

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday, January 22, 2019 4:00 PM
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) Office
1 Fenn St., Suite 201, Pittsfield, MA

MPO Representatives/Alternates Present:

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| Francisca Heming, Chair | MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning (Representing Secretary Pollack) |
| Mark Moore | MassDOT District 1 (Representing Highway Administrator Guliver) |
| John Boyle | Northcentral Towns Representative |
| John Duval | North Towns Representative |
| Kyle Hanlon | BRPC Chair |
| David Turocy | City of Pittsfield (Representing Mayor Tyer) |

Others Present:

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| Eammon Coughlin | BRPC |
| Peter Frieri | MassDOT District 1 |
| Justin Gilmore | BRPC |
| Anuja Koirala | BRPC |
| Derek Krevat | MassDOT Planning |
| Clete Kus | BRPC |
| Thomas Matuszko | BRPC |
| Andy McKeever | iBerkshires |
| Brandon Wilcox | FHWA |

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

Ms. Heming called the meeting to order at 4:03 PM. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

Note: Since a quorum was not met at the beginning of the meeting, MPO members moved on to items in the agenda that were non-action items.

3. DISCUSSION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2020-2024 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Ms. Koirala stated that the review process for the 2020-2024 TIP has begun. On January 2nd, solicitation letters were sent to all town delegates and alternates, BRTA delegates, town clerks, town administrators, and planners, with a due date of February 1st, 2019 – indicating project selection. Ms. Koirala stated that on February 11th, project evaluations will be initiated for this year’s TIP. This process will involve BRPC staff, in collaboration with MassDOT District 1 staff and MassDOT OTP staff, working together to review and evaluate projects. On February 12th, a TIP day will be held in which MassDOT staff and MassDEP staff reviews and assesses projects based on how well they meet various design standards. Ms. Koirala proceeded by mentioning that in April, the TIP will be released for public comment period and in May it will be endorsed.

4. DISCUSSION ON SAFETY PERFORMANCE MEASURE TARGETS (PM1)

Ms. Heming mentioned that due to Brian Pounds' absence, the discussion of the safety performance measures will not occur. Mr. Kus explained that this topic came up at the last transportation managers meeting and due to a change in the data that assists in establishing safety performance measures and targets, the MPO requested an update on this anomaly. Safety performance measures and targets will be discussed at the next MPO meeting.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE 2020 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

- RTP SURVEY FINDINGS
- GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
- NEXT STEPS

RTP 'Transportation Needs' Survey Findings

Mr. Gilmore began providing an overview to MPO members on the results of the 2020 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) 'Transportation Needs' survey, the primary tool used to engage Berkshire residents on updates to the RTP. Mr. Gilmore explained the purpose of the survey was to get a sense of general travel and commuting behavior, to understand transportation challenges, to get a sense of different regional initiatives residents might support to improve transportation options in the region, and to understand the condition and availability of various transportation components.

My Gilmore continued by briefly describing survey distributional methodology – consisting of sending out emails to organizational contacts, issuing press releases, hanging flyers and leaving business cards with links to the survey in local establishments, sending out 4,200 hard copy links to the survey through every-door-direct-mail to environmental justice communities, and attending local events to spread the word. The survey was open from late August to early November and gleaned input from 708 respondents. Due to the survey distribution methodology, the results are not statistically valid based on statistical sampling. This means that the survey sample does not represent a significant cross-section of the Berkshire public, however the survey results do offer a good window into some of the transportation needs countywide.

Mr. Gilmore reviewed demographic features of survey participants – with the main takeaways being that most survey respondents fell into the middle- to older-adult range, tended to be highly educated, and relatively well off with respect to annual household income. Additionally, 20% of survey respondents are not currently working or are unemployed.

Focusing in on survey findings, Mr. Gilmore explained that for general travel/commuting behavior, most survey respondents use their personal vehicle to travel to work and throughout the county. The survey also contained a question that asked residents to identify their work schedule – days and times during the week. The purpose of this question was to uncover non-traditionally work hours – second and third shift times – to get an understanding of any potential demand for an employment-based transportation need. However, most respondents identified traditional work hours – 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The largest share of respondents work in Pittsfield, followed by Great Barrington and then North Adams.

Mr. Gilmore continued by stating that when asked to choose from a list of transportation challenges, those that were most pressing related to pedestrian infrastructure – the condition and availability of

sidewalks and bike paths – along with public transportation not being available when and where folks need it. Additionally, there was a transportation challenge related to the idea that residents do not have their input accounted for when transportation decisions are being made in the county. Additionally, we found that finding affordable transportation was the single greatest challenge for those making under \$20,000 annually. The younger age cohort was primarily concerned with access to rideshare vehicles like Uber and Lyft. Comments received for this section primarily focused on a need for more reliable and easy-to-understand public transportation service along with having more interregional connectivity – being able to easily travel to places outside Berkshire County via rail, buses, etc.

