

MPO Meeting Minutes

Memorandum for the Record

Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting

January 23, 2020 Meeting

10:00 AM–12:00 PM, State Transportation Building, Transportation Board Room, 10 Park Plaza, Boston

Steve Woelfel, Chair, representing Stephanie Pollack, Secretary, and Chief Executive Officer, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) agreed to the following:

- Approve the minutes of the meeting of December 19, 2019
- Release draft Amendment Two of the federal fiscal years (FFYs) 2020–24 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for a 21-day public review period

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance on pages 12 and 13.

2. Public Comments

Scott Englander (Town Meeting Member, Town of Brookline) commented on Item 9 of this agenda, “Route 9 Corridor Study in Brookline.” S. Englander thanked MPO staff for this analysis. S. Englander previously chaired the Committee for Design of Complete Streets for the Town of Brookline, serves on the Brookline Transportation Board, and participates in the taskforce to reenvision the Route 9/Boylston Street corridor between Washington Street and Cyprus Street. The taskforce envisions this corridor as a pedestrian friendly, safe, urban boulevard rather than a suburban highway dividing Brookline neighborhoods. This transformation would require changes to the built environment. S. Englander argued that designing streets to accommodate traffic creates traffic, and advocated for a corridor designed for people. He asked for follow up analysis on streetscape improvements that reduce illegal speeding, which is common in the area. The report recommends maintaining the median. S. Englander stated that the median encourages speeding and that space could be used to plant trees, expand sidewalks, and add protected bike lanes or parking. He advocated for removing the median, reducing lanes to 10 and a half feet, and reducing four lanes to three with a

center lane that changes direction to accommodate rush hour traffic. Three lanes could support less traffic and a calmer streetscape. S. Englander added that the report does not mention the Route 65 bus, which travels on Route 9 between Washington and Cyprus Streets.

3. Chair's Report—*Steve Woelfel, MassDOT*

There was none.

4. Committee Chairs' Reports

There were none.

5. Regional Transportation Advisory Council Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair, Regional Transportation Advisory Council*

There was none.

6. Executive Director's Report—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff*

T. Teich reminded members about two introductory "MPO 101" sessions for new board members being held on January 23, 2020, and January 31, 2020, and the first MPO pilot Transit Working Group meeting on January 30, 2020. T. Teich proposed moving the February 20, 2020, MPO meeting to February 27, 2020, to give staff adequate time to complete TIP evaluations. There were no objections to the meeting change. T. Teich also asked board members to save March 26, 2020, for a tentative third MPO meeting that month.

T. Teich thanked the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and Samantha Silverberg for increasingly transparent communication and collaboration regarding the MBTA's capital planning process. S. Silverberg and T. Teich discussed an approach to bringing MBTA capital planning updates to the MPO board throughout the process to provide the board more opportunity to ask questions.

T. Teich highlighted MPO staff's outreach activities. In addition to attending Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregional meetings throughout the fall, MPO staff collaborated with MAPC staff to host the first transportation-specific meeting for Inner Core Committee municipalities. T. Teich thanked MPO members who attended and stated that the meeting showed there is enthusiasm for coordination between transportation staff in the Inner Core. MPO staff will work with MAPC to coordinate future meetings.

T. Teich reminded MPO members to provide comments on the draft community shuttle definition shared with board members as part of the recent study, “Operating a Successful Community Shuttle” by January 29, 2020.

T. Teich thanked S. Englander for his comment and noted that, while MPO staff provide a conceptual design in corridor studies, there is and should be a public process on the part of municipalities to develop a design that works for the community.

T. Teich highlighted Item 10 on this agenda, and thanked Beth Osbourne from Transportation for America (T4America) for coming to speak to the board.

7. Approval of December 19, 2019, MPO Meeting Minutes—*Kate White, MPO Staff*

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of December 19, 2019, was made by MAPC (Eric Bourassa) and seconded by the North Suburban Planning Council (Town of Woburn) (Tina Cassidy). MassDOT Highway Division (John Romano) and North Shore Task Force (Town of Beverly) (Aaron Clausen) abstained. The motion carried.

8. FFYs 2020-24 TIP Amendment Two—*Matt Genova, MPO Staff* [Document posted to the Meeting Calendar](#)

M. Genova presented Amendment Two of the FFYs 2020–24 TIP. All of the projects included in Amendment Two are in the FFY 2020 transit portion of the TIP, and are being supported by non-Regional Target funding sources. Amendment Two documents the awarding of Federal Community Transit Grant Program funds and Mobility Assistance Program grants to organizations and public agencies that serve older adults and people with disabilities. Both programs are administered by MassDOT.

