

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of April 14, 2010 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

1. **Introductions** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

Laura Wiener, Chair and representative of Arlington, 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** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

- L. Wiener announced that Marcy Crowley, a long-time Advisory Council member representing Wayland, recently passed away. L. Wiener expressed her gratitude for Marcy's years of service and her wisdom.
- L. Wiener updated members on the status of the next Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). Currently the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee is working on the LRTP's visions and policies.

3. **Approval of the Meeting Minutes of March 10, 2010** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

A motion to approve the minutes of March 10, 2010 was made by Louis Elisa, representative of the Seaport Advisory Council, and seconded by Tony Centore, representative of Medfield. The minutes were unanimously approved.

4. **Member Announcements**

Malek Al-Khatib, representative of the Boston Society of Civil Engineers, announced a seminar his organization is hosting on April 28 regarding freight rail and transit. The seminar is approximately \$55 for non-members, and will be held at Anthony's Pier 4 restaurant.

5. **FFY 2011 Unified Planning Work Program Discussion** – *Laura Wiener, Chair; and Steve Olanoff, Chair of the Advisory Council's UPWP Committee*

L. Wiener reported that the MPO's UPWP Subcommittee is beginning to work on the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2011 Unified Planning Work Program. S. Olanoff reported that staff is preparing its list of recommended studies, which will be reviewed by the subcommittee. The Advisory Council should make recommendations for staff and the subcommittee. The Advisory Council has promoted a regional HOV study for many years. The freight study in the FFY 2010 UPWP was supposed to follow up on the state study, but staff has not moved on it because the statewide study is not finalized. S.

Olanoff is looking for the freight committee to recommend what staff can do in FFY 2011 to follow up on their \$40,000 study programmed in FFY 2010.

Richard Flynn, of the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition, said he and others on the Freight Committee could answer questions about the recommendations of the statewide study. He also said the Freight Committee will incorporate any comments and questions into what they recommend for the FFY 2011 Unified Planning Work Program.

L. Wiener reminded members to send their ideas for the FFY 2011 UPWP to the Advisory Council's UPWP Committee.

6. Briefing by Secretary Mullan on Timely Transportation Issues – *Secretary of Transportation, and Chief Executive Officer of MassDOT, Jeffrey B. Mullan*

MassDOT Structure and Transportation Reform

Clinton Bench, of MassDOT, addressed the Advisory Council and answered questions while the Secretary was delayed at a press conference.

C. Bench discussed the structure of MassDOT. Before the reform bill, the transportation organization of the state was fragmented. The Executive Office of Transportation coordinated the work of many separate agencies, and reported to the governor. Under the new, more rational, structure the secretary oversees MassDOT and reports to the governor and the Board of Directors. Four divisions report up to the Secretary –Highway, Rail and Transit Division, Aviation, and the Registry of Motor Vehicles. MassPort is also part of MassDOT, but they maintain a different chain of command to their executive director, who does not report directly to the Secretary of Transportation.

Richard Davey was appointed as the administrator for the Rail and Transit Division two weeks ago. Administrator Davey oversees all of the Commonwealth's rail assets, the regional transit authorities, and the MBTA. The MBTA and MassDOT have the same Board of Directors. This allows for clear consistency in the way policies are laid out.

Among the benefits are cost savings and unified planning. MassDOT estimates they will achieve \$100 million in savings just with the reforms implemented thus far. Information technology is another area where sharing services can save money and share knowledge. For example, MassDOT is also looking at how to use the in-house marketing expertise of the MBTA at the other divisions of MassDOT.

Senior staff is meeting weekly to define MassDOT's mission and goals. Improving customer service is a core part of MassDOT's mission. The open data initiative is something MassDOT is proud of because it saves money and improves customer service. Through the initiative, data (such as bus location information) are made available to the public and software developers are encouraged to create applications.

Healthy Transportation Compact

The reform bill created an inter-agency entity called the Health Transportation Compact. It is a coordinated effort of multiple divisions of MassDOT and other state agencies to take into account the public health effects of transportation. Members include Secretary Mullan (Chair), administrators of the MassDOT Highway and Rail and Transit Divisions, the Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, and the Commissioner of Public Health. This will be a forum where public health, environmental, and transportation officials can come together and develop policies that address the environmental effects of transportation, and the ability of transportation to improve health by encouraging walking and biking. This work has the capability to improve air quality and health while building safer and stronger communities. The group is also talking about doing Health Impact Assessments for MassDOT capital projects.

