

Meeting Summary

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting Transit Working Group

February 10, 2022, Meeting

4:00pm–6:00pm, Zoom Web Conference, recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8nTntvy3VY>

Meeting materials posted at: <https://www.bostonmpo.org/calendar/day/20220210>

Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome and Meeting Guidelines—*Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff, and Jonathan Church, Manager of MPO Activities*

Sandy Johnston welcomed attendees to the seventh meeting of the Transit Working Group (TWG), and introduced Jonathan Church. J. Church invited attendees to introduce themselves in the Zoom chat and note their affiliation and location. J. Church explained that the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) approves the allocation of all federal transportation dollars in the Boston region, and that the MPO board includes representatives from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and regional transit providers. J. Church explained that MPO staff provide planning and technical work in support of the region's goals to create a sustainable, robust, equitable and economically viable transportation system. He shared a link to the [Frequently Asked Questions page](#) on the MPO website.

J. Church explained that the TWG is a forum to support coordination between transit providers to discuss important transportation topics, and to build connections between transit providers and the MPO. He shared a link to more information about the TWG on the MPO website.

J. Church thanked guest speakers and MPO staff presenters, and invited Sandy Johnston, meeting facilitator, to discuss the meeting agenda and introduce presenters. S. Johnston introduced himself as a Senior Transportation Planner at the 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 at this meeting MPO staff will give updates on MPO-related matters of interest to the group, and transit providers will have the opportunity to give updates on their work and discuss with the group. He noted that MPO staff members will present some recent work that will be of interest and applicable to the group with

opportunities for discussion, and keynote speaker Grecia White will present her research on gendered experiences at transit stops and how agencies can support safety and inclusivity for riders. S. Johnston shared a link to the [meeting agenda](#).

2. MPO Activities Update—Sandy Johnston, Michelle Scott, Rose McCarron, Srilekha Murthy, MPO Staff

Pilot Transit Working Group Findings

S. Johnston introduced Michelle Scott to give an update on the pilot status of the TWG. M. Scott described the background of the TWG, which has been meeting since January 2020 and is expected to be an ongoing activity for the MPO. After analyzing data on the TWG function gathered between January 2020 to early December 2021, M. Scott recapped the findings and highlights presented to the MPO Board on February 3, 2022. M. Scott mentioned that the link to the memo that was presented to the MPO is available on the February 3, 2022, MPO Meeting Calendar page, and a link was shared in the chat.

M. Scott explained that the pilot study aimed to explore the characteristics of the TWG and assess its success in fulfilling the missions of (1) providing a forum for coordination between transit providers in the Boston region, and (2) helping to inform the MPO's decision-making on transit-related matters. She explained that the pilot was set up with a relatively flexible structure, with MPO organization and meeting facilitation but no formal membership or leadership structure. The pilot aimed to attract a wide variety of participants in the transit space, including regional providers such as Regional Transit Authorities (RTA), Transit Management Associations (TMA), the MBTA, human services organizations that provide transit, advocacy groups, transportation agencies, and members of the public involved in the transit space. Pilot topics touched on both MPO-related matters and items of specific interest to transit providers.

M. Scott described some of the questions MPO staff set out to answer during the pilot, such as *Who will want to participate? What benefits will there be for participants and for the MPO? How could the group be structured?*

M. Scott discussed the considerable impact of COVID-19 on the TWG: topics of discussion in early 2020 were influenced by transit agencies' concerns around ridership decreases and other challenges posed by the pandemic, and the TWG meetings shifted from an in-person to virtual format. M. Scott explained that although the first pilot meeting at the State Transportation Building in January 2020 had healthy in-person attendance, attendance increased considerably after the meetings shifted to a virtual format. She showed a chart of registrations for TWG meetings and participation over time.

M. Scott explained that in addition to the general TWG meetings, MPO staff wanted to create a space for an informal presentation and discussion format, at which participants could engage more directly than the large virtual meetings allow. This led to the formation of the TWG Coffee Chats, hour-long sessions with capped attendance where MPO staff bring some facilitation questions and participants discuss the topic of the day. She showed a chart of registrations for Coffee Chats and participation over time, noting that MPO staff have been able to accommodate everyone who wants to participate with very few exceptions.

M. Scott reviewed the overall participation outcomes of the pilot: more than 230 individuals participated in one or more TWG events (general meetings or Coffee Chats), with many repeat attendees. She showed a graphic breakdown of participants' affiliation type, and noted that municipalities were the largest category of participants (about 19 percent of overall participation). MBTA, RTAs, TMAs and human service providers together made up another 31 percent of overall participation. M. Scott noted that the large variety of types of participants has enriched the discussions, and repeat attendance at multiple events is encouraging in terms of the overall success and likely longevity of the group.

