

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting

March 27, 2025 Meeting

1:00 PM–2:53 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Jen Rowe, Chair, representing Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston and the Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

J. Rowe welcomed committee members to the meeting of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee. See attendance on page 12.

2. Public Comments

Len Simon (Town of Sudbury) asked the committee members if they expected the actions of the federal government to affect the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Phase 3 project in Sudbury.

Ethan Lapointe (MPO staff) answered that this project is programmed with formula funds, not discretionary funds, so it is not likely to be affected.

John Thibault (City of Lynn) spoke regarding two projects currently programmed on the TIP in Lynn: the Rehabilitation of Western Avenue (project ID 609246) and the Rehabilitation of Essex Street (609252). He explained that both corridors have multiple crash clusters, and these projects would work to address multimodal safety issues. The City of Lynn is supportive of delaying the Essex Street project to FFY 2028, but the City urged the committee to consider a delay of one year instead of two for the Western Avenue project, thereby delaying it to FFY 2029 instead of FFY 2030.

Bill Deignan (City of Cambridge) stated that the City of Cambridge does not believe that the Cambridge Street Bike Lanes project (613357) would be a good match for TIP funding. This project was considered in all four scenarios presented to the MPO board on March 27, 2025. The City's first priority would be \$2 million of design funding for the Fitchburg Crossing project. Although this project received an award from the

Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods grant, only \$400,000 of the funds have been obligated due to actions taken by the federal government.

3. Action Item: Approval of February 13, 2025, TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Minutes—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- February 13, 2025, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of February 13, 2025, was made by the Inner Core Committee (Brad Rawson) and seconded by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (Eric Bourassa). The motion carried.

4. Action Item: Revised Programming Scenarios for the Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2026-30 TIP—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager, and Jen Rowe, Chair*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- FFYs 2026–30 Transportation Improvement Program Revised Scenarios ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))
- FFYs 2026–30 Transportation Improvement Program Revised Scenarios (Simplified) ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

E. Lapointe described the meeting’s objectives. The committee would be presented with a few scenarios based on the board’s decision to advance Scenario 1A for further consideration at the last MPO board meeting on March 20, 2025. These options would be further discussed at the MPO board meeting on April 3, 2025, culminating in a vote to adopt a final scenario. The committee could make a recommendation to help facilitate the board’s discussion. Another topic discussed at the last meeting was a strategy to address project readiness issues. Specifically, a motion was made to direct the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee to “recommend to the full board a set of expectations for the proponents of projects programmed in the TIP Regional Target program.” However, this topic will be addressed over the coming months and will not be reflected in the final scenario.

J. Rowe spoke about how the committee might approach the motion. First, J. Rowe proposed two goals: (1) incentivizing good communication, collaboration, and progress towards project delivery and (2) mitigating risk to the overall program. Next, the

committee might consider two categories of expectations: expectations about information sharing and expectations about design progress.

J.Rowe described steps the MPO board and the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee have already taken to develop expectations about information sharing—beyond a project's initial application—that would enable fair and informed decisions:

- At an earlier MPO meeting, board members voted to request updated schedules from a subset of project proponents to inform last week's scenario discussion. The committee could recommend this as an annual requirement of all project proponents, which would allow staff time to prepare this information for the committee in a digestible format.
- The board voted to request updated cost estimates from project proponents that had not recently reached a design milestone. The committee could discuss making some form of update to cost estimates an annual requirement, even if that update only reflects current material costs and is not connected to a new design submission.
- The TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee discussed the information that MPO staff would need from some project proponents to rescore a subset of projects. The committee could create a formal expectation that project proponents provide this information.
- Additionally, J. Rowe noted that changes to a project scope are another important driver of cost changes and these are already required to be reflected in TIP amendments in the current TIP year. Developing an annual requirement for sharing updates to a project's scope would allow staff to keep project scores up to date and give the MPO board more advance notice about likely cost changes.

