation or the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. The “Other” group includes people representing private sector consulting organizations, organizations outside of Massachusetts, and other groups not reflected by the other categories.

Table 2-1
Transit Working Group Participants by Affiliation Category and Number of Events Attended

| Category | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 or More | Total |
|---|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------|--------------|
| Advocacy Organization or Advisory Group | 22 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 33 |
| Human Service Transportation Organization | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| MassDOT | 9 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 16 |
| MBTA | 19 | 8 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 32 |
| Municipality | 24 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 44 |
| Other | 17 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 27 |
| Other Government | 10 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 24 |
| Public | 14 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 16 |
| Regional Transit Authority | 6 | 2 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 14 |
| Transportation Management Association | 9 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 20 |
| Total | 133 | 43 | 23 | 14 | 19 | 232 |

MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. MassDOT= Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

**Table 2-2
Transit Working Group General Meeting Registrations and Attendance by Affiliation Category**

| Category | 1/30/2020* | 7/20/2020 | | 11/12/2020 | | 3/19/2021 | | 7/9/2021 | | 10/12/2021 | |
|---|------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended |
| Advocacy Organization or Advisory Group | 11 | 14 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 18 | 13 | 10 | 5 | 9 | 7 |
| Human Service Transportation Organization | 0 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| MassDOT | 6 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 6 |
| MBTA | 2 | 17 | 14 | 9 | 8 | 14 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| Municipality | 4 | 22 | 15 | 22 | 16 | 21 | 14 | 13 | 9 | 18 | 13 |
| Other | 2 | 8 | 5 | 11 | 5 | 18 | 13 | 7 | 4 | 9 | 8 |
| Other Government | 0 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 12 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 7 |
| Public | 1 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 13 | 8 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| Regional Transit Authority | 2 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 7 |
| Transportation Management Association | 4 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 8 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 5 | 9 | 5 |
| Total | 32 | 107 | 76 | 90 | 60 | 121 | 87 | 75 | 45 | 81 | 57 |

Note: The January 30, 2020, meeting was held in person. While RSVPs were requested, no advance registration was required.

MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. MassDOT= Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

**Table 2-3
Spring 2021 Transit Working Group Coffee Chat Registrations and Attendance, by Affiliation Category**

| Category | Microtransit (5/7/2021) | | Medical and Human Service Transportation (5/11/2021) | | Partnerships for Ongoing Transit Recovery (5/12/2021) | | Improving Connections and Closing Gaps (5/19/2021) | | Transportation Demand Management (5/26/2021) ^{a,b} | Regional Rail Coordination (6/30/2021) ^a | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|---|-----------|--|-----------|---|---|-----------|
| | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Attended | Registered | Attended |
| Advocacy Organization or Advisory Group | 4 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Human Service Transportation | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MassDOT | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MBTA | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Municipality | 6 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 0 |
| Other | 5 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| Other Government | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Public | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Regional Transit Authority | 5 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 4 |
| Transportation Management Association | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Total | 25 | 13 | 14 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 24 | 10 | 10 | 17 | 12 |

^a This coffee chat was invitation-only.

^b Advance registrations were not required for this coffee chat.

MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. MassDOT= Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

**Table 2-4
Fall 2021 Transit Working Group Coffee Chat Registrations, by Affiliation Category**

| Category | Human Services Transportation (10/26/2021) | | Improving Bus Access to MBTA Regional Rail Stations (11/5/2021) ^a | | Closing Regional Gaps (11/8/2021) | | Confronting Driver Recruitment Shortfalls (11/17/2021) ^a | |
|---|--|-----------|--|----------|-----------------------------------|-----------|---|-----------|
| | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended | Registered | Attended |
| Advocacy Organization or Advisory Group | 5 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 0 |
| Human Service Transportation | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| MassDOT | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| MBTA | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 5 |
| Municipality | 6 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| Other | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other Government | 6 | 5 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| Public | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Regional Transit Authority | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| Transportation Management Association | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| Total | 22 | 14 | 23 | 7 | 31 | 20 | 29 | 12 |

^a Participation in this coffee chat was restricted to transit providers and supporting agencies. MPO staff reviewed registrants against this criterion before admitting participants.

MBTA = Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. MassDOT= Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

Source: Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Staff.

