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The Boston Region MPO,
the federally designated
entity responsible for
transportation decision-
making for the 101 cities
and towns in the MPO
region, is composed of:

MassDOT Office of Planning and
Programming
City of Boston
City of Newton
City of Somerville
Town of Bedford
Town of Braintree
Town of Framingham
Town of Hopkinton
Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Massachusetts Bay Transportation
Authority Advisory Board
Massachusetts Bay Transportation
Authority
MassDOT Highway Division
Massachusetts Port Authority
Regional Transportation Advisory
Council (nonvoting)
Federal Highway Administration
(nonvoting)
Federal Transit Administration
(nonvoting)

MEMORANDUM

DATE January 27, 2011
TO Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
FROM Cathy Buckley, Mike Callahan, and Sean Pfalzer, MPO Staff
RE Livable Communities Workshop Program

BACKGROUND

Since 2004, the Boston Region MPO has conducted the Walkable Community Workshop (WCW) Program to promote safe, accessible, and aesthetic walking environments. The WCWs bring together various community members to learn about good pedestrian design, identify local shortcomings, and discuss possible strategies for improvements.

The MPO has established the Livable Communities Workshop Program in the FFY 2011 UPWP (ID # 13801; \$55,000 budget, \$30,000 to CTPS, \$25,000 to MAPC; \$27,500 PL and \$27,500 Section 5303). This program will build upon the model and success of the WCW Program by expanding the scope beyond walking, including other active transportation modes. According to Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation Ray LaHood, a livable community is one “where if people don’t want to have an automobile, they don’t have to have one. A community where you can walk to work, your doctor’s appointment, pharmacy, or grocery store. Or you could take light rail, a bus, or ride a bike.”

The Livability Program will offer three components: regional forums, workshops, and a website of resources. The forums will allow in-depth topical discussions and allow input from a broad range of participants. The workshops will continue to focus on issues at the level of a particular neighborhood or community. The website will be a source of information for all, from state, regional and municipal staff members to individual residents.

The forums, workshops and website will address parking, land use, urban design, public health, energy, climate change and other environmental issues. This program will further the goals of the state’s Healthy Transportation Compact as well as the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

REGIONAL FORUMS

The regional forums will bring together municipal officials, community and business leaders, and members of the public to raise awareness about livability and discuss opportunities and challenges to improving livability in the region. The first regional forum will be held in March 2011 through the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC) meeting and will focus on the linkage between transportation and public health.

LIVABLE COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

Solicitation

The MPO will publicize the Livable Community Workshop Program through various channels, including *TRANSREPORT*, MPOinfo, Twitter, the MPO website, and the MAPC subregions. Requests for services will be fielded and prioritized by staff on an ongoing basis. The communities selected will have the opportunity to focus their workshop on relevant objectives by choosing from a menu of livability topics. The menu will include the issues listed above; bicycling, walking, transit, parking, land use, urban design, public health, energy, climate change and other environmental issues. It is anticipated that the program will include approximately two forums and five workshops in federal fiscal year 2011.

Workshop

Each Livable Community Workshop will have two parts. The first is a presentation by staff on elements of livability that have been incorporated at the local, regional, national, and international level. Each presentation will emphasize the livability topics identified by the host community. The second part would usually commence with a walk through a local area (chosen by the community), followed by a brainstorming session: identifying shortcomings, discussing possible strategies for resolving them, and envisioning other potential improvements. All members of the community, including elected officials, business owners, residents, and local professionals in the fields of planning, engineering, law enforcement, health, sustainability, and education, are encouraged to participate. The workshop will help stimulate local awareness and generate more discussion on both living in the area without a car and how the built environment can be changed to facilitate such travel.

Following the workshop, staff will produce a memorandum on the consultations to document the work, recommendations, and outcomes. The memorandum will consist of both short- and long-term recommendations, but staff will not perform design or planning studies. Staff will be available for follow-up discussions or to assist with next steps toward improving livability.

LIVABILITY WEBSITE

The Livability website will store all information and activities developed in the program. The website will be a source for livability indicators and livability planning materials by topic. It will feature an interactive database that allows cities and towns of the Boston region to analyze aspects of their community's livability by viewing indicators, including population and employment density, sidewalk coverage, bicycle coverage, bicycle and pedestrian crash rates, vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per household, and average household transportation costs. In addition, the interactive database will allow communities to compare their livability with similar municipalities in the region. The website will also contain links to resources on specific livability planning topics.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

January 27: Provide program update to the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee

February 16: Solicit Livable Community Workshops through various MPO media channels

March 9: Regional Transportation Advisory Council/Livability Program: Transportation and Public Health Forum

April – September: Conduct Livable Community Workshops

September: Regional Forum #2: Topic to be determined from workshop experiences