

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary

August 22, 2024, Meeting

1:00 PM–2:30 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Jen Rowe, Chair, representing Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston and the Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

Decisions

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the summary of the meeting of March 14, 2024
- Approve the summary of the meeting of March 28, 2024
- Approve the summary of the meeting of May 16, 2024

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance on page 11.

2. Public Comments

There were none.

3. Action Item: Approval of March 14, 2024, Meeting Summary—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. March 14, 2024, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 14, 2024, was made by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) (Derek Krevat) and seconded by the Town of Arlington (John Alessi). The motion carried.

4. Action Item: Approval of March 28, 2024, Meeting Summary—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. March 28, 2024, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

John Bechard, MassDOT, highlighted that an attendee, Leon Gaumond, was identified in the meeting summary as affiliated with the Town of Arlington and issued a correction that L. Gaumond is affiliated with the Town of Weston.

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 28, 2024, was made by the Town of Arlington (J. Alessi) and seconded by MassDOT (D. Krevat). The motion carried.

5. Action Item: Approval of May 16, 2024, Meeting Summary—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

1. May 16, 2024, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of May 16, 2024, was made by the Town of Arlington (J. Alessi) and seconded by MassDOT (D. Krevat). The motion carried.

6. Review of Process Improvements for Information Sharing around TIP Decision-Making—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager, presented planned improvements to the frequency with which information is shared, and the level of detail of information, with MPO board members throughout the TIP development process.

E. Lapointe presented an overview of the prior relevant meetings, including TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee and MPO board meetings.

At the May 16, 2024, TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting, committee members highlighted changes between the draft and final versions of the TIP and discussed challenges.

At the July 18, 2024, MPO board meeting, board members reflected on the entirety of the TIP process.

At both meetings, board and committee members expressed a clear and consistent need for timely and detailed information.

Informational needs demonstrated by board members included the following:

- Limited time to select “fill-in” projects for funding that had not yet been scored, including “backfill” projects in the programs of the project proponents
- Evaluation of alternative investments and decisions, such as alternative project proponents
- Reasons for changes to project readiness, cost, or scope

E. Lapointe overviewed the MPO’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which is an agreement between the MPO, Commonwealth, and providers of public transportation to carry out the transportation planning process. The MOU outlines the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan and the TIP. E. Lapointe stated that MPO staff are in the process of updating the MOU, and MPO staff have incorporated feedback from members to improve coordination and communication about the TIP.

E. Lapointe stated that the MOU is complemented by the Operations Plan, which describes how the TIP process is to be conducted. Section Eight of the drafted Operations Plan includes processes to solicit project information for TIP development from MassDOT, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA), and the Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA).

E. Lapointe stated that much of the feedback that MPO staff received emphasized the need to consider project proponents other than municipalities, such as the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport). E. Lapointe stated that while these project proponents are not included in the Operations Plan, MPO staff are looking at ways to better engage DCR and Massport in the TIP process.

E. Lapointe stated that Section Eight of the Operations Plan will help to ensure that projects in the TIP are scored before being considered by MPO members. Section Eight also includes a request to outline or identify a first-tier projects list that could be chosen from if unallocated funding is available for additional projects in future TIP development cycles.

E. Lapointe then presented more specific and detailed actions that are being taken in additional forums through which information can be shared by project proponents. E.

Lapointe prefaced that this is an early look at processes still in development and under consideration, and processes outlined in the presentation are subject to change pending further feedback about the development of the MOU and the Operations Plan.

E. Lapointe discussed process improvements related to candidate transit projects, which included the following points:

- Process outlines requirements for transit projects from the MBTA, MWRTA, and CATA seeking Regional Target funding
- Solicitation of projects commences in November
 - February deadline for submission to provide four weeks to score projects prior to scenario discussions
- Proponents may update the MPO board twice annually as to the status of MPO-funded projects
 - February: Coincides with TIP Readiness Days (TRD)
 - September: End of federal fiscal year outlook

In addition to improvements to candidate transit projects, E. Lapointe discussed the addition of quarterly project readiness updates, which would provide a comprehensive review of projects during the initial TRD and would be complemented by three additional quarterly updates. Currently, the TRD effort that MassDOT undertakes in February of each year drives most of board members' awareness and information on project readiness. The addition of quarterly readiness updates would allow for additional and structured information throughout the year.

E. Lapointe reviewed the cyclical process for the quarterly project readiness updates, described in the following points:

- MPO staff and MassDOT Office of Transportation (OTP) schedule Quarterly Readiness Update
- MPO staff compile a list of projects with questions or comments to be addressed
- MassDOT Highway responds to the inquiry and provides additional information as necessary
- MPO staff, MassDOT OTP, and MassDOT Highway Division resolve points of clarification or outstanding questions
- MPO staff present the project updates to the MPO and solicit follow-up items to be addressed at the next update

In addition, E. Lapointe described a sample workflow for any federal fiscal year (FFY).