Appendix 3: Questions Used for the Transit Working Group Focus Group and Survey

Message to Focus Group Invitees

Thank you for your participation in the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) [Pilot Transit Working Group](#). As the Transit Working Group moves out of the pilot phase, we would appreciate feedback about your experience and suggestions for improvement. We expect to incorporate this feedback into a report for the MPO board sometime this fall. If you have questions, please contact Michelle Scott (msscott@ctps.org) or Sandy Johnston (sjohnston@ctps.org).

We will discuss the following questions, time permitting, during the virtual feedback session on September 10, 2021, at 10 AM. We also welcome your feedback on these questions by email or this form through close of business on September 17, 2021. If you need a refresher on past meeting topics, additional information is provided below under Past Transit Working Group Discussion Topics. (Note: See Appendix 1).

Feedback Questions

1. What Transit Working Group meeting and coffee chat topics have been the most interesting or useful to you?
2. Has your participation in Transit Working Group events (meetings or coffee chats) helped you to better coordinate with other transit providers or other organizations relevant to your work? If so, how?
3. Past Transit Working Group events have included information about the Boston Region MPO and its activities. What information about the MPO has been the most useful to you?

Examples of MPO-related information include updates about (1) technical assistance offerings and funding opportunities, (2) MPO studies, and (3) MPO planning processes and public comment periods.

4. Do you feel that you understand the functions of the Boston Region MPO better than before you participated in the Transit Working Group? If so, what Transit Working Group activities have helped with this?
5. Have you participated more in other MPO activities since you began participating in the Transit Working Group? If so, how? Do you feel more inclined to participate in other MPO activities than before?

Examples of participating in other MPO activities include attending MPO Board meetings, attending other MPO events, commenting on MPO plans, or applying for MPO technical assistance or capital funding.

6. What questions do you have about the MPO, its activities, or its decisions that you would like to see discussed at Transit Working Group events?
7. What role, if any, would you like to see the Transit Working Group have in MPO decision-making?
8. What would you like to see more of at future Transit Working Group events?
9. What would you like to see less of at future Transit Working Group events?
10. What presentation or discussion topics would you suggest for future events? Do you have any suggestions for presenters?
11. Is there anything we should consider when selecting dates and times for future Transit Working Group meetings and coffee chats?
12. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

APPENDIX 4: FEEDBACK THEMES FROM THE TRANSIT WORKING GROUP SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP (SUMMER AND FALL 2021)

This Appendix summarizes feedback collected at a focus group about Transit Working Group (TWG) activities through August 2021, through a survey issued to focus group invitees in September 2021, and other written comments submitted in October 2021. Focus group invitees included transit providers and transit-supporting agency representatives that had attending TWG meetings or events. Feedback has paraphrased and been summarized by topic area. Comments made by multiple participants are indicated with an asterisk (*). Comments made by Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) members that participated in the focus group are indicated with a hashtag (#).

TWG Event Formats

- Participants from transit providers and supporting organizations found coffee chats to be particularly valuable because they allowed for more focused discussion and coordination. *
 - These sessions provided opportunities to share learning experiences and have in-depth conversation with colleagues. *
 - The written summaries of these chat sessions were helpful.
 - The guided discussion format was helpful.

Information Provided at TWG Events

- Participants reported that information shared at working group events has generally been interesting and educational. **
- TWG events have provided a way for transit providers to hear about what's going on at the MPO in a digestible way. *
 - The information about funding opportunities is valuable. *
 - It is important to provide coordinated information about grant programs for starting shuttle services.
 - The TWG has been helpful in explaining what the MPO's activities are and what studies and technical assistance offerings are available.
 - The MPO information presented at TWG events can help people stay up to date and improve their understanding of MPO activities. It is helpful to have a chance to ask questions in a smaller format more focused on transit providers.
- It was good to have the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback at the meeting where the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's (MBTA) Forging Ahead plan was presented.

- It has been helpful to hear what transit agencies have been doing regarding the pandemic.
- It can be challenging to apply lessons from presenters from outside of the region if their operating context is different.

