



Draft Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

May 11, 2022, Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM–4:15 PM, Zoom

Lenard Diggins, Chair, representing the MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

Lenard Diggins called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. For the attendance list, see page 10.

2. Draft Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Universe of Proposed Studies—*Srilekha Murthy, UPWP Manager, MPO Staff*

Srilekha Murthy, Unified Planning Work Program Manager, took questions on the Draft FFY 2023 UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies.

Discussion

Franny Osman, Town of Acton, asked S. Murthy to give an overview of the Unified Planning Work Program and talk about what kind of studies are done and what is interesting on the Universe of Proposed Studies this year.

S. Murthy stated that the UPWP is a federally required document that maps out budgets, discrete planning studies, and recurring programs that are federally funded through two different federal funding programs. S. Murthy stated that in the UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies, there is only one study under the roadway and multimodal mobility category because the MPO staff will be rolling out new studies and a Complete Streets program this year. These studies will provide annual recurring support for roadway and multimodal mobility projects. One interesting project is T-3, Opportunities for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in the Boston Region, which proposes to assess mobility options at affordable housing developments.

Lenard Diggins asked how much funding there would be for the T-3 project. S. Murthy answered that the budget conversations are still ongoing, and there is no final number for the

FFYs 2023 UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies. The current draft of the FFYs 2023 UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies includes an estimated budget, which is subject to change.

L. Diggins stated that he liked the T-3 project and suggested that the project could be more forward looking to help give towns a sense on how to develop their housing, especially housing that is affordable and senior housing close to transit. L. Diggins further stated that the results of the study may be obvious, but it would help to have this information reiterated by a more current study that drives home the point strongly.

Andy Reker, City of Cambridge, asked for insight into how the new state law that requires zoning capacity for multifamily housing near MBTA stations would affect the T-3 project and what the new law and the project may imply for cities in the region.

S. Murthy answered that the new state law guidelines fit in well within the T-3 project. The new law adds an additional layer of consideration for municipalities when examining where to construct new affordable housing and where affordable housing is currently located.

S. Murthy further stated that if there is an opportunity to integrate the MBTA guidelines within the UPWP studies, that would be considered.

John McQueen, WalkBoston, commented about the Future of the Curb study and stated that he no longer saw it represented on the FFYs 2023 UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies.

J. McQueen stated he was interested by project A-1, Shared-Use Path Guidebook, and encouraged MPO staff to segment the multi-use paths by their design, specifically in rail trail environments. J. McQueen further stated that in project A-3, Update Bicycle/Pedestrian Count Database, it would be important to go beyond locations such as the Minuteman Trail and focus on the newer trails such as the Peabody Trail or the Bruce Freeman Trail.

S. Murthy responded to J. McQueen's comments by stating that, for the A-1 project, segmenting multiuse paths by design would be an important point to consider. Seeing if there are different methods that could be used for different paths can be discussed during the scoping process. For the A-3 project, the goal is to expand past the urban core area and look toward more suburban trails, as well as collect data at different times of the day to ensure an accurate count of trails.

J. McQueen followed up by stating that one of the important reasons for adding trails in suburban areas is to help give commuters greater connectivity to the urban core. In terms of project A-1, one of the primary reasons for looking at segments by design is the issue of safety. There are certain designs that have confined spaces and that might not be able to handle bicycle speeds or volumes in ways other roadways can. J. McQueen gave an example of the Segway revolution, which occurred 10 years ago, and a study during that time by the City of Boston that had determined that Segways should not be on the sidewalks, given their speed and bulk.

L. Diggins stated that project A-1 is only for bike lanes as opposed to bike paths and rail trails, which means this project is relevant to bikes, buses, and cars. L. Diggins stated that he did not find J. McQueen's comments relevant for the project. In terms of the T-3 project, L. Diggins asked whether staff have an idea of cost on an ongoing basis.

Jonathan Church, MPO Staff, said that the cost was still being worked out.

Jennifer Rowe, City of Boston, asked about the February RTAC meeting and commented that there were certain items that were not included in the draft UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies. J. Rowe asked if there was a place to view all the items that were submitted to the draft UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies originally and to understand the factors that go into a project being included or not included. J. Rowe had another question about efforts to visualize the transportation funding that is entering the region and where it is coming from, where the federal funding match comes from, and any local sources of funding that are being used. J. Rowe further stated that it would be important to include who had decision-making authority and what type of decision-making authority they had over the funding.

