

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of May 9, 2007, Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

1. Call to Order and Introductions - *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

Steve Olanoff, Chair and Westwood, called the meeting to order at 3:10 PM.

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

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes of December 13, 2006, and February 14, March 14, and April 11, 2007

Motions to approve the December 13, 2006 and the February 14, and March 14 meeting minutes were, seconded, and after discussion, passed, as revised. The meeting minutes of April 11 were tabled until the June meeting.

3. Chair's Report and Announcements

Steve Olanoff, Chair, made several announcements. He reported that the Boston Region MPO's Transportation Planning and Programming Committee adopted the Journey to 2030 Regional Transportation Plan. In addition, the Committee held its annual Municipal TIP Input Day on April 26, a full day set aside for any municipality in the region to present updates on their project priorities. The Committee is also considering a transit amendment and adjustment, to be discussed later in this meeting.

Rick Arena, Association for Public Transportation (APT), announced the APT annual meeting which will take place on June 25 at the Harvard Club. Robert D. Yaro, of the New York/New Jersey/Connecticut Regional Plan Association will speak. He noted that New York City is moving forward with major investments to their transit system, in spite of their funding constraints. John Businger, National Corridors Initiative, noted that the speaker has a good perspective of the New England Region and regional connectivity. A notice will be sent to Advisory Council members.

The next Freight Committee is at 1:00 on June 13.

4. Presentation on Coalition-Building for the AMTRAK Downeaster – *Patricia Quinn, Executive Director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority*

Patricia Quinn introduced the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) and described the growing Downeaster service. NNEPRA provides commuter rail service funded by the Federal Transit Administration and the State of Maine. AMTRAK operates the service under an operating agreement. Service is provided with three trainsets on 78 miles of track owned by Pan Am Railways (Portland to Plaistow) and the MBTA (remaining 38 miles to Boston). Good interagency coordination and cooperation is clearly required and NNEPRA works closely with all partners to provide and improve the passenger transportation service.

The goal of the service is to get travelers out of their automobiles and onto transit. Seventy percent of the passengers are going to Boston. Train travel for tourism and recreation is still getting established. NNEPRA is working to expand this.

Working with the host railroads is very important. To operate the Downeaster service, the Pan Am-owned rail lines need to be rehabilitated. The cost of improvements was \$70 million, most of which was federally sourced. Part of the work involved capacity improvements such as extra passing sidings to improve passenger rail travel time and allow the addition of a fifth round trip. There is an ongoing capital program to invest in railroad upgrades.

AMTRAK, under contract to provide the Downeaster service, has also been a very strong partner in providing this service. They provide use of the right-of-way, the equipment and other service resources, the operating experience, and the name recognition.

There is also an intermodal connection that works well and contributes greatly to the success of the service. NNEPRA collaborates with two bus services (which provide a cheaper and faster service than the Downeaster trip) to try to create a seamless transportation network for passengers. Passengers can use a flex-pass that is interchangeable between the bus and the train. In addition, NNEPRA has contracted with the bus operators to provide a late (end of day) return trip to complement the rail service.

NNEPRA staff is meeting with the municipalities that host stations to develop and reinforce their support and seek support services.

Downeaster ridership is up 32% over last year, the largest increase in the AMTRAK system. Revenue is up 34%. The formula for their success is developing partnerships. This has involved respecting roles and accepting responsibility, creating an identity, seeking efficiencies, innovating, and demanding excellence.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Do you see the need for a connection to South Station? (J. Businger) Would shuttle service boost your service? (Bob Sturgis, Visitor) You might distribute Charlie Cards to make the transfer easier. (John McQueen, Walk Boston) *We have prepared a video that shows people how to get to South Station. We feel the need to focus on one initiative at a*

time. We do provide information for travelers on making connections to the MBTA transit system. (P. Quinn)

The MPO has a suburban transit program and your program can provide good tips on how to advance it. (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)

Please discuss your funding. (S. Olanoff) *Operating costs are \$12 million. Revenues are \$5 million, AMTRAK receives \$8 million, 80% of which is FTA Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) funding (which will expire next year) and 20% comes from the State of Maine. NNEPRA is looking for capital funding for improvements. (P. Quinn)*

4. Proposed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment and Adjustment – Joe Cosgrove, MBTA

Joe Cosgrove explained that the MBTA is proposing this amendment so that programming will reflect the current realities of scheduling and permitting for MBTA projects. Some activities are being accelerated and some are not able to move forward as quickly as planned. This amendment proposes changes that reflect how the MBTA can best meet its capital spending goals and address its state-of-good repair program (which is 91% of the MBTA capital program). He referred to the attached summary and discussed each item. The amendment would affect 13 programs or projects in six funding categories (See attached summary.)