M. Scott described the methods MPO staff used to collect feedback from TWG participants: (1) post-event surveys (M. Scott noted that attendees of today's meeting will be receiving a survey that focuses on what people liked/disliked about the meeting and suggestions for future events), and (2) a focus group with transit providers and other organizations that MPO staff talked to in 2019 prior to setting up the pilot. She noted that more detailed discussion of this material can be found in the appendices of the memo presented to the MPO on February 3, 2022, which was linked in the chat. M. Scott summarized highlights of the overall feedback received: participants found TWG topics to be interesting and informative, and appreciated the additional opportunities for coordination, connection, and discussion offered by the Coffee Chats. Participants also indicated interest in other types of coordination that MPO staff could support; transit providers in particular were interested in exploring collaborative action to address shared issues and needs. Some examples from participant feedback were mapping different regional services as a basis for understanding gaps and ways to increase efficiency, and cross-agency collaboration on customer information translation or better General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS) feeds to capture transit schedules.

Concluding her discussion of feedback, M. Scott highlighted participants' appreciation of the TWG as a venue to engage with the MBTA on service coordination, and their interest in exploring ways to sustain and improve upon that in the future. M. Scott expressed MPO staff's appreciation of the MBTA's participation both in presentations at

TWG meetings and in engagement with regional providers at Coffee Chat discussions. She shared some general impressions about the TWG from MPO staff: Staff appreciate the opportunities to strengthen their relationships with a diverse group of participants and transit providers, and share ongoing MPO work through the development of the TWG. M. Scott also expressed MPO staff's hope that the flexible structure of the group allows people to continue participating at the level that feels right for them, and noted that the planning and investment work done by the MPO will continue to be informed by the information, ideas, and needs that TWG participants share.

In conclusion, M. Scott explained that under S. Johnston's leadership, MPO staff expect to continue the general structure and meeting schedule of the TWG through the end of the current Federal Fiscal Year (September), and will use feedback from these and other meetings to inform the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, upcoming Coordinated Public Transit–Human Services Transportation Plan, and other MPO work. She noted that MPO staff will continue exploring the question of how the TWG can facilitate more action-oriented work and provider-to-provider coordination, given the constraints of resources, the MPO's structure, and coordination with other agencies and actors. M. Scott encouraged attendees to share any thoughts or ideas with S. Johnston, including on the question of how the TWG can best relate to the MPO. S. Johnston shared his email in the chat.

Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Support Program

S. Johnston introduced Rose McCarron, who recently joined the Transit Analysis and Planning staff at the MPO. R. McCarron explained that the MPO's Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Support Program offers support for transit planning including route planning, ridership, cost effectiveness, and other transit service characteristics. She explained that RTAs, TMAs, municipalities, and Metropolitan Area Planning Council subregions offering services to the public are eligible to receive this support from the MPO. R. McCarron shared a link in the chat to the program page on the MPO website for more information on the program and encouraged attendees to look at the page for more information on the program or if they were interested in applying for support.

Unified Planning Work Program

S. Johnston introduced Srilekha Murthy, who is succeeding him as the new Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Manager. S. Murthy explained that the UPWP is an MPO policy document that programs federal funding for planning and analysis projects across the Boston region. She noted that funded projects include core MPO programs known as Certification Requirements, as well as discrete studies that are selected and renewed on an annual basis, technical assistance offerings, and ongoing program

support budgets. She explained that currently (February) we are at the beginning of the UPWP process, and MPO staff are soliciting study ideas that could potentially be funded in the next year. S. Murthy encouraged attendees to contribute any study ideas via a survey or by emailing her, and shared the survey link and her email address in the chat.

Travel Demand Management

S. Johnston discussed the Travel Demand Management (TDM) study that MPO staff are currently undertaking. He explained that over several years MPO staff have received feedback from regional stakeholders indicating an interest in the MPO taking on a more significant role in TDM, which is the suite of non-construction projects, policies, and incentives that policymakers and other entities can undertake to support non-single occupancy vehicle travel. S. Johnston explained that MPO staff hosted informative and successful digital forums on TDM in the last fiscal year (2021), and the MPO decided to fund a brief follow-up study during this current fiscal year to decide whether the MPO should be involved in TDM, and if so, how. S. Johnston noted that he is the project manager for that study, and shared a link to the [project scope](#) in the chat.

S. Johnston described the major tasks involved in the TDM study: first, surveying and interviewing staff at other MPOs to document how they engage with TDM practices, and second, surveying and interviewing regional stakeholders (such as attendees at this TWG meeting) to document the level and specific areas of interest in MPO involvement in TDM. He shared a link to the TDM survey in the chat and encouraged attendees to fill it out any time before the end of February. He also highlighted the upcoming TWG Coffee Chat, where TDM will also be discussed (2/16/22) and shared a link to the Coffee Chat registration page in the chat. S. Johnston also noted that after conducting some interviews with regional stakeholders, MPO staff intends to host an open house-style event at a future date. After collecting all that information, he explained that MPO staff will compile feedback and make recommendations to the MPO about involvement in TDM.

3. Transit Provider Exchange

S. Johnston explained that this item on the agenda is an open exchange for transit providers and agencies to share updates, announcements, and questions.

Alistair Sawers (MBTA Senior Director of Rail Transformation) discussed ongoing MBTA work exploring how to communicate information across MBTA systems about other services that the MBTA network touches or connects to. He noted that this was a topic that the TWG had briefly discussed last year. He explained that the MBTA has created a draft mock-up of some onboard maps that they have started to generate, and

one idea currently under consideration is putting QR codes at MBTA stations to help users find other transit service links. He noted that one challenge is frequently changing service schedules, so links or websites would need to be dynamic or updated very frequently. A. Sawers mentioned that some attendees may receive outreach on this topic.

