

Draft Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Unified Planning Work Program Committee Meeting Summary

October 3, 2019 Meeting

9:00 AM–9:55 AM, State Transportation Building, Conference Rooms 2 and 3,
10 Park Plaza, Boston

Eric Bourassa, Vice Chair (Metropolitan Area Planning Council [MAPC])

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the meeting summary for the July 18, 2019, meeting

Materials

Materials for this meeting included the following:

1. Meeting Summary for the July 18, 2019, meeting
2. Memorandum on the status of the UPWP Database and potential options for proceeding
3. Table displaying potential changes to the UPWP document

Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

1. Introductions

E. Bourassa called the meeting to order and read the accessibility statements. Members present introduced themselves.

2. Public Comments

There were none.

3. Action Item: Summary of July 18, 2019, meeting—*Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager*

Note: This item was handled between agenda items 4 and 5, due to the late arrival of a quorum of members.

With a quorum now present, E. Bourassa asked for a motion to approve the meeting summary from the July 18, 2019, meeting. Steve Olanoff (Three Rivers Interlocal Council/Town of Westwood) made the motion to approve, and another member seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Update on UPWP Study Recommendations Tracking Database—*Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager*

S. Johnston introduced the background of the UPWP Database, the development of which had been funded by the MPO in the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2017 UPWP, with the intention of tracking with greater accuracy the extent to which MPO studies carry into actionable items.

S. Johnston proceeded to walk the Committee through the memorandum on the progress of the UPWP Database and the various options for data collection. He noted that although significant progress had been made since the last update earlier in the year, MPO staff had only heard back from less than half of the municipalities contacted. Staff contacted the municipalities that had not responded several times without success, and are now asking for the Committee's guidance on how to proceed. There are two actionable questions: first, what the mechanism should be for continuing to try to gain input from the municipalities, and second, how often should staff engage in this effort and how much bandwidth should they devote to it?

E. Bourassa opened the floor for discussion. S. Olanoff said he thought staff should proceed with all of the above options. He noted that participation in other MPO activities, including voting in elections, is low, so the low response rate is not particularly unusual. He noted the importance of finding not just the nominal contact, but the right contact, in each town; someone who would be responsive both to this and to other MPO concerns, such as the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). E. Bourassa said he thought that turnover among municipal staff is a major challenge. He shared that a 50 percent response is not a bad rate, and that it might be worth waiting about three years before launching a follow-up effort. He also recommended that staff create expectations of follow-up, written or verbal, when working with municipalities. MAPC has found that planning staff do not always receive the buy-in or sign off from the Board of Selectmen, town manager, or equivalent bodies.

David Koses (City of Newton/At-Large City) arrived and E. Bourassa recapped the meeting for him. D. Koses responded that sometimes planning staff want to do something, but planners do not make the decisions, elected officials do, and decisions can take a long time. He noted that the Washington Street study took five years to implement, and that at the time the study was being done, he had pushed for the study

team to go to meetings with elected officials, and to do public meetings to get buy-in, something that is unusual but critical. E. Bourassa concurred. E. Bourassa asked if MPO staff are presenting studies thoroughly. Mark Abbott (Traffic Analysis and Design Group Manager) responded that recently staff have been sure to achieve buy-in from all relevant stakeholders, including Boards of Selectmen and the local Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) districts. He noted that it can take anywhere from three to seven years to go from recommendations made in studies to implementation through the TIP.

There was more discussion on the idea to present to elected officials more. D. Koses noted that local committees are very busy and sometimes you have to wait until 10:00 PM to present.

S. Olanoff noted that sometimes municipalities need nudges to follow up on projects and having a regular reminder every year might help, if directed to the right person.

With more members having arrived, E. Bourassa repeated S. Johnston's basic question of how to proceed, and S. Johnston restated some of the options for proceeding, noting that he had heard considerable support for conducting interviews to understand how municipalities make decisions. S. Johnston also explained that MPO staff have been making considerable effort to find the "right person" in each municipality, per S. Olanoff's suggestion. S. Olanoff cautioned against a rigid schedule for checking up.

