

MPO Meeting Minutes

Draft Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

November 18, 2021, Meeting

10:00 AM–12:08 PM, 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 work program for *Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region*
- Endorse Amendment One to the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance on pages 11–13.

2. Chair's Report—David Mohler, MassDOT

D. Mohler reported that MassDOT and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) are recommending the return of all municipal contributions for the construction of the Green Line Extension (GLX) project to the cities of Somerville and Cambridge. GLX is projected to end construction under budget, and the addition of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act make the return of these funds possible. D. Mohler stated that the return has been approved by the MBTA board but has not yet been approved by the MassDOT board.

Tom Bent (Inner Core Committee) (City of Somerville) thanked D. Mohler on behalf of the City of Somerville.

D. Mohler noted that Congress passed a federal infrastructure bill, and the President has signed it into law. He stated that MassDOT plans to present the impact of the new law on the MPO at a future meeting. D. Mohler stated that he was not yet comfortable providing estimates of funds that the MBTA or municipalities may receive as he expected real numbers in the coming weeks.

Ken Miller (Federal Highway Administration [FHWA]) added that FHWA is also in the process of receiving information on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). K. Miller stated that increases to formula funding vary by funding category, and it is likely FHWA will not have exact apportionment numbers until January. K. Miller stated that in addition to increases in formula funding categories, there are new discretionary funding categories that require new regulations to implement. K. Miller stated that there will be changes to eligibility for existing programs that may change the ability of MPOs and municipalities to be direct applicants and recipients of federal funds.

Jim Fitzgerald (City of Boston) (Boston Planning & Development Agency) asked whether the rollout of BIL funds would impact the schedule for the upcoming Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). D. Mohler stated that because the BIL is intended to start in FFY 2022, it will certainly impact TIP development for 2023 and beyond, but there is a question of whether the appropriations bill will pass in the 2022 timeframe. D. Mohler added that he did not expect the BIL to slow down TIP development for this cycle.

K. Miller added that an appropriations bill would also determine what the obligation authority is, i.e., how much funding can be spent in a given year.

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

T. Teich provided updates on recent staff recruitments and outreach activities. T. Teich welcomed Zihao Jin to the Travel Model Development group and noted that interviews were ongoing for the Manager of Outreach and Communications and Public Outreach Coordinator positions. T. Teich added that the UPWP Manager and a Planner/Analyst position would be posted soon.

T. Teich stated that MPO staff recently held several Transit Working Group Virtual Coffee Chats, would be releasing applications for the next round of Community Connections funding, and are continuing annual outreach to Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregional groups.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports—Jay Monty, At-Large City, City of Everett, Chair, Congestion Management Process (CMP) Committee

J. Monty stated that the CMP committee would meet prior to the MPO board meeting on December 2, 2021. J. Monty stated that the CMP committee has four open seats and encouraged MPO board members to join.

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

L. Diggins stated that the last meeting featured Frank Tramontozzi, City of Quincy, on the City's recent appointment to the MBTA Board, and Anne McGahan on the MPO's next Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). L. Diggins noted that he was reelected as Chair of the Advisory Council and stressed the importance of improving the diversity of the MPO board.

7. Action Item: Work Scope, Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region—Betsy Harvey, MPO Staff

B. Harvey presented the work program for *Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region*, which will cost \$70,000 and take 11 months to complete. B. Harvey stated that existing MPO equity policies align with federal requirements that focus on preventing future discrimination. This project would elevate the MPO's equity work by identifying opportunities to reduce transportation inequities today, not just in the future. The study will develop a baseline assessment of existing transportation inequities and quantify inequities that have resulted from past investments. MPO staff will identify metrics to analyze as baseline equity indicators, consulting with the MPO board, environmental justice (EJ) advocacy groups, and agency partners. B. Harvey stated that the metrics are likely to include at least those analyzed under the MPO's Disparate Impact and Disproportionate Burden (DI/DB) policy. These include travel time for public transit and driving, access to opportunities like healthcare and jobs, and exposure to carbon monoxide. MPO staff will also examine transportation costs. B. Harvey noted that the project will focus on developing and documenting replicable methodologies for these novel analyses.

