

**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)**

Tuesday, December 17, 2019 4:00 PM

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) Office  
1 Fenn St., Suite 201, Pittsfield, MA

**MPO Representatives/Alternates Present:**

Steve Woelfel	MassDOT District 1 (Representing Secretary Stephanie Pollack)
John Boyle	North Central Towns Representative
John Duval	North Towns Representative
Zachary Feury	City of North Adams
Kyle Hanlon	BRPC Chair
Sam Haupt	Town of Peru
Francesca Hemming	MassDOT District 1 (Representing Highway Administrator Gulliver)
Sheila Irving	Chair of BRTA
Jim Lovejoy	Southwest Towns Representative
Ricardo Morales	City of Pittsfield

**Others Present:**

Cassandra Gascon Bligh	MassDOT OTP
Peter Friari	MassDOT District 1
Justin Gilmore	BRPC
Mark Moore	MassDOT District 1
Anuja Koirala	BRPC
Clete Kus	BRPC

**1. CALL TO ORDER/INTRODUCTIONS**

Mr. Woelfel called the meeting to order at 4:10 PM. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

**2. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no public comments.

**3. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES FROM NOVEMBER 26, 2019 (ACTION ITEM)**

**ACTION:** Motion by Mr. Boyle, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy to approve the meeting minutes from the November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019 MPO meeting.

**VOICE VOTE:** Motion carried unanimously.

**4. CONSIDERATION OF AN AMENDMENT (1<sup>ST</sup> AMENDMENT) TO THE 2020-2024 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (ACTION ITEM)**

Ms. Koirala explained that this amendment to the 2020-2024 TIP went out for a public comment period after the last MPO meeting in November. Ms. Koirala stated that one comment was received, by MassDOT, which touched on the cost change for the project. The new cost for the project is \$1,137,668.

Mr. Frieri explained that the project underwent a slight increase to reflect efforts by the conservation commission – those efforts are now built into the overall project cost.

**ACTION:** Motion by Mr. Hanlon, seconded by Mr. Boyle to approve the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment to the 2020-2024 TIP.

**VOICE VOTE:** Motion carried unanimously.

**5. CONSIDERATION OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE 2020 UPWP TO ADD A NEW TASK, TASK 3.9: BERKSHIRE FLYER/CSX RAIL CORRIDOR CAPACITY ANALYSIS AND SERVICE IMPLEMENTATION AND ADD ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR THIS TASK (ACTION ITEM)**

Mr. Kus explained that at the last MPO meeting, the MPO authorized a public comment period on this amendment to the 2020 UPWP. Mr. Kus explained that funding under this task would assist in efforts to further the Berkshire Flyer pilot project – which is scheduled for Spring 2020. Funding allocated under this task will be used to hire a consultant to perform a Corridor Capacity Analysis for the particular segment of CSX rail line. Additionally, this funding will be used to assist BRPC staff efforts related to the implementation of the Berkshire Flyer service.

**ACTION:** Motion by Mr. Hanlon, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy to approve an amendment to the 2020 UPWP to add a new task, Task 3.9: Berkshire Flyer/CSX Rail Corridor Capacity Analysis and Service Implementation and add additional funding.

**VOICE VOTE:** Motion carried unanimously.

**6. RECEIVE A PRESENTATION ON THE I-90 INTERCHANGE STUDY**

Ms. Bligh introduced herself as the project manager for the I-90 Interchange Analysis. Ms. Bligh explained the impetus behind this study, stating that it originated with the MA Legislature – tasking MassDOT with studying the feasibility relative to the establishment of an interchange on interstate highway Route 90 between the existing interchanges located in the City of Westfield and the Town of Lee. The study began in 2017.

Ms. Bligh continued by explaining the study overview which included establishing mission, goals, objectives, developing evaluation criteria, conducting an in-depth existing conditions analysis, exploring alternatives to development and analyzing current/future conditions and summarizing findings and ultimately issuing recommendations. Ms. Bligh explained that MassDOT held the last Working Group meeting on October 2<sup>nd</sup> and the final public meeting and open house on October 10<sup>th</sup>, both of which were very well attended. A draft report will be made available to the public soon. Ms. Bligh proceeded to outline the study area with maps included in the presentation.

Ms. Bligh explained the study goals that were formulated with assistance from the Working Group. The primary study goal is to improve access to and from I-90 for towns in the center of the regional study area. The secondary study goal is to mitigate I-90-bound traffic to and from Lee and Westfield.