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Is the Government Center Station work part of this amendment? (Domenic D'Eramo, Town of Millis) *No. (J. Cosgrove)*

The funding for preventative maintenance is not enough. (Rob Rottenbucher, American Council of Engineering Companies) *This is for vehicle maintenance and repairs. (J. Cosgrove)*

5. Update on MPO Documents, MPO Staff

a. Transportation Improvement Program – Pam Wolfe, CTPS

The MPO is considering an adjustment to the FFY 2007 element of the FFYs TIP to that would specify recipients of funding in the MPO's Suburban Mobility Program. Four projects would receive these CMAQ funds. (Please see attached summary.)

The MPO will begin work on a highway amendment for FFY 2007 and on the Draft FFYs 2008 – 2011 TIP in June. The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee will begin reviewing project evaluations in early June. The goal is to have a draft TIP out for public review in early July so that a final document can be adopted by mid-August.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Why not begin the development of the draft certification documents earlier in the year? (Bill Deignan, City of Cambridge) *TIP development begins in December. It also can take a while for issues requiring an amendment to arise. (P. Wolfe)*

b. Unified Planning Work Program

MPO staff is reaching out to MAPC Subregions and to the Advisory Council to identify transportation issues and needs, particularly focused on safety and mobility. Staff will then use this information to formulate studies to gather information to address those needs. In June, staff will again attend the Council meeting to hear members' views on these needs. The MPO's UPWP Subcommittee will be meeting weekly until the Draft UPWP is approved for public review.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Is there any overlap with the outreach for the MBTA Program for Mass Transportation? (Romin Koebel, Visitor and APT) *Much of the PMT's outreach is scheduled for June and is too late for our use in developing the initial draft UPWP, but staff and the Committee will review the PMT input and incorporate ideas, if possible. (M.E. Sullivan)*

c. Draft MPO Public Involvement Program

The MPO is updating its public participation program so that it reflects the MPO's current practices and certain directives included in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act – Legacy for Users. The draft program is now in a 45-day public comment period and the MPO will be conducting several public focus groups to gather input from members of the public. The MPO would appreciate participation from members of the Council in these focus groups and will attend the June meeting to gather input, as well.

6. Discussion of the Transportation Finance Commission Report, Transportation Finance in Massachusetts: An Unsustainable System, Paul Regan, MBTA Advisory Board, Boston Region MPO, and Commission Member

Massachusetts is facing an enormous funding gap between transportation needs and available resources. The state's legislatively-created Transportation Finance Commission has conducted an extensive study of maintenance and expansion needs and possible funding sources to cover them and has found that there is, conservatively, between a \$15 and \$19 billion dollar gap over the next twenty years. Many states (such as Connecticut, New York, Georgia, Washington) are facing the same transportation-funding crisis.

All the transportation agencies are running a substantial deficit. The cost of debt service is heavily burdening the MBTA. MassHighway is paying employees from capital bond

funds. The MassPike is carrying \$1.5 billion in Central Artery debt and has its own debt problems due to deferred maintenance. The Department of Conservation and Recreation was never adequately funded to meet the needs of its transportation infrastructure.

The condition of the entire transportation system is in decline. The MBTA is carrying \$1.5 billion of debt that handicaps it in the provision of basic services. Chapter 90 monies for municipalities are declining and are inadequate to maintain their roads. There are capital needs in the metropolitan highway system, including the Sumner and Callahan Tunnels.

The revenue stream is also constrained. The MBTA is at the national average for fares. Its main source of funds is its portion of the sales tax (one cent of five). Forward funding was to have provided the MBTA with a reliable revenue stream, but the 3% growth on which it was planned did not materialize. The gas tax has not increased in 16 years and buying power has diminished; better gas mileage has also reduced gas tax revenues. Currently, MassPike tolls are used to pay for the Central Artery and maintenance and improvements for the turnpike are being deferred.

There are not even enough funds maintaining the existing system, leaving none for expansion projects.

