



FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES May 16, 2024

This was a virtual meeting as allowed by Ch. 2 of the Acts of 2023 extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30 sec.20 until March 31, 2025.

I. Opening

A. The meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm.

Chair Malcolm Fick stated that per the open meeting law, BRPC was recording this meeting. Others may record the meeting after informing the meeting Chair. Documents presented must be provided to the Chair at the meeting.

B. Roll Call

The following Commission members were present:

Diana Mott – Becket Alternate
Peter Traub – Cheshire Delegate
Mary McGurn – Egremont, Delegate
Pedro Pachano – Great Barrington Delegate
Malcolm Fick – Great Barrington Alternate
Leanne Yinger – Lanesborough Delegate
Buck Donovan – Lee Delegate, 7:30 arrival
Laura Mensi – Monterey Delegate, left for another meeting at 8 pm
Kyle Hanlon – North Adams, Delegate
Sheila Irvin – Pittsfield, Delegate
Sari Hoy – Sheffield, Delegate
Nancy Socha – Stockbridge Delegate
Amanda Hamilton – Tyringham Delegate
Don Gagnon – Washington, Delegate
Roger Bolton – Williamstown Alternate
Doug McNally – Windsor Delegate

Towns with no Delegate or Alternate present:

Adams, Alford, Clarksburg, Dalton, Florida, Hancock, Hinsdale,
Lenox, Mount Washington, New Ashford, New Marlborough, Otis,
Peru, Richmond, Sandisfield, Savoy, West Stockbridge

Staff Present:

Thomas Matuszko, Marianne Sniezek, Kate Hill Tapia, Laura Brennan,
Clete Kus, Anuja Koirala

Others Present:

Andy PCTV; Brittany Polito, iBerkshires

C. Approval of March 21, 2024 Minutes

Douglas McNally moved to approve the March 21, 2024, draft meeting minutes; Pedro Pachano seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The minutes were approved with a roll call vote with Diana Mott, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Leanne Yinger, Laura Mensi, Sari Hoy, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally voting to approve.

Abstained: Kyle Hanlon, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, Nancy Socha

II. Suggestions from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Delegates and Alternates about Items or Topics for Future Meetings

Diana Mott asked if there is a battery storage facility zoning law template. Tom said yes and will follow up with Diana.

The presentation and discussion about Microtransit will be on the 5th Thursday, May 30, from 4-6 pm at Mazzeo's. Please register by the end of Monday, May 20.

Doug McNally recommended we continue to look into income inequality and increase in self-employment as reported in the Berkshire County data update and explore the relationship to an influx of second homeowners during the pandemic.

III. Comments from the Public

None

IV. Presentation of Executive Committee Actions

There were no questions or discussion about the Executive Committee actions taken on the Commission's behalf at its April 4 and May 2, 2024, meetings.

V. Presentation on and Discussion of MassDOT's Vision for Passenger Rail Service for the Commonwealth called Compass Rail

MassDOT's West-East Passenger Rail Director Andy Kozoil presented MassDOT's Vision for Passenger Rail Service for the Commonwealth called Compass Rail, which proposes passenger rail service between Boston and Albany, including Pittsfield. Compass Rail is a program of projects that includes West-East Rail.

Andy reviewed maps of existing and future services and projects, including studying, planning, and implementing improvements and expanding the number of routes, stops and travel times, and additional rails in congested sections.

Current state-funded projects include:

- A station in Palmer

- Track reconfiguration in Springfield to improve the intersection of north/south and west/east trains
- Track improvements near Pittsfield.
- New Haven to Boston via Springfield (Inland Route) modeling & design to improve track service; construction begins 2027

Planning extends to a vision for services in 2045 with six daily roundtrips Boston – Springfield and three daily roundtrips Albany to Springfield. Stops include Albany, Pittsfield, Springfield, Worcester, Framingham, Boston Back Bay, and South stations.

The federal government's [Corridor ID Program](#) to expand passenger rail is separate but related in that MassDOT's efforts have been accepted into that program and will get funding support.

CSX owns Worcester to Albany and has been a good partner. The travel time between Pittsfield and Boston is not yet known. There was an acknowledgment that the "last mile" is an issue in the Berkshires, referring to how people get to and from trains. Andy is a former BRPC Transportation intern and welcomes questions or input. Andrew.m.koziol@dot.state.ma.us

VI. Vote to Authorize the BRPC Chair to Vote to Approve the FFY 2025-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at the May 28, 2024 Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting

The Transportation Improvement Program for the Berkshires establishes the projects that will receive the limited federal transportation funds in the region. The Commission's review of the draft TIP document and associated vote guides the Chair on how to vote at the May 28th Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) meeting. See the plan at: berkshireplanning.org

Funding has been kept level, and costs have increased, so fewer projects will happen. Seventy-three projects are slated and were reviewed by Principal Transportation Planner Anuja Koirala. There are four categories of projects: highway improvements, intersections, bicycle/pedestrian trails, and bridges. There is a meeting with DPW Superintendents on June 27th to review the plan and process for submitting projects. Projects funded through the TIP do not need to come from towns' budgets.

