

**Draft Memorandum for the Record
Transportation Planning and Programming Committee of the
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)**

May 12, 2011 Meeting

10:00 AM – 12:10 PM, State Transportation Building, Conference Rooms 2 & 3, 10 Park Plaza, Boston

David Mohler, Chair, representing Jeffrey Mullan, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Transportation Planning and Programming Committee agreed to the following:

- hold Transportation Planning and Programming meetings outside of Boston on a quarterly basis
- conduct an assessment of the MPO's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) every two years and conduct a public outreach initiative around that topic
- add language to the MOU regarding the consideration of geographic equity in the MPO's regional planning

Meeting Agenda

1. Public Comments

There were none.

2. Chair's Report – David Mohler, MassDOT

There was none.

3. Subcommittee Chairs' Reports

There were none.

4. Regional Transportation Advisory Council Report – Laura Wiener, Regional Transportation Advisory Council

L. Wiener spoke about the Advisory Council's position on issues the MPO is discussing regarding change the MPO's MOU. The Council does not support the idea of having MPO members representing each of the subregions, adding a member from the legislature or from a Regional Transit Authority, instituting term limits for members, or holding regularly scheduled Transportation Planning and Programming Committee meetings outside of Boston.

The Council does support adding one new member to the MPO. It also favors adding language to the MOU to require MPO staff to make meeting materials available to the public 48 hours in advance of each meeting. The Council also recommends that the MPO make the Council a full voting member of the MPO.

5. Director's Report – *Karl Quackenbush, Acting Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS)*

There was none.

6. Memorandum of Understanding – *David Mohler, MassDOT*

Members discussed issues and questions raised regarding changes to the MPO's MOU, which are summarized under the topic headings below.

Should there be requirements for advance posting of materials prior to discussions at meetings?

Members reached consensus to add language to the MOU to require that MPO staff provide meeting materials to the public, via the MPO's website, at least 48 hours before a meeting. This rule would apply to subjects that would be action items on the agenda. If the MPO does not meet this requirement the MPO would not take up the agenda item at that meeting.

It was noted that the MPO would have the ability under Robert's Rules of Orders to waive this requirement in the event that the MPO must take action to meet a federal deadline.

Should the MPO meet quarterly outside of Boston?

The MPO currently holds its regularly scheduled meetings at the State Transportation Building in Boston. Members discussed whether the MPO should periodically hold meetings outside of Boston.

Some members who advocated for meeting outside of Boston noted that doing so would enhance the MPO's public outreach and provide an opportunity to make the MPO process available for people who don't feel a part of it now. It was also noted that MassDOT meetings held outside of Boston were well received by the public. Voicing support for meeting outside of Boston were David Mohler, MassDOT, Eric Bourassa, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), Paul Regan, MBTA Advisory Board, John Romano, MassDOT, and Dennis Giombetti, Town of Framingham.

Those opposed to changing the usual meeting locations noted that doing so could reduce attendance since it may be inconvenient for MPO members and members of the public who rely on transit to get to other locations (particularly if people must travel from one side of the region to another) and because moving the meeting location could cause confusion. Further, if the MPO holds meetings in areas that are not easily accessible by transit, then attendees may drive rather than take transit. It was also noted that the MPO staff is housed in the State Transportation Building and that staff members are often called upon during meetings to produce materials or answer questions. Mary Pratt, Town of Hopkinton, Lourenço Dantas, Massachusetts Port Authority, Laura Weiner, Regional Transportation Advisory Council, Joe Cosgrove, MBTA, and David Koses, Town of Newton all raised concerns about meeting outside of Boston.

D. Koses also stated that if the MPO were to hold meetings outside of Boston, the agenda items should be taken into account so that the MPO would be discussing topics relevant in the area where they are meeting and not inconveniencing people by discussing topics that relate to parts of the region that are farther away from the meeting location. Tom Bent, City of Somerville, suggested coupling the out of town meetings with other MPO events, such as TIP seminars.

Karl Quackenbush, Acting Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS), noted his appreciation for the sensitivity to possible burden on the staff, but said that the staff is here to serve the MPO and will attend meetings where needed.

A motion to hold MPO meetings outside of Boston on a quarterly basis was made by E. Bourassa, MAPC, and seconded by P. Regan, MBTA Advisory Board. The motion carried.

Should the MPO review its MOU more frequently?