For changes and/or new services that would improve the network – here we found increasing BTRA hours of operation to include nights and weekend and expanding BRTA service range topped the list. Additionally, we found a need for alternative transportation options like Uber, Lyft, and local taxis and we also heard about the need for having more affordable transportation options and services – having low-cost auto repair or maintenance or having a reduced fare when using public transportation. Comments received for this section called for increasing regional connections, specifically passenger rail service to places such as Springfield, Boston, Albany, and New York City. We also heard a desire to improve local connectivity within the county – particularly improving north/south county access. We also received comments calling for improving pedestrian infrastructure along with having more transportation services for seniors and individuals with disabilities – not just to medical appointments, but also for things like grocery shopping and socializing.

Mr. Gilmore continued by explaining that participants were asked about their support for alternative sources of funding that might go towards transportation improvements. The list of ideas included:

- An entertainment tax (tax on ticket sales to local musical and art performances)
- Slight increase to property taxes
- Higher use fees (higher bus fares)

Here, the largest share of respondents favored of ‘a combination of the suggested initiatives’, followed by ‘none of the above.’ Younger adults seemed to be more in favor of levying an entertainment tax to secure additional transportation improvement funding.

For condition and availability of transportation components, those that received high marks include the condition of major roadways such as Route 7, 8, 9 & 20, the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, and intersections, signs and traffic lights. Those that scored poorly include the condition of smaller residential streets and local roadways, pedestrian infrastructure like sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and on-road bike lanes, and the availability of rideshare vehicles (Uber, Lyft). Comments centered again on improving regional connections to places like Springfield, Boston, Connecticut, and New York City along with having better pedestrian infrastructure.

Other regional initiatives that respondents were in support of include improving pedestrian infrastructure to make walking and bicycling easier, having more passenger train connection between the Berkshires and places such as Springfield and Boston, and expanding BRTA fixed route hours and service area along with reducing fixed-route headways. Initiatives that respondents were not in favor of include exploring the implementation of autonomous and connected vehicles when the technology becomes available along with implementing a countywide bike-share system. Comments received for this question mainly focused on improving regional connectivity – making it easier to travel to areas outside of the Berkshires.

Continuing forward, Mr. Gilmore explained that the largest share of respondents said they ‘would never use a bike share service’ when asked about personal reasons to use such a service. This response grew in frequency as age and as annual household income increase. Lower-income residents identified cost savings as a top reason and younger adults acknowledged exercise and convenience as reasons to use such a service. Comments here voiced general support for recreational purposes. Some said they would be more in favor of such as service if there were better supporting infrastructure (sidewalks, bike paths/lanes). Some acknowledged that this service would help support and improve travel and tourism in the region.

When viewing survey results in their entirety, key findings include:

- 1) Expanding BRTA fixed route hours, service range, and improving user-friendliness such as better dissemination of information on routing and scheduling.
- 2) Improving pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, bike paths/lanes) to promote alternative modes to the personal automobile.
- 3) Increasing alternative and affordable transportation options along with rideshare services.
- 4) Improving county connections, specifically interregional connectivity (via rail) to make travel to Springfield, Boston, Connecticut, Albany, and New York City easier. Also, improve connectivity and supporting modes to increase access within the county.
- 5) Improve efficacy with respect to public involvement in transportation decisions. In general, local leaders need to do better to ensure residents feel that their input is accounted for and affects final transportation decisions.

Berkshire RTP – Draft Goals & Vision Statement

Mr. Coughlin proceeded to briefly describe RTP draft goals and vision statement. As a brief reminder, Mr. Coughlin noted that BRPC updates the RTP once every four years, and while this latest update is for 2020, the planning horizon for this RTP will span to 2040. The idea is to start big, and then gradually move to identifying specific recommendations and projects. Mr. Coughlin briefly reviewed the vision statement for the 2020 RTP, which outlines how the county envisions the future of transportation for the region. From the vision statement, we’ve created six goal areas. Each goal area outlines specific planning projects and identifies real-world road construction projects and sources of funding that will help advance the goals.

Mr. Coughlin explained that the previous 2016 RTP has helped establish the 2020 RTP vision statement and draft goals. Any recommendations or projects that are still relevant from the last RTP and have yet to be implemented will be carried over into the update. Survey results and past planning studies have also helped in assessing the relevance of projects and recommendations from the last RTP that will be rolled into the update. Additionally, any new projects or initiatives currently underway that were not mentioned in the previous RTP, such as the Berkshire Flyer or establishing a Transportation Management Association (TMA), must be incorporated into updated goals and objectives.

