

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of June 10, 2009 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

Malek Al-Khatib, Chair, called the meeting to order at 3:10 PM.

1. Chair's Report – *Malek Al-Khatib, Chair*

Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

M. Al-Khatib said an Advisory Council meeting will be held in August. A presentation on the Accelerated Bridge Program is planned for the August meeting.

2. Approval of the Draft Meeting Minutes of May 13, 2009

A motion to approve the Draft Meeting Minutes of May 13, 2009, with no changes, was made and seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Presentation: Briefing on the Program for Mass Transportation (PMT) – *Joe Cosgrove, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)*

Joe Cosgrove briefed members on the draft PMT, which is the long-range capital plan for the MBTA. He said that the PMT will soon be submitted to the MBTA Board of Directors, and the MBTA Advisory Board, for approval.

According to J. Cosgrove, a different approach was taken to the development of this PMT. Liz Moore of the MPO Staff, was project manager for the PMT. This PMT devotes a greater share of resources to achieving a state of good repair for the MBTA system than previous plans. In the past, the PMT took a “broad brush” approach, looking at any ideas for capital improvements. Many of these ideas were expansion projects. But now the state is playing a larger role in setting the expansion agenda with many projects, such as the Green Line Extension, being paid for by the State. This PMT is more focused on achieving a state of good repair and taking a systems-level approach, rather than getting involved in project-level planning.

J. Cosgrove next reviewed some general statistics about the system, which can be viewed in the attached presentation slides. The Boston region is vibrant, and the transit system's status quo will not work. There are 175 communities, 4.5 million people, and 2.5 million jobs in the service area. The Boston region has the 12th worst traffic congestion of any region in the nation, so it's important to have quality transit service that is a viable alternative to the car. This is a very transit-friendly region. It is one of only three cities

where the transit system beats the car for work trips to the CBD, which makes the MBTA very proud.

J. Cosgrove said that these are the best of times and worst of times for transit. Ridership is at record levels, but the MBTA also faces a financial crisis because of its debt service burden. The MBTA is looking at potentially the fourth fare increase in the last nine years. This is very much a concern of MBTA management.

He then presented the visions and priorities of the PMT. The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is the MBTA's fiscally constrained, short-range capital planning document, while the PMT allows MBTA to produce a long-range vision and set priorities as an agency, without that constraint.

The vision of the PMT is to meet mobility needs, reduce environmental impacts, and strengthen the region's economic competitiveness. The PMT goals are to take people where they need to go when they need to go, to provide good customer service, to get information systems up for customers, and to consider the system's impacts on the environment.

The PMT examined different investment strategies and worked with the PMT Advisory Committee to come up with evaluation criteria and targets. These targets are to increase ridership by one percent per year, and reduce travel time by two percent per year. The PMT also considered larger societal goals, such as the Commonwealth's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Scenarios of different investment strategies, focused on a state of good repair, were analyzed.

In the development of the PMT, the region was broken into corridors, referred to as "transit markets." The PMT considered what is happening in those markets now, and what they will look like in 20 years. Several common themes, such as accessibility, improving bus service, bike access, bus rapid transit systems, and community coordination emerged.

The MBTA is not building much parking because they lack funding for it. The MBTA is now the second largest provider of parking in the Northeast. They currently own 45,000 parking spaces; 20,000 spaces were added between 1990 and 2005. The MBTA is the second largest holder of real estate in Massachusetts, behind only the Commonwealth. They are considering how to better utilize their land holdings to create travel demand near stations.

Members had the following questions and comments:

How is MBTA coordinating with the Regional Transit Authority feeders and supporting their operations? (Frank Demasi, Wellesley)

They are working together on streamlining the CharlieCard to make transfers more seamless. They also have partnered on the issue of parking. Much parking expansion has been done in partnership with the RTAs. (J. Cosgrove)

Is economic development a goal of the PMT? (Walter Bonin, Marlborough)

It is indirectly. Mobility has economic development ramifications. (J. Cosgrove)

Not expanding roads puts MBTA under pressure to facilitate economic development, as the highways once did. Route 128 and I-495 were built partially to facilitate economic development, but now the pressure is on the public transportation system to fill this role. (W. Bonin)

That is a critical point. The MBTA has a capacity problem. You are right, the highway system is developed, so the capacity issue needs to be addressed through track capacity, providing for midday layover space at South Station, and better connections between North and South Stations. By 2015, many of the buses and commuter rail/rapid transit vehicles will need to be replaced. It will be a big challenge to finance procurements that will be needed for the next generation of vehicles. (J. Cosgrove)

Joe Cosgrove invited people to contact him at his e-mail, jcosgrove@mbta.com, and by phone, (617) 222-4400, with questions or comments.

