

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday, March 28, 2018 4:00 PM

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) Office

1 Fenn St., Suite 201, Pittsfield, MA

MPO Representatives/Alternates Present:

David Mohler, Chair	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning (Representing Secretary Pollack)
Larysa Bernstein	City of North Adams (Representing Mayor Bernard)
Kyle Hanlon	BRPC Chair
Francisca Heming	MassDOT District 1 (Representing Highway Administrator Gulliver)
Andy Hogeland	Northern Berkshire Towns Representative
Jim Huebner	Southeast Berkshire Towns Representative
Jim Lovejoy	Southwest Berkshire Towns Representative
Robert Malnati	BRTA
Laurel Scialabba	North Central Berkshire Towns Representative
David Turocy	City of Pittsfield (Representing Mayor Tyer)

Others Present:

Bill Cooke	Town of Great Barrington
Eammon Coughlin	BRPC
Peter Frieri	MassDOT District 1
Justin Gilmore	BRPC
Nat Karns	BRPC
Clete Kus	BRPC
Anuja Koirala	BRPC
Andy McKeever	iBerkshires
Mark Moore	MassDOT District 1
Gabriel Sherman	MassDOT Planning
Sean VanDeusen	Town of Great Barrington
Sarah Vallieres	BRTA

1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Lovejoy called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 27, 2018

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Huebner, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy to approve the minutes as written.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carried unanimously.

4. REPORT FROM THE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF MARCH 20, 2018

Mr. Kus updated the MPO on discussion at the TAC meeting of March 20, 2018. The major result of that meeting was a recommendation on a TIP funding scenario. TAC members reviewed four draft funding scenarios. The recommended scenario is a revised Scenario 3A that maintains the Hinsdale Skyline Trail project (606406) in FY21 and the Egremont Route 23/41 project (608767) in FY22. Note:

both the Hinsdale and Egremont projects are already programmed in the current TIP in these fiscal years.

5. CONSIDERATION OF AN AMENDMENT (4TH AMENDMENT) TO THE 2018 -2022 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (HIGHWAY) (listed on agenda as Item #6)

Mr. Koirala introduced the 4th amendment to the 2018-2022 TIP. The amendment increases funding in FY18 for:

North Adams – Route 2 & Phelps Ave. Intersection Improvements (607429)
Lenox – Walker St. Reconstruction (606462)

The amendment moves the following projects:

Pittsfield Intersection and Signal Improvements Routes 8 & 9 (607760) (moved from FY18)
BMC Area Improvements (606233) (moved from FY19)

Mr. Lovejoy asked if, with these amendments, any funding was being “left on the table” in FY18. Ms. Koirala responded no.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Huebner, seconded by Mr. Hanlon, to release the 4th amendment to the FFY 2018-2022 TIP for a 21-day comment period.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carries unanimously.

6. DISCUSSION ON PROJECT FUNDING SCENARIOS AND PROJECT LISTING FOR THE 2019 – 2023 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (listed on agenda as Item #5)

Ms. Koirala presented the draft funding scenarios to MPO members. Major developments in the TIP process this year are that BMC area improvements project (606233) was not ready for funding in FY19, and that the Adams Route 8 project (607238) was unable to be moved to FY19 for funding in its place. The only project that could be ready for funding in FY19 is the repaving of the Ashuwillticook Trail (608351) and the currently programmed Lenox Walker St. project (606462) (as second year of advance construction beginning in FY18). These two projects are programmed into FY19 in each of the four draft scenarios. The TAC recommended a revised Scenario 3A, which maintains the Hinsdale Skyline Trail project (606406) in FY21 and the Egremont Route 23/41 project (608767) in FY22 (as currently programmed).

Ms. Scialabba asked why the Hinsdale Skyline project is being moved back in the recommended scenario. Staff responded that the recommended scenario leaves the Hinsdale project where it is currently programmed.

Mr. Lovejoy asked why the Egremont Route 23/41 project is being moved back. Staff responded that the recommended scenario leaves the Egremont project where it is currently programmed.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Turocy, seconded by Mr. Huebner and others, to adopt the revised funding Scenario 3a that will be used to draft the FY19-FY23 TIP.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carries unanimously.

