

# Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Unified Planning Work Program Committee Meeting Summary

## March 31, 2021, Meeting

9:00 AM-10:00 AM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform, recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISS9bX49otg&list=PLT37eeNGYpCEjKeOqXHIFkpgpCcxErWo-&index=20>

Derek Krevat, Chair, representing Jamey Tesler, Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

## Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee agreed to the following:

- Recommend staff develop proposal to eliminate 21-day comment period for UPWP amendments
- Recommend staff develop proposal to convert corridor studies into recurring projects

## Materials

There were none.

## Meeting Agenda and Summary of Discussion

### 1. Introductions

Derek Krevat introduced the meeting, read the guidelines and accessibility statement, and called the roll.

### 2. Public Comments

There were none.

### 3. Meeting Summary of November 18, 2021, Meeting—*Approval of this summary*

The minutes for the November 18, 2021, meeting were still under development as of this meeting, so this item was skipped.

#### **4. Discussion: Elimination of 21-day Comment Period for UPWP Amendments—*Sandy Johnston and Srilekha Murthy, MPO Staff***

At the March 3 UPWP Committee meeting, S. Johnston and S. Murthy discussed a proposal to streamline budget categories in the upcoming year's UPWP and eliminate the 21-day comment period for UPWP amendments. S. Murthy discussed some of the reasons for eliminating the comment period for minor amendments: amendments rarely receive comments during the public comment period, and the process to develop an amendment, present it to the UPWP Committee and MPO board, and then release it for public comment can cause delays in staff commencing the work outlined in said amendment. S. Murthy then presented three potential scenarios for discussion: 1) retaining the comment period; 2) eliminating the comment period for federal fiscal year 2022, which would require the Public Engagement Plan to be amended; or 3) eliminate the comment period beginning with the FFY 2023 UPWP.

Lenard Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council [RTAC]) stated that while he understands that members of the public may not be making comments on UPWP amendments, he wondered if the comment period was too short for subregional committees to be able to discuss amendments during their meetings. He asked whether it would be possible to extend the comment period for major amendments to allow for adequate discussion and response time from the public.

Daniel Amstutz (Town of Arlington) asked whether this proposal was related to the previous meeting's discussion of changing the UPWP's amendment requirements and thresholds for needing an amendment. S. Johnston replied that the two proposals are related, and staff are looking to the Federal Highway Administration and the UPWP Committee for guidance on budgeting policies and to determine what changes require an amendment. D. Amstutz replied that he is generally supportive of more efficient processes for staff. He then asked whether Option 3—eliminating the public comment period beginning in FFY 2023—would require amending the Public Engagement Plan. S. Johnston replied in the affirmative.

David Koses (City of Newton) stated that he is supportive of this proposal, with the caveat that there should always be a possibility of opening an amendment to public comment if its contents contain significant changes to the UPWP.

Tom Bent (Inner Core Committee/City of Somerville) stated that he agreed with previous statements by committee members, as long as the committee allows comment periods for major changes.

Tom O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council/Town of Norwood/Norwood Chamber of Commerce) agreed, stating that the change should be implemented from FFY 2023 onwards.

Steve Olanoff (Three Rivers Interlocal Council/Town of Westwood) stated that because the UPWP is a public document, it should be subject to the same public processes as other public documents. He supported keeping the public comment period and waiving it for minor changes. D. Koses agreed with S. Olanoff.

D. Krevat stated that the comment period is not federally required but is cited in the MPO's Public Engagement Plan, so there is an option to maintain it while waiving it when necessary. S. Johnston replied stating that previously, the comment period was 30 days, and it was reduced to 21 days after multiple instances when the longer time period had a bearing on when staff commenced work. Whether the committee ultimately decides to remove the comment period altogether and implement it when necessary, or maintain it as default and waive it for minor amendments, staff will be able to adapt. S. Johnston assured committee members that amendments will always be brought to the committee and the MPO board for approval, and the public has time to comment at either UPWP Committee meetings or MPO board meetings.

L. Diggins asked staff to clarify what makes eliminating the comment period desirable from their perspective. S. Murthy replied that the 21 days between presenting an amendment to the committee and MPO board and the end of the comment period are often a crucial step in starting the work delineated in the amendment itself. Especially in cases where the amendment is concerning a budget restructuring or clarification, the public comment period is time lost when staff could instead make progress on a given task or project. S. Johnston added that in past years when an amendment was necessary to divide a given project budget into two smaller projects and budgets, the 21-day comment period was essentially lost time where staff could have started work earlier. Such delays can impact how quickly a project can be completed, which then has implications for the next fiscal year's budget cycle.

D. Amstutz stated that increased discretion from the committee on when to open an amendment for public comment would be the most beneficial.

D. Koses asked whether waiting the two weeks in between MPO and committee meetings has historically impeded staff work. S. Johnston replied that in his tenure, he has not encountered a situation so time-sensitive it could not wait until the next MPO meeting.

T. Bent stated that in cases where there are minimal changes to text or budgets, there is no need to hold up staff for the 21-day period. At the same time, the public has the opportunity to comment during UPWP Committee meetings as well as during MPO meetings, and for minimal changes it does not make sense to delay the commencing of work.

