

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the March 9, 2011 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. Attendees introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

2. **Chair's Report** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

The MPO is discussing changes to its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). L. Wiener asked members to contact her directly if they would like to discuss the MOU. The Advisory Council discussed the MOU in a working group last fall.

Prior to this meeting, L. Wiener met with the Co-Chairs of the Advisory Council's Freight Committee to discuss how the Committee can focus their work on issues affecting the MPO and the Advisory Council.

3. **Approval of the Meeting Minutes February 9, 2011** – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

Frank DeMasi of Wellesley requested an adjustment to the draft minutes of February 9, 2011. The 263,000 pound weight limit for freight rail cars results in 15 percent less capacity, rather than 50 percent as he was quoted. A motion to approve the draft minutes of February 9, 2011 was made and seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

4. **Panel Discussion: Health and Transportation**

- *Cheryl Bartlett - RN, Acting Director, Bureau of Community Health Access and Prevention, Massachusetts Department of Public Health*
- *Maeve Valley Bartlett – Assistant Secretary, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs*
- *Catherine Cagle – Manager of Sustainable Transportation, Massachusetts Department of Transportation, Office of Transportation Planning*
- *Steve Miller – Executive Director, Healthy Weight Initiative, Harvard School of Public Health*

Each panelist spoke for five minutes before the panel fielded questions. A summary of each of their comments follows:

Cheryl Bartlett

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health seeks to influence health from a socio-ecological model. Among the social conditions that influence public health are:

- Access to health care
- Income
- Education
- Affordable housing
- Healthy food
- Access to transportation

Income is highly correlated with good health, so improving access to things that will help people have economic success is important. Transportation is an important component of economic success because it gives people access to employment opportunities and health care. Transportation can also help people be active. Driving increases stress, pollutes the air, and causes injuries and deaths through accidents. It's important that the transportation system is designed to help us access important places, while also enhancing our health.

Maeve Valley Bartlett

The Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) is working on the state's Climate Change Plan for 2020 and 2050. The plan is required by state statute (Climate Protection and Green Economy Act), and will cover all greenhouse gas emissions producing sectors. M.V. Bartlett focuses on transportation policies for the Plan.

EOEEA focuses primarily on two things related to climate change: adaptation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Their goal of the Plan is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25% from 1990 levels by 2020. A key piece of the transportation section is the GreenDOT policy of MassDOT, which came about from cooperation between EOEEA and MassDOT. EOEEA helped develop estimates of what the greenhouse gas emissions reductions would be from MassDOT initiatives and policies. EOEEA is especially interested in how discretionary transportation planning funds can look into things that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and modeling these emissions from projects.

Catherine Cagle

Transportation has traditionally been thought of as connecting points. But it's also about connecting people to housing, jobs, food, and other opportunities. This understanding of transportation is related to the concept of livability. There is now a strong policy framework in Massachusetts to address climate change and encourage livability. This framework includes GreenDOT and the Healthy Transportation Compact.

The GreenDOT policy of MassDOT has three main goals:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Promote the healthy transportation options of bicycling, walking, and transit
- Support compact development to change transportation patterns

The Healthy Transportation Compact is an innovative program that connects EOEEA, the Department of Public Health, and MassDOT. Massachusetts is the first state to bring together the lead organizations on transportation, the environment, and public health to discuss livability and how the policies of each organization can be better coordinated. The recession has made this program even more important because there is a need to share resources.

Steve Miller

There are some distinctions between public health and livability that are important to recognize. Public health is about creating an environment that makes it easy for large groups of people to make healthy choices by default. The default should be easy, low cost, accessible, and culturally acceptable. Livability is about creating places where people want to live, and feel good about being there.

Transportation costs, and how to address the costs, are important elements to consider in planning. Transportation costs to consider include the following:

- 40,000 people die annually in the United States in automobile accidents.
- About 10% of the people killed in automobile accidents are pedestrians.
- 40% of child fatalities relating to automobile accidents occur while a child is traveling to or from school.
- Traffic accidents cost the U.S. economy about \$180 billion per year.
- Overweight and obesity costs the U.S. economy about \$450 billion per year.
- Obese people spend \$2,300 more per year on health costs than non-obese people.
- Transportation-related air quality health costs in the United States are between \$50 and \$80 billion per year.
- Combustion to power vehicles is a major source of ultrafine particulate matter. Exposure to ultrafine particulate matter reduces life expectancy in the U.S. by approximately 2 years.
- Children living near highways are twice as likely to have asthma.
- Adults living near highways are four times as likely to have impaired lung function, and twice as likely to have heart attacks and lung cancer.
- High traffic makes people less likely to go outside. People living on busy streets have fewer friends nearby.

