



BOSTON REGION METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

Jamey Tesler, Acting MassDOT Secretary and CEO and MPO Chair
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WORK PROGRAM

ACCESS TO CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICTS, PHASE 2

APPROVAL DATE—FEBRUARY 18, 2021

Proposed Motion

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) votes to approve this work program.

Project Identification

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Classification

Boston Region MPO Planning Studies and Technical Analyses

Project Number 14370

Client

Boston Region MPO

Project Supervisors

Principal: Annette Demchur

Manager: Paul Christner

Funding Source

MPO Planning and MPO §5303 Contract #112310

Schedule and Budget

Schedule: Eight months after work commences

Budget: \$75,000

Schedule and budget details are shown in Exhibits 1 and 2, respectively.

Relationship to MPO Goals

The Boston Region MPO elected to fund this study with its federally allocated metropolitan planning funds during federal fiscal year (FFY) 2021. The work completed through this study will address the following goal area(s) established in the MPO's Long-Range Transportation Plan: safety, capacity management and mobility, clean air and clean communities, transportation equity, economic vitality.

Background

Since March of 2020, the Boston region has experienced rapid, unprecedented changes in work and travel patterns, consumer behavior, business continuity, and public health restrictions in response to the immediate health risks imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent need for social distancing. These changes resulted in a dramatic rise of people teleworking and home deliveries, and precipitous declines in transit, transportation network company (TNC) ridership, and commuting by all modes. (Tirachini and Cats 2020; Uber 2020). Many people who used transit shifted to more individual modes of transportation, such as walking, cycling, and private automobiles (Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir 2020). Many trips people made using TNCs may have simply disappeared rather than shifting to other modes, as most people using TNCs tend to ride infrequently and use the service to access leisure activities (Grahn et al. 2020).

State and municipal officials across the nation and the Boston region rapidly devised numerous small, low-cost, quick interventions to respond to the unfolding public health and economic crisis. Between March and August, the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) recorded 353 pandemic-related transportation projects, policies, and initiatives across the United States (NACTO 2020). Locally, Massachusetts implemented the Shared Streets & Spaces Program that distributed \$10.2 million to fund 124 projects in 103 municipalities across the Commonwealth (MassDOT 2020b). The program funded a variety of transportation projects to support public health, revive commerce, and create safe connections to essential destinations and workplaces (MassDOT 2020a). Projects included new outdoor dining spaces, parklets, pedestrian infrastructure enhancements, protected bike lanes, dedicated bus lanes, and traffic calming measures. Massachusetts subsequently renewed the program in late 2020 as *Winter Shared Streets & Spaces* with an additional \$10 million, and expanded support for recreation, transit connections, and making temporary projects permanent.

As the COVID-19 pandemic concludes, central business districts (CBDs) will emerge with a new set of post-pandemic challenges. In *Transportation Access Studies of Central Business Districts*, MPO staff defined CBD as the area within a municipality that had the highest overall density, based on population density, employment density, street network density, and density of civic land uses. A survey of US firms indicates that CBDs intend to increase the telecommuting workforce relative to pre-pandemic levels (The Conference Board 2020). A survey in the UK found that 94 percent of people who began cycling during the pandemic intend to continue after public health restrictions end (Zintl 2020). The sudden rise in online grocery shopping may also endure as 81 percent of respondents in a national survey expect to continue ordering groceries online after the pandemic (Stecyk 2020). When asked to predict post-pandemic travel patterns, a survey of Boston commuters revealed a potential shift away from riding transit toward driving, walking, cycling, and telecommuting (A Better City

2020). According to the survey, the share of Boston commuters who use transit may decline from 63 percent to 36 percent while those who drive may increase from 23 percent to 38 percent. At the same time, the share of people choosing active transportation is expected to increase from nine percent to 14 percent and teleworking from 0.2 percent to five percent.

While the pandemic and the immediate health risks of the virus may gradually subside with the introduction of a vaccine, the demand for rapid and creative solutions to changing travel patterns and transportation needs will not. Cities will need to continue adapting to evolving travel patterns well after health risks dissipate. Hynes et al. (2020) argues policymakers should begin post-COVID-19 planning as soon as possible, and learn from the failures during the pandemic to create more resilient and adaptable socioeconomic systems.

