



Draft Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

January 10, 2024, Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM–4:15 PM, Zoom

Lenard Diggins, Chair, representing the MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

L. Diggins called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM. (For attendance list, see page 6.)

2. Project Universe for Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2025-29 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager, MPO Staff*

E. Lapointe provided a review of the current TIP, Federal Fiscal Years (FFY) 2024–28. In the current TIP, which includes new and existing projects, there are 58 projects funded with \$697.5 million in regional target funding to the program.

E. Lapointe stated a main driver for the discussion is a Project Design Pilot Program in the FFYs 2025–29 TIP to provide federal funding support to municipalities to design projects that may apply for construction funding in the TIP. E. Lapointe stated that in recent TIP cycles, there has been a stark decline in overall construction project applications for the investment programs that represent the majority of funding at the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). While the MPO is taking actions to mitigate these trends, the pattern follows for the FFYs 2025–29 TIP.

E. Lapointe noted that these trends can be attributed to the project life cycle. E. Lapointe stated getting a project selected on the TIP for federal funding can be challenging because of two ongoing processes: the Massachusetts Department of Transportation project development design process and the MPO TIP development funding process. E. Lapointe discussed three key thresholds for TIP funding: initiation and scoping, project review committee approval, and 25 percent design.

E. Lapointe presented a summary of the FFYs 2025–29 TIP, stating that the Universe of Projects is a working document that is constructed with each iteration of the TIP. The FFYs 2025–29 TIP will include projects from FFYs 2024–28 universe minus programmed and deactivated projects. E. Lapointe discussed the trends and distribution of projects across the

MPO's eight subregions, noting particular themes in new projects (such as the popularity of bicycle and pedestrian and Community Connections projects) and challenges faced by various subregions, including barriers to designing and initiating new projects.

Discussion

Josh Ostroff, City of Newtown asked for a community to submit a project on the upcoming TIP and how much time should be allocated to get Project Review Committee (PRC) approval. E. Lapointe responded that the application period runs from November 1 to December 31, so current projects have already sought PRC approval.

J. Ostroff asked what it means if a project is funded for design, but the design is not complete. E. Lapointe discussed that many of the projects seeking design funding do not yet have other sources of design identified or have not yet started design.

John McQueen, WalkMassachusetts said that the 25 percent Design of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Phase 3 will be submitted in April or May, and asked what fiscal year the project would be programmed in. E. Lapointe responded that if a project is at 25 percent Design by October of this year, it could be considered in FFY 2025.

3. Microtransit Discussion—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager, MPO Staff*

E. Lapointe provided a review of the MPO's Microtransit Pilot Program and facilitated a discussion on challenges and strategies for the MPO's program and microtransit more broadly. The MPO's Community Connections Program, which focuses on first- and last-mile connectivity, funds microtransit pilots in the region. E. Lapointe discussed that the microtransit pilots began in the FFYs 2021–25 TIP, building off a former program known as the Workforce Transportation Grant Program from FFY 2020.

E. Lapointe listed seven currently funded microtransit projects at the MPO:

- Canton Royall Street
- Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA) On-Demand
- NewMo Microtransit
- Montachusett Regional Transit Authority
- MetroWest RTA (MWRTA) CatchConnect
- Stoneham Shuttle
- Watertown Pleasant Street

E. Lapointe discussed that many of the shuttle programs that the MPO has funded are facing challenges to continue operations after the three-year pilot program. He noted that the funding provided by the MPO can only be used for microtransit pilots and service expansion, but not to support continued operations after the pilot period.

Jim Nee, MWRTA, presented an overview of the MWRTA's microtransit program, CatchConnect. J. Nee discussed some challenges related to the MWRTA's pilot program:

- Startup process involves extensive marketing to establish organic growth.
- Trip Generators are both positive and negative. Demand is relative to what each unique program can manage.
- Pilot areas with a lack of density result in increased trip length, trip time, wait time and reduced operational efficiency.
- Pilot areas with too much density result in increased wait time, reduced operational efficiency, and poor satisfaction.

J. Nee discussed lessons learned from MWRTA's microtransit pilot program:

- Programs can be highly effective, but in limited scenarios
- Programs require suburban levels of density to be effective
- Requires extensive marketing
- Microtransit should be a tool on the tool belt for certain providers
- Microtransit should be used as both an operational and planning tool

Discussion

Franny Osman, Acton resident, asked if the MWRTA reached out to partners during the needs assessment in designing CatchConnect. J. Nee discussed that the MWRTA has a number of public-private and public-public partnerships and is continuing to establish partnerships related to microtransit.