- December
 - End of calendar year
 - Early warning for TRD
- February
 - Main TRD event
 - Biannual transit presentation to complement MPO staff presentation
- May
 - Review changes between draft and final TIP
 - Flag TRD project issues
- September
 - End of FFY outlook
 - Preparation for next TIP development

E. Lapointe stated that MPO staff recognize that the new process is a large undertaking for coordination between MassDOT, MPO staff, and municipal project proponents. E. Lapointe stated that to facilitate this effort, MPO staff are hoping to better incorporate municipal project proponent feedback into the main TRD. The existing TRD structure affords MPO staff the opportunity to provide some input for each project MassDOT evaluates.

In addition, MPO staff are anticipating scheduling Pre-Readiness Days Workshops between January 14, 2025, and January 16, 2025, which would be split between Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregions, focusing on currently programmed or new Regional Target projects. The workshop would consist of three days with three meetings, with the following MAPC subregions:

- Day 1: Inner Core Committee, MetroWest Regional Collaborative
- Day 2: Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC), North Suburban Planning Council (NSPC), North Shore Task Force (NSTF)
- Day 3: South Shore Coalition (SSC), SouthWest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP), Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC)

E. Lapointe stated that workshop discussions would be led by MPO staff, involving MAPC subregional coordinators. E. Lapointe stated that information related to MassDOT District staff would be communicated after the event. The Pre-Readiness Days Workshops would help inform MassDOT's perspective on making recommendations around the TRD, and it would act as a proactive opportunity for municipalities and consultants to provide project updates. The process may include new applicants as well.

E. Lapointe also proposed the idea of Readiness Conditions to committee members, which would facilitate decision-making when TIP projects are reevaluated. MPO board members suggested implementing protocols that determine when MPO staff rescore TIP projects. E. Lapointe stated that establishing a protocol creates equitable circumstances for both current and future project proponents and sets stricter standards for performance.

Next steps will include discussions of new scoring criteria, the TIP Universe of Projects, and information from partner agencies on potential applications at the start of FFY 2025.

Discussion

Eric Bourassa, MAPC, asked if MPO staff considered creating a schedule with the information presented. In addition, E. Bourassa expressed support for formal discussions with multiple subregions and district offices about project statuses and expressed interest in scheduling them early in FFY 2025.

E. Lapointe stated that these processes are still being internally discussed, and there are no set dates yet. Tentatively, discussions may be held in January 2025.

J. Rowe asked if new project applications will still be due around the end of the calendar year.

E. Lapointe responded that the project application window is between October 28, 2024, and December 31, 2024, and there will be a formal deadline of the end of February 2025 for fill-in projects.

E. Bourassa asked if there are criteria for evaluating transit projects, and E. Lapointe responded that there are, and they are a part of the Transit Transformation Program.

E. Bourassa stated that the MBTA and regional transit authorities (RTA) should become familiar with the transit criteria, including which projects score better than others.

Lenard Diggins, Regional Transportation Advisory Council, stated that the fill-in projects should focus on transit projects to ensure that they are chosen in an equitable manner. L. Diggins stated that smaller municipalities may not have the capability and resources to provide fill-in project options, and that mainly larger municipalities have projects looking for funding.

Erin Chute, Town of Brookline, expressed appreciation for MPO staff's proposed ideas and stated that they are responsive to the feedback from the prior MPO board meeting.

In addition, E. Chute stated that fill-in projects could be an opportunity for municipalities to continue with projects that continually get delayed. E. Chute stated that municipalities could prepare for fill-in project selection by completing designs beforehand. In addition, E. Chute stated that she would prefer time for a thorough and timely review of projects before MPO staff began creating Readiness Conditions for reevaluating TIP projects. E. Chute stated that the projects are extremely valuable to any given municipality's community regardless of delays, and searching for funding for delayed projects is a very laborious process that includes intense community engagement.

E. Lapointe expressed appreciation for E. Chute's comment and stated that this would be an introduction for ideas about a potential protocol for reevaluating projects, and any actions that MPO staff intend to take will be discussed with board and committee members. E. Lapointe also stated that MPO staff are hoping to see a balance of municipal and transit fill-in projects.

John Alessi, Town of Arlington, expressed support for Pre-Readiness Days, and stated that the new process will keep municipalities engaged in providing updates on projects. J. Alessi also reiterated E. Chute's comment regarding protocol for rescoring projects and stated that the process of rescoring will be helpful in decision-making throughout the TIP development process. J. Alessi asked if there will be limitations on the projects that can be considered for fill-in projects.

E. Lapointe responded that the first-tier list of potential fill-in projects would reflect a subset of projects in the TIP Universe, but that there will not necessarily be boundaries as to what projects are eligible from the TIP Universe.

Josh Ostroff, MBTA, stated it would be helpful for the MBTA to understand the TIP criteria in advance, and MBTA staff could assemble a list of potential fill-in projects when the need arises.