Less travel through better land use decisions, cleaner vehicles, and greater use of transit, walking, and bicycling will help address these costs. The Advisory Council can help the MPO select projects that are better for public health by promoting the use of health impact statements, which provide analysis on health impacts of transportation projects.

Questions

In response to questions, the panelist made the following additional comments.

Regarding how the Advisory Council can encourage stronger government action on public health and climate change:

- Climate change is a global issue that needs federal attention. But states should not sit back. There are policies that can be implemented at the state level to help. Action at all levels can create a perfect storm. (M.V. Bartlett)
- Massachusetts is ahead of the nation, but other states are not doing much. Groups like the Advisory Council still need to push the state to take stronger actions to improve public health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. (S. Miller)

Regarding how communities can fund paths and sidewalks:

- The Department of Public Health has awarded municipal leadership wellness grants to 14 communities to hire Mass in Motion coordinators. The coordinators work to connect departments in a community and can help identify funds for these projects. (C. Bartlett)
- Portland, Oregon has studied the cost and fuel savings from the construction of bike and pedestrian infrastructure. The savings exceed the costs of building the infrastructure. Governments need to use holistic accounting, which involves looking not only at the capital and maintenance costs, but also the benefits and costs avoided. Putting money into preventative efforts saves money down the road. (S. Miller)
- The state can set aside 10% of its highway funds for the Transportation Enhancement program. However, Massachusetts spends less of these funds than any other state on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The Department of Conservation and Recreation has a Recreational Trail Program, but only spends about half of the funds authorized for this purpose. (S. Miller)
- The process by which project proponents apply for Transportation Enhancement program funds was recently simplified and streamlined. (C. Cagle)

Regarding how freight distribution can address health and climate change issues:

- MassDOT is looking at ways to encourage cleaner freight distribution through its GreenDOT initiative. (C. Cagle)
- EOEEA does not want to micromanage the movement of freight. EOEEA thinks getting trucks off the road and moving freight by cleaner modes is desirable, but the Global Warming Solutions Act does not prescribe specific freight policies or projects. EOEEA modeled various policies from the State Rail and Freight Plans. The greenhouse gas emissions reductions from these policies were not found to be as effective as other policies, such as a low carbon fuel source. (M. V. Bartlett)

Regarding how programs can encourage people to use healthy transportation modes:

- The recession has encouraged government to take a closer look at how resources are being used, and heightened the awareness of the benefits of sharing resources. The Healthy Transportation Compact is a good example. (M.V. Bartlett)
- It should not be assumed that the funding situation will get better. It's important for government to do things that have the greatest impact. Government actions in the transportation sector should not just be about infrastructure. (S. Miller)

Regarding transportation funding and lack of support for increasing the gas tax:

- Advocates should think about how they are framing their messages. The largest land asset governments own (streets) is given over to cars. It should be clear to the public that this policy causes asthma and other health problems. Issues need to be reframed around the health and climate impact. (S. Miller)

Regarding how emissions from bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure are calculated:

- The Global Warming Solutions Act calls for setting a greenhouse gas emissions reduction target for 2020 and setting a plan for moving forward. EOEEA and MassDOT made estimates of how much policies such as complete streets would

reduce greenhouse gas emissions. EOEEA and MassDOT are now working on an updated GreenDOT plan that will provide more detail. (M.V. Bartlett)

Regarding how people can be brought together to implement the policies:

- The Health Resources in Action program, funded by the Department of Public Health, provides funding to train municipal staff on how to bring people together to talk about planning. (C. Bartlett)
- It's important to bring together a diverse set of people to discuss these issues. The Healthy Transportation Compact was required by statute. It has been effective and could be replicated at the municipal level. (C. Cagle)
- There is a concept called convergence that calls for bringing together communities, agencies, advocates, and other relevant parties when talking about an issue. Advocates need to protest, form partnerships, applaud what is done well, and encourage agencies to do more. The advocates then need to go to the public and build support. (S. Miller)

Regarding how, and to what extent, exposure to fine particulate matter should be taken into account:

- Understanding risk factors is part of the review of projects. (C. Cagle)
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is studying fine particulate matter. (M.V. Bartlett)
- Agencies can only go so far on the issue of fine particulate matter. This is about policy and politics. Groups like the Advisory Council should take the lead and demand that transportation costs be accounted for in a holistic way, and not just consider moving people and things faster. Politics affects how the agencies behave. Advocacy groups need to take the lead. (S. Miller)

5. Transportation Improvement Program and Unified Planning Work Program Amendments – Hayes Morrison, TIP Program Manager, MPO Staff

H. Morrison described the two proposed Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) amendments and the proposed Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) amendment that the MPO will take action on March 24.

