

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary

October 17, 2024, Meeting

1:00 PM–2:25 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Jen Rowe, Chair, representing Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston and the Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

J. Rowe welcomed committee members to the meeting of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee. See attendance on page 9.

2. Public Comments

Ryan O'Malley (City of Malden) spoke in support of continued funding of two projects in Malden: project S12966, the Canal Street Bicycle Lanes Community Connections project, and project 613088, the Spot Pond Greenway project. R. Malley stated that these projects have received design funding through various grants, including ones from MassTrails and the Gaming Commission. He explained that the City has conducted a number of community engagement meetings through the feasibility study process and is currently conducting three more public meetings as part of the 25 percent design process. Despite staff turnover, the projects are still on schedule. R. Malley thanked the committee members for their support.

3. Review of Milestones and Future Meetings for Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2026-30 TIP Development—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

E. Lapointe explained that the purpose of the presentation was to review some of the milestones of the upcoming FFYs 2026-30 TIP development process and to formally kick off another year of developing the TIP and soliciting projects. In addition, the presentation will review some of the recurrent concerns seen in the past few TIP cycles.

E. Lapointe began the presentation with a review of the previous TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting in August. The committee reviewed some of the process improvements that are under consideration for the FFYs 2026-30 TIP, including an improved Transit Transformation application process. The MPO will solicit a broader selection of different types of transit projects from the Massachusetts

Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA), and the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA). This preemptive solicitation of projects will provide for more time for MPO staff to score and consider the funding of those projects.

E. Lapointe said that the MPO staff will be working with staff from Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Highway Division headquarters and the Highway Districts to trial a Quarterly Readiness Update. Using information gathered from MPO staff and MassDOT, the updates will be presented to MPO board members four times a year on all projects funded within the Regional Target Program. One of these four meetings will be the existing February TIP Readiness Day. The MPO staff will also lead a pre-readiness meeting in which municipalities can provide their own feedback into the readiness process. MPO staff will then aggregate and relay this information to MassDOT.

E. Lapointe then began a review of challenges surrounding the FFYs 2025-29 TIP development process. He noted that the MPO staff will not be able to resolve all of these issues in one year but would make steps towards improving these processes. He predicted that some of the challenges would reappear for the FFYs 2026-30 TIP cycle, including project cost increases, delays, increasing reliance on advanced construction funding, and reduced project application volumes.

E. Lapointe discussed how 16 of the 28 capital construction projects within the MPO's regionally prioritized programs were identified as being at risk for a delay and that eight projects were flagged as at risk for further delays. Most of these delays fell within the two nearest years of the TIP, FFYs 2025 and 2026. He explained that this was pertinent because when a delay happens in these years, it is difficult to find a municipally prioritized project to take the place of the delayed project when funding becomes available. He added that even when there were funding surpluses, 13 of the 28 projects also saw cost increases above 10 percent, with several seeing cost increases year over year of anywhere from 20 to 30 percent.

E. Lapointe explained that the MPO staff had used surplus funding to support several transit projects, but because delays were announced so late in the TIP cycle these projects were not able to be scored. In addition, because projects were consistently being delayed out of the nearer years into the later years of the TIP, projects funded in FFYs 2027 and 2028 saw deficits in their funding levels, which required additional delays to maintain fiscal constraint for several projects. These delays also jeopardize the opportunity to fund new projects in FFY 2029.

E. Lapointe moved on to the topic of advanced construction funding, a strategy where a project is funded over multiple years. While this is not an unusual funding mechanism for other MPOs in the Commonwealth that may have less Regional Target Funding each year, the Boston Region MPO has historically only used advanced construction funding on large-scale TIP projects. However, some of the recent trends that have emerged with project readiness have led to an increased reliance on using advanced construction funding for smaller-scale projects. This was particularly true for projects funded in FFY 2028, when there was a deficit. To alleviate some of these issues, the MPO board voted to increase the amount of funding in the near-term years of the TIP for the McGrath Highway, Rutherford Avenue, and Western Avenue projects. By shifting the funding into the near-term years, long-term funding obligations to these large-scale projects could be lessened to help increase the volume of project applications for future TIPs.

E. Lapointe then described a table showing seven projects expected to receive funding in 2030: Boston's Reconstruction of Rutherford Avenue, Somerville's McGrath Boulevard Construction, Woburn's Roadway and Intersection Improvements at Woburn Common, Ipswich's Argilla Road Roadway Reconstruction, Bellingham's Roadway Rehabilitation of Route 126, and Sudbury's and Framingham's Bike Path Construction of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. The table also included the Transit Transformation, Community Connections, and Bikeshare Support Set-Asides.

E. Lapointe discussed a chart showing that the applications for TIP funding in Core Investment Programs has declined markedly since the FFYs 2021-25 cycle, with a low of four projects in the FFYs 2025-29 cycle. He explained that though there is likely to be an increase in the FFYs 2026-30 cycle, it will take some time to see a rebound in application volumes. However, steps can be taken towards resolving some of these challenges. The Quarterly Readiness Days can help staff get an early warning on project delays and cost increases, which will help to inform the availability of funding. Municipal pre-readiness days in January will help as well.

