

Community Advisory Council Charter

PURPOSE, MISSION, AND GOALS

The Community Advisory Council (Advisory Council) is an advisory body to the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) that advances public engagement in the regional transportation planning process. As a forum that informs MPO planning and decision-making, the Advisory Council includes and elevates diverse perspectives from stakeholders representing areas and interests throughout the region. The Advisory Council's mission is to create space for knowledge-building and productive discussions about regional transportation issues and to advise the MPO staff and board on the development of MPO programs and projects to ensure that they are responsive to public priorities.

To accomplish this, the Advisory Council is guided by the following goals:

1. **Equity.** The Advisory Council membership is composed of advocacy, community-based, and professional organizations, agencies, and municipalities, and increases equitable involvement in the MPO's decision-making process by including and elevating diverse and underrepresented perspectives, fostering robust dialogue, and supporting engagement in the planning process.
2. **Accountability.** The Advisory Council focuses on bringing transparency and greater accountability to encourage the MPO's decision-making to be consistent with the vision and goals established in the Long-Range Transportation Plan and reflective of the priorities and needs of the public.
3. **Engagement.** The Advisory Council has an empowered role in the development and implementation of the MPO's Public Engagement Program and Plan and coordinates with staff on public education efforts.

ADMINISTRATION

To support the Advisory Council's mission and goals, the administration and facilitation of the Advisory Council is managed and funded through the Boston Region MPO's Public Engagement Program. MPO staff provide ongoing educational opportunities for Advisory Council members to effectively engage with MPO work and maintain timely connections to the MPO planning process, including by creating engagement opportunities at key decision-making points, evaluating the impact of the Advisory Council's input in the planning process, and coordinating on implementation of the Public Engagement Plan.

MPO staff, in collaboration with the Advisory Council chair and vice chair, will conduct periodic reviews of the Advisory Council's function and efficacy. The chair and vice chair may also choose to engage other members in these reviews. Reviews may result in recommended changes and improvements to the Advisory Council structure,

administration, and function, including updates to this charter. Should changes to the charter be recommended, staff will implement updates in consultation with Advisory Council leadership and members.

External communications on behalf of the Advisory Council, including interactions with the press, will be managed by MPO staff in collaboration with Advisory Council leadership.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership Structure

The Advisory Council maintains a membership of no fewer than 10 and no more than 30 active members. If the number of active members becomes fewer than 10, staff must facilitate the addition of new members to reach the 10-member minimum threshold within two meetings or else meetings are paused. Members must maintain an active affiliation with the entity that they represent, except for unaffiliated community advocate and general public members. Members may be any type of entity or be unaffiliated with an entity, and the Advisory Council prioritizes membership for those representing voices that are underrepresented in MPO decision-making. Staff strives to ensure a diversity of representation on the Advisory Council while giving priority to those representing community-based organizations. Members of the MPO board may not be members of the Advisory Council.

Member entities can designate one primary representative and one alternate representative to attend meetings when the primary representative is unavailable. Designation of representatives must be made formally by the member entities via email or letter, which MPO staff will keep on file. Member entities may choose to update representatives via the same designation process at any point. If individual members' affiliations change during their terms, they must inform MPO staff and they may be required to reapply with their new affiliate entities.

Members serve two-year terms, without term limits. The end of each term presents an opportunity for the member and MPO staff to evaluate participation in the Advisory Council, discuss areas for improvement, and make necessary changes. At the end of a two-year term, members are required to reapply for Advisory Council membership unless this requirement is waived by staff. Members may choose to resign or end their term early by submitting a formal written notification to staff. In extreme circumstances, such as failure to fulfill contractual roles and responsibilities of membership or follow norms and expectations, staff may choose to remove a member.

