

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of August 13, 2008 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building.

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 PM.

1. Chair's Report – Kristina Johnson, *Chair and City of Quincy*

On July 31 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency published in the Federal Register its approval of changes to the Statewide Implementation Program (SIP) transit commitments. The SIP transit revisions are the improvements to the Fairmount Commuter Rail Line, 1,000 new park-and-ride spaces in the Boston Region, extension of the Green Line transit line to Medford Hillside with a spur to Union Square, and design (not construction) of the Blue Line/Red Line Connector. These projects substitute for projects approved in 1994, including restoration of the Arborway, extension of the Green Line to Ball Square, and design and construction of the Red/Blue Connector. The revised SIP does not affect the Commonwealth's ability to include the former commitment projects in its transportation planning process, seek future federal-funding for the projects, or undertake these specific transit projects as a state initiative.

The Governor's Office has released State FY 2008-2009 Commonwealth Capital applications. If you have pending state grants (PWED, STRAP, TOD, etc.), your 2008 score is no longer valid, and you must submit an FY 08-09 Commonwealth Capital application to ensure that you receive credit in your grant application. Kurt Gaertner, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, has indicated a one-month turn-around. Cities and towns are strongly encouraged to contact their respective grant administrators regarding this new process.

On August 14 the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee and the MPO is expected to vote on the Draft FFY 2009 UPWP. The Advisory Council submitted a comment letter to the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee, generally supporting the document but urging better coordination between study recommendations and their implementation.

Before next month's Advisory Council meeting, the Freight and Membership Committees will meet. The Freight Committee will meet at 1:00 PM in Conference Room 4. The Membership Committee will meet at 2:00 PM in the MPO Conference Room in Suite 2150, where participants will learn about a recent membership audit and consider methods to strengthen and expand membership.

In September the Advisory Council will elect a new chair and vice chair. Steve Olanoff, chair of the Nominating Committee, will present its recommendations later in today's meeting.

2. Approval of the Draft Meeting Minutes of May 14, June 11, and July 9, 2008

These minutes were approved unanimously

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

It would be helpful if the minutes were distributed more promptly following the meeting. Prompt distribution of the minutes may encourage more discussion. (Marcy Crowley, Wayland)

Approval of these minutes was delayed due to a series of weighty agendas. MPO staff works very diligently to ensure the timely dissemination of the minutes prior to each meeting. (K. Johnson)

3. Member Announcements

There were no member announcements.

4. Presentation: “Neighboring MPO Update: Old Colony Planning Council” – Charlie Kilmer, Transportation Manager

Charlie Kilmer detailed projects and planning initiatives in the fifteen-town Old Colony Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) region immediately south of the Boston Region MPO area.

- As part of its congestion management process, the Old Colony Planning Council (OCPC) has monitored park-and-ride lot utilization along commuter rail lines and highway corridors, studied origins of vehicles, recorded commuter rail boarding and alighting, and expanded its traffic count database.
- Similar to the Boston Region MPO, OCPC has developed a list of projects for its Draft FFYs 2009-2012 TIP, developed a coordinated human-services transportation plan, and advertised many of its capital projects.
- OCPC has worked closely with the Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) and the Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works (EOTPW) to move forward with the South Coast Rail project, an effort to extend commuter rail to New Bedford and Fall River, possibly through the Old Colony region.
- OCPC recently completed studies involving highway corridors in Easton, Plymouth, and Kingston. Corridor studies underway include Route 27 and Route 44. OCPC staff has recommended pursuing corridors studies related to Route 58 and Route 139.
- The region is currently conducting studies of regional bicycle and pedestrian mobility, and Massasoit Community College commuter mobility.
- Finally, OCPC is following commercial and residential development projects in the region, most notably for enticing the entertainment industry to Plymouth and a casino to Middleborough.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

The handout material does not show active freight rail lines. Has OCPC considered the impact of truck freight congestion, rail diversion or other related effects of supporting rail freight in the region, particularly as it relates to the South Coast Rail project? Does it consider the impact of development projects on freight infrastructure? (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)

Stakeholders have discussed coordinating freight service on off-peak hours. (C. Kilmer)

Freight needs greater support in a public policy platform. The South Coast Rail project is slated for 2016; in the interim there is a tremendous opportunity to allow freight service. (F. DeMasi)

How does the State expect to finance the South Coast Rail project? (Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge)

