



Draft Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

February 9, 2022 Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM–4:15 PM, Zoom

Lenard Diggins, Chair, representing the Regional Transportation 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 7.)

2. Annual Conversation with Kate Fichter—*Kate Fichter, Assistant Secretary and Chief of Climate and Decarbonization, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)*

Kate Fichter introduced herself and stated that part of her work has been running the shared streets and spaces grant program, which has been a good example of state and municipal partnership around changing streets, curbs, plazas, and parking to make streets useable for all modes of transportation.

K. Fichter presented *Decarbonizing Travel: What is Our Responsibility? A State DOT Perspective*. Massachusetts has many regulations that are working to address the problem of transportation emissions. The Global Warming Solutions Act of 2008 required the establishment of economy-wide goals for reducing emissions. Every five years, the commonwealth issues a Clean Energy and Climate Plan to lay out the pathways, by economic sectors, for achieving the required goals. The latest update to the plan is currently underway and will need to include policies to meaningfully reduce emissions from the transportation sector. *Kain vs. Mass. DEP (2016)* reaffirmed that the emissions targets in the Global Warming Solutions Act are legally enforceable. Massachusetts has already been sued on these issues and could be sued again.

There are two truths that the transportation world should accept: the transportation community has a responsibility for how the things it builds are used, and transportation policy decisions cannot be separated from decisions regarding land use, housing, social justice, and public health. From these truths, there are three general understandings regarding transportation decision-making. First, transportation planning organizations need to

understand the impacts of transportation decision-making on climate change and adjust approaches accordingly. Second, individual choices about mobility are a function of the system that people are given by the public and private sectors. Third, the goal is not to limit mobility and movement to reduce emissions, but to change modes and fuels and to enable those changes through good public policy and incentives.

When talking about travel choice, the narrative of personal responsibility around travel behavior is flawed. While it is true that individual choices have fewer negative social costs, it is also true that many people don't have meaningful choices about how they get around. It is important to keep in mind that the line between choice and no choice is often not as clear as it may seem, and choice tends to be a false idea that is only available to certain people. Policies are designed to either nudge or shove people into making mobility choices other than driving, but both will fail and produce inequitable outcomes if the populations that are the target of the policies do not have other viable mobility choices available to them. Without a real way to avoid the penalties that the policy would try to impose, change would not happen, and some people will be more burdened than others.

MassDOT supports the efforts of our colleagues at the environmental and energy agencies to increase the adoption of electric vehicles. MassDOT is working to electrify public buses and to focus on transportation behavior to understand why people are going where they are going and where there could be opportunities to effectively encourage a shift to a lower carbon mode. MassDOT recognizes a disconnect between public concern about climate change and understanding of the structural reasons for high vehicle-miles traveled and emissions and is focusing on providing attractive alternatives to driving, with a particular focus on short trips. MassDOT looks for opportunities to influence policies on land use and housing, with a particular focus on density.

MassDOT offers funding programs for municipalities to create better, safer, and more inclusive streets and curbs, with less emphasis on the needs of automobiles. These programs leverage historic downtowns and village centers for their walkability, human scale, and natural attributes of great places. MassDOT also helps to lead the Trails Team, which has put millions of state and federal dollars into more than 150 off-road trail projects.

Discussion

John McQueen, WalkBoston, asked whether MassDOT was considering additional revenue streams, such as revenue generated by a tax on vehicle miles traveled by personal vehicles or public transportation. J. McQueen further asked where the State was in terms of emissions reduction goals. K. Fichter responded that additional pricing on transportation is something that would live in the control of the legislature and not MassDOT, although conversations have been happening for years regarding whether to use pricing to raise revenue or to regulate behavior. In terms of emissions, the last set of data MassDOT has is from 2018, but K. Fichter would try to find more information.

Steven Olanoff, Town of Westwood, asked what the challenges are to electrifying the commuter rail system. K. Fichter responded that electrifying the commuter rail is very expensive. The commuter rail system has a larger existential problem of who is currently using the service, and whether that service meets the needs of users compared to the travel patterns it was originally designed for. It is hard and expensive to update this type of infrastructure.

S. Olanoff asked if K. Fichter was aware of dual-mode train proposals for the commuter rail system. K. Fichter responded yes, and that it seems that current battery technology is a limitation to implementation.

3. Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Study Ideas—Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff

Sandy Johnston stated that Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) staff is currently developing study ideas for the upcoming Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023 UPWP. MPO staff is currently gathering ideas for what the UPWP should study. The majority of what is funded by the UPWP lays out how the MPO will spend planning and analysis funds allocated from the federal government each year. From these funds, a certain amount of money is dedicated to performing new studies and analyses. The UPWP Committee uses various methods of engagement to get ideas and to understand the needs of the community and the MPO's priorities. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provides additional planning funds for the FFY 2023 UPWP, and the MPO is looking at an estimated 15 to 20 percent increase in planning funds. MPO staff has a public survey out as well that is open through the end of February.

Discussion

Barry Steinberg, Association for Public Transportation, asked if the MPO would consider previous study ideas along with new study ideas. S. Johnston replied yes.

Laura Wiener, City of Watertown, suggested a study that provides more trip generation and parking estimate data for lab buildings in non-suburban settings. Current estimates overestimate the amount of parking spaces needed and the trips by people who come by single occupancy vehicles. L. Wiener additionally suggested a study that examines different ways to leverage development to support transportation improvement. S. Johnston replied that he would share an interesting paper on Montgomery County, Maryland, which has implemented a development impact fee instead of asking developers to pay for specific mitigation at their site. Developers pay into a general fund for transportation infrastructure and service improvements. Regarding the lab idea, MPO staff is aware of the need. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is looking into conducting the research. The MPO's current trip generation study will also examine the policy aspects of trip generation estimates.

L. Diggins asked for clarification on the working relationship between the MPO and MAPC in coordination of studies. S. Johnston replied that although the relationship has varied over the years, the MPO and MAPC are currently planning to set up regular coordination meetings with MAPC's transportation staff. Much of the working topics share a lot of overlap, but the MPO and MAPC are looking to avoid duplicating work but rather complement each other's work.

Andy Reker, City of Cambridge, asked if the electrification of the commuter rail system could be studied to further research and expand the universe of studies for the system. A. Reker also asked if there was any research planned with topics of climate action and resilience, as well as active transportation. S. Johnston replied that in the FFY 2022 UPWP discrete studies section, the MPO did not have any resilience linked studies, but did establish a new budget line for resilience planning. The budget stated as a small amount of funding in FFY 2022, but the budget will expand in future years. Active transportation was incorporated into many of the studies the MPO has conducted. Regarding regional rail, the MPO has been reluctant to take on issues that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is actively working on, although the idea would be interesting to study.

J. McQueen stated that regarding the future of the curb, it would be nice to gain more information dealing with the effects of delivery vehicles on streets. S. Johnston replied that the MPO wants to include curb delivery elements in future studies and pointed to e-commerce studies that had been recently done by MAPC.

Franny Osman, Town of Acton, suggested a study about connections between regional transit authorities (RTA), specifically between Lowell Regional Transit Authority and the MBTA, in addition to connections between Framingham and Lowell. The study would examine ways to increase funding for RTA expansions and connections. F. Osman further suggested the creation of a guide to explain how funding flows from federal and state sources into the various planning organizations. S. Johnston replied that the idea of a guide to transportation planning funding has come up every so often and would be valuable. Further, the MPO should work to understand and improve RTA connections and will address some of these issues in the coming years through the Transit Working Group.

AnaCristina Fragoso, Boston Society of Civil Engineers, stated that one of the largest problems in Massachusetts planning work is that public planning organizations do not interact with private planners.

Jen Rowe, City of Boston, suggested a study to examine potential new sources of funding and what the impacts of that funding would be in terms of mode choice and the State's climate goals.

F. Osman stated that a guide to transportation planning funding would be a great way to spread information about the topic.

A. Fragoaso asked at what points can members of the public give input on MPO activities and major documents. S. Johnston replied that there are often opportunities for public input on all parts of the MPO's work. S. Johnston noted that a funding guidebook may be challenging to produce as MPO documents only mention federally funded projects, and there are many other projects that are on a state level.