L. Diggins asked whether an amendment could go before the UPWP Committee and the MPO board on the same day. D. Krevat responded in the affirmative, as long as the amendment is on the agenda. L. Diggins followed up asking whether either of these options would require amending the Public Engagement Plan. D. Krevat responded saying that the plan would have to be amended. S. Johnston replied that the public comment period for the Public Engagement Plan is 45 days, and given the conversation, it might be best to implement this change for the FFY 2023 UPWP, meaning that staff have until October 1 to finish amending the Public Engagement Plan.

S. Olanoff stated that it would be prudent to specify within the amended Public Engagement Plan what constitutes a waiver and when the committee can choose to waive the comment period.

S. Johnston stated that staff will return to the committee with a memo outlining the chosen plan of action and document it in the FFY 2023 UPWP.

## **5. Discussion: Converting Corridor Studies into Recurring Projects— *Mark Abbott and Sandy Johnston, MPO Staff***

S. Johnston presented a proposal to convert recurring studies into a permanent program. Such studies include corridor studies; studies on safety and operations, selected intersections, low-cost improvements to express highway locations; staff generated research; and technical assistance projects. This staff proposal would convert these studies into a permanent program with a permanent budget line under the Traffic Analysis and Design group, titled the Corridor and Complete Streets Program.

This change will allow staff greater flexibility to develop studies because, in the last few years, there have been disruptions of traffic studies. This would also allow staff to focus more on environmental justice communities and work more closely with subregional groups and their specific needs. This program has the additional benefit of fulfilling a new requirement outlined in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) that MPOs spend 2.5 percent of their planning funds on Complete Streets-type projects. While this does not necessarily change the nature of these studies, it will allow staff to work more closely with communities without being tied to the federal fiscal year to complete work.

M. Abbott stated that this program would allow staff to be much more responsive to community needs as they arise and avoid having to wait until the next fiscal year for a project or study to be considered. By converting corridor studies into an ongoing program, staff have more time to complete the study, and communities can be more involved in the process as well.

S. Olanoff stated that a similar proposal was implemented with freight studies when the MPO decided that such studies were important and should be conducted on a regular basis. He stated his support for this program.

D. Amstutz asked about whether the Low-Cost Improvements to Bottleneck programs would still fit under this program, how much money the program would be allocated, whether there would be a screening process for applications, and if Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) would conduct this work. S. Johnston replied that the bottlenecks program work would continue. The budget would be a consolidation of funds allocated to each of these studies individually; in FFY 2022, the total amount allocated to these studies was between \$200,000 and \$300,000. M. Abbott stated that the screening process for projects would likely be revamped with an online application for communities to complete, while staff conduct their own screening using a set of criteria which includes crash history, use of the roadway, environmental justice impact, and Title VI considerations. M. Abbott confirmed that CTPS staff would undertake this work.

D. Koses asked what kinds of projects would take priority. M. Abbott stated that the intention is to continue to do the same kinds of studies as in previous years, but with an added focus on environmental justice and Title VI communities. D. Koses asked whether a project that is not located within an environmental justice or Title VI community would be less likely to be selected. M. Abbot said that would not happen and that this discussion is a starting point for a proposal which would be presented to this committee and the MPO board.

L. Diggins asked whether the committee could have oversight over which projects are chosen and the project work. S. Johnston replied that the committee has jurisdiction over the entire UPWP and thus can always discuss project and study ideas. L. Diggins replied that oftentimes the committee only sees projects once they are well-developed and does not have much of a say in project selection. M. Abbot replied clarifying that this program would simply be combining the discrete studies which have been approved over the past ten years into one "umbrella" program, but that the selection processes would remain the same, allowing the UPWP Committee to provide input on studies. L. Diggins stated that he is looking to see where in the process the UPWP Committee

can provide input on study selection before the study ideas are brought to the MPO for discussion. M. Abbott replied that this program would still defer to the committee, so there will be opportunities to discuss potential studies with committee members.

D. Amstutz asked whether the budget line for the Staff Generated Research (SGR) task would become a permanent amount of money or whether it would change from year to year. S. Johnston replied that historically, the budget for SGR has been approximately \$20,000; for this program, the budget would stay relatively stable.

## **6. Members Items**

There were none.

## **7. Next Meeting**

D. Krevat stated that the next UPWP Committee meeting is expected to be held on April 28, 2022. MPO staff will present the Universe of Proposed Studies.

## **8. Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by T. Bent (Inner Core Committee/City of Somerville) and seconded by T. O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council/Town of Norwood/Norwood Chamber of Commerce). The motion carried.

## Attendance

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<b>Members</b>	<b>Representatives and Alternates</b>
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (Office of Transportation Planning)	Derek Krevat
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	Daniel Amstutz
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood/Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce)	Tom O'Rourke
Three Rivers Interlocal Council alternate (Town of Westwood)	Steve Olanoff
City of Framingham (MetroWest Regional Collaborative)	Dennis Giombetti

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### **MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff**

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Tegin Teich, Executive Director  
Annette Demchur, Director of Policy and Planning  
Hiral Gandhi, Director of Operations and Finance  
Mark Abbott, Traffic Analysis and Design Manager  
Sandy Johnston, UPWP Manager  
Srilekha Murthy, UPWP Manager

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**Title VI Specialist**

Boston Region MPO  
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150  
Boston, MA 02116  
[civilrights@ctps.org](mailto:civilrights@ctps.org)

**By Telephone:**

857.702.3702 (voice)

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