Memorandum for the Record
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
Pilot Transit Working Group Meeting

July 9, 2021, Meeting
10:00 AM–12:00 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, link:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JiLVbnkWNxA&t=5s

Meeting materials available at: https://www.bostonmpo.org/calendar/day/2021-07-09

Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

1. Welcome—*Tegin Teich, Executive Director, Central Transportation Planning Staff, and Michelle Scott, MPO staff*

T. Teich welcomed attendees to the fifth meeting of the Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Pilot Transit Working Group. She explained that CTPS supports the Boston Region MPO in realizing its vision for the region's transportation system. The MPO works with many partners in the region, such as the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), municipalities, regional transit authorities, and others. More information is available on the frequently asked questions page on the MPO website.

T. Teich explained that the goal of the Pilot Transit Working Group (TWG) is to support coordination between transit providers in the region and to build connection between people working in transit and the MPO. She gave a brief introduction of each item on the meeting agenda.

M. Scott reviewed the meeting guidelines and agenda, noting that MPO staff would prioritize questions and comments coming from transit providers and municipalities.

2. MPO Transit-Related Activities Update—*Paul Christner, Sandy Johnston, Michelle Scott, and Kate White, MPO staff*

Presentation

S. Johnston stated that the Boston Region MPO will vote to release for public comment the draft federal fiscal year (FFY) 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) on July 15, 2021.The UPWP is the document that defines how the MPO will spend its federal planning funds each year. This includes studies conducted by MPO staff, referred to as "discrete studies." Proposed discrete studies in the FFY 2022 UPWP include the following:

- A follow-up study to the Future of the Curb, which will study curb usage and its changing demand.
- A study addressing equity and access in the Blue Hills. MPO staff has been informed that while the Blue Hills Reservation is geographically proximate to some Boston neighborhoods, it remains inaccessible to individuals without cars, many of whom come from marginalized and vulnerable communities. This study will include intensive outreach and service planning to better facilitate transit in the area.

In addition to discrete studies, funds allocated through the UPWP allow MPO staff to provide technical support and analysis to stakeholders and partners. This includes Regional Transit Service Planning Technical Support and the Community Transportation Technical Assistance Program. The UPWP also lists on-contract work conducted by MPO staff to its partner agencies.

K. White provided an overview of the MPO's Public Engagement Plan (PEP). The PEP seeks to include all people across the Boston region in the regional transportation planning process. The PEP covers all outreach activities conducted by MPO staff, including both in-person and virtual engagements, as well as digital communications.

The PEP, which is currently being updated, will highlight the MPO's virtual public involvement strategies and outreach principles. The updated PEP will be paired with a public participation guidebook, which will consolidate avenues for engagement with the MPO. The updated PEP will have a 45-day public comment period.

P. Christner provided an update on Phase 2 of the Access to Central Business Districts study. This study will result in a guidebook to assist municipalities in reaching their COVID recovery goals, including transportation needs and interventions to support said goals. MPO staff are currently interviewing employees from 12 municipalities throughout the region to inform the guidebook.

3. Transit Working Group Chats Update—*Michelle Scott, MPO staff*
Presentation
M. Scott stated that the purpose of the TWG chats was to explore a complementary format to the quarterly TWG meetings. TWG members expressed interest in a format that would facilitate casual conversation and opportunities to easily share ideas. Based on this input, MPO staff hosted four one-hour sessions in May 2021 via Zoom, and invited previous TWG participants. The topics discussed were microtransit, medical and human services transportation, partnerships for ongoing transit recovery, and improving connections and closing gaps in the transit network

For each meeting, MPO staff developed a list of prompts to facilitate discussion. However, attendees were encouraged to raise any item related to the topic of the meeting. The number of attendees was limited to give all attendees opportunities to speak. MPO staff offered priority registration to transit providers, municipalities, and state agencies, depending on the topic, though registration was posted to the TWG meeting list.

There were 32 participants across the four events. Attendees included representatives from the MBTA; regional transit authorities; transportation management associations; local transportation advisory boards; regionally oriented advisory groups; and municipal staff and Select Board members. For most sessions, there were more registrants than MPO staff could accommodate, indicating an interest in the Group Chat format.