General Regional Transit Coordination

- Coordination needs are still being addressed outside the group to meet transit providers' needs. Regional Coordinating Councils (RCCs) support coordination discussions for specific geographic areas. Other coordination discussion supports how to improve transfers between services.
- Transit providers had hoped this would be a venue where all the transit services in the region could be mapped and discussions could be had about how to provide service more efficiently, close gaps, and generally look at regional transit service in a more comprehensive way. *
 - Participants raised the following questions: What transit services are serving major connection points to reduce crowding and congestion? How can connections to the MBTA be maintained? How can mobility hubs play a role? *
 - One participant asked the following question: What is the best entity to take on this kind of work?
 - Transit-related coordination would be helpful given all that has changed during the pandemic, as well as the amount of change that can happen between Long-Range Transportation Plans or Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans.
 - It is important to capture both when and where transit services are being provided when mapping transit information. For example, how does transit service availability change at night or on weekends?
- The TWG has been helpful in terms of learning who to go to for information about certain subjects, topics, or ideas.
- The TWG discussions have been helpful; it takes time to put new connections to use.
- One participant suggested clarifying the purpose of the group and what the group is trying to accomplish through more coordination and documenting the value of coordination.
- The MPO may be best positioned to answer questions of regional coordination, given its regional coordination and its work with subregional groups. The MPO's technical assistance resources could support this work. #

- The MPO wants to continue coalition building and breaking down barriers between municipalities and subregions. The MPO board is being intentional in terms of showing how suburban transit and regional transit authority (RTA) operations are essential to servicing the Inner Core and the whole region's interests. #

Coordination with the MBTA

- One participant asked the following: Could this group have been more of a resource for the MBTA's Forging Ahead Plan by allowing for the collection of feedback from transit providers responding to changes brought about by the plan? For example, transit providers could have suggested alterations to routes to support more efficiency.
- One MPO member noted the following: This group should not be a venue that duplicates outreach that the MBTA can do on its own. #
 - One participant suggested the following: The TWG mailing list could let people know about MBTA outreach events.
- An MPO member asked the following: How can the TWG serve functions that are not being served by the MBTA right now, in terms of helping services make connections? #
- An MPO member asked the following: How do municipalities have a stronger voice when engaging with the MBTA about the need for specific transit services, including those that have been suspended during the pandemic? Is the MBTA Advisory Board or the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) a better venue for these discussions? #

Other Coordination Partners

- An MPO member noted that there has been a renaissance in the MBTA advisory board in the past year and a half. This group represents 170 municipalities and captures a lot of mobility patterns. People should support their work and advocacy. #

TWG Participants

- Some participants suggested reaching out to MetroWest Regional Transit Authority and the Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA) to see how to make this group more useful to them so that they participate. *
- One participant noted that there needs to be more RTA participation in general because RTAs need additional support and could benefit from coordination efforts.

Topics of Interest and Future Opportunities

- Several participants suggested that this group can be an opportunity to elevate the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan and its purpose. *#
 - Transit providers are encouraged to coordinate their services when applying for funding, but there does not seem to be a good mechanism to make sure that happens.
 - The TWG could reflect on the work of the Community, Social Service, and Paratransit Transportation Commission (Executive Order 530 from the Patrick Administration), see what updates there have been since the commission was formed, and assess where further progress could be made.
 - There are opportunities to make the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan more of a living document if the group talks more regularly about those recommendations/goals and brainstorms about how they may be addressed, particularly when organizations apply for grants.
- A participant asked the following: What is the best way to provide information and resources to passengers? They noted that regional bodies can help coordinate this information for local and private operators.
 - How can the group let people know not only how services connect, but what services riders can access?
 - How can the group improve General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) feeds as part of this process? Improved GTFS feeds can be part of communicating changes to schedules. *
- A participant asked the following: Could this group be an opportunity to dig deeper into the planning of transit and routes?
- One participant suggested that TWG members could present on topics that their agencies and organizations are doing in the transit space.
- One participant said that it would be great to do more active problem solving at TWG meetings.
- A participant asked the following: How can transit providers secure translation services at a regional level? Could they partner with the MBTA and/or the RTAs?
- A participant asked the following: Could the group connect with a representative from TransitApp about representing all the transit services in the region in that application?

- One participant noted that it would be interesting to have Jarrett Walker (Human Transit blog) as a speaker at a future TWG event.

