

MEMORANDUM

DATE February 18, 2010; Revised February 10, 2011
TO Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
FROM Anne McGahan and Mike Callahan, MPO Staff
RE Public Involvement Plan for Paths to a Sustainable Region

INTRODUCTION

This draft Public Involvement Plan outlines the means by which the MPO will inform, engage, and solicit input and feedback from the general public and other stakeholders throughout the development of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's next Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Paths to a Sustainable Region.

Outreach will build upon the input received during the development of JOURNEY TO 2030, MAPC's MetroFuture Plan, and the youMove Massachusetts planning work. Paths to a Sustainable Region will be informed by input from a broad and robust set of interested parties, including those specified by SAFETEA-LU for LRTP review and members of the general public. It will also utilize new avenues of communication in addition to traditional methods.

OBJECTIVES

Consistent with the MPO's Public Participation Program, outreach for Paths to a Sustainable Region will promote meaningful involvement by the public at all stages of LRTP development. This process will give the public the integral role it should have and will bring valuable ideas to the LRTP discussion and decision making. Specific objectives of this public involvement plan are the following:

- Engage the general public during all phases of LRTP development
- Provide convenient means for the public to provide input and feedback to the MPO during LRTP development
- Recruit individuals and groups to participate that have not traditionally been involved in the regional transportation planning process or have been less engaged in the past
- Utilize new avenues of communication
- Summarize feedback and provide it to the MPO in a timely manner so the MPO may consider it during deliberations and decision making

SCHEDULE

Two public review periods of the MPO's work are planned. In February 2011 the draft transportation needs assessment was made available for review. In June 2011 the draft document will be available for public review and comment. The following meetings are planned:

For review of the needs assessment:

- February 10 at 5:30 PM – Saugus Town Hall
- February 15 at 5:30 PM – Needham Public Library
- February 16 at Noon and 5:00 PM – Boston, State Transportation Building

Additionally, the MPO will hold a Transportation Equity Forum on February 23 at the Boston Public Library in the Boston Room. The purpose of this meeting is to present to the public the transportation equity needs outlined in the needs assessment.

For review of the draft document:

- June 21 at 5:30 PM – north of Boston
- June 22 at noon and 5:00 PM – Boston, State Transportation Building
- June 23 at 5:30 PM – west of Boston
- June 28 at 5:30 PM – south of Boston

The MPO's website allows ongoing feedback from the public. More information about this new tool is provided later in this memorandum.

TARGETED PARTICIPANTS

Paths to a Sustainable Region will be informed by input from a variety of constituencies and interests and from members of the general public. The MPO will make an effort to reach individuals and groups with an interest in transportation, including, but not limited to:

- Access and disability interests
- Affected agencies
- Chambers of commerce and businesses
- Community development corporations
- Councils on aging
- Environmental interest groups
- Freight shippers and providers of freight transportation services
- MAPC Subregion members
- Municipal officials (chief elected officials, planning and DPW directors)
- Neighborhood associations
- Private providers of transportation
- Professional organizations with transportation interests
- Regional equity contacts
- Regional Transportation Advisory Council
- Representatives of public transportation employees
- Transportation agencies
- Transportation interest groups

The MPO will also seek to reach individuals not traditionally or formerly involved in

transportation decision making by engaging in Web-based outreach, including the use of social media such as YouTube and Twitter.

OUTREACH PROCESS AND INDIVIDUAL METHODS AND TOOLS

Process

In February and March of 2010, MPO staff focused work on informing the public and raising awareness about the LRTP update. Outreach commenced with a press release, notices through MPOinfo, coverage in *TRANSREPORT*, and a “Name the Plan” contest.

Quickly the focus of outreach work shifted to soliciting input and feedback for the MPO’s consideration. An MPO open house was scheduled for early April, which provided an opportunity for discussion and exchange of ideas.

As LRTP materials are developed, outreach will focus on informing the public about the MPO’s progress, seeking feedback on the draft needs assessment and eventually soliciting comments on the draft document. This will often be Web-based activity; however the MPO will continue to conduct quarterly open houses and will hold public workshops on its draft LRTP. Materials will also be available in print for individuals without access to the Internet and in accessible formats for persons with disabilities. To facilitate review of the draft LRTP, staff will produce a summary document in addition to the full draft. A revised summary will also be produced when the LRTP is final, which will make the final document more readily accessible to the general public and other stakeholders.

Methods and Tools

The methods and tools that will be used to conduct public outreach during the development of the LRTP can be categorized as communicative, Web-based interactive, and face-to-face interactive. The MPO will rely on the communicative approaches to get out notices and provide updates. The two types of interactive approaches are useful both for communicating information and for soliciting feedback and responding to that feedback. The methods and tools are as follows:

Communicative

- MPOinfo
- Press releases
- *TRANSREPORT*
- Social media
- Video and/or print summary

Web-Based Interactive

- MPO website
- Social media

Face-to-Face Interactive

- “Invite Us Over” briefings
- MAPC Subregion meetings
- Open houses
- Regional Transportation Advisory Council discussions
- Workshops

Each of the methods and tools is discussed below.

