

MPO Meeting Minutes

Draft Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

March 3, 2022, Meeting

10:00 AM–12:18 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

David Mohler, 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 January 20, 2022

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance beginning on page 12.

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

There was none.

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

Tegin Teich stated that there will be a third board meeting in March on March 31, and that the planned April meetings will be on April 14 and April 28.

T. Teich provided updates on the Central Transportation Planning Staff's (CTPS) strategic planning efforts, including the development of new travel demand modeling tools and improvement of the agency's internet presence.

T. Teich stated that this is Róisín Foley's last board meeting, as she is leaving the agency on March 4. She encouraged board members and colleagues to send R. Foley well wishes.

T. Teich provided updates on agency's public outreach efforts and events.

4. Public Comments

Erin Wortman (Director of Planning and Community Development, Town of Stoneham) expressed support for Stoneham's Community Connections grant application. She stated that the project would address first- and last-mile transit connections, build capacity into existing Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) service, and enhance transportation equity in the town.

Jeffrey Roth (resident, Town of Belmont) expressed support for Belmont's Community Connections grant application. He stated that the project would provide covered bicycle parking at the Chenery Middle School. J. Roth also expressed support for project #609204 (Belmont Community Path).

Valerie Gingrich (Director of Planning and Conservation, Town of Wilmington) discussed the cost increases associated with project #609253 (Lowell Street and Woburn Street Intersection Improvement in Wilmington) programmed for federal fiscal year (FFY) 2023. V. Gingrich noted that the project was flagged for a cost increase of 35 percent. V. Gingrich stated that about 30 percent of the increase was caused by utility relocation costs being significantly higher than original estimates, which was reflected in the 75 percent design plans. She stated that various stormwater management issues accounted for about 42 percent of the cost increase, unit price increases accounted for another 15 percent, and addressing MassDOT comments accounted for the remainder of the increase. V. Gingrich stated that the overall scope of the project has not changed, and that the town hopes to submit the 100 percent design plans by the end of May. She advocated for the MPO to fund the cost increase due to the project's importance for local safety.

Sophia Galimore (resident, City of Watertown, Watertown Transportation Management Association [TMA]) advocated for Watertown's Community Connections grant application for funding to replace one existing gas-powered shuttle bus serving the Pleasant Street corridor with two electric vehicles. She stated that this project is part of the Watertown Comprehensive Plan and climate change initiative to support electrification of vehicles. S. Gallimore stated that adding a second vehicle will shorten headways by 50 percent and increase ridership.

Richard Benevento (WorldTech Engineering, municipal consultant) discussed cost increases associated with project #608348 (reconstruction of Bridge Street in Beverly). R. Benevento stated that the 4 percent inflation cost recommended by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is likely inadequate given substantial increases in material costs, and that more costs should be factored in at the beginning of projects to account for inflation as well as the final add-on costs for MassDOT to administer

projects. He stated that many total project cost increases are not due to scope creep but rather inflation and general increases in secondary costs.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports—Derek Krevat, Chair, Unified Planning Working Group (UPWP) Committee

Derek Krevat (MassDOT) provided an update about the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee's meeting that was held on the morning of March 3. He stated that the items discussed at the meeting were the FFY 2023 UPWP development schedule and proposed changes to the budgeting process. D. Krevat stated that at the next meeting, the committee will be reviewing the universe of proposed UPWP studies.

D. Mohler noted that he received a letter of support from State Representative Sally Kerans for a particular UPWP project. He stated he has shared that letter with MPO staff.

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

Lenard Diggins stated that at the March 9 meeting of the Advisory Council, Sandy Johnston (MPO staff) will be discussing freight planning and there will be a discussion about the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

7. Action Item: Approval of January 20, 2022, MPO Meeting Minutes—Róisín Foley, MPO Staff

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of January 20, 2022, was made by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) (Eric Bourassa) and seconded by the Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Tom O'Rourke). The motion carried.

8. Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region Study Update—Betsy Harvey, MPO Staff, Transportation Equity Program Manager

Betsy Harvey presented an update on the MPO study, *Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region*. She provided an overview of the study and described the metrics that have been identified: access to jobs, healthcare, education, and essential services. B. Harvey explained that the study will make use of the software Conveyal to analyze access to and from different destinations. She asked for input from the board on the study design and metrics.

