

Report from the Berkshire Transportation Advisory Committee to the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization

~ From the Meeting Held on October 4, 2007 ~

Summary of Items Discussed

- **Approval of Minutes from July 5th TAC Meeting**

It was determined that TAC meeting minutes are not necessary. Mr. Karns explained that when the TAC was first created, it was decided that the group would act as an advisory committee and would operate more informally in order to avoid administrative issues such as determining a quorum and the like. As an advisory committee, it is not necessary to have formal, approved minutes. A written report will be prepared and submitted to the MPO by the Chair. This report will not need to be approved by the TAC either.

- **Report from August 14th MPO Meeting**

Mr. Karns provided a verbal report of the August 14th MPO meeting at which the MPO discussed the TIP and its relative priorities. The MPO did not receive additional public comments after release of the draft TIP. Therefore, the MPO approved the TIP as it had been approved to release for public comment. The Tyringham Main Road and Park Square projects will be sent out to bid during FFY 2008. Some of the funding for the Tyringham Road project will come out of the 2009 allocation. The Florida River Road project will go to bid in 2009 and will get funding in 2009 as well as from the 2010 allocation. The MPO also approved the UPWP. The MPO was briefed by MHD on the proposed bike path Project Need Forms (PNFs) submitted in the spring by Pittsfield, Lenox and by MHD for the Adams extension. Additional details have been added to the PNFs since the spring. These additions will be the focus of the MHD presentation at this TAC meeting.

- **Overview of Bicycle Facility Planning in Berkshire County by BRPC Staff**

Prior to the presentation by MHD, BRPC staff presented the remaining pieces of bike path planning in Berkshire County that are not included in the PNFs. These are the Williamstown to North Adams section, the North Adams to Adams (Lime Street) section and the southern leg of the Pittsfield section. There has not been much progress to report upon for pieces extending south of Lenox through Lee, Stockbridge, Great Barrington or Sheffield.

The Adams PNF suggests a 1.2 mile northward extension of the existing Ashuwillticook Trail from Hoosac Street to Lime Street but doesn't include information on how the trail will get from Lime Street to downtown North Adams. The Adams (Lime Street) to North Adams section is still in its first stages. Two

feasibility studies have been completed, one by BRPC and one by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., an engineering consulting firm out of Watertown, MA. There needs to be a focused discussion with the two municipalities about how to proceed and BRPC will undertake that in the near future. From the Lime Street Bridge up to Heritage State Park, there are a number of property owners, and a lot of farmland, wetlands and flood plains which pose a number of environmental constraints. There is a lot to be worked out for this portion in terms of constructing new road crossings, bridges, controlling for flooding and delineating wetlands, permitting and right-of-way acquisition.

A feasibility study for the North Adams to Williamstown piece was funded through a grant from the National Scenic Byways Program. The North Adams to Williamstown piece will hopefully serve as an extension of the existing Ashuwillticook Trail “spine” and connect the trail to Vermont. The feasibility study has allowed local residents an opportunity to voice their opinions on preferred and alternate routes before turning the project over to a consultant for preliminary design work. The feasibility study will analyze preferred and alternate routes, environmental impacts and mitigation efforts, and possible parking areas. Once the feasibility study is complete and confirmation of ownership of land within the right-of-way is received, a Request for Proposals will be sent out and a consultant will be hired to prepare conceptual designs and cost estimates. BRPC hopes to hire a consultant sometime during the winter months.

The southern leg of the Pittsfield trail which will connect the bike path in Pittsfield to the bike path in Lenox was not included in any of the PNFs submitted by the City of Pittsfield. This part of the Pittsfield trail has remained largely undefined because it has yet to be determined where this leg of the Pittsfield trail will connect with the Lenox trail. This is a second priority for BRPC staff to start to coordinate this section with the two municipalities.

- **Presentation by MassHighway Staff of proposed bike path projects in Pittsfield, Lenox and Adams, as presented in the Project Need Forms submitted by those municipalities**

The Lenox PNF begins by recommending connecting Route 20 to the Lenox High School via Blantyre Road and East Street. This portion would be off-road separated from the existing streets by a 1 to 6 foot buffer. The PNF indicates that this route would be located primarily along town-owned right-of-way. Looking at the length and cost, rough cost estimate of \$1 million per mile for construction was provided. Design for this project has not yet begun. There is a small brook crossing so there is the need for some environmental permitting. The right-of-way acquisition for this portion should not be too much of a problem because it is located on town-owned right-of-way.

The second part of the Lenox PNF suggests a path that would connect the Lenox High School to the Woods Pond pedestrian bridge. This portion would also be off-road, separated by a buffer and still primarily along town-owned right-of-way. The planning for this portion is essentially complete. The town has spent about \$18,000 on preliminary survey and design. 0.6 miles of the Lenox trail is at 75% design and the town has also secured a wetland permit.

