

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of March 14, 2007 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 1 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

1. Chair's Report - *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

Steve Olanoff, Chair and Westwood, called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM.

Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves. See the attached attendance list.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve was made by Frank DeMasi, Wellesley, and seconded by Marcy Crowley, Wayland. They were approved unanimously. The minutes of December 2006, and February 2007, have not yet been prepared.

3. Announcements

S. Olanoff made the following announcements:

The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee will meet on March 15 to discuss the public comments on the Journey TO 2030, the regional transportation plan (Plan), and to hear an update on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the upcoming MPO Election process. The TIP will be the next major focus of the Planning and Programming Committee when the Plan is completed. The March issue of *TRANSREPORT* was mailed this morning.

S. Olanoff and Bill Moore extended their apologies for the confusion on the meeting start time for the February meeting due to the building management's imposition of a change in room availability.

Walk Boston's annual meeting will feature a walk with Transportation Secretary Bernard Cohen. There is generally a large turnout for the annual meeting and walk.

Northeast Passenger Transportation Association and the Federal Transit Administration are sponsoring an exposition March 28 and 29.

The last in the series of public workshops on the Plan, to be held March 21, was announced. Comments from all the public outreach activities will be discussed with the Planning and Programming Committee at its March 15 meeting.

Rick Arena of the Association for Public Transportation, also an Advisory Council member, will brief the Advisory Council on the I-95 Corridor Coalition and the Northeast Rail Operations (NEROps) Study at the Advisory Council's April 11 meeting.

4. Update on the Draft Journey to 2030, the Regional Transportation Plan (Plan) of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) – Anne McGahan, Plan Manager, Boston Region MPO Staff

Anne McGahan distributed comment cards to members who might want to submit comments from the entity they represent, independent of the Advisory Council's comment. She reviewed the dates of the public comment period and noted that the MPO has been conducting extensive public outreach, including workshops, discussions following the municipal seminars, and an open house to discuss the Plan and stimulate comments. Staff is also discussing the Plan with each of the MAPC subregional groups. The comment period will close March 27, after which all the comments will be summarized for the Planning and Programming Committee members.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Romin Kobel asked about the relationship between the Plan and the MBTA Program for Mass Transportation (PMT). *The information on transit developed for the current PMT has been used in the draft Plan, particularly to inform the selection of transit projects. The PMT was developed with extensive public involvement. The MPO also used input gathered as a result of the Plan's public outreach program. The MBTA is initiating its next PMT now. (Anne McGahan)*

5. Final Discussion on the Advisory Council Draft Plan Comment Letter to the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee – Steve Olanoff, Advisory Council Chair

S. Olanoff explained that the Advisory Council has already submitted (in writing) and made (at meetings) comments explaining its positions on general transportation projects and on freight to the MPO and its Planning and Programming Committee during the development of the draft Plan. The Advisory Council's final written comment may remind the Planning and Programming Committee that the Advisory Council's input has been received and that the suggestions, requests, and motions on various topics, including the selection of projects, were mostly turned down. S. Olanoff also asked for direction from the members on voting on the Plan. He began the discussion by asking members who have submitted comments to summarize them.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

M. Crowley suggested that the Advisory Council consider toning-down its comments so that it will not be ignored in the future. She is concerned that the Advisory Council's credibility might be reduced. Something should be done. *S. Olanoff pointed out that credibility would be lost if the Advisory Council simply agreed to everything at the*

Planning and Programming Committee's discussions. He represents the views of the Advisory Council and will vote as directed.

Dick Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC) wondered if the comments of other members of the Planning and Programming Committee were also getting turned down. The MAGIC Subregion supported projects important to the subregion and also expressed its concerns that future transportation funding will not be adequate to provide for future maintenance and operation needs of the current infrastructure. They feel very strongly that the proposed allocations for highway expansion projects in the Plan is too much and that there should be more focus on transit and suburban and bicycle and pedestrian mobility. They also questioned the MPO's reason for not considering flexing some highway funds to transit.

Jim Gallagher, MAPC, said that MAPC voted against the Plan because of lack of funds. They didn't think that, considering the severe funding shortfalls, the Plan's proposals are prudent or realistic. They don't agree with the proposed program of highway expansion projects of the funding sources for the transit projects. The Plan relies on the commonwealth for the funds, but has not identified a specific source. They want to see minimum levels of funding for the Suburban Mobility and Transportation Demand Management, Freight, Bicycle, and Pedestrian programs. The issue of whether the region has enough funds and if not, whether this should be discussed in the Plan is being considered by the Planning and Programming Committee.

John Stasik, MetroWest Growth Management Committee (MetroWest), has commented on the inadequacy of funding. Without the state Transportation Finance Commission report and any information and recommendations it might provide on sources of funding MetroWest has questions about the Plan's financial constraint.

F. DeMasi, Advisory Council Freight Committee, said that without the context of the MPO's Freight Study or an MPO freight program, the Plan's freight discussion is limited. The Committee has made progress but the discussion in the Plan is not sufficient. There should be an integrated Plan that supports freight. He said that there is not enough information given about finances and that the Advisory Council may be best advised to abstain. *The MPO prepared chapters focusing on its major policy topics and strived to develop a discussion around what the MPO could do on those topics; there were no freight projects recommended. There is a state policy that if a bridge over rail is being constructed or re-constructed that it meet specifications for double-stacked rail. (A. McGahan) A draft Freight Study is scheduled to be released for Transportation Planning and Programming Committee's review at its March 29 meeting. (Bill Moore)*

Lisa Lepore, Somerville and Chair of the Freight Committee, said that a comment will be prepared.

