

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of September 12, 2007 Meeting

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

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

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

The FFY 2007 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) now includes an administration modification that added the MBTA Onboard Passenger Survey. More extensive work related to the Survey will follow in FFY 2008. The Metropolitan Planning Organization approved the FFY 2008 UPWP at its September 6 meeting.

The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee received two letters from the Advisory Council regarding the Draft FFY 2008 UPWP; one from the entire body and another from the Freight Committee. David Mohler replied on behalf of the Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works (EOTPW).

The Metropolitan Planning Organization approved Amendment Four to the FFY 2007 Transportation Improvement Program as well as the study entitled Safety and Operational Improvements for the Rte. 24/I-93 Interchange.

The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee also discussed the Bicycle Parking Program and possibly extending the deadline.

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and EOTPW have held meeting to discuss State Implementation Plan transit commitments and the annual update to the Status Report. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) will apply for New Starts funding for the Green Line extension project, potentially adding two years to the project. Fred Salvucci, former Secretary of Transportation, made several comments, including saying that the Green Line extension to West Medford is delayed because EOTPW is not performing concurrent work; that regarding the Blue Line, trains will have more cars, but headways will be reduced; and that there should be a continuation of the Fix it First policy that emphasized maintenance, particularly for bridges.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

The Green Line project should already be funded and approved; further delays are unacceptable. (Chan Rogers, Southwest Area Planning Committee)

Blue Line should have increased throughput ultimately. (Kate Fichter, EOTPW)

It is appropriate also to pursue new projects early to limit their costs in the future. The transportation executive needs to orchestrate uniform guidelines for all of the transportation agencies and offices in the state. (John Businger, National Corridors Initiative)

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of August 8, 2007, were approved unanimously.

3. Announcements

J. Businger announced the Regional Transportation Conference on October 11, 2007, at the Omni Parker House. The Conference is hosted by the National Corridor Initiative and will include notable public officials from across New England and transportation policy advocates.

4. Annual Advisory Council Elections

Jeff Levine, Inner Core, requested an extension to October to hold elections and asked S. Olanoff and F. DeMasi to remain as acting chair and co-chair, respectively, in the interim. The Advisory Council concurred.

5. Advisory Council Review of Membership Attendance

F. DeMasi reported that attendance is better and expected to have a report of attendance figures in October.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Several members often fail to show up. What is the process of removing them from the roll? (C. Rogers)

The Advisory Council previously utilized a fixed membership, and that worked well. The MPO requested a more inclusive membership, but the new policies do not have stringent ratification requirements, and the Advisory Council suffers as a result. The Chair should write letters to encourage regular participation at the Advisory Council. (Marcy Crowley, Wayland)

Municipalities not represented on the MPO should be encouraged to participate in the Advisory Council as an avenue to affect transportation planning policy in Greater Boston. (Kristina Johnson, Quincy)

The Advisory Council welcomes participation in all committees. Those who wish to be part of the Membership Committee should contact F. DeMasi, committee chair. (S. Olanoff)

The Wednesday afternoon meeting time may deter greater involvement. (K. Johnson)

6. Presentation: "Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements in Town Centers"

Jared Fijalkowski, Project Manager, MPO staff, presented this MPO study on bicycle and pedestrian improvements in six geographically diverse town centers: Duxbury, Essex, Holbrook, Lynnfield, Norfolk and Southborough. The study examines low-cost steps to enhance mobility and offers a range of models for other communities to use when addressing their own bicycle and pedestrian improvement programs.

The presentation pointed out issues involving sidewalks, crosswalks, shoulders and bicycle parking and suggested methods for their betterment. Asphalt sidewalks offer a rural appeal over concrete and brick paths, but they are more susceptible to broken or cracked edges. Sidewalks observed in these small town centers sometimes had design deficiencies, such as narrow widths, and sometimes did not connect with other sidewalks or important destinations. The delineation of some crosswalks was faded; some may be misaligned or poorly positioned with respect to sidewalks, curb cuts and stop lines at intersections; locations where crosswalks are needed were also noted. In some instances, shoulders were too narrow and filled with debris, making them less safe. Other concerns are conflict with on-street parking and sunken, raised or poorly aligned storm drainage grates. Finally, these smaller towns only sporadically provided bicycle parking at schools or playgrounds.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association, asked if the study considered American with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.

