

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Unified Planning Work Program Committee Meeting Summary

March 4, 2021, Meeting

9:00 AM–9:50 AM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform. Recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8003ZqglDQ>

Benjamin Muller, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Acting Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the summary of the February 4, 2021, meeting

Materials

Materials for this meeting included the following:

1. Summary of the February 4, 2021, meeting
2. Changes in UPWP Amendment and Administrative Modification Guidance for FFY 2022

Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

1. Introductions

B. Muller read the accessibility statement and called the roll.

2. Public Comments

There were none.

3. Meeting Summary of February 4, 2021—*Approval of this summary*

Steve Olanoff (Town of Westwood/Three Rivers Interlocal Council [TRIC] Alternate) pointed out that he had been left off the list of attendees of the February 4, 2021, meeting. Staff promised to correct the minutes. Tom Kadzis (City of Boston) made a motion to approve the minutes with that correction and Tom Bent (City of Somerville/Inner Core Committee) seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. New Amendment and Modification Procedures— *Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager*

S. Johnston explained potential changes to the MPO's policy for amending or modifying the UPWP, based on guidance from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Prior to federal fiscal year (FFY) 2021, the trigger for a formal amendment was mostly undefined in federal guidance; in FFY 2021 the MPO received guidance that a 10 percent change in the budget of any individual task would require a formal amendment process. For FFY 2022, the MPO has received guidance that that threshold would change to 25 percent. There are also other minor changes to the guidance. Staff are asking for the committee to give an indication that they support these changes, which will be described in Chapter 2 of the UPWP and formally approved as part of the vote to endorse the new UPWP.

B. Muller added some background. Prior to last year, the amendment process was carried out mostly between the MPO and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), and then MassDOT would notify FHWA of the amendment. Starting last year, FHWA wanted to formally review the amendments before the MPO executed the amendments. However, the volume of amendments presented was higher than FHWA anticipated, so this change to the threshold is being made to reduce the amount of paperwork.

S. Olanoff asked why the proposed new procedures specify a 21-day public comment period for amendments when the current practice is to hold a 30-day comment period. S. Johnston explained that the committee discussed this question last year and agreed to change the length of the comment period. The revised comment period, which matches the length of time for the TIP amendments, will be noted in the MPO's new Public Participation Plan. S. Olanoff and S. Johnston discussed some of the reasoning behind and drawbacks to this change, including that a 21-day period would be too short for some organizations that might wish to provide comments if those organizations meet monthly. B. Muller added that the shorter period makes moving amendments through the full process, which involves votes at multiple MPO meetings, easier and faster, and he noted that the state is trying to make the process consistent.

Discussion of the changes continued. T. Bent expressed support for consistency in amendment timelines. Daniel Amstutz (Town of Arlington/At-Large Town) asked some clarifying questions and suggested prioritizing outreach to stakeholders potentially affected by amendments, to which S. Johnston responded that staff definitely would. T. Kadzis said it seemed like a reasonable proposal. S. Johnston provided more context: in his four years of managing the UPWP, staff have received a total of approximately three comments on UPWP amendments. Len Diggins (Regional

Transportation Advisory Council) talked about how the 21-day period does make it harder for some potentially interested groups to hold meetings to discuss comments, but he understands the need to keep the process moving and how the additional time of a 30-day period could delay a vote. S. Johnston affirmed that sometimes that additional time would in fact be lengthy. A member of the public, Tom Branham (Alternative Transportation Group), commented that he thought the proposal seems reasonable, but expressed concern that unforeseen events might disrupt the timetable.

5. Coordination with Other MPOs— *Ben Muller, UPWP Committee Chair, and Jonathan Church, Manager of MPO Activities*

B. Muller discussed how MassDOT helps MPOs coordinate across the Commonwealth. MassDOT acts as a coordinating entity and also is responsible for passing along the UPWP funds to the MPOs, ensuring that MPOs are following federal regulations, and providing the local match to federal funds. B. Muller and his colleagues at MassDOT's Office of Transportation Planning (OTP) have an oversight role over the MPOs; B. Muller personally oversees the Boston Region, Old Colony, Southeastern Massachusetts, and Cape Cod MPOs. He reviews the key MPO documents from all of the MPOs, and compares notes with his colleagues as information comes in. Thus, MassDOT is able to identify cross-cutting needs and coordinate studies between MPOs—or launch studies of their own—based on cross-regional needs. MassDOT also helps share best practices between regions.