While planning for recovery the Boston region can aim to *bounce forward* instead of *bouncing back* from the crisis and seek economic and mobility improvement rather than simply pursuing a pre-pandemic status quo. In this manner, the COVID-19 crisis is more than merely an obstacle to overcome. It is a forced opportunity to learn how to enhance and strengthen the region's CBDs. The region can aim for transportation projects that support the MPO's goals of safety, capacity management and mobility, clean air and clean communities, transportation equity, and economic vitality.

This project will focus on developing a guidebook to help municipalities with post-COVID-19 transportation planning. Staff will identify transportation options and strategies to support CBD recovery consistent with the MPO's goals in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective(s)

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Review academic literature, reports, and news articles to anticipate potential conditions and transportation needs of post-pandemic CBDs.
2. Evaluate COVID-19 impacts, recovery expectations, and transportation recommendations of local CBDs by interviewing and surveying local municipal officials, businesses, and community organizations.
3. Develop a guidebook to assist municipalities in planning for post-pandemic transportation needs consistent with the MPO's goals and recovery goals in the CBDs.

Work Description

This project will be divided into four tasks described in more detail below.

Task 1 Perform Background Research on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Scenarios

Staff will review and synthesize research, reports, and ideas from broad sources and local interviews.

Subtask 1.1 Literature Review

Staff will carry out a targeted literature review focusing on COVID-19-related changes in access to CBDs. Staff will review how institutions, governments, and academics conceptualize post-pandemic trends that can impact transportation access to CBDs. Staff will also review interventions in CBDs during the crisis, best practices, and strategies to keep or expand desirable changes post-COVID-19.

Subtask 1.2 Boston Area Interviews

Staff will interview stakeholders to understand how local officials, businesses, community organizations, and agencies conceptualize post-pandemic transportation trends and goals. Stakeholders to be interviewed will include representatives from municipal planning departments, Chambers of Commerce, community organizations focused on mobility and economic development, and the local business community.

For the interviews, staff will select at least two municipalities on which to focus from each of the six CBD categories defined in *Transportation Access Studies of Central Business Districts*. This will result in a minimum of 12 focus municipalities. As part of the group of 12 selected municipalities, staff will include some communities that have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and some that have experimented with new uses of public space. MPO staff will also reach out to MPO board members for recommendations about focus municipalities and whom to interview within the focus municipalities.

Based on the themes identified in Subtask 1.1, staff will develop interview questions that may vary, depending upon the characteristics of the interviewee and CBD type. During interviews, staff will ask interviewees about the impact of the pandemic on their CBDs and recent pandemic-induced transportation changes in their CBDs, such as using on-street and lot parking for outdoor dining, reserved pick-up/drop-off zones, free parking, dedicated bus lanes, slow streets, and additional pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Staff will document the implementation processes and successes of these transportation strategies and whether municipalities wish to keep or expand them post-pandemic. Finally, staff will discuss short-term and long-term recovery goals with each interviewee, and how these goals relate to MPO goals.

Products of Task 1

Summary of themes, annotated bibliography, and interview findings

Task 2 Create Memorandum on COVID-19 Recovery Scenarios and Transportation Needs

Based on the findings of the research in Task 1, staff will create a brief memorandum defining possible recovery scenarios and associated transportation needs. For transit elements within recovery scenarios, public service plans from the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and regional transit authorities will be examined to determine how the service plans may support various CBD recovery scenarios. MPO staff will consult Metropolitan Area Planning Council economic development planners to assist in scenario development. Staff will then discuss the findings of Task 1 and the identified potential recovery scenarios with the MPO board to determine how to proceed with Task 2. Possible frameworks for Task 2 include providing recommendations by recovery timeframe, by CBD type, and by individual CBD goals. Staff will solicit input from the board on priorities to focus on for the most useful outcome while staying within the allocated budget.

Table 1 presents a framework to guide the scenario development process. The table is based on the COVID-19 transit recovery research by Shaheen and Wong (2020). Staff will refine the framework throughout the literature review and interview process, and will determine priorities for using this framework within the available budget.