4. Briefing on the Development of the UPWP – Steve Olanoff, Westwood & UPWP Subcommittee Chair

S. Olanoff discussed the current work of the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee's UPWP Subcommittee by highlighting some of the new studies proposed in the Universe of Projects list. The freight studies requested by the Advisory Council were added to the list. He thinks the HOV lane study is important. This is a study to look at the potential of HOV lanes in the region, and is important because of capacity constraints on the highway. He reported that the list is extensive and will be whittled down. Budget information, which will show the amount of funding available for new studies, is necessary for the final development of the UPWP. This information will be forthcoming.

Members had the following questions and comments:

Where is the list of projects? Does the Advisory Council have a list of priorities, and will we be voting on that? (Kristina Johnson, Quincy)

The list is extensive at this time. (S. Olanoff)

K. Johnson said she would like the list to be whittled down for the Advisory Council to consider. K. Johnson also asked S. Olanoff to summarize his recommendations.

S. Olanoff said that besides the HOV study, he cannot make a recommendation at this time because the list is so long. He said it will be difficult for the list to be whittled down and brought back to the Advisory Council for further discussion because of the tight time frame.

K. Johnson asked if S. Olanoff can bring to the Advisory Council a shorter list of projects to be considered. K. Johnson said she thinks it will be helpful for the full Advisory Council to have input in the process.

M. Al-Khatib expressed concern that the committees of the Advisory Council are not meeting frequently enough. The Advisory Council committees should be looking at documents such as the UPWP and making comments. He wants everyone who would like to be on the Advisory Council committees to let M. Al-Khatib or the committee chairman know they are interested.

M. Al-Khatib said that a special meeting could be held to discuss the UPWP before the next meeting. Anyone with interest in a special meeting should discuss it with S. Olanoff.

S. Olanoff said that he will ask if the UPWP Universe of Projects can be sent to the Advisory Council membership by e-mail after each revision.

K. Johnson said that the Advisory Council should not have to wait for MPO Staff to whittle the list down.

Louis Elisa of the Seaport Advisory Council said that perhaps an Advisory Council committee on water transportation should be formed.

Hayes Morrison of MPO Staff said that MPOs only are concerned with surface transportation, and that water transportation is not included in the definition of surface transportation.

L. Elisa of the Seaport Advisory Council said that water transportation may be emphasized in the reauthorization bill.

F. Demasi said that water transportation needs to play more into the overall transportation planning because it affects the freight network.

Is there an opportunity for the UPWP to address the Urban Ring? (Roman Koebel, Fenway Community Development Corporation)

S. Olanoff said it may be considered in some of the ongoing work of CTPS, but the list they are talking about includes new projects to be initiated in the coming year.

M. Al-Khatib asked that the Universe of Projects be sent to the membership for discussion.

5. Briefing on the Development of the Draft TIP FFY 2010-2013 – Hayes Morrison, MPO Staff

H. Morrison briefed the Advisory Council on the development of the FFYs 2010-2013 TIP. She said that June and July is TIP season, and that on Thursday, June 11, a staff recommendation for the projects to be funded with target funding is scheduled to be made to the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee (TPPC). Additionally, an amendment to the 2009 element of the TIP will be presented to the TPPC. It does not involve removing projects; it would only make some adjustments to costs. She is hopeful that all projects that went into the 2009 element will remain.

The Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) met on May 28 and each Metropolitan Planning Organization was given target-funding levels for TIP development. The targets are the monies each MPO has control over for funding of projects. H. Morrison said that the information shows anticipated level funding through FFY 2013. Target funds for the Boston Region MPO to program will be approximately \$65 million in 2010.

The Boston Region MPO only programs the target funding, which includes CMAQ funding, National Highway System funding, Surface Transportation Program (STP), Highway Safety Improvement Program funding, and Enhancement Projects, if there are any. It is a small subset of the larger TIP. The 2009 Target funding is \$65 million approximately, while the entire TIP, with all highway and transit elements, is in excess of \$1.2 billion. In a normal year it is about \$600 to \$700 million. It is higher this year because of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding.

Roughly \$535 million of federal highway funds come to Massachusetts, and roughly \$140 million of that is available to the MPOs, and that amount is divided between the MPOs based on population.

Next month, the Transportation Planning and Programming Committee will develop its draft FFYs 2010 to 2013 TIP. The TIP will be an agenda topic for the Advisory Council. A draft TIP cannot be released to the public until the MPO releases its draft Regional Transportation Plan Amendment. The Advisory Council will have opportunities to review and comment on the draft TIP.

