

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday, June 24, 2014 4:00 PM

At the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission office

1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

MPO Representatives/Alternates:

Clinton Bench, MassDOT (Representing Secretary Davey)

Mark Moore, MassDOT District 1 (representing Administrator DePaola)

Bruce Collingwood, Pittsfield

Bob Malnati, BRTA

Jim Huebner, Washington (Southeast Berkshire)

Ron Turbin, Williamstown (North Berkshire)

Sheila Irvin, BRPC

Michael Nuvallie, North Adams

William Goddard Jr., Hinsdale (North Central Berkshire Alternate)

Others Present:

Clete Kus, BRPC

Anuja Koirala, BRPC

Nat Karns, BRPC

Joe Sokul, Great Barrington

Doug Plachcinski, BRPC

Brian Domina, BRPC

Peter Frieri, MassDOT District 1

Bill Palmer, MassDOT

Kevin Wright, FHWA

Andy McKeever, iBerkshires

1. CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Bench called the meeting to order at 4:01 PM. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM MAY 20, 2014

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Huebner, seconded by Mr. Collingwood, to approve the MPO meeting minutes for May 20, 2014. (Three abstentions)

VOICE VOTE UNANIMOUS, MOTION CARRIES, ONE ABSTENTION

3. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

4. PRESENTATION AND UPDATE ON THE PASSENGER RAIL STUDY

Mr. Domina presented the passenger rail study as the project is heading towards completion by September 30. He explained that the Housatonic Railroad Company hopes to restore passenger service from NYC to the Berkshires. Related to station recommendation, Mr. Domina indicated that Lenox and Stockbridge were eliminated from consideration because of station proximity to Great Barrington and Lee. Stations should maintain a minimum spacing of 10 miles because of the time it takes to start and stop the train and each station stops adds to travel time. Also, the recommendation for a station in the southern part of Sheffield is dependent on a station being located in North Canaan, Connecticut.

A station at the terminus of the line would occur in Pittsfield at the intermodal transportation center. The probability exists that additional parking would need to be provided in proximity to the intermodal center, possibly adding an additional level to the Columbus Avenue parking facility. Local needs were considered as well as physical constraints in determining station sites. Lee's downtown station siting is problematic because of physical constraints, the need for property consolidation, existing residential units, and proximity to the Housatonic River. Great Barrington has a historic station location which can be

utilized and there is a secondary potential location north of Downtown that is an industrial land use. There is a 16 acre parcel in Sheffield located on the state boundary that is flat and accessible for a station. There are also two secondary station sites located closer to the center of Sheffield.

BRPC is going to release a draft report in July, followed by two open houses. The report will include more specific details and will incorporate public comments. BRPC will release a final report the first week of September and have one final meeting in the middle of September.

Mr. Huebner asked about timeline and potential cost for implementing the passenger rail. Mr. Karns stated that there were two different references to this project (\$30M+ by itself and \$170M with other projects) in the Commonwealth's Capital Investment Plan, both including funds for progress in developing the service. The Governor has publically stated a potential commitment of \$30M. Mr. Bench suggested the time of getting the project moved forward could also drive the price up, particularly after alternatives are analyzed. Mr. Karns also suggested that HRRC may sell the railroad and right-of-way. There are also many structures and bridges that may need to be improved in addition to full replacement of rail tracks. Mr. Bench indicated that the current BRPC study was headed in the right direction.

5. APPROVAL OF THE SECOND AMENDMENT TO THE 2014-2017 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) TO PROGRAM ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR THE ASHUWILLTICOOK RAIL TRAIL (HOOSAC STREET TO LIME STREET) TO COVER INCREASED PROJECT COSTS.

Ms. Koirala reviewed the two proposed TIP amendments. Mr. Moore suggested that the project cost increases for the rail with trail shift were offset by expected low bid prices. Also, a right of way acquisition plan for the Town of Adams has not been finalized so it was not possible for MassDOT to recommend this project for approval until the next MPO meeting.

