

MPO Meeting Minutes

Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

September 23, 2021, Meeting

10:00 AM–12:20 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

David Mohler, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) agreed to the following:

- Approve the minutes of the meeting of August 5, 2021
- Release Recommendations from the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee for a 21-day public review period
- Change election procedures so that only the municipalities in each subregion may vote for their subregional representative on the MPO Board

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance beginning page 9.

2. Chair's Report—*David Mohler, MassDOT*

There were none.

3. Executive Director's Report—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff*

T. Teich announced ongoing staff recruitment, including for the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Manager and Public Outreach Coordinator positions.

T. Teich stated that MPO staff have received one public comment on the draft Public Outreach Plan and encouraged board members to publicize the document for public review.

T. Teich stated that MPO staff would visit Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregional meetings in October to conduct annual outreach.

4. Public Comments

There were none.

5. Committee Chairs' Reports

There were none.

6. Regional Transportation Advisory Council Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair, Regional Transportation Advisory Council*

There was none.

7. Action Item: Approval of August 5, 2021, MPO Meeting Minutes—*Róisín Foley, MPO Staff*

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of August 5, 2021, was made by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Advisory Board (Brian Kane) and seconded by MAPC (Eric Bourassa). The motion carried.

8. Action Item: Recommendations from the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee—*Matt Genova, MPO Staff*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. [Draft Programming Policies to Address TIP project Cost Increases](#)

M. Genova presented recommendations from the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee in response to the issue of TIP project cost increases. He explained that cost increases were commonplace regardless of design stage, project type, and development timeline, but the largest cost increases occurred before projects reached the 25 percent design milestone. M. Genova also stated that the MPO does not have clear expectations around project development benchmarks and that the MPO has historically had limited levels of direct engagement with project proponents after projects are selected for funding.

M. Genova stated that the Committee made the following recommendations for the federal fiscal years (FFY) 2023–27 TIP cycle: require project proponents to submit 25 percent design plans and an updated cost estimate before being eligible for funding; provide proponents with annual project benchmarks and a TIP how-to guide; introduce biannual check-ins with project stakeholders, including MassDOT staff; and establish a process for rescoring projects when cost increases exceed a specified threshold. M. Genova stated that, with the approval of the board, these recommendations would be released for a 21-day public review period.

Discussion

E. Bourassa stated that the recommendations are flexible, with the goal of setting clear expectations rather than instituting strict rules.

Jay Monty (At-Large City) (City of Everett) stated that the new 25 percent design requirement would put smaller outlying towns at a disadvantage and that the impact of communication on preventing cost overruns is uncertain. J. Monty stated that the scoring system would need to be overhauled to implement rescoring, since a cost benefit analysis is not factored into the current evaluation system.

David Amstutz (At-Large Town) (Town of Arlington) asked whether projects could be scored upon approval by MassDOT's Project Review Committee (PRC) and then rescored at the 25 percent design stage. M. Genova confirmed that this would be possible. D. Amstutz asked if 25 percent design status is a typical benchmark among other MPOs. M. Genova responded that the Cape Cod Commission encourages project proponents to bring projects that are close to 25 percent design. D. Amstutz asked about staff capacity to maintain regular contact with project proponents and the possibility of the MPO creating a project subcommittee to more closely examine project issues going forward.

B. Kane underscored the importance of putting out the recommendations for public comment and the long-term benefit of project cost control in achieving a balanced distribution of funds.

L. Diggins agreed with D. Amstutz on creating a subcommittee and J. Monty on the impact of the design requirement on smaller communities. He noted that cost benefit has always been considered in project evaluation, and what the Ad Hoc Committee proposed was to formalize cost benefit analysis in the scoring system. L. Diggins agreed with B. Kane on releasing the recommendations for public comment.

L. Diggins asked if the MPO must use a four percent inflation rate. D. Mohler stated that MassDOT recommends consistency across MPOs, and four percent is the inflation rate currently used by MassDOT and the other MPOs in Massachusetts.

E. Bourassa explained that projects would be plotted on a chart to display cost changes in relation to project score. M. Genova stated that the four-quadrant plot can help the MPO prioritize funds and understand projects' relative values.

D. Mohler asked how the MPO would decide the threshold for each tier in the quadrant.

E. Bourassa responded that details could be discussed later as a group. M. Genova

stated that the cutoff values were based on the median values for the projects used in the example.

D. Mohler asked whether the proposal would be applied immediately to FFY 2023 projects. E. Bourassa acknowledged that the framework will not be applied to projects that are already programmed in the TIP and have not reached 25 percent design. Projects that are programmed in the forthcoming TIP cycles will be reevaluated if their costs go up.

David Koses (At-Large City) (City of Newton) asked how many projects were programmed in the TIP that did not reach the 25 percent design status. He also asked whether the 25 percent design requirement indicated the submittal or approval; whether there is a cost change between the 25 percent submittal and approval; and how many projects that were programmed were pre-25 percent and had more than a 25 percent cost increase.

