

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



COMMITTEE REPORTS

March 9 – April 13, 2011

Regional Transportation Advisory Council Committees

Freight – Walter Bonin & Dom D'Eramo

The Freight Committee will meet on Wednesday, April 13 at 1:00 PM, prior to the Advisory Council meeting, in Conference Room 4.

Plan Committee – Schuyler Larrabee

The Plan Committee met on Wednesday, April 6 at 1:30 PM in the MPO's Conference Room to discuss the Advisory Council's priorities for project selection. In attendance were the Plan Committee Chair, Schuyler Larrabee of the Boston Society of Architects; Advisory Council Chair Laura Wiener of Arlington; Advisory Council Vice Chair Steve Olanoff of Westwood; Dick Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition; Frank DeMasi of Wellesley; Walter Bonin of Marlborough; Tom O'Rourke of the Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce; Richard Canale of the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination; and John Businger of the National Corridors Initiative. Also in attendance from staff were Mike Callahan, Sean Pfalzer, Anne McGahan, and Bill Kuttner.

The MPO will soon begin selecting surface transportation projects and programs to fund in the Boston region between 2011 and 2035. Any project that costs more than \$10 million, or adds capacity to the transportation system, must be included in the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

Before selecting individual projects, the MPO will discuss the effectiveness of different funding strategies towards achieving their vision for the future of the region. As part of this discussion the MPO will also consider which share of the available funding to program on large projects (costing more than \$10 million) through the Plan, and how much to set aside to fund smaller maintenance projects, which don't need to be listed in the Plan. In previous Long-Range Transportation Plans the MPO set aside as much as 70 percent of the funding for smaller projects. But in JOURNEY TO 2030, the current Long-Range Transportation Plan that was updated in 2009, close to 90 percent of the funding was allocated towards large projects in one five-year time band.

Anne McGahan, the MPO's manager for the Long-Range Transportation Plan, discussed the different investment categories the MPO is considering. They are listed below in order of effectiveness at supporting the MPO's policies:

- Transit Modernization
- Clean Air and Mobility program

- Currently funded at \$2 million per year in the Transportation Improvement Program for projects with air quality and mobility benefits.
- Transit State of Good Repair & Maintenance
- Roadway Modernization
- Transit Expansion
- Bike and Pedestrian Expansion
- Transit Management & Operations
- Roadway State of Good Repair & Maintenance
- Roadway Management & Operations
- Freight Expansion
- Roadway Expansion

Definitions for the investment categories are:

- Management & Operations: ITS and low-cost capital improvements for system efficiencies
- State of Good Repair and Maintenance: Repair and maintenance of the existing system
- Modernization: Upgrades to the existing system to meet contemporary standards
- Expansion: Extending or adding capacity to the existing system

Members of the Plan Committee made the following comments on prioritization of the investment categories:

- Maintenance and modernization of the existing transportation system should be the MPO's top priority, and it should receive a greater share of funds than the other categories.
- When there is funding for expansion, The MPO should favor rail projects over highway and bicycle/pedestrian projects. Rail is a more sustainable way of accommodating growth in passenger and freight travel.
- The MPO should allocate approximately 80 percent of its available funds over the next 24 years to large regional maintenance and expansion projects.
- The remaining 20 percent of the available funds should be dedicated to programs that will provide the greatest benefit for the funds invested. For example, an intersections program that will favor improving the worst intersections, as determined by available data is to be preferred.
- The MPO should use quantifiable performance measures to determine which projects are the best to fund.

Other comments included the following:

Freight

- Freight expansion should be a higher priority of the MPO than it previously has been.
- The freight benefits of all projects should be considered in developing the Plan. The freight movement benefits of MPO projects are usually not identified as such. For example, the I-93/I-95 interchange project in Woburn is identified principally as a highway expansion project, but it will also serve as an important project in facilitating the movement of freight.
- The Plan should include a chapter dedicated to goods movement.

Transit

- The MPO should continue to pursue transit expansion. This can be done with state funds or through a flex of highway funds. The MBTA needs to focus its available capital funding on maintenance.
- Intercity passenger rail is not given enough consideration in the Plan. A third track on the Northeast Corridor will be needed to accommodate the additional commuter and intercity passenger rail, and will also have benefits for the movement of freight.

Highway

- Determining how to split the funds between maintenance and expansion is difficult without first discussing which major highway interchange projects the MPO supports.
- Most of the projects in the Universe of Projects are maintenance. The MPO is building very few new roads. Even the add-a-lane projects are simply fixing a bottleneck or building a lane to replace the current use of a breakdown lane.

General

- Projects should be evaluated for their economic impact.
- There are elements of the expansion projects listed in the Universe of Projects that are not expansion. Each expansion project should be evaluated to determine what share of the project's budget is for expansion, and which share if for maintenance or enhancement.
- The MPO needs to consider the transportation needs that transcend regional and state boundaries when selecting projects and programs to fund. For example, there is a need to improve the intercity passenger and freight rail network that connects the Boston region to the rest of the country. Local projects should be evaluated to make sure they will support, and not prevent, the development of a better intercity rail system.

The following committees did not meet and have not scheduled future meetings:

Executive – Laura Wiener

Membership – Steve Olanoff

Nominating – Malek Al-Khatib

Programs – Richard Canale

Transportation Improvement Program – Monica Tibbits

UPWP – Steve Olanoff

Transportation Planning and Programming Committee Subcommittees

The MPO's Unified Planning Work Program Subcommittee will meet on Thursday, April 21.