M. Scott shared summaries of the Group Chats. Takeaways and highlights included

- chats provided an opportunity to share experiences and offer advice;
- discussion surrounding the Greater Attleboro and Taunton Regional Transit Authority experiences with implementing microtransit and demand-responsive service in its area;
- discussion of challenges and needs, including funding and methods for coordinating schedules between agencies; and
- discussion of the PT-1 program, which supports transportation related to MassHealth. During this discussion, an advocate noted that people can contact their state legislators to help advance a new brokerage contract for this program.

Feedback surveys were given to participants, and the meetings received an average rating of 8.4 out of 10. The surveys indicated that participants appreciated the diversity of organizations represented at the meetings; the opportunity to speak with representatives of groups and regions they do not frequently speak with; the focused attendance; and the relative spontaneity of the discussions. The surveys also provided feedback on how to structure future meetings, including how to encourage participants to think about the discussion topics in advance of the sessions.

Beginning in Fall 2021, MPO staff plan to host additional virtual Group Chats. MPO staff will explore slightly larger group sizes and diversify the range of discussion topics. Potential topics include fare and schedule coordination, funding opportunities, and development of the upcoming Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

4. Transit Provider Items

Marah Holland (Metropolitan Area Planning Council [MAPC]) gave an overview of Get It Rolling, a workbook for bus improvements that was released in June. Get it Rolling is a

study of six recent bus improvement projects in Everett, Somerville, Arlington, Cambridge, Watertown, Boston, and Roslindale.

Based on the study of these projects, Get It Rolling provides suggested steps for how to implement bus improvements, such as red bus lanes and transit signal priority. M. Holland emphasized that the document is not prescriptive, as communities vary across the region. To this end, MAPC wrote the guidebook as generally as possible while providing steps for developing and implementing new bus infrastructure.

Get It Rolling consists of three sections: the workbook, case studies of the above study locations, and an executive summary of suggested steps for municipalities.

Wig Zamore asked if there is a venue for regional and/or state vision integrating land use, transportation, environment, and health. S. Johnston stated that MassDOT issued a request for proposals for a statewide LRTP. Although this contract has yet to be awarded, it will be an opportunity for individuals to help develop the vision of planning and land use.

5. Transit Regionalization and Consolidation—*Richard Farr, Executive Director, rabbittransit*

Presentation

R. Farr provided an overview of how central Pennsylvania has advanced regionalization.

Transit networks typically operate within municipal boundaries; however, transit riders operate outside of these boundaries. Regionalization provides improved service for consumers across these boundaries. In central Pennsylvania, regionalization has consisted of merging multiple transit systems into one. R. Farr framed this approach with the term "systemness," defined as "the state, quality, or condition of a complex system, that is, of a set of interconnected elements that behave as, or appear to be, a whole, exhibiting behavior distinct from the behavior of the parts."

Act 44, a major funding source, was passed in 2007 and required Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) to conduct a Human Services Transportation Coordination study. The study was conducted by PennDOT, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Aging, and the Department of Health. The study found that various transit services worked in silos, and that removing these silos would improve service. rabbittransit began working toward a more coordinated system, merging with the Adams County Transit System and becoming the coordinator for Northumberland County in 2011. Following this, rabbittransit began discussions with county coordinators

about improving service and merging with additional counties to create a 10-county system. In 2018, rabbittransit began managing Capital Area Transit (CAT). rabbittransit recently submitted articles of incorporation to the Secretary of State to form a new transit system within the 10 counties, named the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Authority.

R. Farr discussed the benefits of regionalization. As an example, he stated that a shared-ride vehicle with 10 passengers could have 10 different funding sources. An average shared-ride trip costs approximately $23 with an average trip length of approximately 23 miles, a relatively low cost. rabbittransit saved CAT approximately $100,000 per year by removing service on a route where rabbittransit also operates.

R. Farr stated that regionalization bolsters economic development, both in attracting large employers and in providing a reliable workforce. He noted the importance of reliable transportation in a competitive labor market. Regionalization also provides improved employment opportunities for individuals. rabbittransit has addressed transportation needs for work shifts at sheltered workshops, nontraditional and seasonal positions, as well as employment at large regional employers. rabbitCARES, a nonprofit branch of rabbittransit, has been successful in identifying nontraditional funding sources to connect veterans to employment opportunities and Veterans Affairs hospitals.

