

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary

February 13, 2025 Meeting

1:00 PM–2:49 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

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

Decisions

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the summary of the meeting of December 19, 2024

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

J. Rowe welcomed committee members to the meeting of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee. See attendance on page 11.

2. Public Comments

Marzie Galazka (Town of Swampscott) requested continued appropriation of funding for the Swampscott Rail Trail project, which is currently programmed on the TIP in federal fiscal year (FFY) 2028. She encouraged members to direct anyone with questions about the project to herself or to Dustin Kerksieck, a consultant for the project.

JR Frey (Town of Hingham) explained that the Town of Hingham had provided a comment on the draft Readiness Scenario requesting that the Hingham Improvements on Route 3A project (Project # 605168) continue to be funded in FFY 2026 instead of FFY 2027.

3. Action Item: Approval of December 19, 2024, TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- December 19, 2024, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of December 19, 2024, was made by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (Eric Bourassa) and seconded by the Town of Arlington (John Alessi). The motion carried.

4. Action Item: Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2026-30 TIP Readiness Status and Scenario—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- FFYs 2026–30 Transportation Improvement Program Readiness Scenario ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))
- Draft Programming Policies to Address TIP Project Cost Increases ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

E. Lapointe introduced his presentation, explaining that the purpose was to discuss challenges and issues facing the MPO during the development of the FFYs 2026-30 TIP as well as to discuss potential solutions.

E. Lapointe noted that in the previous TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting on December 19, 2024, he had discussed some of the changes to projects that were funded in FFY 2026 but recommended for delay into FFY 2027, contributing to the major deficit in FFY 2027. He also noted that MPO staff had expected low application volumes due to trends in recent years; however, there were ten applications for the Core Investment Programs (Complete Streets, Intersection Improvements, and Bicycle Network and Pedestrian Connections), 11 applications for the Transit Transformation Program, and seven applications for the Community Connections Program. Application levels are likely to remain high because some municipalities chose not to apply this year because of anticipated fiscal constraint.

E. Lapointe listed the projects for which applicants are seeking funding in FFYs 2026–30 and made some comments regarding design status:

- (Project ID#) 613885: Bolton—Reconstruction of Route 117 (Main Street) from 200 feet west of John Powers Lane to the Intersection of Mechanic Street including Culvert Replacement
 - Pre-25 percent design checklist submitted on February 10, 2024
- 613658: Cambridge—New Bridge and Shared-Use Path Construction over Fitchburg Line at Danehy Park Connector
- 612870: Concord—Assabet River Multi-Use Trail and Bridge Construction
 - 25 percent design is prepared to be submitted in March
- 613585: Everett—Reconstruction of Vine Street and Third Street from Chelsea Street to Second Street
 - 25 percent design is in progress
- 613695: Lexington—Roadway Reconstruction on Hartwell Avenue and Bedford Street
 - 25 percent design expected in the second or third quarter of this calendar year
 - This project is likely to be funded over multiple years due to its high cost of \$46,195,840.
- 612947: Marblehead—Village Street Bridge Replacement M-04-001
 - 25 percent design expected in March
- 612534: Melrose—Lebanon Street Improvement Project (Lynde Street to Malden City Line)
 - 25 percent design expected in the second or third quarter of this calendar year
- 612536: Needham—Reconstruction of Highland Avenue, from Webster Street to Great Plain Avenue
 - 25 percent design is expected in December 2025
- 613594: Newton—Bridge Replacement on Christina Street
 - 25 percent design is expected in Fall 2026
- 609388: Wenham—Safety Improvements on Route 1A
 - 75 percent design was received on February 8, 2024

E. Lapointe then shifted the conversation to the Readiness Scenario, noting that this information would also be presented at the MPO board meeting on February 20, 2024. First, he gave some background about how the data for each project was color-coded and displayed on the spreadsheets. He also noted that this new Readiness Scenario includes information about the number of years since each project has achieved a design milestone with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). If a project has not achieved a design milestone in several years, this may be a sign that the project is at risk for delay. E. Lapointe brought up the TIP Project Cost Change Policy,

which was published on September 23, 2021, and encouraged board members and members of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee to review the policy.

