

MPO Meeting Minutes

Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

March 4, 2021 Meeting

10:00 AM–1:10 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

David Mohler, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Acting Secretary, and Chief Executive Officer, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) agreed to the following:

- Approve the work program for Improving Pedestrian Variables in the Travel Demand Model
- Release Amendment Three to the Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2021–25 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for 21-day public review period

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance beginning page 9.

2. Chair's Report—*David Mohler, MassDOT*

D. Mohler invited John Bechard (MassDOT Highway Division) to present on the TIP process and project cost estimates. J. Bechard described some of the steps MassDOT has taken to improve reliability and the MassDOT contingency costs included in the final cost estimates for projects. He stated that these are known costs and are not added at the end of the process. The total federal participating cost (that is, the amount programmed in the TIP) includes these contingencies. J. Bechard reviewed these estimates for each of the MPO-funded projects in the FFY 2021–25 that were previously discussed by the MPO during discussions of budget overruns.

Discussion

Jay Monty (At-Large City) (City of Everett) asked at what point in project design the contingency costs are added. J. Bechard replied that these costs should have been accounted for by the designer and acknowledged that MassDOT needs to better educate municipalities and consultants on estimating. D. Mohler added that if a consultant designs a project based on the amount in the TIP, they are overdesigning the

project, and it will not be delivered at the TIP estimate because the TIP estimate includes the contingencies.

Ken Miller (Federal Highway Administration) agreed that these costs should be included in any total federal participating costs programmed in the TIP. Office estimates may include nonparticipating items that should be excluded from the total federal participating costs. K. Miller expressed concern about the difference between the estimates presented by J. Bechard and those presented by staff. J. Bechard replied that this may be due to recent changes that have not yet been updated in MassDOT's project information system.

Tom Bent (Inner Core Committee) (City of Somerville) asked whether the problem is that design consultants are not accurately accounting for these costs. J. Bechard agreed and stated that these costs need to be scrutinized more. T. Bent asked whether there is an assessment of costs after the completion of a project. J. Bechard stated that MassDOT does track final costs in relation to estimates.

David Koses (At-Large City) (City of Newton) asked how the MPO would know if an office estimate does not include these extra costs. J. Bechard stated that there is a communication breakdown between the consultant community, MassDOT, and municipalities.

D. Mohler suggested that the MPO ask municipalities to submit itemized office estimates.

Tom Kadzis (City of Boston) (Boston Transportation Department) stated that the MPO should coordinate with MassDOT project managers to review functional design reports.

Jim Fitzgerald (City of Boston) (Boston Planning & Development Agency) asked how the MPO could get more accurate cost estimates earlier. J. Bechard stated that within six months of project approval, MassDOT holds a pre-25 percent design scoping meeting with the designer and the community.

Tom Branham (Framingham Alternative Transportation Group) stated that it is difficult for communities to secure funding for design and that better guidance would be helpful.

Ben Cares (City of Chelsea) agreed that the immediate intervention at the 25 percent design stage could be extremely helpful.

3. Public Comments

Matthew Petersen commented that it is unclear how costs can be contained if the MPO is committed to covering all cost increases for all projects. M. Peterson stated that the MPO should be clear that costs above a certain degree of contingency will not be covered, because doing so inhibits the MPO's ability to fund new projects and meet the transportation needs of the region. M. Peterson stated that more project oversight at all stages of the planning, funding, and delivery processes will deliver real benefits to the people living in the Boston region.

Marzie Galazka (Director of Community and Economic Development, Town of Swampscott) advocated for programming project #610666 (Swampscott Rail Trail) in the FFYs 2022–26 TIP.

Allison Burson (Solomon Foundation) advocated for programming project #610666 in the FFYs 2022–26 TIP.

Mayor Tom McGee (City of Lynn) advocated for keeping project #602077 (Reconstruction on Route 129 [Lynnfield St.] in Lynn) programmed for FFY 2022, project #609252 (Rehabilitation of Essex Street in Lynn) in FFYs 2024, and asked that the MPO program project #609246 (Reconstruction of Western Avenue [Route 107] in Lynn) in the FFYs 2022–26 TIP.