R. Farr described how regionalization improves transit operations. He noted that although CAT and rabbittransit will merge in October, staff is already in place at both agencies who are dedicated to their specialties for both systems. Although one person may be hired by CAT, they also oversee rabbittransit, thus eliminating duplication. This includes information technology, marketing, and expertise in microtransit and advocacy. He noted that no one has lost their job through these mergers, but rather CAT and rabbittransit have reallocated staff resources and hired people in more specialized areas. The merger with CAT will result in increased Title VI and environmental justice analyses, and rabbittransit has hired someone to ensure its compliance.

Shared resources have allowed for improved customer service. CAT and rabbittransit's call center operates 12 hours per day, while most smaller transit networks generally operate for eight hours. Shared technology has made its staff more efficient. An example of this is connecting caller ID to its paratransit scheduling software, allowing automated populating of client files. He noted that one purchase of new technology will be deployed across 11 counties, as opposed to making 11 purchases.

rabbittransit has dedicated staff that serves as a bridge among five partner MPOs and represents the agency in MPO meetings. They are attempting to update the Human

Service Transit Coordinated Plan to include all of these MPOs, thus all MPOs will work together.

For medical trips provided through the shared-ride program, the closest vehicle performs the pickup of the rider. After the drop-off, the vehicle then provides local service during the medical appointment and returns to the rider at the conclusion of their appointment. This provides cost savings and improves service.

Additional benefits of regionalization include improved connectivity to higher education and improved coordination for emergency management.

R. Farr provided an overview of the "good and bad" of regionalization. He stated that although county commissioners may want to regionalize, the management of that county's transit system may be hesitant. He described a situation in which a transit manager was resistant to ideas proposed by rabbittransit because of perceived differences in their systems. Ultimately, the manager was impressed with how well regionalization efforts had gone. R. Farr stated that, as a principle, he believes that transit systems are more alike than they are different.

The largest challenge faced through the process of regionalization is fear. This includes the fear of losing control, losing jobs, and losing service. He expressed that none of this has come to fruition through their regionalization efforts. After merging with Northumberland County, R. Farr recognized these human concerns and has made a concerted effort to reassure individuals of the agreements they have with counties to allay these fears.

An additional fear is that elected officials in larger counties would not understand a smaller region. Although York is a city of 45,000 people, this is perceived large to residents of rural communities with 400 residents. Assuaging these fears involves assuring residents that service will continue and the staff they are familiar with will continue to be employed. R. Farr noted that rabbittransit merged with the smallest county in Pennsylvania. Although transit may not be as robust as larger counties, shared resources allowed for extending service hours from six hours per day to 12 hours per day. rabbittransit has been successful in reducing operating costs at the local level and reinvesting those funds toward drivers.

R. Farr emphasized the importance of managing rumors and reassuring staff that jobs will remain after a merger. rabbittransit has developed checklists broken down by specific functions of a transit provider, which they go through with transit providers to facilitate conversation and document each step of a merger. He noted that rabbittransit has an "all boats rise" philosophy and wants to form sincere partnerships. rabbittransit is

not rigid about its operational practices. If it found that a transit provider had a practice that functioned better than rabbittransit's equivalent practice, it would adopt the transit provider's practice. He noted that some counties may have slight operational differences compared to other counties, and rabbittransit tries to allow counties to preserve these unique features.

R. Farr noted that soliciting public participation can be difficult. Generally, there is a core group of people who attend both CAT and rabbittransit meetings. The advisory councils for these systems were recently merged, and R. Farr expressed hope that this would provide more robust input from the public. He stated that in addition to communicating with employees, rabbittransit communicates processes to the public. Outreach efforts include Facebook messaging, seat drops, newsletters, direct mail campaigns, and partnerships with senior centers and health care systems.

R. Farr stated that rabbittransit places an importance on branding. Historically, branding for rabbittransit in rural counties was relatively easy, as most of its vehicles were unmarked white vans. However, the upcoming merger with CAT will likely make branding more difficult, as CAT has good brand recognition.

R. Farr stated that his largest concern in merging rabbittransit and CAT is governance. He wanted to ensure that all stakeholders were comfortable with the governance model, as stakeholders want to know who represents them and how much power they have. The metrics for determining governance were based on four factors: population, local match contribution, average monthly fixed-route miles, and average monthly ridership. He expressed that this was the largest hurdle in working with the five municipal partners of the merger.