**Table 1
Framework for Developing Transportation Interventions**

Central Business District Type from Phase 1 Study: 1-6				
Intervention Timeframe	Vision	Recovery Scenario 1	Recovery Scenario 2	Recovery Scenario 3
Immediate	Ambitious	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions
	Status quo	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions
Short term	Ambitious	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions
	Status quo	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions
Long term	Ambitious	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions
	Status quo	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions	Transportation interventions

Transportation recovery scenario types that may be developed as part of this task are as follows:

1. Telecommuting falls and traffic congestion rises to pre-pandemic levels, prompting the rapid return of transit demand.
 - a. Possible transportation interventions: bus lanes, Transit Signal Priority, improved bicycle and pedestrian connections to commuter rail stations
2. Telecommuting remains high, transit ridership recovers slowly, and there is a rise in local automobile traffic, along with more walking and cycling.
 - b. Possible transportation interventions: curb management strategies, improved bicycle and pedestrian connections between the CBD and nearby neighborhoods, more outdoor dining

Products of Task 2

Brief memorandum describing the recovery scenarios that will serve as the baseline for the guidebook; discussion of the recovery scenario framework with the MPO board

Task 3 Create COVID-19 Transportation Recovery Guidebook

MPO staff will create a guidebook for municipalities to assess transportation needs for CBDs based on the recovery scenarios developed in Task 2. The guidebook will describe transportation solutions and interventions (consistent with the MPO's goals) to support each recovery scenario. Solutions will be tailored to the recovery goals and expectations identified in the interviews conducted in Task 1. The guidebook will discuss implementation strategies, funding opportunities, such as available grants, and possible timelines for implementation.

Products of Task 3

Transportation planning guidebook for COVID-19 recovery scenarios

Task 4 Present Findings to the Boston Region MPO

Staff will present the findings of the study and the guidebook to the Boston Region MPO board.

Products of Task 4

Presentation of the guidebook to the MPO board

REFERENCES

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The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) operates its programs, services, and activities in compliance with federal nondiscrimination laws including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, and related statutes and regulations. Title VI prohibits discrimination in federally assisted programs and requires that no person in the United States of America shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin (including limited English proficiency), be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives federal assistance. Related federal nondiscrimination laws administered by the Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, or both, prohibit discrimination on the basis of age, sex, and disability. The Boston Region MPO considers these protected populations in its Title VI Programs, consistent with federal interpretation and administration. In addition, the Boston Region MPO provides meaningful access to its programs, services, and activities to individuals with limited English proficiency, in compliance with U.S. Department of Transportation policy and guidance on federal Executive Order 13166.

The Boston Region MPO also complies with the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law, M.G.L. c 272 sections 92a, 98, 98a, which prohibits making any distinction, discrimination, or restriction in admission to, or treatment in a place of public accommodation based on race, color, religious creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, or ancestry. Likewise, the Boston Region MPO complies with the Governor's Executive Order 526, section 4, which requires that all programs, activities, and services provided, performed, licensed, chartered, funded, regulated, or contracted for by the state shall be conducted without unlawful discrimination based on race, color, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, disability, veteran's status (including Vietnam-era veterans), or background.

A complaint form and additional information can be obtained by contacting the MPO or at http://www.bostonmpo.org/mpo_non_discrimination. To request this information in a different language or in an accessible format, please contact

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Exhibit 1
ESTIMATED SCHEDULE
Access to Commercial Business Districts, Phase 2

Task	Month							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Perform Background Research on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Scenarios	█							
2. Create Memorandum on COVID-19 Recovery Scenarios and Transportation Needs					█ A			
3. Create COVID-19 Transportation Recovery Guidebook						█ B		
4. Present Findings to the Boston Region MPO								█ C

Products/Milestones

- A: Short memorandum describing the recovery scenarios that will serve as the baseline for the guidebook. Presentation to MPO board.
- B: Guidebook for Covid-19 Recovery Scenarios
- C: Presentation of the Guidebook to the MPO board

Exhibit 2
ESTIMATED COST
Access to Commercial Business Districts, Phase 2

Direct Salary and Overhead	\$75,000
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Task	Person-Weeks			Direct Salary	Overhead (106%)	Total Cost
	M-1	P-2	Total			
1. Perform Background Research on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Scenarios	1.0	5.0	6.0	\$8,067	\$8,551	\$16,619
2. Create Memorandum on COVID-19 Recovery Scenarios and Transportation Needs	1.0	2.3	3.3	\$4,878	\$5,170	\$10,048
3. Create COVID-19 Transportation Recovery Guidebook	3.6	12.0	15.6	\$20,788	\$22,036	\$42,824
4. Present Findings to the Boston Region MPO	0.6	1.0	1.6	\$2,674	\$2,834	\$5,509
Total	6.2	20.3	26.5	\$36,408	\$38,592	\$75,000

Other Direct Costs	\$0
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TOTAL COST	\$75,000
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Funding

MPO Planning and §5303 Contract #112310