

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday, October 16, 2012 4:00 PM

At the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission office
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

MPO Representatives and Alternates Voting:

Clinton Bench, MassDOT (Representing Secretary Davey)
Mark Moore, MassDOT District 1 (representing Administrator DePaola)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington (Southwest Berkshire Delegate)
Ron Turbin, Town of Williamstown (North Berkshire Alternate)
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield
Bob Malnati, BRTA
Jack Hickey, BRPC
Mike Nuvallie, City of North Adams
John Boyle, Town of Dalton (North Central Berkshire Delegate)
Jim Huebner, Town of Washington (Southeast Berkshire Alternate)
Paul Maloney, FHWA (Ex-Officio)

Others Present:

The Honorable Gail Cariddi, Berkshire 1st District Representative
Clete Kus, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, BRPC
Nat Karns, BRPC
Douglas Plachcinski, BRPC
Jonathan Butler, Town of Adams
Arthur Harrington, Town of Adams
Peter Frieri, MassDOT District 1
Jane Winn, BEAT
Andy McKeever

1. CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Bench called the meeting to order at 4:00. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

2. MINUTES OF September 12, 2012

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, supported by Mr. Malnati, to approve the September 12, 2012 minutes.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

3. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Butler provided some background on the Route 8 & Friend Street intersection project that is proposed for removal from the TIP, including the \$85k already spend for engineering and the 25% design submissions sent to MassDOT in September. The Town pointed out that the construction funding is a match for state development grants for Greylock Glen and that there is significant industrial activity along with the development of a new Wal-Mart in the area.

4. DISCUSSION OF REPURPOSED FEDERAL EARMARKS

Mr. Bench explained how Congress moved towards eliminating earmarks in the new transportation authorization legislation, MAP 21. Mr. Bench further explained that the Federal Government

identified about \$500 Million in “idle” earmarks in the summer and asked states to determine if those earmarks could be obligated, or completed in the 2012 calendar year. Massachusetts had 14 of these projects and the Route 8 Corridor Access Management Earmark, which is now programmed for the Route 8/Friend St. intersection was the only one in Berkshire County. The MassDOT Secretary of Transportation decided to repurpose the earmarks’ money to the regional transit agencies (other than MBTA) so that it would be spent by December 31, 2012. BRTA submitted two projects, the purchase of 4 paratransit vehicles and repairing the maintenance garage roof, to replace the Route 8/Friend St. intersection project.

Mr. Lovejoy asked if staff had any input on the completion of any of the projects. Mr. Moore said that the Adams project was impossible to spend this calendar year. Mr. Karns suggested that Adams needed earmarked funds to complete design of the project, for a difference of about \$125,000 and that alteration was an amendment to an existing design contract. Adams would like some assurance that Federal construction money would be available when design is complete.

Mr. Bench indicated that the 2004 earmark first obligated some funds for design in 2009. Mr. Karns stated that it was not an Adams specific earmark and that BRPC was responsible for delays in developing projects to use the funding from 2004-2009. The regional project was meant for corridor access management. Mr. Bench indicated that there was consensus and desire for the Adams project but the immediate need was to satisfy the ‘we can’t wait’ directive from FHWA and ensure that Massachusetts didn’t lose the unspent earmark funding to other states. The Adams project is in 2014 of the TIP, immediately making it a no-go for expending the earmark. MassDOT would like to meet with the MPO and the Town to discuss how to bring the project to 100% design and how to ensure that if that happens, the project is funded for construction in 2014.

Mr. Lovejoy asked if there was some guarantee that BRTA complete obligation for the two replacement projects, the paratransit bus purchase and the roof replacement. Mr. Malnati explained that the buses could be purchased under an existing purchase agreement and that the roof repairs could be contracted very easily. Mr. Malnati further stated that BRTA would provide additional documentation to the MPO at next meeting following the public comment period on the TIP amendment. Mr. Karns asked directly about the bid specifications for the maintenance garage roof and Mr. Malnati committed the completion of the bid package by the end of the month.

