

# **MPO Meeting Minutes**

## **Draft Memorandum for the Record**

### **Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting**

#### **September 2, 2021, Meeting**

10:00 AM–11:10 AM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

David Mohler, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

#### **Decisions**

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) agreed to the following:

- Approve the minutes of the meeting of July 15, 2021
- Endorse Amendment One to the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

#### **Meeting Agenda**

##### **1. Introductions**

See attendance on page 6.

##### **2. Chair's Report—*David Mohler, MassDOT***

D. Mohler announced that the MPO would not meet on September 16, 2021, and would instead meet on September 23, 2021.

##### **3. Executive Director's Report—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS)***

T. Teich provided an update on two open positions at CTPS.

##### **4. Public Comments**

There were none.

##### **5. Committee Chairs' Reports—*Derek Shooster, MassDOT, Chair, Unified Planning Work Program Committee***

D. Shooster reported that the UPWP Committee met prior to the MPO board meeting and agreed to recommend that the MPO vote to endorse draft UPWP Amendment One.

**6. Regional Transportation Advisory Council Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair, Regional Transportation Advisory Council***

L. Diggins reported that the Advisory Council would next meet on September 8, 2021.

**7. Action Item: Approval of July 15, 2021, MPO Meeting Minutes—*Ariel Patterson, MPO Staff***

***Vote***

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of July 15, 2021, was made by the MBTA Advisory Board (Brian Kane) and seconded by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) (Eric Bourassa). At-Large Town (Town of Arlington) (Daniel Amstutz) and Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton) (Austin Cyganiewicz) abstained. The motion carried.

**8. Action Item: FFY 2021 UPWP Amendment One—*Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff***

***Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar***

1. [Recommended Revisions to Certain 3C Budgets \(FFY 2021\)](#)
2. [Draft FFY 2021 UPWP Amendment One](#)
3. [Comment Letter: Conservation Law Foundation](#)

S. Johnston stated that Draft Amendment One to the FFY 2021 UPWP accounts for actual spending in the first three quarters of FFY 2021 and fourth-quarter needs. In addition to the changes proposed to the CTPS budget, the amendment includes a minor change to work conducted by MAPC using UPWP funds. S. Johnston stated that the MPO voted to release this amendment for a 21-day public review period at the meeting on August 5, 2021. MPO staff received one comment on the amendment from the Conservation Law Foundation. The letter expressed disappointment that the amendment reallocates funding from the Transportation Equity Program because staff have not had the opportunity to expend the funds despite the equity needs of the region.

***Vote***

A motion to endorse Amendment One to the FFY 2021 UPWP was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville) (Tom Bent). The motion carried.

**9. Community Connections Program Update—*Matt Genova and Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff***

M. Genova provided an update on and recommendations for the MPO's Community Connections Program. Community Connections is one of the investment programs established in the MPO's current Long-Range Transportation Plan. The program funds

first- and last-mile connections and other small, non-traditional projects that promote mobility. The MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) includes \$2 million annually for Community Connections. The second round of funding was allocated in the most recent TIP. M. Genova stated that during the most recent funding cycle, seven out of the 17 proponents applied for funding for transit operating projects, representing 64 percent of the total funding requested. The MPO funded ten projects, allocating the full \$2 million in FFY 2022 and including future year funding for both transit operating projects selected.

M. Genova stated that current challenges for the program fall into two main categories: administrative hurdles and the demands of transit operating projects. The program places a heavy administrative burden on staff in MassDOT's Office of Transportation Planning to manage contracts with proponents. Transit operating projects require additional analysis to determine net greenhouse gas reductions before they can be eligible for another year of funding. The funding of operating projects across multiple years limits the amount of funding within the program for smaller projects going forward.

M. Genova proposed streamlining the application process, simplifying the administration of capital projects, and changing the approach for transit operating projects. Streamlining the application would involve shortening the application and clarifying eligible project types. Simplifying the administration of capital projects would involve moving to a collective purchasing model, wherein MAPC would conduct a joint procurement for all capital items approved through the program each year. M. Genova described two options relative to funding transit operating projects. The first would require that shuttle and microtransit projects be administered directly by a regional transit authority (RTA). The other option would remove transit operating projects from the list of eligible projects.

M. Genova stated that MPO staff will finalize any adjustments to the program and begin the application process for next year's round of funding on October 1, 2021, the beginning of FFY 2022. Project proposals will be due in December.

### ***Discussion***

D. Amstutz asked whether limiting the number of transit operating projects funded in a given year would reduce the administrative burden and whether RTAs are open to administering projects. D. Amstutz also asked for clarification as to how the collective procurement process would work.

