Memorandum for the Record
Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
Pilot Transit Working Group

January 30, 2020, Meeting

2:30 PM–4:15 PM, State Transportation Building, Conference Rooms 2 and 3,
    10 Park Plaza, Boston

Materials

Materials for this meeting, posted on the [MPO meeting calendar](#) on the MPO's website, included the following:

1. Agenda
2. Pilot Transit Working Group Presentation
3. Memorandum: Transit Committee Outreach
4. Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Booklet
5. Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Booklet
6. Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Booklet
7. Transit Signal Priority (TSP) Guidebook
8. Future of the Curb Blog
9. Reverse Commute Blog

Summary of Discussion

1. Introductions
See attendance on page 8.

2. Welcome
Michelle Scott (MPO Staff) and Tegin Teich (Executive Director, MPO Staff) welcomed the working group members and provided background about the purpose of the meeting, the role of MPO staff, and the importance of providing an opportunity for ongoing conversations about transit. T. Teich invited the group to provide feedback on how the pilot working group format can be most useful and effective.

3. MPO Transit Working Group Pilot
M. Scott provided background about the pilot working group. The Federal Highway Administration has encouraged the MPO to improve representation of transit providers to better address their needs and enhance coordination between them. Based on this recommendation, staff developed the idea of a transit-focused working group. The

group is structured as a pilot so staff and the group members can determine the format that works best.

M. Scott outlined four main activities that future meetings could focus on:

- Presentations from MPO staff about recent activities and decisions
- Discussion of transit-related issues and solutions
- Facilitation of discussion and information sharing between group participants
- Check-ins on how the working group itself is functioning and progressing

Paul Regan (MBTA Advisory Board) remarked that the MPO has limited resources to address operational concerns, which he noted may be a topic of concern for some members.

4. Transit-Related MPO Activities

M. Scott provided an overview of the LRTP. The LRTP outlines a long-term vision of how the MPO will work to improve transportation in the region, and details the principles and programs used to guide how funds are allocated. It provides for short-term capital improvements, planning studies and research through the UPWP, and technical assistance.

Kate White (MPO Staff) provided an overview of the investment programs included in the LRTP:

- Complete Streets
- Intersection Improvements
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Connections
- Community Connections
- Transit Modernization
- Dedicated Bus Lanes

She noted that the Community Connections program may be most relevant to the group. Funds from this program can be used for first- and last-mile connections, wayfinding, and projects to help connect older adults or people with disabilities to transportation services.

Sandy Johnston (MPO Staff), as the primary staff member who oversees the program, added that the program has a total budget of $2 million and that the funds can be used for operations of new transit services. Staff are currently evaluating the applications they have received.

Andrew Clark (MPO Staff) gave an overview of four recent studies completed by the MPO staff's Transit Analysis and Planning group. These projects collectively have served to improve planners' and municipal officials' understanding of the techniques that can be used to improve transit service:

- Transit Signal Priority in the Boston Region: Staff reviewed the status of transit signal priority (TSP) in the Boston region and interviewed municipal officials who were involved with TSP planning and implementation to learn about their challenges and successes. Their feedback informed a guidebook for municipal officials and planners that may be interested in implementing TSP in their communities.

- The Future of the Curb: Staff identified examples of cities addressing curbside congestion in creative and innovative ways. Common issues focused on ensuring sufficient passenger pick-up and drop-off spaces, commercial vehicle loading zones, access and safety for people riding transit, walking, and biking, and active on-street parking demand management. Examples from across the region and country were detailed in a memorandum that serves as a resource for municipalities that are addressing similar challenges.

- Reverse Commute Areas Analysis: Staff examined four suburban case study locations with relatively high percentages of reverse commuters—Burlington, Needham, Waltham, and Woburn—for existing transit service and opportunities to improve transit access.

- Planning and Operating a Successful Shuttle Program: In this ongoing project, MPO staff will interview staff of shuttle providers across the region to learn about their challenges and successes. The information gleaned, combined with national resources and best practices, will be presented in a guidebook for municipalities and other organizations interested in planning and operating their own shuttle service.

