

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the June 8, 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 3:00 PM. Attendees introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

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

The MPO continues to work on revising its Memorandum of Understanding. The MPO has decided to increase the municipal membership. Each subregion will have a municipal representative, there will be four at-large municipal seats, and the City of Boston will have two permanent seats. MassDOT still has three seats, but no longer has a veto. Additionally, the Advisory Council will have a seat on the MPO. The draft revisions are out for public review and comment through July 5. In response to L. Wiener's comments, Richard Canale of the MAGIC subregion suggested that the Advisory Council consider making the MPO municipalities voting Advisory Council members.

L. Wiener also announced that the MPO staff has made a recommendation for the federal fiscal years (FFYs) 2012-15 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The recommendation only includes two new projects because of severe fiscal constraint.

The Advisory Council's next election of officers will be held in September. Please contact the Nominating Committee Chair, Malek Al-Khatib, if you would like to nominate someone for Chair or Vice Chair. The Committee will be meeting soon.

In April the Advisory Council decided to write a letter to the Boston Region MPO asking them to approach the Federal Highway Administration with suggestions about how the Transportation Enhancements Program in Massachusetts can be improved. A motion was made by John McQueen (WalkBoston) and seconded by Marilyn Wellons (Riverside Neighborhood Association) to approve the letter. It was unanimously approved. (See attached.)

The Membership Committee recently met and decided to recommend that the Advisory Council accept the Town of Belmont as a voting member. A motion to add Belmont to the membership was made and seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

3. Approval of the Meeting Minutes May 11, 2011 – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

The minutes of May 11, 2011 were unanimously approved.

4. What Massachusetts Can Learn from Cancelled High Speed Rail Projects – *Richard Arena, President of the Association for Public Transportation*

R. Arena's presentation focused on how to market and build support for high-speed rail. He believes that high-speed rail has an image problem. Many people don't know why they would choose a train over other modes. In the United States, people think of services with an average speed of 50 miles per hour as high-speed rail. People are confused.

R. Arena described the differences between high-speed rail and higher-speed rail. Higher-speed rail describes many of the services available or proposed in the United States. High-speed rail means 200 miles-per-hour trains that compete with airplanes. Higher-speed rail means 90 miles-per-hour trains that compete with cars and buses. Higher-speed rail shares right-of-way, while high-speed rail requires a dedicated right-of-way. Higher-speed rail often uses diesel locomotives, while high-speed rail uses electric only. Finally, higher-speed rail requires an operating subsidy, while high-speed rail does not.

High-speed rail will be most effective at attracting air travel passengers for trips of a length between 200 and 600 miles. High-speed rail works best when connecting city pairs with high population density. It works especially well for business trips, which are less price elastic than leisure trips. Frequency is also important.

A lot of infrastructure work must be done to achieve high-speed rail. Trains in the United States make 90 degree turns in 3 miles. A 300 mile-per-hour train needs about 10 miles to make the same turn. There is no class 9 track in the United States (allows 200 mile-per-hour speeds) and only some class 6 track (allows speeds over 110 miles-per-hour). Better infrastructure to deliver people to the trains will also be needed.

Several recently cancelled high-speed rail projects in the United States offer lessons. All of these projects are in states with Republican governors, but that was not the main reason they were killed. The Access to the Region's Core tunnel (ARC) connecting New Jersey and New York was cancelled because the cost ballooned and it's terminus in New York was poorly planned. Florida high-speed rail failed for political reasons and because the distance was too short. The proposal to connect Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati failed because a draft time table was published showing an average speed of only 39 miles per hour. The Wisconsin proposal was killed for purely political reasons.

High-speed rail funds are easy for Congress to cut. A business case for high-speed rail needs to be made by promoting the benefits rather than the features. There are benefits for non-users too. For instance, the northeast air space is becoming very congested, causing air travel delays all over the country. High-speed rail should also be decoupled from environmental strategies and estimates of the future price of oil.

New funding sources must be found to pay for high-speed rail. A high-speed rail trust fund should be created. It can be funded in part through a charge on air travel tickets. A \$10 fee would bring in \$6 to \$8 billion per year that could be bonded.

These funds could be used to upgrade the Northeast Corridor. There are too many bridges and curves along the coastal route between New York and Boston. A new inland route has been proposed for New England. However, our competitor states are figuring out how to implement high-speed rail and are jumping in front of New England for funds. They are being more aggressive and even using their own funds. The D.C. to Atlanta corridor is poised to jump in front of the Northeast Corridor. Massachusetts needs a strategic break-through project, such as the North-South Rail Link.

Questions

In response to questions, R. Arena made the following additional comments.

- High-speed rail improvements in New England are unlikely to be completed before the improvements in the Southeast.
- The Acela service is often sold out, which is part of the reason the cost is so high. Amtrak is looking to increase capacity on each Acela train by 40%.
- Massachusetts received less than 1 percent of the recently redistributed high-speed rail funds. MassDOT sought funds to replace a rail bridge in Haverhill. Massachusetts should be seeking to improve South Station and construct the North-South Rail Link. We need a bigger vision.

Comments

Members and guests made the following comments.

