

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the April 13, 2011 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

1. Introductions – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

Laura Wiener, Chair and representative of Arlington, called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM. Attendees introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

2. Chair's Report – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

L. Wiener welcomed Mike Gowing of Acton to the Advisory Council. He replaced Lauren Rosenzweig-Morton as Acton's representative on the Advisory Council.

3. Approval of the Meeting Minutes March 9, 2011 – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

The minutes of March 9, 2011 were unanimously approved with Kurt Mullen, representing Needham, abstaining.

4. Transportation Enhancements Program; Overview and Discussion of Changes – *Jim Cope, Massachusetts Department of Transportation*

The Transportation Enhancements Program has been around since 1991 when the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) surface transportation bill was approved. Among the projects and programs eligible for funding are:

- Facilities for pedestrians and bicycles
- Safety and educational activities for pedestrians and cyclists
- Acquisition of scenic easements, scenic and historic sites
- Scenic or historic highway programs
- Landscaping and scenic beautification
- Historic preservation; archaeological research and documentation
- Historic transportation facilities
- Railway corridor preservation
- Storm water pollution mitigation; wildlife protection and habitat
- Transportation museums

Projects funded under the program need to be non-traditional, have a functional relationship to transportation, have a beneficial impact on the transportation system, and be near a transportation facility.

The Transportation Enhancements Program in Massachusetts has been less successful than in other states. A consultant team was hired to help MassDOT improve its

Transportation Enhancements program. They found that MassDOT's program has many redundancies. Applicants had to go through two review processes – one for Transportation Enhancements, and the usual MassDOT project development and review processes. This discouraged project proponents, and it was taking too long for projects to be completed. To improve the situation, the Transportation Enhancements steering committee was eliminated and the Transportation Enhancements eligibility review was integrated into the MassDOT project development process. Transportation Enhancement projects now go through the MassDOT project development process like all other projects reviewed by the MassDOT Highway Division.

MassDOT also wants to encourage MPOs to program Transportation Enhancement funds. MassDOT will provide a \$1 match for every \$2 an MPO programs for Transportation Enhancement purposes. For FY 2011, there are \$1.5 million programmed statewide for Transportation Enhancements, with \$644,500 set aside for the Boston region. In FY 2012, there will be \$3.5 million available statewide, of which about \$1.5 million is for the Boston region. If a region does not program all of the funding it can be spent in other regions. Proponents will fund the design of Transportation Enhancement projects, as they currently do for projects implemented through other funding sources.

MassDOT's priorities for Transportation Enhancement funding are the following:

1. Bay State Greenway Priority 100 miles (This is a statewide network of proposed and existing rail trails, and connections between them. There are more than 100 miles of these trails, but the Priority 100 miles are MassDOT's priority.)
2. Other Bay State Greenway shared-use paths
3. Other shared-use paths
4. Other eligible Transportation Enhancement projects and activities

Questions

In response to members' comments, J. Cope had the following additional comments:

- The state's match is a line item in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program. Each region's share comes from its federal target funds.
- Regions were informed of the two-for-one match program in November 2010.
- The process involved in using federal funds is pretty extensive, which makes it difficult to construct a project that costs less than \$500,000 with federal funds.
- The \$644,000 available to match Transportation Enhancement projects in the Boston region can be spread over more than one project.
- Staffing at MassDOT to review projects is limited. Delays in getting design comments to proponents are not limited to Transportation Enhancement projects.
- About 30% of the state's federal highway funding goes towards paying down debt on the Big Dig, which limits MassDOT's ability to spend money on discretionary projects, such as those eligible for Transportation Enhancements funds.
- A wildlife sanctuary next to a transportation facility would be an eligible activity.
- Transportation Enhancements funds are distributed as grants in some states. However, the Federal Highway Administration requires all federal-aid projects in Massachusetts to go through the full review process.

- MassDOT Highway Division project staff is responsible for design review. They deal with projects between just before the 25% design stage and when the project is put out to bid. Their review is not part of the project cost.
- State law requires a minimum project size of \$5 million for MassDOT to use a design-build approach on a project.
- Transportation Enhancement funds can be used to construct a stand-alone project.
- MassDOT would like to eventually spend 10 percent of its Surface Transportation Program funding on Transportation Enhancements. MassDOT would need to triple its Transportation Enhancement spending to arrive at this goal.
- Visit www.enhancements.org if you have questions on the program. Staff at the regional planning agencies can also answer questions about the program.
- MassDOT is working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation on a storm water project in Clinton and Boylston. There are not many projects in which another state agency is the proponent, and they are handled case-by-case.

Comments

- There needs to be additional help getting Transportation Enhancement projects through the design process. It took almost a year for Cambridge to get comments back on its 25% design for a project. Making it easier to apply, but not improving the design review process, will not result in more projects being constructed. (Bill Deignan, Cambridge)
- The Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse issues a score for each state based on how much of the available funding it spends. The guideline is 10% of its Surface Transportation Program funds, although states are not required to spend the full amount. Massachusetts consistently ranks last among the states and territories in the United States. There is no set aside for Transportation Enhancements, so projects are not as likely to get funded. (Dick Williamson, Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail)
- B. Deignan suggested the Advisory Council write a letter to the MPO and MassDOT encouraging them to take steps that will support the implementation of more Transportation Enhancements projects. The letter should ask MassDOT to reopen discussions with the Federal Highway Administration about letting Massachusetts give municipalities grants for Transportation Enhancement projects. Enhancement projects should be reviewed more quickly, or subject to a less stringent review process. The design and review process is too burdensome.