S. Olanoff suggested funding an updated household travel survey. The last survey was completed 10 years ago, and MAPC's MetroCommon 2050 plan calls for more regular survey schedule, possibly yearly. S. Johnston replied that it has been too long since the last survey was completed, and that when it was performed, bikeshare barely existed. There is optimism about cellphone-based data and how it can replace some of the household travel survey, albeit with poorer data richness.

L. Diggins suggested a study to pilot and expand the Bluebikes network to bus stops. L. Diggins further suggested studying pedestrian crossing times at signalized intersections to ensure all groups have enough time to cross and identify ways that municipalities can modify their signal timings. L. Diggins suggested another study enhancing public engagement to increase residents' understanding of the MPO and to help the public participate in the planning process. Another study idea could explore crowdsourcing to collect data. Finally, a study to explore the implementation of reduced car footprints and their effects on the roads, as well as the impacts of shared personal vehicles such as ZipCar.

F. Osman asked about the state of autonomous vehicles and what is currently being studied. S. Johnston replied that the autonomous vehicle industry would not have working implementations for at least the next three years.

F. Osman suggested a study exploring bike trails along rail rights-of-way and how the two modes could coexist.

A. Fragoaso stated some autonomous car manufacturers are implementing rideshare programs where customers rent directly from the manufacturer.

L. Diggins asked what the deadline for the UPWP Study Proposal survey is. S. Johnston replied that the survey would close at the end of February.

4. Big Ideas for Regional Transit Authorities—*Jon Seward and Franny Osman, Advisory Council*

F. Osman stated that she did not have any new information to bring today but was interested to hear how many RTAs were represented in the Advisory Council meeting.

L. Diggins stated that F. Osman and J. Seward had asked for additional members who would be interested in working together to bring a future presentation on RTAs.

F. Osman stated that the Legislature underfunds RTAs, which causes RTAs to focus on their hubs, preventing the outskirts of the RTAs from getting the funding they need. The RTA Advancement bill is currently advancing through the legislature.

L. Diggins asked what groups are helping to advance the RTA Advancement bill in the legislature. F. Osman responded that Alexis Walls of the Massachusetts Public Health Association was helping to lead some efforts.

J. Seward stated he is working to develop ideas around how RTAs can be more forward leaning and produce useful effort to benefit the activities of the MPO. L. Diggins has requested a presentation around these ideas in the fall.

5. Old Business, New Business, and Member Announcements

L. Diggins stated that at the previous MPO Board meeting, the MPO spoke about roadway safety targets for the Boston region. This was an annual presentation. Currently, MassDOT is implementing its next iteration of the Strategic Highway Safety Plan. The Strategic Highway Safety Plan is a vision zero plan with the goal of zero deaths or serious injuries, which is a huge undertaking. In addition, there was a presentation on the Transit Working Group pilot and the report is available to read.

A. Reker stated that the National Association of City Transportation Officials will hold a conference in the Boston region on September 7, 2022, through September 10, 2022.

David Montgomery, Town of Needham, stated that one issue with Advisory Council meetings is the lack of meeting minutes, and that he would like to see meeting minutes for meetings in the future. L. Diggins agreed and asked to discuss this topic with D. Montgomery.

B. Steinberg suggested that the MPO produce a guide to local transportation projects and the public transportation system.

6. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Association for Public Transportation (Barry Steinberg) and seconded by the Boston Society of Civil Engineers (AnaCristina Fragoso). The motion carried.

Attendees

Member Municipalities	Representatives and Alternates
Acton	Franny Osman
Boston	Jen Rowe
Brookline	Dan Martin
	Todd Kirane
Burlington	John Strauss
Cambridge	Andy Reker
Needham	David Montgomery
Watertown	Laura Wiener
Westwood	Steven Olanoff

Citizen Advocacy Groups	Attendees
American Council of Engineering Companies	Fred Moseley
Association for Public Transportation	Barry Steinberg
Boston Society of Civil Engineers (BSCES)	AnaCristina Fragoso
MoveMassachusetts	Jon Seward
National Rural Transit Assistance Program	Scott Zadakis
WalkBoston	John McQueen

Agencies (Non-Voting)	Attendees
MassDOT	Kate Fichter
MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning	Derek Krevat

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Marilyn Wellons	
Laura Castelli	
Sarah Freeman	

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Matt Archer

Anne McGahan

Stella Jordan

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