



# BRPC

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

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MINUTES OF THE Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)  
Tuesday, October 27, 2020  
*Meeting Held Via Zoom Video Communications*

MPO Representatives/Alternates Present:

David Mohler	MassDOT (Representing Secretary Stephanie Pollack)
John Boyle	North Central Towns Representative
Zac Feury	City of North Adams
Kyle Hanlon	BRPC Chair
Andy Hogeland	Town of Williamstown
Francesca Hemming	MassDOT District 1 (Representing Highway Administrator Gulliver)
Sheila Irving	Chair of BRTA
Jim Lovejoy	Southwest Towns Representative

Others Present:

Ethan Britland	MassDOT OTP
Peter Frieri	MassDOT District 1
Justin Gilmore	BRPC
Anuja Koirala	BRPC
Derek Krevat	MassDOT OTP
Clete Kus	BRPC
Ben Lamb	1Berkshire
Bob Malnati	BRTA
Tom Matuszko	BRPC
Mark Moore	MassDOT District 1
Makayla Niles	MassDOT OTP
Kevin Pink	1Berkshires
Andrew Reovan	FHWA

## **I. Introductions**

Mr. Mohler called the meeting to order at 4:03PM. Meeting attendees introduced themselves via a roll call conducted by Mr. Kus.

## **II. Opportunity for Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

## **III. Approval of the Meeting Minutes from July 28, 2020 (Action Item)**

**ACTION:** Motion by Mr. Lovejoy, seconded by Mr. Hanlon to approve the meeting minutes from the July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 MPO meeting.

**VOICE VOTE:** Motion carried unanimously. Mr. Hanlon and Mr. Feury abstained from voting.

## **IV. Update on East/West Rail Study**

Ms. Niles proceeded to update MPO members on the recent status of the East/West Passenger Rail study effort. This includes reviewing the 3 final alternatives selection, alternatives evaluation process, draft study document and final report, and next steps.

The first alternative, referred to as Alternative 3, shares the existing rail corridor alignment. The other two alternatives, Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 hybrid, share the current corridor but use new, separate track in the Worcester to Springfield segment. The primary difference between Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 hybrid include a few high priority alignments that are meant to straighten out curves in the Springfield to Worcester segment. All three of the alternatives provide rail service from Pittsfield to Boston and include stops in Chester and Palmer. Ms. Niles proceeded to review, in depth, the differences between each alternative including graphics that show proposed routes, re-alignments, and travel times.

Key overall findings from the alternative's evaluation show:

- Ridership forecasts range from 922 to 1,554 daily boarding's (278K to 469K annual boarding's)
- Conceptual capital costs range from \$2.4 million to \$4.6 million
- Interaction between passenger and freight trains is higher in the Pittsfield to Springfield segment
- Difference in improvements, costs, and travel time are all attributable to the Springfield-Worcester segment

Ms. Niles proceeded to review evaluation criteria used to rank each alternative including service performance (travel time, frequency, station stops, ridership), costs (capital, operations and maintenance), environmental and community indicators, and a benefit-cost analysis (BCA).

The study draft document was released for a 30-day public comment period on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The study includes key findings and recommendations. In order to continue advancing the project's conceptual phase, four key actions are highlighted. They include:

- More detailed study to economic and community benefits and impacts
- Explore opportunities with rail partners
- Understand governance options for expanded passenger rail in western MA
- Evaluate funding opportunities and obstacles

The final report is expected to be completed and released by November 30, 2020.

Mr. Hogeland asked how this project can increase benefits resulting from the BCA to make it more competitive for federal funding assistance – and also asked about the benefit-cost analysis that will be used for the Northern Tier study, which has yet to commence.

Mr. Mohler stated that given the low BCA of this project – it will be quite difficult to make it more competitive from and federal funding standpoint. The other possibility relates to proposed new rail funding bills introduced to congress by Senator Markey and Congressman Neil, which would eliminate the requirement of BCA as part the passenger rail analysis.

Mr. Mohler stated that the scope is currently being developed for the Northern Tier study and are awaiting passage of the bond bill in order to fund the scope of work effort.

## **V. Presentation on Transportation Management Association Feasibility Study**

Mr. Lamb proceeded to update MPO members on the recent status of 1Berkshire's Transportation Management Association (TMA) feasibility study. Mr. Lamb explained 1Berkshire are the facilitators of the Berkshire Blueprint 2.0 and the idea of a TMA was identified as a major aspect of economic development in the region – and therefore aligns with the work efforts of 1Berkshire. Mr. Lamb stated that he would

provide a summary of the working group, the report process, recommendations that came out of the final draft report, and next steps underway.

Mr. Lamb briefly reviewed the working group that was tasked with studying the viability of a TMA and mentioned this work is a continuation of Senator Hinds 2017 working group efforts which examined the feathering together of the region's existing transportation infrastructure with private industry and tertiary transportation services to create more efficiencies. In essence, looking at how to cohesively bring together the region's existing transportation assets to work together to ensure folks have transport to employment areas.

The consultant that worked with 1Berkshire on this study effort was TransAction Associates. The group was contracted in January 2020 and completed the draft study report in August 2020. The report has yet to be presented to the TMA working group, after which, it will be made available to the public. Mr. Lamb then proceeded to outline the research process and the efforts that went into developing the report.