After the vote, Ms. Koirala moved on to discuss Bike/Ped. projects and Non-Interstate Pavement Projects.

Mr. Lovejoy asked why there were no south county projects on the Non-Interstate Pavement Project list. Mr. Moore responded that only roadways that are part of the National Highway System (NHS) are eligible for this funding. In south county, only Route 7 is part of the NHS.

Mr. Hogeland asked if the Williamstown Route 43 project listed in the Non-Interstate Pavement list is separate from other planned MassDOT projects on Water St. (Route 43) in Williamstown. Mr. Moore responded that yes, it is a separate project. Mr. Mohler also clarified that MassDOT is preparing the list of bridge projects in the region, and that it would not be ready until next month.

Ms. Koirala moved on to discussion of Transit related funding, and after discussion, Mr. Mohler asked for a motion to approve the Transit and Non-Interstate Pavement projects list.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, seconded by Mr. Huebner and others, to adopt the Bike/Ped. and Non-Interstate Pavement projects that will be used to draft the FY19-FY23 TIP.

VOICE VOTE: Motion carries unanimously.

7. UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Mr. Coughlin gave an update to MPO members on performance measures. There are four categories of performance measures that MPOs must adopt, related to Safety, Pavement & Bridges, System Performance, and Transit. Each measure requires a target that is set to track performance. MPOs can adopt statewide targets as set by MassDOT, or they can set and adopt their own. They can also adopt additional performance measures as they wish. If the MPO adopts the statewide targets, there are no additional reporting requirements. If they set their own, they must report on performance as part of the TIP and RTP.

The performance measures related to safety were adopted in January. MPO staff are waiting on targets from MassDOT for the system and pavement & bridge measures. In past MPO meetings, members expressed interest in adding a ridership measure to the other required transit performance measures. MPO staff received data from BRTA on ridership. Since FY04, BRTA ridership has been generally increasing in Berkshire County. However, ridership declined in FY17 from peaks in FY15 & 16. Mr. Coughlin presented trendlines based on ridership and average ridership based on a 5-year rolling average. Overall, the trendline shows increasing ridership and projects that it would increase in future years, although it is unknown if this could be sustained. Mr. Coughlin called for discussion and questions.

Mr. Hogeland asked why ridership has been increasing over the years. Mr. Malnati explained that BRTA has been working to increase efficiency. Routes throughout the county have been tweaked in recent years to assess to whether routes are meeting existing needs. North county is BRTA's busiest area.

Mr. Lovejoy asked what the benefit of adopting a ridership performance measure would be, given that it is not required of the MPO. Mr. Mohler explained that MPOs are required to set targets by the Federal government. Through the funding that is provided to MPOs, they are required to achieve

or meet the set targets. Therefore, if the MPO were to set a target around transit ridership, it would be partially the responsibility of the MPO to provide funding to meet that target. The MPO could hypothetically shift funding from highway sources to increase transit funding if the ridership targets were not being met. Mr. Lovejoy stated that given limited funding, it might not be beneficial to shift funding around based on a performance measure that the MPO might set and might not know if it could meet in the future. Mr. Malnati stated that given the condition of the Berkshire Mall, and declining population in the county, it might not be beneficial to set a ridership performance measure. Additionally, it is unknown if current levels of ridership can be sustained. Mr. Malnati also mentioned that BRTA ridership declined last year, and that this trend has been seen in other areas. It is thought that competition from rideshare as well as the improving economy has been decreasing transit ridership across the nation. Mr. Lovejoy asked why the MPO would set up another performance measure for itself to have to be met, given the uncertainty of increasing ridership. Mr. Mohler restated the consensus of the discussion - that the MPO would not formally adopt a ridership performance measure.

8. PRESENTATION ON BRTA'S SHARED RIDE ACCESS TO WORK STUDY

Ms. Vallieres presented on a study that was conducted in late summer through November 2017. Ms. Vallieres stated that surveys conducted by BRTA always indicate that service in the evening hours and on Sundays is desired. Given limited funding to BRTA, it can provide transportation to workers during the day shift, but cannot do so for second shift workers. BRTA received a grant from MassDOT and worked with consultant McMahon Associates to develop the study.