Amendment 2 of the 2011 element of the federal fiscal years (FFYs) 2011-14 TIP would program funds for an intercity bus study. The proposed study is also the subject of the proposed Unified Planning Work Program amendment.

Amendment 3 of the 2011 element of the FFYs 2011-14 TIP would flex \$12.5 million in highway funds to build a second head house at the Assembly Square Orange Line station.

Questions

In response to members' questions, H. Morrison made the following additional comments:

- Funding for the Somerville Community Path was removed from and funding for the Crosby's Corner project was reduced in the 2011 element of the FFYs 2011-

14 TIP. The Crosby's Corner project is moving more slowly than anticipated and funding for the project will begin in FFY 2012 and end in FFY 2015. The Somerville Community Path is not ready for construction; it needs \$700,000, but the TIP is fully programmed in FFY 2012.

- The Crosby's Corner project has not necessarily been moved back a full year. It just will not be accessing funds before October 1, 2011.
- The funds for the Community Path that were removed from the FFY 2011 element of the TIP were for the Cedar to Lowell segment of the path.
- The Community Path project is in limbo. It was not moved to another year of the current TIP. The Orange Line station at Assembly Square needed an additional \$12.5 million this year, and the Community Path project was not ready to go in FFY 2011. However, the MPO strives to honor prior funding commitments.

Comments

Members of the Advisory Council and guests made the following comments:

- The Assembly Square project is very important. Somerville and the state have built a lot of infrastructure and a lot of development is permitted. (Wig Zamore, resident of Somerville)
- The Advisory Council should support the amendments and urge the MPO to fully fund the two projects that were removed from the FFY 2011 element of the current TIP. (Richard Canale, representative of the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination)

R. Canale made a motion for the Advisory Council to write a letter in support of all the amendments described by H. Morrison, and urge the MPO to fully fund the two projects removed from the FFY 2011 element of the TIP. The motion was seconded by Steve Olanoff, Vice Chair and representative of Westwood, and approved unanimously by the Advisory Council.

6. Announcements

Michael Cooper, of the Association for Public Transportation, announced the Association would host a meeting on March 26 to discuss high speed rail. Al Engel, who is leading Amtrak's high speed rail initiatives, will be the featured speaker at the meeting.

7. Committee Reports

There were none.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 PM.

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for March 9, 2011

Cities and Towns

Lauren Rosenzweig-Morton, Acton
Laura Wiener, Arlington
Jeff Levine, Brookline
Gail Wagner, Lexington
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Dom D'Eramo, Millis
Jack Gillon, Quincy
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Karen Pearson, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Steven Rawding, MassDOT – Aeronautics Division
Donna Smallwood, MassRIDES
Alison Felix, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC)
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)

Citizen Groups

Mary Ann Murray, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Thomas Daley, American Council of Engineering Companies
Michael Cooper, Association for Public Transportation
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects
Jenna Venturini, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition
Chris Anzuoni, Massachusetts Bus Association
Jillian Zywiec, Massachusetts Motor Transportation Association
David Ernst, MassBike
Jon Seward, MoveMassachusetts
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
Tom O'Rourke, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Monica Tibbits, Route 128 Business Council
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors

Bishara Addison, Nuestra CDC
T. Angela Burgess, MBTA
John C., T Riders Union
Valerie Callahan, Greater Lynn Senior Services
Joanne Champa, MassDOT Rail and Transit Division
Paul Crowley, Greater Lynn Senior Services
Jacquelyn Dunlop, Greater Lynn Senior Services
Sarah F.
Kristina Johnson, City of Quincy
Barry Keppard, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Romin Koebel, Fenway CDC
Chris Knoper, Southwest Boston CDC

Ed Lowney, resident of Malden
Alan Moore, Friends of the Community Path
John Oliver, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA
Lola Omolodun, Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Haley Peckett, Volpe Center – US DOT
Jonah Petri, Friends of the Community Path
Ellin Reisner, Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership
Stephen Winslow, City of Gloucester
Simon F. Wright
Wig Zamore, Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership

MPO Staff

Walter Bennett
Cathy Buckley
Mike Callahan
Janie Guion
Hayes Morrison
Sean Pfalzer
Pam Wolfe