S. Johnston noted that A. Sawers and his team with MBTA Rail Transformation gave an informative presentation on their program at the TWG last spring, and also participated in a Coffee Chat last fall. S. Johnston expressed MPO staff interest in bringing the MBTA Rail Transformation team back for another TWG event in the future, and mentioned that perhaps that could be a forum for more discussion on the interactive signage and information program that A. Sawers referenced.

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) mentioned that residents around the Lexington area have been asking for a way for the MBTA and the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) to connect, or for an alternate service that would better reach the Bedford VA Hospital and also the Middlesex Community College. She noted that MBTA and LRTA affiliates were in attendance as well as many transit experts, and that this has been a long-term issue that residents have been requesting solutions for. She hoped that the relevant entities could arrange a coordination meeting soon. She also mentioned that Lexington continues work on a regionalization action plan and hopes to find a way to better coordinate services in the area. She encouraged attendees to reach out to her for more information.

S. Johnston expressed excitement for S. Barrett's regionalization plan and mentioned that he hoped to feature some of that work at the TWG in the future.

4. Transportation Recovery Guidebook for Commercial Business Districts—*Betsy Harvey, MPO Staff*

S. Johnston introduced Betsy Harvey, Transportation Equity Manager at the MPO, to discuss the MPO's Access to Commercial Business Districts Phase II study. B. Harvey explained that the goal of the study was to develop a pandemic recovery guidebook for municipalities for transportation access to and within commercial business districts (CBD) in our region. She explained that in addition to looking at transportation, the guidebook also explores the role of other areas that pertain to pandemic recovery including public health, housing, real estate, and the economy. She expressed the intention that the guidebook's recommendations will not only help CBDs recover from the pandemic but also help them build back in a way that will leave them more economically vibrant, equitable, and resilient for the future.

B. Harvey described case studies of 12 CBDs in 11 municipalities (including two in Boston) that helped inform the study's understanding of how COVID-19 has affected CBDs in the region as well as strategies they have employed to support continued access during the pandemic. She explained that the case study CBDs were selected based on their level of public transit access, and included two of each access type, ranging from high-transit access with rapid transit to just commuter rail or no transit access at all. She noted that case study CBDs were also selected in consideration of having geographic and economic diversity and a range of municipality sizes. She noted that several selected municipalities had a significant environmental justice population.

B. Harvey described some public transit-related feedback heard from case study interviewees last summer, noting that contexts have since evolved somewhat. Feedback related to challenges included the fact that the drop in commuter rail ridership had a waterfall effect on transit ridership on other services such as shuttles connecting to stations. CBDs with higher shares of people who work remotely saw more disruption to their transit ridership, while areas with more essential workers saw less of a disruption. Related challenges included ensuring safe access for riders who rely on public transit such as essential workers, especially in areas where demand remains high, as well as uncertainty about the future of downtowns and corporate office space and the ridership of transit that serves those spaces.

B. Harvey then described interviewees' responses about transit-related goals both during and after the pandemic, including positive and negative trends that occurred. One goal was to improve biking and walking connections to train stations, which interviewees hoped would also help ease congestion and improve public health. B. Harvey described the increase in public demand for transit access to outdoor destinations, and the related goal of maintaining and potentially expanding services to help people access recreation and the outdoors and ease congestion. Another goal was to accelerate planned investments using newly available federal and state funds, which B. Harvey noted will likely continue to be a priority given the increased federal funds made available since the interviews took place.

B. Harvey explained that the input heard from interviews helped MPO staff complete the Exploratory Scenario Planning (XSP) process to develop the recommendations in the guidebook. She explained that the XSP framework is specifically designed to support decision-making where there is significant uncertainty and multiple interconnected forces at play. XSP helped staff create a guidebook that could adapt to the uncertain future of the pandemic, reflect the challenges that municipalities throughout the region face, and proactively help municipalities recover and build back stronger.

B. Harvey showed a chart that illustrated the steps that MPO staff took to complete the XSP process and mentioned that more detailed discussion of the steps can be found in the guidebook. She described two steps that were particularly important: shaping scenarios around the driving forces that will significantly impact CBD recovery and developing recommendations that address those forces.

B. Harvey explained that driving forces can be technological, societal, environmental, political, or economic, and will affect how well and quickly CBDs recover from the pandemic. She noted that there is more certainty about some forces than others, and explained that MPO staff selected the driving forces for the guidebook based on input from case study interviews and other research. She highlighted some of those forces, including public health (there is certainty of a high vaccination rate in Massachusetts, but uncertainty about the ongoing severity of the pandemic); transportation (the MBTA is focusing more on transit critical populations and there has been an increase in demand for active transportation and outdoor recreation access, but there is uncertainty around ridership changes in different areas); and economic (persistent socioeconomic and racial inequities are an ongoing reality, and there is uncertainty about consumer shopping preferences and long-term impacts on CBD retail, as well as the evolution of employers' remote work policies and how those will shape demand for office space and housing in different areas). B. Harvey explained that these driving forces and the associated uncertainties helped MPO staff develop distinct scenarios to explore possible futures and encouraged attendees to find more detail about the scenarios in the guidebook.