Councillor Stephen Winslow (City of Malden) advocated for the programming of several Community Connections projects in Malden including MBTA Main Street Transit Signal Priority (TSP), MBTA Salem Street and Centre Street TSP, and BlueBikes Expansion.

Emily Teller (Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail) advocated for keeping project #608164 (Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, Phase 2D in Sudbury and Concord) programmed in FFY 2022 and suggested that it could be ready to program in FFY 2021 should any other projects not be ready. She asked for a commitment from MassDOT that the Chapter 91 licensing issue not be a delay.

Beth Suedmeyer (Town of Sudbury) advocated for project #608164 and stated that the town is confident the project can be delivered in FFY 2022.

David Kucharsky (City of Salem) advocated for Community Connections project Salem Skipper Microtransit Service.

Rich Benevento (WorldTech Engineering) advocated for project #608933 (Rehabilitation of Central Street in Peabody), noting that while the office estimate is slightly over budget, the design team will be working to keep costs down. He noted that he is

working with J. Bechard on a stakeholder group to resolve the aforementioned cost estimating issues.

B. Cares advocated for project #608078 (Reconstruction of Broadway, from City Hall to the Revere City Line in Chelsea), stating that the city is well positioned to advertise in December 2021. B. Cares also advocated for the MPO to program project #611983 (Park Street and Pearl Street Reconstruction in Chelsea).

Brendan Callahan (City of Peabody) advocated for and provided updates on two currently programmed projects, #609211 (Independence Greenway Extension in Peabody) and #610544 (Multi-Use Path Construction of Independence Greenway at I95 and Route 1 in Peabody).

Todd Blake (City of Medford) advocated for Community Connections project BlueBikes Expansion in Malden.

Sophia Galimore (Watertown Transportation Management Association) advocated for Community Connections project Watertown Shuttle Service.

Lisa DiRocco (Medford Bicycle Advisory Commission) advocated for Community Connections project BlueBikes Expansion in Medford.

Phil Lemnios (Town of Hull) advocated for project #601607 (Reconstruction of Atlantic Ave. and Related Work in Hull), currently programmed in FFY 2021, and stated that the project is on schedule.

R. Benevento provided an update on project #607777 (Rehabilitation of Mount Auburn St. [Route 16] in Watertown), stating that the project would be a good candidate to move into FFY 2023.

4. Executive Director's Report—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff*

T. Teich provided an update on recent MPO staff outreach activities.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports—*Benjamin Muller, MassDOT, Chair, Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee*

B. Muller stated that the committee met prior to the MPO board and would next meet on March 25, 2021, at 9:00 AM.

6. Regional Transportation Advisory Council Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair, Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Advisory Council)*

L. Diggins stated that Matt Genova and Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff, would speak at the next Regional Transportation Advisory Council meeting.

7. Action Item: Work Scope, Pedestrian Environment Variable—*Jieping Li, MPO Staff*

1. [Comment Letter United Spinal Association](#)

J. Li stated that, for the purposes of the travel demand model, the pedestrian environment includes all nonmotorized travelers: people walking, jogging, using wheelchairs, and biking. This study would improve the Pedestrian Environment Variable (PEV) calculation by improving the representation of local roads. The duration of this project is four months with a total estimated cost of \$25,000. J. Li addressed comments made by Abby Swaine, United Spinal Association, regarding the consideration of wheelchair users in the PEV.

Discussion

Brian Kane (MBTA Advisory Board) commented that it is important to make sure that people using mobility devices are properly accounted for in the model.

L. Diggins asked about the representation of sidewalks in the model. J. Li replied that sidewalks are a variable in the current PEV that will hopefully be improved by using local road inventory data.