Katie Stetner (MPO Staff) gave an overview of the technical assistance offered by the Transit Analysis and Planning group. Staff work with municipalities, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) subregions, and transportation management associations (TMAs) to provide support for national best practices in transit planning and analysis. Staff has funding for a few projects each year, and there may be funding and staff resources for an additional study this summer. Past projects have included support to the Alewife Bus Priority project, the Mission Hill Link shuttle service, and a transit opportunities study in Peabody.

Stephanie Cronin (Middlesex 3 Coalition/TMA) asked for clarification about whether TMAs are eligible for technical assistance. K. Stetner replied that priority is given to municipalities and subregions, but staff can and have worked with TMAs.

S. Cronin asked if the Reverse Commute Areas Analysis study considered the changes that could be coming to the study areas in the next five to ten years. K. Stetner replied that the study considered existing conditions only.

Alyssa Sandoval (Town of Bedford) asked whether technical assistance is available to the MBTA only, or to other regional transit authorities (RTAs) as well. K. Stetner replied that the program is available to any RTA in the Boston region.

5. Future Transit Working Group Activities

M. Scott asked attendees how the conversation and information provided to this point aligned with their needs, and asked if there were ways staff could provide support.

Susan Barrett (Town of Lexington) said that coordination is important, and that there are missing links between the various services provided throughout the region. She discussed the recent founding of the Inner West Regional Coordinating Council.

A. Sandoval noted that the town of Bedford is on the outer limits of both MBTA and Lowell RTA service. There could be an opportunity for a connection point in town if communication and coordination were improved.

Thomas Schiavone (MassDOT Rail and Transit Division) explained the role of the Rail and Transit Division in coordinating with the state's RTAs. There are sources available to RTAs for capital and operating funding, and there is a new discretionary grant program to which RTAs can apply. A new Workforce Transportation grant program is available for municipalities and TMAs, with approximately $4 million available to applicants. There are currently 24 applications pending approval and awards will be formally announced soon. Also, the Community Transit grant program is available for projects focused on connecting seniors and people with disabilities.

Andrea Leary (Assembly Connect TMA/North Shore TMA) discussed the challenge suburban TMAs face as they rely on grant funding and how the time-limited structure of grants can create budgeting problems after the funding window has expired.
T. Schiavone noted that government funding tends to come in the form of seed money, which is not intended to serve as a long-term source of funding for ongoing operations. He said applications that can show strong public-private partnerships are likely to be successful because they show long-term sustainable funding.

S. Barrett said that when services focus on serving a specific population—for example, seniors, particular businesses, or particular residential developments—there is a missed opportunity to provide better service to the general public. She urged providers to be open to the public whenever possible.

A. Sandoval said she could use help finding resources, both for funding and operational decisions. She gave an example of when she needed to do extensive research on bus shelter design and eventually found a good resource from the MBTA. Knowing what resources are available and who are the best points of contact for questions and guidance would be helpful. M. Scott noted the MPO would like to serve as a repository for such resources.

Jim Gascoigne (Charles River TMA/EZRide) echoed the importance of leveraging short-term public funding to obtain longer-term private funding. For EZRide shuttles, he developed a funding plan using a blend of three years of public funding and a five-year funding commitment from private partners. Transit operators also need to be mindful of the concerns of their private funders, in terms of quality of service and capacity constraints.

Jeff Bennett (128 Business Council) noted that transit providers often need to get creative to secure funding. He hoped the working group could serve as a venue to facilitate communication between people and organizations.

Franny Osman (Town of Acton and Lowell Regional Transit Authority) referenced funding commitments made by the Towns of Lexington and Acton for their transit services. S. Barrett noted that support can change from year to year based on town administration changes and election cycles. She questioned the sustainability of subjecting something as critical as transportation to those fluctuations.

M. Scott recapped the four ways meetings could be structured in the future:

- Presentations from MPO staff about recent activities and decisions
- Discussion of transit-related issues and solutions
- Facilitation of discussion and information sharing between group participants
- Check-ins on how the pilot and working group itself is function and progressing

She asked the group for feedback and suggestions for any specific topics that should be prioritized for discussion.

Lenard Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) asked whether the group had any expectations of what progress would look like or if there were particular

deliverables the group could work towards. A. Leary added that if the group identified a topic the members could have discussion about it and work towards specific goals. M. Scott added that MPO staff could bring relevant resources and information on best practices.