Sam Haupt moved to direct the BRPC Chair to vote to approve the updated Transportation Improvement Program for the Berkshires establishing the projects that will receive the limited federal transportation funds in the region at the May 28, 2024 Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) meeting.

Doug McNally seconded the motion. The motion was approved with a roll call vote: Diana Mott, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Leanne Yinger, Buck Donovan, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, Sari Hoy, Nancy Socha, Amanda Hamilton, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally.

VII. Vote to Authorize the BRPC Chair to Vote to Approve the October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) at the June 25, 2024 Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO Meeting

The Unified Planning Work Program for FFY 2025 establishes the transportation planning work BRPC staff will be involved in for the coming year. The Commission instructs the BRPC Chair how to vote at the May 28 MPO meeting. [FFY-25-UPWPDdocument-PRELIM-DRAFT.DOC.pdf](#)

Transportation Program Manager Clete Kus reviewed the plan. Key elements are:

- Management and Certification
- Technical support
- Planning studies
- Other Activities
 - Scenic byways
 - Transportation/land use planning

Doug McNally encouraged the exploration of hydrogen for BRTA buses and as a place to channel excess electricity from wind projects. Clete said there is a conversation about a bike path for Sheffield, and there is no plan yet.

Doug McNally moved to instruct the BRPC Chair to vote to approve the draft Unified Planning Work Program for FFY 2025, establishing the transportation planning work BRPC staff will support through September 2025.

Sam Haupt seconded the motion. The motion was approved with a roll call vote: Diana Mott, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Leanne Yinger, Buck Donovan, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, Sari Hoy, Nancy Socha, Amanda Hamilton, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally.

VIII. Vote to Submit the 2024 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Performance Report

Laura Brennan, Assistant Director and Economic Development Program Manager, reviewed the [2024 CEDS Performance Report](#), due by June 30, 2024 which must be submitted annually to the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Two highlights are that Berkshire County's median household income (MHI) increased 13.4% in 2021-2022 and was the highest compared to neighboring counties. Per capita income also increased. A few projects were removed and new ones were added.

It was discussed that there is a relationship between unemployment and median household income, although overtime unemployment numbers do not account for the lack of participation in the workforce. A lower cost of living in the Berkshires is no longer true

and is not an excuse for lower wages. Certificate programs for CDL drivers and HVAC technicians at Berkshire Community College are favorable developments. It was suggested that these be watched for their impact.

Kyle Hanlon moved to approve the submission of the 2024 CEDS Performance Report and any necessary edits, due by June 30, 2024, to the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

Roger Bolton seconded the motion. The motion was approved with a roll call vote: Diana Mott, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Leanne Yinger, Buck Donovan, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, Kyle Hanlon, Nancy Socha, Amanda Hamilton, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally.

IX. Vote to Adopt the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission FY 2025 Budget

Per the BRPC bylaws, BRPC must adopt an annual budget for each fiscal year. The Finance and Executive Committees recommend the FY 2025 budget as presented in the meeting materials.

Marianne Sniezek, Administration Program Manager, said the proposed FY 2025 budget is conservative because it only shows known income and expenses. Numerous grant applications are pending and would change the budget if received. BRPC's budget is different from municipal budgets because it is not a controlling budget. Doug McNally noted that the budget emphasizes the Commission's important role in the county's economic development.

Doug McNally moved to approve the proposed FY 2025 budget as presented and recommended by the Finance Committee.

Pedro Pachano seconded the motion. The motion was approved with a roll call vote: Diana Mott, Peter Traub, Mary McGurn, Pedro Pachano, Leanne Yinger, Buck Donovan, Sam Haupt, Sheila Irvin, Kyle Hanlon, Nancy Socha, Amanda Hamilton, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally.

X. Authorization for Executive Committee to Act on Behalf of the Commission

BRPC bylaws require Commission members to vote annually, confirming the Executive Committee's authorization to act in the name of and on behalf of the Commission. Details on three easy ways to vote are in a memo in the meeting materials and will be sent via email on Friday 5/17: Vote via email, SurveyMonkey poll, respond to the email, or mail a paper form. Prompt votes are needed so the Executive Committee can meet the first week in July.

XI. Executive Director's Report

A. Berkshire Benchmarks Indicator Update

[Berkshire Benchmarks](#) released the 2024 State of the County Update. It

highlights notable changes in the regional indicators, including comparisons to comparable counties, when possible. A few positive highlights include a continued increase in self-employed households making over \$75,000 and the percentage of conservation framework land protected. The region has seen a decrease in asthma-related emergency department visits and the percentage of people aged 65 and older living alone. Other significant topics Berkshire Benchmarks is watching include housing, population change, and mental health.

B. Housing Listening Session

Tom encouraged people to add comments on the statewide housing plan. The plan and contact information for comments are at [mass.gov](https://www.mass.gov).

There was a listening session at BCC on May 16, 2024.

XII. Adjournment

Roger Bolton motioned to adjourn, seconded by Pedro Pachano, and approved by roll call vote: Peter Traub, Pedro Pachano, Leanne Yinger, Buck Donovan, Sheila Irvin, Kyle Hanlon, Nancy Socha, Amanda Hamilton, Don Gagnon, Roger Bolton, and Doug McNally.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:55 pm.