EOTPW will pursue federal New Starts funding and may consider a variety of other progressive financing strategies, including district improvement financing, local funding, and revenue generation and spending reform vis-à-vis the recommendations of the Transportation Finance Commission. (C. Kilmer)

What is the role of OCPC in the South Coast Rail project? (K. Johnson)

OCPC is providing technical support to the project, but it is not advocating on behalf of the politically charged endeavor. The Army Corps of Engineers will make a final determination on the best route alternative. (C. Kilmer)

Do OCPC studies include vehicle miles traveled (VMT) data? (F. DeMasi)

VMT data is a standard consideration in OCPC studies. (C. Kilmer)

Does OCPC produce one document that encompasses all of its plans? (J. Rosenblum)

Each plan is one document. Given the size of the plans, it would be difficult to compile all the plans in one document. (C. Kilmer)

Does OCPC consider alternative mode mobility as criteria in its TIP? (Chris Porter, MassBike)

Yes, like the Boston Region MPO, the Old Colony MPO utilizes TIP criteria that consider alternative modes, safety, and congestion. (C. Kilmer)

5. Presentation: “Urban Ring Phase II Update” – Ned Codd, Project Manager, EOTPW

Ned Codd presented updated information about the Urban Ring project, which would provide circumferential bus rapid transit (BRT) service around Boston’s inner suburbs connecting the MBTA’s radial rail transit system – roughly, the rim to the traditional hub-and-spoke design – and serving employment centers and environmental justice neighborhoods. Ultimately, the project will improve level of service rates in corridors throughout the region.

EOTPW has developed a locally preferred alternative that will attract 175,000 riders annually by 2030. Segment A will operate from Logan International Airport to Lechmere via the commuter rail corridor in Chelsea, Wellington Station, Assembly Square, and Sullivan Square. Segment B runs to the MIT campus, over the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge to Kenmore Square, under the Longwood Medical Area, and to Ruggles Station, with spurs to Allston and to Harvard Square. Finally, Segment C travels to Dudley Square, east to South Boston via Melnea Cass Boulevard, and to the Convention Center/World Trade Center area, with a spur to the Kennedy Library and Museum and UMass-Boston.

More information about the project is available online at: www.TheUrbanRing.com.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

The Urban Ring Compact, a coalition of communities in the Inner Core subregion, appreciates EOTPW's coordination and public involvement work. (J. Rosenblum)

When will the Advisory Council address this project? (J. Rosenblum)

The Advisory Council’s Regional Transportation Plan Committee is the most appropriate vehicle through which to comment on the project. The Plan Committee will meet – possibly more frequently than the Advisory Council’s monthly meetings - in the next two months to consider this and other projects and to develop a comment letter as these projects relate to the upcoming

MPO Plan Amendment. The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee expects that it will approve the Draft Amendment for public comment in late October and that the MPO will submit the Final Amendment for federal approval in late November. (K. Johnson)

In 1997 before the project was phased into three parts, the MBTA estimated that it would cost \$2.7 billion. Ten years later and after phasing, can the State estimate what will be the mid-point cost of the project? (John Businger, National Corridors Initiative)

Phase 2 is projected to cost \$2.2 billion in 2007 dollars. The State projects the mid-point cost to fall in a 2015 to 2020 construction window, so the mid-point costs are projected for Summer 2017. The State faces a challenge to pay for the project, but it will apply to the federal New Starts program and likely qualify for significant construction funding. The State still needs to address non-federal funding. (N. Codd)

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is may not be an appropriate mode for a transportation project of this magnitude. Based on the State's projected ridership figures, 175,000 to 200,000 passengers will require over 2,000 buses busloads, a length that would stretch for 25 miles – the same length of the proposed Urban Ring corridor. The nearly \$3 billion project will be less effective at relieving congestion through Boston than enhancements to the existing system. According to the Federal Transit Authority and the Federal Railroad Authority, of the 32 projects applying for federal New Starts funding, only two – the Urban Ring Phase II project and Silver Line Phase 3 – are not rail; many cities across the country have changed transportation modes for new projects from BRT to rail. It is disappointing that Massachusetts insists on using BRT for critical backbone transportation projects when the rest of the country is moving back to rail. In light of the above concerns, why did EOT not select rail as the preferred alternative for the Urban Ring? (Richard Arena, Association for Public Transportation)

While EOTPW considered rail, the rail alternative is too expensive. (N. Codd)

If Phase II of this project is too expensive, is there a guarantee that the State will build Phase III? Is it wise to pursue Phase II? (Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects)

If Phase II is too expensive to construct, does it mean that the State should not pursue Phases I and II?