E. Lapointe gave an overview of TIP Readiness Days, which are a series of days in early February when MassDOT staff meets with each of the Massachusetts MPOs. The Readiness Days team solicits information from stakeholders to provide a recommended readiness year for each project. Project cost increases and budget deficits are usually not considered. This year, MPO staff have worked to better anticipate the news received on Readiness Days by hosting Quarterly Readiness Days and Subregional Readiness Days with project proponents and other stakeholders. This proactive solicitation of project updates is meant to reduce the number of surprises on Readiness Days.

E. Lapointe gave a forecast of the funding surpluses and deficits in the coming years. There are significant surpluses in FFYs 2025 and 2026, but there is a large deficit in FFY 2027. FFYs 2028 and 2029 have minor surpluses and deficits, and FFY 2030 has a surplus of about \$40 million.

The surplus in FFY 2025 is a result of three projects being delayed from FFY 2025 to FFY 2026:

- 610544: Peabody—Multi-Use Path Construction of Independence Greenway at I-95 and Route 1
 - This project also experienced a cost increase of 58 percent.
- 611982: Medford—Shared-Use Path Connection at the Route 28/Wellington Underpass
- 608067: Woburn—Intersection Reconstruction at Route 3 (Cambridge Road) and Bedford Road and South Bedford Street

There are two projects that MPO staff have flagged as being at risk of being delayed from FFY 2025:

- 609211: Peabody—Independence Greenway Extension
 - This project was delayed from FFY 2024 to FFY 2025 due to utility issues, and it has a low risk of being delayed to FFY 2026.
- 608051: Wilmington—Reconstruction on Route 38 (Main Street) from Route 62 to the Woburn City Line
 - MPO staff are monitoring this project due to its high cost.

The surplus in FFY 2026 is a result of seven projects being delayed from FFY 2026 to FFY 2027. Four of these seven projects were also delayed from FFY 2025, and two of these four projects were delayed from FFY 2024 as well. E. Lapointe reminded the committee that four projects had been flagged as at risk for delay at the previous TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting on December 19, 2024:

- 605857: Norwood—Intersection Improvements at Route 1 and University Avenue/Everett Street
 - This project is also at risk for a large cost increase due to its early design stage and a change in the project's scope to incorporate the construction of a large culvert.
- 606453: Boston—Improvements on Boylston Street, from Intersection of Brookline Avenue and Park Drive to Ipswich Street
 - The 75 percent design update has been delayed due to a scope change to incorporate the design of a large intersection at Park Drive. The cost is expected to increase to about \$15 million from \$8,665,052.
- 608045: Milford—Rehabilitation on Route 16, from Route 109 to Beaver Street
 - This project requires a third 25 percent design submission with additional environmental permits.
- 609252: Lynn—Rehabilitation of Essex Street
 - MassDOT is still waiting for a 25 percent design submission for this project. Due to its very early design stage and probable permitting needs, this project is at high risk for a cost increase and for delays in future TIP cycles.

E. Lapointe then moved on to list the projects at risk for delay to FFY 2027 that were not included in the December 19, 2024 TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee discussion:

- 609532: Chelsea—Targeted Safety Improvements and Related Work on Broadway, from Williams Street to City Hall Avenue
 - This project, a MassDOT fill-in project, has a substantial amount of right-of-way title work required.
- 605168: Hingham—Improvements on Route 3A from Otis Street including Summer Street and Rotary; Rockland Street to George Washington Boulevard
 - The 75 percent design of this project is in revision due to concerns with utility plans and coastal permits. Last year, this project experienced a cost increase of 91 percent. MassDOT staff suggested that there was a possibility that the project could stay programmed in FFY 2026; however,

due to the project's large size, a delay late in the federal fiscal year could have serious implications.

- 610823: Quincy—Intersection Improvements at Willard Street and Ricciuti Drive
 - The 100 percent design submission of this project is overdue.

E. Lapointe described the projects that are at lower risk of being delayed from FFY 2026, but that are still important to monitor:

- 609204: Belmont—Community Path, Belmont Component of the Mass Central Rail Trail (Phase 1)
- 608940: Weston—Intersection Improvements at Boston Post Road (Route 20) at Wellesley Street
 - This project might be able to advertise in FFY 2025.

E. Lapointe then discussed projects programmed in FFY 2027. Only one project programmed in FFY 2027 is recommended to shift, while previous TIP cycles experienced much higher levels of delays in the second year of the TIP. The one project recommended for delay is:

- 608954: Weston—Reconstruction on Route 30
 - There were some delays during the design process and some difficulty coordinating the construction due to nearby wetlands.