R. Farr shared frequently asked questions from stakeholders. One question dealt with allocation and spending of funding. He stated that Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds must be spent in the urbanized area for fixtures. With regards to job assignment for drivers, R. Farr stated that the agency keeps them local to avoid relocation assistance and to be considerate about paid driver hours, which accounts for the largest share of expenses for a transit system. Shared ride operators will also work primarily in their assigned areas. A third question addressed the impact of regionalization on collective bargaining agreements (CBA). R. Farr clarified that Central Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and Capital Area Transit Authority will continue to exist and hire employees who are protected under the CBA.

Discussion

R. Farr responded to a question that asked how rabbittransit interacts with Centre County, PA. He stated that interactions have been limited to shared-ride trips connected at county lines.

Rachel Fichtenbaum (Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services [EOHHS]) requested clarification of the role of Pennsylvania counties in public transit, senior shared ride, and Medicaid transportation. She asked if all counties allow passengers using multiple funding streams to ride in the same vehicle. R. Farr stated that language placed in the Pennsylvania fiscal code requiring that non-emergency medical transportation must be brokered; advocacy efforts ultimately reversed this. He stated that 15 percent of operational costs must be covered by consumers. Thus, the cost for a shared ride increases as the number of riders decreases. As such, in most Pennsylvania counties, the shared-ride system is fully coordinated. PennDOT sets the fare structure based on anticipated ridership. Riders supported by different funding sources within one shared trip is a commonality. He emphasized that the shared pay structure allows for system-wide coordination.

A participant asked how customers responded as transit services were consolidated, and what was learned about keeping customers informed about changes to the system. R. Farr stated that local shared-ride services are personal in that individual drivers frequently operate on the same route; as such, many riders expressed concern that they would lose service and "their" driver. rabbittransit employed a mix of direct mail, robocalls, and online information to communicate that service would persist, and engaged community case workers to assist them in understanding the change.

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) asked which transit services were operated prior to merging, and how transit is governed at the county level in Pennsylvania. R. Farr stated that the shared-ride program is generally county based, and for many years was limited to taxi services. Fixed-route services could be based on borough, city, county, or multiple counties. He added that he attempts to bring transit to the county level.

S. Barrett stated that the school bus system in Massachusetts may take away potential youth riders. She asked if R. Farr has had conversations on this topic. R. Farr noted that public transit agencies are prohibited from providing school bus service but can provide connecting bus services. Students in the cities of York and Harrisburg ride public transit to school. rabbittransit provided a rural fixed-route program which, in part, gave access to connections for students in the Hanover borough of York County; the school ultimately elected to adopt a school bus system, removing students from the transit

system and destabilizing the program. He suggested building relationships with schools to maintain public ridership.

A participant asked about the role of state and federal agencies in the regionalization and consolidation process. R. Farr stated that, to date, no federal direct recipient has been merged. However, dialogue has been initiated regarding the merger of CAT and rabbittransit. This will require PennDOT to redesignate the federal funding recipient, which is not anticipated to be difficult. PennDOT provides significantly more funding to rabbittransit than the FTA. Investments in rabbittransit include technical assistance grants, legal costs, and purchasing of new technology.

6. Preview of Interactive Bus Delay Application—*Emily Domanico, MPO staff*

Presentation

E. Domanico stated that CTPS is developing an interactive application to analyze bus delay for the MBTA. Eventually available to the public, the app will allow users to analyze and visualize delay across different time periods and across the entire MBTA bus network.

In 2016, CTPS produced a study of bus delay limited to parts of the network that had 1,500 or more daily passengers. Data inputs were automatic passenger counters (APC) for passenger loads and INRIX road speeds for select times of the year. The primary goal of the current project is to update this study with more recent data.

Since 2016, the MBTA has expanded APC coverage to nearly all of the bus network, which allowed for the use of APCs for both passenger loads and bus speeds. This also provided data on delay for the bus network and to analyze bus speeds for a specific schedule rating, or a season's schedule. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the data used in the project is weekday bus delay from the Fall 2019 rating. The application was developed to allow for future data updates with minimal work.

The application provides several ways to view delay: throughout the network; by bus route; by municipality; and by high-delay corridor.

E. Domanico stated that the project is nearing the end of its development phase. She posed two discussion questions to the audience on future application of bus delay data and outstanding features of the 2016 bus delay study.