NO ACTION TAKEN

6. APPROVAL OF THE THIRD AMENDMENT TO THE 2014-2017 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) TRANSIT SECTION AND AUTHORIZE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE MPO CERTIFICATION ON BEHALF OF THE MPO

Anuja described this proposed BRTA amendment for year 2014 of the 2014-2017 TIP. The amendment includes replacing vans and funding for Berkshire Rides vanpooling, and travel training. Mr. Malnati also explained some of the vehicle replacements and arrangements with local Councils on Aging. There were no comments from the public on this amendment during the review period.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Malnati, seconded by Mr. Collingwood to approve the proposed 2014-2017 TIP amendment and to authorize the chair to sign the MPO certification on behalf of the MPO. Unanimously approved.

7. APPROVAL OF THE 2015 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM AND AUTHORIZE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE MPO CERTIFICATION ON BEHALF OF THE MPO

Mr. Kus explained the development of the UPWP and mentioned the different planning studies that BRPC would conduct; this information was also provided in a handout to members. There were no comments submitted to the MPO during the comment period. Mr. Kus also reviewed the proposed budgets included in the 2015 UPWP. Mr. Kus explained how he addressed comments of planning project scheduling from FHWA and aligning certification approval timelines. MassDOT also asked for additional emphasis on greenhouse gas reductions, GreenDOT policy, and healthy transportation directives, which Mr. Kus indicated that the UPWP would address as a result of including work tasks to analyze mobile emissions and planning for greenhouse gas reductions.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Collingwood, seconded by Mr. Turbin to approve the proposed 2015 UPWP and to authorize the chair to sign the MPO certification on behalf of the MPO. Unanimously approved.

8. APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED 2015-2018 TIP AND AUTHORIZE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE MPO CERTIFICATION ON BEHALF OF THE MPO

Ms Koirala discussed the development of the TIP including the project evaluations, annually inflated cost estimates, and the regional funding targets for each of the four TIP years. She explained how the projects were listed by year, beginning with the highway, bridge, and bike path projects. Mr. Bench added to the discussion and provided details on each federal funding resource. With respect to comments received on the TIP, only one letter was received from the Town of Washington which was in support of a project for Washington Mountain Road.

Mr. Koirala then explained the transit portion of the 2015-2018 TIP which directs substantial funds towards operations and maintenance. Mr. Malnati explained the BRTA's capital projects that include bus and van replacements along with a conversion to compressed natural gas (CNG) capabilities

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Turbin, seconded by Mr. Malnati to approve the 2015-2018 TIP and authorizing the chair to sign the MPO certification on behalf of the MPO.

9. APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED BERKSHIRE MPO TITLE VI PLAN AND AUTHORIZE THE CHAIR TO SIGN THE FHWA AND FTA TITLE VI ASSURANCES ON BEHALF OF THE MPO MEMBERS

Mr. Kus provide a brief overview of the Title VI Plan and indicated that no comments were received during the public comment period. Mr. Bench described the documents and that the assurances were similar to the MPO certification documents for the TIP, UPWP and RTP.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Turbin, seconded by Mr. Malnati to approve the MPO TITLE VI PLAN and authorizing the chair to sign the FHWA Title VI assurances on behalf of the MPO.

10. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES

Mr. Frieri reviewed the MassDOT District 1 project update spreadsheet.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

The MPO did not discuss any other business.

12. NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting date will be called as needed.

13. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:23 p.m.

VOICE VOTE: PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- May MPO Meeting minutes
- 2014-2017 TIP amendment for transit
- 2014-2017 TIP amendment for Rail Trail
- District 1 project update spreadsheet

- Berkshire MPO Title VI Plan and FHWA assurances.
- 2015-2018 TIP
- 2015 UPWP
- BRPC current activities

Respectfully submitted,
Douglas Plachcinski
Senior Transportation Planner