

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Unified Planning Work Program Committee Meeting Summary

July 1, 2021 Meeting

9:00 AM–10:00 AM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xpPFLsK39c>

Benjamin Muller, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Acting Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the summary of the May 6, 2021, meeting
- Approve the amended staff-recommended list of discrete studies for the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022 UPWP

Materials

Materials for this meeting included the following:

1. Summary of the May 6, 2021, meeting
2. Amended staff-recommended list of discrete studies for the FFY 2022 UPWP
3. Comment letter from the Conservation Law Foundation and Transportation for Massachusetts

Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

1. Introductions

B. Muller introduced the meeting, read the guidelines and accessibility statement, and called the roll.

2. Public Comments

There were none.

3. Meeting Summary of May 6, 2021—*Approval of this summary*

A motion to approve the summary was made by Lenard Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) and seconded by Tom Bent (City of Somerville/Inner Core Committee). The motion passed unanimously, with the Town of Arlington abstaining.

4. FFY 2022 Discrete Studies—*Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager*

S. Johnston explained that staff are bringing to the committee a revised proposal for a list of discrete studies to be programmed in the FFY 2022 UPWP, reflecting new details about funding and resource allocation that have arisen since the May 6 meeting at which they presented an initial draft. The new proposal cuts the budgets of several studies and deletes two entirely. The request from staff is for the committee to either approve this list as written or provide alternative guidance to staff, knowing that the amount of available funding is about \$120,000 lower than previously known.

Tegin Teich (CTPS Executive Director) gave further explanation of how the current budget situation came to be. Initial assumptions like those made in May are driven by historical data. In the intervening time, a few things can change: the overhead rate; which staff are allocated to which projects; salary adjustments; and revenue assumptions. This year, the MPO received about \$180,000 less in 3C planning funds from the federal government. The overhead rate went up slightly to reflect investments in legal fees, COVID-19 concerns, and a remote work environment. It remains low by comparative standards but did rise. Some other work areas needed additional funding, notably Regional Travel Model Enhancement and professional development. In addition, some of the discrete studies, especially the “recurring” corridor studies, needed additional funding. Staff expect the situation to revert closer to the previous baseline in future years.

David Koses (City of Newton) and Annette Demchur (CTPS Director of Policy and Planning) discussed whether the small cut to the budget of the study *The Future of the Curb Phase 3* would have a significant impact on the work product. L. Diggins brought up the impacts of deleting the congestion pricing study concept from the work to be done. T. Teich explained that staff’s intention is to cover much of the intended work through other processes and budgets, such as LRTP scenario planning, but that the committee could direct staff to reinsert the study as they desire. L. Diggins suggested partially funding the congestion pricing study, and that making a commitment to this long-standing question is important. T. Teich said that it’s possible committing only partial funding would not yield the necessary outcomes. Daniel Amstutz (Town of Arlington) stated that while he recognizes the lack of consensus around this study idea, it has been continually kicked down the road and delayed and asked for staff to report

with more specificity what they would do through other budget lines on the topic, if this study does not happen.

D. Amstutz also discussed some questions about budget tweaks to the corridor studies with Mark Abbott (CTPS Manager of the Traffic Analysis and Design Group) and the Travel Demand Management study with S. Johnston. Eric Bourassa (Metropolitan Area Planning Council [MAPC]) said that he thinks congestion pricing is an important topic of study, and he is happy to see it continuing through other budget lines, even if not as a discrete study. MAPC has been doing a lot of work on parking policy and pricing, which can be considered a type of congestion fee, and has found it has major impacts. With lots of large infrastructure proposals out there, influencing *how* they work is important. Steve Olanoff (Town of Westwood/Three Rivers Interlocal Council alternate) stated that he agrees with the comment letter submitted by Transportation for Massachusetts and the Conservation Law Foundation, and that congestion pricing is a critical study that has been delayed for too long. He suggested taking money from one of the corridor studies to fund the congestion pricing study. B. Muller and T. Teich discussed what the congestion pricing work would look like and how it would relate to the scenario planning process to be carried out in advance of the next Long-Range Transportation Plan.

There was further discussion of the possibility of reallocating money from the corridor studies to congestion pricing, reaching the conclusion that the corridor studies are valuable, particularly as they allow rapid movement from conceptual improvement to implementation. Josh Ostroff (Transportation for Massachusetts) shared his thoughts on congestion pricing. He argued that it is a highly politically charged issue that needs CTPS' technical expertise, as congestion is getting rapidly worse. He stated that he recognizes the funding scarcity issue, but is appalled at the lack of available financial resources for this type of planning, given the need for it. He promised to come to future MPO meetings to highlight the issue.

D. Amstutz suggested that the committee make a firm commitment to funding the congestion pricing study in the next (FFY 2023) UPWP. L. Diggins inquired about the possibility of delaying a decision, but B. Muller said that to meet federal deadlines there is no remaining flexibility. T. Teich noted that staff do not want the committee to feel forced into a decision, so some small tweaks can be made, but that it is probably not possible to continue the discussion at the next committee meeting on July 15. B. Muller expressed that from his perspective, the MPO has study items that are more important than congestion pricing for its day-to-day functioning, and that it's not clear there would be any actionable items from the congestion pricing study. T. Teich said that that is valuable input, and that there is also uncertainty about what future needs will be.

E. Bourassa noted the need to come to a decision and offered a motion to approve the revised staff-recommended list of discrete studies, as presented at this meeting. D. Koses seconded the motion. T. Bent wondered whether \$60,000 does the congestion pricing study justice, but said he thinks it is important, and wondered whether it could be included in the next UPWP. B. Muller and S. Johnston discussed a framework for formalizing staff's commitments to analyze congestion pricing in the 2022 UPWP through other budget lines. S. Olanoff reiterated the urgency of doing the congestion pricing study now.

The motion passed unanimously on a roll-call vote. E. Bourassa discussed the importance of the congestion pricing conversation, and that it would be great to discuss at a full MPO meeting, given the extent of disagreements.

5. MAPC Use of UPWP Funds—*Eric Bourassa, Transportation Director, MAPC*

The committee agreed to defer this item to the July 15 meeting. E. Bourassa said he would send the relevant materials to the committee, and they could ask questions then.

6. Members Items

There were none.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for July 15, 2021.

8. Adjourn

T. Bent made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and E. Bourassa seconded it. Without objection the meeting was adjourned.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Office of Transportation Planning)	Ben Muller
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke
Three Rivers Interlocal Council alternate (Town of Westwood)	Steve Olanoff
City of Framingham (Metrowest Regional Collaborative)	Erika Oliver Jerram

Other Attendees Affiliation

Josh Ostroff Transportation for Massachusetts
Cassie Ostrander Federal Highways Administration

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Gina Perille, Deputy Executive Director

Annette Demchur, Director of Policy and Planning

Hiral Gandhi, Director of Operations and Finance

Rebecca Morgan, Director of Projects and Partnerships

Marty Milkovits, Director of Modeling and Analytics

Mark Abbott, Traffic Analysis and Design Group Manager

Anne McGahan, Chief Planner

Betsy Harvey, Transportation Equity Program Manager

Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager

Kate White, Public Outreach Coordinator

Ariel Patterson, Transportation Planner

Matt Archer, Transportation Planner

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