Vote

A motion to approve the work program for Improving Pedestrian Variables in the Travel Demand Model was made by the MBTA Advisory Board (B. Kane) and seconded by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins). The motion carried.

8. Action Item: FFYs 2021-25 TIP Amendment Three—*Matt Genova, MPO Staff*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [TIP Amendment Three Simplified](#)

Amendment Three makes adjustments to four MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) projects in FFY 2021. These changes are being made to align MWRTA's programming with the federally approved project list.

Vote

A motion to release Amendment Three to the FFYs 2021–25 TIP was made by the MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham) (Thatcher Kezer III) and seconded by North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn) (Tina Cassidy). The motion carried.

9. Discussion: FFYs 2021-26 Preliminary Project Scenarios—Matt Genova, MPO Staff

1. [FFYs 2022–26 TIP Preliminary Programming Scenario](#)
2. [FFYs 2022–26 TIP Detailed Readiness and Cost Information](#)
3. [FFYs 2021–25 TIP Project Descriptions](#)
4. [FFYs 2022–26 TIP Unprogrammed Project Descriptions](#)
5. [FFYs 2022–26 TIP Public Comments Received as of 0302](#)

M. Genova provided a summary of written public comments submitted to the MPO since the last board meeting and discussed the initial programming scenario for the FFYs 2022–26 TIP. M. Genova stated that the presented scenario assumes all recent cost changes, a four percent non-compounding inflation rate beginning with FFY 2023, and full funding for the Community Connections and Transit Modernization programs. The scenario includes all other current funding commitments and maxes out funding for existing TIP projects in each fiscal year, resulting in a five-year program with a net balance of zero dollars. M. Genova stated that the MPO has received \$3.7 million in applications for the Community Connections program, with just \$2 million in funding allocated to the program in FFY 2022. In FFY 2026, the total funding request for all other TIP projects is approaching \$350 million. In the presented scenario, no funding would be available to cover any of this request. M. Genova noted that four projects are moved into later fiscal years and only one would be moved purely due to funding limitations. M. Genova stated that the goal for the discussion would be to build consensus on a scenario to move forward with to clarify how much funding might be available for new projects.

Discussion

B. Kane stated that the MPO should not program all the funding every year, especially in the last years of the TIP, to account for cost overruns.

Eric Bourassa (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) asked whether the changes to the cash flows for project #606226 (Reconstruction of Rutherford Avenue in Boston) assume that the project funding continues into FFY 2027. M. Genova responded that this is correct and that the scenario assumes there is an additional \$8.5 million

remaining to fund. E. Bourassa stated that it would be critical to get a determination from MassDOT about the construction schedule.

J. Fitzgerald thanked the MPO for its support of project #606226 and noted that the City has secured \$25 million over 10 years for the project in casino mitigation funds, which will hopefully account for some of the additional costs.

D. Mohler stated that MassDOT is reassessing its analysis of #606226's readiness, and if the project is delayed it will free up \$10 million in FFY 2022 but will require \$10 million more in FFYs 2023 through 2027.

T. Kadzis suggested keeping a reserve in FFY 2022.

L. Diggins agreed and suggested that the MPO do this whenever a project is delayed to anticipate increases.

K. Miller stated that he understood the appeal of leaving a reserve, but that doing so would signal an acceptance of cost increases and remove the incentive to reduce costs.

B. Kane stated that it would not accept cost increases as inevitable but rather acknowledge their reality.

L. Diggins stated that the MPO should honor previous commitments until there is a formal policy change.

K. Miller stated that an alternative would be to change the inflation rate, stating that nothing prevents the MPO from using a rate different than the federal default.

There was some discussion of adding an agenda item regarding policy changes to a future meeting.

L. Diggins noted that the MPO has received a significant number of comments in opposition to the Belmont Community Path project and asked that the Town of Belmont or other representatives of the project speak to these concerns. M. Genova stated that the Town of Belmont has addressed these objections in writing and he would let them know the MPO's concern.

