



Draft Memorandum for the Record Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

March 13, 2024, Meeting Minutes

2:30 PM–4:30 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 list, see page 7.)

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the December 13, 2023, meeting was made by the Boston Society of Civil Engineers (AnaCristina Fragoso) and seconded by an Acton resident (Franny Osman). The minutes were approved.

3. Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Update and Review of Peer Advisory Councils— *Stella Jordan, Public Engagement Program Manager, MPO Staff*

S. Jordan discussed the MPO's MOU update process and presented a review of peer advisory councils. She explained that the MPO is updating its core governance document, the MOU, based on feedback received from the Federal Certification Review (the quadrennial process for ensuring MPOs are meeting their federal requirements) in 2022. The MPO's federal partners suggested several updates, including revising the description of the role of the Advisory Council. S. Jordan discussed the goals for updating the Advisory Council language in the MOU established by the MPO's MOU Update Committee:

- Clarify the role and mission of the Advisory Council
- Outline the relationship between the Advisory Council and MPO board, staff, and engagement activities.
- Clearly define goals for the Advisory Council.
- Do not focus on specific mechanisms and logistics at this time.

S. Jordan presented findings from the [Review of Peer Agency Public Advisory Entities](#) memorandum. She stated that there is a wide variety of roles and structures for advisory councils and that peer MPOs' advisory councils have had several common successes and challenges.

S. Jordan stated the MOU update offers the opportunity for the Advisory Council to establish a purpose and mission related to the MPO's decision-making process. S. Jordan led a discussion on mission, vision, and goals to develop ideas and priorities to inform the draft update for the Advisory Council language.

Discussion

AC Fragoso discussed the makeup of the Boston Region MPO's Advisory Council. She asked if other MPOs' advisory councils have technical members and boards. S. Jordan stated that the composition of the peer advisory councils referenced in the memorandum was focused on community participation, but other MPOs researched had advisory councils with more technical and professional representation.

L. Diggins discussed the challenges of inviting participants who may not be familiar with transportation in the Boston region. L. Diggins stated that there should be a process to help educate the public about transportation so that they can fully engage in the planning process.

F. Osman stated that the Boston Region MPO's Advisory Council should grow to involve more participants, and members should seek to understand why people attend meetings.

L. Diggins asked if other Massachusetts MPO advisory councils have a voting seat on the MPO board. S. Jordan discussed that other Massachusetts MPO advisory councils appear more similar to policy boards or technical committees in terms of composition and representation and are less focused on public engagement. L. Diggins stated that as the chair of the Advisory Council he feels a greater responsibility for understanding the MPO's technical work and communicating with members to make educated decisions.

F. Osman asked who the Advisory Council advises, whether that be the MPO board, the chair of the Advisory Council, or the MPO staff. L. Diggins discussed that the Advisory Council guides the MPO's transportation planning and decision-making through various venues and that the Advisory Council can be seen as a sample of various groups and communities that members represent.

John McQueen, WalkMassachusetts, suggested that staff should share how the Advisory Council guides their work and how their input has influenced the MPO's work. S. Jordan discussed that peer agencies stated the significance and challenges of evaluating the role of their advisory councils. S. Jordan stated that, in her role as the liaison between the Advisory Council and MPO staff, she works with the chair of the Advisory Council and MPO staff to

effectively coordinate time for staff to meet with the Advisory Council to share information and seek input about projects and plans; staff engage with the Advisory Council throughout the development of MPO work and especially before decisions have been made. She noted that other MPOs included in the peer research framed their advisory councils as focus groups for helping staff develop projects and plans, which is similar to the role MPO staff see the Boston Region MPO's Advisory Council playing. Tegin Teich, executive director of MPO staff, agreed with S. Jordan's statement and added that the role of the Advisory Council is to provide input on projects and plans, but this requires effort from both sides to ensure that the process is meaningful and effective.

F. Osman stated it was interesting and affirming to learn about peer advisory councils' successes and challenges. F. Osman is planning to work with S. Jordan on initiating discussions with past Advisory Council members to learn more about their experiences and to help expand membership and guide the work of the Advisory Council in the future.

L. Diggins asked how the Boston Region MPO's Advisory Council came to having a seat on the MPO board with a voting role. T. Teich discussed that the power and impact of the chair of the Advisory Council having a voting role on the MPO board. She noted that there is a broad variety of governance structures at other MPOs, where groups similar to the Boston Region MPO's Advisory Council sometimes have a voting role. She expressed interest in conducting further research to identify the historical context for the Advisory Council's participation on the MPO board.

4. Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Universe of Proposed Studies—*Srilekha Murthy, Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Manager, MPO Staff*

S. Murthy provided an overview and facilitated a discussion about [the FFY 2025 Universe of Proposed Studies](#). She stated that staff received 121 study ideas via a public survey, and she explained that to create the Universe of Proposed Studies staff met to categorize studies into four general topic areas:

- Climate resilience
- Bicycle and pedestrian
- Freight
- Transit/multimodal

S. Murthy described a set of criteria that staff used to review the proposed studies in the Universe. The criteria assess how each proposed study is

- consistent with the goals of the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), MPO priorities, and current focus themes for staff's work (equity, resilience, safety, and uncertainty);

- supportive of ongoing program work; and
- regionally relevant and applicable.