Members had the following questions and comments:

What will happen with the TIP at the meetings on June 18 and 25? (Laura Wiener, Arlington)

The current schedule is for the projects to be discussed at the TPPC meeting on June 18 and for a vote on the draft to occur at the TPPC meeting on June 25. (H. Morrison)

Although the MPO only has freedom of choice with a certain amount of the TIP, does the TIP include in its documentation all the regionally significant surface transportation projects? (Wig Zamore, Somerville)

Not necessarily. (H. Morrison)

Are there projects with air quality impacts that are not in the TIP?(W. Zamore)

If they are funded with 100% state money, they are not in the TIP. Transit projects funded solely with state money do not need to be in the TIP. (H. Morrison)

And they are not in the air quality conformity analysis? (W. Zamore)

I believe they are in this analysis. (H. Morrison)

Can RTAC comment on things in the TIP that are not within the MPO's freedom of choice? (W. Zamore)

Yes. (H. Morrison)

What is the status on the clarification of the fiscal constraint issue with regard to the TIP and the Regional Transportation Plan amendment? (W. Zamore)

The fiscal constraint issue was a problem with the completion of the 2008 TIP. That problem was resolved with the passage of the transportation bond bill in 2008, which covers five years worth of funding. There is not a fiscal constraint issue, as introduced in 2008, as the reason for not accepting the 2008-2011 TIP. (H. Morrison)

Can you explain the delay with the Regional Transportation Plan and is there anything we can do to expedite it? (Lauren Rosenzweig, Acton)

The Plan amendment is contingent upon the Commonwealth determining the availability of state and federal funding for regionally significant projects over the next 30 years. Those numbers have not been forthcoming. There has not been a vote in the legislature on state revenue sources. (H. Morrison)

What is your best estimate as to when the Plan will be amended? (Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination)

Not in the immediate future. The MPO can move forward with the TIP table development, but cannot finalize the action until the Plan is amended. But, the TIP and Plan amendment can be released for public comment together (H. Morrison)

Will disbursement be based on the Census update? (John McQueen, WalkBoston)

The target could be impacted by the Census update. But that does not affect the present TIP being developed. (H. Morrison)

Can non-motorized modes be funded by the MPO? (J. McQueen)

Yes. (H. Morrison)

7. Advisory Council Committee Reports

Freight: The Freight Committee Chair, Walter Bonin, introduced the topic of the freight studies.

W. Bonin mentioned studies the Advisory Council has recommended, which will look at ways to divert freight from trucks to rail, and how to support the development of short lines. Short lines can support economic development. The studies may address the

issues raised by M. Al-Khatib, who expressed concern about loss of rail infrastructure and the need to identify particular rail corridors to preserve.

Co-Chair F. Demasi said public policy can be used to preserve the freight network. It is in jeopardy because of high-end development on terminal properties and the development of commuter rail. He said that he thinks public policy should be used to preserve the freight network, and that he hopes the state's freight plan addresses these issues. Furthermore, he supports the creation of a transportation infrastructure bank that would fund rail improvements.

Members then commented on the importance of the rail infrastructure for both freight and passenger services.

8. Member Announcements

R. Canale: There may be a field trip to Alewife to look at the multi-modal aspect of the area around September 1.

M. Al-Khatib: The membership committee has been investigating attendance issues. They are considering revising the Advisory Council bylaws to give the membership the ability to remove members, through a vote, that are not attending meetings. He is going to send recommendations for changes to the membership for consideration.

Members then discussed and offered suggestions and comments about addressing low attendance. They included:

- Removing a member entity's voting rights, after low attendance, but not removing their membership
- Providing the member entity an opportunity to select another representative
- Considering holding meetings in another location or time of day

An informal poll showed that five members preferred that meetings be held starting at 1 PM, six preferred 3 p.m., and five would prefer a morning meeting start. M. Al-Khatib said the Advisory Council will continue to meet at 3 p.m.

S. Olanoff announced the results of the MPO election held on June 9. Braintree won the city seat and Bedford won the town seat.

F. Demasi asked if there was any response to the Advisory Council's letter to the Secretary of Transportation. M. Al-Khatib said he was told by the Secretary that transportation funding depends on the legislature.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m.

Attachments:

1. Attendance List for June 10, 2009

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for June 10, 2009

Cities and Towns

Lauren Rosenzweig, Acton
Laura Wiener, Arlington
Bob Campbell, Braintree
Todd Kirrane, Brookline
Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge
Gail Wagner, Lexington
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Tony Centore, Medfield
Patrick Reffett, Natick
Kurt Mullen, Needham
Kristina Johnson, Quincy
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination
Steven Rawding, Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Council
Donna Smallwood, MassRides

Citizen Groups

Douglas Prentiss, American Planning Association/Massachusetts Chapter
Elliot Rothman, Boston Society of Architects
Tom Yardley, Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization
John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors

Joe Cosgrove, MBTA
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council
Richard Flynn, Northeast Logistics Systems
Romin Koebel, Fenway Community Development Corporation

MPO Staff

Mike Callahan
Anne McGahan
Liz Moore
Hayes Morrison
Sean Pfalzer