S. Murthy explained that, as a relatively new employee, she did not know the history regarding the ideas that had been considered versus those that made it into that UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies. S. Murthy added that the idea of visualizing funding may be an eligible activity that could be funded through the UPWP. Projects chosen for the Universe reflected staff capacity as well as understanding of what the UPWP Committee would prefer to see.

J. Church added that the idea has come up before and that he would go back and look at the original list and find where things stand. He further stated that factors such as the scope of the funding and how big the project is would be evaluated as part of the process, as well as how things might be affected by the new Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

L. Diggins asked about the getting more insight into the scoring process of the UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies.

Franny Osman, Town of Acton, asked about the T-1, Flexibly Fixed Route Bus Service project. F. Osman had several questions: Which RTAs would be involved? What is the anticipated outcome of regional transit authority (RTA) service routes? Will there be additions to the map? And, will there be a report to review operations and progress?

S. Murthy answered that, because the MPO staff is in the early process, the project has not been fully scoped. At this stage, S. Murthy was unsure what RTAs would be studied and noted the T-1 project may not make the final FFYs 2023 UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies and may go into the next year's UPWP Universe of Proposed Studies. The T-1, Flexibly Fixed Route Bus Service, project plans to map what service currently exists and where current transit stops are.

A. Reker asked if the UPWP would expect more funding coming from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and if the funding will be split the same way, and he asked if there will be discussion about how those funds would be distributed.

J. Church responded that there would be more funding coming to the UPWP and that the way the money will be split up has not been determined. This topic will be brought up in the UPWP Committee in the future for further discussion. The bottom line is that there will be more funding this year for the UPWP.

A. Reker asked if there are considerations that could help cities understand about how the decisions will be made and what factors are at play that will influence the split.

J. Church answered that this is the first time in his twenty-year career that he has seen an increase in funding. J. Church stated that now is a new and exciting time to figure out how the funding is going to fit and work, so coming back and discussing funding again will be important.

L. Diggins asked who currently determines the split between the discrete and non-discrete studies.

J. Church answered that the MPO board determines the split by the way it chooses to prioritize programs.

J. McQueen spoke about the A-1 project and stated that he believed it was mistitled and the content is not reflective of the title. J. McQueen stated that a shared-use path is not close to a bicycle or bus lane, and he further stated that a shared-use path has always been defined as a path that does not deal with motor vehicle conflicts. Project A-1 seems to be skewed towards improvement of bicycle infrastructure, although a shared-use path is typically a path equally shared between bicycles and pedestrian uses. J. McQueen stated that he believed project A-1 would reflect two separate studies, with the shared-use path being one study and a separate study dealing with the impacts of a Complete Streets situation. J. McQueen stated that project A-1 either needs to be split up or refocused.

L. Diggins stated that changing the focus of project A-1 from paths to lanes might work to resolve the terminology. L. Diggins stated that terms can change, so it's important to be careful with word choice and to apply it appropriately to the context.

F. Osman asked if project A-1 would be conducted in conjunction with the Massachusetts Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board or the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).
F. Osman asked who was going to run the study.

S. Murthy responded that the study would be undertaken by the Central Transportation Planning Staff, but if similar work were being done by the MAPC or other agencies there

would be opportunity to ensure that the study does not overlap with work that has been done or that has been planned.

A. Reker stated that project A-1 looks like two separate ideas. There is a lot of guidance for urban municipalities in the NACTO Urban Bikeway Design Guide as well as in the Transit Guide. Additionally, there is a fair amount of Federal Highway Administration material on the project. The second piece is the least helpful in terms of municipal guidance, but there could be some value in talking about shared-use paths. A. Reker stated that J. McQueen brought up a good point about the trade-offs that have happened in the past that might not be great now. The shared-use or multiuse paths may have been designed narrower than we would have designed today. There are also different types of bikes available now with different qualities in terms of how people travel on them. A. Reker encouraged the focus to be on the shared-use path instead of shared bike lanes and on helping municipalities understand how to design a new path or redo an existing path.

J. McQueen stated that he has seen anecdotally that e-bikes have been used on sidewalks by underage riders and others. The e-bikes are not only the ones that provide pedal-assist power, but also the type that give power when the rider is not pedaling. Study should be given as to where conflicts must be prevented and where there is an appropriate use for some of these motor vehicles. Shared paths need a lot of attention and study.