Discussion

L. Diggins asked whether MPO staff will look at metrics that were suggested as part of the public outreach process for the DI/DB policy. B. Harvey stated that MPO staff will refer to those metrics when considering what to include as part of the study. Whether all the metrics suggested as part of the DI/DB policy outreach are analyzed will depend on the timeline of the project and the practicability of analysis. Some metrics may be set aside to consider in the context of future work. L. Diggins asked how these metrics

might be incorporated into future TIP project evaluations. B. Harvey stated that the results of the study could be used in future rounds of TIP evaluations and to support investment decision-making in the LRTP.

Brian Kane (MBTA Advisory Board) asked how this project might integrate into efforts like Title VI and DI/DB analyses at the MBTA. B. Harvey stated that most equity analyses focus on analyzing possible future discrimination or inequity that could result from a specific investment choice or choices. The goal of this work is to create a comprehensive understanding of where disparities currently exist. This could allow the MPO to make strategic investments to address existing disparities rather than just preventing them in the future. B. Harvey added that hopefully this will be useful information for the MBTA and MassDOT to build on in their equity analyses. B. Kane encouraged MPO staff to coordinate with agency partners doing similar work in housing and economic development.

K. Miller asked whether MPO staff plan to make any distinction between urban and suburban settings when selecting metrics. B. Harvey stated that MPO staff would be looking at metrics for communities of color and low-income communities throughout the region, rather than separating out communities by geography. B. Harvey added that a goal of the study is to look at destination access metrics, which would take into consideration the availability of different types of transportation for different population groups. K. Miller asked whether MPO staff would only look at EJ communities or consider metrics for low-income and people of color throughout the region. B. Harvey stated that the metrics will not confine analysis to geographies considered “EJ,” but look at where low-income people and people of color live throughout the region.

Vote

A motion to approve the work program for *Identifying Transportation Inequities in the Boston Region* was made by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by MAPC (Eric Bourassa). The motion carried.

8. Action Item: FFY 2022 UPWP Amendment One—Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff

1. [Technical Memorandum: Recommended Revisions to Certain 3C Budgets \(FFY 2022\)](#)
2. [FFY 2022 UPWP: Redlined](#)
3. [FFY 2022 UPWP: Clean](#)

S. Johnston stated that the UPWP Committee met prior to the MPO to discuss Amendment One and voted to recommend MPO endorsement. The MPO released

Amendment One for a 21-day public review period on October 21, 2021. MPO staff received no public comments on the amendment. S. Johnston stated that the amendment extends \$45,000 in unused FFY 2021 Combined Continuing, Cooperative, and Comprehensive (3C) funds for modeling staff skill development and support from the developer of the MPO's travel demand software. The Amendment also makes several minor textual corrections, such as inserting project ID numbers.

Vote

A motion to approve Amendment One to the FFY 2022 UPWP was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville) (T. Bent). The motion carried.

9. FFYs 2023-27 TIP Universe of Projects—*Matt Genova, MPO Staff Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar*

1. [FFYs 2023–27 TIP Universe of Projects](#)

M. Genova reviewed the timeline of TIP development. Throughout October and November, MPO staff conduct outreach to proponents. After the deadline to submit new projects for consideration (December 17, 2021), MPO staff will begin project evaluations. In mid-January, staff will provide draft scores to proponents for their review. In February, MPO staff will present final scores to the board. Also in February, MassDOT typically hosts TIP Readiness Days to discuss cost and readiness updates for currently programmed projects. MPO staff will share cost and readiness information with the board in March, beginning the discussion of project programming. Throughout March, the MPO board will consider different programming scenarios. In late April, a final draft list of projects will be incorporated into the full draft TIP document and released for a 21-day public review period. After public comment, MPO staff will bring all feedback to the board before a final vote to endorse in late May.

