

# Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday, February 3, 2015 4:00 PM

At the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission office

1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

## MPO Representatives/Alternates:

Clinton Bench, MassDOT (Representing Acting Secretary DePaola)  
Peter Niles, MassDOT District 1 (Representing Highway Administrator)  
John Duval, North Berkshire Towns Representative  
John Boyle, North-Central Towns Representative  
Jim Lovejoy, Southwest Berkshire Towns Representative  
Jim Huebner, Southeast Towns Representative  
Jeane Pryor, Southeast Towns Alternate  
Sheila Irvin, BRPC  
Bob Malnati, BRTA

## Others Present:

Clete Kus, BRPC  
Anuja Koirala, BRPC  
Nat Karns, BRPC  
Doug Plachcinski, BRPC  
Kevin Wright, FHWA  
Trey Wadsworth, MassDOT  
Mark Moore, MassDOT  
Peter Frieri, MassDOT  
Andy McKeever, iBerkshires

### **1. CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS**

Mr. Lovejoy called the meeting to order at 4:04 PM. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

### **2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM DECEMBER 9, 2014**

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Huebner, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy, to approve the MPO meeting minutes for December 9, 2014.

VOICE VOTE UNANIMOUS, MOTION CARRIES, THREE ABSTENTIONS (Niles, Malnati & Irwin).

### **3. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no comments.

### **4. APPROVAL OF THE SECOND AMENDMENT TO THE 2015-2018 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) TO ADD ASHUWILLTICOOK RAIL TRAIL (HOOSAC STREET TO LIME STREET) INTO YEAR 2015 AND AUTHORIZE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE CERTIFICATION DOCUMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE MPO.**

Ms. Koirala explained the purpose of the proposed TIP amendment and indicated that the amendment was highlighted blue in the handout materials. She indicated that a 30 day public comment period was initiated following the last meeting and that no comments were received on the proposed amendment.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Duval, seconded by Mr. Niles to approve the second amendment to the 2015-2018 TIP. Unanimously approved

**5. INTRODUCTION OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE 2015-2018 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (THIRD AMENDMENT) FOR THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS: 605930-MT. GREYLOCK SCENIC BYWAY SUMMIT IMPROVEMENTS, 601320-LEE, TYRINGHAM ROAD AND 602280-DALTON, HOUSATONIC STREET AND AUTHORIZE A 30-DAY COMMENT PERIOD.**

Ms. Koirala provided handout materials related to the proposed amendments and indicated that they were highlighted in yellow. Regarding the first element of the amendment, Lee, Tyringham Road, the project cost remains the same; however STP funding is decreased \$479,242 in year 3 for a total cost of \$660,062. The second component relates to Mt. Greylock summit improvements and is a cost adjustment in the amount of \$6,800 for a total project cost of \$996,800. The third element of the amendment is for the Dalton, Housatonic Street project. The project cost has increased and MassDOT has determined that project has a larger CMAQ component which would allow for additional Statewide CMAQ funding to be applied to the project. Through this amendment, \$479,242 of remaining STP funds would be converted to Statewide CMAQ and an additional \$1,020,758 Statewide CMAQ funds (total \$1,500,000) would be programmed for this project in 2015. Mr. Frieri provided clarification on the Mt. Greylock project. Mr. Lovejoy sought clarification on Statewide CMAQ monies inquiring if it was part of our target.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Huebner, seconded by Mr. Duval to release the third amendment of the 2015-2018 TIP amendment for public comment. Unanimously approved

At this point in the meeting (4:15 PM), Clinton Bench arrived and assumed responsibilities for chairing the meeting.

**NOTE: THIS ITEM WAS RECONSIDER LATER IN THE MEETING- SEE PAGE 4**

**6. UPDATE AND DISCUSSION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 2016 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN**

Mr. Plachcinski started the discussion describing his interactions with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission at their meeting on January 15, 2015. He was appreciative of their feedback and indicated that their input was incorporated back into the goals and objectives for the RTP. Mr. Plachcinski indicated that the online survey is going well but there is still opportunity for more input, he expects the survey to conclude in March. There is a transportation forum planned by the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition on March 13th and this will provide another opportunity to gain input on transportation issues and to seek participation in the survey. Based on a quick review of the survey responses so far, the main issues are public transportation, access to non-motorized facilities and repairing existing infrastructure. In addition to these activities, work will be occurring on sections of the RTP that are focused on economic development, sustainability and hazard mitigation with input and assistance from other BRPC staff that are knowledgeable in these areas. Mr. Plachcinski concluded with mentioning that he will be soliciting communities for input on projects for the 25 year plan. At some future point, he expects to receive financial information from MassDOT and this will be used to develop a prioritized table containing transportation projects. This project listing will be the cornerstone of the RTP.

Mr. Bench inquired if the goals are staying the same or if they have changed since the last meeting; Mr. Plachcinski responded that no significant changes have occurred, only minor changes. He also provided suggestions to staff including looking at providing broader strategies and solutions to solve mobility problems; identifying corridors needing attention and not identifying specific items needing attention. Mr. Bench indicated that the new Transportation Secretary is looking to see that problems are clearly defined and understood before a solution is proposed and that this is something which she will voice in

an upcoming visit. Mr. Bench also spoke about the potential to integrate outreach on the RTP with upcoming listening sessions by the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development.