- The North-South Rail Link would improve the efficiency of commuter rail. We must also consider that the United States population will increase to 500 million people by 2100. The limits to air and highway capacity make high-speed rail important. (Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Council)
- It is often cheaper to fly to New York City than take Amtrak, and buses are far cheaper. (Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council)
- Massachusetts is less aggressive in seeking federal funds than it used to be. There is more energy elsewhere. (John Businger, National Corridors Initiative)
- New England has not organized as well regionally around high-speed rail as the Southeast. (Richard Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition)
- Leadership from regional planning agencies is needed to make high-speed rail successful. (L. Elisa)

5. Unified Planning Work Program Discussion – Mary Ellen Sullivan, UPWP Project Manager, MPO Staff

M.E. Sullivan went over the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) development process. The UPWP programs the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration funds coming into the region for transportation planning work. It programs funds for ongoing MPO work, and new studies. The process of developing the UPWP begins each January when staff reviews past public comments. A series of meetings among the managers of the MPO staff are held to determine the funding needs for ongoing work, and the priorities of the staff for new studies. Guidance from the federal government is also considered as a set of new projects is developed. This year about \$370,000 is available for new studies.

S. Olanoff discussed the Advisory Council's role in the development of the UPWP. The Advisory Council sits on the MPO's UPWP Subcommittee, which is where the initial decisions are made. The Subcommittee reviewed the staff recommendation last week. The Advisory Council's UPWP Committee met and expressed strong support for freight studies and a regional HOV systems study. There is agreement now among MPO members about the importance of freight studies.

Questions

In response to questions, M.E. Sullivan made the following additional comments.

- The evaluation of each study is just one part of the decision-making process. Other factors go into the priority level set by the MPO.

Comments

- There is a bias against freight at the MPO. Studies and projects are not evaluated for their freight benefits. (Dom D'Eramo, Millis)
- I expected the evaluation of the freight studies to improve after suggestions made at the Advisory Council's UPWP Committee meeting. (M. Wellons)
- Some high priority studies have very few check marks in the evaluations. This seems to be an inconsistency in the selection process. (Bob McGaw, Belmont)

6. Long-Range Transportation Plan Update –Sean Pfalzer, MPO Staff

S. Pfalzer provided an update on the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan. Three different strategies for how to invest transportation funds were presented to the MPO. The strategies were discussed during the last three meetings. There was a consensus among the MPO members to support their prior Plan commitments. Additionally, they wanted to have a good balance among the modes and to leave funds available for smaller projects and additional maintenance projects, which can be identified and assigned annually through the Transportation Improvement Program. Approximately 50% of the federal highway funds at the MPO's discretion were not programmed in the Plan for this reason.

The only project removed from the Plan was Trapelo Road in Belmont, which is in the staff recommendation for the FFYs 2012-15 TIP. The Conley Haul Road in South Boston was added, but it's expected that Massport will fund the project. Some projects were moved into different five-year time bands to smooth out when funds would be spent.

Feedback on the draft set of projects can be submitted at www.bostonmpo.org/2035input. The draft Plan will probably be out for public review and comment in July or August.

Questions

In response to questions, S. Pfalzer, Pam Wolfe of the MPO staff, and S. Larrabee had the following additional comments.

- The MPO is committed to ensuring that the transportation network is multimodal. There is ongoing discussion about using cost-benefit analyses. The MPO has

decided to flex about \$160 million of highway funds to transit to pay for the Green Line Extension between College Avenue and Route 16. (P. Wolfe)

- About 2% of the funds are expected to be invested in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. These are worthwhile investments and the MPO is not programming too much money for these modes. (S. Larrabee)

Comments

- The MPO needs to think bigger. (C. Rogers)
- Bike trails are not all the same. They should be compared. The benefits of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail are questionable. (R. Flynn)
- We need to redefine intermodal and multimodal. (D. D'Eramo)
- The MPO needs to prioritize projects and make hard decisions. (R. Arena)

A motion was made by R. Arena, and seconded, for the Advisory Council to support eliminating funding for bike projects until the state's fiscal situation improves.

On the motion, J. McQueen argued that the MPO should fund bike facilities because they feed downtown centers and commuter rail stations.

R. Canale made a motion to table the discussion and vote on R. Arena's motion. S. Olanoff seconded the motion. R. Canale said that this R. Arena's motion raised important policy issues and a decision on it should not be rushed. The motion was approved with R. Arena, D. Flynn, and Tony Centore of Medfield voting against it.

7. Announcements

There were no announcements.

8. Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 PM.

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for June 8, 2011

Cities and Towns

Laura Wiener, Arlington
Bob McGaw, Belmont
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Tony Centore, Medfield
Kurt Mullen, Needham
John Gillon, Quincy
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Steve Rawding, MassDOT Aeronautics Division
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC)
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)

Citizen Groups

Mary Ann Murray, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Marvin Miller, American Council of Engineering Companies
Richard Arena, Association for Public Transportation
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects
David Ernst, MassBike
Chris Anzuoni, Massachusetts Bus Association
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Tom O'Rourke, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors

Meaghan Hamill, Senator McGee's Office

MPO Staff

Walter Bennett
Mike Callahan
David Fargen
Sean Pfalzer
Mary Ellen Sullivan
Pam Wolfe