

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



COMMITTEE REPORTS

May 11 – June 8, 2011

Regional Transportation Advisory Council Committees

Freight – Walter Bonin & Dom D'Eramo

The Freight Committee met on Wednesday, April 13 at 1:00 in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building. In attendance were co-chairs Walter Bonin of Marlborough and Dom D'Eramo of Millis, Frank DeMasi of Wellesley, Schuyler Larrabee of the Boston Society of Architects, Ed Lowney of Malden, Steve Olanoff of Westwood, Abby Swaine of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Lynn Vikesland of Massport, Marilyn Wellons of the Riverside Neighborhood Association (Cambridge), and Laura Wiener of Arlington. MPO staff Bill Kuttner and Mike Callahan were also present.

The one item of business requiring Committee action was the approval or direction of an input statement for the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) project list. A list of about 30 candidate freight projects and initiatives had been developed for consideration by the Committee. Some projects could be implemented by the MPO if incorporated into the LRTP. Others involved far reaching changes, involved projects outside the MPO region, or were policy initiatives.

L. Wiener requested that since all other projects under consideration for the LRTP were implementable, that the Freight Committee should select several implementable projects for incorporation into the LRTP. A. Swaine suggested four criteria, later broadened to five, for informing the selection of projects for recommendation to the LRTP. A candidate project ideally should:

1. Enjoy agency support
2. Be mentioned in the state freight and/or rail plan
3. Be well defined at a planning level and potentially fundable
4. Offer synergy with other projects or initiatives
5. Result in beneficial economic and environmental externalities

There was consensus that these were appropriate criteria for the process at hand, and it was agreed that an editorial working group would select a group of high-priority projects for the LRTP. That group met later in April and selected the following four projects as their highest priority:

1. South Boston Roadway Improvements – This project would build a new Conley Terminal freight bypass road. It would remove trucks from neighborhood streets, and help prepare

the terminal for the increase freight traffic that will come once the Panama Canal is widened.

2. Track 61 Rail Improvements – This project would upgrade and extend an existing freight rail track into the South Boston Marine Industrial Park to serve a planned bulk cargo facility.
3. Framingham Subdivision Improvements – This project would upgrade the CSX line from Framingham to Mansfield to handle heavier and higher freight cars to help move additional freight from the South Coast region.
4. New Truck Rest Facility on I-495 – The State’s Freight Plan identified a need for additional truck rest facilities on I-495.

These projects are all identified as needs in the State’s Freight Plan.

M. Callahan gave an update of freight-related studies and analysis conducted by the MPO staff. The 2007 freight study focused mostly on freight service inventory and stakeholder concerns. A new freight study is now underway, which will continue the critical data gathering process with an eye toward improving our truck modeling capabilities. Phase I is about 70% complete, and a work program will soon be developed for Phase II. There will be a meeting concerning the UPWP, which authorizes studies, on April 28, and public requests to study freight are helpful.

UPWP Committee – Steve Olanoff

The Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee met on Wednesday, May 18 to discuss the development of the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2012 UPWP. In attendance were Chair Steve Olanoff (Westwood), Richard Flynn (Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition), Richard Canale (Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination), John McQueen (WalkBoston), Schuyler Larrabee (Boston Society of Architects), and Laura Wiener (Arlington). Also in attendance from the MPO staff were Mike Callahan, Mary Ellen Sullivan (UPWP project manager), David Fargen, and Pam Wolfe.

The UPWP is currently being developed for FFY 2012. The MPO’s UPWP Subcommittee has developed a universe of studies under consideration for funding in the next UPWP. A description of the possible studies, and pertinent comments, are listed below. This list does not include the MPO’s ongoing work, such as the development of the Transportation Improvement Program, public outreach, and work on the long-range transportation plan, for example.

Priority Corridors for Long-Range Transportation Plan Needs Assessment: This \$120,000 study would study several corridors that were identified as needing improvements in the needs assessment for the long-range transportation plan.

- Corridor studies are very useful, but there is not enough money available to pay for the recommended improvements.

Wellington Circle Improvements – Medford: This study would consider conceptual short and long term improvements to address safety and congestion problems at Wellington Circle.

- This study needs to consider the developments at Assembly Square in Somerville.

Route 20 and Boston Post Road Transportation Improvement Study This study would evaluate long-term multimodal solutions to address traffic safety and operations on Route 20 and Boston Post Road in Weston.

- This area could be studied as part of the Priority Corridors for Long-Range Transportation Plan Needs Assessment study.
- It would be valuable to study the effect of travel to and from nearby schools. Solutions to this school-based traffic could be applied throughout the region.
- Using the Central Mass rail line for commuter rail might help the situation.
- Site specific studies should only be undertaken if they can provide information that will be useful to other areas in the region.