She then discussed the guidebook's recommendations for addressing driving forces, which were designed to help municipalities recover under a variety of circumstances and future uncertainties to ensure long-term resiliency, sustainability, and equity. B. Harvey showed a table that listed some recommended strategies and actions, and their relation to the driving forces discussed. She encouraged attendees to review more detailed recommendations in the guidebook. She explained that the recommendations are organized into two categories: systematic (things that are woven through all of municipalities' and transit providers' work, such as public outreach or collaboration with other agencies) and infrastructural/programmatic (one-off investments in a particular infrastructure or program). She encouraged attendees to review the guidebook for more detailed information and case studies that illustrate the implementation of recommendations, along with information on other resources and funding opportunities available. She again noted that there have been developments in funding since the guidebook was written, and encouraged attendees to also review new funding opportunities through the current bipartisan infrastructure law.

B. Harvey described several key recommendations included in the guidebook. Systematic recommendations included increased collaboration with other municipalities (especially when applying for funding from the MPO or other state or federal grants) and developing a curb management plan, which can help municipalities determine how to divide up space on the road for different uses including public transit. B. Harvey then discussed infrastructural and programmatic recommendations including increased investments in public transit infrastructure to support essential workers (from actual transit routes to small-scale bus stop amenities), as well as supporting the implementation of regional rail systems to mitigate the loss of transit ridership and improve mobility across all areas of needs throughout the region.

S. Johnston encouraged attendees to reach out to B. Harvey with any questions and B. Harvey provided her email in the chat. S. Barrett requested the link to the draft guidebook in the chat, which was provided.

5. Managing Curb Space in the Boston Region: A Guidebook—*Blake Acton, MPO Staff*

S. Johnston introduced Blake Acton, Transportation Planner and Analyst at the MPO, to discuss another MPO guidebook on curb management in the Boston region. B. Acton shared the link to the guidebook in the chat. He explained that the guidebook is the result of the Future of the Curb Phase II study conducted by MPO staff, which examined case studies, best practices, and challenges facing the region to create a guide that provides planners with practical strategies to effectively manage curb space.

B. Acton defined curb space as roughly the area between a street curb and the roadway, typically used for parking. He explained that this space is increasingly valuable, especially in denser urban areas where it can be used not just for parking but also as a travel lane, for deliveries, outdoor dining, or as dedicated lanes for bikes or buses. Curb management helps determine which of these uses most effectively serves the needs of the community. He explained that it is ideal to treat curb space as a blank slate and try to reframe the traditional concept of parking as the default use and everything else as an alternative.

He explained that to create the guidebook, MPO staff interviewed 27 different professionals, mostly transportation planners, who told MPO staff that curb management is mostly a new practice and that curbs are managed in a largely reactive and ad hoc manner. Interviewees expressed a strong desire for more practical strategies and ideas for curb management, which informed the guidebook's scenarios and recommendations.

B. Acton described the three foundations of curb management discussed in the guidebook. The first foundation he described was to build a community coalition of allies that can help develop and accomplish curb management goals, which is an important way to address the challenges planners face with competing needs and priorities for valuable curb space and limited power to change the curb on their own. He explained that planners can identify issues, collect feedback, and promote projects and goals by establishing committees, maintaining outreach, and developing relationships with local elected officials who can more easily and effectively implement projects.

The second foundation B. Acton described was to develop a curb priority matrix that prioritizes various curb uses within each land use type according to the needs of the community. He showed an example matrix grid illustrating different ranked land uses and curb uses, and explained each ranking for each use. He explained that the example shown could be a matrix for a CBD that determines the highest priority curb use to be activation of public space, such as providing outdoor dining and parklets. He noted that the matrix shown was only one example, and that each community's priority matrix will look different depending on the community's unique land use contexts.

The third foundation B. Acton described was to create a curb inventory: a searchable database with curb regulations by location and time. He explained that the database would help planners answer simple questions such as how many parking spaces are available on a given block at a given time, and that it would ideally be updated on an ongoing basis in response to curb changes. He noted that municipalities could either choose to develop the database in-house or use a vendor.

B. Acton then described three scenarios to illustrate how planners could use the guidebook to address specific curb management issues. He explained that the starting point for all of the scenarios was a parking study, which he recommended planners undertake as the first step in the curb management process. He explained that this would be a comprehensive survey of parking use and turnover near planners' areas of interest and would help planners determine the existence of any parking surpluses, areas to focus price interventions, and opportunities to replace underused parking with new curb uses. He also mentioned that parking surveys could help planners defend new curb use projects and proposals against perceptions that more parking is always needed.

B. Acton explained that a completed parking study generally produces one of two primary outcomes: in simple terms, parking occupancy in an area of interest is lesser or greater than about 90 percent. He explained that if occupancy is greater than 90 percent in an area of interest planners could decide to increase prices to decrease

demand. An alternative response would be to increase parking supply, which B. Acton explained is not an ideal response: it is increasingly apparent that this creates an expensive vicious cycle in the long term that encourages more car dependency and fuels increased parking demand. He explained that parking study results often indicate less than 90 percent parking use, which gives planners the opportunity to repurpose the underused curb space with something else that better serves the needs of the community. He explained that the hypothetical scenarios in this presentation illustrate the previously mentioned outcomes and possible planning interventions under various spatial and usage circumstances.