Vote

A motion to release draft Amendment Two of the FFYs 2020–24 TIP for a 21-day public comment period was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by the MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham) (Thatcher Kezer III). The motion carried.

9. FFY 2019 Addressing Safety, Mobility, and Access on Subregional Priority Roadways—*Chen-Yuan Wang, MPO Staff*

Kara Brewton (Economic Development Director, Town of Brookline) thanked the MPO and MassDOT Highway District 6 staff for the collaborative study process and detailed analysis. K. Brewton stated that Brookline looks forward to working with the MPO and MassDOT as they consider moving forward with implementation. The Town of Brookline has worked with MAPC on housing production, commercial development, and

revitalization plans that highlight Route 9/Boylston Street as a key corridor. Brookline has seen significant development east of the study area on Route 9. Brookline has two organized neighborhood committees that have expressed openness to change if the transformation of Boylston Street includes safer pedestrian and bike accommodations. The development of housing at the former Newbury College and intensified use of parcels on either side of Route 9 by Brookline Public Schools means much more frequent pedestrian crossings. K. Brewton noted that the Town of Brookline has learned from past projects that it is helpful to ascertain early where right-of-way takings may be feasible in order to implement new zoning and bike accommodations.

C. Wang presented the findings from the Route 9 Brookline study. This study is a recurring effort to address subregional transportation needs. MPO staff worked closely with the Town of Brookline, MassDOT District 6, and the MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning to host three study advisory meetings, review findings, and propose improvements. Route 9 is a major east-west highway and is the main alternative route to the Mass Pike (Interstate 90). The selected Route 9 section is about 2.8 miles in length from the Newton city line to Washington Street in Brookline. It is a four-lane divided Urban Principal Arterial under the jurisdiction of MassDOT Highway Division District 6. The study area is served by MBTA Green Line D branch and MBTA bus routes 60 and 51. The Route 65 bus is excluded as it turns on Washington Street before the study area.

Major issues include a significant number of pedestrian/bicycle crashes, a lack of safe bicycle accommodations, pedestrian crossing and safety concerns, transit access issues, recurrent traffic congestion at major intersections, and substandard on-street parking. The corridor generally has a right-of-way width of 100 feet or more. This provides opportunities for adding bicycle lanes and improvements for other modes. The study advisory committee agreed that separated bicycle accommodations should be considered along with a number of design strategies, such as improving sidewalks and transit access, and maintaining medians for the safety of pedestrians and motorists.

Based on the MassDOT Separated Bike Lane Planning and Design Guide, MPO staff explored three corridor reconfiguration alternatives. Among the three alternatives, Alternative 1 was chosen by the committee. Alternative 1 focuses on a sidewalk-level bike lane design. Alternative 1 would require removing all existing on-street parking except some essential loading zones. The Town of Brookline considers this feasible given that most commercial properties have back-street access or on-site parking. Additionally, parking on state highways is generally not allowed.

Under the preferred corridor improvement plan, staff developed a series of short- and long-term improvements. The proposed improvements have a number of benefits, including providing safe and comfortable accommodation for bicyclists, and providing opportunities to improve sidewalks and transit access. The roadway reconfigurations, such as reducing travel lane width and maintaining medians, would reduce traffic speeds in the corridor and enhance safety for all users. The proposed improvements at major intersections and pedestrian crossing locations would significantly improve safety and mobility of the transportation system. Together they would support economic activities and enhance livability for adjacent neighborhoods and the wider areas in the subregion.

The study provides a vision for the corridor's long-term development. The Town of Brookline and MassDOT District 6 both support the proposed corridor improvement plan. The short-term improvements could be implemented with Chapter 90 funds or other maintenance funds, if available. In the long term, depending on available funding sources, the corridor could be divided into two to three improvement projects. It would require significant resources and collaborative efforts from the Town of Brookline, MassDOT, and all stakeholders to achieve this vision.

Discussion

Tom Bent (Inner Core Committee) (City of Somerville) asked about local businesses reaction to the removal of parking. K. Brewton responded that the Town of Brookline has not started the official public process but the topic has been broached in the Chestnut Hill area. A concept discussed is to incentivize group area parking garages, shared by multiple parcels, and open to the general public. T. Bent reiterated the importance of working with local businesses early on in the planning process to prevent challenges in removing parking. K. Brewton also shared that it is important to look at ride-hail pickups and drop-offs in the corridor.