Communicative

- *MPOinfo*
MPOinfo, the MPO’s one-way e-mail listserve, will be used to announce open houses, workshops, and the availability of materials and documents for public review on the MPO website. MPOinfo subscribers will also receive the monthly *TRANSREPORT* inserts (described below) via e-mail. MPOinfo currently has approximately 2,000 subscribers, including the general public, local officials, chambers of commerce, legislators, and print media. Subscribers are added to MPOinfo when they provide their e-mail address to the MPO.
- *Press releases*
Press releases will be sent to newspapers in the region to announce open houses, workshops, other public meetings, milestones in LRTP development, and the availability of documents for public review. Press releases will be translated into Spanish and sent to Spanish-language media. This broader media coverage is intended to reach members of the public who may not usually take part in transportation planning.
- *TRANSREPORT*
The MPO’s monthly newsletter, *TRANSREPORT*, is an important tool for communicating information about the 2035 LRTP development process. Between March 2010 and adoption of the completed LRTP, *TRANSREPORT* will regularly include an insert dedicated to the LRTP. The inserts will provide information about the planning topics being discussed at that time and will announce open houses and other public involvement activities. They will also ask members of the public for input and ideas. Topics may include, but will not be limited to, the following:
 - Mobility
 - Preservation and modernization
 - Regional equity
 - Environment (including climate change)
 - Safety and security
 - Transportation and land use (including livability)
 - Economic development and freight

The last page of each monthly insert may include a question asking for feedback on LRTP topics. Members of the public will be asked to answer the question and return the survey or to answer the question on the MPO's website. The monthly insert will also be e-mailed to subscribers of MPOinfo. In addition to the 2035 LRTP insert, articles about the LRTP may be included in the standard sections of *TRANSREPORT*.

- *Social media*
Discussed under Web-Based Interactive, below.
- *Video and/or print summary*
A short summary document utilizing graphics, tables, charts, maps, and jargon-free text will be produced for the public comment period and revised following adoption of the 2035 LRTP. Such a document will help make the LRTP more accessible to the general public and other stakeholders.

A video summary of the document may also be produced in addition to, or in lieu of, a print summary. This could be posted on YouTube and would also include graphics, tables, charts, maps, and narrative from MPO members and/or MPO staff.

Web-Based Interactive

- *MPO website*
The MPO's website, www.bostonmpo.org, is an important tool for informing and soliciting feedback from the general public throughout the LRTP development process. While meetings and workshops will continue to be an important component of the MPO's public involvement work, Web-based outreach has several advantages. Used effectively, the website will allow members of the public to access LRTP information and provide feedback at their convenience. This may open the planning process up to individuals with schedule conflicts or other personal obstacles which preclude involvement during workshops and open houses.

One of the first steps was to develop a Paths to a Sustainable Region webpage at www.bostonmpo.org. The content is updated regularly and will include the following:

- Materials under consideration or recently approved by the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
- Schedule of LRTP development
- Announcements of open houses, workshops, and other public involvement activities
- Surveys
- Link to archive of JOURNEY TO 2030 materials and plan

Staff is exploring new ways to gather timely feedback from the general public through the MPO's website. An example of how this is done is adding a feedback button directly to each draft document. This button opens a text box where comments can be entered and

submitted to the MPO staff. Summaries of these comments will be regularly reported to the MPO.

- *Social media*
Social media tools such as YouTube and Twitter are becoming important outreach tools utilized by MPOs and state DOTs, including MassDOT. The Boston Region MPO can use these sites to announce meetings, open houses, workshops, and other public involvement activities; make other announcements; post draft documents; and facilitate discussion of the LRTP among the general public. These tools can help the MPO reach new individuals and groups, and their use is consistent with the MPO's Public Participation Program, which calls for using new avenues of communication.

Face-to-Face Interactive

- *"Invite Us Over" briefings*
The MPO recognizes that not everyone interested in transportation issues is willing or able to attend MPO-hosted public events. Therefore, the MPO is asking to be invited to regularly scheduled meetings of organizations that have an interest in transportation to learn about their issues and concerns. Obtaining this input at the regular meetings of organizations will make for broader and more diverse input for the 2035 LRTP. At these meetings, staff will briefly present the LRTP development process and will listen to and record the organization's transportation issues and concerns.
- *MAPC Subregion meetings*
The eight Metropolitan Area Planning Council Subregions will be updated regularly about the 2035 LRTP, presented with LRTP products and topics, and asked for input at their regularly scheduled meetings throughout the development of the LRTP.
- *Open houses*
The MPO will hold quarterly open houses with topics pertaining to the 2035 LRTP (among other topics). The purpose of the open houses is to engage members of the public in detailed discussions of LRTP topics, generate timely input, and educate them about the LRTP development process. Topics for open houses may coincide with the topics in the current and recent *TRANSREPORT* issues (see topic list under the *TRANSREPORT* heading) and will seek to focus public attention on other timely LRTP activities. Open houses will also utilize visualization tools, such as maps, to facilitate discussion and understanding of the region's needs.
- *Regional Transportation Advisory Council discussions*
The Regional Transportation Advisory Council will be updated and asked for input at its regularly scheduled meetings throughout the development of the LRTP. Detailed work sessions with the Advisory Council's LRTP Committee will be suggested.

- *Workshops*
Workshops will be organized to engage and inform the general public. The workshops will feature a presentation from staff and a discussion with and among the attendees. They will be scheduled in February and June during the MPO's public review periods. Workshops will be held in transit accessible locations throughout the region.

- *Other discussions with targeted interests*
Staff will examine ways to increase its communication and engagement with the following types of groups:
 - Accessibility advocates and interests
 - Chambers of commerce and individual businesses
 - Environmental advocacy groups
 - Transportation equity contacts
 - Transportation advocacy groups

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