

# Draft Memorandum for the Record

## Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary

### October 19, 2023, Meeting

1:00 PM–2:05 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Jen Rowe, Chair, representing Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston and the Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

## Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

### 1. Overview—*Jen Rowe, Chair, and Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

J. Rowe and E. Lapointe welcomed committee members to the first meeting of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee.

E. Lapointe stated that the objective of this meeting is to define and discuss the committee's role and to establish a baseline understanding of current challenges and potential ways to address them.

### 2. Purpose and Needs—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, and Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

T. Teich stated that the committee was established in the MPO's Operations Plan to be a forum for the following:

- Providing ongoing input into the TIP development process
- Diving deeper into topics of interest
- Engaging in dialogue between board members and project proponents
- Improve information sharing and transparency

E. Lapointe discussed challenges with project information sharing, using the development of the Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2024–28 TIP as an example. In this development, four target-funded projects had cost increases of more than 30 percent in FFY 2024. Nine projects were delayed, five of which were delayed out of FFY 2024.

E. Lapointe stated that delays and cost increases are a symptom of volatility and uncertainty.

E. Lapointe stated that the MPO board votes on amendments to all projects and programs represented in the TIP, including the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's programs. A high volume of amendments was made to the FFYs

2023–27 TIP with recurring themes such as cost changes due to inflation and congressional earmarks.

E. Lapointe stated that this committee presents an opportunity to incorporate points of feedback earlier in the TIP process and discuss ongoing needs. E. Lapointe reviewed a potential timeline for the committee.

### ***Discussion***

Brad Rawson, Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville), encouraged committee members to consider the perspectives of municipal, state, and federal partners.

### **3. Contextualizing Challenges—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager***

E. Lapointe stated that one challenge for municipalities is identifying which investment program a project qualifies for due to subdivisions within investment programs.

E. Lapointe stated that with the Transit Transformation investment program, regional transit authorities, such as the MBTA, will be applying at the same time as they apply to all other investment programs. This will help to address an existing concern. Previously during TIP development, if the MPO had funding available in its regional target funds during scenario development, the MBTA would bring projects later in the TIP process to consider for funding. This practice would result in projects not being scored due to time constraints.

E. Lapointe stated that a 25 percent design requirement was established by the MPO board to address project volatility, as there is a reasonable expectation that the project scope will not change significantly once it has reached this threshold. This requirement has created a higher barrier to entry for TIP projects, leading to fewer project applications.

E. Lapointe stated that there is limited contingency in regional target funding programming to account for project readiness challenges. E. Lapointe stated that in previous TIP cycles, approximately \$20 million was held in reserve for near-years of the TIP in case a project is ready to be constructed early. For FFYs 2024 and 2025, approximately \$3.7 million and \$2.5 million are held in reserve, respectively.

E. Lapointe stated that there is a downward trend for project applications to investment programs other than the Community Connections investment program; these programs account for 98 percent of all funding. E. Lapointe stated that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has resulted in increased funding from formula funds and discretionary grants.

E. Lapointe stated that Advance Construction obligations for regionally significant projects, such as Rutherford Avenue in Boston, McGrath Boulevard in Somerville, and Western Avenue in Lynn, are expected to continue until 2032. Changes in project readiness for these projects could lead to further financial constraints that necessitate projects to receive discretionary grant awards.

#### **4. Next Steps—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager***

E. Lapointe stated that the TIP Universe of Projects will be presented to the MPO board and this committee in December to preview emerging themes from project applications.

E. Lapointe shared questions to consider moving forward.

#### **5. Discussion**

Lenard Diggins, Regional Transportation Advisory Council, asked if scoring additional projects earlier in the TIP cycle would assist in limiting the number of unscored projects late in the scenario development process. E. Lapointe stated that the Transit Transformation program gives agencies that have supplied last minute projects in the past, such as the MBTA, an opportunity for information sharing to occur.

Robert King, Town of Brookline, asked if unused funds will carryover into the next fiscal year. E. Lapointe stated that the funds do not carryover, but they can be identified for other funding uses. In FFY 2023, there was contingency available and projects programmed for FFY 2023 increased in cost, so the contingency was programmed to the cost increases. E. Lapointe stated that the first year in the TIP is most important for contingency.

R. King asked what the causes of the decrease in project applications could be. E. Lapointe stated that one barrier, which is being addressed, in part, by the Project Design Pilot, is the financial burden required for a project to reach appropriate levels of design. E. Lapointe discussed project specifications, such as sidewalk and bicycle lane requirements, and noted that some existing designs may not qualify for programming. John Bechard, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, offered to help steer project proponents through challenges such as permitting and funding.

Eric Bourassa, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), discussed municipal capacity to bring forward projects aligned with state and MPO specifications.

Kristen Guichard, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton), discussed the necessary political mobilization to get approvals and authorizations at Town Meetings.

## **6. Members Items**

There were none.

## **7. Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the MAPC (E. Bourassa). The motion carried.

## Attendance

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<b>Members</b>	<b>Representatives and Alternates</b>
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Jen Rowe
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Office of Transportation Planning)	Derek Krevat
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)	John Bechard
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
Town of Arlington	John Alessi
MetroWest Regional Collaborative, City of Framingham	Dennis Giombetti
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination, Town of Acton	Kristen Guichard
Inner Core Committee, City of Somerville	Brad Rawson
Town of Brookline	Robert King

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<b>Other Attendees</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Rich Benevento	Tighe & Bond
Ali Kleyman	MBTA
Benjamin Muller	MassDOT
Amira Patterson	MBTA Advisory Board

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### **MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff**

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Tegin Teich, Executive Director  
Logan Casey  
Annette Demchur  
Ethan Lapointe  
Erin Maguire

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