A motion was made by B. Deignan and seconded by Steve Olanoff of Westwood for the Advisory Council to write a letter to the Boston Region MPO asking them to encourage MassDOT and the Federal Highway Administration to remove obstacles that are keeping Transportation Enhancement projects from being built in Massachusetts. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Discussion of the Advisory Council's Comments on Project Selection for the Long-Range Transportation Plan – Schuyler Larrabee, Plan Committee Chair

The Advisory Council's Plan Committee met on April 6 to discuss its values and how they relate to project selection for the Long-Range Transportation Plan. Committee Chair Schuyler Larrabee described the outcomes of the meeting, which were outlined in a draft letter prepared by the Plan Committee and handed out to Advisory Council members.

Among the key decisions made by the Plan Committee were the following:

- The majority of federal capital transportation funds should go towards maintaining existing infrastructure.
- 80% of the available federal funds should go towards larger projects with a regional impact. The remaining 20% should go towards smaller projects that can be funded through a program, such as a program to improve intersections.
- The MPO should use quantifiable performance measures to select projects.
- Rail expansion projects should be favored over highway expansion projects.
- Freight should receive more attention in the Plan. The MPO should fund more freight projects, and identify the freight components of the projects it funds.
- The MPO should prioritize transit maintenance, but it should not ignore expansion of the system.
- Intercity passenger rail plans must be considered so that regional projects do not preclude better intercity passenger rail service in the future.
- Projects identified as expansion by the MPO often have large maintenance elements. The project cost should be split between maintenance and expansion.

Comments

- The MPO's visions and policies for mobility are biased towards the movement of people, and do not adequately consider freight. (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)
- The bicycle and pedestrian community cannot support the Plan Committee's recommendations as they are expressed in the draft comment letter. The letter calls for favoring rail over highway. However, there is no basis for saying rail is more sustainable for moving people than bicycle or pedestrian modes. Bicycles and pedestrians support rail, and do not produce greenhouse gas emissions. Bicycle and pedestrian enhancements contribute to economic development and are consistent with MassDOT's Green DOT strategy. (J. McQueen)
- The letter emphasizes roadway modernization, which includes incorporating bicycle and pedestrian facilities into the road. (L. Wiener)
- The Advisory Council's letter should be clear that rail, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities are favored over highway expansion because they are more sustainable. (S. Larrabee)
- The emphasis on evaluating projects for economic impact is too myopic. Public health and sustainability impacts also need to be evaluated. (J. McQueen)
- The proposed rail trails would improve connectivity to transit stations. Shared-use paths are a low priority of the MPO; only one of these paths without a Congressional earmark is in the current LRTP. (Dick Williamson)
- Transit expansion in the near term is not a good idea. The MBTA has trouble maintaining what they have. Projects, such as South Coast Rail, will add to the maintenance needs to the MBTA. More people use highways and the MPO should pay closer attention to their maintenance needs. (Tony Centore, Medfield)

- The Plan is a long-term document. We should not assume that transit expansion is impossible in the long term. (Dick Canale, MAGIC)
- It is important to MASCO that projects be considered for their economic impacts. The emphasis on rail and transit is good. The state's Energy and Climate Plan calls for a 25 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 80 percent by 2050. A great way to reach these goals is to pursue substantial transit investments. The letter should encourage the Plan to be consistent with the state's environmental goals. (Tom Yardley, MASCO)
- The comment letter should urge the MPO to consider high-speed rail expansion plans. (Bob McGaw, resident of Belmont)
- Pedestrians and bicycles are a local transportation issue. Federal funds should be spent on projects that help people travel longer distances. (Chan Rogers, SWAP)
- The City of Quincy has a \$1.3 billion redevelopment in its downtown. The Cliveden Bridge project is a key component of this redevelopment. The new crossing will help bus circulation and facilitate better pedestrian and bicycle connections in the downtown area. The project is consistent with the Advisory Council's goal of supporting economic development. Quincy would appreciate the Advisory Council's support of it. (Kristina Johnson, City of Quincy)

A motion was made by R. Canale, and seconded by K. Johnson, that the Advisory Council's letter on priorities for project selection should state that when there is funding for expansion, the MPO should favor rail/transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects over highway projects. The motion was unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Marilyn Wellons of the Riverside Neighborhood Association, and seconded by Kurt Mullen of Needham, to add to the statement that projects should be evaluated based on economic impact so that it includes an evaluation of economic costs, such as the impacts on public health, maintenance, and the environment. The motion was unanimously approved.

6. Announcements

F. DeMasi announced that the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee will meet on May 4 to further discuss issues affecting the MBTA's service and budget.

7. Committee Reports

The Freight Committee met prior to the Advisory Council's meeting to discuss priority freight projects for the Long-Range Transportation Plan. Their recommendations will be distributed to the Advisory Council prior to the May meeting.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 PM.

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for April 13, 2011

Cities and Towns

Mike Gowing, Acton
Laura Wiener, Arlington
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Bill Deignan, Cambridge
Tony Centore, Medfield
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Dom D'Eramo, Millis
Kurt Mullen, Needham
Kristina Johnson, Quincy
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Karen Pearson, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Donna Smallwood, MassRIDES
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC)
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)

Citizen Groups

Thomas Daley, American Council of Engineering Companies
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects
Chris Anzuoni, Massachusetts Bus Association
Tom Yardley, MASCO
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Tom O'Rourke, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors

Jim Cope, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Bill Luster, North Shore Alliance for Economic Development
Bob McGaw, Town of Belmont
Dick Williamson, Massachusetts Recreational Trails Advisory Board

MPO Staff

Walter Bennett
Mike Callahan
Pam Wolfe