

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Unified Planning Work Program Committee Meeting Summary

April 11, 2024, Meeting

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

David Krevat, Chair, representing Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Decisions

The Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the minutes of the meeting of March 7, 2024
- Recommend that the MPO board waive the 21-day public review period and approve Amendment Two of the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024 UPWP
- Approve Scenario Three of the Discrete Studies Scenarios

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

See attendance on page 9.

2. Public Comments

There were none.

3. Action Item: Summary of the March 7, 2024 Meeting—*Srilekha Murthy, MPO Staff*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

March 7, 2024 Meeting Minutes [pdf](#) | [html](#)

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 7, 2024, was made by the Inner Core Committee, City of Somerville (Tom Bent), and seconded by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Lenard Diggins). The motion carried.

4. Action Item: FFY 2024 UPWP Amendment Two—Srilekha Murthy, MPO Staff

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

FFY 2024 UPWP Amendment Two [pdf](#) | [html](#)

FFY 2024 UPWP Amendment Two Memo [pdf](#) | [html](#)

FFY 2024 UPWP Amendment Two Redline [pdf](#) | [html](#)

S. Murthy presented Amendment Two of the FFY 2024 UPWP. This amendment consists of adjustments to ongoing work program budgets. The details of the adjustments can be found in the FFY 2024 UPWP Amendment Two Memo, found on the MPO meeting calendar and linked above. Additionally, the clean and redline versions, which track the changes in the budgets, can be found above and on the calendar. These changes are primarily addressing evolving needs, staff capacity, and staff attrition. S. Murthy clarified that, similar to other budget adjustments that have been presented in the past, a reduction in budget does not mean the work will not be completed. It simply means that staff have reevaluated the budget and realized not as many resources are needed to complete a project. These adjustments will have an overall net-zero impact on the total FFY 2024 UPWP budget.

S. Murthy requested that the board vote to waive the 21-day public review period and approve the amendment as presented. Waiving the public review period would allow staff adequate time to commence and complete any planned work before the end of the fiscal year with their adjusted budgets. This amendment will be presented to the MPO board on April 18, 2024.

Discussion

D. Krevat reinforced S. Murthy's points by explaining that this budget change is to adjust for the status of ongoing and remaining projects and, as the end of the fiscal year approaches, make sure the budget is allocated correctly.

Vote

A motion to recommend that the MPO board waive the 21-day public review period and approve Amendment Two as presented, was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the Inner Core Committee, City of Somerville (T. Bent). The motion carried.

5. Presentation: Discrete Studies Scenario Development—Srilekha Murthy, MPO Staff

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

FFY 2025 UPWP Universe of Studies [pdf](#) | [html](#)

UPWP Survey Results [pdf](#) | [html](#)

S. Murthy then went on to present on proposed discrete study ideas, and results from the survey sent to staff and committee members. This included an overview of the study development and selection process to date, and some context regarding staff's process in developing their recommendations, and some funding possibilities.

S. Murthy explained that the development of study ideas begins with an outreach effort that begins in the fall. MPO staff attend meetings, release public surveys, hold conversations, and share presentations. One example is a ranking survey distributed recently (results available on the MPO meeting calendar and above). MPO staff also take feedback from committee meetings into account, and ensure that studies align with the MPO's vision, goals, and objectives, and with the overall priorities of the MPO. They also review ongoing work, staff resources and capacity, and the potential for the work to be completed in one fiscal year.

The UPWP Discrete Studies survey was completed by six committee members and six staff members. Both groups had a range of priorities, but there were notable overlaps. Taking this account, staff chose studies that can be funded in a variety of ways. Some other studies were chosen based on feedback from meetings and staff reviews. The final discrete studies budget is \$150,000 for FFY 2025.

The staff recommended a variety of studies. The first is the Bluebikes and MBTA Connections (initially named Bikes and Trains) (study M-2). The next is Mode Shift: What Would It Take to Move the Needle? (M-3), followed by Roadway Pricing: Balancing the Need for a Transition to Sustainability Mobility with Equity Considerations (M-4), and finally, Decarbonizing the Freight Sector: Exploring the Potential for Using E-Cargo Bikes for First-/Last-Mile Freight Deliveries (F-2).

These suggestions were carefully developed using all of the criteria described above. Staff noted that some of the studies can be flexible in their timelines and budgets. For example, the Roadway Pricing study could be completed in as little as a fiscal quarter, in order to align with the release of results from Governor Healey's Transportation Funding Task Force. Once studies are selected, staff review the initial study descriptions and refine them to make goals and study questions clearer.

Staff developed four scenarios that incorporate these projects in different ways. The first two scenarios prioritize Roadway Pricing and Mode Shift, supplemented with either the Freight or Bluebikes studies. The other two scenarios give priority to the Freight and Bluebikes studies, with the option of including either Roadway Pricing or Mode Shift.