Some of the public comments submitted to the MPO during the public review period for the MOU expressed that the process to revise the MOU “came out of nowhere.” As a result, D. Mohler proposed that the MPO hold a biennial assessment of the MOU and conduct the same level of public outreach regarding revisions to the document as it does for any other certification document.

During a discussion about his item, P. Regan suggested that the reviews be held at times that do not compete with other MPO priorities. Jim Gillooly, City of Boston, recommended that the MPO reassess the MOU when the public expresses interest in making changes rather than on a mandated schedule.

Members reached consensus to add language to the MOU to require an assessment of the MOU every two years and to conduct public outreach and debate the issues raised by the public.

Should the MPO consider geographic equity when approving all certification activity documents?

For the discussion of this topic, staff provided members with graphics illustrating a breakdown of TIP funding, population, and employment by subregion. (See attached.) It was noted that there is a perception among some members of the public that the MPO does not distribute transportation dollars in a geographic equitable way, although the graphics indicate otherwise.

E. Bourassa noted that the MPO already considers geographic equity when it makes decisions about distributing transportation funds. He recommended that the MPO formalize this action by including it in the MOU.

J. Gillooly and P. Regan added that the MPO should watch for long-term trends in terms of how resources are distributed throughout the region, since the distribution may not be balanced in any single given year.

D. Giombetti recommended that the MPO provide an explanation in the TIP when the MPO deviates from distributing resources in a geographically balanced way. T. Bent noted, however, that in any given year, the balance could be skewed by one or two projects and that at issue is the lack of funding available to the MPO to distribute. L. Dantas noted that the MPO addresses transportation problems by using TIP evaluation criteria more so than by considering the geographic location of projects.

D. Mohler and J. Romano both commented that the MPO should consider geographic equity as a final step in the regional planning process to provide for resources being distributed fairly throughout the region.

J. Gillooly suggested that the MPO add language to the MOU to reference the geographic equity as among the factors the MPO considers when evaluating projects, but to make sure that the language does not lead people to believe that it is the only criteria used.

Members paused in their discussion to hear public comments on the topic of geographical equity.

Arnold Pinsley commented that the issue is less about geographical equity and more about serving needs. As an example, he remarked upon the sale of Beacon Yards and the movement of truck distribution centers to the west, which has created a need for infrastructure improvements between the I-495 and I-95 corridors to enable goods to be transported to Boston expeditiously. Without such improvements there would be negative impacts in terms of the rising cost of goods and cost of living for the labor force.

State Representative Chris Walsh remarked that Boston already has a mature transportation system and that other areas of the state need basic infrastructure. He recommended a sort of “affirmative action in transportation” to consider investment in areas outside of the Inner Core.

State Representative Tom Sannicandro noted that much of what the MPO does is symbolic and that suburban communities consider MPO actions as too Boston-centric. He stated that he appreciates the MPO considering regional equity.

Members then reached consensus to add language to the MOU regarding geographic equity. They continued discussing the details of what that language would include.

They also discussed the suggestion that the MPO should include an explanation in the TIP to explain when there is a deviation from a geographically-balanced approach to funding. Concerns were raised about exactly how the MPO would determine the appropriate balance for funding distribution, and whether the definition of geographic equity would include factors such as growth, population, employment, or road miles. Also, concerns were raised about the MPO becoming too prescriptive and parsing the funding in such a way that would inhibit the MPO from achieving federal mandated goals, such as goals for air quality improvement.

The discussion of this topic will continue.

Should the membership of the MPO be expanded?

J. Gillooly expressed concern about expanding the membership of the MPO. Harkening back to the negotiations that developed the current MOU 14 years ago, he explained that at that time Boston accepted a 14% representation on the MPO despite the fact that the city holds about 20% of the population and 30% of the jobs in the region, and given that Boston is the capital city containing most of the built infrastructure in the region and serving as the hub of the regional economy. He expressed strong concern that adding members would diminish the city's role in the MPO. He also noted that the city has worked in good faith to support local membership on the MPO and to support regional projects outside of the city. He stated that the existing MPO structure has worked well and questioned the workability of a larger structure. M. Pratt expressed agreement that the existing structure and municipal membership has worked well.

E. Bourassa expressed MAPC's support for adding two new members to the MPO and MAPC's opposition to having subregional requirements in MPO elections. M. Pratt expressed concern about MAPC's position stating that such changes could disadvantage certain subregions.