Daniel Amstutz (At-Large Town) (Town of Arlington) thanked C. Wang for the consideration given to separated bike lanes in the study. He stated that if vehicle speeds are generally 45–50 miles per hour (mph), this is not conducive to on-street bike lanes. D. Amstutz asked for more detail on the types, and number of pedestrian and bike crashes.

C. Wang responded that some sections of the corridor have average vehicle speeds of 40 mph, 35 mph, and 30 mph. The section near Reservoir Road and Hammond Street had cars moving at an average speed of 50 mph or more. Generally, all vehicles traveling the corridor are traveling 5 mph higher than the regulated speed. With the

reconfiguration of the corridor (as MPO staff propose), the entire corridor can be designed for 30 and 35 mph speeds, which is a much safer speed for all users.

David Koses (At-Large City) (City of Newton) asked if it is MassDOT or the Town of Brookline that decides to allow or not allow on-street parking in this corridor. Mark Abbott responded that while Route 9 is technically a state highway and state highways are not allowed to have on-street parking, this issue will have to be revisited because currently, there are confusing signs about parking on Route 9. There is some permitted two-hour parking in front of commercial areas that technically should not exist on a state highway.

D. Koses commented that even without support for removing on-street parking, many of these recommendations could move forward. C. Wang responded that there are an estimated 200 on-street parking spaces in the corridor that are generally unregulated. Staff recommend loading zones in the corridor for commercial and school districts, and reducing the two-hour parking to 15 minutes.

T. Teich commented that in corridor studies, staff are able to focus on overarching goals for the corridor. These goals include moving people, reducing congestion, and improving economic development. In addition to not being allowed on state highways, the issue of parking does not meet these goals, and it is not the best use of six feet of roadway.

L. Diggins asked if staff also looked at the time of day for crash rates. C. Wang responded that crashes mostly happened during the daytime. Overall, pedestrian and bike crashes were high in the analysis. L. Diggins added that work programs for corridor studies should include a provision for staff to revisit corridors once recommendations are implemented to assess whether recommendations addressed the corridor's needs.

Jim Fitzgerald (City of Boston) (Boston Planning and Development Agency) asked whether changes to infrastructure would change ridership on the Route 60 bus. C. Wang responded that the study provided improvements for bus stop access and amenities, which should encourage more ridership.

10. Considerations for Incorporating Cost-Effectiveness Analysis into the TIP Process—*Beth Osborne, T4America, and Matt Genova, MPO Staff*

[Presentation posted to the meeting calendar](#)

M. Genova introduced B. Osborne to discuss the various approaches to measuring cost-effectiveness in the TIP process. B. Osborne serves as the Director of T4America,

Smart Growth America's transportation arm. She leads transportation policy development and technical assistance with different transportation departments across the country. B. Osborne previously worked at the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), where she served as Acting Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Policy, beginning in 2009. At USDOT, B. Osborne managed the TIGER Discretionary Grant program, the Secretary's livability initiative, the development of the Obama administration's surface transportation authorization proposal, and the implementation of The Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act or MAP-21.

M. Genova stated that in the summer of 2016, staff members from MassDOT, MAPC, and the MPO attended a transportation leadership academy sponsored by T4America, where cost-effectiveness analysis was raised as a part of a larger conversation around performance-based planning. Following the academy, MPO and MAPC staff engaged T4America in a technical assistance partnership, leading to the production of a memorandum on cost-effectiveness practices. This memorandum was shared by E. Bourassa in September of 2018, and the board expressed interest in pursuing the subject further. MPO staff has since reengaged T4America in a second round of technical assistance related to revising the TIP criteria.

Cost-effectiveness analysis fits into the broader suite of considerations the board can take into account when making project selection decisions. Cost-effectiveness is defined as receiving a good value or benefit for the amount spent on transportation. The goal of cost-effectiveness is to use limited funds to meet stated goals for as much of the region as possible. B. Osborne presented several examples of how different state and regional agencies consider costs in project prioritization. She stated that this is a new field, there is no single best practice, and the MPO should consider what works best for the Boston region.

Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT)

In 2014, Virginia enacted legislation that required an evaluation of all projects that add capacity to the transportation system by six performance areas: congestion mitigation, safety, access to jobs, economic development, environmental protection, and coordination with land use. VDOT is currently in the third round of funding under this new process, and has changed the project prioritization process for every round. B. Osborne stated that the best performance management processes are constantly updated based on lessons learned.

VDOT divided the state into four area types: very large urban, medium-urban, small urban, and rural. While evaluating a project, the emphasis put on each of goal area is

dependent on the community type. VDOT quantifies each goal area, tallies a benefit score, and then divides it by cost. VDOT also gives proponents the opportunity to contribute funds to the project's design and construction, which reduces cost in relation to benefit. In partnership with the University of Wisconsin, T4America developed a way to quantify access to jobs for VDOT. This information can be made available to any transportation agency.