L. Diggins stated that it might be good to study dedicated bike lanes because if people felt safer on the streets, they may be more likely to use a lane instead of a sidewalk. L. Diggins suggested the study could be split into two studies: one to focus on bike paths and one to focus on bike lanes and how to make them safer. L. Diggins reiterated that he would like to see how these projects are scored. Regarding the economic value column, he noted that a lot of bike project scores are on the low side and there could be a lot more economic value from those projects. L. Diggins requested the UPWP Draft Universe of Studies in a PDF and Excel format. L. Diggins will ask the Advisory Council members to rank the projects to give more feedback.

J. Rowe voiced her support for the TE-3 study, Assessing Mobility Options at Affordable Housing Developments. J. Rowe had previously worked on bike studies in affordable housing developments 10 years ago and it was an eye-opening experience for her. J. Rowe stated that there is a lot of potential benefit in the City of Boston to help people become more connected.

Regarding the TE-1 study, Analyzing the Environmental Justice Impacts of Congestion Pricing, J. Rowe stated that it was exciting to see the project, as it has been suggested for many years. J. Rowe suggested looking into the framing, as congestion pricing may have a negative impact on environmental justice communities. The project description could be written more neutrally about how to understand the benefits and drawbacks of congestion

pricing. J. Rowe also expressed her support for the TE-4 study, Chelsea Freight Electrification Survey, since it could have an implementable outcome.

L. Diggins expressed support for the framing and concept of the TE-1 study, Analyzing the Environmental Justice Impacts of Congestion Pricing.

3. 3C Documents Committee—Andrew Reker, City of Cambridge, Discussion of the 3C Document Committee’s Meeting on the Draft FFYs 2023–27 Transportation Improvement Program

A. Reker led a discussion of the 3C Document Committee’s meeting on the draft FFYs 2023–27 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The 3C Documents Committee reviewed the TIP and noted the following. First, there is a surplus of additional funding coming from the federal government, and it is reflected in how projects are funded. The 3C Documents Committee offered its appreciation for funds that are being applied to the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) goals and noted that funds are not being doubled down on major infrastructure projects. The committee referenced the LRTP goals found in the Executive Summary, Chart ES-2. The Committee noted that there is a strong focus on Complete Streets, transit modernization, and bicycle/pedestrian projects.

One concern was the lack of transparency in how the MassDOT and MPO projects were prioritized. There was a conversation about how these projects were ranked, including those in the top 25 or 50 project lists. The Advisory Council anticipates the confirmation of these unscored projects will achieve all the relevant LRTP long-term goals and objectives. The 3C Documents Committee encourages the use of the current MPO process, which is very transparent, for all the different programs. The committee further requests that scoring results are shared as part of the TIP..

In the 3C Documents Committee meeting, L. Diggins had expressed appreciation to staff for bringing more of a cost-benefit analysis into the selection process and giving priority to projects that are both low cost and high scoring. The committee also noted that the current pool of potential projects for future TIPs has been shrinking. There is a long-standing need for staff to be involved in project development and a strong need for technical assistance. The Advisory Council should understand that going into future years there is a long-standing need for smaller or less wealthy municipalities to address some of their regional equity concerns. One example would be the River Street and Western Avenue Bridges which have a long-standing need to be fully replaced.

4. Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) in the Boston Region— Franny Osman, Town of Acton

Jeannette Osino, Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities (MARTA), and Alexis Walls, Massachusetts Public Health Association, gave an overview of the RTAs.

J. Osino stated that there are 15 regional RTAs statewide with Springfield PVTA being the largest RTA and the Worcester RTA as second largest. The Boston Urbanized Area (UZA) has eight RTAs, including the MBTA, a New Hampshire RTA, and a Rhode Island RTA. Within the Boston Region MPO area, there are two RTAs—Cape Ann Transportation Authority and MetroWest RTA—that are formally members, and the Boston MPO performs their regional planning. Most RTAs belong to their own regional transit agencies.

J. Osino stated that, at least twice, the Federal Transit Administration in its review of the Boston Region MPO noted that the MPO does not include voting membership for the Cape Ann and MetroWest RTAs. So far, the Boston Region MPO has not voted to allow the RTAs a voting membership. The MPO board has not brought the issue to a vote and has formed a committee in response. These RTAs are formally part of the MPO, but do not have the power to vote.

L. Diggins asked about the history behind the MPO board's decisions to keep the RTAs as non-voting members. J. Church stated he did not know the relevant history and he would have to look through the archives to understand.