J. Rowe stated that information-sharing expectations could help the committee define projects that are in good standing. For example, if a project meets these conditions, it could be considered in the readiness scenario and initial TIP scenarios. If not, it could be deferred and considered at the same time as previously unprogrammed projects. The information gathered would help the board make fair, informed decisions. Additionally, noncompliance to an ask designed to be very basic and achievable could allow the MPO board to feel justified in not always awarding an existing project priority over new projects

J. Rowe described a second category of expectations related to design progress. For example, at a previous MPO meeting, the board discussed the possibility of a design threshold for inclusion in the TIP Regional Target Program. Additionally, the committee

could consider design thresholds for how far along projects must be in their design to be considered ready for programming in each year of the TIP. For example, a project in the first year of the TIP might need to have had a 75 percent design submission approved by the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). If a project met that design progress milestone, MPO staff could program it in the first year of the TIP in the readiness scenario. If not, MPO staff could not program it in that year and, if a proponent wants an exception, the onus would be on the proponent to explain why by sharing an updated schedule and presenting before the committee or the MPO board. Developing these two types of expectations for project proponents could help the MPO board get ahead of project delays and cost increases and minimize risk to the overall program.

Tom Bent (City of Somerville) clarified that the MPO board had created a subcommittee a few years ago to research and address issues facing the TIP. This subcommittee had recommended that projects achieve a 25 percent design status before being considered for programming on the TIP. T. Bent explained that he believed the subcommittee intended to require a 25 percent design approval, not a 25 percent design submission. He agreed with J. Rowe that this position should be clarified. He then explained that he believed that the grace period for enforcing these requirements should be concluded and that a stricter set of standards should be enforced for the upcoming TIP season.

Josh Ostroff (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority) noted that transit projects typically have a different design process. He suggested that a discussion could be held at a future meeting to determine specific expectations for these unique projects.

B. Rawson recommended that the committee approach the development of these project requirements with grace and with a long-term commitment to one another, given the many difficulties that projects currently face.

E. Bourassa agreed to the suggestion of defining programming requirements based on readiness thresholds. He suggested that the committee prepare for the next TIP cycle over the course of the year. He reiterated that determining the sources of delay is essential and that the blame should not be placed unfairly on the project proponents.

John Bechard (MassDOT) explained that due to challenges encountered over previous years, MassDOT brought on a program management group. This group offers municipalities and their consultants an opportunity to scope projects in-house so that there is less of a discrepancy between the goals of the municipality and the standards of MassDOT projects. He noted that he often works directly with project proponents to determine where projects are being held up, such as with permitting issues.

J. Rowe thanked everyone who commented and remarked that this process is challenging due to the wide variety of projects programmed on the TIP.

E. Lapointe gave a recap of the discussion held at the MPO board meeting on March 20, 2025. The board voted to advance further discussion of Scenario 1A, which delayed the Rehabilitation of Essex Street project to FFY 2028 and delayed the Rehabilitation of Western Avenue project to FFY 2030. The purpose of this meeting is to address the surpluses in FFYs 2026 and 2030.

E. Lapointe explained the consistencies between the new proposed scenarios. All scenarios fund all the Community Connections projects that applied this year, as well as all four design projects that were not funded in FFY 2025. The Route 3A project in Hingham (605168) and the Boylston Street Improvement project (606453) in Boston both remain programmed in FFY 2026, with the funding for the Hingham project being split between two years. The Lynnfield Rail Trail Phase I project (613163), previously funded in the Statewide Highway Program, is now being funded in FFY 2026 under the Regional Target Program. The remaining funds in FFY 2026 would total \$26.4 million, and the remaining funds in FFY 2030 would total \$45.8 million.

E. Lapointe discussed cost changes that had taken place between the MPO meeting on March 20, 2025, and the meeting on March 27, 2025. The Belmont Community Path project (609204) experienced a cost increase of 33.2 percent, the Boylston Street project (606453) in Boston experienced a cost increase of 17.5 percent, and the Woburn and Burlington Intersection Reconstruction at Route 3 project (608067) experienced a cost increase of 42 percent. This last project was delayed from FFY 2025 to FFY 2026 as a part of Amendment One to the FFY 2025–29 TIP. When the 25 percent design for the project was submitted in January 2024, the project experienced a cost increase of 73 percent. The 42 percent cost increase is as a result of a recent 75 percent design submission.

