

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday August 30, 2011 4:00 PM

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

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Clinton Bench, MassDOT (Representing Secretary Mullan)
Mark Moore, MassDOT District 1 (representing Administrator Francis DePaola)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mt. Washington (Southwest Berkshire Delegate)
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield (Representing Mayor Ruberto)
John Boyle, Town of Dalton (North Central Berkshire Delegate)
Bob Malnati, BRTA
James Mullen, BRPC
Gordon Bailey, (Southeast Berkshire Delegate)

Others Present:

Kevin O'Donnell, TAC Chair, (Great Barrington)
Arthur Harrington, Town of Adams
Trey Wadsworth, MassDOT
Peter Frieri, MassDOT District 1
Justin Diagle, MassDOT District 1
Mark Siegars
James McGrath, City of Pittsfield
Jim Huebner, Town of Washington (Southeast Berkshire Alternate)
Nat Karns, BRPC
Clete Kus, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, BRPC
Douglas Plachcinski, BRPC

1. CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS

Mr. Bench called the meeting to order at 4:07

2. MINUTES OF July 26, 2011

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Mullen, supported by Mr. Boyle, to approve the minutes of the July 26, 2011 MPO meeting.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

3. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments.

4. REPORT FROM THE TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. O'Donnell reviewed the TAC's recommendations on the certification documents. The TAC discussed all of the information and recommended unanimous approval for each. He also summarized the second August TAC meeting.

5. VOTE TO APPROVE FFY 2011 FEDERAL AID BRIDGE PROJECT TIP AMENDMENT

Ms. Koirala reviewed the TIP amendment. There were no public comments

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Bailey, supported by Mr. Lovejoy, to approve the amendments to 2011 of the 2011-2014 TIP. Mr. Bailey further indicated that FHWA should be made aware that it is unnecessary for each member of the MPO to sign the certification page because the body has voted to allow the Chair signatory responsibility.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, supported by Mr. Bailey, to make FHWA aware that it is unnecessary for each member of the MPO to sign the certification page(s) because the body has voted to allow the Chair signatory responsibility.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

6. 2012 RTP ADOPTION

Mr. Plachcinski reviewed the 2012 RTP public meeting on August 18th and comments. Mr. Plachcinski explained how BRPC addressed the comments and that the document was fiscally constrained and within the MassDOT air quality conformity determination for western Mass. Some of the comments are best addressed moving forward so that the MPO has good decision-making tools for all of its activities. Mr. Mullen asked for clarification regarding functional classifications.

ACTION: Mr. Bench requested a unanimous vote to adopt the 2012 RTP as amended.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

7. PRESENTATION OF THE 2012-2015 TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) TO THE MPO AND AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE DRAFT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Koirala presented the funding target amounts, the existing '12-'14 program, and discussed comments received from MassDOT and FHWA. She pointed out that BRPC received the FHWA comments after the close of the public comment period. Passenger rail in the 'Knowledge Corridor' should remain in Air Quality Conformity Determination because funding is already obligated through a Federal Railroad Administration grant. Mr. Lovejoy asked if the project listing sheets could be prepared in a more readable format.

Mr. Collingwood proposed an amendment to program the remainder (~\$700k) of a 1998 earmark for design of the BMC area improvements. Mr. Moore indicated that if the project was placed in the RTP for construction, then design funds could program into the last year of the TIP. Mr. Collingwood estimated that the design of the project may take two to three years. Then, the unallocated portion of '15 could be assigned for BMC area improvement construction. Mr. Lovejoy pointed out that it would not only be '15 construction but also '16 target funds, essentially back-dooring the project in after the MPO chose to leave the balance of '15 unassigned.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Collingwood, supported by Mr. Boyle, to approve the 2012-2015 the TIP, including programming the \$700k earmark for design in 2012 and the 2015 balance for construction.

Mr. Lovejoy reiterated his concern over the unknown costs and timeliness of the BMC area improvements. Mr. Bailey echoed his concerns. Mr. Collingwood proponent that the City was making this a priority and that property acquisition may be a long process.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

8. ADOPTION OF THE FFY 2012 UNIFIED PLANNING WORK PROGRAM (UPWP)

Mr. Kus summarized the UPWP for the upcoming year from October 2011 through September 2012 and explained how MassDOT and FHWA comments were addressed.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Boyle, supported by Mr. Mullen, to approve the 2012 UPWP.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

9. RAIL TRAIL EXTENSION PROJECTS- PRESENTATIONS FROM PROJECT PROPONENTS IN PITTSFIELD AND ADAMS/NORTH ADAMS, POSSIBLE ACTION TO PRIORITIZE EFFORTS

Mr. Kus explained the background and the need to discuss the projects. Mr. Karns explained the existing funding earmarks and more details of the projects- the Coltsville spur extension and the Adams-North extension.

Mr. McGrath presented on behalf of the City of Pittsfield. He explained that the path links commercial centers, neighborhoods, and employment center. The Comprehensive and Recreation plans advocate for the extension. Arthur Harrington spoke on behalf of Adams and mentioned that the path should be expanded in both directions. The Town has worked to avoid encroachments on the adjacent industrial areas. The Town would also like to install parking at the northern end of the project. The additional connection to North Adams and the technical high school is valuable.

The total amount remaining in the earmark is \$2.3M, enough for most of the Pittsfield project and half of the Northern section. The MPO had originally endorsed a project in Lenox, but the Town had withdrawn the commitment. The MPO also discussed other finance alternatives for these two projects. Mr. Mullen asked how the City promoted other bicycle activity; Mr. McGrath explained the projects and efforts the City undertakes. Mr. Boyle asked if the railroad would donate the land and Mr. McGrath indicated he was unsure.

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, supported by Mr. Moore, to prioritize the Northern section for project delivery.

VOICE VOTE:

MOTION FAILS

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Boyle, supported by Mr. Hubener, to prioritize the Pittsfield section for project delivery.

Ms. Wynn suggested that the northern section provided more connectivity and potentially would damage the environment less.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIES

10. DISCUSSION AND DIRECTION TO STAFF ON FREIGHT AND GOODS MOVEMENT STUDY

Mr. Kus summarized the task scope and outlined the deliverables. Mr. Seigars suggested that there could be opportunities to add value to freight as it passes through the Berkshires. Mr. Bench suggested preserving lands that may benefit from direct rail access. Mr. Bench explained the revision rights from rail trials. Mr. Mullen stressed the opportunities for passenger rail as well as preserving rail capacity, almost a rails AND trails system. Mr. Siegars explained some of the legal distinctions with railroads in state and federal law.

11. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES

Mr. Frieri provided an update on the status of improvement projects within the region, most specifically projects that changed status or are slated for the FFY 2011 and 12. Mr. Collingwood described issues with the South St. Corridor. Mr. Karns explained the results from the sustainability plan workshops, particularly as they relate to transportation

12. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

13. CERTIFICATION

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, supported by Mr. Malnati, to endorse the certification.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED

14. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:31 p.m. Unless there is a need to meet in September, the next meeting is scheduled for October 25, 2011.

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- June meeting minutes
- RTP Public Involvement Appendix
- TIP
- UPWP
- Freight and Goods Task
- Sustainability Plan input

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Plachcinski, AICP
Senior Transportation Planner