

# REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Summary of September 9, 2009 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Rooms 2 and 3 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

### 1. **Introductions** – *Malek Al-Khatib, Chair*

Malek Al-Khatib, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

### 2. **Chair's Report** – *Malek Al-Khatib, Chair*

There was none.

### 3. **Briefing on Transportation Reorganization and Other Timely Topics** – *Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation, James A. Aloisi, Jr.*

#### **The Secretary discussed the following topics:**

- *Transportation Reform and the Implementation of MassDOT*
  - MassDOT will be implemented on November 1, 2009.
  - MassDOT consolidates several agencies with unique cultures into one agency. This is the most challenging aspect of creating MassDOT.
  - A five-person board will govern the agency. The Board will also replace the existing MBTA Board. The Governor is currently considering candidates for the Board.
  - MassDOT will have less effect on aviation.
  - The Office of Planning and Programming is a new division and will adopt many of the responsibilities of the current Secretary's office.
  - MassDOT will allow one policy imperative to pass down to each division and break down barriers between agencies. It will allow for more policy coherence and a higher degree of collaboration.
  - The transition on November 1 should be seamless for the public.
- *The Secretary's Policy Views*
  - Emphasize public transportation. Public transportation has been underfunded for too long. The transportation future is not the same as the past; policies should not be anti-auto, but should recognize that we can't remain auto-centric. Public transportation and rail must be emphasized if the future is to include smaller carbon footprints, fewer emissions, and enhanced quality of life.
  - Some specific projects the Secretary supports are:
    - Extending the Blue Line to Lynn. This project will help people get to the airport via public transportation.

- The Urban Ring, phased so the northern tier is completed first with support from MassPort. It will connect the Blue Line to Chelsea and Everett. This project will also help workers and travelers get to the airport without driving.
    - Improving the Silver Line; connecting the Silver Line to South Station via Essex Street (Direct Connect). This is another project that will help people access the airport. Funds are not currently available for Silver Line Phase 3, but the Direct Connect project is an example of getting something accomplished to address the mobility issue with the resources that are available. This project will be supported with American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) funding.
  - Improve mobility and the environment. The Obama administration recognizes that rail and public transportation can improve both.
  - Further develop regional rail – The Secretary and other transportation officials in New England are leading an effort to develop a regional rail plan for the Northeast. An emphasis of the initiative is improving rail connections between cities and access to airports in the region, including a connection between the Boston region and T.F. Green airport in Rhode Island. Applications were submitted to the federal government to begin implementing the plan.
- *Financial Situation*
  - The sales tax increase this year is not a permanent solution to the financial shortfalls. It temporarily prevented a toll increase and maybe a fare increase for the MBTA. Groups and individuals advocate for projects as though there is plenty of money, but there is not. The enormity of the problem is clear when the cost of transportation needs and improvements is approached straightforwardly.
  - The Commonwealth must be careful about borrowing. GANs financing used for the Central Artery/Tunnel and the Accelerated Bridge Program (ABP) limits the Commonwealth's ability to pursue many worthy projects. The Central Artery/Tunnel and ABP are good programs, but the borrowing required for them is not sustainable.
- *The Healthy Compact*
  - The requirement to create a healthy compact is one of the best elements of the reform bill. Governments cannot be serious about health care reform without considering the health impacts of transportation decisions.
- *Public Involvement*
  - The Commonwealth must consider the impact of transportation decisions on people. The noise and air pollution caused by transportation are examples of ways in which the transportation system does not respect people. Showing people respect by developing projects in a way that minimizes unwanted impacts is the best way to advance a program and obtain the increased funding for the innovative projects and programs that will help improve the system.
- *Freight Rail*

- Freight rail is a job creator and its good for the economy and environment. More competition among the Class 1 rail freight operators is good for the Commonwealth.
- The regional rail plan for passenger rail presents the potential for conflict between passenger and freight rail. Freight and passenger carriers must share the rails in harmony. The issues that cause conflict are complicated and involve liability and maintenance questions.
- Federal consensus is needed on issues such as standards and how to deal with liability. Freight rail solutions cannot be found on a state-by-state basis.
- There is nothing to announce regarding the CSX closings, although they are getting close.