Bryan Pounds (MassDOT) noted that the UPWP can also serve as a vehicle for research, and ideas generated during the group's discussions can be incorporated in the UPWP. S. Johnson said that next year's studies are being selected now, but there is time to accept additional ideas. In the spring, the MPO's UPWP Committee will finalize the studies.

S. Barrett said that a good resource to bring to the next meeting would be a map of all of the services in the region. This would help identify gaps. She also discussed school transportation and whether there may be opportunities to integrate services.

S. Cronin offered several items that the committee could discuss, including information about funding; best practices with regard to transit-oriented development, zoning, and encouraging businesses to join TMAs; and bus rapid transit. She also wondered whether there is an opportunity to develop an app-based solution to help commuters quickly find and pay for parking, perhaps before even leaving home.

A. Leary suggested a discussion about outbound buses to better understand any under-utilized capacity.

J. Bennett suggested a discussion about operational coordination, noting that connecting between different services is often a point of friction for riders.

J. Gascoigne suggested a discussion about ongoing redevelopment of transit stations in Boston and how to ensure they are as bus-friendly as possible—protected from the elements and outfitted with information and signage—so that riders can make seamless connections.

Ben Muller (MassDOT) agreed that a discussion about rider amenities is an opportunity for the group, adding that there is funding available through the MPO for improvement projects. He also encouraged continued outreach so relevant organizations know this work is happening. M. Scott noted there will be additional targeted outreach for future meetings.

L. Diggins voiced his support for the group on behalf of the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee, noting that the two groups' areas of focus are complimentary.

Eric Burkman (MBTA) introduced the Transit Priority Group within the MBTA's planning and scheduling department. The group's focus is on bus lanes, TSP, bus-on-shoulder treatments, and other projects that improve bus reliability. He noted that the MBTA can offer technical assistance, implementation, and funding for municipalities. A major goal within the next year or two is the creation of a "bus reliability toolkit" to help municipal officials envision projects. The group will be reaching out to municipalities in the near future.

Jillian Linnell (MBTA) noted the value of assembling the many resources discussed at the meeting into one place and for keeping the resources updated and managed.

Gregory Sobczynski (MassDOT) encouraged the group to incorporate equity of service and access into the work it does.

6. Public Comments
There were none.

7. Closing and Next Steps
M. Scott provided summary remarks and next steps. Staff will work to refine the list of discussion topics brought up at the meeting. Staff will also explore creating a page on the MPO's website to host information about the group and its work.

Attendance

Attendees	Affiliation
Lucia Dolan	Green Newton
Louise Baxter	T Riders Union
Len Jokubaitis	Harvard School of Public Health
Paul Ruggeri	Streetlight Data
Amitai Lipton	MassDOT District 6
Benjamin Jaffer	Office of Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu
Michael Littman	Howard Stein Hudson
Thomas Schiavone	MassDOT Rail and Transit Division
Stephanie Cronin	Middlesex 3 TMA
Caitlin Allen-Connelly	A Better City
Ben Muller	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Michael Gentile	495 Partnership
Jillian Linnell	MBTA
Alyssa Sandoval	Town of Bedford
Susan Barrett	Town of Lexington
Franny Osman	Town of Acton; Lowell RTA
Gregory Sobczynski	MassDOT Office of Diversity and Civil Rights
Sheila Greene Douglas	South Boston City Point Neighborhood Association
Kristiana Lachiusa	Livable Streets Alliance
Lori Steans	MassDOT District 6
Ari Ofsevit	Institute for Transportation & Development Policy
Eric Burkman	MBTA
Ana Cristina Fragoso	Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Lenard Diggins	Regional Transportation Advisory Council; MBTA Rider Oversight Committee
Russell Findley	City of Salem
Bryan Pounds	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Antron Watson	AARP
Jim Gascoigne	Charles River TMA (EZ Ride)
Paul Regan	MBTA Advisory Board
Jeff Bennett	128 Business Council
Andrea Leary	Assembly Connect TMA/North Shore TMA

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

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Annette Demchur
Jonathan Belcher
Andrew Clark
Róisín Foley
Sandy Johnston
Michelle Scott
Katie Stetner
Kate White

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