Yes, it is consistent with requirements. Though the ADA requirements were not examined specifically, the study heavily relied on MassHighway Design Guidelines, which uses ADA codes in its recommendations. (J. Fijalkowski)

David Ernst, MassBike, asked about the composition of the report.

Each town is highlighted in a chapter of the report with detailed descriptions of the issues examined. (J. Fijalkowski)

D. Ernst commented that towns have misconceptions about designs for shoulders and fog stripes and argued that this report showed some bias favoring bicyclists riding in the shoulder as opposed to in the travel lane.

C. Rogers commented that the study showcases discrepancies in public works departments in small towns and in more experienced and better-funded cities.

Michael Abend, American Planning Association – Massachusetts Chapter, commented that roads need edgelines for safety purposes and these towns put these lines very close to the public right of way to facilitate driving with little apparent consideration for bicycling.

S. Olanoff commented that the MassHighway Design Guidelines should measure traveling lanes from the centerline instead of from the edgeline to provide lanes of uniform width and to provide more space for bicyclists.

John McQueen, WalkBoston, asked if the study reflects year-round demands on town roads like snow removal.

Data was only collected in the summer. (J. Fijalkowski)

John Gillon, Institute of Transportation Engineers, commented that cities and towns will need to utilize transportation planners to achieve the models that this study suggests.

Bill Deignan, Cambridge, commented that local planners and directors of public works should use the MassHighway Design Guidelines as the definitive resource on these issues.

Romin Koebel, Fenway Community Development Corporation, commented that connectivity in the Fens is poor and should be addressed by the City of Boston.

7. Presentation: “South Coast Rail: Update and Discussion”

Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Manager for EOTPW, opened her presentation regarding the South Coast Rail extension project to Fall River and New Bedford by asking the members about their interests in and concerns with this project.

She described the project as a model corridor for smart growth development, providing opportunities for economic development and innovative financing for the third most-expensive public works project in recent history. To achieve those results, EOTPW has approached the issues with progressive consideration for land use, economic development and environmental protection. EOTPW has examined the Greenbush project in order to develop methods both to follow and to avoid. The Office has also toured the corridor alternatives and has held public workshops with advocacy groups to develop a comprehensive perspective of the challenges presented by the area.

Starting in October, a consultant will begin a six-month, coordinated federal and state environmental review process to develop build alternatives. Following generation of these alternatives, EOTPW will begin an extensive and formal environmental review process to examine the alternatives developed.

Further work will assess anticipated revenue from economic development along the corridor, methods for conservation areas and will coordinate priority development as prescribed in the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs’ Conservation and Development Plan, and identify challenges and benefits of implementing a regional transfer of development rights program and other revenue-sharing mechanisms between neighboring towns. EOTPW intends to establish a comprehensive land use planning process before construction of the line.

EOTPW will meet with local and state agencies, citizen advocacy groups and members of the public over the next year to develop a comprehensive regional corridor plan for accurate and long-term execution of initial policies.

Points and Issues Raised During Discussion

J. Businger asked what the ridership expectation is for the South Coast Rail Line.
There will be changes to land uses in order to maximize ridership along the corridor. (K. Egan)

K. Johnson asked how public/private partnerships would affect innovative financing options for the project.

EOTPW is working with local governments to explore opportunities to utilize district improvement financing (DIF) programs. Also, EOTPW is considering legislative methods to return project-related property tax revenue from new development to the project. (K. Egan)

K. Johnson commented that Quincy is the first community in Massachusetts to utilize district improvement financing and that EOTPW might benefit from studying the city. (K. Johnson)

D. Ernst asked what pressure a new line into South Station would impose.

The U.S. Post Office will need to be moved to provide greater space for increased rail lines. That issue is being considered at an interagency level at the moment. (K. Egan)

J. Levine asked if the project would impact current Capital Investment Project (CIP) commitments.

Projects already listed in the CIP have received dedicated funds independent of the South Coast Rail project. (K. Egan)

S. Olanoff asked how the state expects to benefit from revenue generated by increment financing mechanisms that currently go to local coffers.

