

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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NATHANIEL W. KARNS, A.I.C.P.
Executive Director

March 15, 2017

Stephanie Pollack, Secretary
MassDOT
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, MA 02116

RE: 2018-2022 Capital Investment Plan Comments

Dear Ms. Pollack:

The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) appreciates the opportunity to provide input as work begins on developing the 2018 -2022 Capital Investment Plan. As this plan directs funding towards transportation projects across the Commonwealth over the next five years, on behalf of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission I wanted to take the opportunity to share thoughts and comments on transportation priorities for the Berkshire region. Below you will find general comments for our priorities by mode/programmatic area followed by a listing of highway projects highlighting the region's higher priority projects.

As an overall comment, we hope that the equity analysis contained in the 2017-2021 CIP is kept in mind as the updated CIP is developed. Last year's equity analysis indicated that the more rural regions of the Commonwealth did not receive equitable treatment, particularly in regards to public transportation. We believe this year's CIP development provides a real opportunity for MassDOT to respond to that analysis in a positive manner.

Program and Mode Priorities

Transit – There is a need to expand service hours, add Sunday service and decrease headways as determined by BRTA's Comprehensive Service Analysis. This is also a frequent comment which county residents make when asked about transportation improvements. The CIP should program funding for capital improvements (busses and facilities) to provide for expanded service to achieve service levels more similar to that provided in the MBTA service area.

State of Good Repair – Increased funding for bridge and road maintenance for both federal aid eligible and local facilities. All Berkshire cities and towns struggle to maintain their existing transportation

infrastructure and many rely entirely on their meager Chapter 90 allocation. These funds must cover a range of transportation improvements, from roadway resurfacing and crack sealing to signage and bridge reconstruction backlogs. Current funding levels are not adequate and both Berkshire cities and many towns are at or very close to their tax levy ceilings, which mean legally are not permitted to raise the funds locally.

Bicycle Facilities – Construction funding to complete the Ashuwillticook Trail is needed. The federal earmark for the construction of the initial segment has been expended and additional funds are required to complete this facility that will serve as the spine for a county-wide nonmotorized transportation system.

Freight and Passenger Rail – Within the county, rail ties, track, crossings and bridges are in need of replacement and reconstruction. These improvements will improve the overall condition of the Berkshire Line, replacing infrastructure built in 1920 or earlier, which in turn will help preserve 800 manufacturing jobs in southern Berkshire and northwest Connecticut, many of which are held by Berkshire County residents. Additionally, these improvements will benefit proposed passenger rail service from Pittsfield, south to New York City fostering additional economic development including tourism. We also request that any funding directed towards expanding passenger rail service between Boston and Springfield be expanded westward to improve that service between Boston and Albany, New York, where connections can be easily made to the excellent Hudson Valley Amtrak service into New York City and in the future to true high speed rail being planned by New York State.

Complete Streets - We applaud the efforts which MassDOT has taken to move this program forward and, as importantly, providing the necessary funding. This program has been well received by Berkshire County communities and BRPC is eager to continue to assist in implementing this program which will make our roads safer and provide enhancement for all travel modes.

Small Bridge Program – Increased funding for small bridge reconstruction is needed. BRPC appreciates your efforts regarding the introduction and initial funding of \$50 million for the Municipal Small Bridge Program. Although this program and funding is a good, first start, this amount is clearly inadequate to rehabilitate the 1,262 10' to 20' span small bridges across the Commonwealth. Deteriorating bridge conditions are a significant concern in our region; additional investment in small bridges will support a safe and efficient multimodal transportation network.

With regards to specific highway projects in the Berkshires, the following is a listing of our higher priority projects.

East Street (Route 9) reconstruction project, Pittsfield. East Street serves as the main thoroughfare and provides connectivity to central and northern Berkshire. This segment of road is also immediately adjacent to the Williams Stanley Business Park, a large redevelopment site controlled by the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority. This project will not only address deteriorated road conditions, it will incorporate Complete Street concepts, improve mobility for all transportation modes and improve the marketability of the Business Park, assisting in improving the economy of the most chronically economically struggling region in the Commonwealth.

CSX Bridge Replacement over Hubbard Avenue, Pittsfield. The existing underpass is functionally obsolete and is unsafe. It has an extremely narrow opening 19'-2" wide and a height clearance of 13'-6" on a street which serves several significant industrial areas in Pittsfield and Dalton. In addition to

impacting freight and goods movement in this industrial and commercial area, safety and mobility issues exist due to the lack of sidewalks and shoulders through the underpass.

Brown Street Bridge, North Adams. This is a severely failing bridge in the City of North Adams. It is a critical piece of infrastructure as it connects Route 2 to River Street, two of the most widely travelled roads in the City.

Hubbard Avenue reconstruction, Pittsfield. Hubbard Ave provides regional connectivity to/from Pittsfield, Dalton, Hinsdale and other hill towns with access to major retail hubs and industrial sites. This project was identified in the Regional Transportation Plan as a regional bottleneck with a limited capacity as well as a recommendation of the 2011 Freight Goods & Movement Study. Improvements from this project will correct poor drainage and subbase, geometric design deficiencies throughout the corridor, add complete street elements, better accommodate freight vehicles, and enhance traffic flow and safety.

In conclusion, BRPC acknowledges the extensive efforts that went into developing last year's CIP which has spurred projects to move forward and improve transportation infrastructure within the Berkshire region. It is imperative that the projects contained in the prior year CIP are not forgotten and are carried forward in the new CIP but also to begin to adjust the CIP's projects to correct noted regional inequity documented in the current CIP.

Sincerely,



Nathaniel Karns
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Adam Hinds, Senator, Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin & Hampden District
The Honorable Gailanne Cariddi, Representative, 1st Berkshire District
The Honorable Paul Mark, Representative, 2nd Berkshire District
The Honorable Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Representative, 3rd Berkshire District
The Honorable Smitty Pignatelli, Representative, 4th Berkshire District
Ms. Astrid Glynn, Transit & Rail Administrator, MassDOT
Mr. Thomas J. Tinlin, Highway Administrator, MassDOT
Ms. Francisca Heming, District 1 Highway Director, MassDOT
Mr. Alex Bardow, Director of Bridges and Structures, MassDOT
Mr. Robert Malnati, BRTA Administrator
The Honorable Linda Tyer, Mayor, City of Pittsfield
The Honorable Richard Alcombright, City of North Adams
Mr. Kenneth Walto, Town Manager, Town of Dalton