Discussion

M. Scott asked if this project supports ongoing bus network redesign efforts. E. Domanico stated that the project looks at historic delays. Changes to the bus network

would result in different delay patterns, which would take some time to analyze with APCs. As such, while the project does not directly support the bus network redesign, it will hopefully provide useful information regarding the movements of buses through the system.

Wes Edwards (MBTA) stated that the 2016 CTPS study helped kickstart the implementation of bus priority projects throughout the region, adding that the study created momentum for addressing critical bus delay areas. Within the past three years, 15 miles of bus priority lanes have been installed, more than twice the amount installed in the past 20 years. A challenge for the MBTA is that it operates in 50 municipalities in the Commonwealth. The MBTA desired a user-friendly application that allows municipalities to easily understand bus delay when considering potential transportation projects. W. Edwards highlighted the importance of distributing the application to its municipal partners, as well as MassDOT and the Department of Conservation and Recreation. The application will assist in identifying areas of focus for the bus network redesign.

S. Barrett asked if outreach will be conducted to municipalities with significant bus delay. E. Domanico stated that the tool will be shared with municipal planners, and there is discussion regarding hosting seminars on how to use the tool.

Amitai Lipton (MassDOT) asked if the tool can separate delays caused by roadway construction from congestion. E. Domanico stated that construction is not specifically noted, although it would be an interesting addition.

Lisa Weber (EOHHS) asked if the tool accounts for dropped trips and bus rerouting because of outages in rail service. She noted that riders think of delay in terms of how late their bus is. E. Domanico stated that delay is scaled by passenger hours per mile. The amount of time a bus is delayed compared to when it operates the fastest is multiplied by the number of people on the bus. As such, the tool displays delay differently than "this bus is X minutes late." W. Edwards noted that dropped trips are not included in the database. The purpose of the tool is to assist in improving bus service, while dropped trips are a result of internal MBTA functions. The MBTA is working to modernize how dropped trips are tracked to better manage the system. The MBTA is also building driver capacity to better provide service when buses are rerouted or drivers are sick.

7. Public Comments

S. Barrett stated that the Town of Lexington received a grant through MassDOT's Community Transit Grant Program to work on a mobility management project. An

aspect of this is an ongoing regionalization action plan. The Town's next step is for consultants to attend the upcoming Regional Coordinating Council meeting.

8. Closing and Next Steps

M. Scott stated that participants will receive a post-meeting email and feedback survey. M. Scott pointed to MPO's YouTube channel for the record of the meeting and provided the schedule for the next TWG events.

Attendance

Attendee	Affiliation
Jonathan Ahn	AECOM
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Michaela Boneva	MassDOT
Brady Caldwell	Town of Burlington
Donlyn Cannella	Springwell
Sue Clark	The Jenks Center
Martha Collins	Wellesley Climate Action Committee, Mobility Committee
Stephanie Cronin	Middlesex 3 Coalition
Lenard Diggins	Regional Transportation Advisory Committee
Wes Edwards	MBTA
Geordie Enoch	Office of Massachusetts Representative Joan Meschino
Richard Farr	rabbittransit
Rachel Fichtenbaum	EOHHS
Kelly Forrester	Brockton Area Transit
Maria Foster	Brookline Senior Center
AnaCristina Fragoso	Boston Society of Civil Engineers Section
Michael Garrity	MassDOT
Gail Gilliland	Natick resident
Marah Holland	MAPC
Timothy Horan	MBTA
George Kahale	Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
Todd Kirrane	Town of Brookline
Alexandra Kleyman	City of Somerville
Joshua Klingenstein	MBTA
Amitai Lipton	MassDOT
Constance Mellis	Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
Scott Mullen	A Better City
Benjamin Muller	MassDOT
Steve Olanoff	Three Rivers Interlocal Council
Marc Older	US Info
Aileen O'Rourke	North Shore Transportation Management Association
Franny Osman	Town of Acton
Cayla Paulding	Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection
Gina Provost	128 Business Council
Paul Ruggeri	StreetLight Data

Attendee	Affiliation
Clay Schofield	Cape Cod resident
Jon Seward	Move Mass
Allison Simmons	NorthEase Consulting Group
Gregory Sobczynski	MassDOT
John Stout	Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group
Lisa Weber	EOHHS
Vanessa White	MBTA
Laura Wiener	Town of Watertown
Darlene Wynne	Town of Beverly
Wig Zamore	Somerville resident

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