



FACT SHEET

DRAFT POLICY CHANGES FOR THE BOSTON REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION'S (MPO) TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP)

This fact sheet outlines proposed policy changes to the Boston Region MPO's TIP process. This proposal is available in a more detailed format in a [memo](#) submitted to the MPO board for consideration at the board's meeting on Thursday, September 23, 2021. At that meeting, the board voted to release this proposal for public review. The MPO welcomes feedback on these proposed policies. The public comment period will close at 5:00 PM on Monday, October 18, 2021.



What is the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee?

The TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee is comprised of Boston Region MPO board members who volunteered their time to help address persistent cost increases for those projects funded through the TIP, the MPO's five-year capital plan. In recent years, cost increases to projects selected for funding by the MPO have limited the board's ability to fund new projects, as little funding remained available after all cost increases were covered.

The MPO board established this committee in April 2021 to explore solutions to this challenge. The committee's work formally began on June 3, 2021. Over the course of six meetings throughout the summer of 2021, the committee explored data on past TIP project funding, identified key issues, and drafted policy proposals for consideration by the full MPO board.

The committee, comprised of nine members of the MPO board, is chaired by the representative of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. Additional seats are held by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) Highway Division, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's Advisory Board, the Regional Transportation Advisory Council, and five municipalities in the Boston region (Boston, Everett, Medway, Rockland, and Somerville).

What were the key issues identified by the committee?

The committee identified several issues concerning current MPO practice that have contributed to the cost increase challenges faced by the board during recent TIP development cycles:

1. The MPO currently selects projects for funding in the TIP early in the overall project design and development process. By allowing projects to be funded any time after approval by MassDOT's Project Review Committee (PRC), the MPO is taking on a great degree of risk due to the uncertainty of project costs early in design. Generally, the earlier in the design process a project is added to the TIP, the greater the likelihood its final cost will be significantly higher than its original projected cost.
2. The MPO lacks a clearly defined process for making decisions about how to approach project cost increases when they occur. As a result, stakeholders in the TIP process may believe that decisions are arbitrary or unfair.
3. There is often limited direct engagement between many project proponents and the MPO board and staff, except for communication that is absolutely necessary for developing the new TIP. Currently, significant resources are not devoted to proactive monitoring of projects in the TIP.
4. Historically, the MPO did not set robust expectations for project proponents after their projects were originally selected for funding in the TIP. As a result, project proponents may lack clarity in terms of their responsibilities for advancing projects through development and design to construction.

What policies did the committee propose to address these challenges?

To address the issues identified above, the committee proposed policies that fell into three categories:

Proposed Policy #1: Require More Advanced Design Status at Project Programming

The committee recommended that the MPO should require project proponents to submit 25 percent design plans and obtain an updated cost estimate from MassDOT, based on these plans, to be eligible for TIP funding. This policy would apply to all projects considered for funding by the MPO.

Coupled with this higher programming threshold, the committee recommended that the MPO make three complementary policy changes:

1. Formalize a preliminary project evaluation step that would offer proponents guidance on how their projects would score, based on the MPO's project-evaluation criteria, before proponents invest local resources to reach 25 percent design. This preliminary scoring could be done any time after a project has been PRC-approved.
2. Establish year-over-year benchmarks for marking progress on project design to set clear expectations for project proponents at the outset of the programming process. These benchmarks would be used to gauge the extent to which projects are advancing at an appropriate pace and could act as an early warning sign for those projects that are not on schedule.
3. Create additional instructional materials about the TIP process to support project proponents. These materials should take the form of a TIP how-to guide that outlines all of the key steps and requirements for proponents to have a project funded in the TIP.

Proposed Policy #2: Create Additional Touch Points Between Project Proponents, MPO Staff, the MPO Board, and MassDOT Staff

To enhance proactive communication between all TIP stakeholders, the committee recommended that the MPO do the following:

1. Establish biannual check-ins between MPO staff, project proponents, and MassDOT Highway District staff. These check-ins would provide an opportunity to regularly discuss project progress and address challenges and questions as they arise.
2. Encourage proponents to include MPO staff on design submissions to MassDOT, so that MPO staff will be informed if there are significant changes to a project's scope or design as it advances.
3. Require that proponents present to the MPO board in the event of major project cost or scope changes. This policy would provide an opportunity for the MPO board to directly engage proponents, learn why changes have occurred, and assess the appropriate course of action for addressing such changes.