S. Murthy then showed the cost breakdown of all four studies, as shown below:

- Scenario 1
 - Roadway Pricing, \$50,000
 - Mode Shift, \$40,000
 - Bluebikes and MBTA Connections, \$60,000
- Scenario 2
 - Roadway Pricing, \$50,000
 - Mode Shift, \$50,000
 - Decarbonizing the Freight Sector, \$50,000
- Scenario 3
 - Roadway Pricing, \$50,000
 - Bluebikes and MBTA Connections, \$60,000
 - Decarbonizing the Freight Sector, \$40,000
- Scenario 4
 - Mode Shift, \$40,000
 - Bluebikes and MBTA Connections, \$70,000
 - Decarbonizing the Freight Sector, \$40,000

S. Murthy concluded by requesting that the committee discuss and decide on a final list of studies to fund in FFY 2025. MPO staff are working on developing the document of studies and are aiming to present the Draft FFY 2025 UPWP to the UPWP Committee in early May. S. Murthy then opened the floor for questions, comments, and discussion.

Discussion

J. Wallerce (MAPC) asked if it was typical to fund studies like these at different levels, and what criteria determines whether a particular study is funded more than another.

S. Murthy answered that typically funding depends upon staff ability to complete a project within the budget and timeframe. The budget estimates depend on the amount of work that can be completed.

David Koses (City of Newton) expressed some confusion about the study called Decarbonizing the Freight Sector: Exploring the Potential for Using E-Cargo Bikes for First-/Last-Mile Freight Deliveries, noting he did not remember that being discussed.

J. Wallerce clarified that these would be e-cargo bikes, with a higher load capacity.

D. Koses clarified that his confusion was about whether this had been discussed as

presented here. D. Krevat noted that the original study proposal had a much larger, general scope, which was beyond the capabilities of the UPWP, and that the study had been revised to bring it within UPWP capabilities. S. Murthy agreed that the study had been pared down based on feedback from the last UPWP Committee meeting, in which committee members ranked the study highly, and needed a more specific focus. S. Murthy also pointed out that some of the confusion might be about the similarity with another proposed study (study F-1) that was similar, but was also too widely scoped, and was in some ways folded into this re-worked study. Additionally, the F-2 study was *not* included in the ranking survey, but F-1 was. Those two studies were worked together to become the study presented here, which is a replacement.

L. Diggins requested the documents to look over. L. Diggins then asked for more information on the planned multimodal studies for FFY 2025, how they fit into the overall budget along with these discrete studies, and how the discrete studies would complement the multimodal studies. S. Murthy responded that she would have Ronaq Basu, Manager of Multimodal Planning and Design, provide an answer.

R. Basu first went back to clarify on the questions D. Koses had. R. Basu reiterated what S. Murthy and D. Krevat had said, that the F-1 study was included in the ranking survey, while the F-2 was not (although it was generally available in the UPWP Universe documents), which is why it might not have looked familiar. Since the F-1 program was rated so highly, and the F-2 study was generally similar, but more focused, it felt more appropriate to focus on that one instead. D. Koses sought more information on the purpose of the E-Cargo Bike Use study, asking if the study was focused on improving air quality by using e-bikes to replace motorized vehicles for activities such as food delivery, rather than electric vehicles.

R. Basu responded that the focus was less on air quality and more on safety. Staff learned from the MPO's Sustainability and Decarbonization in the Freight and Logistics Sector in the North Suffolk Area study that one of the main concerns raised was about the small vans that are typically used for last-mile package deliveries in neighborhoods, which were raising questions of safety. Separately, the City of Boston is conducting a study on the use of e-bikes for food deliveries, and this study looked more at the use of the e-cargo bikes for last-mile deliveries for online shopping. This study would build on both the City of Boston study and the North Suffolk study.

Tom O'Rourke (Three Rivers Interlocal Council, Town of Norwood) noted that the studies being discussed in this meeting were all Boston-centric, and did not apply to areas further out in the region.

J. Wallerice added that the focus on the e-cargo bikes was really about congestion and curbside management because of last-mile delivery vehicles becoming increasingly common, with little inventory, meaning more trips. These vehicles are also quite large, with a lot of impact, making the streets less safe, while taking up street space, bike lanes, and bus lanes in dense urban areas. This study would be able to combine two important goals, as discussed: both the issue of safety and road use, and decarbonization and air quality. T. Bent used this point to ask for further explanation of what the purpose of this study would be, noting that it would require establishing neighborhood freight hubs, which would upend the system business have in place now. T. Bent wondered what the response would be from businesses, as well as the cost of the project, and if it really would be any safer.

L. Diggins agreed that what T. Bent had asked was partially why the request for the rest of the MPO's multimodal studies was raised. L. Diggins went on to tentatively support Scenario 2 (above), specifically noting how helpful a Roadway Pricing study would be for supporting the Transportation Finance Task Force's work on the same subject.