P. Regan expressed opposition to expanding the MPO membership and advocated for eliminating the subregional restrictions in elections. He emphasized the need for members to take a regional approach in order to achieve federal mandates.

L. Dantas and T. Bent also expressed concern that adding new municipal members would not make the MPO a more effective body. L. Dantas pointed out that the MPO achieves broad municipal representation through the regional member agencies including MAPC, the MBTA Advisory Board, the Massachusetts Port Authority, and the Regional Transportation Advisory Council.

L. Weiner stated that the Advisory Council does not support having a city/town distinction in the MPO elections.

D. Mohler stated that there is a perception that municipalities in the region are under-represented on the MPO and that the MPO should consider adding new members. He noted that this action would dilute the weight of the state vote.

Steve Olanoff, Advisory Council, noted that the Town of Westwood is in favor in increasing municipal membership. To address the concerns of the City of Boston, he suggested that Boston could have two votes.

Members then heard additional public comments.

Representative Sannicandro stated that it is important that the voice of a Regional Transit Authority is included in the MPO.

Robert McGaw, Regional Transportation Advisory Council, recommended that the MPO include language in the MOU that states that the MPO takes a regional approach to planning and that all members are dedicated to taking a regional approach. He encouraged the MPO to consider the need for this region to compete with other regions in the nation for knowledge industry jobs and the need to position this region to bring investment to the area. He referenced research that he has been involved in that examined other parts of the country that have attracted knowledge-based industries and pointed out that those regions benefit from a transportation network that allows for connectivity and provides easy access to tight knit research clusters. He emphasized that a regional approach to planning is beneficial while parochial efforts by municipalities to win projects are not.

John Stasik, Town of Framingham, suggested that the MPO consider subregional representation or else have at-large membership. He noted that while there is an ideal that members vote with a regional interest in mind, in reality they vote in the interest of their city or town, agency, or subregion.

Arnold Pinsley recommended reducing the number of “Boston-centric” entities on the MPO and adding more representatives from outside the city. He stated that the MPO membership should reflect changes that have occurred in the region.

Three straw polls were then held to gauge members’ opinions on membership issues.

The first straw poll was held to determine the members’ opinions regarding whether the MPO membership should expand to include more municipalities. Members were evenly divided on this issue so no consensus was reached.

The second poll determined if members had an interest in maintaining the status quo for MPO membership. While the majority of members were in favor of maintaining the status quo, consensus was not reached.

The third poll gauged whether members wish to eliminate the subregional restrictions in MPO elections (also keep city/town distinction) and to underscore at-large membership. The majority of members were not in favor of this action, and again consensus was not reached.

The discussion of this topic and other issues raised regarding the MOU will be continued at the meeting of May 26.

7. Members Items

There were none.

8. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by L. Dantas and seconded by E. Bourassa. The motion carried.

Transportation Planning and Programming Committee Meeting Attendance
Thursday, May 12, 2011, 10:00 AM

Member Agencies

MassDOT
MassDOT Highway

City of Boston

City of Newton
City of Somerville
MAPC

MassPort
MBTA
MBTA Advisory Board
Regional Transportation
Advisory Council
Town of Braintree
Town of Framingham
Town of Hopkinton

Representatives and Alternates

David Mohler
David Anderson
John Romano
Jim Gillooly
Tom Kadzis
David Koses
Tom Bent
Eric Bourassa
Eric Halvorsen
Lourenço Dantas
Joe Cosgrove
Paul Regan
Laura Wiener
Steve Olanoff
Christine Stickney
Dennis Giombetti
Mary Pratt
John Westerling

MPO Staff/CTPS

Michael Callahan
Maureen Kelly
Hayes Morrison
Sean Pfalzer
Karl Quackenbush
Pam Wolfe

Other Attendees

Michelle Ciccolo
Mike Gowing
Brian Jenkins

Brian Kane
Robert McGaw
Thomas Mills

Joe Onorato
Franny Osman

Mary Anne Padien

Karen Pearson
Arnold Pinsley
Representative Tom
Sannicandro
John Stasik
Representative Chris Walsh
Sheri Warrington

Town of Hudson

Office of State Representative
Tom Sannicandro
MBTA Advisory Board
Town of Belmont
Office of State Representative
Lori Ehrlich
MassDOT District 4
Acton Transportation Advisory
Committee
Office of State Senator Karen
Spilka
MassDOT
Natick
State Representative

Town of Framingham
State Representative
Office of State Senator Thomas
McGee