Previously, the VDOT decision-making process was seen as opaque and political. Modeling also biased selection toward major highway projects. When VDOT beta tested the projects, they found that while they were awarding points for projects not harming the environment, they were not showing if the projects supported or enhanced the environment. VDOT then proposed a new way to measure environmental impacts. This transparency enhanced public trust and expanded the number and the diversity of projects funded.

Only scoring for benefits favors large projects because the more you spend, the more benefit you should get. This often results in selecting larger and fewer projects. In FFY 2020, VDOT funded 134 projects in 87 localities. Under previous scoring, only 17 projects in 10 localities would have been funded, with less diversity in project types. The tradeoff is less of the larger projects and more small projects in communities throughout the state. VDOT also offers communities help in meeting identified project needs in smarter and more cost-effective ways, such as evaluating whether an identified need can be addressed through operational improvement or transportation demand management. Lower costs and added benefits improve a project's score.

In Virginia, a project that has been selected for funding must be rescored if there are significant changes to the scope or cost of the project. For scope changes, VDOT first does a qualitative assessment to determine whether benefits will be impacted. For cost increases, if an estimated increase does not exceed the VDOT thresholds, the state covers the cost without further assessment. If it does exceed the thresholds, and the applicant is not covering the increased cost with other funds, board action is required to approve the budget increase. If the project scope is reduced or modified, such that the revised score is less than the lowest-ranked funded project in the district for that cohort of projects, board action is required to approve the change. The board could choose to revoke funding. When first implementing this process, VDOT feared that this would happen frequently, but project proponents were more conservative in cost estimates and honest about risk in the cost estimates. Only two to three projects in three rounds of funding have lost funding because of increased costs.

Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL)

ATL recently developed a new approach to evaluate cost-effectiveness to help rank transit projects into tiers for inclusion in the Regional Transportation Plan. ATL chose to rank projects by type. Although ATL only has three categories, performance measures are based on outputs rather than outcomes. ATL puts cost-benefit scores into four tiers. Tier one projects are considered “High Impact/Low Cost,” tier two projects are considered “High Impact/High Cost” and “Low Impact/Low Cost,” and tier three projects are considered “Low Impact/High Cost.” Tier three projects are not included in the plan. Calculation of project-level cost-effectiveness is the total cost of the project (capital cost plus 20 years of operations and maintenance costs) divided by the total project score. Projects are then examined according to type, rank, and tier.

Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission’s (MTC) Plan Bay Area 2040 includes an evaluation and ranking based on benefit/cost ratio for each project and expected performance in meeting the region’s performance targets. Projects with a cost-effectiveness score less than 1.0 are “low performing,” and are not included in the plan. Because cost-effectiveness and target scores are not the only two considerations for inclusion in the plan, staff set up a process for upgrading low-performing projects to “medium performing” status based on more nuanced information. MTC established a compelling case process by which project proponents can make the case for “low performing” projects to be moved to “medium performing” based on specific identified shortcomings in the benefit/cost methodology or qualitative considerations related to federal or regional priorities. Proponents could also choose to rescope projects at a lower cost or update the benefit-cost information to demonstrate a ratio above 1.0 rather than go through the compelling case process. The introduction of this process removed billions of dollars of low performing projects and boosted the cost-effectiveness of the overall plan.

Mississippi Department of Transportation

The Mississippi Department of Transportation decided that giving each county four-lane highways provided economic development; however, the cost or cost overruns of these projects were not considered. Taking this approach resulted in degradation of roadways across the state, because of a backlog of maintenance costs that ballooned. The state was forced to cancel highway construction projects that had already been graded and had to undergo an environmental study and right-of-way purchasing. B. Osborne advocated for a process that determines what constitutes too great an increase.

B. Osborne stated that any cost-effectiveness process should be transparent, easy to understand, have results presented in a clear way, ensure criteria are closely connected

to the regional goals, help applicants with the process, and score once and fund fully. The process should be revised and updated each round based on lessons learned.

Discussion

Jay Monty (At-Large City) (City of Everett) asked how cost-effectiveness factors into geographic equality. B. Osborne responded that VDOT has a statewide pot of funding, and then funding for each region. Each region knows that they will get some projects funded, but what specific projects are funded are dependent on which projects score best. For the TIGER program, USDOT looked at scores first and then looked at what states might be missing from the universe of projects. USDOT then pulled up projects from the recommended list from those states. The USDOT Transit Administrator noted that transit expansion projects always scored well, but state of good repair projects did not, which did not align with USDOT's "fix it first" policy. Therefore, USDOT agreed to check projects that were highly recommended or recommended from the state of repair lists, and pull up those projects. B. Osborne stated that it is important to recognize the political forces that play a role in these processes and to find a productive way to incorporate them.