The first scenario B. Acton described began with a result of less than 90 percent parking use, with a neighborhood commercial land use type with conditions favorable to outdoor dining (for example, low traffic, narrow streets with trees, and most residents entering the area via active or public transit), where the top curb priority was activation of public space; planners decided to replace some curb parking with outdoor dining installations and parklets. He showed graphics to illustrate this scenario.

The second scenario he described began with the same parking study outcome (less than 90 percent use), with a neighborhood connector land use type where the highest priority was to move people and goods (for example, a congested, high-traffic corridor with high transit ridership). Planners decided to replace curb parking with a dedicated bus lane, for its efficiency moving many people through the corridor. B. Acton explained that in this scenario the curb intervention might receive more pushback, since it would require the replacement of more parking over a larger area. He recommended a quick build strategy for this type of scenario: a low-cost, fast, small-scale and temporary project that would demonstrate the new curb use without the risk of committing to a permanent change. He described the example in this scenario could be creating a temporary bus lane using only traffic cones and signs, which could easily be removed if the lane didn't work. He mentioned that a critical component of a successful quick build is a plan to evaluate the impact of the project and collect feedback from the community, in order to inform the next action (removal, alteration, or permanent replacement of the intervention). He showed graphics to illustrate this scenario.

The third scenario B. Acton described began with a higher than 90 percent parking use, with low available space and high congestion. He explained that one approach planners could take in this type of scenario would be to increase the price of parking (either outright or through decreased time limits), which would decrease parking demand to eventually reach a rate of less than 90 percent use. He explained that once the utilization was sufficiently lowered, planners could eventually replace some parking with

higher priority uses like in the previous scenarios. He showed graphics to illustrate this scenario.

B. Acton described some curb management recommendations specifically for CBDs: planners should approach business owners and develop relationships early in the process in order to introduce the idea of curb use priorities and attempt to address concerns and potential negative perceptions proactively. He recommended that planners emphasize the benefits of increased parking turnover: less parking availability generates more traffic and discourages people from visiting the area, while raising parking prices increases turnover, which results in more visitors in the same time period, increasing revenue for businesses. He also mentioned that planners could consider introducing prices with a Parking Benefit District, where local parking revenue is reinvested into the district and managed by a committee of local stakeholders who can adjust prices and recommend new projects funded by the revenue. Examples he gave of such projects included improvements to sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting, street trees, or bus stop amenities, which would help attract more visitors and more revenue to the district, leading to a virtuous cycle.

B. Acton explained that the curb management guidebook was a product of the Future of the Curb Phase II study conducted by MPO staff, which was a follow up to the Phase I study conducted a few years ago. He explained that Phase I explored more nationwide strategies for curb management, while Phase II formalized those strategies into recommendations, and the upcoming Phase III will aim to develop methodologies to help planners evaluate their own curb management strategies and continue to expand recommendations for measuring the success of curb interventions. He encouraged attendees to send him any recommendations or ideas for projects that will affect the curb in some way, explaining that MPO staff are interested in analyzing the effect of these types of projects to use as case studies in Phase III. He shared his email in the chat.

Discussion

A. Sawers mentioned that he was interested in station drop-off, explaining that the MBTA manages some themselves, whereas some are city- or town-based or in town centers. The MBTA is studying station drop-off where it is on their property, but he expressed interest in coordinating with cities and towns who were also looking at the issue. He noted that coordination would be helpful even though conditions are different for each station, making it hard to generalize.

B. Acton stated that he would be interested in exploring this.

Freda Wiley asked a question in the chat about plans for bikes on the Green Line and also expanding ride service and repairing transit service into towns where the commuter rail goes. S. Johnston replied that he did not know about any specific plans for expanding bikes on the Green Line, but mentioned that the possible upcoming upgrades to the Green Line may facilitate transporting bikes, although he was not sure about specifics or implementation timelines. He noted that paratransit is also a frequent topic of discussion among MPO staff and mentioned an upcoming Coffee Chat on human services transportation including paratransit, for which registration information will be shared at the end of the meeting. He stated that MPO staff are aware of issues around paratransit service area gaps and overlaps in the region and are working to provide more opportunities to discuss these issues.

F. Wiley responded that her question had been partially answered in the chat, and explained that she brought up the issue due to personal experiences facing challenges and barriers to using public transportation.

S. Johnston encouraged F. Wiley to attend the next Coffee Chat.

Alicia Hunt (City of Medford) described a question that has recently emerged for planners in Medford regarding curb management and related to paratransit and senior transport. She explained that some residents were requesting parking spots or pick-up services in their neighborhood or close to their homes. Medford officials have been hesitant to use the handicapped parking designation for that, and A. Hunt mentioned that she had been discussing creating specific pick-up/drop-off or loading zones to address the issue. She asked if other communities have solutions or recommendations for this. She noted that the Medford Traffic Commission would like to find a straightforward answer, since they remained unconvinced that this would be a proper use of handicapped parking designations.