E. Lapointe reiterated that the utilization of more proactive transit project solicitation from the MBTA, MWRTA, and CATA can also help to mitigate some of the surplus funding in nearer years while also making sure that all projects are being considered by the MPO.

E. Lapointe then began a recap of the Project Design Pilot, which had its inaugural funding year in FFY 2025. He explained that although funding is not reserved for a second round of the Project Design Pilot within FFY 2026, he hopes that in later years

the pilot could become a long-term funding source. This will help to increase project application volumes for the MPO's investment programs and help mitigate the prevalence of delays in projects due to difficulties in acquiring funding for design.

E. Lapointe concluded the discussion by introducing the next segment of the meeting, in which committee members shared their thoughts for the future of the TIP.

J. Rowe opened the floor for questions from the committee members while members filled in their answers for the EasyRetro online exercise.

Brad Rawson (City of Somerville) underscored E. Lapointe's point that the mitigation strategies will take a few years to gain traction and achieve scale, and he reminded the committee to focus on the long-term results.

Lenard Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) asked why there has been a recent decrease in proposed projects and raised a concern that if circumstances changed, the MPO could find itself with an overabundance of applications.

E. Lapointe answered that one of the predominant issues was that municipalities bear the burden of the majority of design expenses, and this process can be prohibitively difficult and expensive especially due to rising design costs. Municipalities are also developing more complex projects. He explained that municipalities often derive their funding either from local appropriations or Chapter 90 funding, which he believes has not kept up with purchasing power. This has been an issue with smaller communities in particular.

Eric Bourassa (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) asked for a reminder of the total amount of Regional Target Funding in FFY 2030.

E. Lapointe answered that he does not know the exact amount yet, but assuming that funding is level it would be the same as the FFY 2029 figure—\$161 million, of which about \$85 million is currently allocated to projects.

E. Bourassa expressed that he believed the greatest concern since 2020 has been readiness issues that cause delays and cause the MPO to fund projects in nearer years. He stated that he wanted to avoid having to vote on projects that were brought before the board only a week before the deadline, as this does a disservice to the evaluation criteria, public engagement plans, and other processes that the MPO has in place to prioritize projects.

Erin Chute (Town of Brookline) said that the biggest barriers for municipalities is the DOT process, municipal staffing, and the cost for adhering to DOT requirements. It is a significant commitment for municipalities to put forward an application when they may or may not receive capital funding. She expressed that would be helpful if this process became more accessible. She suggested having a “bench” of projects that the MPO has already examined that could be ready to go if there is a need to use excess funding.

J. Rowe shifted the conversation to the EasyRetro exercise, an online interactive group retrospective tool.

Josh Ostroff (MBTA) expressed that he wanted to share these solutions with his team at the MBTA, and he agreed that he would commit to providing a list of projects early so that there were fewer surprises later on in the TIP cycle.

J. Rowe read through some of the comments on the EasyRetro exercise. Committee members were interested in seeing higher application volumes throughout all years of the TIP, having a better handle on cost changes, and having more time to consider unscored projects before programming them in the TIP. Members were also interested in having the MPO take an active role in helping municipalities secure design funding. Another comment spoke to how the MPO enacts public engagement and whether the MPO should simply listen to comments or address them in the prioritization process.

E. Bourassa agreed with a comment on the EasyRetro board that the committee and the board should meet in person more often, especially during key decision-making periods.

Logan Casey (Town of Marblehead) spoke to the design funding process. He explained that Marblehead is spending almost all its Chapter 90 funding on design for a project that will soon seek TIP funding, but many of his peers do not know much about what the role of the MPO is. He suggested that the MPO staff attend more subregional meetings to improve the MPO’s engagement and outreach so that more municipalities understand what the MPO can offer their communities.

J. Rowe continued reading comments on the EasyRetro board. A few comments spoke to improving the relationship between municipalities that are less engaged with the MPO. Other commenters wanted to ensure that the MPO board is confident that the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee is in line with the board’s overall priorities.

L. Diggins asked that the committee define what role they want public engagement to play in these committee meetings.

J. Rowe expressed the understanding that the purpose of this committee was to discuss and recommend changes to the TIP process, not to make final funding decisions.

E. Chute agreed with L. Diggins that the committee is not a place for the public to give comments and express opposition, and that framing the appropriate place for public comments would be an important measure for the group.

E. Lapointe said that he would work with the Communications and Engagement team to raise this discussion. He added that he wants to convey to municipalities what the expectations are for providing information from public comments when they have a project on the TIP. The municipalities need to provide the MPO board with a broad public perspective on projects and cannot rely only on comments directed specifically at the MPO.

J. Rowe expressed the hope that the MPO would not have to vote to delay a project this cycle and suggested that the MPO staff rescore projects that might not have been scored in a while or were scored on a different scale with different criteria.

