

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



Regional Transportation Advisory Council

March 9, 2016, Meeting

3:00 PM, State Transportation Building, Conference Room 4, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA

Meeting Summary

Introductions

T. Bennett, Chair (Cambridge) called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. (For attendance list, see page 7)

Chair's Report-Tegin Bennett, Chair

T. Bennett reported on the recent Boston MPO meeting discussions. Green Line Extension discussions were shifted to late April. The MPO's UPWP Committee will meet on the March 31 to review recommendations for First Tier projects for the upcoming FFY17 UPWP. The Advisory Council will submit comments on the First Tier projects prior to the MPO's UPWP Committee meeting.

Minutes - February 10, 2016

A motion to approve the minutes of the February 10 meeting was made and seconded. The minutes were approved.

Focus40: Long-Term Investment Plan for the MBTA - Jennifer Slesinger, Office of Transportation Planning, MassDOT

J. Slesinger presented on Focus40, the 2040 investment plan for the MBTA. As an introduction to this long-range plan, the ongoing Program for Mass Transit (PMT) and the State of the System reports were reviewed. 2040 trends, and next steps sections of the plan were discussed. Below is a summary of her presentation.

Focus40 is the latest iteration of the PMT, which is required by statute every 5 years; this PMT will fulfill requirements for the Fiscal and Management Control Board's 20-year capital plan. The plan establishes priorities to be implemented through the annual Capital Investment Program (CIP).

Focus40 lists the goals of planning for uncertainty, engaging in civic engagement, creating the universe of ideas, employing new evaluation tools, and operating under the premise of financial realism. Strategies employed in the planning process will offer a roadmap to the State of Good Repair (SGR) and will promote line specific investment packages and municipal partnerships.

The "State of the System" series of reports provides an overview of the MBTA's capital assets, their age and condition, and how their condition impacts system capacity and performance. See: <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/focus40/TheMBTAToday>.

The MBTA operates five primary transportation services; each varies in terms of the type of trips served and cost of providing trips. More than 90 percent of the SGR backlog is on the rapid transit and commuter rail. To gain insight to how the riders are being served, the MBTA surveyed 6,000 customers across all modes in the summer of 2015. The responses covered a broad range of topics including the condition and number of assets, operating practices and budgets, and some issues that are beyond the MBTA's control. Fleet reliability was a major hurdle in customer perceptions.

A steady commitment to purchasing new buses is needed because the vast majority of the MBTA's fleet is past its midlife. As an investment plan to address system aging over the 25-year horizon of the Focus40 process, this will remain critical for the MBTA.

System-wide asset management and maintenance issues that limit the ability to make improvements include storage and capacity constraints of existing maintenance facilities and the lack of right-of-way and station ownership. The presence of traffic signals and sidewalks contribute to the operational environment that can make changes more challenging. This is a significant factor in making stations more accessible to customers with disabilities.

Major capital investments needed in the Rapid Transit system are station design, signal systems, power sources and fleet size. The Commuter Rail system, which covers the largest geographic area and requires the broadest and capital intensive base, must focus investment on track and signal issues.

The MBTA will continue to meet the needs of a growing base of transit customers. With a population growth in the Greater Boston region estimated at 22.5 percent over the 2010-2035 timeframe, the Focus40 process will address the role of the MBTA as it

meets the evolving needs of Greater Boston in 2040. There are several factors that may alter the role the MBTA plays 25 years from now including climate change, demographic shifts, changing mobility preferences and technologies.

As commuting options change to include more car-free lifestyles, the system-wide impact of increased reliance on walking, bicycling, ridesharing, autonomous vehicles, and other commuting options will be addressed.

The Focus40 planning process will look for opportunities to engage with stakeholders to help shape the way they plan for an uncertain future. The Focus40 process is scheduled to launch in May, 2016. Alternate scenarios for the Greater Boston region in 2040 will be proposed. Potential investment strategies will be built and evaluated with final recommendations in early 2017.