**Members had the following questions and comments:**

*The MPO should evaluate the draft Plan Amendment based on the mode share today and what it will be in 20 years if the Plan is fully implemented. Is that a policy imperative the MPO should use to make decisions? (Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge)*

I think that's a good approach and I'm sure CTPS (Central Transportation Planning Staff) has the data. (Secretary Aloisi)

CTPS has projections of future mode share resulting from implementation of the Plan. (Clinton Bench, EOT)

*Will the formation of MassDOT lead to a restructuring of MPOs? (Kristina Johnson, Quincy)*

No. (Secretary Aloisi)

*Why are most projects in the Regional Transportation Plan inside Route 128? Most growth is outside of Route 128. How do you propose to address that? (Arnold Pinsley)*

Regional equity is something the MPOs strives for. While the goal is to spread funding around the region, it may be that more urgent needs are in the center of the region.

(Secretary Aloisi)

*How will regional and local planning work with the new statewide Office of Planning and Programming? (Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects)*

EOT tries to be respectful of local desires and needs, and obtain their input. EOT reviews the input from local and municipal levels but that doesn't mean EOT always says yes.

Not all decisions can be made at the State Transportation Building, but it's where the final vetting process occurs. (Secretary Aloisi)

*Will someone on the MassDOT Board be a MBTA user? (Steve Olanoff, Westwood)*

One should be, but it's not a statutory requirement. There should be at least one or more.

The Board will not be able to properly function in its role as the MBTA Board without members who use public transportation. These are the kind of recommendations that will be made to the Governor and if this group agrees, you should advocate for it. (Secretary Aloisi)

*Thank you for meeting with the Advisory Council. Will participation of high-level transportation staff at our meetings continue? (Marvin Miller, American Council of Engineering Companies)*

It should. Secretaries come and go, but there should be a standard for their accessibility to advisory boards or groups. EOT needs to hear from advocates and customers of the transportation system. Citizen involvement is a central part of democracy that should be embraced. We may not always agree, but we don't know everything and can learn a lot through listening. (Secretary Aloisi)

*Will the MBTA's debt be transferred to MassDOT? (M. Al-Khatib)*

The transportation reform bill does not require a transfer of MBTA debt to MassDOT. There may be some strategies for dealing with the debt problem, but there is nothing in the reform bill to solve the problem. (Secretary Aloisi)

*I am concerned about the lack of freight planning at the MPO and state levels. It's important to address increased truck traffic as more distribution centers move west. We hope rail, truck, and maritime freight will be addressed in a more strategic way (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)*

Freight is critical to the region and the economy. It will be a focus. (Secretary Aloisi)

*How might the Accelerated Bridge Program better protect the environment, particularly the B.U. Bridge? (Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association)*

The Accelerated Bridge Program work on the B.U. Bridge has largely been done under the auspices of the Department of Conservation and Recreation. MassDOT is obtaining those assets soon. It is important not to do more damage to the environment in the Charles River basin. There is also concern about all of the bridges being under construction at the same time. EOT needs to be attentive to mitigation and have a plan in place to shift traffic to transit. Enhanced bus service should be paid for out of the cost of the project. (Secretary Aloisi)

*Too few projects that will have a significant beneficial impact on the state's economy were shovel ready for the first round of ARRA. How will MassDOT streamline the process so projects come out in a timely fashion and will be ready when funds are available? (Tony Centore, Medfield)*