Discussion

L. Diggins asked B. Harvey for the results of the study to be summarized in a memo for future reference. He expressed interest in MPO staff analyzing the cost of transit access per household and asked B. Harvey to elaborate on that aspect of the study. B. Harvey stated that future studies may examine the specific economic effects of increased transit costs on households.

E. Bourassa expressed his support for exploring the relationship between cost and access. He asked B. Harvey what form the final product of the study will take. B. Harvey responded that MPO staff are still determining this, and the final product will be guided by the research and the data. E. Bourassa expressed an interest in the final product having a strong visual and spatial component.

D. Mohler asked B. Harvey to elaborate on the comparison of access by car versus transit. B. Harvey responded that MPO staff are still deciding how car and transit access will be compared, and that one way is to compare access relative to populations or geography. D. Mohler noted that access to jobs by transit depends on where a person lives in the region, and many wealthier communities do not have access to MBTA services. He asked B. Harvey how the study could ensure that results are not being biased in that way.

B. Harvey replied that MPO staff could break down geographic areas to consider differences in transit access. B. Harvey noted that having metrics that will serve as the baseline for disparate impact metrics for the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) must be considered at a regional level. She stated that the study also seeks to investigate differences in access to destinations for environmental justice equity populations, including lower income communities and communities of color, regardless of where they live. D. Mohler suggested that MPO staff also consider transit users' lived experiences and difficulties of using transit in addition to access.

Kenneth Miller (FHWA) asked B. Harvey how Conveyal measures access to destinations via cars and whether Conveyal considers cost of time in addition to cost of transit service. B. Harvey asked Emily Domanico (MPO staff) to respond. E. Domanico stated that MPO staff are still exploring the capabilities of Conveyal, but that the software is primarily used to measure access and travel time. E. Domanico stated that census information regarding car ownership is available in Conveyal.

L. Diggins noted that residents do not always have a choice of where to live, and many residents are priced out of densely populated areas with robust transit access. He discussed the difficulty of deciding what data to use in access and cost studies.

Daniel Amstutz (Town of Arlington) stated that he agreed with L Diggins' comments. D. Amstutz stated that he would like a metric of affordability to be applied to the metrics, if possible.

D. Mohler reiterated that he hopes the study will identify and focus on equity populations and will avoid mistakenly identifying transit deserts in wealthier areas where residents do not necessarily need transit or choose not to rely on transit.

E. Bourassa agreed and stated that B. Harvey has done well defining and identifying equity populations in the past.

B. Harvey noted that the study will be specifically examining access for environmental justice populations, defined as people within 200 percent of the poverty level and people of color, compared to those who do not qualify as environmental justice populations.

9. FFYs 2023-27 Transportation Improvement Program Project Scoring Results—Matt Genova, MPO Staff, Transportation Improvement Program Manager

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [Draft FFYs 2023-27 TIP Project Descriptions and Scoring Results](#)
2. [Draft FFYs 2023-27 TIP Public Comments Received as of 03-01-2022](#)

M. Genova presented the scores and results for new TIP projects being considered for funding this year in the FFYs 2023–27 TIP. He noted that TIP project descriptions and scoring results, as well as public comments received as of March 1, 2022, were available on the MPO meeting calendar. M. Genova stated that there were two goals for the discussion: to develop an understanding of the projects under consideration for funding this year, and to start a discussion about the board's preferences for programming scenarios which will be discussed at the next MPO meeting on March 17, 2022.

M. Genova provided an update on the TIP timeline, noting that a draft scenario must be agreed upon by the board by the end of March to be included in the larger draft TIP document that MPO staff anticipate releasing the draft TIP for public comment in late April after a vote by the board. M. Genova reviewed and summarized the written public comments received since the last MPO meeting on February 17, 2022, which were posted to the MPO meeting calendar. He stated that MPO staff received additional written comments within the past 48 hours, which will be brought to the next MPO meeting on March 17, 2022.

M. Genova stated that MPO staff scored 25 projects for TIP funding, including 11 Community Connections projects, 8 Complete Streets projects, two intersection improvement projects, two bicycle infrastructure projects, and two major infrastructure projects. He noted that approximately two-thirds of the projects under consideration for funding this year have been scored in prior years but were not funded primarily due to funding limitations. He stated that the majority of new funding that the MPO board can allocate to new projects is available in the fifth and final year of this TIP, which is FFY 2027. He noted that there is also new funding available in each FFY of the TIP, beginning in FFY 2023, due to the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law last year. He stated that funding will be discussed more at the next MPO meeting.