M. Genova noted key decisions made by the board in last year's TIP. Cost overruns for already-programmed projects severely limited the ability to fund new projects in the FFYs 2022–26 TIP. The board allocated \$77 million in new funding to projects that were already programmed in the TIP. All 10 new projects that received funding were programmed under the MPO's first- and last-mile Community Connections funding program. These projects used all of the program's \$2 million available funding in FFY 2022, and some future funding for shuttle projects in FFY 2023 and 2024. Due to projects shifting in schedule, the MPO was able to allocate \$14 million in FFY 2021 to Phase 2 of the MBTA's center-running bus lane project on Columbus Avenue in Boston.

M. Genova described the TIP project development process. To be considered for TIP funding, project proponents should reach out early to both MassDOT highway and MPO staff to confirm that the project is a good fit for federal funding and aligns with MPO goals. If a project is a good candidate, proponents will then fill out Project Need and Project Initiation Forms via MaPIT, MassDOT's online project initiation platform. Once both forms are complete, the project can be approved by MassDOT's Project Review Committee (PRC). After a project is PRC-approved, it is assigned a project identification number and MassDOT project manager. From there, the project can be considered for funding in the TIP.

M. Genova reviewed the Universe of Projects for this year's TIP development. To create this list, MPO staff began with last year's universe and removed any projects that were already funded or deactivated. The list was then refined with input from municipal TIP contacts and MassDOT highway district staff. M. Genova noted that some projects in the Universe are listed as "Pre-PRC" in the design status column. These are conceptual projects that MPO staff have heard about directly from municipalities and are intended as a log of potential projects for future funding. These projects cannot be actively considered for funding until they have been PRC approved.

M. Genova stated that Table 1 in the Universe of Projects handout represents the full list of projects that could potentially be evaluated for funding this cycle. The universe is broken down by MAPC subregion and project type. M. Genova added that the variation in the number of projects included in the universe from each subregion depends on ideas that MPO staff hear at fall MAPC subregional meetings. More projects could be added in the coming weeks as staff continue to attend these meetings.

M. Genova provided an overview of how the current Universe compares to Universes from years past. Over the past six years, the total number of projects in the Universe has fluctuated between 70 and 100. Over the last several years, MassDOT has made a significant effort to deactivate projects that are no longer active priorities. The trend over the last two years has been generally upward, in part because very few new projects have been funded due to cost increases for existing projects.

M. Genova reiterated that MPO staff will only score a subset of projects—those that are PRC approved and active priorities. Staff will also score 14 projects that were scored last year but went unfunded due to financial limitations. M. Genova noted that Community Connections projects do not appear in the Universe because they are sourced through an open call application process that will open in late November. MPO staff will bring those projects to the MPO on the same scoring and programming timeline as all other TIP projects. M. Genova noted that the number of projects scored

has trended downward over the last five years, with MPO staff intentionally removing projects from the scoring process that were no longer municipal priorities.

M. Genova noted the implications of the new TIP project cost policies for this year's scoring process. In response to ongoing cost increases, the board created a committee to discuss policy changes. The MPO endorsed the committee's recommended policy on November 4th and will apply it in the new development cycle. As part of this policy, the MPO decided to move forward with a requirement that projects submit 25 percent design plans to MassDOT prior to being funded in the TIP. M. Genova stated that as of this meeting, seven of the 14 projects MPO staff anticipated scoring had reached 25 percent design status. M. Genova added that regardless of policy, all programming decisions are ultimately at the discretion of the board.

Discussion

L. Diggins asked whether there are municipalities that want to advance projects for TIP funding but cannot because they lack the financial or staff capacity. M. Genova stated that municipal stakeholders have expressed that staff capacity and municipal budget constraints are a limiting factor to advancing projects in the TIP, but that MPO staff seek to be a resource to municipalities as they advance projects.

