



BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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MINUTES OF THE Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Tuesday, January 24, 2023

Meeting Held Via Zoom Video Communications

Meeting Materials: <https://berkshireplanning.org/event/berkshire-mpo-virtual-meeting/>

MPO Representatives/Alternates Present:

Stephen Woelfel	MassDOT (Representing Secretary Gina Fiandaca)
John Boyle	North Central Subregion Representative
Francisca Heming	MassDOT District 1 (Representing Highway Administrator Gulliver)
Christine Hoyt	North Subregion Representative
Sheila Irvin	Chair of BRTA
Kent Lew	Southeast Subregion Delegate

Others Present:

Peter Frieri	MassDOT District 1
Justin Gilmore	BRPC
Chris Klem	MassDOT OTP
Anuja Koirala	BRPC
Derek Krevat	MassDOT OTP
Clete Kus	BRPC
Bob Malnati	BRTA
Tom Matuszko	BRPC
Mark Moore	MassDOT District 1
Nick Russo	BRPC
Sarah Vallieres	BRTA

I. Call to Order – Introductions

Mr. Woelfel called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. Meeting attendees introduced themselves via a roll call conducted by Mr. Kus.

II. Opportunity for Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Since a meeting quorum was not met at this time, the MPO moved on to non-action items.

VII. Discussion on the development of the 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program

Ms. Koirala briefly reviewed the [TIP tentative schedule handout](#), mentioning the new TIP process began January 5th. Ms. Koirala sent out project solicitation letters to each town. The due date to return the forms is January 31st. Ms. Koirala proceeded to review the key dates and milestones outlined in the above handout.

VIII. Update on the development of the Regional Transportation Plan

Mr. Russo proceeded to update MPO members on [preliminary results to the Community Transportation survey](#), the primary tool being used to gather community input for the 2024 Regional Transportation Plan update. Mr. Russo proceeded to review the slideshow linked above. The main takeaways can be found

on the last two slides. A quick summary of survey respondent information along with input gathered is provided below:

- **Demographics:**
 - Most respondents were older, financially stable individuals, centrally located in Berkshire County.
- **Housing:**
 - Most respondents are currently living or envision themselves living in a detached house on a large lot in the next stage of life.
 - Housing affordability and travel time to and from destinations greatly influence where respondents choose to live.
- **Commuting:**
 - Most respondents travel using their personal vehicle.
 - Average commute time is under 17 minutes (EV & micromobility implications).
 - Little to no disruption to commuting from COVID.
- **Rating of Transportation Infrastructure/Services:**
 - Satisfaction with different transportation components is low, including ratings for pavement condition along with signs and striping.
- **Transportation Challenges:**
 - Pedestrian infrastructure, BRTA service times & locations, an inability to influence transportation decisions, finding transportation services for seniors or disabled individuals, and affordability represent top challenges.
- **Desired Changes/New Services:**
 - More rideshare services, bus service that connects to other transit systems, increased BRTA bus frequency and evening service, access to bikeshare, and more car sharing options.
- **Budget Priorities:**
 - Most respondents prioritized maintenance, improving public transit, safety, better bike/pedestrian facilities, and implementing new technology to augment the existing network.
- **Sustainability/Resilience:**
 - Downed trees or power lines, ice accumulation, bridge damage, road flooding/washouts, impassable dirt/gravel roads due to mud were the top-five weather-related impacts to our transportation system.
- **Active Transportation:**
 - Repairing and constructing new sidewalks along town roads would be the most important active transportation investment.
 - Most are in favor of a bikeshare service in their town but would not use it.
- **Transportation Technology:**
 - Little to moderate desire among respondents to utilize various transportation technologies and services.

Ms. Heming expressed appreciation for being able to hear about the preliminary survey results.

Ms. Irvin expressed some concern about preliminary findings concerning BRTA, as most of the respondents do not use BRTA services in any frequent or significant way,

Mr. Russo mentioned that these are preliminary results, and we do hope to do more analysis and filter responses based on certain attributes of respondents – in this case, we plan to look at the sentiments expressed about BRTA among those that use the fixed route service frequently or rely on transit service

as a primary mode of travel. Additionally, Mr. Russo mentioned that it might be a worthwhile exercise to ride the bus and attempt to solicit responses from riders.