S. Johnston responded that this could be an area for MPO staff to explore in the next phase of the study.

B. Acton stated that staff are looking for case study ideas, and this situation could be a good candidate. If Medford officials had a specific place where this situation is happening, MPO staff could collect data or conduct an analysis to try to answer A. Hunt's question.

Hunt responded that she will be in touch with MPO staff about this situation.

6. Bus Stops, Amenities, and Perceived Safety Through a Gender Lens—*Grecia White*

S. Johnston introduced Grecia White, who completed her Master's Degree in Urban Informatics from Northeastern University last August and currently serves on the board of Planners of Color, the National Coalition for Latinx with Disabilities, and is the Vice Chair of the Latinos in Planning Division of the American Planning Association. Her documentary on women who bike at night will be released at the end of this month. S. Johnston noted that G. White is interested in using data and media to improve the delivery of government services to better serve the needs of all citizens and foster trust and engagement. For this meeting, she is discussing her master's research on gendered experiences at bus stops and takeaways for planners.

G. White expressed appreciation for the previous presentations and discussions and introduced her research on bus stop amenities and perceived safety through a gender lens, which she explained was completed as part of her master's program at Northeastern. She mentioned that the project was funded by the Congress for New Urbanism New England Chapter as part of their Spatial Justice Fellows program. She noted that this project was hyper focused on one bus route, extending from Nubian Square in Roxbury to the Harvard campus in Cambridge, with the goal of determining the extent to which gender, time of day, and bus stop amenities play a role in people's perceptions of safety while waiting at bus stops.

G. White explained that the first part of the project involved a safety audit, which was conducted via a text message-based survey, and the second part was examining survey data from the MBTA's Plan for Accessible Transit Infrastructure (PATI). She described the process she used for the first part of the project, which began with creating posters with survey participation instructions to place at bus stops along the chosen route. She explained that she used free web tools to create the posters and survey, intentionally chose bright colors for the poster to attract attention, and made the survey available in four languages, although she noted that translations were made using Google Translate and professional translation would be preferable.

G. White showed photos of the posters, which were large and weatherproof, and described the process of installing them at bus stops. She explained that she installed posters at 33 out of the 46 bus stops along the bus route, skipping some stops due to limitations related to stop crowding or gatherings of potentially unhoused people. She described the contents of the survey, which included a brief description of the project and began with the yes-or-no question "do you identify as a woman?", for which she would have liked to include more options but didn't in the interest of minimizing the survey length. She briefly described the other questions in the survey, which asked

respondents how safe they felt when the sun is out and at nighttime, as well as how long they spend waiting for the bus (she noted that she did not use data from this final question due to time constraints).

G. White then described the second part of the project for which she used the PATI dataset, which included data on specific amenities at each MBTA bus stop. She explained that she used intuitive icons to show the different amenities in an interactive map, and showed a graphic with the icons. She then showed graphics to illustrate the bus route in both directions with all of the surveyed stops, broken down by the number of responses received at each stop, as well as the reported gender identity of respondents (those who identified as a woman, those who did not, and those who preferred not to answer). She noted that some stops received significantly more responses than others, including stops in the Roxbury area and Boston Medical Center. She also mentioned that she had been interested in using GTFS data to support her analysis of wait times at selected stops (GTFS datapoints were indicated on the bus stop map she showed), but ultimately decided not to use this data due to time constraints.

G. White described how she analyzed survey responses by assigning numerical values to calculate averages, giving her a higher-level view of all survey responses. She described the difference between average perceptions of safety during the day and during the night, showing a chart to illustrate the significant drop in overall perceptions of safety from day to night. She then showed another chart illustrating the average differences in nighttime and daytime perceptions of safety broken down by reported gender identity. She explained that the results indicate that during the day, people who identified as a woman felt slightly safer than those who did not, while during the night perceptions of safety dropped for both groups, with a greater drop for people who identified as a woman.

She then described how she combined the survey data with the PATI bus stop amenities data, to explore whether there was a relationship between perceptions of safety and bus stop amenities. She showed graphics and maps to illustrate her findings. She first discussed the two bus stops with the highest reported perceptions of safety during the day (a stop close to the Harvard campus and a stop close to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology [MIT] campus), both of which had bus shelters and some other amenities. People who identified as a woman had the same safety score for both stops, while the MIT stop ranked highest for those who did not. She then discussed the stops with the highest reported perceptions of safety during the night, which differed by reported gender identity. She noted that the stop with the highest safety score for people who identified as a woman had many amenities and was located

between Central Square and the MIT campus, in an area with high foot traffic. She noted that for people who did not identify as a woman, the stop with the highest safety score was near the Harvard campus, which also had some amenities and foot traffic.

G. White then discussed the bus stop where respondents reported feeling least safe during the day, which was the same stop for both reported gender identities. The stop was located in Boston and had relatively fewer amenities, but was adjacent to a 7-Eleven storefront. G. White noted that this was an interesting finding, because one might think that being located next to a storefront would have a positive impact on perceptions of safety. She mentioned that she would have liked to collect more qualitative data through direct interviews at this bus stop to find out why people felt so unsafe.