M. Genova reminded the board that TIP decision-making this year will reflect the board's endorsement in November 2021 of new TIP project cost change policies. He encouraged board members to keep in mind their decision to set a flexible 25 percent design submission threshold for project programming as they consider programming scenarios. M. Genova noted that the new project cost change policies also include a requirement that project proponents bring updates to the board on any projects that had significant project cost increases, and that those updates will continue to be brought at this meeting and the next two MPO meetings.

M. Genova stated that the project scores presented at this meeting were generated using the TIP scoring criteria endorsed by the MPO board in October of 2020. The scores are on a 100-point scale. M. Genova noted that each investment program uses a slightly different set of scoring criteria, so the board should consider each project score in comparison to other projects of the same type within the same investment program and not compare projects across different investment programs.

M. Genova stated that the TIP project scores under consideration were reviewed in a collaborative scoring process by MPO staff and project proponents to ensure projects were fairly evaluated. He stated that notes on the status of projects under consideration are included in the slides. The projects fall into three status categories reflecting MassDOT's designations: (1) Project Review Committee (PRC) approved, (2) 25 percent design submitted, and (3) 25 percent design rejected. He noted that projects are listed by investment program and ranked from highest to lowest score within each program.

M. Genova discussed each project under consideration in detail. Project descriptions and scoring results and the recording of this discussion can be found on the MPO calendar.

M. Genova encouraged the board to consider and discuss the projects being reviewed and potential programming scenarios at this meeting and at the next MPO meeting. He reminded the board of the intention for a final scenario to be selected at the March 31, 2022, MPO meeting with a subsequent vote to release the scenario for public review in late April.

Discussion

D. Amstutz noted that two projects, project #609204 (Belmont Community Path) and project #610666 (Swampscott Rail Trail), both received many public comment letters last year, in addition to many recent letters of support. He suggested that it would be useful if the proponents of those projects could discuss the contents of the letters received, particularly the concerns of community members and direct abutters, to give the board more context on how the 25 percent designs of the projects included public feedback. D. Amstutz also asked about the 25 percent rejected status of project #610666 (Swampscott Rail Trail). He asked whether the cost estimate for the project was still conceptual given the project's status.

M. Genova responded that he could encourage the proponents of projects #609204 (Belmont Community Path) and #610666 (Swampscott Rail Trail) to provide a short update to the board on the status of the projects in relation to public comments at an upcoming meeting. He stated that both communities have been working with abutters to address concerns. M. Genova stated that the cost estimate for project #610666 (Swampscott Rail Trail) has not been updated since the project was first approved by the PRC. He stated that the cost estimate is still fairly conceptual but will likely be updated once the 25 percent design plans are resubmitted to MassDOT.

Jay Monty (City of Everett) noted that among many great projects there are a few larger and more expensive LRTP projects such as project #607981 (McGrath Boulevard in Somerville) and project #609246 (Western Avenue reconstruction in Lynn). He suggested more consideration of funding needs and contexts for these larger projects in the coming weeks.

L. Diggins noted that the MPO is in a good funding situation this year. He expressed approval for project #607981 (McGrath Boulevard in Somerville). He stated that he found the TIP scoring document posted on the meeting calendar very helpful. He requested more information on the current TIP scoring criteria and in particular the criteria for adjusting safety and equity points.

K. Miller asked about the fiscal sustainability score component of the Community Connections scoring. He asked if the score indicates whether the applicant can

implement the project with MPO funding, or whether it is an estimate of the project's continued sustainability after receiving Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding. K. Miller noted that CMAQ funding helps get projects started, with the expectation that they should be fiscally sustainable afterward.

M. Genova replied that MPO staff do ask project proponents a range of questions on that subject, including whether proponents of operations projects have identified funding for their fourth year and beyond. M. Genova stated that many proponents discuss their outreach to local business and money being allocated to projects in the town budget. He noted that MPO staff expect proponents to provide details on their future ability to maintain service and meet the matching requirements of initial grants they receive.

K. Miller suggested that if the scoring addresses whether proponents can implement the projects, then the criteria should be pass or fail. He suggested that if projects cannot pass, they should not be included as candidates for funding. K. Miller also suggested that it would be helpful to include a summary table listing projects by category and score.