Mr. Karns stated his frustration at the lack of communication from MassDOT to the Town of Adams during this process. There seemed to be little response from the Secretary after the Town contacted MassDOT regarding the lagging earmark. Mr. Bench said MassDOT accepted responsibility for the lack of communication however, the decision to reprogram the earmarks had to be made by October 1, 2012 and that the decisions were made based on performance of the projects, not on location or need. Mr. Bench reiterated MassDOT’s commitment to resolving the issue as soon as possible. Mr. Karns agreed that the project could not meet the end of the year deadline for construction, however, the project should receive funding to complete 100% design so that construction funding can best be procured. The original obligation of the Adams project was for 100% design and the change in design to a roundabout more than doubled the cost of the engineering. Mr. Maloney stated that FHWA would like to see sufficient progress in design – an accepted 25% level - before obligating the additional money to cover the increased design costs.

Representative Cariddi expressed concerns that MassDOT was uncommunicative about the decision to repurpose the earmark and vague about the process for ‘we can’t wait’. Mr. Lovejoy pointed out that the item for consideration was starting the public comment period, not approving the amendment. Mr. Lovejoy suggested that the 100% design of the Adams project could replace the repairs to BRTA’s maintenance facility in the proposed TIP amendment.

Mr. Bench stated that the escalated timeline for repurposing earmarks was a result of the US DOT's decisions. Secretary Davey decided that the most expeditious and fair method for repurposing the funding was to ask regional transit authorities for projects and attempt to keep the funding whole within the MPOs. Mr. Butler reiterated that as a community leader, he was disappointed by the lack of communication and transparency from MassDOT during the earmark reassignment process. Mr. Bench reiterated that the first priority should be having a meeting of the roundabout's stakeholders during the proposed 15 day public comment period to finish funding the 100% design.

5. AUTHORIZE A 15 DAY COMMENT PERIOD FOR CONSIDERATION OF AN AMENDMENT TO THE FFY 2013-2016 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM PLAN (TIP).

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, supported by Mr. Malnati, to approve releasing the amended 2013-2016 TIP for public comment. Specifically, inserting the purchase of four paratransit vehicles (\$420,000, FY 2013) and roof repairs to the BRTA maintenance facility (\$250,000, FY 2013) while removing construction funding for the Friend Street and Route 8 intersection improvement project in Adams (\$650,000, FY 2014).

Mr. Harrington asked that if the roundabout were removed from the TIP, would the entire project development process have to start over, and Mr. Bench responded that the project development process would not have to start all over, however, new construction funding would have to be identified before the project came back onto the TIP. Mr. Bench reiterated that the 15 day review was important for the Statewide TIP to be compiled and sent to FHWA.

Mr. Karns said he thought MassDOT should have no difficulty amending the existing design contract for the intersection to include the additional \$120,000 to complete the 100% design further questioning the transportation reform efforts through MassDOT and that there were serious problems with the Federal-Aid funding system for processing such simple changes. Mr. Lovejoy confirmed that the bottom line was not losing the funding. Mr. Bench assured the body that all information and processes for the MPO to make a decision would occur within 15 days.

VOICE VOTE, MOTION CARRIED

Mr. Karns asked Mr. Bench to make sure that MassDOT was aware of the dramatic funding shortfall and that the Adams project shouldn't have to compete with all of the other regional priorities. Also that the Adams' project funding was important to match state funding for the Greylock Glen development project, one of the most critical and important economic development projects in the region. MPO and regional planning coordination are very important because this economically significant regional Greylock Glen project is in one of the most economically distressed areas of the County and the Commonwealth.

6. PRESENTATION ON BRTA'S 10-YEAR VISION

Mr. Malnati presented the BRTA 10 year plan and transforming from line-haul to a semi-flexible paratransit system through Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) with more nimble vehicles and route deviation. BRTA is also becoming more environmentally friendly with fuels and facilities. The plan spreads infrastructure and service improvements over 10 years. Mr. Malnati indicated he would send out copies of the report through the MPO.

7. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES

Mr. Bench indicated that the Secretary of Transportation had established some substantial goals for increasing non-motorized and public transportation mode-share. Mr. Frieri provided an update on the status of all projects MassDOT was reviewing, including all of the projects scheduled for Federal Fiscal Year 2013 like the Great Barrington Main Street project and the Rail Trail extension. Mr. Frieri mentioned that the Dalton Housatonic St. project needed to catch up. Mr. Collingwood indicated that the BMC area improvements were initiating design towards 25%.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

The MPO did not discuss other business

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

November 8, 2012, 4:00 p.m.

10. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:38 p.m.

VOICE VOTE: PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- September meeting minutes
- 2013-2016 TIP Amendment Materials
- Earmark memo
- Project update spreadsheet

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Plachcinski, AICP
Senior Transportation Planner