E. Lapointe stated that, originally, the Separated Bicycle Lanes on Cambridge Street project in Cambridge had been proposed for inclusion in all three scenarios. However, at the request of the City of Cambridge, this application for funding has been withdrawn. Instead, the City of Cambridge is requesting design funding for the New Bridge and Shared-Use Path Construction over Fitchburg Line at Danehy Park Connector (613568). This project received design funding from the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant last year; however, the status of this grant is not secure.

E. Lapointe also noted that this was the highest scoring project that the MPO staff received in the FFYs 2026–30 application cycle.

B. Deignan clarified the difference between the aforementioned project and the Danahy Park Connector project, which is not currently seeking funding.

E. Lapointe described a new Transit Transformation project proposed by the MBTA called the Operational Enhancement of Bus Routes 714 and 716. The MBTA is requesting \$1.875 million for FFY 2026. Currently, these routes are private services contracted by the MBTA; Route 714 serves Hingham and Hull and Route 716 serves Boston, Milton, and Canton. The 714 buses will have headways of 30 minutes and the 716 buses will have headways of 45 minutes. The Route 716 improvements will also include a diversion to Houghton's Pond on weekends to serve the Blue Hills Reservation, which is consistent with the recommendations set by a study done by MPO staff. This project was not scored.

E. Lapointe described the other two projects proposed for funding in the Transit Transformation program in FFY 2026. The first is the Better Bus Project—Operational Safety Improvements at Bus Stops, which is funded for \$3.2 million. The second is the Bus Priority and Accessibility Improvements project, which is funded for \$6 million.

E. Lapointe reiterated the consistency between the three scenarios. Each scenario features the same transit projects and has the same level of reserve funding in FFY 2026. All scenarios include funding for the Cambridge Street Bicycle Lanes project and do not include funding for the Fitchburg Line crossing project; however, E. Lapointe reiterated that the MPO board may decide to obligate funding to the Fitchburg Line crossing project, especially if it is substituted for the funding currently allocated for the Cambridge Street Bicycle Lanes. He also explained the distinction between the Fitchburg Line crossing project and the other design projects. This project already has a contract in place for design service, so there is less uncertainty about whether MPO staff and MassDOT staff have the capacity to guide the municipality through the design and contracting progress.

E. Lapointe described the differences between the scenarios. Scenario 2A programs four projects with relatively low readiness risk due to recent cost estimates and near-term 25 percent design submissions. Two of these projects are located in the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination subregion, which has had a relatively low level of Regional Target funding compared to its population—one percent of funding for five percent of the MPO population. Scenario 2A would increase the share of funding to nearly three percent. The four new projects are as follows:

- Melrose- Lebanon Street Improvement Project (612534)
 - Cost: \$10,528,000

- This project involves resurfacing and the installation of a new sidewalk and protected bike lane along most of the project length. A 25 percent design submission was made in January. This cost estimate reflects the recent design submission.
- Needham- Newton- Bridge Replacement on Christina Street (613594)
 - Cost: \$5,551,514
 - This project involves a replacement of a deteriorating rail bridge over the Charles River. The 25 percent design submission is planned for the fall of 2025.
- Concord- Assabet River Multi-Use Trail and Bridge Construction (612870)
 - Cost: \$9,119,298
 - This project was expecting a 25 percent design submission in March, but the submission was delayed due to elevated water levels. The project involves the construction of a new pedestrian bridge over the Assabet River, connecting the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and West Concord Station with an office park.
- Lexington- Roadway Reconstruction on Hartwell Avenue and Bedford Street (613695)
 - Cost: \$46,195,840 (\$10,000,000 funded in FFY 2030)
 - This project is included in Scenario 2C as well. It is part of a larger project in the Long-Range Transportation Plan that includes the reconstruction of the Route 4/225/I-95 interchange, which is currently programmed for design funding in FFY 2026.

