

# REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Summary of May 12, 2010 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Rooms 2 and 3 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

### 1. **Introductions** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

Laura Wiener, Chair and representative of Arlington, called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

### 2. **Chair's Report** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

- The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee of the MPO is currently developing the next Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). These three documents will be discussed at the June meeting.
- The Advisory Council's TIP Committee will meet at 2:00 PM on June 9.
- The MPO is also evaluating project proposals for their Clean Air and Mobility Program. Projects will be selected next month.

### 3. **Approval of the Meeting Minutes of April 14, 2010** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

The meeting minutes of April 14, 2010 were unanimously approved.

### 4. **Presentation of the Draft Statewide Freight and Rail Plan** – *Paul Nelson, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Office of Transportation Planning*

Paul Nelson, the deputy project manager of the State Freight and Rail Plan, gave a presentation on the findings and recommendations of the draft Plan. Below are some of the main points of the presentation:

#### **Introduction**

- Freight is an important topic to consider because its movement affects our environment, economy, and quality of life.
- The goals of the draft plan are to preserve and improve existing infrastructure, enhance existing operations, facilitate freight system improvements that will enhance economic development, and help the system preserve and enhance the environment and quality of life.

## **The Existing Freight System**

- Trucks carry more freight annually (239 million tons) than rail (18 million tons) in Massachusetts. Thirty two percent of the freight moved from one point in the state to another (internal volume) is moved by truck.
- Less than one percent of internal volume is moved by rail. Rail makes more economic sense for moves longer than 500 miles.
- There is a concentration of distribution activity in Boston, Worcester, Springfield, the Route 24 corridor south of Boston, and I-93 corridor north of Boston.
- Distribution facilities are expanding beyond the Boston metropolitan area because larger tracts of cheaper land are available there.
- There has been a shift in Massachusetts to manufacturing high-value, low-weight products that are more likely to be distributed by truck or airplane.
- Freight volumes are expected to increase 70 percent by 2030.

## **Issues & Constraints**

- Much of the infrastructure in Massachusetts was built to earlier standards.
- There is a need to upgrade the infrastructure to accommodate current standards.
- Vertical clearances, congestion, and weight restrictions are major freight issues.
- Ships are getting bigger and need greater depth than available in Boston's port.
- The conflict between freight land uses and other land uses is an important issue.
- Freight needs to be better considered in the prioritization of projects.

## **Scenarios**

- The draft Plan considered five scenarios. Those with the highest return on investment were:
  - Clearance improvements to the Pan-Am Southern line, which will allow for the passage of double stack containers.
  - Increased weight capacity on several lines, including the CSX lines from Framingham to Fall River and New Bedford.
  - A Massport project to dredge Boston Harbor to 50 feet.
  - Roadway access improvements to the South Boston port.
- Construction of all rail projects recommended in the draft plan would increase rail mode share from the current 6.1 percent to 7.1 percent in 2035. This represents an increase in overall rail volumes of 14 percent. This would divert 296,800 trucks from the road. The improved intermodal service competition could increase the rail mode share even higher.
- The scenarios demonstrate that there are private and public benefits to freight projects and there are opportunities for cooperation between the sectors. An example would be an Industrial Rail Access Program (IRAP), which is recommended by the Plan. It could help preserve and facilitate freight intensive land uses and infrastructure that can be crowded out by other uses.

## **Member Questions**

In response to members' questions, P. Nelson made the following additional comments:

