

MPO Meeting Minutes

Draft Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

November 4, 2021, Meeting

10:00 AM–11:45 AM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Stephen Woelfel, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

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

- Approve the minutes of the meeting of September 23, 2021
- Approve the recommendations from the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance on page 8.

2. Chair's Report—*Stephen Woelfel, MassDOT*

There was none.

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

T. Teich welcomed the newly elected MPO board member representing the Town of Burlington (North Suburban Planning Council) and the re-elected MPO board members representing the Town of Arlington (At-Large), City of Newton (At-Large), and the Town of Norwood/Neponset River Regional Chamber (Three Rivers Interlocal Council).

T. Teich also welcomed the new representative from the Massachusetts Port Authority.

T. Teich announced that she had been elected to the board of the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO), the national member association for MPOs.

T. Teich provided updates on ongoing staff recruitment efforts, including the hiring of a new project accountant, Silva Ayvazyan, and the ongoing interviews for the Manager of Outreach and Communications and Public Outreach Coordinator positions. Recruitment

is also underway for the positions of Transportation Planner/Analyst and Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Manager/Transportation Planner.

T. Teich highlighted recent public outreach activities, including the Transit Working Group virtual coffee chats on October 26th where the topic of discussion was human services transportation. Future Transit Working Group coffee chats will be held in November and December. Finally, Open Houses were held to kick off the federal fiscal years (FFYs) 2023–27 TIP development process.

T. Teich reminded members about annual visits by the MPO staff to Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregional groups from October to December and stated that staff would attend the SouthWest Advisory Planning Committee meeting on November 9, 2021, the South Shore Coalition on November 18, 2021, and the North Suburban Planning Council on December 14, 2021.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports

There were none.

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

L. Diggins introduced himself to new MPO board members as the MBTA's Rider Oversight Committee representative on the Advisory Council and current chair of the Advisory Council. L. Diggins stated that the Advisory Council would meet on November 10, 2021, and hear from Frank Tramantozzi of the City of Quincy about the City's goals as it assumes a new seat on the MBTA Board of Directors. L. Diggins stated that Anne McGahan (MPO staff) also would talk about the MPO's next Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

7. Action Item: Approval of September 23, 2021, MPO Meeting Minutes—*Jonathan Church and Róisín Foley, MPO Staff*

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of September 23, 2021, was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the At-Large Town (Town of Arlington) (Daniel Amstutz). Ken Miller (Federal Highway Administration) clarified his statements about the inflation rate for TIP project costs recorded at this meeting. With this change, the motion carried.

8. Action Item: Recommendations from the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee—*Matt Genova, MPO Staff*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [Draft Policy Recommendations](#)
2. [Public Comments](#)
3. [Fact Sheet](#)

M. Genova reviewed the proposed policy changes presented by the MPO's TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee and the public comments received on the recommendations. The committee's first recommendation is to raise the threshold for project programming to require that proponents have submitted 25 percent design plans to MassDOT and received an updated cost estimate based on that submission. This change would be accompanied by (1) a preliminary project evaluation step allowing proponents to have their projects scored by MPO staff prior to advancing to 25 percent design; (2) established year-over-year project development benchmarks; and (3) additional supporting materials, such a how-to guide with project development benchmarks, to help proponents understand the process and move through it smoothly.

The committee's second recommendation is to increase TIP stakeholder communications, including establishing bi-annual check-ins between MPO staff, project proponents, and MassDOT staff.

The committee's third, and final, recommendation is to establish a clear and consistent policy for rescoring projects when costs change beyond a specified threshold of \$2.5 million for those projects that originally cost more than \$10 million, or 25 percent of project costs for those projects that cost less than \$10 million. If proponents exceed this threshold, they would be required to attend an MPO meeting to explain the causes of the cost increase to the MPO board. If the cost change is the result of an updated project scope, proponents may request that the project score be updated to reflect the new changes. The new costs and score would then be analyzed for cost effectiveness relative to other TIP projects using a four-quadrant matrix in which a project score is plotted against cost per point and then divided into tiers by relative values on these metrics.

MPO staff's proposal is to pilot this approach for the upcoming TIP cycle and then recommend adjustments in advance of future funding rounds. M. Genova stated that these policies aim to reduce the prevalence of large-scale cost increases that disrupt the overall TIP program and place significant limitations on the MPO's ability to fund new projects; increase collaboration; and support the MPO's decision-making.