E. Bourassa stated the 25 percent design requirement meant the submittal of 25 percent design plans and stated that the change in project costs between the submittal and approval is generally smaller than between PRC approval and 25 percent submittal. He stated that the majority of the projects in the TIP were pre-25 percent submittal in the past five to six years.

Ken Miller (Federal Highway Administration) clarified that at least a four percent inflation rate is set by Federal Highway Administration, but the MPO can propose an increased rate. He suggested that having a variety of metrics is important in project evaluation because project scoring is often unrelated to the size of the project and disadvantageous to larger projects. K. Miller suggested that MPO staff pick a project type and come up with unit cost metrics that they would ask proponents to provide.

Jen Constable (South Shore Coalition) (Town of Rockland) asked why the MPO did not already have a set-aside for cost overruns. She also mentioned the difficulty of understanding cost increases from the reporting requirement, since information provided in project updates tends to be standard and consistent. E. Bourassa acknowledged that given that MassDOT is able to only focus on projects that are already programmed on the TIP, due to limited staff capacity, the MPO is trying to get projects on the TIP for review and not being overly conservative about reserving funds. If implementing new policies does not address cost increases, the MPO would explore other options, including set-asides.

Tom O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council) (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce) asked if the staff has the capacity and confidence to implement

the recommendations. M. Genova stated that check-ins could be standardized and iterative to make efficient use of staff time. He added, in response to an earlier inquiry from D. Koses, that two-thirds of the projects programmed for FFY 2022–26 were just at PRC-approval and two-thirds of the projects in the sample data saw cost increases of over 25 percent.

D. Amstutz asked about the time frame for policy implementation. M. Genova stated that if the recommendations are released for public review, comments would be presented to the board, and staff could make needed updates to the policy; once the edits and details are written out, staff would ask for the board to endorse the proposal.

D. Mohler asked whether the project has to be at 25 percent design status regardless of which TIP year it is programmed. He also asked whether there would be projects that are at pre- or 25-percent submittal. E. Bourassa confirmed that these are true, although some projects for the next TIP cycle might not be at the 25 percent submittal, and the MPO has to decide what to do about these projects.

D. Mohler asked if consideration was given to setting a higher threshold in order to advance into year one of the TIP. M. Genova explained that setting a threshold that is higher than the recommended level might discourage municipalities from moving forward with design spending. Public comment would help the MPO understand how cities and towns would feel about the 25 percent threshold. E. Bourassa stated that it is rare to have new projects in the first year of the TIP because the MPO relies on MassDOT to provide information to determine whether the project would be ready for the first and second year of the TIP.

John Bechard (MassDOT Highway Division) noted that the committee was focusing on the long-term vision of getting more projects listed on the TIP rather than determining a threshold for projects to qualify for the TIP. He added that it is rare for MassDOT to have projects with nearly complete designs ready to recommend for new programming in the TIP, as projects typically only reach an advanced design stage if they already have capital funding allocated to them.

D. Mohler asked if high-cost, high-score projects would qualify as such regardless of their costs, as long as they score above the specified threshold. M. Genova confirmed that the assumption is correct.

Vote

A motion to release Recommendations from the TIP Project Cost Ad Hoc Committee was made by At-Large Town (Town of Arlington) (D. Amstutz) and seconded by MAPC (E. Bourassa). The motion carried.

9. Exploration of Uncertainties Related to the Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Travel Behaviors—*Marty Milkovits and Rebecca Morgan, MPO Staff*

A joint effort between the MPO and MassDOT, this study will explore the pandemic and post-pandemic uncertainties in travel behavior. R. Morgan stated that the purpose of this study is to provide guidance to MPO stakeholders on how to leverage CTPS products in light of pandemic and post-pandemic uncertainties and to identify how these uncertainties challenge existing inputs and assumptions. The study will outline guidelines on how to interpret model outputs and recommendations for further research of new data and tools. M. Milkovits stated that stakeholder inputs on remote work capabilities will be used to implement the representation of remote work in the travel demand model that will be used for scenario planning in the next Long-Range Transportation Plan.

Discussion

Bill Conroy (City of Boston) (Boston Transportation Department) expressed interests in participation in the process.

10. MPO Elections Survey Results—*Róisín Foley, MPO Staff, Eric Bourassa, MAPC, and Brian Kane, MBTA Advisory Board* ***Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar***

1. [Updated MPO Municipal Election Process Survey Results](#)

R. Foley presented stratified results of the MPO elections survey to show contrasts between responses from MPO board member municipalities and non-MPO board member municipalities. The goal of the survey, which was proposed in May 2020 and distributed in January through May 2021, was to gauge familiarity with and opinions about the MPO municipal elections process to better understand leading causes for a lack of representation in the MPO board makeup. She stated that stratified results were largely consistent with overall results, although certain findings from the initial analysis were more pronounced in the stratified data. She explained that a lack of knowledge or awareness of the MPO and the board elections process was prevalent regardless of the municipality's board membership status, and this might be attributed to the lack of internal communication within municipalities. In terms of possible changes, she stated that both members and non-members had chosen subregions voting for their subregional representatives as a top solution. Other top choices included continuing to hold virtual meetings, holding more meetings outside of the State Transportation Building, setting term limits, and at-large reps being voted in by only cities and towns.