10. MBTA Bus Network Redesign Project—*Caroline Vanasse, MassDOT Staff*

C. Vanasse presented an update on the MBTA Bus Network Redesign process. The Bus Network Redesign is one of several projects at the MBTA designed to improve bus service. Other efforts include implementing transit priority, improving bus stops, modernizing fleets and facilities, and improving passenger information and bus operations. The Bus Network Redesign is focused on matching service to the new travel needs of the region and improving service for transit critical populations. The MBTA defines transit populations as low-income people, people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, and people who live in households with few or no vehicles. C. Vanasse stated that the project has included extensive stakeholder engagement and will begin implementation in 2022 and continue in phases over five years. The goal is not to return to a pre-COVID-19 network, but to build a better, more equitable network than before. C. Vanasse stated that while the redesign is based on pre-COVID-19 service hours, the project team is working to identify where more service could be added with additional resources.

C. Vanasse reviewed the major themes the team has heard in outreach and noted that the project team is using new cell phone data to understand where people are traveling, even if the people are not currently using the MBTA. C. Vanasse stated that this is the

best data the MBTA has ever had on how low-income residents and people of color travel, and it has allowed staff to prioritize trips made by these populations when thinking about where to allocate resources and design new service. C. Vanasse noted that there will be trade-offs to making the overall network better. Focusing service where there is a lot of demand may mean fewer stops along some routes, some routes will be simplified so that the routes can run the same way all day, and schedules will be better aligned with all-day demand. Some areas may see new types of service, there may be fewer routes on some streets, and some passengers may need to transfer to another bus or to the rail system. C. Vanasse stated that one major part of the project is creating “high frequency corridors” with associated bus infrastructure improvements, including transit priority and amenities.

C. Vanasse noted some of the limitations of this process, including the number of buses, garage and maintenance facilities, and drivers available to provide service. There are also curb space, layover space, and congestion limitations. C. Vanasse added that many of these limitations can be mitigated by partnerships with municipal stakeholders. C. Vanasse noted that trade-offs do not include sacrificing network coverage, so places the MBTA serves today will still have service generally within walking distance.

C. Vanasse stated that the project team will begin having pre-briefings with elected officials, municipalities, and other external stakeholders in the winter of 2022 before bringing a draft network map to the public for two months of extensive public outreach. C. Vanasse stated that the team expects the map to change because of outreach. The team plans to bring a final network map to the board in the summer of 2022 for approval before beginning the five-year phased implementation in fall/winter 2022/2023.

Discussion

David Koses (At-Large City) (City of Newton) noted that the proposal will be resource neutral and asked what the implications of the BIL may be on the project. D. Mohler stated that because the MBTA is a large urban system, the BIL is not expected to include any operating funds. Any new funds will be limited to capital projects.

C. Vanasse stated that while staff are creating a plan that is resource neutral, MassDOT has the tools and analysis to identify where additional funds could be used should they become available. C. Vanasse added that staff are working closely with the transit priority team on implementing capital investments to complement the redesign process.

D. Koses asked whether the initial proposal would include where additional service could be added if more funds become available. C. Vanasse stated that staff have the tools to respond to questions about this during the public process.

Tom O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council [TRIC]) (Town of Norwood/Neponset River Regional Chamber) stated that the project seems focused on the inner core of the system and asked about plans for engagement with suburban communities. C. Vanasse stated that there are plans for extensive regional public meetings, but that if there are specific committee or stakeholder meetings that would be useful for staff to attend, they are happy to do so. T. O'Rourke invited C. Vanasse to attend a future TRIC subregional working group meeting on transit access.

L. Diggins asked whether this effort is also working to address bus bunching. Wes Edwards (MBTA) replied that MBTA staff are actively working to manage bus bunching and transit signal priority is one tool that helps to alleviate bunching, which is why working with municipalities is so important. Melissa Dullea (MBTA) added that there are some aspects of the network which may encourage bus bunching, such as two infrequent routes on a single corridor, which may be alleviated by redesign alone.