MPO staff received three formal written comments on the policy proposals. Two comments came from abutters to the proposed Belmont Community Path (#609204) and one came from a member of the Belmont School Committee. Several additional informal comments were made at the TIP Policy Open House on October 14, 2021, and directly to MPO staff from municipal staff, MassDOT staff, and project consultants.

In addition to supportive comments, a few concerns were expressed. There was support for creating clear project benchmarks, but some concern that setting a 25 percent design submittal as the funding threshold could deter municipalities from pursuing TIP funding. There was support for cost-effectiveness measures but concern that those measures be clear and well communicated to all stakeholders. Public comments also included requests that MPO board and committee meetings continue to be accessible virtually as this has allowed for unprecedented access to the committee's policy deliberations. Commenters also did not want the MPO to limit consideration of projects that are expensive but of high quality. There was a request to create transparency around the inputs for project cost estimates, including contingencies.

Discussion

L. Diggins stated that the MPO should keep the Ad Hoc Committee intact long-term and open membership to additional MPO members. E. Bourassa agreed that the committee should not be disbanded and that the committee should have the ability to hold a December meeting to discuss details about evaluating projects for the FFY 2023–27 TIP.

D. Amstutz asked whether these recommendations were generally endorsed by every member of the committee. D. Amstutz agreed with L. Diggins that the Ad Hoc Committee should continue. M. Genova responded that the committee voted unanimously to formally recommend these policies to the MPO board.

Jay Monty (At-Large City) (City of Everett) expressed concern about the third policy proposal, stating that it creates a fallacy that an increasing cost automatically means a change in scope or that the project is not worthwhile. J. Monty stated that it would be better to focus this policy on a change of scope as that would be the true measure of a cost-benefit analysis.

Tom Bent (Inner Core Committee) (City of Somerville) expressed support for the recommendations.

K. Miller stated that (1) there is a distinction between a cost-benefit analysis and unit-cost comparison, and (2) applying some of these methods to projects as they are developing, and not only when costs increase, should be considered.

E. Bourassa agreed that some kind of unit-cost measure was needed but added that the recommendations are not set in stone and provide a more transparent and data-driven way to analyze projects.

Vote

A motion to approve the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee's recommendations as proposed and to keep the Ad Hoc Committee intact was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins). The motion carried.

9. Informing the Big Ideas Behind the MPO's Scenario Planning Process—Michelle Scott, MPO Staff

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [Big Ideas StoryMap](#)
2. [Big Ideas Summary Tables](#)

M. Scott presented the results of the Informing the Big Ideas Behind the MPO's Scenario Planning Process project, including a StoryMap summarizing the results of the project. M. Scott acknowledged former MPO staff member Kate White's work on this project and thanked the focus group participants. M. Scott stated that the Big Ideas project was included in the FFY 2021 UPWP. Its purpose was to identify, through equitable and inclusive outreach, the ingredients for exploratory scenario planning for the next LRTP, *Destination 2050*. M. Scott explained that exploratory scenario planning envisions multiple possible futures to assess how to best prepare for uncertainties, while pursuing an overarching vision. The process enables staff to identify strategies that might work in multiple futures, address uncertainty, develop ways to adapt to change, and collaborate with regional partners.

There are four major steps in the exploratory scenario planning process. The first identifies forces that may shape the future. Next, planners create scenarios of what the future might look like based on those forces. Third, planners analyze how outcomes change as different strategies are applied in those scenario environments. Finally, the information learned through the scenario planning process is used to develop and implement plans.

The feedback collected during the Big Ideas project will apply through the entire scenario planning process, however it is critical for the first and third steps. Staff sought participation from stakeholders representing municipalities, agencies, community organizations, Chambers of Commerce, and advocacy groups to reflect diverse perspectives. Further, staff was looking for participants who work on important planning

areas that intersect with mobility, such as public health, housing, economic development, and the environment.

M. Scott stated that 53 individuals from over 40 organizations participated in this process. The format of the focus groups was based on an approach outlined by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and the Sonoran Institute. Each focus group had between five and eight participants representing different parts of the region, organizations, or planning areas. Staff also held a focus group specifically for youth.