Members representing advocacy and community-based organizations will receive a stipend for their participation in the Advisory Council via a contract agreement with the affiliate organization. Contract agreements will be reviewed and renewed annually

during active membership terms. Unaffiliated community advocates and general public members will also receive compensation for their participation via incentives provided for each meeting attended. This compensation will be distributed quarterly or biannually. As membership changes over time and new applications are considered each year, the MPO's financial resources will also be a consideration in determining the size of the membership and the number of members eligible to receive stipends for that year.

Application Process

Members are selected through a rigorous application process. MPO staff review all applications and select members based on applicants' statements of interest, background, experience, and affiliation. Staff seek to build and maintain a membership that is representative of a variety of perspectives and interests across the Boston region, and that includes voices that are not currently well-represented in the MPO's planning and decision-making process.

Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and MPO staff may actively solicit applications annually or when space becomes available in the group. MPO staff will strive to select and onboard applicants in a timely manner.

New members will receive informational resources about the Advisory Council and the MPO planning process, and they will participate in onboarding and training sessions led by MPO staff.

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities of Advisory Council members include the following:

- Attending and participating in Advisory Council meetings
 - This includes preparing for meetings and following up on action items.
 - Members or their designees must attend the majority of meetings each year and report planned absences to staff to remain in good standing.
- Representing the entity with which the member is affiliated (or their community's interest, for unaffiliated community advocate and general public members) in Advisory Council discussions and decisions
 - This may involve proactive solicitation of input from their organization or community in advance of planned discussions and decisions.
- Representing the Advisory Council as appropriate when attending MPO meetings and events (on an ad-hoc basis or as desired since representing the Advisory Council at MPO meetings is primarily the responsibility of the chair and vice chair)
- Sharing information about the Advisory Council and the MPO with their organizations, communities, and networks

The expected total time commitment for Advisory Council members is approximately 40 hours per year, or three to four hours per month. This time commitment includes time spent attending, preparing for, and following up on meetings. It also includes coordination with the members' affiliated entities, the community or communities they serve or represent, and/or other stakeholders in their networks. Through this coordination members are expected to gather insights on local priorities and needs relevant to the Advisory Council's work and share information about the MPO.

LEADERSHIP

The Advisory Council elects a chair and vice chair from its membership through an annual election process.

Elections

MPO staff administer elections annually in the fourth quarter of the federal fiscal year (July through September). Any member in good standing may be nominated by other members or nominate themselves during a meeting and choose to run for a leadership position. The newly elected chair and vice chair are formally introduced at the next MPO board meeting following the election.

Leadership Structure

The Advisory Council chair and vice chair serve two-year terms, with a limit of two consecutive terms (but no overall term limit) for either leadership position. Leadership positions represent a voluntary commitment from members to fulfill the leadership roles and responsibilities outlined below, in addition to the existing roles and responsibilities of general Advisory Council members. As such, they represent a voluntary expenditure of additional time that is not included in a membership stipend. Depending on the preference of the chair and vice chair to share and manage leadership roles and responsibilities, leadership positions may require an additional time commitment of between four to eight hours per month in addition to the estimated time commitment for general members.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities for these leadership roles include the following:

- Representing the Advisory Council on the MPO board and committees and sharing the Advisory Council's input during planning and decision-making discussions
 - This includes preparing for, attending, and following up on MPO board meetings (typically held on the first and third Thursdays of each month) and committee meetings (which vary in cadence throughout the year).
- Collaborating with staff on planning and facilitating Advisory Council meetings and events, including identifying potential discussion topics for meetings

- Collaborating with staff on synthesizing input from Advisory Council members and meeting discussions

Any other member of the Advisory Council may be designated jointly by the chair and vice chair to serve as a representative to the MPO board and committees. Only one Advisory Council leader or member at a time will represent the Advisory Council as its official representative in MPO board and committee meetings, but any Advisory Council member is invited to participate in MPO board and committee meetings. If the chair is not able to attend to represent the Advisory Council at an MPO meeting, the vice chair is the immediate alternate for representation. If the vice chair is also not able to attend to represent the Advisory Council, the chair and vice chair may choose to designate another member of the group to represent the Advisory Council at an MPO meeting; otherwise, priority for alternate representation goes to the alternate designee for the chair's entity, then to the alternate designee for the vice chair's entity.

