

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Boston Region MPO Board
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116

Re: Draft Federal Fiscal Years 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program

Dear Members of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board:

The Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Advisory Council) is an independent group of citizen and regional advocacy groups, municipal officials, and agencies charged with providing public input on transportation planning and programming to the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The Advisory Council reviewed the MPO's Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). We would like to offer the following comments for your consideration:

- We appreciate that MPO staff have more closely involved us in the development of the TIP. Ethan Lapointe, the TIP manager, has given presentations and participated in question-and-answer sessions at several meetings.
- In the Executive Summary, Figure ES-3 compares the funding within the subregions of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council as to the percent of population, percent of employment, and percent of Federal Aid Roadway Miles. We would appreciate hearing how this data affected this year's TIP funding and how the MPO would like to use this data moving forward. We also thank you for increasing clarity over the last few years of the six evaluation criteria and six investment programs that guide the funding decisions.
- We continue to encourage the MPO and staff to think through how projects progress through each stage of the TIP funding process. We appreciate the MPO's decision to pilot a program that will help get municipalities to a design readiness of at least 25%. This could also become a more holistic assessment of what supports we have for project design and at what stage projects are programmed into the TIP. We would like to see the pilot continued, and expanded to be an annual support program as we see that some municipalities are less equipped than others to bring projects to that level of design. An ongoing program could be more easily evaluated and utilized sooner. The allocated \$4 million is a good start to what is likely to be a crucial step in the project development process. We hope this program is well-publicized and easily accessed.
- We support the MPO's recognition of the overlap between investment programs such as the transit and complete streets being elemental within major infrastructure projects and helping those projects score higher. Furthermore, transit does not stop at town lines, RTA lines, or even

MPO lines. The Advisory Council recommends a focus on funding of better inter-regional transit connections. Similar to the recent focus on transit and complete streets, we would like to see a future willingness to increase points for projects that include a sustainability and climate resiliency component.

- The Advisory Council would like to understand the history and policy for last-minute additions or amendments to the TIP. We encourage the MPO to have a bank of projects ready for when there is a surplus of funds due to a project being postponed. It would be helpful if time and budget estimates for when a project will be ready for construction were available to help prioritize last-minute changes.

We understand that there are often large increases in the costs of projects. We are concerned about the low level of unprogrammed money to help in these situations. We encourage the MPO staff to keep the Advisory Council abreast of changes in projects that will lead to major increases in cost, and provide clarity about how last-minute funding changes are made and why some large projects continue to be postponed. The Advisory Council would like to be consulted and more involved in last-minute decision making.

- We are glad to hear that the Boston Region MPO included an annual funding stream in the TIP for state of good repair for Bikeshare in the region and support for municipalities adding bicycle infrastructure or Bikeshare expansion, including the addition of electric bikes.

- When there are successful initiatives of promising technology funded in one area of the Boston MPO Region (microtransit pilots, for example) it would be helpful for a top-down look from the MPO at how the same service or technology can be tested in various parts of the region. Rather than be reactive, and receive applications from parts of the region or municipalities that happen to enjoy active local leadership at the time, the MPO should on its own declare certain efforts as worthy of a try regionally, and offer technical assistance and funding of similar pilots in multiple areas. Without that regional view, planning and execution of creative efforts will continue to be sporadic, geographically lopsided, and more difficult to scale up.

- The Advisory Council encourages the MPO to begin considering migration from an area due to climate forces rather than rehabilitation. The MPO should establish stronger climate-responsive parameters. The Advisory Council would like to know where the MPO will draw the line and score repeated rehabilitation lower.

Sincerely,

Lenard Diggins, Regional Transportation Advisory Council Chair