M. Abbott expressed support for checking up each year on recommendations that are three years old or older. He also noted that it might not be good to use technical assistance as an incentive mechanism, since the MPO provides a valuable service to municipalities that do not have staff. D. Koses said that recommendations vary across a wide range of size, cost, and complexity, and staff should keep fiscal limitations in mind since municipalities will often come to the MPO for assistance with larger projects.

Benjamin Muller (MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning) asked if staff had analyzed the distribution of responses they had received. S. Johnston answered that they had not looked into it, but his instinct is that there is something of a response bias—towns that are more likely to have responded are also more likely to have implemented staff's recommendations. He also explained that staff had tracked responses as they came in, and that the percentage of recommendations implemented had stayed fairly constant as more responses came in. B. Muller suggested starting from that point to analyze where there may be gaps. S. Olanoff suggested that responses should be getting better as staff become more familiar with contacts. D. Koses asked if staff assume that a recommendation has not been implemented if staff

have not heard back. S. Johnston responded that staff do not make that assumption, but have been able to use Google Streetview to make judgments in some circumstances. D. Koses asked about going out to physically observe if a recommendation had been made. S. Johnston responded that that was one of the options laid out in the memorandum, but would require direction from the Committee, the MPO, and additional resources.

Tom Kadzis (City of Boston/Boston Transportation Department) stressed the importance of bureaucratic buy-in and getting a commitment not just from planners, but from the implementing agency, such as Public Works. Tom Bent (City of Somerville/Inner Core Committee) said that a lot of towns feel discouraged by the process of applying for project funding, but he is not sure how to address that problem. He expressed support for the approach of checking up on recommendations, and for making joint presentations to all relevant stakeholder parties. M. Abbott reinforced that his staff make a significant effort to involve all stakeholders from the very beginning, not just the town planners.

5. Potential Changes to UPWP Document in FFY 2021—*Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager*

S. Johnston explained the handout sheet with a color-coded table where he had laid out initial thoughts for consideration on what might be worthwhile to change in the UPWP document. E. Bourassa asked what the difference would be if the MPO moved some content online, since most people already encounter the UPWP document online rather in paper format. S. Johnston responded that it would mean hosting the content on a page on the MPO website, rather than in a PDF that is posted on the website. E. Bourassa expressed support for paring down the document so that readers could directly reach key content, such as the new studies.

S. Olanoff said that while most people encounter the document electronically, some do read it on paper, and moving content online risked placing a burden on them. S. Johnston noted that in the three years he has been preparing the UPWP, staff had never sent a paper document outside the 10 Park Plaza building. Some members of the Committee agreed that placing a notice online that paper copies are available could be sufficient. D. Koses remarked that E. Bourassa was right, and people mainly want to see the list of new studies.

There was some discussion about the best way to present the new studies as a priority item. B. Muller explained that while he is a big fan of interactive formats, MassDOT had encountered a lot of pushback when they transitioned the Capital Investment Plan to a StoryMap format this year, and had to scramble to make alternative methods available.

E. Bourassa expressed support for moving MAPC materials to another chapter, since the distinction between support or administrative activities and technical activities established in the existing UPWP has somewhat broken down. T. Kadzis expressed support for making the document user-friendly for the public and prioritizing new studies, and said he had no problem with S. Johnston's suggestions.

6. Members Items

There were none.

7. Next Meeting

S. Johnston explained that typically, the next UPWP meeting would be in January. Members were content with that.

8. Adjourn

With no objections from members, E. Bourassa adjourned the meeting.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Tom Kadzis
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Benjamin Muller
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Westwood)	Steve Olanoff

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Annette Demchur, Interim Co-Executive Director, Director of Policy and Planning
Scott Peterson, Interim Co-Executive Director, Director of Technical Services
Mark Abbott, Traffic Analysis and Design Manager
Matt Archer, Specialist
Hiral Gandhi, Finance and Operations Manager
Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager
Ali Kleyman, Certification Activities Manager
Kate White, Public Participation Manager