Rick Arena, Association for Public Transportation (APT), announced that the group will meet to prepare its comment. He does not think that the Advisory Council's views and input to the Planning and Programming Committee is too radical and that they are

reasonable. He suggested the Chair be more insistent that the Advisory Council's views be accepted by the Planning and Programming Committee. Regarding the projects in the Plan, he suggested adding the North/South Rail Link, stating that it will be very important for the future. He noted billions of dollars of heavy rail projects being constructed in other states. He believes that the Commonwealth has to improve the rail infrastructure to avoid falling behind.

Walter Bonin asked if there is the political will to seek additional funding through some avenue such as taxes. He linked the Planning and Programming Committee's refusal to adopt Advisory Council input with a possible no-vote on the Plan. J. Gallagher explained that the MAPC strategy is to be specific about needs by identifying worthy projects and noting that additional funding is needed for them. The Plan can then be used to try to find the needed funding. If the Plan can be changed to recognize that more funding is needed, then a yes-vote might be in order.

The Advisory Council considered offering a motion that a Planning and Programming Committee vote on the Plan be postponed until more information is available. *Federal requirements dictate that an approved Plan must be in place by July 1 (including a three-month federal review period) in order for a region to be in compliance with SAFETEA-LU.* (A. McGahan)

John Businger, National Corridors Initiative, suggested that the Advisory Council vote include reservations that explain the Advisory Council's concerns about under-funding, particularly the increases foreseen in federal funding in the future. He suggested advocating for a larger share of funding. There are subsidies for highways that he feels have diminished the percentage of funding for transit and wanted to know the percentages.

Doug Wynne, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce, asked if the Plan could be amended. *The Plan can be amended. The MPO has done so to change project construction times. When the SIP commitment process is complete, an amendment will be needed to include changes.* (A. McGahan)

A. McGahan explained that if there are changes in projects or in project timing in this draft, additional modeling would be required, which will take at least two weeks.

Several members commented that to maintain credibility, the Advisory Council has to continue to express its views, even if they differ from those of the agency members of the Planning and Programming Committee. The Advisory Council may wish to seek media coverage for its positions. Other members thought that making sure the positions are clearly stated for the record would be a more effective approach. Also, planning for any upcoming amendment or revision of the Plan would be useful.

Bill Deignan, City of Cambridge, noted that getting the members' direction now on how to vote on the Plan would tie the Chair's hands to react to changes or events at the Planning and Programming Committee meeting. However, the consensus was that the

Chair should vote no. (Several members indicated the view that the Chair should abstain and one, vote yes.)

Regarding the written comment, M. Crowley suggested that copies be sent to parties beyond the MPO so that others would be informed about the Council's concerns about its input not being adopted.

6. Briefing on Operation Lifesaver - Ed O'Connor, Executive Director, Massachusetts Operation Lifesaver and Superintendent of Locomotive Repair, Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad Company

The Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad Company operates commuter rail service for the MBTA. Operation Lifesaver is an international group (begun in 1972 in Idaho) with a mission to prevent crashes and incidents at railroad grade crossings. Massachusetts joined in 1982. It accomplishes its mission through education and awareness. Members of the Advisory Council were asked to introduce Operation Lifesaver to schools and other departments or groups in their communities; Operation Lifesaver will respond to requests for presentations and educational opportunities.

The program is based on the "3-E Approach" – education, engineering, and enforcement. Education spreads awareness. Engineering provides for safe design of crossings. Enforcement of existing laws needs improvement. Drivers have a role and responsibility in grade crossing safety, too. Safety requires drivers to be alert, observant, and cautious every day. People should expect the unexpected and take precautions.

Mr. O'Connor showed examples of grade crossing incidents and provided statistics to support safe behavior. For example, it takes a freight train one mile to stop; a commuter train needs three quarters of a mile; the weight ratio of a train to a car is comparable to that of a car to a soda can. He provided safety instructions: look for oncoming trains and listen for their whistles (there will be no whistle if there is a whistle ban at that intersection); understand that your headlights will not illuminate far enough ahead to allow adequate stopping distance; do not go around crossing gates; do not pass at a grade crossing; do not cross on the tracks. If you are stuck on the tracks, get out of the car and safely away from the tracks.

Trespassing is a very big safety problem in Massachusetts. The railroad right-of-way is off-limits. Examples of trespassers are: hunters, joggers, snowmobilers, all terrain vehicle drivers, and fishermen on railroad bridges.

Mr. O'Connor provided his and Operation Lifesavers' contact information.

7. Advisory Council Committees

Committee Chairs are needed for two committees: the Regional Transportation Plan Committee and the Transportation Improvement Program Committee.

8. Member Items for Discussion and Other Business

There were none.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 pm.

Attachment:

1. Attendance List for March 14, 2007

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for March 14, 2007

Cities and Towns

Laura Wiener, Arlington
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Gail Wagner, Lexington
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Ed Chisholm, Millis
John Squibb, Revere
Marcy Crowley, Wayland
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Jim Gallather, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
David Rand, Division of Energy Resources
Matthew DeSorbo, Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission
John Stasik, MetroWest Growth Management Committee
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination

Citizen Groups

Marilyn McNabb, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Arthur Kinsman, American Automobile Association, Southern New England
Michael Abend, American Planning Association/Massachusetts Chapter
Richard Arena, Association for Public Transportation
Vince Dixon, Association for Public Transportation
Nick Rubino, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Doug Wynne, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Herb Pence, New England Bus Transportation Association
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association

Guests and Visitors

Romin Koebel
Jane O'Hern
Robert Sturgis

MPO Staff

Anne McGahan
Bill Moore