Mr. Lamb briefly highlighted a few of the report's recommendations. These include:

- Creating a group focused on assessing the feasibility of a TMA (this group has largely been formed) however, additional stakeholders need to be added to the process
- Develop a cost-sharing model to ensure services are affordable for the users
- Establish resource partnership – often TMA's are joint public/private ventures
- Create individual partner profiles – to track where potential users are traveling from and to (origin/destination information)
- Create clearinghouse site – to create central place where existing transportation services can be accessed
- Introduce carpooling matching, and other gap resources

Mr. Lamb then briefly reviewed next steps which include finalizing the report, establishing a ride-share best fit model, developing a model for 'hosting', and to partner on outreach and engagement.

## **VI. Transportation Climate Initiative: Update and Discussion**

Mr. Kus proceeded to update MPO members on the Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI) work efforts. Mr. Kus mentioned that there have been two webinars since the last formal meeting on the TCI was held. One of the webinars focused on program design and COVID-19 implications. A lot more must be fleshed out for this process, including program costs and impacts to rural communities. The second webinar focused on ensuring environmental justice and equity in the eventual roll-out of TCI. This would ensure that disadvantaged communities would not be adversely impacted by the TCI. A co-sponsored forum between T4MA and BRPC will be held on November 10<sup>th</sup> and will specifically focus on clean transportation for rural communities.

## **VII. Receive information on Berkshire Benchmarks Update Effort**

Mr. Gilmore proceed to update MPO members on the Berkshire Benchmarks initiative and update efforts that are currently underway for this project.

Mr. Gilmore provided background on Berkshire Benchmarks – stating that this was an initiative designed to improve the quality, access, and volume of data and analysis available on the region. In 2010, the Berkshire Benchmarks website was developed. The website contains a data clearinghouse – which acts as a central repository for information specific to the Berkshires – including census data, labor statics, building permit data and so forth. The website also outlines indicators which are used to track the health and vitality of communities over time. The overall goal of Berkshire Benchmarks is to use indicators to mobilize informed, strategic decisions to achieve a desired future.

The Berkshire Leadership Impact Council (BLIC) is the group spearheading recent update efforts. BLIC is composed of 16-20 individuals representing organizations, sectors, and initiatives regionally. From this group, a smaller team, known as the BLIC Data Team, are the ones getting into the process of updating sectors and identifying new indicators. The overall goal of these update efforts is to develop a State of the County report highlighting key indicators across different sectors and to update and revamp the Berkshire Benchmarks website.

Mr. Gilmore proceeded to review the new sectors that have been identified (economy, education, environment, government, health, housing, social environment, transportation). Mr. Gilmore then briefly reviewed the concept of an indicator. A draft list of transportation indicators was then reviewed. These draft indicators are not set in stone under the transportation sector – and we hope to review, refine, and discuss these indicators with stakeholder groups that we hope to develop under each sector. Recommended indicators are indicators that will be explored further for potential inclusion into the State of the County report, and the ‘not recommended’ indicators won’t be included in the report – however that information will be housed on the Berkshire Benchmarks revamped website.

Mr. Gilmore proceeded to discuss establishing a transportation sector stakeholder group – the primary purpose of which is to gain key participation and input to this update process. Hopefully a few MPO members might volunteer themselves. Organizations that we’d like to get participation from have been identified and this stakeholder group will work to review, discuss, and define 10-12 good indicators that will be considered for specific mention in the final report. Stakeholder groups will then reconvene at a later date to determine if indicators are still relevant and work to consolidate to the top 3-5 that will be highlighted in the report. Primary outcomes will be the revamped Berkshire Benchmarks website, the State of the County report which highlight select indicators across all 8 sectors, and to hold a few bi-annual meetings with stakeholder groups to review indicators and discuss priorities moving forward.

Mr. Matuszko mentioned one last plug for the Berkshire Benchmarks transportation sector stakeholder group – mentioning MPO members are uniquely positioned to come up with meaningful indicators that can help track the state of transportation in the county, given their familiarity with this topic.

### **VIII. Status Report from Member Agencies**

Mr. Frieri provided MPO members a status report of District One project updates. MassDOT was able to advertise all the projects that were listed in the 2020 TIP including the 2 bike trail projects. All projects, aside from the bike path projects, are currently in the construction phase. The Lanesborough-Pittsfield-Ashuwillticook extension to Crane Avenue just had a bid opening today. The Williamstown-Mohawk Bike Trial was advertised in the middle of September and has a bid opening on November 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Mr. Frieri proceeded to explain the FFY 2021 TIP projects. Half of the projects that are currently programmed are either at the 100% or final design stage. Mr. Frieri proceeded to review those projects. Mr. Frieri then proceeded to review the FFY 2021 projects that are at 75% design and those at 25% design.

### **IX. Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **X. Next Meeting Date – November 24, 2020**

The next Berkshire MPO meeting date is November 24, 2020.

**ACTION:** Mr. Lovejoy motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Hanlon. Mr. Mohler adjourned the meeting at 5:04p.m.

**Materials Distributed:**

- Meeting Agenda
- Draft July 28, 2020 MPO Meeting Minutes
- E/W Passenger Rail Update Presentation
- 1Berkshire TMA Update Presentation
- Berkshire Benchmarks Update Presentation

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