EOT has streamlined the process. ARRA projects were turned around in record time. A recent Congressional report had Massachusetts low on the list of projects constructed under ARRA, but Massachusetts does a lot of complicated work compared to a state like Wyoming, which was high on the list. We want to build a platform for permanent growth with ARRA funds. An example is the Assembly Square project, which will create jobs in the long run. Massachusetts is doing road repairs too, but not all work is quick and easy. Massachusetts is also flexing highway funds to transit. The next round of ARRA projects will be regionally equitable, but help build platforms for permanent jobs. (Secretary Aloisi)

*Is there any thought to alternative transportation in terms of working with the maritime community and increasing water access? (Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council)*

We are funding the Lynn Ferry, we have funded improvements on Martha's Vinyard for the Steamship Authority, and are looking at another project on the North Shore.

**4. Officer Elections** – *Malek Al-Khatib, Advisory Council Chair, and Kristina Johnson, Chair of the Nomination Committee*

Kristina Johnson, Chair of the Nomination Committee, announced the nomination of Laura Wiener of Arlington for the office of Chair. In accordance with the directive from the current Chair, M. Al-Khatib, nominations for either Chair or Vice Chair were accepted from members between the August and September meetings. No other nominations for Chair were received.

L. Wiener made a brief statement. She has worked as a planner for the Commonwealth, for the City of Boston, and Towns of Watertown, and Arlington. She presently is a senior planner and the director of housing for Arlington. She became interested in transportation planning through her involvement in the redesign of Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington. She sits on the Green Line Extension Advisory Group and the MBTA Advisory Board. She is a walker, biker, and supports investment in all modes of transportation.

K. Johnson asked for nominations from the floor. None were made and Chan Rogers of the Southwest Advisory Planning Committee made a motion elect to L. Wiener as Chair of the Advisory Council. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

K. Johnson discussed the process for nominating candidates for the office of Vice Chair. She explained that two of the three Nominating Committee members supported Steve Olanoff of Westwood and he accepted the nomination. Schuyler Larrabee of the Boston Society of Architects was also nominated. Both persons' names appear on the ballot. K. Johnson invited the nominees to make a statement.

S. Olanoff said that should he become the Chair next year, there would have been three different Chairs since his last term in FFY 2007. S. Olanoff said leadership and a strong voice is needed on the MPO. He demonstrated his leadership by advocating for the addition of a freight study on the UPWP, which was added due to his motion.

S. Larrabee said that transportation alternatives, especially transit and rail, need to be encouraged. S. Larrabee said he has been an architect practicing master planning for 40 years. He has a lot of management experience and has served on several boards. He believes the Advisory Council must be a little more aggressive, but is advisory and can't insist.

K. Johnson asked for nominations from the floor. There were none.

F. Demasi spoke in support of S. Olanoff citing his experience and knowledge of the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee of the MPO. He said that it is good to have the balance of a new person as Chair and an experienced person as Vice Chair.

M. Miller spoke in support of S. Larrabee saying that he would gain the necessary experience during his year as Vice Chair. He said that S. Olanoff was a great Chair and Vice Chair, but that it's important to get new people involved in the leadership positions.

The election was held by secret ballot. S. Larrabee was elected for the office of Vice Chair by a vote of 14 to 13.

## **5. Discussion of Advisory Council Comment Letter on the Draft Plan Amendment - *Kristina Johnson, Chair of the Plan Committee***

K. Johnson explained the process of producing the draft letter.

- The Plan Committee met on September 3 to discuss the Advisory Council's comment letter for the draft Plan Amendment.
- MPO Staff produced a letter based on the Plan Committee's discussion.
- The draft comment letter was sent by e-mail to the Advisory Council membership and some members recommended strengthening the language supporting the addition of the North-South Rail Link to the list of illustrative projects; that language has been included.

Several members said that they would like the language to be stronger and more direct. One member reminded the group that the tone can be both direct and polite. Another member suggested that the letter request that a third transit project, in addition to the North South Rail Link and the Red Line-Blue Line Connector, be added to the Illustrative Projects list.