Ms. Bligh explained that seven alternative recommendations had been developed – that were then winnowed down to three alternatives that hit the primary goal of improving access to the center of the study area. The first alternative, Alternative #1 recommends an interchange at Algerie Road in Otis. Alternative #2 recommends an interchange at the Blandford Maintenance Facility in Blandford, MA. Alternative #3 recommends an interchange at the Blandford Service Plaza, again in Blandford. Ms. Bligh explained these three alternatives were chosen by MassDOT to study in greater depth.

Ms. Bligh went through the factors influencing the analysis conducted for each alternative along with how impacts differ depending on the alternative chosen. Factors highlighted by Ms. Bligh that influence the analysis conducted for each alternative include daily traffic change, level of service (LOS), vehicle miles travel (VMT), vehicle hours traveled (VHT), along with public health indicators such as noise and environmental quality (in terms of emissions reductions).

Ms. Bligh explained that alternative #3 provides the greatest savings in terms of travel time and travel distance which also translates into having the greatest emissions reductions among these alternatives. Alternative #2 provides the most change in terms of access to opportunities.

Ms. Bligh proceeded to review a matrix showing the impacts of each alternative. These include impacts to wetlands, water resources, open space/Article 97, ROW, Environmental Justice populations, potential property takings, parcels with residences along with the factors mentioned above (traffic change, LOS, VMT, VHT), projected daily use and estimated conceptual cost.

Ms. Bligh explained that all three alternatives are feasible from an engineering prospective. Naturally, each alternative varies in cost, impacts, benefits, and public acceptance/opposition – which can allow for decision-making between alternatives. Ms. Bligh explained that should an interchange project move forward, Alternatives #2 and #3 in Blandford are more favorable. Alternative #1 in Otis is recommended to be dismissed.

Ms. Bligh concluded by stating that in order to move this interchange project toward construction there is a lot of work ahead. Regional support among MPO's and among Blandford along with identified funding are all necessary for such a project to eventually move toward construction.

Mr. Haupt asked if most of the beneficial and adverse impacts of such a project were localized to the Pioneer Valley?

Ms. Bligh replied that it is difficult to delineate beneficial and adverse impacts to a specific town/city or area based on this conceptual analysis.

Mr. Woelfel mentioned that historically, the way Federal Highways has handled projects that cross multiple MPO jurisdictions, is by requiring agreement among the MPO regions on moving a project forward – fully acknowledging the potential pros and cons for each region that would result from implementing a project.

Mr. Lovejoy laid out a series of statements that went to questioning the nature of this project – and whether this is a project that is worthwhile and needed.

Ms. Bligh responded by stating that hopefully this report can be used by municipalities to ultimately determine whether this project is something to advocate for.

## **7. STATUS REPORTS FOR MEMBER AGENCIES**

Mr. Frieri proceed to update MPO members on District 1 projects. Key highlights include:

- The Adams, Cheshire, Lanesborough Resurfacing of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail had a pre-construction meeting on December 5<sup>th</sup>.
- The Pittsfield Bridge Replacement on Lakeway Drive over Onota Lake had a bid opening on December 10<sup>th</sup> – New England Infrastructure is the apparent lowest bidder.
- The Adams Pavement rehabilitation and relation work on Route 8 project has a PS&E due by January 2020 – this is the final design package.
- The Florida, Savoy resurfacing and related work on Route 2 project was advertised at the end of November. Bid opening is scheduled for 3/17/20.
- The Adams systematic bridge maintenance on Route 8 was advertise on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and the bid opening is scheduled for 4/7/20.

## **8. OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Kus mentioned that BRPC will be holding our 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday Dinner on January 30<sup>th</sup> – Stephen Russell, Alternative Transportation Program Coordinator/Clean Cities Director for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be speaking about electric vehicles and charging stations.

Mr. Kus also mentioned that today was the deadline for the Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) to release their MOU.

## **9. NEXT MEETING DATE – JANUARY 28, 2020**

The next MPO meeting will be on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

ACTION: Mr. Hanlon motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Boyle. Mr. Woelfel adjourned the meeting at 4:55 PM.

### Materials Distributed:

- Meeting Agenda
- Berkshire MPO FFY 2020 – 2024 TIP 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment Handout
- Task 3.9: Berkshire Flyer/CSX Rail Corridor Capacity Analysis and Service Implementation
- Berkshire MPO 12/17/2019 – MassDOT District One Project Updates
- The Berkshire Regional Planning commission: 5<sup>th</sup> Thursday Dinner: Electric Cars and Charging Stations handout