



## Draft Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

April 13, 2022, Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM–3:50 PM, Zoom Virtual Conferencing Platform

Lenard Diggins, Chair, representing the Advisory Council

### Meeting Agenda

#### 1. Introductions

Lenard Diggins called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. (For attendance list, see page 8.)

#### 2. Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2023-27 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Draft Programming Scenario—*Matt Genova, MPO Staff*

Matt Genova, MPO TIP Manager, introduced an open-ended conversation about the FFYs 2023-27 TIP draft programming scenario. He encouraged attendees to reference an updated version of the detailed scenario table which was shared with the Advisory Council in preparation for this meeting.

M. Genova provided a brief overview of new TIP funding sources beginning in 2022, including funding available through the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and funds reallocated to the MPO from the completed Green Line Extension project. He noted that the new funds provided additional flexibility for project allocation, particularly in the final year of funding. He briefly outlined some of the projects included in the draft scenario table.

#### *Discussion*

John McQueen, Walk Boston, noted that many of the changes the Advisory Council had requested, including greater emphasis on the Community Connections Program, had been realized. J. McQueen asked about projects included in the draft scenario table that are designated as “high risk,” and what needed to be done internally to address the risk and advance the projects.

M. Genova responded that the “high risk” designation reflects project timing concerns and a desire to push the projects forward with extra attention to schedule and stakeholder coordination.

J. McQueen asked if it was as much pressure for municipalities to move toward their milestones as an internal flag to move approvals forward on time.

M. Genova responded that it depends on project proponents and that the flags help make proponents aware of concerns about project timing. He explained that the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) designates projects in February, and MPO staff then communicate with municipalities on timing and provide support to address potential barriers.

Ana Cristina Fragoso, American Council of Engineering Companies, asked about the projects highlighted in gold on the scenario table. She stated that her understanding was that in March M. Genova discussed a surplus of \$27 million for those projects, while the table showed higher proposed costs that would not be covered by that surplus.

M. Genova responded that the \$27 million surplus was just the surplus resulting from the return of Green Line Extension funding to the MPO in 2022. He explained that there are several other sources of surplus as well, including about \$20 million per fiscal year from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and extra funding from delayed projects that had already been programmed. He noted that the large gaps on the table are covered by the addition of all the various surpluses.

A.C. Fragoso asked if the gold highlighted projects were chosen specifically because they were closest to being ready to advance into the next phase of construction.

M. Genova responded that the highlighted projects were identified by MassDOT as projects that are ready on their existing funding timelines and were also projects that aligned with MPO priorities for key regional connections, especially in the bicycle and pedestrian network.

Franny Osman, Acton Transportation Committee, asked about the conversations around the microtransit application.

M. Genova responded that the Community Connections Program is still a relatively new approach to funding projects. He noted that the MPO has funded one microtransit and one shuttle project through the Community Connections Program to date, so there is not much data available on project success. He added that the MPO has substantial extra funding available now and several proposed municipal and regional transit authority (RTA)-led projects throughout the region, so there is a desire to build up the base of shuttle and microtransit projects now and monitor performance to be able to refine funding approaches in future years.

L. Diggins agreed and added that the project scores are a good way to compare projects to each other and to overall objectives. He also referenced the Advisory Council's 3-C

discussion and request that the MPO consider funding all high-scoring, low-cost projects, which would capture most or all the Community Connections and microtransit projects.

L. Diggins also noted that microtransit projects were discussed at a past Transit Working Group meeting. He stated that making these programs more robust will increase utilization and support long term success. He hoped that the MPO can support microtransit projects outside of the Community Connections Program through a broader set of funds after the Community Connections Program tests and demonstrates project potential.

L. Diggins noted that the MPO provided more overall funding to the Community Connections and Transit Modernization Programs. He expressed desire for more MPO funding with fewer constraints to be available for the Community Connections Program and suggested that in the future MassDOT could potentially prioritize more flexible funding to these projects.

M. Genova noted that the new funding for the Community Connections and Transit Modernization Programs also represents a permanent increase in MPO funding to those programs. He also noted that most of the transit operating projects the MPO selected through the Community Connections Program this year are expansions of existing services, which recognizes the commitments municipalities and RTAs have already made to these services and will hopefully support long-term sustainability and utilization.

J. McQueen stated that analyzing coverage and levels of service helps validate assumptions about the MBTA's viability and utility, as ridership generally increases when coverage and service is added. He stated that, similarly, the microtransit and Community Connections projects exemplify the Advisory Council's previously stated objectives to increase funding for more accessible and robust systems at the municipal and local levels.

