



Draft Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

June 12, 2024, Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM–4:15 PM, Zoom

Lenard Diggins, Chair, representing the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC).

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

L. Diggins called the meeting to order at 2:30 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. (For attendance, see page five.)

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2024, meeting was made by WalkMassachusetts (John McQueen) and seconded by the Boston Society of Civil Engineers (AnaCristina Fragoso). The minutes were approved.

3. North Suffolk Freight Decarbonization Study—*Erin Maguire and Shrvanthi Gopalan Narayanan, MPO Staff*

E. Maguire and S. Gopalan Narayanan presented findings from the [Sustainability and Decarbonization in the Freight and Logistics Sector in the North Suffolk Area](#) discrete study. E. Maguire discussed the study area, stating the project scope was expanded early in the development phase as several of the challenges facing Chelsea were relevant to surrounding communities. E. Maguire noted the study area is composed of Critical Urban Freight Corridors and Designated Port Areas serving local and regional markets. E. Maguire defined freight in relation to the study as the transportation of bulk goods by truck, air, sea, or train, and operational facilities.

E. Maguire stated stakeholder engagement involved advocacy groups and community-based organizations, municipalities, and industry actors. E. Maguire discussed the key themes and overlapping and conflicting priorities between stakeholders, such as roadway conditions, noise and air pollution, and coastal flooding.

S. Gopalan Narayanan discussed decarbonization strategies based on a literature review and stakeholder engagement, including

- electrification and alternative fuels,
- air quality reporting,
- mode shift, and
- coordination.

S. Gopalan Narayanan discussed conducting follow-up studies focusing on ideas that emerged such as regional freight patterns and emissions, potential locations for charging infrastructure, and the feasibility of electric cargo bike deliveries. In addition, S. Gopalan Narayanan discussed the potential for broader regional efforts using strategies such as building a coalition of stakeholders, further exploration of multimodal freight systems, and emphasizing public engagement and education.

Discussion

J. McQueen and S. Gopalan Narayanan discussed the feasibility of electric cargo bikes and their impact on congestion and safety. S. Gopalan Narayanan stated that while the study focused on decarbonization strategies, staff are planning to study the impact of electric cargo bikes in the next fiscal year. S. Gopalan Narayanan noted that staff are looking to the City of Boston's Boston Delivers electric cargo bike pilot program to inform future MPO work.

AC Fragoso asked how staff are considering emergency management routes in freight traffic studies. S. Gopalan Narayanan discussed collaboration with the MPO's Climate Resilience Program to consider emergency scenarios and identify critical links in the region.

Logan Casey (Town of Marblehead) inquired about industry stakeholders who have started to adapt their practices to the potential impacts of climate change. E. Maguire discussed various strategies that industry stakeholders are considering and the factors influencing adaptation strategies.

Jim Nee (MetroWest Regional Transit Authority) noted that the Strengthening Mobility SMART Grant through the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) will be accepting Phase 1 applicants through the end of the summer.

L. Diggins and E. Maguire discussed measuring the percentage of business that industries are conducting within the study area. E. Maguire noted that it was not specifically explored in the study.

L. Diggins and J. McQueen discussed California's Warehouse Actions and Investments to Reduce Emissions Program point system. E. Maguire stated that industries in the program can adopt mitigation strategies to offset fees, which seek to address point source pollution and not electrification costs. E. Maguire and J. McQueen discussed challenges that were prevalent in stakeholder discussions including consistent market supply and infrastructure on the interstate which poses technical and operational obstacles. E. Maguire noted that the

USDOT released an action plan to achieve net zero for vehicles in the freight system, which involves identifying key areas throughout the country that are freight hubs to support electrification.

L. Casey asked if MPO staff are interested in exploring the potential of inactive rail yards to support the transition from freight to rail. S. Gopalan Narayanan stated while staff has considered this potential, various factors pose a challenge to achieve the transition.

Andy Reker (City of Cambridge) and E. Maguire discussed the potential of electric cargo bikes to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT). A. Reker asked how prevalent the topic of reducing VMT was in conversations with municipalities and advocacy groups. E. Maguire stated that road safety was much more prevalent with advocacy groups and community-based organizations, hence the recommendation for cargo bikes. E. Maguire noted it will be interesting to consider the impact of cargo bikes in a future study. J. McQueen asked about the feasibility of cargo bikes to replace vans in terms of load sizes. S. Gopalan Narayanan discussed solutions other cities have implemented to address load sizes and efficient delivery routes.

AC Frago inquired about the impact of local small businesses on freight. S. Gopalan Narayanan stated an interest in focusing on small businesses in the future, especially considering the focus on last-mile delivery cargo bikes.

4. Update on Engagement Education Program—*Stella Jordan and Jia Huang, MPO Staff*

S. Jordan and J. Huang introduced a pilot educational program called the MPO Community Planning Lab and facilitated a discussion for feedback. S. Jordan discussed the role of educational programs in engaging the public in planning processes, highlighting a key opportunity for the MPO to innovate on public involvement and address barriers to engagement.

J. Huang provided a summary of peer research of similar programs that helped guide the development of the MPO pilot Community Planning Lab program. J. Huang described the successes and benefits of educational programs, including

- increased public participation,
- more effective participation,
- more buy-in to the planning process, and
- more beneficial for both staff/agency and participants.

J. Huang discussed the purpose, vision, and goals for the MPO Community Planning Lab to build the public's capacity to engage in the planning process, to create more meaningful opportunities for engagement, and to improve engagement effectiveness.

J. Huang described the scope of the pilot as a one- to two-day program in September 2024 with a target cohort of five members representing community-based organizations. The participants will receive stipends for their time and participation.

Discussion

S. Jordan facilitated a discussion to gather feedback for the pilot program's development.

J. McQueen and S. Jordan discussed using local transportation issues to engage participants in the planning process. J. McQueen emphasized the importance of having participants feel that their ideas are being heard and considered.

A. Reker highlighted the significance of staff's role in supporting participants in building their capacity by helping them realize their individual strengths. A. Reker and L. Casey noted the importance of avoiding jargon and simplifying information when possible. L. Casey discussed the significance of helping participants learn the MPO's planning process, work products, and key points for engagement.

L. Casey stated that providing stipends will be a significant way to expand access to engaging in the planning process. L. Diggins suggested reaching out to groups who may be interested in joining the Advisory Council as potential program participants. L. Diggins stated that program participants should have access to continuous engagement with the MPO after the program ends.

5. Chair's Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair*

L. Diggins stated that he submitted a comment letter on the FFY 2025 Unified Planning Work Program with Fred Moseley (American Council of Engineering Companies), following the special 3C meeting to discuss the letter held on May 29.

L. Diggins discussed the TIP Before-and-After study that will be presented during the July Advisory Council meeting.

6. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the City of Cambridge (Andy Reker) and seconded by the Boston Society of Civil Engineers (AnaCristina Fragoso). The motion carried.

Attendees

Member Municipalities	Representatives and Alternates
Cambridge	Andy Reker

Citizen Advocacy Groups	Attendees
Boston Society of Civil Engineers (BSCES)	AnaCristina Fragoso
MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)	Lenard Diggins
WalkMassachusetts	John McQueen
American Council of Engineering Companies	Fred Mosley

Agencies (Non-Voting)	Attendees
MWRTA	Tyler Terrasi
MWRTA	Jim Nee

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Regina Aris	Baltimore MPO
Logan Casey	Town of Marblehead

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Gina Perille
Shravanthi Gopalan Narayanan
David Hong
Jia Huang
Stella Jordan
Ethan Lapointe
Srilekha Murthy
Sean Rourke

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