Mr. Coughlin briefly reviewed the draft vision statement which was developed by BRPC staff in collaboration with Jim Lovejoy. It’s composed of seven smaller statement that together add up to the vision. It reads:

A network of safe, well-maintained roads for cyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles with zero fatalities.

A robust a diverse array of accessible and affordable public transportation services and transportation providers.

A countywide share-use path network connecting Berkshire communities and spanning from Vermont to Connecticut.

Vibrant villages, city centers, and neighborhoods where biking, walking, and using public transit is as simple as driving.

Convenient passenger rail connections to location in the Berkshires, NYC, Boston, and beyond.

A cost-effective, affordable and resilient system; sensitive to our rural and historic context, enabling local ecologies, and future-proofed against the effects of climate change.

A community of stakeholders working in concert to address the transportation system's nexus to the economy, poverty, environment, health and well-being and responding to the demographic shifts our region is facing by embracing technology, innovation, and cooperation.

Mr. Coughlin proceeded to explain that the six focus areas and accompanying goals help establish the basic framework for the updated RTP. The goals must also align, in some way, with the eight National Performance Goals along with a series of ten planning factors that were created by the most recent federal transportation legislation known as the FAST Act. The six draft goals for the Berkshire Region include:

- 1) Maintain infrastructure in a state of good repair
- 2) Increase the safety and security of the transportation system
- 3) Support the economic vitality of the Berkshires while remaining sensitive to surrounding context
- 4) Expand transportation options
- 5) Enhance system reliability, efficiency, and project delivery
- 6) Increase resiliency to climate change while protecting and enhancing the natural environment

Mr. Coughlin continued by describing the basic framework for each goal area. Each area begins with a problem statement, describing the nature of the transportation improvement needed and the best approach for implementation. Each goal area has an objective, or a series of objectives, each containing an identified performance measure, either one that has been adopted by the MPO or that BRPC is recommending. Mr. Coughlin then proceeded to walk MPO members through each goal and objective(s) listed for the six focus areas.

Note: Kyle Hanlon arrived at 4:40 p.m. giving the MPO a quorum.

6. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 23, 2018 (ACTION ITEM)

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Hanlon, seconded by Mr. Turocy to approve the meeting minutes for the September 25, 2018 MPO meeting.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

7. CONSIDERATION OF AN AMENDMENT (1ST AMENDMENT) TO THE 2019-2023 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TRANSIT) AND INITIATE A 21 DAY PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (ACTION ITEM)

Ms. Koirala updated MPO members on recent funding awards to BRTA warranting an amendment to 'Transit' section of the existing TIP. Under the 5310 grant program, BRTA was awarded a total of \$389,160 for three items. Under the program BRTA received:

- 1) \$282,400 for a bus replacement (under 30’).
- 2) \$96,800 for the purchase of two vans, each wheelchair accessible.
- 3) \$9,960 for operating assistance for mobility management travel training.

Ms. Koirala explained that the existing TIP needs to be amended to reflect these projects.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Hanlon, seconded by Mr. Boyle to consider the TIP amendment and initiate a public comment period.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

8. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES

Mr. Frieri updated the MPO on District 1 Projects. (42:30)

Mr. Kus reviewed BRPC’s monthly activity report. (49:18)

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Kus mentioned on January 30th MassDOT, along with consultants, will be hosting a visioning session for Route 43. Additionally, the Massachusetts Bike Plan is up for review and public comments on the plan are due by January 31st. Mr. Kus proceeded to update MPO members on the status of the East/West Passenger Rail Study, which held its first meeting on December 18th, 2018 in Springfield at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission offices. The meeting was very well attended, with a committee of approximately 31 members. The committee is made up of rail owners and operators along the corridor, legislative and state officials, regional planning agencies, and members from key municipalities and business groups. The purpose of the study is to conduct an evaluation of the benefits, costs, and impacts of a range of alternatives for rail service between Boston and Pittsfield. Six alternatives will be assessed and a framework for each will be developed. The study will span 12-18 months and has a budget of \$1,000,000. The next meeting date has not yet been scheduled but will likely occur in the upcoming Spring.

10. NEXT MEETING DATE – FEBRUARY 26, 2019

The next MPO meeting will be on November 27, 2018.

ACTION: Mr. Turocy motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Hanlon. Ms. Hemming adjourned the meeting at 5:09 PM

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft October MPO meeting minutes
- Berkshire MPO FFY 2019 – 2023 Transit TIP 1st Amendment released by MPO on January 22nd, 2019
- Berkshire MPO FFY 2020 – 2024 TIP Schedule
- 2020 RTP ‘Transportation Needs’ Survey Results PowerPoint Slides
- Berkshire Regional Transportation Plan 2020 – Draft Goals and Vision Statement handout
- Berkshire Region – Safety Performance Measures

- MassDOT projects status report
- MPO work activity updates