The third portion is from Housatonic Street north to New Lenox Road. This would be an off-road path utilizing the old trolley line, DCR land, and will also require acquisition of some private property. It would be a mix of paved path and possibly some boardwalk among the environmentally sensitive areas. The path would also possibly provide access to the Eastover Resort property. The length would be about 4 miles at a cost of \$4 million. The town has some additional work to do in regards to identifying constraints, right of ways and environmental impacts that might cause problems for this project. The design for this portion has not yet begun. The Town has applied for a DCR grant to bring the design to at least 25% by 2009. The grant would consist of \$38,000 from DCR with the Town providing a 20% match.

The Pittsfield PNF has divided the Pittsfield trail into two sections and suggests a mix of on-road and off-road trails. The Northern section would begin at the end of the existing Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and continue to Merrill Road along the Housatonic Railroad right-of-way. The location of this portion has been decided, except negotiations need to be completed with Petricca Industries.

For the middle portion, the preferred alternate route is along the Tennessee Gas easement from Merrill Road to Elm Street. The middle portion still requires a detailed on-the-ground survey. Pittsfield has also applied for the DCR grant to develop a feasibility analysis for the southern section. The newly reformatted PNF for Pittsfield had not yet been reviewed by MHD as of the Oct. 4th TAC meeting.

The Adams PNF calls for an extension of the existing Ashuwillticook Rail Trail as far as Cook Street, located along the former rail bed which is now owned by DCR. MHD met with the Town of Adams in December, 2006 and held a public meeting in March 2007. At the public meeting, the community spoke out in support of extending the trail as far as Lime Street for a total of 1.2 miles. This addition will include one private property and either the use of a street through the Adams Corporate Park or a town-owned easement adjacent to the river. The trail will go through the design stage this year, although there is some wetland permitting that will need to be worked out. This project is still in the preliminary design stage and still needs to receive right-of-way acquisition.

Congressman Olver's Congressional earmark, with conditions, totals \$4 million. The earmark is for design and construction. The motion was made that the TAC recommend to the MPO to give primary consideration to extending the existing trail by committing funds to the Adams project as well as the northern leg of the Pittsfield portion from the mall area to Merrill Road. The motion carried with

8 votes in favor, one abstention and three opposed. Those opposed to the motion expressed their minority viewpoint. The minority report is included at the end of this report.

- **Transportation Funding Issues, including Recommendations of the Transportation Finance Commission**

Mr. Karns provided a preliminary background on the Transportation Finance Commission's Recommendations. There was the suggestion to recommend that all items other than #24 (tolls on the western Turnpike) be put to the MPO for consideration. Mr. Karns suggested that an in-depth conversation be saved for a later date. There was a proposal to hold an additional TAC meeting before the MPO meeting on November 14th to discuss the Transportation Finance Commission's report in greater detail and determine if a recommendation will be made to the MPO.

- **Next Meeting Date and Agenda**

It was decided that the TAC will hold an additional meeting on November 8th at 5:00 pm to continue the discussion of the Transportation Finance Commission report document in greater detail. Copies of the report are available at the following website:

http://www.eot.state.ma.us/downloads/tfc/TFC_Recommendations.pdf

Majority Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

The majority vote expressed their opinion that the goal was to expand upon the existing Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. To this end, their preference was to make the extension in Adams the top priority, and then give consideration to the northern leg of the Pittsfield piece in order to push the trail's development south of the mall. They expressed their opinion that it would be best to extend either end of the existing trail north in Adams and south in Pittsfield rather than give consideration to three or four trails in a piecemeal fashion.

They added that Lenox already has some trails and bike accommodations and that they were not convinced the TAC could recommend funding the Lenox project without knowing where the trail would go south of Lenox.

Furthermore, in regards to the minority view that the pieces being considered for funding are not located within easy walking distance, members who had voted in favor of the motion made the

point that the Adams route does go through developed areas in the Town of Adams. Members who had voted in favor of the motion made the point that the MPO can still amend the motion.

Minority Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

A minority of the TAC expressed their disagreement with the recommendation to fund the Adams bike path and the Pittsfield bike path. Primarily, the minority viewpoint was to recommend funding for the Lenox piece instead of the northern section of the Pittsfield piece because the Lenox piece seems much farther along in the development stages than the Pittsfield piece. Furthermore, the Pittsfield portion will not be located within easy walking distance and residents will still have to drive to the trail in order to use it. They also felt that showing progress south of Pittsfield would encourage southern Berkshire to start work on developing their sections.