

# REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

*February 9 – March 9, 2011*

### **Regional Transportation Advisory Council Committees**

#### ***Freight – Walter Bonin & Dom D'Eramo***

The Freight Committee met on Wednesday, February 9 at 1:15 in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building. In attendance were co-chairs Walter Bonin of Marlborough and Dom D'Eramo of Millis, Frank DeMasi of Wellesley, Richard Flynn of the Eastern Massachusetts Rail Freight Coalition, Jo Hart of Worcester, Schuyler Larrabee of the Boston Society of Architects, Ed Lowney of Malden, Steve Olanoff of Westwood, Arnold Pinsley of Natick, Abby Swaine of the EPA, Lynn Vikesland of Massport, Marilyn Wellons of the Riverside Neighborhood Association, Laura Wiener of Arlington, and Jillian Zywiec of the Massachusetts Motor Transportation Association. MPO staff Bill Kuttner and Mike Callahan were also present.

W. Bonin called the meeting to order at 1:15 and the meeting began with introductions. There was an update on the environmental permitting for the expansion of the CSX intermodal facility in Worcester as it relates to the Boston Region MPO.

The one item of business requiring committee action was the approval of an input statement for the 2035 RTP needs assessment. The Eastern Massachusetts Rail Freight Coalition (EMFRC) had organized a working group which had prepared a text dated February 4, 2011. This text was intended for independent submission to a number of transportation policy offices and forums, and the text presented at this meeting was a final draft of the EMFRC statement.

The motion was made that committee adopt the EMFRC text, unmodified, as its comment letter on the needs assessment. R. Flynn described the EMFRC and summarized the EMFRC statement. Some of the themes of the proposed statement were amplified in a Powerpoint presentation by W. Bonin. There followed a wide ranging discussion of some of the issues raised in the statement. L. Vikesland expanded the discussion to highlight issues of port capacity in Boston. A. Swaine offered that the efforts of the Freight Committee bore direct relevance to the diesel efficiency and emissions efforts that she manages for the EPA.

Some of the recommendations in the comment letter include:

- Freight-related data gathering needs to be ongoing. Data gathering efforts underway or envisioned can inform MPO and state policy deliberations. These efforts should be continued and broadened. One key planning need is data on how the predicted 70 percent increase in freight volume in Massachusetts between now and 2030 will affect the region's transportation system. Ultimately, the MPO transportation modeling capabilities

could be enhanced to be able to estimate freight mode shifts in a manner similar to the techniques used to estimate mode shifts in person trips.

- Various governmental entities and functions need to interact effectively to ensure that the logistics activities serving the MPO and state can operate efficiently. There is a need for a Director of Freight within the MassDOT executive office who can align state policy options with regards to rail, road, intermodal, and land use issues to realize opportunities for increased logistics efficiencies, as well as preserve options for future industrial growth.
- Most of the transportation infrastructure in the Boston Region MPO area is government owned. Ongoing maintenance and reconstruction should in all cases address the potential as well as existing needs of freight transportation. For instance, a source of funding could be identified that would permit state-owned rail lines, both MassDOT and MBTA, to be gradually upgraded to the national 286,000 pound car weight standard. This would increase the willingness of freight rail customers to locate or expand in eastern Massachusetts in the future.
- On-dock ship to rail container transfer is another potential investment whose feasibility should be investigated. A new generation of container vessels designed for an enlarged Panama Canal will change the economics of both deepening the Boston Harbor approach channels as well as on-dock rail.
- The relocation of freight rail terminal facilities from the inner core of the Boston region to Worcester and Ayer will also have an impact on the region's highways. The need for distribution facilities inside Route 128 should be identified in the needs assessment. There will be more trucks on our express highways bringing freight into the Boston region from Worcester and Ayer if this need is not addressed.

D. D'Eramo moved that the subcommittee adopt the proposed text. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 2:30. A future meeting was not scheduled.

#### ***Plan Committee*** – Schuyler Larrabee

The Plan Committee met on Thursday, February 17 at 3:00 PM in the MPO's Conference Room to prepare a comment letter on the Boston Region MPO's transportation needs assessment. The needs assessment was conducted to identify and give priority to the region's transportation needs before decisions are made about how to invest funds in the next Long-Range Transportation Plan to address the needs. In attendance were the Plan Committee Chair, Schuyler Larrabee of the Boston Society of Architects; Laura Wiener of Arlington; Steve Olanoff of Westwood; and Chris Anzuoni of the Massachusetts Bus Association.

Anne McGahan, the MPO's manager for the Long-Range Transportation Plan, went over the schedule before the Committee discussed its comments on the draft needs assessment. Public review of the draft needs assessment will continue through the end of February. Towards the end of February the MPO will begin to discuss its priorities and develop a universe of projects.

Before May 5 the MPO will select projects and programs to include in the Plan, and use the travel demand model to make sure the selected projects and programs will not exceed state limits on particular emissions. The public review and comment period is anticipated to begin in early June. Public workshops to discuss the draft Plan will be held the last two weeks in June.

Members of the Plan Committee made the following comments on the draft comment letter on the needs assessment, which was distributed prior to the meeting:

- Suburban transit service is a need for many communities. Commuter rail service provides good travel to and from Boston, but intra-town services are also needed.
- The regional transit authorities serve mostly transit dependent customers. There is a need to market these services within the communities and to businesses in order to attract more riders.
- The draft document is difficult to navigate. It would be helpful to readers if there were references within the text to other places in the document where related information can be found. For instance, when discussing bottlenecks in the summary chapter, there should be references to the pages in earlier chapters where information about the bottlenecks in each corridor can be found.
- Text should be provided that clarifies the statement “all transportation needs should be listed, although some may not be in the MPO’s purview.”
- The letter should focus exclusively on the needs in the region. The following statement should be removed: “Only those projects and programs that address an identified need should be funded.”
- The final chapter summarizing the region’s needs should include specific interchanges and intersections that need improvements, not just segments of highway.
- Gaps in the transit system need to be filled. There are many opportunities for interconnection that should be identified in the needs assessment.
- Comprehensive freight-related data is a need. The letter should expand on what data are needed.
- Economic development needs are missing in the needs assessment. There is no connection made between the priority areas for economic development and the transportation needs that are limiting economic development in those areas.

A final draft letter was prepared and distributed to Advisory Council members on February 18. It was delivered to the MPO’s Transportation Planning and Programming Committee on February 24.

**The following committees did not meet and have not scheduled future meetings:**

*Executive* – Laura Wiener

*Membership* – Steve Olanoff

*Nominating* – Malek Al-Khatib

*Programs* – Richard Canale

*Transportation Improvement Program* – Monica Tibbits

*UPWP* – Steve Olanoff

### **Transportation Planning and Programming Committee Subcommittees**

There was a Transportation Planning and Programming Committee Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) subcommittee meeting on February 17 to discuss the status of projects in the federal fiscal year 2011 UPWP.