The first part of these discussions included brainstorming exercises to identify uncertainties about the future and discuss strategies. Participants mentioned hopes for the future, such as investment in transit systems and other infrastructure, improved transportation access and connectivity, climate change adaptation, and a focus on equity in transportation decision-making. Participants also brought up concerns about a future where the transit system falls into disrepair because of lack of investment, and where ridership has declined while personal vehicle use has increased. For the youth focus group, extreme weather and factors around climate change were a big topic of discussion. Focus group participants also expressed concern about extensive displacement of people in the region caused by a lack of affordable housing.

When discussing future uncertainties, M. Scott focused on a subset of themes that came up in the focus groups: the environment, technology, and the economy. For the environment, forces discussed included climate change and environmental policy. For technology, forces discussed included electric and autonomous vehicle policies, the role of communications and data, micromobility, and equitable access to technology. For the economy, forces included the future of remote work, e-commerce, energy pricing and use, automation, and the effects of income inequality. M. Scott stated that the second part of these workshops focused on ranking these certainties and uncertainties. Critical uncertainties included the future of transportation funding while critical certainties included climate change, migration, and the aging of the region's population.

MPO staff also organized the strategies mentioned in the focus groups by theme. For the environment, strategies included supporting renewable energy, expanding the bus network, electrifying vehicles and infrastructure, reclaiming green space, and relocating communities in certain parts of the region as climate effects become more severe. For technology, strategies included focusing technology advancements related to automation and vehicle electrification on transit as opposed to single occupancy vehicles, improving transit to reduce personal electric vehicle use, and supporting use of micromobility and e-mobility as last-mile options. For the economy, strategies included increasing transit service to transit-dependent areas, considering all types of workers

when developing transit plans, investing in ways to support equitable growth in the region, and Massachusetts' competitive advantages in the national and global economy.

M. Scott outlined next steps for the scenario planning process. In the short term, these will include analyzing certainties and uncertainties, including those suggested by MPO members. MPO staff will host an MPO Member Focus Group to gather this feedback. Afterwards, MPO staff will propose scenarios for MPO consideration.

Discussion

K. Miller commended staff on the use of focus groups as a data collection strategy and asked if there were participants invited that did not participate. K. Miller encouraged staff to broaden their reach and work with participants such as the freight community and first responders, who may have feedback about highway congestion and safety.

M. Scott responded that there were some invitees who were not able to participate, but that, in some cases, staff were able to have one-on-one conversations with them.

S. Olanoff asked M. Scott to clarify why some items were marked "N/A" (Not Applicable) on the feedback table. M. Scott clarified that some topics of discussion among participants were not discussed in enough detail for staff to categorize them or to put notes about their importance or certainty in the table. S. Olanoff stated that staff should look for a different way to show this, as certain items do appear to be applicable.

M. Scott stated that staff would work to address it.

L. Diggins invited M. Scott to present at a future Advisory Council meeting.

10. Members Items

S. Woelfel stated that registration was open for MassDOT's annual Moving Together conference, which would be held virtually December 7-9, 2021.

11. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins). 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)	Bill Conroy
Federal Highway Administration	Ken Miller
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Stephen Woelfel John Bechard John Romano
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	
Massachusetts Port Authority	Sarah Lee
MBTA Advisory Board	Amira Patterson
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 (Town of Burlington)	Melisa Tintocalis
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland)	Jennifer Constable
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 Steve Olanoff

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Paul Cobuzzi	
Aleida Leza	Belmont resident
Derek Krevat	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Michelle Ho	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Sarah Bradbury	MassDOT District 3
Ben Muller	MassDOT District 6
Michael Garrity	MassDOT
Wesley Lickus	MassDOT
Gus Norrbom	MassDOT
Owen MacDonald	Town of Weymouth
Joy Glynn	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Adi Nochur	MAPC
Patrick McAlpine	Town of Lynnfield
J.R. Frey	Town of Hingham
Joe Blankenship	City of Boston
Joseph Stanford	Volpe Center
Cassandra Ostrander	FHWA

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Gina Perille
Annette Demchur
Silva Ayvazyan
Jonathan Church
Róisín Foley
Matt Genova
Betsy Harvey
Zihao Jin
Sandy Johnston
Heyne Kim
Anne McGahan
Marty Milkovits
Rebecca Morgan
Michelle Scott

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