## **7. OVERVIEW OF THE 2016 -2019 TIP DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

Ms. Koirala started the discussion indicating that tomorrow, February 4<sup>th</sup>, staff will initiate project solicitations for the 2016-2019 TIP. Project solicitations will occur via email and will include project forms that must be return to the BRPC in order for projects to be considered. A copy of the TIP development schedule was distributed. By March 4<sup>th</sup>, towns must return project forms. All projects will be evaluated and ranked by staff from MassDOT and BRPC. On March 31<sup>st</sup>, the MPO will be presented with the project scoring and ranking. When TIP financial targets are received, staff will work to develop funding scenarios and meet with the TAC and MPO to discuss and receive further direction. This financial information will be provided at meetings outlined in the TIP development schedule over the next three months.

Mr. Karns suggested that the solicitation be broadened and ask about projects that should be considered in the RTP that are outside of the timeframe of the TIP. This would avoid any confusion by the towns if they were to receive two seemingly identical letters. Staff will work to identify the appropriate means to solicit input for the RTP.

## **8. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES**

Mr. Frieri reviewed the MassDOT District 1 project update spreadsheet, including the Fiscal Year 2015 projects that were discussed earlier in conjunction with TIP amendments, Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension in Adams and the Mt. Greylock project in Adams. He also mentioned 2014 projects that went to bid; the Adams roundabout bid opening is on February 10<sup>th</sup> and notice to proceed has been issued for the BMC Area improvement project design. Updates on bridge projects were provided along with mentioning a kick off meeting for the Lee Bikeway design phase last November. The two resurfacing projects for the region have completed the bid process and the bid openings are scheduled for March.

## **9. OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Bench inquired with Mr. Malnati to see if the BRTA would be acquiring any new vehicles. The BRTA does not anticipate purchasing any new buses at this time, only support vehicles.

As follow up to an inquiry from the previous meeting, Mr. Kus shared trail count information obtained from DCR for the Ashuwillticook trail. Between July 25, 2013 and October 11, 2013, nearly 50,000 persons used the trail. Saturdays are the busiest days, approximately 1,300 users, daily average is 611. More information can be obtained from the handout.

Mr. Kus mentioned that a deed has been recorded for the acquisition of the Housatonic Rail Line from the Connecticut state line to Pittsfield and for the Coltsville spur.

Trey Wadsworth shared information related to the Hoosac Tunnel project. MassDOT received a \$2M grant from FRA. This funding will provide for preliminary design, up to 25%, and environmental permitting work, NEPA and MEPA. Norfolk Southern will contribute \$1M in match funds for this project. VHB is the design consultant, work will be completed within 18 months. Notice to proceed will be issued in the first quarter of 2015.

Mr. Karns mentioned the Adams spur acquisition and related track upgrades. He requested that MassDOT continue to push this along as well as sharing information with the MPO about the progress. Mr. Bench indicated that he would have staff look into this and report back.

## **RECONSIDERATION OF AGENDA ITEM 5**

At this point in the meeting, the Chair asked a question related to the Dalton, Housatonic Street project and programming of funding related to the third TIP amendment and if the total target was reduced with the \$479,000 STP funds. Mr. Bench went on to clarify that it was the understanding of BRPC's staff that the \$479K as available target funds would have to remain and we would not have access to it because we paid down the AC balance of the Lee project effectively by that amount by using statewide priority funds. It appeared that staff presumed that it would be an even trade because that is what staff was led to believe by MassDOT. Mr. Bench has concerns over how it may appear that \$479K in total target funds is not actually accessible to the MPO. He is suggesting reducing 2017 AC spending for that project by \$479K and actually spending it this year in 2015 using the target funds and that way we free up capacity in 2017.

Chairman Bench asked for a motion to consider the earlier motion to release the TIP amendment for public comment and that the purpose of the motion would be for shifting the \$479K out of 2017 as an AC payment and pay it up front in 2015.

**ACTION:** Motion for Reconsideration of the earlier motion to release the TIP amendment for public comment; the purpose of the motion would be for reducing the \$479K in 2017 as an AC payment and pay it up front in 2015. Motion made by Mr. Lovejoy, seconded by Mr. Boyle. Unanimously approved.

As the original motion was now up for reconsideration, the Chairman asked if there was anyone who needed further explanation or needed debate on this. Seeing none, the chair called for a vote for those in favor or reconsideration. Unanimously approved.

**ACTION:** The original motion was now up for reconsideration, the chair asked if by unanimous consent if the body would be willing to amend the previous motion and to provide for reducing \$479,242 from 2017 and making it available as target funds in 2015 and releasing the TIP amendment for public comment. Unanimously approved.

## **10. NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next meeting date is March 31, 2015.

## **11. ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:09 p.m.

**VOICE VOTE:** passes unanimously

### **Materials Distributed:**

- Agenda
- Third TIP amendments with supportive paperwork
- December MPO Meeting minutes
- 2016 RTP Update memorandum
- Ashuwillticook Trail count data
- District 1 project update spreadsheet