Questions and Comments

In response to a comment from C. Porter, J. Slesinger explained that Focus40 will serve as the organizing document for the Program for Mass Transit (PMT), containing various studies undertaken for bus and rail modes.

In response to a comment by B. Steinberg, J. Slesinger explained that the Focus40 plan will not change the direction of the current transit initiatives, which are covered by the CIP, over the next five years. Focus40 will concern itself with broader issues covering 25 years into the future. One concern, raised by B. Steinberg, was the capacity for bus storage at a time when the MBTA is eliminating bus garages. J. Slesinger described the issue in terms of the number of garages available and from an SGR framework indicating that some facilities are in need of upgrading. J. Slesinger also explained that the proper geographic allocation of garage space to best facilitate active assets is another ongoing concern.

In response to a question from S. Ringler, J. Slesinger stated that although the framework has not been set, there may be a “resilience” section covering modernization or enhancement issues that deal with mitigation efforts as they relate to climate change.

T. Bennett asked how the plan will incorporate all of the ideas generated in public outreach into a universe of ideas that can be evaluated through a standardized priority-setting process.

J. Slesinger explained that although not yet formalized, ideas will be solicited throughout the process. Initially the focus of the planning process was to consider trends and broad themes. They are receiving a whole universe of ideas which will be reviewed to determine if they merit further evaluation. Different investment scenarios

may require a different set of evaluation tools, for example, an aggressive climate change investment scenario would weigh things differently than with an aggressive core capacity or State of Good Repair investment scenario. After pre-screening all of the ideas in the universe, an evaluation process that best aligns with the chosen investment scenario will be applied.

T. Bennett expressed support for the Focus40 process that places a heavier emphasis on exploring trends, suggesting there is more opportunity to move in a trend-based direction. T. Bennett also pointed out that trends analysis does not have a specific report but the information is reported in the individual State of the System Reports.

D. Montgomery pointed out that the big funding issues are not going to be dislodged by a specific planning process. At issue is a need for more funding in presenting solutions to long-term transportation improvements.

J. Slesinger stated that the State has reviewed Federal legislation from a policy framework perspective to determine the impact of the legislation on discretionary programs. M. Gowing noted that program funding sources translate into plan inputs.

In response to a question from T. Bennett on the influence of funding sources on the scenario planning process, J. Slesinger stated that the plan is financially constrained, but financial realism guides the direction of investments. If more funds are available under one program, it may have an impact on the planned action to be taken.

P. Nelson asked about the relationship between the MBTA and municipal partners and questioned if municipalities liked the direction this plan takes and whether it offers positive changes.

T. Bennett explained that Cambridge has been proactive over the last several years and has engaged more with the MBTA. The City has many MBTA service operations and there are many economic developments that are heavily tied to the success of the MBTA. The City has its own strategic plan for transit that acknowledges there are many actions a city can undertake to improve bus service; there are fewer actions a City can take that would improve subway service.

M. Gowing noted that the Town of Acton has worked with the MBTA in planning the reverse-commute commuter rail project developed in last year's plan. He encouraged exploring more municipal partnerships between municipalities, MassDOT and the MBTA.

S. Olanoff commented that the area of major concern outside the central core is first mile/last mile service.

S. Larrabee was concerned with the mismatch of bus size and service corridors that see empty buses arrive infrequently. He questioned why the MBTA cannot offer smaller size buses that operate more frequently. J. Slesinger stated that the lack of facilities is a problem contributing to limiting bus size. One possibility might be to contract for smaller buses as a way to provide better service.

M. Wellons and M. Gowing commented on increased long-term operations costs for drivers in expanding bus service using either large or small buses. These issues become more expensive with expanding routes due to labor costs. In response, J. Slesinger said that there is a possibility for a service plan to be implemented to evaluate needed improvements to existing services. This would represent a separate planning process.

A. Swaine stated that the Focus40 presentations are excellent but they should be moved to a more visible location on the website. She also suggested that outreach activities include a positive message in the form of success vignettes rather than focus exclusively on shortages and system needs. J. Slesinger said the upcoming launch will emphasize improved public outreach.