K. Miller also requested an update on project #605789 (Reconstruction of Melnea Cass Boulevard in Boston).

T. Branham stated that not all abutter concerns regarding rail trail projects are legitimate concerns rather than opposition to change.

M. Petersen agreed that letters of opposition for any given project may only represent the opinions of a vocal few.

D. Mohler noted that there is also the possibility that the cash flows for project #1570 (Green Line Extension to College Avenue with the Union Square Spur in Somerville and Medford) could be adjusted to make additional funding available for programming.

10.Members Items

There were none.

11.Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the MBTA Advisory Board (B. Kane) and seconded by the North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn) (T. Cassidy). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members

Representatives and Alternates

At-Large City (City of Everett)	Jay Monty
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
At-Large Town (Town of Brookline)	Heather Hamilton
	Todd Kirrane
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Tom Kadzis
Federal Highway Administration	Ken Miller
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	David Mohler
	John Bechard
MassDOT Highway Division	John Romano
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Jillian Linnell
Massachusetts Port Authority	
MBTA Advisory Board	Brian Kane
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Thatcher Kezer III
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	Austin Cyganiewicz
North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly)	Darlene Wynne
North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn)	Tina Cassidy
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland)	
South West Advisory Planning Committee (Town of Medway)	Peter Pelletier
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Aaron Clausen	City of Lynn
Abby Swaine	United Spinal Association
Aleida Leza	Belmont Resident
Ali Kleyman	City of Somerville
Alicia Hunt	City of Medford
Allison Burson	Solomon Foundation
Anacristina Fragoso	Advisory Council
Andrew J. Hall	
Ben Muller	MassDOT
Bryan Pounds	MassDOT
Cheryll-Ann Senior	MassDOT
Charlie Russo	Town of Sudbury Select Board
Constance Raphael	MassDOT
Cosmo Caterino	Belmont Resident
Cynthia Guise	
Dan McCormack	
David Kucharsky	City of Salem
Erika Oliver Jerram	City of Framingham
Eve Mathison	
Frank Tramontozzi	City of Quincy
Janie Dretler	Town of Sudbury Select Board
Jay Corey	
Jeanette Rebecchi	Town of Bedford
Jennifer Honig	
Jeremy Thompson	MetroWest/495 Partnership
Jessica L. Whited	
Joe Blankenship	City of Boston
Joel Angiolillo	
John Morgan	
Josh Klingenstein	MBTA
Joy Glynn	MWRTA
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Justin Curewitz	
Kien Ho	Beta Group
Kristen Guichard	Town of Acton
Len Simon	
Lisa DiRocco	

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Councillor Stephen Winslow	City of Malden
Marcia Rasmussen	
Marzie Galazka	Town of Swampscott
Matthew Petersen	
Michelle Ho	MassDOT
Mike Garrity	
Miranda Briseño	
Nick Lapointe	Fuss and O'Neill
Owen MacDonald	Town of Weymouth
Paul Cobuzzi	
Paula Doucette	
Phil Lemnios	Town of Hull
Robert Penfield	
Rich Benevento	WorldTech Engineering
Tom Branham	Alternative Transportation Group Framingham
Brendan Callahan	City of Peabody
Ben Cares	City of Chelsea
Emily Teller	Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
Beth Suedmeyer	Town of Sudbury
Sarah Bradbury	MassDOT
Scott Zadakis	Advisory Council
Sean Fitzgerald	Town of Swampscott
Sheila Page	Town of Lexington
Sophia Galimore	Watertown TMA
Steve Olanoff	TRIC Alternate
Tim Bethke	
Todd Baldwin	Town of Saugus
Todd Blake	City of Medford
Mayor Tom McGee	City of Lynn
Valerie Gingrich	Town of Wilmington
William Paulitz	

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Tegin Teich, Executive Director

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Róisín Foley

Jonathan Church

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Matt Genova

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Ariel Patterson

Gina Perille

Roger Roy

Barbara Rutman

Michelle Scott

Kate White

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