Daniel Amstutz (At-Large Town) (Town of Arlington) noted that the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy recently hosted a webinar on bus network redesigns from around the globe, and one of the takeaways was that revenue neutral efforts were not as effective. D. Amstutz asked whether the initial proposal would include cost estimates for those areas where higher frequency could be implemented with more funding. C. Vanasse stated that the team might not present estimates during public presentations but would have estimates ready should the question arise. D. Amstutz asked how municipalities can advocate for more funding. M. Dullea stated that different options might require different levels of additional funding, but that the MBTA welcomes communities to advocate for more funding for transit. D. Amstutz asked whether the network redesign could be tied to land use incentives, for instance, guaranteeing more service in areas with more housing.

C. Vanasse stated that the location-based data that the MBTA has are consistent with current land use patterns and project staff are working with MAPC's MassBuilds database of planned development to identify areas, in conversation with municipal partners, that are good candidates for transit and density. D. Amstutz added that some suburban communities are working to rezone for density and tying some planned bus service to rezoning could support communities in this process.

Note: E. Bourassa took over the Chair's seat.

J. Monty asked who will ultimately decide what trade-offs are made in the redesign process. C. Vanasse stated that the project team has promoted transparency in communicating that the process is prioritizing transit critical populations and public engagement, including pre-briefings with local officials and municipal staff. Ultimately the decision on the final redesign will be made by the MBTA board, but the final proposed network map will be reflective of public and stakeholder input.

J. Monty stated that one thing that has worked in recent years is agreements between the MBTA and municipalities, such as those for bus lanes, that promote accountability for both parties and encouraged the continuation of similar partnerships.

C. Vanasse noted that she planned to return to the MPO board to present the network maps and high frequency corridors, especially because there is a unique opportunity for the MPO to play a larger role in potentially funding improvements that support the redesign.

J. Fitzgerald asked that the MBTA consider accelerating the timeline on improvements to bus garages to ensure that the redesign is successful. C. Vanasse stated that the redesign team is working closely with MBTA staff on modernizing fleets and facilities to integrate both processes.

Steve Olanoff (TRIC Alternate) encouraged C. Vanasse to coordinate with other planning processes, transit studies, and local shuttle bus services.

T. Bent encouraged C. Vanasse to coordinate with universities that run shuttle services.

11. Members Items

There were none.

12. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department) (Bill Conroy). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
At-Large City (City of Everett)	Jay Monty
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
At-Large Town (Town of Brookline)	Heather Hamilton
	Todd Kirrane
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	William Conroy
Federal Highway Administration	Ken Miller
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	David Mohler
MassDOT Highway Division	John Bechard
	John Romano
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Jillian Linnell
Massachusetts Port Authority	Sarah Lee
MBTA Advisory Board	Amira Patterson
	Brian Kane
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Eric Johnson
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	
North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly)	Darlene Wynne
North Suburban Planning Council (Town of Burlington)	Melisa Tintocalis
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

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Adi Nochur	MAPC
Aleida Leza	Belmont resident
Alison Felix	MAPC
Amy Ingles	
Ben Muller	MassDOT
Cheryll-Ann Senior	MassDOT
Caroline Vanasse	MassDOT
Chris Klem	MassDOT
Christian MilNeil	StreetsblogMASS
Colette Aufranc	Wellesley Select Board
Derek Shooster	MassDOT
Frank Tramontozzi	City of Quincy
Gus Norrbom	MassDOT
Jay Flynn	
Jeremy Thompson	
Jessica Boulanger	MAPC
Joe Blankenship	City of Boston
Joy Glynn	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Melissa Dullea	MBTA
Michael Garrity	MassDOT
Michelle Ho	MassDOT
Owen MacDonald	Town of Weymouth
Patrick Hoey	City of Boston
Paul Cobuzzi	
Sarah Bradbury	MassDOT
Sid Kashi	
Wes Edwards	MBTA
Wesley Lickus	MassDOT

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

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

Rebecca Morgan

Gina Perille

Michelle Scott

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Title VI Specialist

Boston Region MPO
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116
civilrights@ctps.org

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