Freight Planning

The state is about to release an intermodal freight plan and an overall rail plan for the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is about to complete a purchase and sale agreement with CSX to own the former Boston and Albany main line between Worcester and Framingham, the Grand Junction connecting the main line to Cambridge, and pieces of lines currently owned by CSX in the New Bedford and Fall River areas (for the South Coast Rail project). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funded rebuilding three different bridges in New Bedford, which will improve the capacity for freight traffic and help implement commuter rail service. The Pioneer Valley received a high-speed rail grant to make improvements to the Vermonter Amtrak line, which will dramatically increase speed and reduce travel time by 30 minutes.

Suburban RTAs

Toll credits are an exciting new development that will expand the federal capital resources available for regional transit authorities (RTAs). It is an innovative financing tool that allows states to use any maintenance investment in an eligible toll facility to count as the state match for federal transportation funds. This will help the state fully leverage all of the federal funds available for RTAs.

Member Questions

In response to members' questions, C. Bench made the following additional comments:

- No final decision has been made on the Leverett Circle Pedestrian Bridge project. There is substantial interest by local elected officials. We need to finish the modeling for the Charles River Basin improvements and make a decision on a holistic level. A decision will be reached soon because the bridges will be under construction within a year.
- Real-time bus applications should soon be transferable to commuter rail. This has not been done partially because the automated vehicle location data were, until about six months ago, not easily translatable into a useable format for developers.
- MassDOT is hoping to have real-time bus location information for all MBTA buses available for developers within 12 to 16 months.
- A stimulus-funded project is underway now to make improvements to MBTA bus routes 1, 66, 23, 28, 111, and 117. Among the goals are to improve speed and add

customer amenities to the stops. The new stop on the SL4 Silver Line Route could be a prototype for future bus stops along the key routes.

- Snow removal is an excellent problem for the Healthy Transportation Compact to take up. It requires coordination among agencies, municipalities, and the MBTA.
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects at bus stops will all be consistent with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act and in the spirit of the MBTA settlement to improve service for people with disabilities. MassDOT is considering painting streets at bus stops with an asphalt covering, such as that used successfully for the SL4 Silver Line on Essex Street in Boston. They intend to apply the same treatment on Washington Street in Boston.
- The connections between commuter rail and regional transit authority (RTA) bus service are poor. The RTAs are constrained in their ability to connect with commuter rail because of their service schedules. General Manager Davey said improving the connectivity is one of his top five priorities.
- MassDOT is holding meetings in each Highway Division district with members of the advocacy community. They are talking specifically about the Accelerated Bridge Program and making sure they are getting input on how pedestrian and bicycle accommodations can be improved. It is important for the advocacy community to take bold stands.
- Tom Cahir oversaw a rail and transit unit within the old Executive Office of Transportation. The functions of that group now reside within MassDOT's planning office. The rail and transit administrator is excited to bring on new staff, but there may be fiscal limits to how much the division can expand. Implementing some of the initiative will depend on freight railroads for the local funding match.
- MassDOT has requested \$6 million from Congressional officials for design and environmental review of the North-South Rail Link.
- Maine received funds to extend the Downeaster Amtrak service to Brunswick. It is a priority of the state to use future high-speed rail funds to reduce the travel time between Portland and Boston to two hours.
- MassDOT is working on its vision for the future, and developing its critical success factors. MassDOT will also develop a strategic intermodal transportation plan within 12 to 16 months as required in Chapter 10 of the reform bill. It will be important for MassDOT to have an improved asset management system and to know its needs.

Member Comments

- The state should consider equipping the Logan Express buses with GPS units so people know when the next one is arriving. The state should also be more concerned with the health of the current transportation system and spend less time focusing on healthy transportation (Tony Centore, Medfield).
- The clock is running on \$3 billion for the Accelerated Bridge Program, which could have a very positive effect on pedestrian and bicycle accommodations on bridges. Many of the projects are focused only on deck reconstruction (John McQueen, WalkBoston).
- A flow sheet showing who is responsible for what at the MassDOT planning office would be useful for when people have questions. Additionally,

Washington Street needs new signage before the pavement is marked for the Silver Line. Almost every block has a wrong sign (John Businger, National Corridors Initiative).

Secretary Mullan’s comments to the Advisory Council:

The Secretary explained that he arrived late because the MBTA began the process of terminating eight maintenance employees for falsifying records. They were failing to inspect buses on the routine maintenance schedule. Basic data for the maintenance of 150 buses was misrepresented. This action was important because safety is MassDOT’s top priority and MassDOT is also serious about culture change at the MBTA. It’s important to remember, though, that most MBTA employees do a good job every day. Sometimes people forget about that.