Staff additionally assessed internal capacity to execute the proposed studies. S. Murthy stated the MPO is prioritizing proposals that can be incorporated into an ongoing program in FFY 2025 or 2026, or discrete studies that directly relate to future MPO work within an ongoing work program. Staff identified 23 proposed study ideas that met the above criteria and can either be incorporated within ongoing program work or completed as a discrete study.

S. Murthy shared a brief overview of ongoing MPO work programs that will be funded in the FFY 2025 UPWP. She stated that while the budget for discrete studies is not yet known, it is projected to be limited and similar to FFY 2024 (\$150,000).

Discussion

A.C. Fragoso asked if the Advisory Council would create a matrix for the proposed studies to determine which projects should be prioritized. S. Murthy, S. Jordan, and L. Diggins discussed ways the Advisory Council could coordinate a ranking of the proposed studies and share priorities with the UPWP Committee and MPO board.

F. Osman stated that she would be interested in learning about the staff's comments and opinions about the proposed studies. L. Diggins stated that the UPWP Committee meetings may be an informative space to learn more about the proposed studies. S. Jordan added that several staff comments are included in the FFY 2025 Universe of Proposed Studies document posted to the calendar. J. McQueen suggested that staff comments in the document could be more evaluative of the potential impacts of proposed studies. He discussed other considerations in study selection including budget constraints, goal and impact evaluation, revisiting previously proposed study ideas, and gaps in the topics proposed for FFY 2025. J. McQueen, L. Diggins, F. Osman, and S. Murthy discussed prior Advisory Council conversations during the development of the FFY 2025 UPWP and previous opportunities for Advisory Council members to submit study ideas. F. Osman stated she is interested in studying the North-South bus corridor between the East-West rail lines because there are a range of groups that could benefit from transit.

F. Osman, S. Murthy, and Sean Rourke, MPO staff, discussed the difference between UPWP studies and other contract and technical assistance work conducted by staff.

J. McQueen expressed that this discussion did not provide a way to meaningfully provide input on the proposed studies. L. Diggins stated that all comments are encouraged and can be discussed one-on-one, and also brought to UPWP Committee meetings.

5. FFYs 2025-29 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Update—*Ethan Lapointe, Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) Program Manager, MPO Staff*

E. Lapointe presented the [FFYs 2025-29 TIP Project Readiness Scenario](#), which reflects changes to projects currently programmed in the TIP. He stated that while this document factors in most project delays, cost and inflation changes, and advance construction, it does not factor in new projects or new information that staff may receive in coming months.

E. Lapointe reviewed a draft financial outlook for programming in FFYs 2025–29.

E. Lapointe stated that further project delays or deprogramming may be necessary to accommodate fiscal constraints and readiness issues, particularly in FFY 2027. He stated that deprogrammed projects may reapply in future TIP cycles. E. Lapointe noted that the financial outlook will change as scenarios develop and that the issues described are not unique to the Boston region or municipally proposed projects.

E. Lapointe discussed various issues that lead to project delays, including the following:

- Most projects were recommended for delay due to difficulty submitting right-of-way plans and/or environmental permits.
- Many projects are not meeting design submission deadlines, or their submissions require revision.
- Projects with slow design progress often have older cost estimates.
- Permit needs that emerge during design may increase the project scope.
- The longer a project takes to deliver, the worse the needs to be addressed become.

E. Lapointe discussed how these challenges are expected to persist until more projects progress in their designs.

Discussion

L. Diggins and E. Lapointe said that the draft TIP will be released for public comment on April 18.

F. Osman discussed the importance of the MPO providing assistance to municipalities that are facing fiscal constraints.

AC Frago asked if the FFY 2027 fiscal constraints that may necessitate project deprogramming account for the loss of revenue from public transit. E. Lapointe stated that the TIP's financial outlook does not factor in any state funding sources as it is solely related to federal funding availability.

6. 3C Committee Planning—*Lenard Diggins, Chair*

L. Diggins discussed logistics for members to meet and discuss draft Advisory Council comment letters on the FFYs 2025–29 TIP and FFY 2025 UPWP.

7. Chair’s Report—*Lenard Diggins, Chair*

L. Diggins encouraged members to review documents related to E. Lapointe’s presentation on the FFYs 2025–29 TIP.

8. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Boston Society of Civil Engineers (AnaCristina Fragoso) and seconded by an Acton resident (Franny Osman). The motion carried.

Attendees

Member Municipalities	Representatives and Alternates
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City of Cambridge

Andy Reker

Town of Weymouth

Owen MacDonald

Advocacy Groups	Attendees
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American Council of Engineering Companies

Fred Moseley

Boston Society of Architects

Schuyler Larrabee

MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee

Lenard Diggins

MoveMassachusetts

Jon Seward

WalkMassachusetts

John McQueen

Acton Resident

Franny Osman

Agencies (Non-Voting)	Attendees
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MetroWest Regional Transit Authority

Tyler Terrasi

MetroWest Regional Transit Authority

Jim Nee

Other Attendees	Affiliation
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JR Frey

Town of Hingham

Andrew Jennings

Town of Billerica

James McDermott

Dan Albert

Walter Heller

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich

Gina Perille

Annette Demchur

Stella Jordan

Jia Huang

Ethan Lapointe

Srilekha Murthy

Sean Rourke

Erin Maguire

Judy Day

Abby Cutrumbes

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