

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)

Tuesday, September 24, 2013 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)

Peter Niles, MassDOT District 1 (representing Administrator DePaola)

Jim Lovejoy, Mt. Washington (Southwest Berkshire)

Doug Clark, Pittsfield

Mike Ouellette, Adams (North Berkshire)

John Boyle, Dalton (North Central Berkshire)

Jack Hickey, BRPC

Bob Malnati, BRTA

Others Present:

Doug Plachcinski, BRPC

Clete Kus, BRPC

Anuja Koirala, BRPC

Nat Karns, BRPC

Bill Palmer, MassDOT

Mark Moore, MassDOT District 1

1. CALL TO ORDER-INTRODUCTIONS

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

2. MINUTES OF June 25, 2013

ACTION: Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, seconded by Mr. Boyle, to approve June 25, 2013 minutes.

VOICE VOTE: MOTION CARRIED (TWO ABSTENTIONS: Clark, Malnati)

3. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no comments from the public.

4. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION/RECOMMENDATION RELATED TO ELECTRONIC TOLLING ON THE MASSACHUSETTS TURNPIKE.

Mr. Kus and Mr. Karns presented the background information related to tolling within the Berkshires and indicated that it seemed appropriate to have a discussion on these issues. Our region is the only one which has a recommendation in their RTP which calls for the restoration of tolls on the western portion of the turnpike and this will provide the MPO an opportunity to re-affirm their support on this matter. Mr. Bench provided details about the all electronic tolling system. He indicated that it would be at least two and a half years to implement the system. Mr. Bench described the pilot project on the Tobin Memorial Bridge, indicated where the "overhead gantries" would be in our region, the technologies behind photo detection and transponders, and the new billing system. Mr. Boyle asked how long it would be to get a bill if you did not have a transponder and Mr. Bench replied within a month. The price of tolls remains the same as when they were discontinued in 1996. Mr. Karns mentioned that not all vehicles operating in the Pioneer Valley would be assessed a toll and asked if MassDOT had an estimate of lost revenue from the exits in Springfield where tolls were not going to be collected under the all electronic tolling proposal. Mr.

Bench said no, that was not considered specifically. Mr. Moore mentioned that there is the potential cause huge alterations in traffic patterns as a result of additional gantries.

If someone does not have a transponder, MassDOT will add a small processing fee to recover the additional costs associated with the work to collect the toll. Mr. Karns asked if there was an opportunity for legislatively mandated commuting discounts like on the Tobin Bridge and East Boston. Mr. Bench responded that those discounts were part of legislation, but they were also granted because of concerns about the environmental impact of MassPIKE facilities in those communities' locations. MassDOT does not expect similar exceptions on the western turnpike.

5. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION/RECOMMENDATION RELATED TO RESTORATION OF TOLLS ON THE WESTERN PORTION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS TURNPIKE

This item was discussed in conjunction with prior agenda item.

6. DISCUSSION ON PROJECT SELECTION OF "THE WAY FORWARD" TRANSPORTATION FINANCE LEGISLATION AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE TIP PROCESS.

Mr. Karns raised this concern to inquire if there would be some input from the MPO on project selection from the "way forward" initiative which generates additional revenues for project implementation. At a recent MARPA directors meeting there had been a strong indication from MassDOT Planning Director that there would not be an opportunity for MPO's to provide input on project selection/prioritization. Mr. Bench remarked that because he was not at the meeting he can neither confirm nor deny the statements. He indicated that with respect to federal funds, they would be processed through the MPO's and non federal aid funds would continue to be prioritized by MassDOT through their existing process. Mr. Bench indicated that there would be a representative from MARPA on the state-wide project selection advisory council and it will determine what the strategies/priorities will be. He also indicated that a lot of the day to day decisions that are made on the distribution of the capital resources, that process is going to look a lot like you are used to. Mr. Karns stated he just wanted transparency with revenue distribution because in the past, in particular with the delivery of the MPO target funding amounts, it was not always clear how the amounts were determined. He added the caveat that there is not enough money anyways. Mr. Lovejoy pointed out that communities were sick of fighting with each other over the scant amount of funding.

7. STATUS REPORTS FROM MEMBER AGENCIES

Mr. Moore provided an update on MassDOT activities. He began with discussing a survey of ADA ramps and other ADA compliance issues with MassDOT facilities. The results of the survey will help the department understand the scale of any issues. Mr. Bench indicated that the Central Mass MPO was a good example for an MPO conducting a similar project on locally maintained roads.

All of the 2013 projects are successfully underway. 2014 projects are advancing. The Adams Roundabout project is continuing. FHWA and the District are in negotiations with the design agreement for the BMC area improvements, but there should be a resolution soon. The Woodlawn bridge is moving forward and the Sandisfield bridge improvement project is an in-house design. The Walker Street improvement project in Lenox is holding a public hearing. The Lee bicycle project remains under review at FHWA.

Mr. Malnati mentioned the QR code project that lets smartphone users find up-to-date locations of vehicles and where their next stops will be. The buses also have Wi-Fi. This pilot project is for the Route 7 route paid for with JARC funds. BRTA is monitoring the route for ridership.

Mr. Kus mentioned the survey he sent out for civil rights compliance and that MPO representative caucuses were held in the southwest and north central Berkshire MPO sub-regions.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

The MPO did not discuss other business

9. NEXT MEETING DATE

To be determined.

10. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:19 p.m.

VOICE VOTE: PASSES UNANIMOUSLY

Materials Distributed:

- Agenda
- June 2013 meeting minutes
- Information on electronic tolling
- District 1 project update spreadsheet

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Plachcinski, AICP
Senior Transportation Planner