6. Advisory Council Nominating Committee Announcement – Steve Olanoff, Nominating Committee Chair

The Nominating Committee met before the general body meeting to discuss and recommend candidates for the offices of chair and vice chair for the FFY 2009 term from October 2008 to September 2009. The election will be held at the September meeting.

On behalf of the Council, MPO staff researched members' attendance and, based on their participation in MPO activities and their interest in regional transportation planning matters, contacted five potential candidates. Of these five prospective candidates, one was interested in serving as chair while four were interested in serving as vice chair. After considering notable interest in MPO affairs, qualifications, and the value of leadership turnover, the Nominating Committee selected Malek Al-Khatib, Boston Society of Civil Engineers, and Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce, as its nominees for chair and vice-chair, respectively.

Each prospective candidate offered a brief biography:

- Malek Al-Khatib is the director of structural engineering at Louis Berger Group, Inc. He has been involved in several transportation projects throughout the region, is a member of several professional, regional organizations, and is currently serving on several professional committees, including the West End Civic Association and the Bulfinch Triangle Committee.
- Sue McQuaid is president and CEO of the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce. Her position requires her to adopt a regional perspective for a variety of issues, transportation among the highest. Before working with the Chamber, Sue served for nine years on the Norwood Board of Selectmen and on the Norwood School Committee. She has demonstrated considerable interest in MPO matters through her frequent participation in Transportation Planning and Program Committee meetings.

Council members will have an opportunity in September to nominate other members. Those members interested in nominating others should contact John Hersey, MPO staff, with their proposed nomination before August 30; John would then contact the nominated member and request a candidate statement. John will circulate all candidate statements by September 3. Also, John will circulate members' contact information before August 30 to facilitate communication between the members.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Given his ties to a private engineering firm, Malek may face conflicts of interest. (Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee)

Previous chairs have represented firms or agencies without conflict. Since each member of the Advisory Council represents a municipality, agency or citizen group, leadership has always faced this scrutiny and it has managed to represent the Advisory Council fairly and impartially in MPO matters. This instance is no different. (Pam Wolfe, MPO Staff)

At MPO hearings, the Advisory Council chair is expected to represent the interests and opinions of the entire Advisory Council and to recuse himself or herself in a moment of conflicted interest. (K. Johnson)

Because the Advisory Council does not align itself with specific projects and because the chair acts as a facilitator at Advisory Council meetings, there is little opportunity for the chair to favor a particular project or issue. (J. Businger)

While the chair facilitates discussion at Advisory Council meetings, the chair actively participates at MPO meetings, most notably the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee meetings. (K. Johnson)

It may be useful for MPO Staff to distribute members' contact information in order to facilitate communication between members in preparation for next month's vote. (R. Arena)

John Hersey, MPO Staff, will circulate members' contact information to members shortly after this meeting. In the interest of avoiding surprises at next month's meeting, please include John and Steve Olanoff, Nominating Committee chair, in your discussions and nomination considerations. (K. Johnson)

7. Advisory Council Committees

There were no announcements.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 5:05 pm.

Attachments:

1. Attendance List for August 13, 2008
2. Presentation: “Neighboring MPO Update: OCPC ”
3. Presentation: “Urban Ring Phase II Update ”

Attendance List for August 13, 2008

Agencies

Ned Codd, Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works
Jim Fitzgerald, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Charlie Kilmer, Old Colony Planning Council
Steven Rawding, Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee
Donna Smallwood, MassRIDES

Cities and Towns

Marcy Crowley, Wayland
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Kristina Johnson, Quincy
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Todd Kirrane, Brookline
Kurt Mullen, Needham
Steve Olanoff, Westwood
Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge
John Squibb, Revere
Gail Wagner, Lexington
Laura Wiener, Arlington

Citizens Groups

Malek Al-Khatib, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Rick Arena, Association for Public Transportation
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Vince Dixon, Association for Public Transportation
John Kane, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
John McQueen, WalkBoston
Marvin Miller, American Council of Engineering Companies
Chris Porter, MassBike
Bill Scully, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Tom Yardley, MASCO

Guests and Visitors

Romin Koebel
Dick Williamson

MPO Staff

John Hersey
Pam Wolfe