She then discussed the bus stops where respondents reported feeling least safe during the night, with two low-scoring stops for people who identified as a woman and a different one for those who did not. All three of these stops were located in Boston, with two located on the same block adjacent to the Boston Medical Center (one of these two was the lowest-scoring stop for people who did not identify as a woman). She noted that although both stops had many amenities, this is an area where there are services for unhoused people, and where there may be a greater presence of people who may be experiencing homelessness. She discussed the other stop where people who identified as a woman reported feeling least safe, which had many amenities but was isolated and had low foot traffic.

She briefly discussed the nuances around the bus stop amenity data, noting that physical infrastructure alone does not account for differences in peoples' perceptions of safety at different stops, and that social infrastructure is also an important factor. She described social infrastructure as the presence of other people in the area, including levels of traffic, and perhaps the presence of different types of commerce or social services. She noted that it is important to explore the connections between transportation and social issues, and to collaborate with other departments on transportation issues and services.

G. White then showed a chart aggregating safety perception responses from people who identified as a woman at the highest-response stops (those with at least three responses) in both daytime and nighttime. She described the differences in average perceptions of safety, which were much lower during the night than the day. She described the stop with the most significant drop in perception from day to night, which had amenities but was geographically isolated (surrounded by parking lots) and with very low foot traffic. She showed a similar comparison chart for people who did not

identify as a woman, noting that for this group there were fewer stops with at least three responses. She explained that these aggregate comparison charts also illustrate the greater difference in perceptions of safety between daytime and nighttime for people who identified as a woman versus those who did not.

G. White briefly discussed some key takeaways from her research, beginning with the notion that accessibility is fluid. She explained that the MBTA's PATI dataset aimed to capture bus stop accessibility, but its focus was on physical infrastructure; she argued that social infrastructure, including people's qualitative feelings at various bus stops and other external factors including time of day and time of year all affect accessibility in important ways. She noted that elements of a high quality and accessible bus stop include physical amenities and the social environment, including factors such as foot traffic, activity in the surrounding area, and general ambiance, all of which would be best understood by talking more to people on the street and at stops. She mentioned that for future research on this subject she would recommend pairing the quantitative analyses with qualitative research such as interviews, and she would also recommend a deeper examination of land use data in relation to public transit, to explore how streets and outdoor spaces are activated in various ways and how that impacts transit riders' perceptions of safety. She also noted that it would be interesting to explore potential seasonal differences.

G. White then discussed research on gender-focused transit best practices, which she paired with her own research during her project. This included a local initiative as well as two initiatives in Los Angeles. The first item she mentioned was the Gender and Mobility Initiative led by the LivableStreets Alliance in Boston, a research project exploring intersections of gender and mobility at a local level through a survey and public information efforts. She then discussed two recent studies in Los Angeles, where she found a greater concentration of research on gender and transit. One study was conducted by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), titled Changing Lanes, and the other was conducted by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro) and titled Understanding How Women Travel.

G. White explained that the Understanding How Women Travel study was the first time the LA Metro seriously explored the specific experiences of women using public transportation. She shared a quote about the gender data gap, and briefly discussed the importance of including gender data and experiences in conversations about transportation and accessibility. She noted that if some people don't feel comfortable going outside or using public transit at certain times, this indicates that their city is not fully accessible to them, especially for those who do not have cars or rely more on public transportation.

G. White provided a brief overview of the methods used in the LA Metro's study, including focus groups, workshops, and ethnographic studies, in which volunteers observed and documented people's behavior at transit stops. The study also included the concept of Mobility of Care, which was conceived by a Spanish researcher who noticed that past transit research surveys on trip types or purposes lacked a category for care-related travel and work, and that caring work was getting lost in the typical trip categories. G. White mentioned the example of trips people took to shop for children or parents that might simply get folded into a general shopping trip category, losing the nuance of the trip's purpose of caring for others. She explained that by creating a new category for caring work, researchers were able to better quantify those types of transit uses and patterns, which were primarily undertaken by women. She encouraged attendees to explore this research more.

She then briefly discussed the LADOT's more robust Changing Lanes study, which included a strong emphasis on participatory research through community partnerships, working groups, and meaningful community collaboration and engagement at each step of the process.

G. White described key takeaways from both Los Angeles studies. From the LA Metro's study, she mentioned the creation of a Gender Action Plan focused on improvements in staffing, fare policies, station design, service provision, and future investments. From the LADOT's Changing Lanes study, she reiterated the importance of the participatory process and strong community partnerships, and also mentioned cross-sector integration, sustained investment, equitable delivery, knowledge sharing and building, and collaborating with representatives. She mentioned her own recommendation of also including chambers of commerce in these conversations and collaborations, to explore relationships between business activity and transit. She also mentioned the foundational step of data collection, and highlighted the importance of collecting data to fill gender-related gaps in existing data and information. She noted that there were many other complex takeaways from the Changing Lanes study and encouraged attendees to read it and look at included implementation steps on their own time.

