

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday April 26, 2011 4:00 PM

At the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission office
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Clinton Bench, MassDOT (Representing Secretary Mullan)
Mark Moore, MassDOT District 1 (representing Acting Administrator Francis DePaola)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington (Southwest Berkshire Representative)
James Mullen, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield (Representing Mayor Ruberto)
Ronald Turbin, Town of Williamstown (North Berkshire Alternate)
Thomas Szczepaniak, Town of Dalton (North Central Representative)

Others Present:

Mark Siegars, TAC
Jana Brule, TAC
Trey Wadsworth, MassDOT
Peter Frieri, MassDOT District 1
Justin Diagle, MassDOT District 1
Nat Karns, BRPC
Clete Kus, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, BRPC
Douglas Plachcinski, BRPC
Jane Winn, BEAT

1. CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Bench called the meeting to order at 4:07

2. MINUTES OF MARCH 29, 2011

ACTION: Motion by Sczerpinaik, supported by Lovejoy, to approve the minutes of March 29, 2011.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Moore indicated one change, that Mr. Niles was representing acting commissioner DePaola at the last MPO meeting.

VOICE VOTE: 6 Ayes, 1 Abstention

MOTION CARRIED

3. TAC REPORT

Mr. Siegars provided an update from the TAC, summarizing the TAC's discussion on bike paths, the Regional Transportation Plan, and the Transportation Improvement Program.

The TAC is concerned that Congress may take back earmarked Federal funds from old legislation that remains unobligated. Mr. Wadsworth indicated that Congress was only recapturing unobligated funds from TEA-21 (1998), therefore the Berkshires' existing earmarks were still available for obligation. Mr. Bench assured Mr. Karns that commitments made through the Scenic Byways program were still moving forward.

4. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Siegars also indicated that the TAC should begin a funding discussion because driving is less frequent with high gasoline prices, reducing federal and state transportation revenue.

5. DISCUSSION ON RTP

Mr. Plachcinski provided a status report on the RTP. He reviewed the chapters, the graphics, fiscal constraint, and the remaining schedule. Mr. Mullen suggested that the economics section contain information about regional production in addition to employment. Mr. Bench said the approach was consistent with MassDOT's current planning efforts and that the June 30th deadline for RTP adoption was not absolute. Mr. Karns remarked that air quality conformity and transit financial projections were still outstanding for the draft document. Mr. Bench said that the MPO should confirm the availability of the information with Mr. Wadsworth prior to scheduling the Public Hearing for the RTP draft.

6. DISCUSSION ON TIP EVALUATION

Anuja Koirala presented information on the updated TIP selection process and project metrics.

7. DISCUSSION AND POTENTIAL RELEASE OF TIP AMENDMENT

Mr. Kus and Mr. Wadsworth described the TIP amendment that shifted funds for the South St. project through the enhancement program. The MPO discussed potential uses for funds, past and present pitfalls for developing stand-alone enhancement projects. Mr. Bench assured the MPO that the Commonwealth's poor performance of obligating enhancement funds was not because of the Berkshires and there is no longer a Transportation Enhancement steering committee. Mr. Wadsworth mentioned that MassDOT anticipates funding increases in the future, although the current enhancement level was \$153k.

ACTION: Motion by Mullen, supported by Lovejoy, to release the TIP amendment, with corrections, for a 15 day review and public comment period.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Kus stated that the 15-day public notice option is appropriate for a TIP amendment of this nature, and that the Public Participation Plan is consistent with this approach.

VOICE VOTE: 7 Ayes

MOTION CARRIED

8. MEMBER AGENCY REPORTS

Mr. Frieri provided an update on the status of improvement projects within the region, most specifically projects that changed status or are slated for the FFY2011, including the Ashuwillticook, and engineering design from TEA-21 earmarks.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Bench discussed his trip to central Asia and his observations on public transportation systems, particularly high-speed rail at 215 mph. He also noted that in some areas the public

transportation capacity was overwhelmed and that he thought the systems were constructed in a manner that may be difficult to maintain over time.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Plachcinski, AICP
Senior Transportation Planner

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- March meeting minutes
- RTP update and presentation
- TIP project evaluation staff report
- TIP Amendment staff report / materials
- Project status report from MassDOT District I