J. Church discussed the Boston MPO's activities that are coordinated with other MPOs. The MPO has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that allows coordination and collaboration with neighboring MPOs. Staff meet monthly with the other MPOs to discuss various topics relating to regional planning, funding questions, and the like; sometimes staff from FHWA or MassDOT also come to discuss topics of interest. There is also the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies, or MARPA, which also meets monthly and can provide MPOs with guidance.

L. Diggins complimented staff on the presentation on inter-MPO coordination and asked for a sense of what other activities are occurring in other MPOs. He also offered to do some of that research himself. B. Muller explained that because most of the UPWPs are developed at the same time, his office looks at the documents all at once and notes the efforts underway, such as programs like the Boston Region MPO's Community Connections Program, and writes the necessary guidance to MPOs. Mark Abbott (CTPS Manager of Traffic Analysis and Design) added that in some studies, his staff coordinate with neighboring MPOs to look at particular sections of roadway. B. Muller concluded the conversation by noting that the formal boundaries of MPOs can be deceiving in some ways; for example, maps of Massachusetts often leave off Rhode

Island, but the Providence metropolitan area is a neighbor to several areas in Massachusetts. And even within Massachusetts, many areas governed by different MPOs interact quite closely, so there is a need for regional coordination beyond the level of an individual MPO.

6. Discussion of UPWP Pre-Universe— *Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager*

B. Muller introduced the discussion of the UPWP “Pre-Universe.” He noted that this process is slightly different from previous years. The list of potential projects is essentially a loose summary of all the proposed or identified studies from the public process, from internal processes, and from the MPO’s partners. So, normally the first list the committee would see would be a partially vetted list of proposed studies, grouped by staff according to the studies’ relationships to the Long-Range Transportation Plan goals, and budgets for the studies. This information enables the committee to start thinking about prioritizing the studies. This year, however, the committee chair and staff agreed to deliver this document to the committee somewhat earlier to facilitate discussion of the content of the studies prior to the prioritization discussion. As a result, the discussion at this meeting was purely informational; at a future meeting there will be a more detailed discussion.

S. Johnston added that he emailed the pre-Universe document to committee members to allow them to digest some of the concepts and give them the opportunity to ask questions in the meeting or by email. The concepts in this document have not been fully vetted, so they may not all end up in the final Universe, as some may be deemed redundant with other work or not within the MPO’s capabilities. He encouraged committee members to ask questions, think about connections between the concepts, and otherwise brainstorm.

L. Diggins expressed his appreciation for this extra step and said he would examine the document. T. Kadzis said he would think about some related concepts. D. Amstutz said the document contains many interesting concepts and that he is glad to see a study on the topic of congestion pricing among them. B. Muller also pointed committee members to the second tab of the document, which contains survey responses from the UPWP study idea survey that staff released to the public.

7. Members Items

There were none.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for March 25, 2021.

9. Adjourn

L. Diggins made a motion to adjourn the meeting and T. Bent seconded the motion. Without objection, the meeting was adjourned.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Office of Transportation Planning)	Ben Muller
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Tom Kadzis
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke
Three Rivers Interlocal Council alternate (Town of Westwood)	Steve Olanoff

Other Attendees Affiliation

Tom Branham	Alternative Transportation Group
Mike Garrity	
Aleida Leiza	
Darlene Wynne	City of Beverly/North Shore Task Force (MPO Member)

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Annette Demchur, Director of Policy and Planning
Hiral Gandhi, Director of Operations and Finance
Mark Abbott, Traffic Analysis and Design Group Manager
Jonathan Church, Manager of MPO Activities
Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager
Kate White, Public Outreach Coordinator
Ariel Patterson, Transportation Planner
Róisín Foley, Administrative and Communications Assistant
Matt Archer, Transportation Planner

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