MEETINGS

The Advisory Council meets approximately 11 times per year, holding monthly meetings except for a recess typically held in the summer. Meetings are held virtually on Zoom at a regular recurring day and time to be agreed upon by members of the Advisory Council. Advisory Council meetings are public and held in compliance with the [Massachusetts Open Meeting Law](#) (OML), with the exception of internal training or educational sessions held throughout the year that serve as substitutes for typical meetings. Public meetings offer the Advisory Council a formal venue for discussion, deliberation, and decision-making. Internal training and educational sessions offer members informal opportunities to engage with MPO staff and learn more about specific topics relevant to the MPO's work. Any discussion of matters on which the Advisory Council wishes to advise the MPO board or influence planning or decision-making outcomes must be held during a public meeting and in compliance with OML regulations.

MPO staff strive to circulate agendas and meeting materials one week prior to meetings, and all materials are posted at least 48 hours in advance of meetings per OML requirements. Staff also prepare meeting summaries after each meeting.

Meetings are typically 90 minutes. The meeting format includes introductions, time for public comments by non-members, a section for presentation and discussion of MPO work and other relevant transportation topics of interest to members, and a section for formal Advisory Council business such as deliberation and decision-making, taking votes, and advising staff on a specific topic or discussing advice to share with the board.

The Advisory Council convenes in-person at least once per year. In-person attendance is typically optional, and the in-person event may be a meeting, field trip or site visit, or

an informal gathering, depending on member interests and preferences. Advisory Council members are also welcome and encouraged to attend and participate in other meetings and public engagement events hosted by the MPO.

Decision-making and Voting

As the Advisory Council chair and vice chair are responsible for representing the perspective of the Advisory Council group on the MPO board and elevating the group's advice and priorities, they may move to initiate a vote for the group to reach a consensus or express differing opinions on a topic. Other members of the group may also request to take a vote on how to express advice on a topic. If there is consensus among the group on a topic, taking a vote can help the Advisory Council chair and vice chair represent that consensus to the MPO board. However, it is not always necessary for the group to reach a full consensus or take a formal vote on a topic, and the variety of member perspectives and differences of opinion shall also be shared with the MPO board. Votes will also be taken regularly to approve meeting summaries prepared by MPO staff.

Votes may only be taken when at least a quorum (simple majority) of voting members is present. Votes pass by a simple majority of voting members. To initiate a vote, a motion must be made by a voting member and seconded by another voting member.

MPO staff record all votes and formal decisions in meeting summaries. The chair and vice chair will share the outcomes of any formal decision-making votes or discussions conducted by the group with the MPO board as appropriate. Staff also record deliberations and discussions about advice, and specific opinions and priorities expressed by the group and individual members that do not result in formal votes. This information is included in meeting summaries and shared with the chair and vice chair for their use in preparing and participating in MPO board and committee discussions on related and relevant topics.

Norms and Expectations

Advisory Council members are expected to conduct themselves professionally and courteously in meetings and during interactions with staff, other members, and members of the MPO board, as well as when representing the Advisory Council and MPO externally.

The following are group agreements regarding meetings, affirmed by the members of the Advisory Council:

- This is a space for trust and collaboration, and that is our baseline. We are coming together with the shared intention to collaborate on improving the

regional transportation system. We want to create a space where everyone feels comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas.

- We allow space for differences of opinion and recognize that we will not always find consensus or closure. We express different opinions constructively and respectfully.
- We listen to each other for deeper understanding and allow space for others to share.
- We speak intentionally, authentically, and directly, grounding what we share in our values and perspectives, and avoiding making assumptions about each other.
- As members of the Advisory Council, we represent our member entities and their perspectives, but we are also individuals with particular ideas and lived experiences.