E. Lapointe then continued his presentation, focused on Key TIP Dates. TIP applications this year will open on October 28 and close on December 31. This timing allows proponents of projects approved at the next MassDOT Project Review Committee meeting the opportunity to apply. Midway through the application process, the MPO staff will be hosting TIP How-To presentations on November 7 and 12. Other important milestones will be the December Quarterly Update, the January Municipal Readiness Days and the February TIP Readiness Days (another Quarterly Update). TIP Readiness Days are a MassDOT activity that the MPO staff reports back on. The MPO staff are the primary touch point that the MPO members and public have on the progress of projects and their relevant changes. The December Update is a new installation to the TIP timeline and was put in place with the goal of having more frequent project updates. The January Municipal Readiness days are for the municipalities to bring progress updates or difficulties they are encountering to the MPO. As TIP Readiness Days in February fall too close to scenario planning in March, it is difficult to digest all the information received. The MPO staff hopes that more frequent updates will mitigate this issue. Another addition will be the May 15 Draft TIP Changes Quarterly Update. This meeting will reflect any changes that may be happening to TIP

programming in between when the TIP is released for public comment and when the endorsement is expected to take place in June.

E. Lapointe moved onto scenario development. The TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee's Initial Scenario Meeting will take place on March 13. The MPO Initial Scenario is planned for March 20. The TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee's Scenario Adjustment Meeting will take place on March 27. On April 3, the MPO will vote on the final scenario, and on April 17, the MPO will release the draft TIP. The 30-day public comment period will take place April 21 through May 21. On May 22, the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee will evaluate public feedback. On June 5, the MPO will vote to endorse the FFYs 2026-30 TIP. All dates are subject to change.

E. Lapointe concluded that with these more frequent readiness days, the MPO staff can be more proactive about changes and delays and provide the board with more information ahead of scenario development.

E. Lapointe summarized the key dates, reminding the committee that TIP applications are due at the end of December and TIP How-To presentations will take place in November. From December to February, MPO staff will work with MassDOT to gather and discuss project readiness information and rescore some projects. Projects prioritized for rescoring include ones that used a 134-point scale instead of the current 100-point scale. If the MPO board is interested in having other projects rescored, the MPO staff can prioritize those projects for rescoring as well. The full timeline and materials will be available at <http://www.bostonmpo.org/tip-dev>.

E. Lapointe stated that the next TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting is scheduled for December 19 at 1:00 PM. This follows the December Quarterly Readiness Update meeting, which will be presented at the December 19 MPO meeting. This meeting is meant to provide additional information and context. The morning meeting may focus more on the progress of major capital project process, while the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting may be more focused on other project items.

J. Rowe expressed gratitude for all the stakeholders who are working to get ahead of the trends discussed earlier in the meeting.

E. Chute thanked E. Lapointe for his work. She asked if TIP Readiness Days are open to the public and if staff have attended in the past.

E. Lapointe said that he believed that they are not open to the public, but the role of the MPO is to incorporate municipal perspectives. The Municipal Readiness Days are different, in that municipal staff are encouraged to be present and provide their perspectives. MPO staff will make sure that MassDOT staff are there as well so that municipal concerns can be relayed. The TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee can also inform discussions that take place at TIP Readiness Days. Because there will not be time to discuss all projects, the committee will have to prioritize discussion points.

J. Rowe suggested that the committee members could keep track of and pay attention to project issues.

E. Lapointe mentioned that the Readiness Days are a statewide exercise that take place over multiple days and do not only include changes to the Regional Target Program.

J. Ostroff listed some of the sessions that the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee may find relevant at the Moving Together conference.

4. Members' Items

B. Rawson asked if there has been any follow-up to a mid-cycle TIP amendment for the Allston Multimodal Project. He said that this project has not yet been scored and is currently ill-defined, but it has regional impact.

Tegin Teich (Executive Director, MPO staff) said that staff had addressed this from an agenda-setting perspective. She added that David Mohler (MassDOT) is committed to working with the board's request to get more information at the full board meeting, but that she does not have a specific timeframe yet.

John Bechard (MassDOT) explained that if members lack information about a project, they can reach out to him.

5. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Lenard Diggins) and seconded by the Town of Brookline (Erin Chute). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
City of Boston	Jen Rowe
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Brad Rawson
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Chris Klem
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	John Bechard
MetroWest Regional Collaborative	Dennis Giombetti
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	Kristen Guichard
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
Town of Arlington	-
Town of Brookline	Erin Chute

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Sarah Bradbury	MassDOT
Joy Glynn	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Tyler Terrasi	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Jim Nee	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Rick Azzalina	Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.
Marcia Rasmussen	Town of Concord
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Logan Casey	Town of Marblehead
Tim Czerwiesnki	Town of Milton
Matthew Shuman	Town of Winchester
Darlene Wynne	City of Beverly
Ryan O'Malley	City of Malden
Gisell De La Cruz	City of Salem
City of Waltham	City of Waltham
Casimir Dahrouch	Regional Licensing Office
Holly Muson	Belmont Community Path Project Committee
Harrison Bushnell	Representative Joan Meschino
Sarah Lee	Massport
K. McDonough	Unknown

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Annette Demchur
Dave Hong
Ethan Lapointe
Samuel Taylor
Abby Cutrumbes
Srilekha Murthy

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