- An RTAC member asked if the projected 70 percent increase in freight volumes by 2035 has been translated to increased truck trips by major corridors/regions within the state, specifically expressing concern over increases in the I-495/MetroWest region, and within the 128 belt. Mr. Nelson responded that the projection is “an educated guess” and reflects an assumed increase in per capita consumption. He further noted that the national economic slow down is not fully factored into the projection.
- An RTAC member challenged Mr. Nelson’s assertion that much of the freight arriving in Beacon Park Yards in Allston is not destined for Boston proper and asked that MassDOT provide empirical data supporting their assertion. A member noted that with a projected increase of 70 percent growth, it would only be logical that the volume of freight moving inside 128 and Boston proper would grow significantly and gravely impact secondary roads in the region’s communities. Mr. Nelson answered saying that a lot of freight also is distributed to the I-495 corridor and many other areas of the region and that MassDOT is looking to utilize short line railroads to move freight east of Worcester and Westborough. A local short line railroad may be more aggressive seeking additional customers than a national railroad.
- A state rail plan is being developed by the same consultant that produced the draft Statewide Freight and Rail Study. The rail plan is required by federal regulations.
- A number of RTAC members questioned Mr. Nelson on the lack of a rail connection (i.e. the reconnection of Track 61) between the Port of Boston and the national rail system, noting that global shipping patterns are increasingly calling at East Coast ports. Also noting that the widening of the Panama Canal will bring more water-borne freight to East Coast ports. Mr. Nelson said that Massport is dredging the port and acquiring cranes to be ready for larger ships.
- Massachusetts has certain characteristics that make it difficult to match the rail share found in other parts of the country. It is primarily a destination and there are not a lot of bulk goods moving into or through the state.
- There is not much demand for the movement of freight from the port to Beacon Park Yards. Beacon Park Yards and the Port of Boston both serve mainly freight being distributed within the Boston metropolitan area.
- A number of members questioned Mr. Nelson as to why there was only a projected 1 percent increase in rail share, suggesting that it was an unacceptable level given the resulting impact on the highways. Mr. Nelson said that about 87 percent of freight by tonnage is moved by truck in the state. Six percent is by rail and about five to seven percent is by water. A much higher share of freight is moved by air and truck when measuring by value.
- P. Nelson said there may be additional truck traffic in MetroWest if Beacon Park Yards closes, noting that at current levels, these trucks represent less than 0.5 percent of the truck traffic in Massachusetts.
- P. Nelson also noted that diverting freight from trucks to more efficient modes requires working with private companies that make decisions based on cost. Part of the high truck mode share is that the road system is much more developed than the rail system.
- (Staff comment: This is a paraphrase of a comment made by P. Nelson at 53:13)

## **Member Comments**

- A 70 percent increase in freight between now and 2035 seems high. The assertion was made that short-term actions by the state and the MBTA to increase commuter rail and close Beacon Park Yard would have immediate negative highway congestion impacts as well as longer term rail capacity consequences.
- The Panama Canal is being enlarged to accommodate bigger ships. These ships may want to come to Boston and the state should be prepared.
- It is imperative to make a connection between rail lines and the port in Boston.
- More freight could move into the Boston region's urban core if there were better freight access to state-owned rail lines.
- Rail and short sea shipping could play an increased role in moving freight into the urban core of the Boston region.
- A rail freight mode share of 25 percent is common in other parts of the country. The state should set a goal for what percentage of freight to move by rail.
- The air quality impact of closing Beacon Park Yards should be studied.
- The Plan should consider how goods could be moved inside Route 128 by rail or short sea shipping.
- Several members expressed concern that there would be more trucks needed to bring goods into Boston in Beacon Park Yards is closed. Others expressed concerns about the impact of these large trucks on MetroWest roads (Route 90, 9, 20, and 128) both in terms of traffic congestion and road maintenance.

## **5. Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Discussion – Mary Ellen Sullivan, Boston Region MPO staff; Laura Wiener, Chair; Steve Olanoff, Chair of the Advisory Council's UPWP Committee**

Mary Ellen Sullivan, of the Boston Region MPO staff, gave a brief overview of the Unified Planning Work Program. The UPWP contains information about all transportation planning studies and work conducted in the Boston region with federal funds. Most funds go towards ongoing work, such as the development of the Transportation Improvement Program or the Long-Range Transportation Plan. However, there is approximately \$500,000 available annually for new studies. The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee's UPWP Subcommittee is reviewing the universe of studies and preparing to make a recommendation to the MPO.

