

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



April 14, 2011

David Mohler, Chair
Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Suite 4150
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Investment Categories and the Universe of Projects and Programs for the next Long-Range Transportation Plan

Dear Mr. Mohler,

The Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Advisory Council) is an independent group of citizen and regional advocacy groups, municipal officials, and agencies charged by the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) with providing public input on transportation planning and programming.

The Advisory Council's Plan Committee met on April 6 to discuss the Universe of Projects and Programs, and proposed investment categories, for the next Long-Range Transportation Plan. The Advisory Council strongly supports the MPO's decision to take a strategic approach by first allocating funding to investment categories in a manner that supports the Plan's visions and policies, and then selecting projects and programs to fund within each investment category. We offer the following suggestions to consider as the MPO moves forward with establishing priorities among the investment categories, and eventually selecting programs and projects to include in the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

We have the following comments on prioritization of the investment categories:

- Maintenance and modernization of the existing transportation system should be the MPO's top priority, and it should receive a greater share of funds than the other categories.
- When there is funding for expansion, the MPO should favor rail, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects over highway projects. These are more sustainable ways of accommodating growth in the movement of people and goods.
- The MPO should allocate approximately 80 percent of its available funds in the Long-Range Transportation Plan to large regional maintenance/modernization and expansion projects.
- The remaining 20 percent of funds should be dedicated to projects not yet foreseen that will provide the greatest benefit for the investment. For example, an intersections program that will improve the region's worst intersections, as determined by available data, is preferred.

Providing transportation policy advice to the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization

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- The MPO should use quantifiable performance measures to determine which projects are the best to fund.

Other comments by topic included the following:

Freight

- Freight expansion should be a higher priority of the MPO than it previously has been.
- The freight benefits of all projects should be considered in developing the Plan. The freight movement benefits of MPO projects are usually not identified as such. For example, the I-93/I-95 interchange project in Woburn is identified principally as a highway expansion project, but it will also serve as an important project in facilitating the movement of freight.
- The Plan should include a chapter dedicated to goods movement.

Transit

- The MPO should continue to pursue transit capacity expansion. This can be done with state funds or through a flex of highway funds. The MBTA needs to focus its available capital funding on maintenance.
- Intercity passenger rail and high speed rail are not given enough consideration in the Plan. For example, a third track on the Northeast Corridor will be needed to accommodate the additional commuter and intercity passenger rail, and will also have benefits for the movement of freight, but is not currently in the Universe of Projects.

Highway

- Determining how to split the funds between maintenance and expansion is difficult without first discussing which major highway interchange projects the MPO supports.
- Most of the projects in the Universe of Projects are maintenance. The MPO is building very few new roads. Even the add-a-lane projects are simply fixing a bottleneck or building a lane to replace the current use of a breakdown lane.
- There are elements of the expansion projects listed in the Universe of Projects that are not expansion. Each expansion project should be evaluated to determine what share of the project's budget is for expansion, and what share is for maintenance/modernization or enhancement.

General

- Projects should be more thoroughly evaluated for their economic benefits in the creation of jobs and stimulation of economic development, with recognition of environmental, public health, congestion, and capital costs.
- The MPO needs to consider the transportation needs that transcend regional and state boundaries when selecting projects and programs to fund. For example, there is a need to improve the intercity passenger and freight rail network that connects the Boston region to the rest of the country. Local projects should be evaluated to make sure they will

support, and not prevent, the development of a better intercity rail system, including the creation of a true high speed rail system.

The Advisory Council's Plan Committee will continue to meet and provide suggestions as the MPO moves forward with its work to prioritize investments for the next 24 years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Wiener". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Laura Wiener, Advisory Council Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Schuyler Larrabee". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S".

Schuyler Larrabee, Plan Committee Chair