The Commission is looking for feedback on the problem and for ideas for addressing these needs. Members were invited to provide additional feedback through the EOT Web site.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Can the tax be indexed to the price of gas? (R. Rottenbucher) *Massachusetts used to do this. It was repealed. The gas tax is the easiest to collect because it is collected by the distributors.* (P. Regan)

The legislature mandated things regarding the Commission that did not happen; there should be additional members of the Commission (one representative each of an environmental, transportation consumer, planning, and public interest organization). These organizations should have a seat at the table, especially when working on these recommendations. (J. Businger) *We are a sounding board with no "force of law". If we do our job, others can use the report to drive workable solutions. You solve the problem that is in front of you. We are now dealing with the unintended consequences of previous decisions. I appreciate your comments.* (P. Regan)

The Federal government is considering an emissions tax to generate revenue. Maybe such an emissions tax, adjusted to keep it steady when prices rise seasonally, would be more palatable. (Omar Khudari, Visitor) *Interesting idea.* (P. Regan)

The state doesn't spend transportation funds where the biggest return on the investment would be. Project proposals should be required to show their economic benefit and payback and funds should go to those areas first. In spite of the projected growth in jobs in the I-495 area, the Regional Transportation Plan does not show investment in transportation there. (Walter Bonin,

Town of Marlborough) *There are no funds available. That's why this is a crisis. You make an excellent point. Project selection criteria could emphasize that more. (P. Regan)*

APT was in favor of the fare increase and could see the funding crisis coming. Our transit fares are lower than our other neighboring states such as New York and Connecticut. We should link fares to distance traveled. Additional revenues are needed, but expenses, such as management costs or labor costs, should be managed, too. If you do this, the taxpaying public will understand and support a tax increase. We have to take action to address this problem. Letting the system deteriorate creates one more reason not to invest in it. (R. Arena) *Goods and people still need to be moved. (P. Regan)*

We could use partnerships with businesses on station footprints to bring in revenues. (Vince Dixon, APT)

Advisory Council Committees

The Freight Committee was the only committee to submit a report. (See attached report.) Lisa Lepore, Chair, announced that she and Walter Bonin will be Co-Chairs for the Freight Committee. She noted that the Boston Society of Civil Engineers hosted a discussion of multi-modal transportation and port activities and thanked J. Businger for the invitations. She agreed with the discussion's conclusions that congestion is increasing in spite of millions of dollars of transportation investments and that it will continue to grow if the region continues to accept that trucks will be the primary mode for freight.

Walter Bonin reported that the Committee is working to get a legislative representative to serve on it. The next meeting is on June 13 at 1:00 PM. Meetings will go back to the monthly schedule. There was a tri-state conference on high-speed rail between New York and Boston. EOT is funding five projects for a total of \$5.5 million. David Swirk discussed changing the state constitution to allow public funding for private rail facilities, as is allowed in some other states.

The Committee is interested in seeing the Freight Study released to the public and would like to solicit comments on it. Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee, noted that if there were not action soon to increase the rail mode share for freight, there would be a 30% increase in trucks.

5. Member Items for Discussion and Other Business

Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association, reported on the Storrow Drive Tunnel work. The Storrow Drive Committee is looking for information on traffic to and from the MassPike. Some members are looking at this project as a way to displace Storrow Drive traffic. Tom Lisco, CTPS, has consistently said that Storrow Drive is a local traffic system, however, people are not receptive to this idea. Many trips are going to the Fenway and Longwood.

She is also urging EOT to go directly to Phase III for the Urban Ring, which would provide service with rapid transit vehicles and would include a tunnel at Longwood.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 pm.

Attachment:

1. Attendance List for May 9, 2007

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Cities and Towns

Laura Wiener, Arlington
Bill Deignan, Cambridge
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Domenic D'Eramo, Millis
Lisa Lepore, Somerville
Marcy Crowley, Wayland
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Jim Gallagher, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee

Citizen Groups

Marilyn McNabb, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Rob Rottenbacher, American Council of Engineering Companies
Michael Abend, American Planning Association/Massachusetts Chapter
Richard Arena, Association for Public Transportation
Vince Dixon, Association for Public Transportation
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
John McQueen, *Walk Boston*

Guests and Visitors

Omar Khuari
Romin Koebel
Ed Lowney
Cheryl Ravalli

MPO Staff

Mary Ellen Sullivan
Pam Wolfe