L. Diggins added that some of the projects currently programmed are MBTA projects, including a multimodal project in Somerville. He asked whether that project created synergy with the McGrath Boulevard project (project #607981) and noted that he supported both projects but wondered if it would better benefit the region to combine both projects this year instead of programming one now and one later. He noted that MassDOT had made it clear that the Maffa Way superstructure project (project #607670) was ready to be programmed right away and thus was a good use of the surplus funding that the MPO needed to allocate. He expressed hope that eventually more funds could also be allocated to other projects that aligned with other goal areas.

Jen Rowe, City of Boston, noted that all the projects submitted at the most recent MPO meeting (March 31, 2022) that had not already been scored were from RTAs or the MBTA. She asked if any municipalities had projects that were brought up as being at or near 25 percent design and could potentially be programmed in the next few years, and if not, whether the MPO had reflected on ways to support and build capacity for municipalities to

have ready projects lined up that could fill in some of the surplus funding gaps that MassDOT usually fills.

M. Genova noted that this question had also come up with the MPO board recently. He stated that municipalities have priorities which are not always reflected in the TIP process, and sometimes they pursue other avenues for furthering projects. He stated that there is a desire at the municipal level to bring new projects into the TIP process during early or mid-year MPO funding opportunities, and most MPO members would likely support that. He noted that MPO staff would also like to support that work but are often constrained by federal and state requirements around project design and scheduling, which make it challenging for municipalities to pivot some projects into the TIP.

M. Genova stated that this is a good opportunity to reflect more on creating and supporting a broader pipeline for potential projects regardless of readiness.

L. Diggins contrasted normal TIP project development cycles, when municipalities can get projects into a queue and meet specific design milestones to eventually receive TIP funding, to the difficulty of having a non-TIP project ready for the possibility of programming when the MPO has surplus funding. He noted that it is difficult for municipalities to plan projects without specific commitments to follow-through, and it is difficult to engage communities in project development when projects are only theoretical.

Andy Reker, City of Cambridge, agreed that it is difficult for municipalities to switch gears on projects already being developed outside of the TIP. He stated that Cambridge has been concerned about some of the projects in the 2014 Accelerated Bridge Program not being fully completed due to cost overruns on other higher priority projects, and he asked if there were other resources they should consider as bridges continue to deteriorate and repairs do not get funded through state programs.

M. Genova responded that A. Reker's question identifies an important gap and is part of a larger conversation about different ways to bring projects into the TIP pipeline and bridge municipal and state priorities that the MPO is interested in continuing.

A. Reker asked about the Green Line Extension, citing the local desire for completion of Phase 2, extending to Mystic Valley Parkway/Route 16.

M. Genova noted that this question had also been raised at a recent MPO meeting. He stated that MassDOT did not have a tangible update at that time. M. Genova stated that he also did not have current details to offer but recognized that the project continues to be a priority for many stakeholders, and he hopes to see new funding available for it in coming years.

J. McQueen agreed with A. Reker's points on bridge rehabilitation. He returned to the subject of municipal project readiness to note that at a prior 3C Committee meeting members had

also discussed ways to help communities move projects forward, including by examining municipal capacities for engineering and design, and exploring other sources of funding such as Community Preservation Act funds or Chapter 90 funds.

Fred Moseley, American Council of Engineering Companies, noted that project design can be funded through Chapter 90, but that in his experience it was difficult to get municipalities to allocate enough of that funding to design.

L. Diggins asked how this would address design issues related to municipal staff capacity and resources.

F. Moseley replied that the current process and qualification requirements make it too difficult and resource-intensive for most municipalities to develop designs internally.

J. Rowe stated that she recently attended a webinar about the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law where she heard that municipalities could now choose to adopt different design guidance. She asked how that would function with MPO funds and MassDOT design requirements, particularly for programming surplus funding to projects further along in design but designed using different standards.

M. Genova noted that this addresses an overarching tension between MassDOT and MPO capital funding being ideal for larger municipal projects but also being attached to specific design requirements. He stated that the design requirements are not always an issue but sometimes conflict with more progressive and innovative design. He stated that the MPO and MassDOT continue to explore the policy changes made in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, different types of approaches, and ways to best leverage the new funding sources available. He encouraged attendees to be in touch with questions or ideas.

L. Diggins stated that in the recent 3C Committee meeting members had discussed funding many of the small, low-cost Community Connections projects such as two proposed bike rack projects (Chenery Middle School Bicycle Parking in Belmont and Bicycle Parking along the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail in Acton). He asked how the MPO could ensure the staff capacity to coordinate the administrative aspects of those smaller projects.