L. Diggins agreed that a visual matrix of the projects and scores would be helpful. He suggested using a cost-benefit analysis framework to compare projects and their costs.

M. Genova replied that he could create a visual for projects and bring it to the next MPO meeting as a reference for future decision-making.

David Koses (City of Newton) noted that this year's TIP projects under consideration include two very small requests for Community Connections funding. He noted that in the past the board discussed the staff work involved in advancing these smaller projects, and whether the extremely small-scale projects were ultimately worth the level of effort required or if they could secure alternative funding.

M. Genova acknowledged that the MPO discussed this issue last fall and should consider this topic further. He stated that the current meeting and conversation are focused on providing an overview of applicants' projects, but over the next few MPO meetings MPO staff intend to work with MassDOT and MAPC staff to discuss potential pathways for advancing the projects under consideration, including the question of capacity to manage contracts.

Dennis Giombetti (City of Framingham) asked whether all of the relevant cities and towns have been notified of the TIP projects currently under consideration so they can advocate for their programming.

M. Genova responded that all of the project proponents have been actively engaging their communities and have received many public comments. He stated that he will continue to provide project proponents with updates on the scoring process and final scores as well as updates before and after each MPO meeting where projects are discussed and the public has opportunities to advocate for projects.

D. Amstutz mentioned that another area of concern the board discussed last fall involved the challenges of MassDOT managing multi-year Community Connections transit projects. He stated that this issue will probably be discussed again at upcoming meetings.

John Romano (MassDOT) asked E. Bourassa whether the ad-hoc committee would meet to discuss the issue.

E. Bourassa stated that the board had previously discussed the possibility of the ad-hoc committee reconvening to review project costs, but ultimately this would be the Chair's decision. He stated that he would be happy to convene if necessary and if the ad-hoc committee had a recommendation about the process, but he noted that since the MPO is already in TIP development it may be unnecessary to convene separately. He suggested that the board should consider TIP decisions together instead.

D. Mohler stated that he did not think it would be necessary for the ad-hoc committee to meet to discuss what M. Genova presented today. He asked if the ad-hoc committee would want to meet for a deeper dive into the three projects that have passed the 25 percent threshold, with detailed presentations on each application. He stated that the board heard from advocates, designers, and communities today about those projects.

E. Bourassa suggested that this information should be presented to the full MPO board. He stated that the level of detail the City of Wilmington presented to the board today (on project #609253, Lowell Street and Woburn Street Intersection Improvement in Wilmington, programmed for FFY 2023) was a good example of what would be helpful for board members to hear about projects under consideration.

Thomas Bent (City of Somerville) agreed with E. Bourassa that the information should be brought to the full MPO board. He noted that it appears that only half of the submitted projects are at the 25 percent design stage. He noted that the board had agreed not to hold applicants to the 25 percent standard this year, being the first year after criteria were changed.

E. Bourassa agreed that the lower design percentages for many projects this year is a challenge for the board. He noted that the board had committed to flexibility this year on

the 25 percent policy, but the board had also wanted to program projects that were further along and with more complete cost estimates. He stated that the MPO has had thorough investigations and discussions of cost estimates and influencing factors.

J. Romano agreed with E. Bourassa and T. Bent's comments. He stated that he supported further conversations with the full MPO board.

D. Mohler invited members of the public to comment.

Vincent Stanton (Select Board member, Town of Belmont) responded to D. Amstutz's comment requesting that project proponents respond to issues raised by abutters. He stated that last year the Belmont Community Path Project Committee released a lengthy letter co-signed by town administrators to address those concerns about project #609204 (Belmont Community Path). He stated that the committee has held an extensive public process with hundreds of public meetings over many years to demonstrate support for the project and respond to issues raised by abutters, and that information is on record. V. Stanton also advocated for Belmont projects to be considered in the same category as Swampscott projects and for direct comparison and consideration of project scores across categories. V. Stanton also stated that the proposed path is not 16 feet wide as noted in the project summary, but rather 12 feet wide with a 4-foot earth buffer.