J. McQueen commented on the structural design of the routes expressing that he favors an increase in circumferential service. J. Slesinger indicated that any new routes proposed in the plan will be evaluated.

T. Laubenstein expressed interest in the sustainability aspect of power infrastructure of the transit system stating that its impacts should be tied to air quality, congestion, and climate change. J. Slesinger explained that in compiling the trends section of the plan, different stakeholders provided feedback on the issue of climate change and energy impacts on the MBTA.

T. Bennett indicated that Advisory Council members can reach out to various groups they represent to take part in the Focus40 planning process.

UPWP: Report and Discussion - C. Porter, Chair, 3C Certification Documents Committee

C. Porter summarized the discussion of the Committee meeting held prior to the regular meeting. A. Kleyman, the MPO's UPWP Manager, briefly summarized the universe of planning studies being considered for the FFY17 UPWP. The Committee reviewed the universe of projects (studies and programs) and asked clarifying questions regarding standard definitions and also considered project placement on the First Tier list of projects.

The committee members shared comments on the Second Tier list. There was interest in studies relating to electric vehicle use as well as transportation mitigation of major developments. Several projects covered similar areas that are already being studied according to staff and were placed on the Second Tier list of projects for possible future consideration.

C. Porter asked members to contact him if there were any questions or comments about the projects being considered.

P. Nelson commented on the emphasis staff placed on certain types of projects. L. Dantas, Manager of the MPO's Certification Activities, explained that staff tries to select studies and programs that align with the LRTP visions and goals statements, so there will be a mix of selected studies as the staff attempts to balance the types of studies over the current and following years.

T. Bennett asked for input over the balance in program emphasis areas. She stated that the questions of balance will be navigated over the upcoming weeks.

C. Porter stated that the Committee will compile comments received so far and relay them to staff in the next week for consideration as the project priorities are being developed for the MPO's UPWP Committee meeting on March 31.

Old Business, New Business, and Member Announcements

T. Bennett asked members to either fill out the membership survey on the materials table or to complete the survey online. The survey was organized by Vice Chair M. Sanborn and it seeks to get input from members on meeting topics and logistics.

J. McQueen announced that WalkBoston will be holding its annual meeting on March 22. Brochures for the event were left at the sign-in table.

B. Steinberg announced that the Quincy Center Station will be part of a planning process for upgrading facilities in the Quincy Center Planning Area.

S. Olanoff introduced a brief discussion on the proposals that were voted on by the MBTA's Financial Management and Control Board to increase fares on July 1.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting adjourned at 4:20 PM.

Attendance

Agencies (Voting)

MassRides

Gary St. Fleur

Municipalities (Voting)

Acton

Mike Gowing

Brookline

Todd M. Kirrane

Cambridge

Tegin Bennett

Needham

David Montgomery

Westwood

Rhain Hoyland

Trevor Laubenstein

Citizen Groups (Voting)

AACT

Mary Ann Murray

American Council of Engineering Companies

Fred Moseley

Association for Public Transportation

Barry M. Steinberg

Boston Society of Architects

Schuyler Larrabee

Massachusetts Bus Association

Mark Sanborn

MassBike

Chris Porter

MASCO

Paul Nelson

National Corridors Initiative

John Businger

Riverside Neighborhood Association

Marilyn Wellons

WalkBoston

John McQueen

MPO Municipalities, Agencies & Other Non-Voting

MassDOT

Jennifer Slesinger

MassDOT - Aeronautics Division

Steve Rawding

TRIC

Steve Olanoff

BRA

Josh Weiland

Boston

Tom Kadzis

Guests

350MA

Susan Ringler

Neponset Valley TMAA

Karen Dumaine

US EPA - Region 1

Abby Swaine

East Boston Resident

Christopher Blackler

Staff

Lourenço Dantas

Jen Rowe

David Fargen

Matt Archer