M. Genova responded that the two bike rack projects specifically are more challenging because a collective purchasing agreement made with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has recently been suspended due to material cost inflation. He stated that the goal is to continue to use methods like a collective purchasing model to fund those smaller projects without requiring much additional staff capacity to manage them.

M. Genova stated that staff had not expected such small-scale projects to be proposed when initially structuring the Community Connections Program, so MPO staff and MAPC and MassDOT partners must continue to scope the program to support municipalities pursuing

small but impactful community projects while not expending too much staff time on administration.

L. Diggins stated that the small projects are very impactful for communities and the MPO gains goodwill for funding them. He spoke in favor of the MPO providing administrative support.

David Montgomery, Town of Needham, asked if the MPO could have a role in guiding more leveraged use of Chapter 90 funds. He noted that Needham has received annual allocations for incremental redesign of the downtown area using a Complete Streets approach, but the annual incremental funding approach limited the scope of projects and likely created inefficiencies. He suggested leveraging funding to support broader and more collaborative project design.

L. Diggins supported coordination with the MPO and MassDOT and noted that this idea was consistent with the 3C approach. He discussed the MPO's recent efforts to include corridor studies in the annual Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) cycle, which promote continuous examples across municipalities of ways to identify and address common issues.

D. Montgomery suggested that allocating extra funds as a reward for taking a broader approach could support better municipal projects but noted that this would likely need to be advocated for at the legislative level.

John Strauss, Town of Burlington, agreed with D. Montgomery's assessment of fractured funding, design, and implementation of projects at the municipal level. He provided an example of a project in Woburn which should have been done in collaboration with Burlington to avoid the towns planning and getting funding for two similar and connected projects. He supported the use of financial incentives to encourage better regional collaboration.

L. Diggins noted that the monthly subregional meetings coordinated by MAPC and regularly attended by MPO staff are useful forums for municipal collaboration and provide a way for communities to advocate to the MPO about these issues.

J. Strauss provided an example of two recently funded projects in Burlington that had not been coordinated. He stated that coordination on planning would have been better and avoided a patchwork approach to construction.

L. Diggins expressed interest in exploring this example more deeply. He stated that if there are multiple projects being funded in a concentrated geographic area, arguments should be made for greater synergy and potential cost saving or safety benefits of coordination. He discussed the Green Line Extension and other transit system expansion projects as opportunities to make these arguments.

J. McQueen supported the idea of a more unified system of project funding, including Chapter 90 funds and possibly additional state funds made available to support systematic and collaborative planning across communities.

### **3. 3C Documents Committee Update**

L. Diggins noted that the 3C Committee had been able to meet earlier than normal to consider the draft TIP scenarios, giving the Advisory Council the opportunity to provide more meaningful input in the decision-making process. He stressed the importance of MPO staff ensuring that the Advisory Council continues to have this type of opportunity to provide timely input.

L. Diggins stated that the 3C Comment Letter was being prepared. He offered the option for the 3C Committee to meet again before the draft TIP is released and before the April 28 MPO meeting, and he noted the importance of creating public awareness. The 3C Committee members decided not to meet again in April.

### **4. Old Business, New Business, and Member Announcements**

L. Diggins stated that the Advisory Council Chair's Report at the next MPO meeting will be about the 3C Committee meeting and the discussion on drafting the 3C comment letter.

L. Diggins noted that several past meeting minutes will be presented at the next Advisory Council meeting. He also stated that the upcoming meeting will feature another 3C letter discussion and potentially a discussion of the draft UPWP Universe of Projects. He encouraged members to reach out to him offline about additional topics of discussion.

### **5. Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by WalkBoston (John McQueen) seconded by the Town of Needham (David Montgomery). The motion carried.

## Attendees

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### Member Municipalities

	Representatives and Alternates
Acton	Franny Osman
Burlington	John Strauss
Boston	Jen Rowe
Brookline	Todd Kirrane
Cambridge	Andy Reker
Needham	David Montgomery
Weymouth	Owen MacDonald

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### Citizen Advocacy Groups

	Attendees
American Council of Engineering Companies	Fred Moseley Ana Cristina Fragoso
Boston Society of Architects	Schuyler Larrabee
Mass Moves	Jon Seward
MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)	Lenard Diggins
WalkBoston	John McQueen

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### Agencies (Non-Voting)

	Attendees
MassDOT	Derek Krevat

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### Other Attendees

	Affiliation
Katie Malkin	Via

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### MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Matt Genova  
Matt Archer



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