The state will study several financing options and work with communities to develop new methods to benefit both state and local budgets as well as to pay for the costly project. The state will also look at solutions explored in other states. (K. Egan)

J. Levine commented that a transfer of development rights program is exciting, but it will be very challenging to implement.

R. Koebel commented that EOTPW should examine utilizing the Old Colony rail line.

Suggestions should be delivered at one of the several public meetings coming up next year. Off-hand, the right-of-way is very narrow and will lead to capacity issues in the future. (K. Egan)

K. Johnson asked what challenges EOTPW has found with the project.

Issues have revolved around environmental impacts and mitigation requests, particularly with Hockomock Swamp and other environmentally sensitive areas. (K. Egan)

F. DeMasi commented that the project should include freight service in a multi-modal capacity, either as a 24-hour agreement with passenger service by day and freight service overnight or as combined passenger and freight service around the clock. While there is an agency working for passenger service (MBTA), there is no kind of agency working for freight. Consequently, there is a strong influence to expand residential and commercial uses but little interest in expanding industrial uses, and the state may end up boxing out industrial services altogether.

EOTPW is committed to expanding both passenger and freight service. Upcoming RFR will integrate passenger and freight issues in the planning process. Written comments would facilitate a balanced planning process. (K. Egan)

J. Businger commented that residents in the proposed corridor are wary of low-income residents from economically depressed cities on the South Coast traveling to or through their communities. *EOTPW is committed to providing social equity for gateway communities in southeastern Massachusetts. This project is intended to spark economic growth and educational opportunities in that area for its low-income residents and minority populations. (K. Egan)*

D. Ernst asked if the project would have implications for the North/South Rail Link project. *The projects are independent of each other. EOTPW is focused on moving the U.S. Post Office and expanding capacity at South Station. (K. Egan)*

J. Businger commented that he thinks the system and terminal capacity have a significant relationship, and future service expansion on lines terminating in South Station will pressure the commuter rail system in such a way so as to compel a connection between North and South Stations.

M. Wellons commented that concern for the Hockomock Swamp is more than just NIMBY-ism. There is an intrinsic value in natural and wild environs both for native species and for residents. Instead of disturbing existing conditions to prepare spaces for development, planners should recognize challenging areas as reserved space in which nature can adapt and thrive. *Increased data will analyze ecological and human service values and allow for prioritizing development. These natural spaces appeal to social justice interests in terms of human development. (K. Egan)*

J. Levine asked if there is a connection between the Green Line extension and the South Coast Rail project. *The project will not qualify for New Starts; it needs local and state funding. The Green Line extension project is not related to this project because they are also on very different timelines. (K. Egan)*

8. Advisory Council Committees

Storrow Tunnel

M. Wellons reported that the Draft Environmental Impact Report should be available at the end of September and that DCR Commissioner Sullivan has reconsidered creating a bypass road on the Esplanade during construction to alleviate congestion on the roadway.

R. Koebel commented that the new park in Chinatown opened with significant support from Secretary Cohen, Lieutenant Governor Murray, and the Mayor's Task Force. It is an important first step in the Rose Kennedy Greenway and a milestone for interagency cooperation in the Central Artery project.

9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 pm.

Attachments:

1. Attendance List for September 12, 2007
2. "Pedestrian and Bicycle Improvements in Town Centers" Presentation
3. "South Station pushing its limits," *Boston Now* article

Attendance List for September 12, 2007

Cities and Towns

Bob Campbell, Braintree
Marcy Crowley, Wayland
Bill Deignan, Cambridge
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Kristina Johnson, Quincy
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Steve Olanoff, Westwood
John Squibb, Revere
Laura Wiener, Arlington

Agencies

Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination
Kristina Egan, Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works
Kate Fichter, Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works
Jim Gallgaher, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Jeff Levine, Inner Core
Steve Rawding, Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission
Chan Rogers, Southwest Area Planning Committee

Citizens Groups

Michael Abend, American Planning Association – Massachusetts Chapter
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
David Ernst, MassBike
John Gillon, Institute of Transportation Engineers
Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
John McQueen, *WalkBoston*
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association

Guests and Visitors

Romin Koebel
Ed Lowney
Marilyn MacNab

MPO Staff

Jared Fijalkowski
John Hersey