Study goals were to identify unmet employment transportation needs, employment centers, and develop a service concept for a shared ride employment network that makes use of existing assets and providers. Largest employers in the county are based on around healthcare and social service, retail trade, manufacturing, educational, and accommodation and food services. Most of these employers have two or more shifts. Some recommendations of the study are to implement a pilot program for evening and Sunday service using existing paratransit vehicles. However, there are no operational dollars to fund this. Another longer-term recommendation is to work with employers to establish a Transportation Management Association (TMA). A TMA is a public-private partnership that utilizes a membership model and is based around shared resources. It might help to leverage and pool together employer and publicly owned vehicles to help provide better employment transportation options in the Berkshires. Most TMAs in Massachusetts are located in the Boston area.

Mr. Hogeland asked if any progress had been made on advancing the TMA concept since the study was completed. Mr. Malnati stated he has been working with Senator Hinds' office to see if a TMA is feasible. Mr. Malnati also stated that the MCLA design lab has been helping to facilitate meetings to see if a TMA could be started in the region. Mr. Karns stated that Canyon Ranch and Main St. Hospitality are interested in a potential TMA. Mr. Mohler explained that essentially TMAs are non-profit organizations and collaborations of regional employers that combine resources for a combined benefit for improved employee transportation to an area, and often to help alleviate congestion and parking issues. However, some TMAs function only as information sharing and advocacy organizations.

9. PRESENTATION ON BERKSHIRE FLYER FEASIBILITY STUDY

Mr. Mohler provided an update on the Berkshire Flyer feasibility study. The study was authorized by state legislation and the study report was recently delivered to the state legislature. A working group helped to guide the study. It is modeled on the CapeFlyer passenger rail service and focused on providing weekend trips for tourists, not regular commuter service. The Berkshire Flyer study planned for rail service from June to Labor Day, although the working group discussed extending service to Columbus Day weekend. The Flyer would bring passengers from NYC to Pittsfield on Friday evenings during the tourist season and return to NYC on Sunday afternoons. Ridership is based on an estimated 2600 passengers, which is the currently unused capacity of existing trains to Pittsfield. Although, if demand is higher than expected, there is the potential that another train car could be added to provide for an additional 70 passengers per weekend. Of the options studied, one would require construction of over a half mile of new track and utilization of an unused CSX line. This option was considered to be far more expensive than utilization of existing Amtrak rail lines from NYC to Pittsfield through Albany. Therefore, the working group considered only this second and less expensive option. Operating costs of the Flyer were estimated to be around \$421,000. If all the estimated 2600 seats were purchased during the summer months, \$184,000 in revenue would be generated, leaving a subsidy of \$237,000 that would need to be made up in some way. However, marketing expenses for the project would increase this to around \$336,000. MassDOT has a pilot project policy, which means it does not fund pilot projects without an identified sponsor that can provide a “backstop” to cover any potential revenue losses. Additionally, a performance evaluation must be conducted to see that targets are met for the project. If targets are not met, the service is not continued. Last mile transportation is another issue for passengers, as they would arrive in Pittsfield without a vehicle. It is thought that existing taxi or rideshare can help provide some last mile transportation options.

Mr. Mohler stated that next steps are that the Berkshire region should begin to identify potential sponsors for the project, a finance plan, and performance targets.

10. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES

Mr. Frieri updated the MPO on District 1 Projects. Mr. Kus reviewed activities of BRPC staff members.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

12. NEXT MEETING DATE

The next MPO meeting will be on April 24, 2018. Mr. Huebner motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. Mr. Mohler adjourned the meeting at 5:15 PM.

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- Draft February MPO meeting minutes
- 4th amendment to the 2018-2022 TIP
- Bike/Ped and Non-Interstate Pavement project list
- Transit project list
- FFY 2019-2023 TIP tentative schedule
- TIP project evaluation scores and scenarios
- District 1 Project Updates
- MPO work activity updates