Steve Olanoff said that the Advisory Council's UPWP Committee would like feedback from Advisory Council members. S. Olanoff said a good approach would be to look at staff's high priorities and decide if they are also Advisory Council priorities. The Advisory Council promoted a freight study last year and will promote a continuation of that study with a phase two. The Advisory Council has also supported a regional HOV study in the past.

## **Member Questions**

In response to members' questions, M.E. Sullivan made the following additional comments:

- Funding to implement study recommendations is limited. This is encouraging the development of more programs, such as the Community Transportation Technical Assistance Program.
- Each year the MPO's UPWP Subcommittee considers studies that were not approved for funding the previous year.

Frank DeMasi, representative of Wellesley, provided a brief overview of the Freight Committee's recommendation for a FFY 2011 study. F. DeMasi said the Freight Committee would like to see a study of the potential to divert freight from trucks to rail. The state of Vermont conducted a study that could be the prototype. This study could analyze the benefits of modal diversion on congestion, air quality, and highway maintenance costs. The study would involve collecting data to program a mode choice model and then analyzing the model results. F. DeMasi asked for the Advisory Council's support for the study.

Richard Flynn, representing the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition, said it makes sense to first digest the state study.

Kristina Johnson, representing Quincy, said the study proposed by the Freight Committee is probably more appropriate for the MassDOT, rather than MPO staff, to conduct.

Rick Arena, representing the Association for Public Transportation said the proposed study is a good approach.

**6. Update on the Clean Air and Mobility Program – Hayes Morrison, MPO staff; and Laura Wiener, Chair**

L. Wiener said this agenda item would not be discussed because there was not sufficient time remaining in the meeting. L. Wiener instructed Mike Callahan of the MPO staff to circulate information by e-mail about the projects proposed for the Clean Air and Mobility Program.

**7. Committees Report**

- Plan Committee – K. Johnson, Chair of the Plan Committee, announced that the Plan Committee met on April 14. The Plan Committee will follow the MPO's process for developing the next Plan. The draft policies and visions are now being developed. The MPO will not discuss specific projects until later in the summer.
- Programs – Richard Canale, Chair of the Programs Committee, said he would like to call a meeting of the Committee in May. The purpose of the meeting will be to gather ideas for programs and transmit those to staff and the Chair.

**8. Member Announcements**

R. Arena announced that the Association for Public Transportation is meeting on June 15, 2010. Information can be found at their website, [www.assnforpublictransportation.org](http://www.assnforpublictransportation.org).

Chris Porter, representative of MassBike, announced that the week of May 17 is Bay State Bike Week.

## **9. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:35 PM.

### **Attachments:**

Attendance List for May 12, 2010

**ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for May 12, 2010**

***Cities and Towns***

Laura Wiener, Arlington  
Tom Kadzis, Boston  
Bob Campbell, Braintree  
William Friel, Canton  
Walter Bonin, Marlborough  
Tony Centore, Medfield  
Kurt Mullen, Needham  
Kristina Johnson, Quincy  
Jon Squib, Revere  
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley  
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

***Agencies***

Tad Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Paul Nelson, Massachusetts Department of Transportation  
Jim Gallagher, Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC)  
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council  
Ed Anthes-Washburn, Seaport Advisory Council  
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)

***Citizen Groups***

John Kane, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA  
Marvin Miller, American Council of Engineering Companies  
Richard Arena, Association for Public Transportation  
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects  
Malek Al-Khatib, Boston Society of Civil Engineers  
Jenna Venturini, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition  
Richard Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition  
Chris Porter, MassBike  
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative  
Chris Anzuoni, New England Bus Transportation Association  
John McQueen, WalkBoston

***Guests and Visitors***

Neil Angus, Devens Enterprise Commission  
Ed Lowney  
Marilyn MacNab  
Wig Zamore, STEP, MVTF

***MPO Staff***

Walter Bennett  
Mike Callahan

Anne McGahan  
Hayes Morrison  
Mary Ellen Sullivan