J. Bechard stated that he is happy to troubleshoot with municipalities when a project is continually delayed, and community members are welcome to reach out to MassDOT Highway with project problems. J. Bechard stated that his team will generally have the best information available to troubleshoot issues with projects. J. Bechard also expressed support for Pre-Readiness Days and stated that he is hopeful that the process will help with project readiness.

Derek Krevat, MassDOT, stated that OTP serves as a frontline for communications to the MassDOT Highway Division to ensure efficiency and community members are welcome to reach out to OTP with project issues. D. Krevat also expressed support for

formalizing a process for transit agencies and others to submit projects earlier in the FFY.

J. Rowe agreed with D. Krevat's point and asked if there would be an opportunity for a municipal priority that is working in collaboration with an RTA or the MBTA to submit transit project applications between October through December 31.

E. Lapointe stated that ideally, every project application that the MPO would evaluate in the spring would be submitted between late October and December 31, which includes transit projects. E. Lapointe stated that the February deadline is the latest date that applications can be submitted. E. Lapointe stated that there would be opportunities for transit projects, particularly through the Transit Transformation Program.

J. Rowe asked if the reason for the transit complement to TRD and quarterly readiness updates only occurring twice in the FFY was due to transit projects' flexibility.

E. Lapointe responded that the cadence is only twice a year for transit projects because there is more flexibility regarding carryover funding, and the number of transit projects on the TIP is generally less than other investment programs.

J. Rowe discussed the Readiness Conditions and asked E. Lapointe what feedback would be the most helpful.

E. Lapointe responded that the Readiness Conditions are not included in the Operations Plan, but that board members have expressed interest in the concept. E. Lapointe stated that the Readiness Conditions are not required, but that MPO staff recommend moving forward with providing a space to discuss the idea.

L. Diggins stated that he appreciated E. Chute's points about the Readiness Conditions, and that committee members should discuss the idea.

E. Chute stated that she would be willing to move forward with discussing the idea as well, and asked E. Lapointe if he has ideas for broad categories of conditions that could be narrowed down.

E. Lapointe stated that a good place to start discussing these ideas would be to determine when MPO staff rescore projects. E. Lapointe stated that there are several projects on the TIP with outdated scores because the scoring criteria has changed. These projects cannot be equitably compared to projects scored recently because the criteria and scoring structure have changed.

In addition, E. Lapointe clarified that establishing standards for the outcomes of rescoring projects would allow more structure for MPO staff and provide necessary information for project proponents.

L. Diggins asked if projects would be rescored if there is only a cost change rather than a change in scope.

E. Lapointe responded that Section 3.3 of the drafted policy change states that any cost increase more than \$2.5 million or 25 percent would be subject to a rescore. The policy also factors in projects with changes in scope.

L. Diggins asked clarifying questions about the conditions that would be required to rescore a project and the additional workload it would cause for MPO staff members.

E. Lapointe responded that MPO staff are bracing for the need to rescore projects and are intending to reevaluate some projects funded in FFY 2026. E. Lapointe stated that MPO staff will coordinate with the committee over the next few months to lighten and evaluate the effort necessary to rescore projects. E. Lapointe stated that all the proposed actions include additional time commitments from MPO staff and MassDOT.

L. Diggins suggested comparing outdated TIP criteria to the current criteria rather than asking project proponents to reapply to the TIP.

E. Lapointe provided examples of TIP projects that were evaluated with outdated TIP criteria and stated that the goal is making sure that there are no projects on the TIP that have outdated scores.

J. Rowe clarified that the TIP criteria used when municipalities apply to be on the TIP in the fall is the same criteria the committee is considering using to score fill-in projects. In addition, developing Readiness Conditions could help committee members think about when it makes sense to rescore projects and as an aid for decision-making about projects on the TIP.

E. Lapointe stated that the Readiness Conditions would set rules and guidelines around conditions or triggers for which projects that have changes in their scope may need further evaluation, and how projects will be evaluated.

E. Bourassa expressed support for the Readiness Conditions and emphasized that establishing these conditions would be helpful in decision-making processes. E. Bourassa stated that it is very rare that projects get removed from the TIP, and the new

process would allow other decisions to be made about projects' timelines based on scoring information.

7. Members' Items

There were none.

8. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the City of Boston (J. Rowe). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members

Representatives and Alternates

City of Boston	Jen Rowe
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Derek Krevat
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	John Bechard
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
Town of Arlington	John Alessi
Town of Brookline	Erin Chute

Other Attendees

Affiliation

MBTA	Josh Ostroff
MBTA	Glenn Geiler
MetroWest Regional Transportation Authority	Tyler Terrasi
MetroWest Regional Transportation Authority	Jim Nee
MetroWest Regional Transportation Authority	Cam Sullivan
Town of Lexington	Sheila Page
Town of Lynnfield	John Tomasz

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Annette Demchur
Priyanka Chapekar
Dave Hong
Adriana Jacobsen
Ethan Lapointe
Lauren Magee

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