Discussion

E. Bourassa stated that he and B. Kane are doing more outreach among stakeholders other than elected officials and town administrators to raise awareness of the MPO board elections. He added that they are discussing with MPO staff to plan more outreach activities in fall and winter to educate municipal staff about the MPO and what it does.

B. Kane commented that the stratified results are largely the same as the overall results. It is evident from the survey responses that the MPO plays a marginal role among municipalities and little attention is given to regionalization in the state as much as other states.

K. Miller asked if the MPO reached out to communities that did not participate in the survey. R. Foley stated that staff did target outreach to municipalities that had not responded but that staff did not have a follow-up post survey. K. Miller stated that since 43 communities did not respond to the survey, survey results that particularly concern lack of familiarity with the MPO may not be representative of what municipalities have to say as a whole. He added that it is possible that the survey did not reach the right people.

D. Amstutz expressed the opinion that having subregional municipalities vote for their representatives makes sense especially if they are supposed to represent the particular region; however, cities voting for at-large cities and towns voting for at-large towns would make an unnecessary city-town divide.

K. Miller asked if other MPOs around the state allow subregions to vote for subregional representatives. He suggested that having a forum for voting at subregional meetings may help with a higher voter participation. He added that the MPO could consider a non-strict term-limit policy whereby the MPO would institute term limits if there was a challenger.

Vote

A motion to allow only municipalities in a specific subregion to vote for their subregional representatives was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins). At-Large City (City of Newton) (D. Koses) and South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland) (J. Constable) voted no. North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn) (Tina Cassidy) abstained. The motion carried.

Discussion

Thatcher Kezer III (MetroWest Regional Collaborative) (City of Framingham) commented that having communities gather and talk about MPO issues helps to foster

regional relationships. He added that providing food would encourage people to show up in those meetings and participate in voting. Steve Olanoff (Three Rivers Interlocal Council) (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce) stated that subregions voting for subregional representatives might have an adverse impact on voter participation.

Vote

A motion to allow only cities to vote for At-Large City seats and towns to vote for At-Large Town seats was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the MBTA Advisory Board (B. Kane). The motion failed unanimously.

Discussion

D. Koses stated that Newton intends to represent the entire region rather than only cities, and the new procedure complicates the elections process. J. Monty stated that Everett does its best to represent its neighbors and does not see the reason to change the procedure. J. Constable stated that a lot of work is interregional and therefore would vote no. T. Bent also agreed with D. Koses, J. Monty, and J. Constable. B. Kane mentioned the proposed change would create a confusion for towns that maintain city governments such as Weymouth and Watertown. D. Mohler asked whether the new voting procedure would be implemented for the election whose process has already started. E. Bourassa stated that the change will be introduced in the next election cycle.

11.Members Items

There were none.

12.Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by B. Kane and seconded by L. Diggins. The motion carried.

Attendance

Members

Representatives and Alternates

At-Large City (City of Everett)	Jay Monty
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
At-Large Town (Town of Brookline)	Todd Kirrane
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Bill Conroy
Federal Highway Administration	Ken Miller
	Cassie Ostrander
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	David Mohler
MassDOT Highway Division	John Romano
	John Bechard
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	Jillian Linnell
Massachusetts Port Authority	
MBTA Advisory Board	Brian Kane
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Thatcher Kezer III
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	
North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly)	Darlene Wynne
North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn)	Tina Cassidy
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland)	Jen Constable
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke
	Steve Olanoff

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Aleida Leza	Belmont resident
Amira Patterson	MBTA Advisory Board
Ben Cares	City of Chelsea
Benjamin Muller	MassDOT OTP
Bob Frey	MassDOT
Brad Rawson	City of Somerville
C Senior	MassDOT District 5
Dan Seedah	
Derek Krevat	MassDOT OTP
Derek Shooster	MassDOT OTP
Eric Johnson	City of Framingham
Gus Norrbom	MassDOT
Joe Blankenship	Boston Transportation Department
John Gonzalez	DHK
Jon Rockwell	TEC Inc.
Jon Seward	
Josh Klingenstein	MBTA
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Makaela Niles	
Michael McNutt	
Michelle Ho	MassDOT OTP
Mike Garrity	MassDOT District 5
Owen MacDonald	Town of Weymouth
Paul Cobuzzi	
Peter Kuttner	
Sarah Bradbury	MassDOT District 3
Valerie Gingrich	Town of Wilmington
Wesley Lickus	MassDOT

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Jonathan Church

Annette Demchur

Róisín Foley

Matt Genova

Betsy Harvey

Sandy Johnston

Heyne Kim

Anne McGahan

Marty Milkovits

Rebecca Morgan

Gina Perille

Michelle Scott

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