R. Benevento advocated for two projects with which his company is involved: project #609246 (reconstruction of Western Avenue in Lynn) and project #610932 (rehabilitation of Washington Street in Brookline). He noted project #610932 was the highest-scoring project in the Complete Streets category. He stated that this project was an extension of project #610674 (Boston Street improvements in Salem). R. Benevento noted that project #610932 ranked fourth and that the Town of Brookline is implementing a robust design review process. He stated that both projects are currently in the 25 percent design phase awaiting submission and both have strong public support. He advocated for both projects to be added to the TIP as placeholders given their size and costs. R. Benevento stated that when projects are delayed, they affect TIP programming and their cost inflates. He described recent changes in the right-of-way process involving payments that could delay projects.

Marzie Galazka (Community Development Director, Town of Swampscott) advocated for project #610666 (Swampscott Rail Trail). She stated that she provided the board with an updated letter regarding the project and addressing residents' concerns. She stated that past concerns involved right-of-way acquisition and proximity of the trail to residential homes. She stated that the town is addressing residents' ongoing concerns

and that there has been strong support for the project from town administrators and community partners, including financial support for the town to advance the project to 75 percent to 100 percent design. M. Galazka advocated for the rail trail project to be constructed concurrently with an adjacent elementary school being constructed this fall, and she stated that the trail is an important cross-town connector. M. Galazka stated that the 25 percent design for the project was resubmitted to MassDOT because the initial design did not include a bridge crossing Route 1A/Paradise Road.

10. Members Items

There were none.

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 |
| City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency) | Jim Fitzgerald |
| City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department) | Bill Conroy |
| Federal Highway Administration | Kenneth Miller |
| Federal Transit Administration | blank |
| Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville) | Tom Bent |
| | Brad Rawson |
| 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 | Amira Patterson |
| Metropolitan Area Planning Council | Eric Bourassa |
| MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham) | Dennis Giombetti |
| Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton) | |
| North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly) | Denise Deschamps |
| North Suburban Planning Council (Town of Burlington) | Melissa 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 Steven Olanoff |

| Other Attendees | Affiliation |
|------------------------|---|
| Paul Alunni | Town of Wilmington |
| Casey Auch | |
| Eric Barber | City of Beverly |
| Richard Benevento | WorldTech Engineering |
| Todd Blake | City of Medford |
| Joe Blankenship | Boston Planning & Development Agency |
| Catherine Bowen | Town of Belmont |
| John Bowman | |
| Sarah Bradbury | MassDOT District 3 |
| Cassandra Ostrander | FHWA |
| Paul Cobuzzi | |
| Mike Collins | City of Beverly |
| Johannes Epke | Conservation Law Foundation |
| Bruno Fisher | Montachusett Regional Transit Authority |
| Bonnie Friedman | Town of Belmont |
| Marzie Galazka | Town of Swampscott |
| Sophia Galimore | TransAction Associates |
| Valerie Gingrich | Town of Wilmington |
| Joy Glynn | MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) |
| John Gonzalez | |
| Michelle Ho | MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning |
| Patrick Hoey | Boston Transportation Department |
| Todd Kirrane | Town of Brookline |
| Chris Klem | MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning |
| Ali Kleyman | City of Somerville |
| Josh Klingenstein | MBTA |
| Derek Krevat | MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning |
| David Kucharsky | City of Salem |
| Aleida Leza | |
| David Manugian | Town of Bedford |
| Benjamin Muller | MassDOT District 6 |
| Adi Nochur | MAPC |
| Elizabeth Oltman | |
| Jeanette Rebecchi | Town of Bedford |
| Jeffrey Roth | Town of Belmont |
| Jon Seward | Mass Moves / Regional Transportation Advisory Council |
| Dennis Sheehan | Town of Stoneham |
| Vincent Stanton | Town of Belmont |

| Other Attendees | Affiliation |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Tyler Terrasi | MWRTA |
| Frank Tramontozzi | City of Quincy |
| Andrew Wang | |
| Laura Weiner | City of Watertown |
| Erin Wortman | Town of Stoneham |

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Gina Perille

Annette Demchur

Róisín Foley

Hiral Gandhi

Matt Genova

Sandy Johnston

Anne McGahan

Sean Rourke

Michelle Scott

Stella Jordan

Betsy Harvey

Jonathan Church

Matthew Archer

Srilekha Murthy

Silva Avazyan

Emily Domanico

Rebecca Morgan

Marty Milkovits

Heyne Kim

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Title VI Specialist

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By Telephone:

857.702.3702 (voice)

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