G. White then discussed some of her own recommendations for planners and service providers, and for gender and equity-focused transit planning generally. She encouraged attendees to look into another existing initiative, the Mobilizing Justice project in Canada, which brings universities and municipalities together to explore and address transportation justice issues and work on standardizing metrics and practices, and includes a countrywide survey. She mentioned a number of short-term recommendations of her own, including a review of currently available data to determine how much of it can be segregated by gender, and then a municipal-level transit survey

including questions on gender, disability, and times of use, among other things. In terms of safety, she recommended seeking more specificity about perceptions of safety around transit stops, which could be accomplished by surveying riders about where, when, and during which part of their transit usage they feel unsafe. She suggested that this increased granularity would make it easier to target issues and make improvements.

She also reiterated that pairing quantitative analysis with qualitative research is critical, and recommended more direct engagement and conversation with people and the use of participatory research methods. She also briefly described her recommendation for talking about data, and her preference for describing studies, plans, and policies as data informed rather than data driven, to indicate that processes should be iterative, and there is always more information to learn and gather that could continue to inform the process.

Another recommendation G. White gave was to create a paid board that could oversee and give input on project pilots and future iterations, or even create something like the LA Metro's Gender Action Plan. She mentioned that the LA Metro has a Women and Girls Governing Council that spearheaded its gender study, and is a strong example of this. She also recommended a responsibility matrix, another idea from the LADOT's study that allows planners to list goals and indicate who specifically is responsible for them. She then discussed the importance of building understanding of the challenges different transit users face, and mentioned that in addition to engaging people directly, staff could ride different bus and train routes while replicating various rider scenarios, such as traveling at various times of the day and year, and with and without strollers, grocery carts, wheelchairs, or smartphones if possible. She mentioned that the GoBoston 2030 plan tried a related method to build understanding by having city staff shadow riders on trips to gain insight about transit use experiences.

G. White also outlined several long-term recommendations, including exploring the Mobilizing Justice project and conducting a similar but smaller-scale regional mobility census to establish baseline data, as well as looking at the city of Somerville's happiness survey, which could be interesting in a transit context. She also recommended working to ensure that municipal staff reflect the diversity of the municipality's population, developing a Gender Action Plan, locating daycares near transit stops, and exploring a universal basic mobility approach to public transit, which LA also offers an example for with their Universal Transit Pass. She additionally recommended formally incorporating gender mobility work into planning budgets to fund more work and research, and broadly focusing on user experience over design: focusing on how it feels to take transit and how factors related to accessibility,

perceptions of safety, and experiences of riders influence on the transit system in addition to physical infrastructure.

Discussion

S. Johnston thanked G. White for her presentation and asked her to share her email in the chat so attendees could reach out with additional questions. He noted that little time remained in the meeting, so encouraged attendees to reach out to presenters directly with additional longer questions. No attendees asked questions at that point.

7. Closing and Next Steps

S. Johnston reminded attendees that the information shared during the meeting, including all the links shared in the chat, the recording of the meeting posted to YouTube, and information about other upcoming events, would be sent to attendees via email after the meeting. He also noted that everyone would receive a post-event survey via email, for attendees to share their thoughts on the meeting and on other TWG events.

S. Johnston also mentioned some upcoming TWG events that attendees may be interested in. He noted that the large Working Group meetings will continue to be held quarterly, with the next one around May. He reminded attendees that there will be more TWG Coffee Chats in the meantime, and briefly described the themes of three upcoming Coffee Chats. He shared links to the Coffee Chat registration pages in the chat and encouraged attendees to sign up. He again thanked presenters, MPO staff, and attendees, and shared his contact information in the chat.

Attendance

Attendee Name	Attendee Affiliation
Zachary Agush	Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA)
Colette Aufranc	Wellesley Select Board
Jacinda Brabehenn	
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Jeff Bennett	128 Business Council
Todd Blake	City of Medford
Aseem D	
Melissa Dullea	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
Jay Flynn	Transit Matters
Maria Foster	Town of Brookline
Sophia Galimore	Watertown Transportation Management Association (TMA)
Glenn Ann Geiler	Brockton Area Transit Authority
Aaron Goode	
Anne Gripenburg	
Erik Griswold	
Alicia Hunt	City of Medford
Mary Jacob	
Derek Krevat	MassDOT
William McNulty	Old Colony Planning Council Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)
Adi Nochur	
Steven Olanoff	Town of Westwood
Franny Osman	Town of Acton
Alistair Sawers	MBTA
Dori Sawyer	Northern Essex Elder Transport Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC)
Jon Seward	
Allison Simmons	Lower Mystic TMA
Jeremy Thompson	495/MetroWest Partnership

Attendee Name	Attendee Affiliation
Lisa Weber	EOHHS Human Service Transportation Office
Grecia White	
Kate White	City of Somerville
Laura Wiener	City of Watertown
Freda Wiley	

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Annette Demchur, Director of Policy and Planning
Jonathan Church
Sandy Johnston
Sean Rourke
Betsy Harvey
Srilekha Murthy
Michelle Scott
Blake Acton
Róisín Foley
Stella Jordon
Matt Archer
Jonathan Belcher
Heyne Kim
Ryan Hicks

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857.702.3702 (voice)

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