T. Kezer III asked how transformational projects would do in cost-effectiveness scoring. B. Osborne responded that the challenge is ensuring there is enough transformational benefit for the Boston region to justify the transformational cost, adding that it is important to focus on whether transformational projects produce desired outcomes. If a project is transforming an area but not aligning with or meeting goals, the project is not moving the transportation system forward. Testing scoring projects can help to see if the process produces desired outcomes.

S. Silverberg (MBTA) stated that she appreciated the incentive to rescope to reduce cost and increase benefits. If that analysis happens early, it is probably more likely to reduce scope creep. S. Silverberg asked if cost-effectiveness measures could include a more inclusive perspective on the lifecycle cost of a project. B. Osborne responded that right now, it does not. The federal level has focused on capital and not on operations costs. The lifecycle cost of maintenance and operations needs to be considered more but she did not think anyone had yet figured out how to bring it into a project selection process yet.

D. Amstutz asked whether the state and proponents always agree on the benefit scores. B. Osborne responded that it is important to incorporate public outreach and clear communication in determining and messaging benefit scoring. The Deputy Secretary of Transportation for VDOT did extensive outreach across the state. The scoring process needs to be transparent and not arbitrary or personal. When it appears

to proponents that the project is not being funded because it did not score well in the process, the project can be changed or the proponent can seek to change the process.

L. Diggins asked what would be the best way forward for the Boston Region MPO. B. Osborne responded using the example of the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA). The FTA looks at the operations and maintenance plans for projects when deciding to fund a project. It has its flaws but it is a clear process. Another way to start is to confirm if a project is meeting a certain benefit before quantifying it. This allows for checking if there are high and ongoing costs. It is important to note that VDOT does not generate any of the organization's own capacity projects. Projects must be brought in by an outside body. As a result, VDOT gets more latitude when handling projects because they are not comparing those to projects from VDOT.

[Note: At this time, Bryan Pounds (MassDOT) replaced S. Woelfel as Chair.]

Tom Kadzis (City of Boston) (Boston Transportation Department) asked at what point in the project development process is VDOT evaluating a project. The Boston Region MPO's challenge is that projects are assessed at 25 percent design and the costs are low but when the project is at 75 percent design, the costs could have increased by 40 percent. B. Osborne responded that VDOT agrees to fund projects in the early stages, and funds environmental and engineering costs. The proponent can ask for 100 percent of the funds or even just 50 percent of the funds. Therefore, proponents worry about cost escalations. The threat of projects potentially getting kicked out because of the numbers being wrong has resulted in much more accurate proposals. Proponents cushion the numbers more, which the current processes do not always reward.

11. Members Items

There were none.

12. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by MAPC (E. Bourassa) and seconded by At-Large City (City of Everett) (J. Monty). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
At-Large City (City of Everett)	Jay Monty
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
At-Large Town (Town of Lexington)	Sheila Page
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	Tom Kadzis
Federal Highway Administration	Brandon Wilcox
Federal Transit Administration	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Steve Woelfel
	John Romano
MassDOT Highway Division	John Bechard
	Samantha
	Silverberg
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	
Massachusetts Port Authority	
MBTA Advisory Board	Brian Kane
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Thatcher Kezer III
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	Austin Cyganiewicz
North Shore Task Force (City of Beverly)	Aaron Clausen
North Suburban Planning Council (City of Woburn)	Tina Cassidy
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South Shore Coalition (Town of Rockland)	
South West Advisory Planning Committee (Town of Medway)	
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke

Other Attendees Affiliation

Bryan Pounds	MassDOT
Ben Muller	MassDOT
Todd Kirrane	Town of Brookline
Steve Olanoff	TRIC
Frank Tramatozzi	City of Quincy, Mayor's Office
Carrie Lavalley	MassDOT Highway District 6
Scott Englander	Town of Brookline, Town Meeting Member
William Miller	Massachusetts Senate Office
Beth Osbourne	Transportation for America
Kara Brewton	Town of Brookline
Karen Dumaine	TransAction Associates

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Mark Abbott
Kim DeLauri
Annette Demchur
Róisín Foley
Matt Genova
Sandy Johnston
Anne McGahan
Michelle Scott
Chen-Yuan Wang
Kate White