S. Johnston replied that MPO staff would reach out to RTAs to explore this option if the MPO expressed interest in it. S. Johnston added that MPO staff have discussed

introducing caps on the percentage of funds spent on specific project types in a given year, but that the number does not necessarily reduce the administrative burden for MPO staff. Rather, the issue would be future flexibility for the program and how much program funding the MPO board believes should be taken up by operating projects. S. Johnston stated that MAPC would create a collective procurement agreement for each category of projects, wherein the types of objects a proponent can procure are defined, and MAPC would write a contract for each group. E. Bourassa added that the intent would be to determine demand, write a contract, and then allow proponents to apply for materials that are already accounted for. This would also help account for current supply chain issues.

Tom O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council) (Town of Norwood/Neponset River Regional Chamber) expressed concern at the idea of eliminating operating projects given that first- and last-mile connections were the main reason for creating the program. T. O'Rourke noted that it may be too early to judge the ridership of current operating projects due to the impacts of COVID-19. S. Johnston noted that in creating the program, the MPO expressed a desire to fund some transit operating projects while ensuring that they would survive past the period of MPO funding. S. Johnston said that applications have been mixed in terms of how successful proponents have been in ensuring future financial stability. S. Johnston stated that the question is whether the MPO thinks it's important that there be a funding source in the region for these types of projects.

Jim Fitzgerald also wondered how interested RTAs are in taking on the administrative burden of operating projects and expressed support for a dollar limit on operating projects.

B. Kane agreed that shifting the administrative burden to RTAs may not be welcome. He asked whether any currently funded projects have had an air quality benefit or shown evidence of improving or increasing ridership, not just shifting riders from another mode of public transit. S. Johnston stated that the only currently funded operating project that has actually launched is a micro-transit project in Newton, so there is no currently actionable ridership or air quality data.

K. Miller stated that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is not opposed either to shifting administration to RTAs or to having MAPC craft a purchasing agreement, but he noted that MassDOT does not have a program to certify local public agencies to manage federal contracts. FHWA and MAPC would need to discuss questions as to a subrecipient implementing federal construction funds. K. Miller clarified that the intent of the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Improvement Program (which is the

federal program that funds Community Connections) is to make funds available as seed money. Air quality benefit is determined not just via ridership but also by using ridership surveys that indicate prior mode of transportation and other factors.

E. Bourassa stated that if it turns out that MAPC cannot play a role in overseeing procurements, that part of the program may not make sense.

D. Mohler noted that MassDOT oversees similar projects at other MPOs, so working this out with FHWA is not insurmountable.

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) expressed support for RTAs administering or coordinating operating projects in order to reduce gaps in service and make sure services are not duplicative.

L. Diggins asked whether the Transit Working Group (TWG) has been involved in changes to the program. S. Johnston stated that MPO staff would put this topic on the agenda for an upcoming TWG meeting.

D. Mohler stated that discussion seemed to indicate that the MPO is relatively comfortable with proposed changes to the application process and capital project administration. D. Mohler stated that MPO staff should bring the question of administering operating projects via RTAs directly to the RTAs and the TWG before the MPO makes a decision on that recommendation. D. Mohler stated that staff should also explore what a cap on transit operating projects could or should look like before returning to the MPO.

## **10.Members Items**

There were none.

## **11.Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the MBTA Advisory Board (B. Kane). The motion carried.

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## Attendance

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### Members

### Representatives and Alternates

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At-Large City (City of Everett)	Jay Monty
At-Large City (City of Newton)	Jason Sobel
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
At-Large Town (Town of Brookline)	Heather Hamilton
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Bill Conroy
Federal Highway Administration	Ken Miller
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	David Mohler
	John Bechard
MassDOT Highway Division	John Romano
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Jillian Linnell
Massachusetts Port Authority	
MBTA Advisory Board	Brian Kane
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Thatcher Kezer III
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	Austin Cyganiewicz
North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly)	Darlene Wynne
North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn)	Tina Cassidy
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland)	Jennifer Constable
South West Advisory Planning Committee (Town of Medway)	Peter Pelletier
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke Steve Olanoff

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<b>Other Attendees</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Aleida Leza	Belmont resident
Amira Patterson	MBTA Advisory Board
Benjamin N.W. Muller	MassDOT Highway District 6
Derek Krevat	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Derek Shooster	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Gus Norrbom	MassDOT
Johannes Epke	Conservation Law Foundation
Jon Seward	Community Design Partnership
Josh Klingenstein	MBTA
Joy Glynn	MWRTA
Michelle Ho	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Mike Garrity	MassDOT
Sheila Page	Town of Lexington
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Todd Baldwin	Town of Saugus
Wesley Lickus	MassDOT
Yahaira Graxirena	Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
Zack Blais	Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission

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**MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff**

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Tegin Teich, Executive Director  
Mark Abbott  
Matt Archer  
Jonathan Church  
Annette Demchur  
Róisín Foley  
Hiral Gandhi  
Matt Genova  
Betsy Harvey  
Sandy Johnston  
Anne McGahan  
Marty Milkovits  
Ariel Patterson  
Gina Perille  
Michelle Scott

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**Title VI Specialist**

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