L. Diggins asked who microtransit currently serves and what options people have when services are not available. J. Nee stated that depending on the pilot the answer is unique to the community microtransit services.

J. Ostroff stated that CatchConnect has been an excellent example of microtransit services. J. Ostroff discussed that in the future, municipalities could improve by further engaging and creating partnerships with transit-dependent populations.

J. Ostroff discussed that the microtransit pilot program in Newton, NewMo, has been an operational success that addresses the community's needs. J. Ostroff stated that there were financial challenges even when ridership demand increased, thus providing a range of services is crucial to meet the demand.

AnaCristina Fragoso, Boston Society of Civil Engineers, asked about current taxi services and the possibility of microtransit to adopt similar practices. J. Ostroff noted that taxi services have increasingly declined throughout the years. F. Osman referenced a project on taxi services conducted by MassDevelopment and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council during the COVID-19 pandemic.

E. Lapointe discussed that microtransit is an umbrella term that adapts as it addresses each community's unique needs. E. Lapointe stated that regional transit authorities are the preferred program operators, as the MPO only funds microtransit pilots for three years.

Laura Davis, Concord Transportation Advisory Committee, asked about best practices for setting fares for microtransit services. E. Lapointe stated that fares vary by each town but the preference at the MPO is that there is no fare. E. Lapointe discussed that if programs rely too heavily on fares to fund services, there is a risk that if ridership goals aren't met, services will not be able to continue. J. Nee discussed that the fare is important for the MWRTA as a revenue source but is not heavily relied on to continue service but rather to reduce demand.

J. McQueen asked if successful service areas are contingent on having an institutional asset such as colleges or hospitals. E. Lapointe responded that having these elements does help success rates but having a varied approach from point-to-point destinations to a broader geographic area depends on each town.

4. Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Study Ideas (continued)—*Lenard Diggins, Chair*

Srilekha Murthy, MPO staff, opened the discussion for members of the Advisory Council to provide study ideas for consideration in the FFY 2025 UPWP currently being developed.

Discussion

J. McQueen stated concerns about infrastructure needs and travel patterns in relation to climate resilience goals on the UPWP.

L. Diggins discussed looking into previously proposed study ideas to rework and bring into the upcoming UPWP. L. Diggins stated an interest in a continuation of the Future of Curb Parking study and the roadway pricing study.

5. Approval of Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the October 11, 2023, meeting was made by WalkMassachusetts (John McQueen) and seconded by Acton resident (Franny Osman). The minutes were approved.

6. Discussion of Possible Second January Meeting

L. Diggins proposed a second meeting in January to cover additional material, including recently concluded MPO studies and continued discussion of the *Destination 2050* Needs Assessment. A motion was made by the City of Cambridge (Andrew Reker) and Acton resident (Franny Osman) for an optional second meeting on January 24.

7. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Acton resident (Franny Osman) and seconded by the City of Cambridge (Andy Reker). The motion carried.

Attendees

Member Municipalities

Representatives and Alternates

City of Cambridge

Andy Reker

Town of Weymouth

Owen MacDonald

Citizen Advocacy Groups

Attendees

Boston Society of Civil Engineers (BSCES)

AnaCristina Fragoso

MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)

Lenard Diggins

WalkMassachusetts

John McQueen

Acton resident

Franny Osman

Agencies (Non-Voting)

Attendees

Massachusetts Department of Transportation
(MassDOT)

Benjamin Muller

MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA)

Tyler Terrasi

MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA)

Jim Nee

Other Attendees

Affiliation

Karl Allen

City of Chelsea

John Strauss

Town of Burlington

Lillian Hartman

Town of North Reading

Watertown Transportation

Sophia Galimore

Management Association (TMA)

Nicole Freedman

City of Newton

Josh Ostroff

City of Newton

Concord Transportation Advisory

Laura Davis

Committee

Mystic River Watershed Association

Karl Alexander

(MyRWA)

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Logan Casey
Dave Hong
Jia Huang
Stella Jordan
Ethan Lapointe
Erin Maguire
Srilekha Murthy
Gina Perille
Sean Rourke

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