MassDOT is in the sixth month of reform. Large strides are being made on the highway side to consolidate different agencies. In the past the agencies maybe spoke too much amongst themselves. It’s important to get out to meetings, use social media, and speak with stakeholders. The problems in transportation are large, but solvable. It’s going to take everyone working together.

The reform bill is saving the Commonwealth money through reduced interest payments on bonds, and a lower employee head count. These funds can be put back into service.

Member Questions

In response to members’ questions, J. Mullan made the following additional comments:

- The MassDOT Highway Division is taking the lead on pedestrian safety in Charles Circle. Bids will be opened in April for the first phase of the Longfellow Bridge project. Part of the project will look at improving pedestrian safety.
- It’s easy to talk about culture change, but harder to do. It’s important to keep talking about it though. We are making progress, but it takes time to change the attitudes developed over many years in a bureaucracy.
- MassDOT is not saying it will not mitigate the impact of construction on the Charles River bridges. CTPS and VHB are modeling the impacts and the state will work to mitigate the effects. The Accelerated Bridge Program provides \$3 billion to fix bridges. The recent investment in roads and bridges is massive – MassDOT is spending \$1.1 billion this year. In the last year the number of structurally deficient bridges has gone down by 10 percent.
- The MBTA is the focus of a significant amount of attention now because they lack the resources to do what they need to do.
- It is important to improve livability and encourage walking and biking. MassDOT could do a better job using its own design guide.
- Governor Patrick is not in favor of removing local control from the bus operators. However, integrating the regional transit authorities and the MBTA into one statewide network is important. It would create a statewide caucus and advocacy that would help transit. The MBTA caucus is effective in the MBTA service area, but it is not large enough geographically to get enough support in the legislature that MassDOT would like it to have.

- The state is taking steps to create a statewide rail program and make investments in important corridors. These are small steps towards what will eventually become a statewide rail organization, but it is premature to say what this will look like.
- What MassDOT does is move people from point A to point B, and help others do the same. The Motorcoach Association, Amtrak, and the MassPort can help fill in the gaps in Massachusetts. They are part of helping “others do the same.”
- There is not currently a plan to provide more parking at commuter rail stations. However, funds the former Massachusetts Turnpike Authority used to open parking lots along the turnpike corridor are being used by the MBTA to expand parking on the Worcester line. MassDOT prefers to use highway funds to build park and ride lots at commuter rail stations.
- MassDOT did not acquire some of the DCR pedestrian bridges, and will not fund improvements to DCR pedestrian bridges.
- MassDOT only has authority over seaport-side operations run by the MBTA. The Lynn ferry project was cancelled because Federal Transit Administration would not fund it.
- The advertising contract with Wall stipulates that MBTA bus stops owned by Wall are supposed to be shoveled by them. This is an important issue.

In addition, Secretary Mullan was not aware that the footprint of the Boston University Bridge was being expanded, and was not happy to hear it. He would like to have a separate dialog about the footprint of the bridge.

L. Wiener thanked Secretary Mullan and Clinton Bench for taking time to meet with the Advisory Council and for sharing all of this important information.

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55 PM.

Attachments:

Attendance List for April 14, 2010

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for April 14, 2010

Cities and Towns

Lauren Rosenzweig, Acton
Laura Wiener, Arlington
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge
Gail Wagner, Lexington
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Tony Centore, Medfield
Kurt Mullen, Needham
Kristina Johnson, Quincy
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Brian Kane, MBTA Advisory Board
Steven Rawding, MassDOT – Aeronautics Division
Donna Smallwood, MassRides
Bruce Leish, Metrowest Growth Management Committee
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee

Citizen Groups

John Kane, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Marvin Miller, American Council of Engineering Companies
Malek Al-Khatib, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Jenna Venturini, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition
Richard Flynn, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition
Anne Lynch, Massachusetts Motor Transportation Association
Chris Porter, MassBike
Jon Seward, MoveMassachusetts
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Sue McQuaid, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Chris Anzuoni, New England Bus Transportation Association
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors

Doug Low
Ed Lowney
Marilyn McNab
Joan Raifer
Monica Tibbits

MPO Staff

Walter Bennett

Cathy Buckley

Mike Callahan

Hayes Morrison

Sean Pfalzer