IX. Receive a Report on Try Transit

Mr. Malnati mentioned that Try Transit was a grant offered by MassDOT. The 15 RTAs jointly submitted an application which allowed the Transit Authority's to provide fare-free service. BRTA initiated that service the day after Thanksgiving through the 31st of December. BRTA was able to offer fare-free paratransit and fixed route service. BRTA displayed, on their website, weekly, monthly, and quarterly ridership numbers. The ridership numbers were displayed as a goal thermometer type graphic on the website. BRTA set a goal of 55,000 riders for the 5-week period; they came in a little short of that number, most likely due to the snowstorm, ending with 53,930 riders. All in all, BRTA is very satisfied with the results.

X. Status Reports from Member Agencies

Mr. Frieri proceeded to review [District 1 Project Updates](#).

Mr. Kus stated that Transportation Planner Justin Gilmore is going to be moving on from BRPC. He will be joining MassDOT in their Lenox office in the right of way section. We appreciate all his efforts over the past few years that he has been with us and wish him well.

The other item Mr. Kus brought to the group's attention relates to rail efforts. There have been two public hearings so far about the Western Mass Rail Authority, one of those sessions occurred earlier today in Greenfield; the first occurred in the Berkshires back in December. The group is continuing to conduct public info sessions and will be preparing a report soon that will hopefully move efforts forward in terms of bringing East/West rail service to the region.

The other related rail effort is the Northern Tier study. Back on January 12th there was a public information meeting to update interested parties. Information can be found on the project website.

Finally, the steering committee to the Berkshire Flyer recently met to discuss the second year of operations. For the second year of operations, two committees have been created, one will focus on marketing of the Berkshire Flyer and the other will focus on last-mile transportation connections. We hope this second year of the pilot program is more successful than the first year of the pilot and are confident it will be.

At this point, Kent Lew, the MPO's Southeast Subregion Delegate joined the meeting, which provided the group with a meeting quorum.

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes from October 25th, 2022 (Action Item)

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Boyle, seconded by Ms. Hoyt to approve the meeting minutes from the October 25th, 2022, MPO meeting.

Mr. Kus conducted a roll call:

Steve Woelfel – Yea
Francisca Heming – Yea
Sheila Irvin – Yea
Christine Hoyt – Yea
John Boyle – Yea
Kent Lew – Abstain

VOICE VOTE: Mr. Lew abstained from voting. Motion carried.

IV. Approval of administrative adjustment/budget reallocation to the FFY 2023 UPWP. (Action Item)

Mr. Kus explained that he discovered a typographical error in the UPWP budget. The budget number that was included in the plan under the line item "Total Funds" reads \$751,120. That number is short by \$1,000 dollars and should read \$752,120. Mr. Kus is requesting the MPO approve amending the line item to read the correct amount originally programmed.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Boyle, seconded by Ms. Hoyt to approve the administrative adjustment/budget reallocation to the FFY 2023 UPWP.

Mr. Kus conducted a roll call:

Steve Woelfel – Yea
Francisca Heming – Yea
Sheila Irvin – Yea
Christine Hoyt – Yea
John Boyle – Yea
Kent Lew – Yea

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

V. Consideration of an amendment (1st amendment) to the 2023-2027 TIP and authorize a 21-day public comment period to add 5310 funding (Action Item)

Ms. Koirala reviewed the handout showing the [1st amendment to the 2023-2027 TIP](#). This amendment relates to the transit TIP. BRTA received a grant to support the travel training program. Additionally, the Town of Great Barrington received a grant award for software upgrades to facilitate on-demand scheduling that will enable microtransit pilot service planned to start in mid-February.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Boyle, seconded by Ms. Irvin to authorize a 21-day public comment period to the first amendment (the addition of 5310 funding) of the 2023-2027 TIP.

Mr. Kus conducted a roll call:

Steve Woelfel – Yea
Francisca Heming – Yea
Sheila Irvin – Yea
Christine Hoyt – Yea
John Boyle – Yea
Kent Lew – Yea

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

XI. Other Business

Mr. Woelfel mentioned that MassDOT's Innovation Conference will be happening in-person May 2nd and 3rd. There will be hybrid option as well.

There was no other business.

XII. Next Meeting date – February 28th, 2023

The next MPO meeting will be held on February 28th, 2023.

ACTION: Mr. Boyle motioned to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Hoyt. Mr. Woelfel adjourned the meeting at 4:56 p.m.

Materials Distributed:

- [Meeting Agenda](#)
- [BMPO October 25th, 2022 Draft Meeting Minutes](#)
- [BMPO FFY 2023-2027 TIP 1st Amendment Transit](#)
- [BMPO FY 2024-2028 TIP Tentative Schedule](#)
- [2024 RTP Preliminary Survey Results](#)
- [MassDOT District 1 TIP Projects Update](#)