One difference between Scenarios 2A and 2C is regarding Chelsea's Park and Pearl Street project in FFY 2030. The project proponents voluntarily accepted a delay of this project from FFY 2027 to FFY 2031 to prevent conflicting construction schedules. However, in order to provide a more secure position for this project, Scenario 2A partially funds this project in FFY 2030. E. Lapointe stated that this scenario leaves a total of about \$7 million of unprogrammed funding in FFY 2030. He noted that MPO staff received a letter from staff of the Town of Marblehead requesting that the Village Street Bridge project be considered for programming for \$5.3 million in FFY 2030; however, the project did not receive a very high score. Scenario 2A has a surplus of \$16.5 million in FFYs 2026–30, the highest surplus of any of the proposed scenarios.

E. Lapointe explained Scenario 2B. This scenario does not program any new projects. Instead, Chelsea's Park and Pearl Street project is fully funded in FFY 2030. In addition, Lynn's Reconstruction of Western Avenue project is also fully funded for about \$47 million in FFY 2030. While this scenario reduces current cost obligations by not funding any new projects, it does not necessarily address any cost risks. Although there might

be more unprogrammed funds in FFY 2031, the application pool will be significantly more competitive as all of this year's applicants are expected to reapply. Furthermore, awardees of the FFY 2025 Project Design Pilot may begin applying for funding.

E. Lapointe explained Scenario 2C. This scenario funds the three highest scoring projects in FFY 2030, which are as follows:

- Cambridge: New Bridge and Shared-Use Path Connection over MBTA Fitchburg Line at Danehy Park Connector (613568)
 - Cost: \$18,238,535
 - Score: 81
 - This project is advancing towards a 25 percent design submission. As previously mentioned, the City of Cambridge is also requesting money for the design of this project.
- Chelsea-Everett- Reconstruction of Vine Street and Third Street from Chelsea Street to 2nd Street (613585)
 - Cost: \$13,119,298
 - Score: 67.1
 - This project is also advancing towards a 25 percent design submission. The scope of this project includes new sidewalks and separated bicycle lanes in an area planned for redevelopment near the Chelsea Commuter Rail/Silver Line station.
- Lexington- Roadway Reconstruction on Hartwell Avenue and Bedford Street (613695)
 - Cost: \$46,195,840 (\$10,000,000 funded in FFY 2030)
 - Score: 73.2
 - This project is included in Scenario 2A as well.

These projects are adjacent to existing and planned dense housing development.

E. Lapointe suggested that earlier delivery of these projects might mitigate the impacts that increasing land values may have on right-of-way expenses. He also noted that these scenarios are adaptable and subject to modifications if necessary. Next, he recommended that the committee not request to delay projects with readiness issues, as this would have repercussions on future years. Instead, these projects could be recommended for removal from the TIP. Lastly, he noted that, of a total of 30 projects programmed on the TIP that have a MassDOT design status, only ten have reached the 25 percent approval stage. Removing all 20 of the projects that have not yet reached this stage could have an enormous impact on the TIP.

E. Lapointe concluded his presentation by reminding the committee that the next meeting is scheduled for May 15, 2025. This meeting's agenda will include a discussion of updates between the draft TIP and final TIP, a debrief of the TIP development process, and a conversation about policies and guidelines for project programming.

Discussion

Lenard Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) indicated interest in discussing strategies for mitigating project cost increases.

B. Rawson noted the importance of balancing commitments to legacy projects and to new applicants. When larger projects regularly are delayed and increase in cost, it is difficult to commit to subregional equity and the inclusion of new municipalities on the TIP. He remarked that developing a better readiness framework has had a positive impact, and he suggested prioritizing projects that applied during the official application window instead of projects proposed within the last few days or weeks.