Interactions with the MPO and MPO Staff

- The TWG is a good educational tool and a good way to get input from communities and transit providers.
- Connections to the MPO's core services is where this group can provide a lot of value, both to the members and the MPO board.
 - How can this group be a source of potential Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) studies?
- One MPO member noted that the MPO wants to continue to strengthen the transparency, accountability, and collaboration of the MPO board, so information about how transit providers are interacting with the MPO is valuable. #
- One participant said that the best understanding that they have gained about the MPO is from reading documents and talking to staff. They did not recall much discussion about how the MPO operates at the TWG events. They also get a lot of information about the MPO from emails and social media.

Other Comments

- Several participants noted that time constraints during the COVID-19 pandemic have inhibited participation for some people. *
- One person said that participants are interested in seeing the TWG continue to grow, and that it would be good to see the TWG develop as a voice for the range of transit operators in the region.
- A participant said it would be helpful to understand more how the Regional Transportation Advisory Council relates to this TWG and to providing input on regional transportation.
- A participant said that it is good to have this group and that a refresh can be helpful. The work is necessary for the MPO and MPO staff and for transit coordination.
- A participant suggested the following topic: How much more money might come to the Boston Urbanized Area if more services reported their ridership and data to the Federal Transit Administration?

APPENDIX 5: FEEDBACK THEMES FROM TRANSIT WORKING GROUP POST-EVENT SURVEYS (JULY 2020 TO NOVEMBER 2021)

This Appendix summarizes feedback through post-event surveys for Transit Working Group (TWG) events held between July 2020 and November 2021. Feedback has been summarized by event type and topic area. Comments made by multiple participants are indicated with an asterisk (*).

Feedback from General TWG Meetings

Three people completed four post-event surveys following general TWG meetings.

Supportive Feedback

- Appreciated learning about changes to Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) ridership and service reduction scenarios as part of the Forging Ahead plan
- Appreciated discussion of transit models used in other states, including their history

Suggestions for Improvement

- Support more direct problem-solving discussions about how to improve transit coordination in the region, with action-oriented activities
- Develop a map with all the transit services in the region to support more visioning and coordination
- Discuss possibilities for sharing payment systems, apps, and opening more services to the public (if they are not open to them already)
- Allow attendees to direct chat other participants using Zoom

Future Topics for Discussion

- Equity and social justice in transportation
 - This topic could include social justice issues affecting transit drivers, employees, and contractors, as well as those related to paratransit
- Presentations focused on transit services outside of the Boston region
- Spending on school bus services and whether financial resources could be reallocated to services that transport both students and other riders

Feedback from Coffee Chats

Fourteen people completed 17 post-event surveys following TWG coffee chat sessions.

Supportive Feedback

- Appreciated opportunities for open discussion that are possible in a small group *
- Appreciated diversity of participants in individual sessions *
- Liked hearing from people outside of their immediate region *
- Appreciated diversity of issues raised during the discussions *
- Appreciated participants' willingness to discuss experiences, challenges they are facing, questions, and ideas for solutions *
- Liked the meeting facilitation style
- Liked the focused attendance for individual sessions
- Appreciated having participants who work on similar issues as a sounding board
- Liked learning about new resources
- Liked learning about other forms of community transit

Suggestions for Improvement

- Send out discussion questions ahead of time so that people can consider them before the meeting. *
- Find ways of make space for other attendees to participate if they have not spoken. *
- Explore whether to add more people to individual sessions to allow for an even more diverse set of participants.
- Consider organizing sessions geographically at first, because organizations working in different parts of the region experience different challenges.
- Explore small group discussions for riders with similar systems.
- Share participant contact information so that people can connect outside of the meeting.
- Raise awareness of the sessions so that more people know to participate.
- Make the coffee chats problem-and-solution oriented.
- Consider sharing background information about the discussion topic at the beginning of the chat so that people less familiar with the topic can better participate.

Future Topics for Discussion

- Grant programs and funding opportunities *
- Continued discussions of microtransit and demand-response services *
- Fare integration *
- Service consolidation
- Regional transit authorities
- Follow-on sessions for previously discussed topics
- Highlights about model transportation programs
- Youth use of transit, including for school trips
- Chats focused on specific transportation corridors (which affect multiple municipalities)
- Providing transportation outside the core of the region
- Closing technology literacy gaps for transit
- New technologies in the transit space
- Public-private partnerships
- Improving alignment of routes, schedules, and service plans across providers
- Transportation demand management best practices and new technologies
- Strengthening medical and human service transportation networks
- Improving marketing and communications
- Improving wayfinding, navigation, and amenities at key stations and facilities