F. Osman stated that she felt that the service in outskirts of the region was lacking and that the Boston Region MPO was not focusing funding on the regions outside of the inner-core and Boston.

J. Osino stated that the funding for the smaller RTAs is completely different than the MBTA's funding in that there is no dedicated revenue source and the funding fluctuates year to year. The RTA Advocacy group has put together a bill that attempts to address funding issues.

Alexis Walls updated the group on the RTA bill moving through the legislature. The bill could benefit the 55 percent of people who currently live in an RTA service area. When considering the climate and the role of transportation, making sure transportation agencies provide robust options is important because most people live within an RTA service. The RTAs can help people choose transit or other modes of transit instead of passenger vehicles. Even if people do not live or work in an RTA area, the bill still has a large potential impact for the state.

The bill aims to address the chronic underfunding of RTAs and to make sure that there is enough money in the annual budget for RTAs. The coalition is pushing to make sure there is predictable and sustainable funding for RTAs. The RTA Advancement bill in large part would help do that, as it includes language that directs MassDOT to support electrification in RTA communities and eliminates the Farebox Recovery Ratio, which is a performance metric used to evaluate an RTA's performance. The RTA Advancement bill also would require coordinated service between RTAs and MassDOT, the RTAs to work more closely through the RTA Council, and annual reporting on needs in the communities.

The RTA Advancement Bill reported favorably out of the Joint Committee on Transportation in February and is now with the Senate Ways and Means Committee. It is currently the budget season in the legislature, and the Senate Ways and Means released its budget proposal, which does not meet the needs of RTA communities. A. Walls stated that the bill supporters are currently working on a budget amendment strategy.

J. Osino added that having the two RTAs as non-voting members does not help the Boston Region MPO understand the RTAs in the region. While working towards a statewide transit plan, the fact that the Cape Ann and MetroWest RTAs do not have a vote is concerning.

F. Osman asked what percentage of residents in RTAs have access to fixed-route transit service. J. Osino answered that fixed-route service is organized in gateway cities and in suburban areas. As communities have joined RTAs, some have joined without requesting service. If a community wants service, the RTAs will find a way to get them service. RTA boards are established with municipal members serving as the advisory board. The municipality must pay at least 25 percent of the cost of the service. There is no fixed-route service in communities that do not want the service. There has been lots of investment in microtransit throughout the Commonwealth.

L. Diggins asked about the state budget for the RTAs and where the funding stands.

A. Walls stated the goal for funding was a \$7 million increase in base operating funds, which has not happened.

J. Osino stated that in the governor's filing message, he stated that the RTAs have a large surplus of funds, which RTAs are not allowed to have. J. Osino stated that, with all due respect, the governor has never funded the RTAs in all eight years of office, and in one year he asked for cuts. In comparison, the MBTA has a dedicated revenue stream and statutory consumer price index protection.

L. Diggins stated he wants to focus on the RTAs that are non-voting members of the Boston Region MPO and to understand the best way to approach the issue. L. Diggins reiterated his respect for everyone at the MPO and on the board.

F. Osman noted that what happens in the RTAs not only effects the RTAs, but also effects Boston. First-mile and last-mile transportation in RTAs effects the MBTA and vice versa.

5. Chair's Report—*Lenard Diggins, MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee*

L. Diggins stated that the UPWP Committee discussed a lot of interesting studies for the Universe of Proposed Studies. The Administration and Finance Committee continued the work on an operations plan for the MPO that was requested in the most recent federal review of the MPO, which reiterated that the MPO should have an operation plan.

6. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Meetings minutes were not approved due to a technical issue with the MPO Calendar and the lack of a quorum.

7. Old Business, New Business, and Member Announcements

L. Diggins requested that J. Church send a notice to members stating that a short meeting would be held next Wednesday at 2:30 PM to get approval for the 3C Documents Committee letter. Members should RSVP to ensure quorum.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:15 PM.

Attendees

Member Municipalities	Representatives and Alternates
Acton	Franny Osman
Boston	Jennifer Rowe
Cambridge	Andy Reker
Weymouth	Owen MacDonald

Citizen Advocacy Groups	Attendees
Association for Public Transportation	Barry M Steinberg
MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)	Lenard Diggins
National Rural Transit Assistance Program	Scott Zadakis
WalkBoston	John McQueen

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Jeannette Osino	MARTA
Kelley Forrester	BAT Massachusetts Public Health
Alexis Walls	Association

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff
Jonathan Church
Srilekha Murthy

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Title VI Specialist

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