Rich Benevento (VHB) explained that he spoke with the Mayor of Lynn, the Mayor's Chief of Staff, and the Principal Planner of the City of Lynn about the programming status of the Western Avenue project. The project proponents are expected to submit a 25 percent design plan in July and hold a design public hearing by the end of the year. The mayor and his staff were disappointed that both Lynn projects were delayed by two years, while other projects at similar places in the design process were not. R. Benevento asked the committee to consider programming the Western Avenue project in FFYs 2029–31 instead of FFYs 2030–32.

Dennis Giombetti (City of Framingham) asked when the Lynn projects first appeared on the TIP.

E. Lapointe answered that the Essex Street project has been programmed on the TIP for six years and the Western Avenue project has been programmed for three years.

D. Giombetti expressed concern that these projects have not advanced to the 25 percent design stage in the three to six years they have been on the TIP.

J. Bechard explained that MassDOT conducted Readiness Days in early February and recommended that the Essex Street project be delayed from FFY 2026 to FFY 2027. However, MassDOT did not recommend a delay for the Western Avenue project, which is currently programmed in FFY 2028. This project is adjacent to a project in Salem on a connecting portion of Route 107.

L. Diggins expressed preference for Scenario 2A because it programs the largest surplus in FFY 2030. He also spoke in favor of only programming projects that have had an approved 25 percent design submission, but noted that the MPO should assist municipalities in the design process.

E. Lapointe summarized the scenarios again. He explained that Scenario 2A programs four new projects based on project readiness, Scenario 2C programs three new projects based on project score, and Scenario 2B programs no new projects but fully funds a few existing obligations.

Kristen Guichard (Town of Acton) expressed preference for Scenario 2A. She noted that the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination has been underfunded for several years, and by funding two new projects in this region this imbalance could be partially remedied. She thanked L. Diggins for advocating in support of assisting smaller communities in the design process.

J. Ostroff noted that projects may have good reasons for delays and cost increases, but these reasons may not be visible to the public or to MPO board members.

B. Rawson asked if the bridge replacement project in Newton and Needham was an active rail bridge and, if so, whether it served freight or passengers.

J. Ostroff answered that the bridge was used by freight trains on the Charles River Branch, which is now the Upper Falls Greenway. This bridge will be used for recreation and will eventually be owned by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

R. Benevento stated that the 25 percent design submission for the Essex Street project is planned for submission on March 28, 2025, and that the Western Avenue project has one of the highest scores in the TIP. Both projects are on high-use transit corridors. For these reasons, the city staff thought it was unfair to delay both projects for two years.

B. Deignan inquired as to whether a motion to substitute the Fitchburg Line crossing project for the Cambridge Street bicycle lane project had been made.

E. Lapointe answered that the motion had not been taken and that a motion would have to be requested at an MPO board meeting.

J. Alessi expressed preference for Scenario 2A.

Vote

A motion to recommend Scenario 2A to the full MPO board was made by the Town of Arlington (J. Alessi) and seconded by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (L. Diggins). The motion carried.

5. Members' Items

There were none.

6. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee (L. Diggins) and seconded by the Inner Core Committee (B. Rawson). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
City of Boston	Jen Rowe
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Brad Rawson
	Tom Bent
Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)	Eric Bourassa
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)	Chris Klem
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)	John Bechard
MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA)	Tyler Terrasi
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Dennis Giombetti
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	Kristen Guichard
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
Town of Arlington	John Alessi
Town of Brookline	-

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Aleida Leza	-
Ben Muller	MassDOT
Bill Deignan	City of Cambridge
Chris Menge	-
Dan O'Donnell	-
David Koses	City of Newton
Hanna Switekowski	MBTA Advisory Board
Heidi Doyle	Sherborn Town Planner
Joe Parisi	Town of North Reading
John Livsey	Town of Lexington
John Romano	MassDOT
Jon Thibault	City of Lynn
Josh Ostroff	MBTA
Joy Glynn	MWRTA
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Len Simon	Town of Sudbury
Meghan McNamara	Town of Lexington
Rich Benevento	VHB
Rick Azzalina	Stantec
Ross Morrow	-

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Erin Maguire
Ethan Lapointe
Lauren Magee
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