D. Koses asked about the storage space of the e-cargo bikes and if they would be efficient enough, but noted the smaller size would mean they would take up less curb space. J. Wallerice described the capabilities of the e-cargo bikes, explaining that they are different from regular e-bikes in that they are specifically designed to be able to carry extra cargo in large containers attached to the front or back. L. Diggins commented on the use of smaller neighborhood hubs that would be the base for these e-cargo bikes to deliver from.

D. Krevat then moved on by asking S. Murthy to go over study M-2, Bluebikes and MBTA Connections, in more detail. S. Murthy passed this question on to R. Basu, who first expanded on study M-3, Roadway Pricing. R. Basu discussed the various data sets the MPO has access to that would be the basis for this study and how they could contribute to the larger conversation on roadway-pricing strategies in the Boston region. Then R. Basu moved to M-2, the Bluebikes study, briefly discussing how a similar study had ranked highly in the ranking survey and how this particular one was chosen for the relationships it fostered. Finally, R. Basu discussed study M-4 on Mode Shift, which would be built on gathering data on current mode shift efforts, interviews with other key players in the mode shift process, and finally deciding on some projects to prioritize.

D. Krevat expressed some confusion about the Mode Shift study, specifically wondering who the audience would be and how it would impact them. D. Krevat noted that a lot of existing research has been done on the topic of mode shift and what incentivizes people to switch from single-occupancy vehicles to other modes. D. Krevat asked what the

desired outcome for this study would be and what changes it would be seeking to make. Tegin Teich (Executive Director of the MPO staff) answered by noting that board members are encouraged to explore what a desired outcome would be and what change would look like as part of this process, and that these expectations are part of this discussion.

L. Diggins returned to T. O'Rourke's comment about these projects not benefiting the outer subregions of Boston, and asked if anything that had been said made a difference on that point. T. O'Rourke replied in the negative. T. Teich noted that the total for these studies was \$150,000, which was a very small portion of the MPO's funding.

T. O'Rourke agreed, stating that he understood there were many other studies that supported the other subregions. T. Teich went on to say that these studies were designed to be narrow in scope and to be done within a tight timeframe. T. O'Rourke pointed out that he did not have a preference for any of the scenarios because they would all have negligible impact on his subregion.

R. Basu spoke up to discuss the multimodal programs that had been asked about earlier. R. Basu mentioned an intersection study that had a wider reach. Another effort is a reevaluation of how the MPO chooses places to do studies, noting there were many gaps in regions and that those places would be getting extra weight in the decision-making process. L. Diggins said that all MPO projects used to be shared in committee meetings, which would help inform the process for choosing and voting on studies, and that should be brought back to these meetings in some way.

D. Krevat then moved on by asking S. Murthy to clarify the timeline for this process. S. Murthy stated that the full draft would be presented before the board in early May, meaning a decision today would be best, but not absolutely required. D. Krevat stated he understood the need to decide sooner rather than later, but requested more time to read up on these studies, and think about and discuss them with peers further. T. Teich encouraged gathering more information and taking the time to consider everything. T. Teich said that staff felt strongly about these studies, which is why they were recommended, but that they were also in early stages with only a general concept in place. The more specific details and process would be fleshed out as the fiscal year proceeded. D. Krevat stated that under pressure, his preference would be for Scenario 3.

D. Krevat asked the committee how they wanted to proceed. D. Koses agreed with Scenario 3 being a preference. T. Bent voiced another agreement for Scenario 3. L. Diggins also agreed to Scenario 3. T. O'Rourke advocated for Scenario 3. Jim Fitzgerald (City of Boston) agreed with Scenario 3.

T. Teich added that if there was interest in the Mode Shift study, which would not be included in Scenario 3 but that almost everyone had expressed curiosity or interest in, that would inform future studies and projects. D. Krevat asked if anyone wanted to speak up about a different scenario, or if the committee wanted to make Scenario 3 the recommendation. D. Krevat then asked if S. Murthy and T. Teich wanted a formal vote, and S. Murthy agreed this would be helpful.

Vote

A motion to approve Scenario 3 was made by the Inner Core Committee, City of Somerville (T. Bent), and seconded by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (J. Wallerce). The motion carried.

6. Members' Items

There were none.

7. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the Inner Core Committee, City of Somerville (T. Bent). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
At-Large City (City of Newton)	David Koses
At-Large Town (Town of Arlington)	
City of Boston (Boston Planning & Development Agency)	Jim Fitzgerald
City of Boston (Boston Transportation Department)	
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Tom Bent
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	
MBTA Advisory Board	
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Julia Wallerce
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
South West Advisory Planning Committee (Town of Wrentham)	
Three Rivers Interlocal Council (Town of Norwood)	Tom O'Rourke

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Chris Klem	MassDOT
Sheila Page	Town of Lexington

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director
Abby Cutrumbes
Annette Demchur
Casey Cooper
Dave Hong
Ethan Lapointe
Hiral Gandhi
Srilekha Murthy

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