Proposed Policy #3: Establish a Policy for Rescoring Projects When Costs Increase Beyond a Specified Threshold

The committee recommended that the MPO establish a process to adjudicate project cost increases when they occur. That process would follow these steps:

1. If a project increases in cost by \$2.5 million (for projects originally estimated to cost more than \$10 million) or 25 percent (for projects that cost less than \$10 million), the MPO would consider further action.
2. Proponents of projects that have exceeded either threshold above would be required to attend an MPO board meeting to explain the cause of the cost increase. Proponents would provide a short presentation and any supporting design documentation for the board's review, as needed or requested.
3. Proponents could have their projects rescored if the cost increase is related to scope changes that may increase the project's evaluation score. The project would then be compared to other projects in the TIP and assessed for cost-effectiveness, based on both project evaluation score and cost per scoring point.
4. The MPO board would then decide whether the cost increase should be funded. When making this decision, the board may also consider a host of other information, including the availability of funds in a given federal fiscal year (FFY); the distribution of MPO funds across project types and municipalities in the region; past cost increases and readiness issues for the project in question; and the cost, evaluation score, and readiness of other projects funded in the TIP. Project proponents would have the opportunity to comment on any decisions made by the MPO board.



When would these proposed changes be implemented?

These proposed changes would be implemented immediately following adoption, which is anticipated in November 2021. Therefore, the proposed policies would be in effect for the development of the FFY 2023–27 TIP, which will occur between October 2021 and June 2022. The MPO would reserve the right to adjust the implementation timeline for individual components of the proposed policy based on changing needs and conditions.

Will this proposal impact projects currently funded in the TIP?

No projects currently funded in the Boston Region MPO's FFYs 2022–26 TIP will see immediate changes to their funding amounts or programming years as a result of these proposed policy changes. If these policies are adopted by the MPO, any future decisions on project funding and schedules will be made by the board using these policies as a guiding framework.

How can I learn more about this proposal?

Boston Region MPO staff will host an open house on Thursday, October 14, 2021, at noon [via Zoom](#). All stakeholders, including municipal staff, state and regional partners, advocacy groups, and members of the public, are encouraged to attend. MPO staff will give a short presentation on the proposed policies, leaving the majority of the hour open for questions and comments from attendees.

More information on the proposed policies, including links to past committee meeting materials, is also available on the [Boston Region MPO's website](#).

How can I provide feedback on this proposal?

The Boston Region MPO welcomes feedback on this proposal from all stakeholders in the TIP process. Written feedback may be provided through the MPO's [online feedback form](#) or via email to Matt Genova, TIP Manager, at mgenova@ctps.org. Input is also welcome at the open house on October 14 and at the [MPO meeting](#) on Thursday, October 7, 2021, at 10:00 AM.

The public comment period will close at 5:00 PM on Monday, October 18, 2021.

What happens next?

The MPO board anticipates reviewing all public comments submitted on this proposal at its meeting on Thursday, November 4, 2021, at 10:00 AM. Based on this feedback, the board may then make adjustments to the proposed policies before voting to approve them. Once final policy changes have been adopted, MPO staff will communicate the new policies to all TIP stakeholders. Specific care will be taken to ensure that current and prospective TIP project proponents understand the implications of these policy changes for their projects in the coming months and years.



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简体中文 (Simplified Chinese)

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繁體中文 (Traditional Chinese)

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Kreyòl Ayisyen (Haitian Creole)

Si yon moun vle genyen enfòmasyon sa yo nan yon lòt lang, tanpri kontakte Espesyalis Boston Region MPO Title VI la nan nimewo 857.702.3700.

Português (Portuguese)

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Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese)

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