M. Wellons made a motion to approve the letter with more direct language. C. Rogers seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

## **6. Discussion of Membership Committee Recommendations and Approval of New Members – *Laura Wiener, Chair of the Membership Committee***

L. Wiener summarized the Membership Committee's July 28<sup>th</sup> meeting.

- Members of the Committee are concerned about low attendance among Advisory Council members. Often less than 20 of the 53 members attend.
- Low attendance makes it difficult to have one third of the members needed for a quorum.
- The Committee recommended changing the bylaws and establishing a policy to implement the change.
- The Committee recommended adding the following text to the bylaws:
  - "Continuing membership shall depend on active participation, defined as attendance at the majority of council meetings in a federal fiscal year."

- This requirement would be implemented through a new policy. MPO staff would audit attendance annually in October. Members who did not attend the required number of meetings would be informed through a letter. They would be given an opportunity to retain membership by attending two of the next three meetings after the notice.

Members discussed the pitfalls of this change to the bylaws. Some members are out of the region for extended periods of time. Also, the member entity may not be aware that its representative is not attending meetings.

Possible ways to address this were suggested: member entities can identify alternate representatives who can attend when the representative is unable to, and there could also be a committee to review each case.

L. Wiener said she will amend the policy recommendation based on these suggestions and be prepared to discuss the item again at the October meeting.

The Membership Committee on July 28 also reviewed membership applications from three organizations: the Fenway Community Development Council (Fenway CDC), the Seaport Advisory Council (SAC), and the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition (EMFRC). The Membership Committee recommended that the Advisory Council accept the SAC and EMFRC for memberships, but not Fenway CDC. The Committee held the view that the Fenway CDC represents too small an area of interest. The Committee does not want to open membership to all CDCs in the region.

J. Businger expressed concern that no action has been taken on the application of the Fenway Alliance. Action needs to be taken more quickly when a group expresses interest in the Advisory Council. What is the status of the Fenway Alliance application? M. Al-Khatib asked the Membership Committee to look into the Fenway Alliance application.

A motion was made to accept the EMFRC and SAC as members of the Advisory Council. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

## **7. Committee Reports**

There were none.

## **8. Member Announcements**

There were none.

## **9. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 4:50 PM.

## **Attachments:**

1. Attendance List for September 9, 2009

**ATTACHMENT 1: *Attendance List for September 9, 2009***

***Cities and Towns***

Lauren Rosenzweig, Acton  
Laura Wiener, Arlington  
Todd Kirrane, Brookline  
Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge  
Dennis Giombetti, Framingham  
Walter Bonin, Marlborough  
Anthony Centore, Medfield  
Dom D'Eramo, Millis  
Kurt Mullen, Needham  
Kristina Johnson, Quincy  
Jon Squibb, Revere  
Marcy Crowley, Wayland  
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley  
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

***Agencies***

Brian Kane, MBTA Advisory Board  
Jim Gallagher, MAPC  
Jeff Levine, Inner Core  
Tad Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Steven Rawding, Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission  
Jennifer Solomon, MassRIDES  
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee

***Citizen Groups***

John Kane, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA  
Marvin Miller, American Council of Engineering Companies  
Douglas Prentiss, APA Massachusetts Chapter  
Barry Steinberg, Association for Public Transportation  
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects  
Chris Porter, MassBike  
Tom Yardley, Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization  
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative  
Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce  
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association  
John McQueen, WalkBoston

***Guests and Visitors***

Secretary James Aloisi



Clinton Bench, EOT  
Richard Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition  
Douglas Low, Massachusetts Railroad Association  
Ed Lowney, Malden  
Steve Miller, Harvard School of Public Health  
Arnold Pinsley, Natick  
Romin Koebel, Fenway CDC

***MPO Staff***

Mike Callahan  
Anne McGahan  
Hayes Morrison  
Sean Pfalzer  
Pam Wolfe