E. Lapointe noted that there was a low volume of cost revisions for projects programmed in FFY 2027. However, this may be a result of projects being slow to reach new design milestones. MassDOT typically only updates project costs when design milestones are achieved. Therefore, a project that has not experienced any recent cost changes might not be a project with static cost; conversely, it may signal that the project is experiencing delays in its design and may see significant cost increases in its future.

E. Lapointe discussed delays of projects programmed in FFY 2028. MassDOT did not recommend any delays in this year, but the City of Boston recommended a delay for the Rutherford Avenue project (606226). The MPO staff are recommending a delay for Malden's Spot Pond Brook Greenway project (613088) due to delays in the project's design, lack of communication from the City about the project, and recent staff turnover. E. Lapointe also flagged a few projects that are at lower risk for delays:

- 610932: Brookline—Rehabilitation of Washington Street

- The advertisement date is in the fourth quarter of 2024. Even a small delay poses the risk of having to reprogram the project from FFY 2028 to FFY 2029.
- 610691: Natick—Cochituate Rail Trail Extension (MBTA Station to Mechanic Street) – Natick Center Connection
 - This project ties into one of the MBTA’s proposed projects, the Natick Center Station Accessibility Improvement Project. There is a potential for delay to the Rail Trail Extension if the MBTA project is delayed.
- 610666: Swampscott—Rail Trail Construction
 - This project could be a candidate for delay to FFY 2029. The project has a substantially lower cost compared to other similar Rail Trail projects.

There were no delays in FFY 2029, so E. Lapointe continued the discussion with a review of the major capital projects, beginning with MassDOT’s McGrath Boulevard Construction project in Somerville (607981). The 25 percent design update that was submitted on October 21, 2024, incorporated a revised cost estimate, prompting MassDOT to consider phasing the project. This project is at high risk for delay because of issues with Article 97 permitting surrounding a footbridge near the project area. The recent cost increase of this project will be funded with an increased obligation in FFY 2030. This project recently was awarded a Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant for \$43 million (\$53.75 million total, when including the match), which must be obligated by FFY 2028. However, because of recent uncertainty over the use of federal funding, incorporation of this grant is not confirmed, and relying on this grant could pose risks in the future.

Next, E. Lapointe discussed Lynn’s Rehabilitation of Western Avenue project (609246). This project is at a high risk of delay and cost increase, as it has not received an updated cost estimate since 2018. Boston’s Reconstruction of Rutherford Avenue project (606226) is in a similar situation, as it has been more than four years since its last cost estimate was released. E. Lapointe then laid out the advance construction schedule for the Rutherford Avenue project, which is as follows:

- FFY 2029: \$33,500,000
- FFY 2030: \$33,500,000
- FFY 2031: \$44,000,000
- FFY 2032: \$44,759,449
- FFY 2033: \$42,000,000

These significant funding obligations may preclude the MPO from funding other projects programmed in the Long-Range Transportation Plan. E. Lapointe reminded the

committee that Grant Anticipation Notes (GANs), the debt service for the Next-Generation Bridge Program, will reduce MPO Regional Target funding availability beginning in FFY 2032.

E. Lapointe laid out his key takeaways from this analysis. First, because the cost deficits in FFYs 2027 and 2028 outweigh the cost surpluses in FFYs 2029 and 2030, the deficits cannot be solved simply by delaying projects into the outer years of the TIP. Next, further cost increases are likely to emerge as proponents submit their 25 percent design updates in March. Finally, E. Lapointe recommended that the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee consider the recommendations of the TIP Cost Change Committee. He gave the example of requiring project proponents to submit a revised cost estimate each year.

E. Lapointe discussed key considerations for this year's TIP cycle. He stated that last year's balanced strategy—of funding new projects and delaying current projects to address deficits while still addressing new priorities—may be more difficult to pursue this year due to the scale of the current deficit. Another compounding factor is that MPO staff received many project applications this winter, many of which were further along in the design process than projects currently programmed in the TIP. Lastly, funding has been relatively plentiful in recent years, despite budget deficits. If funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is lost and MassDOT resumes reserving funding for GANs, the budget issues will worsen.

E. Lapointe concluded the presentation by recommending that the committee consider a few topics for discussion, such as the near-term and long-term challenges for the TIP.