I-93 North Corridor HOV Study: This study would explore the possibility of extending north the existing HOV lane between the Zakim Bridge and Medford. It would also study other preferential lane system options between I-95 and the New Hampshire border. These could include bus-only express lanes, for example.

- There are also rail options to improve passenger and freight transportation in this corridor. The Haverhill Line is being improved, and New Hampshire is considering an extension of commuter rail to Plaistow and Manchester. The study should be multimodal. Improving highway capacity and commuter rail at the same time could be counterproductive.

Technical Support/Clean Air & Greenhouse Gas Decision Making: This study would provide information to the MPO's Clean Air and Mobility Subcommittee that could be used to guide its decisions.

- This study should also consider how to reduce emissions associated with the movement of freight. The state's Freight Plan predicts that freight volume will increase 70% from 2010 to 2035. Moving 1 percent of the long-haul truck freight from truck to rail would save 111 million gallons of fuel per year.
- Projects funded through the Clean Air and Mobility Program should be studied to see how they performed compared to expectations.

Analysis of JARC and New Freedom Projects: This study will examine the effectiveness of projects funded by these two federal programs, and use the information to evaluate future proposals.

- All of the private transportation services should be catalogued. It is difficult to decide which services are necessary when we lack information about existing services.
- The study should receive a positive evaluation for linking land use and transportation, and working with limited financial resources.

Safe Access to Transit for Pedestrians and Bicyclists: This study would identify low-cost, quick implementation measures that can significantly improve pedestrian and bicycle access at up to 10 stations in the MBTA system.

- Staff should study stations where the recommendations can be applied to other stations.
- The study should focus especially on downtown stations.

Regional HOV Systems Planning Phase 2: This study would look at where HOV lanes are most needed in the region. A preliminary list of highway segments conducive to HOV treatments would be an end product of the study.

- The Advisory Council has long supported this study.

TIP Project Impacts Before/After Evaluation: This would be a pilot study to identify the effectiveness of Transportation Improvement Program projects.

- More than 1 year would probably be needed to complete this study because it would take more than a year to collect the before and after data.

Comparison of MBTA Systemwide Passenger Survey Results: The purpose of this study would be to document trends over time for information gathered through systemwide passenger surveys.

- The survey respondents represent too small of a segment of the traveling public. The survey does not reach non-riders and former riders. Surveying a broader segment of the population about public transit service would provide better data for understanding what needs to be improved.

Pavement Management System: This study would identify the cost of maintaining municipality-maintained federal aid arterial roadways and urban collectors in the MPO area. This would involve collecting data on the condition of more than 3,000 miles of roadway in the MPO area. MassDOT collects data on the roadways it maintains, but they are a small portion of the total road lane miles in the region.

- Does this study need to be conducted for 5 years in a row, as staff has suggested?
- How will the data be maintained? The status of road condition is constantly changing.

Freight Survey This study would survey truckers in the Boston region along major truck corridors (such as I-495) to determine their origin, destination, and commodity they are hauling.

- The study should evaluate well under linking land use and transportation, and protecting air quality and the environment.
- While diverting freight from trucks to rail is good, we will still depend heavily on trucks and it's important to understand their movements.
- Staff should consider studying how different locations for transferring trucks from rail to highway will affect the regional highway system.
- This study will help us understand where infrastructure should be built to accommodate the 70 percent growth in trucks that is forecast for the next 25 years.
- This study will help us understand how feasible truck to rail diversion really is.

Transit Service Planning Technical Support for Regional Transit Authorities, Transportation Management Associations, and Municipal Governments: The MPO has supported transit planning services for RTAs in the region. The service would be expanded to TMAs and municipalities in FFY 2012.

Emergency Evacuation/Hazard Mitigation Mapping – Phase 3: This study would continue work from previous UPWPs for emergency and hazard mitigation mapping to incorporate new

information and data becoming available on natural hazards, evacuation plans, and critical infrastructure in the region.

The UPWP Committee selected the following projects as its top priority:

- Freight Survey
- Regional HOV Systems Planning Phase 2
- Safe Access to Transit for Pedestrians and Bicyclists
- Technical Support/Clean Air & Greenhouse Gas Decision Making

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

Executive – Laura Wiener

Membership – Steve Olanoff

Nominating – Malek Al-Khatib

Plan – Schuyler Larrabee

Programs – Richard Canale

Transportation Improvement Program – Monica Tibbits

Transportation Planning and Programming Committee Subcommittees

The MPO's Unified Planning Work Program Subcommittee will meet on Thursday, June 2.