

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



July 7, 2023

David Mohler, Chair
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4150
Boston, MA 02116

RE: Comments on the Draft Unified Planning Work Program for FFY 2024

Dear Mr. Mohler,

We, the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC) for the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), also known as the "Advisory Council," herein offer our comments on the FFY2024 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). We focus our comments on three aspects of the UPWP: (1) the process by which the four discrete studies were chosen, (2) our thoughts about the discrete studies that were selected, and (3) the programs that support the 3C process.

The Process

First, the fact that we saw perhaps the largest universe of projects ever submitted which then yielded a superb array of "finalists," is a testament to the effectiveness of public outreach this cycle, and it is in stark contrast to the fact the MPO was able to fund only four studies due to the availability of just \$150K for discrete studies. That the UPWP Committee was able to fund even four studies is proof of their commitment to making it possible for the MPO to maximize the nature and extent of its research. It would have been very easy for the UPWP Committee to have chosen only two studies; however, with the adjustment of scopes, not only more, but also more diverse studies were chosen. We applaud the UPWP Committee for this effort, and we encourage it to continue this approach.

Still, we must note again that \$150K is a very small amount, and that has led to the smallest number of discrete studies by far over the last 8 years. We request that the MPO explain to the public in the final version of the UPWP why the available funds for discrete studies is so low this year. We also strongly suggest that the MPO staff and the UPWP Committee review the entire universe of study proposals for this cycle as an informal survey of the interests and concerns of highly-engaged residents and organizations in our region.

The Selected Studies *

1. Lab and Municipal Parking Phase II

Given the large amount of research in the life sciences in our region and the expectation that such will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future, we support research into the factors that affect parking at those facilities and the role that parking plays in the ways that employees commute to those facilities. The continuity ranging from the MAPC's "Perfect Fit" parking study released in 2019 to last year's Phase I of this study should make the results of this study insightful and useful.

2. Parking in Bike Lanes: Strategies for Safety and Prevention

Beyond the paramount goal of making cycling safer, we hope that the strategies that emerge from this study will also make pedestrian street crossing(s) safer, bus trips more reliable, and freight delivery more efficient for both the haulers and the receiving businesses. We encourage staff to explore holistic, novel, and even experimental approaches toward finding solutions.

3. Strategies for Environmental Outreach and Engagement

We strongly support the purpose, approach, and goal of this study. We also feel that this should be an ongoing effort by the MPO that extends far beyond one year. Our main concern with making this comment, however, is that the amount of funds available for discrete studies next year will be decreased by \$25K.

4. Applying Conveyal to TIP Project Scoring

We are very enthusiastic about the potential for this study. Its connection to a study done in 2022 as well an approach that involves working with other MPO regions exemplifies the comprehensive and cooperative qualities that make up the 3C process. This is the kind of study that could indeed have wide-ranging and long-lasting effects on the ways in which we select projects for the TIP and hopefully help us better determine the projects to which we provide technical assistance in hopes that the region can create a pipeline of projects that support the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan.

Programs that Support the 3C Process

Before commenting on specific programs, we note that overall we are pleased with the quality of the programs that are devoted to supporting the 3C progress. In this document, we appreciate Table 3-1 which lists the budget, work progress, and products for FFY2023 alongside those proposed for FFY2024. The additional explanation provided later Chapter 3 add valuable details and explanations.

1. Climate Resilience Program

Of the seven items listed, we highlight the following:

- Develop text and material to create a resilience-focused page on the MPO's website
- Review usability, data needs, outputs, and credibility of vulnerability assessment tools and develop a plan for assessment of Boston region transportation assets of interest to the MPO
- Evaluate resilience and environmental TIP criteria and adjust as necessary to successfully invest in resilience-focused projects

2. Freight Planning Support

Of the seven items listed, we highlight the following:

- Freight planning roadmap
- Develop a program to coordinate freight and land use in the Boston MPO region
- Develop a dashboard with freight infrastructure in the region

3. Roadway Model Enhancement

Of the seven items listed, we highlight the following:

- Conduct exploratory analysis to demonstrate TDM23 capabilities and identify needs for enhancements
- Develop a post-pandemic model base year calibrated to most recent roadway and transit data

4. Data Program

Of the four items listed, we highlight the following:

- Develop data publication standards and explore new methods for sharing data publicly
- Research new data sources and analytic techniques

5. *Bicycle and Pedestrian Program*

Of the five items listed, we highlight the following:

- Update how gaps are identified in the Boston region bicycle network
- Evaluate regional intersections and roadways using the Pedestrian Report Card Assessment and Bicycle Report Card tools

Also under this program we are pleased to read that the MPO “will officially establish the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee and convene the first full year of committee meetings” in FFY24

6. *Multimodal Mobility Infrastructure Program*

Of the seven items listed, we highlight the following

- Multimodal mobility infrastructure program roadmap
- Guidebook(s) to support multimodal infrastructure studies

To be clear, we find all items in each program worthy of being listed as a work product and/or a goal to which the MPO should progress. Our highlights primarily reflect our enthusiasm and our sense of priority and importance.

Finally, we close by expressing our gratitude for the data on the geographic distribution of UPWP studies and technical analysis presented in Appendix D. We strongly agree with the recommendations for uses of that data and the conclusion that “analyses such as these would provide the MPO with a clearer understanding of how the work programmed through the UPWP addresses the needs of the region.”

We offer these comments in good faith, and we look forward to discussing them more with you as well as working with you and the MPO Board in the upcoming year.

Respectfully,
The Advisory Council

* As is often the case, there is a diversity of opinions in our group that leads to a healthy and enlightening dialogue. Below, we offer the verbatim comments of one of our members that also reflect the thoughts of other Advisory Council Members:

“Contrary to the Staff’s recommendation...R-1 should be the Resiliency study because, unlike R-2, it is actionable, timely and needed in The Commonwealth to help save lives. R-2 is a communication issue which is a “nice to know” internal knowledge problem; it is somewhat actionable but is one which an unfunded study or conference can identify, if it becomes a more quantified (versus weighted to qualitative) study; R-2 is not worth sacrificing R-1. R-1 better and directly addresses the LRTP objectives.

Otherwise, to me the two Transit studies (T-3 & T-5) should be the remaining focus and both should be included because they address two important and vital issues confronting **Transit**...the key aspect of any improvement to the state’s long-term mobility, access, and inclusionary efforts.

M-1 is a good study but given the constantly changing dynamics of MA commercial real estate, there are too many moving parts in this evolving Lab Building situation...premature situation and many aspects that are in play outside the Core City...to make this study actionable at this point. Consulting the BPDA Transportation Section regarding Article 80 Lab Buildings and their traffic studies would be helpful...plus BPDA and BTM will develop the actions and policies for Labs.

TE-1 should not be included. This study of “Conveyal” is the Staff’s ‘pet’ app for internal experimentation

for scoring TIP selections on Equity. It might be appropriate, but it should not take up budget and attention from other worthy actionable studies that would better the Commonwealth. TE-1 should actually be funded and fielded either as part of the Staff's discretionary budget OR funded outside UPWP as part of the TIP budget...as a tool to assist TIP planning.

The comments are in reference to this list of proposed studies:

https://www.bostonmpo.org/data/calendar/pdfs/2023/0420_UPWP_Universe_Ranking_Survey_Results.pdf