Discussion

E. Bourassa asked if projects programmed in FFY 2025 must be obligated by September 2025.

E. Lapointe answered affirmatively but noted that transit projects were distinct. Flexes to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) need to be conducted by May 2025. He recommends that the amendment programming these projects be presented by the March 6, 2025, MPO meeting. However, these projects have much more flexibility as to when they must be advertised. They do not have to go out to bid by the end of the federal fiscal year like MassDOT projects must.

Lenard Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) asked if the recommendations from the TIP Cost Change Committee in 2021 were having any effect on current project delays. He also asked if there were any patterns that link projects that experience major cost increases and delays.

E. Lapointe answered that a significant number of the projects that are chronically delayed actually predate the TIP Cost Change Committee and have essentially been grandfathered in. In addition, the design requirements to reach 25 percent design have changed, so project proponents typically take longer to reach this milestone or require multiple resubmissions. E. Lapointe suggested that instead of having milestone-related requirements, such as necessitating a 25 percent design submission to receive funding for a certain year, there could be communication-based requirements instead. This could take the form of requiring annual updates of project cost and scope status.

J. Ostroff asked if the FTA has to approve TIP amendments.

E. Lapointe responded that MPO staff are working with the FTA to determine if this is a requirement, as well as if the FTA Flex amendment is feasible.

Brad Rawson (City of Somerville) asked if the MPO staff can determine which projects have significant scope changes that affect project timelines and costs. He suggested that the MPO board should discuss whether or not to fund projects that have changed drastically since they were scored and voted on.

Tom Bent (City of Somerville) agreed with B. Rawson and stated that this issue was one of the reasons why the TIP Cost Change Committee was formed.

E. Lapointe reminded the committee of his office hours that members can sign up for.

John Romano (MassDOT) proposed resurrecting the TIP Cost Change Committee.

L. Diggins suggested that the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee can continue the work of the TIP Cost Change Committee.

E. Bourassa gave more context about the roles of the TIP Cost Change Committee. He explained that the committee considered reevaluating projects in an objective context to determine which would get delayed or removed from the TIP entirely. Many of the projects that continue to be delayed and increase in cost were programmed before the committee was formed. E. Bourassa proposed that the MPO board have a conversation about reconsidering the programming status of projects that cause persistent problems.

E. Lapointe stated that the MPO staff could invite project proponents to the March 13, 2025, TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting to answer questions. He reminded the committee that MPO staff are re-scoring older projects that may have been evaluated using different criteria, on a different scale, or based on an out-of-date project scope.

J. Romano explained that the TIP Cost Change Committee required that project proponents submit information about scope changes when the project experiences a major cost increase. He expressed concern about keeping projects on the TIP when they have not had a recent cost update.

B. Rawson said that the large-scale projects should not be made into scapegoats simply due to their high costs. He also suggested having municipalities communicate about their project priorities if they have multiple programmed projects on the TIP.

5. Members' Items

There were none.

6. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Lenard Diggins) and seconded by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (Eric Bourassa). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members

Representatives and Alternates

| | |
|---|------------------|
| City of Boston | Jen Rowe |
| Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville) | Brad Rawson |
| | Tom Bent |
| Metropolitan Area Planning Council | Eric Bourassa |
| Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) | Chris Klem |
| Massachusetts Department of Transportation | Tracie Lenhardt |
| MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) | Tyler Terrasi |
| MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham) | Dennis Giombetti |
| Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton) | - |
| Regional Transportation Advisory Council | Lenard Diggins |
| Town of Arlington | John Alessi |
| Town of Brookline | Erin Chute |

| Other Attendees | Affiliation |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Aleida Leza | - |
| Anthony Jones | Federal Highway Administration |
| Barbara Lachance | MassDOT |
| Benjamin Coulombe | MWRTA |
| Dustin Kerksieck | STV |
| Hanna Switekowski | MBTA Advisory Board |
| Jim Nee | MWRTA |
| Joan Meschino | Third Plymouth District |
| John Romano | MassDOT |
| Jon Rockwell | The Engineering Corp. (TEC) |
| Josh Ostroff | MBTA |
| Joy Glynn | MWRTA |
| JR Frey | Town of Hingham |
| Laurel Siegel | City of Medford |
| Lyriss Liautaud | MassDOT |
| Marzie Galazka | Town of Swampscott |
| Meghan McNamara | Town of Lexington |
| Melissa Santley | MassDOT |
| Samira Saad | Federal Highway Administration |
| Sheila Page | Town of Wellesley |

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Lauren Magee

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