

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

May 15, 2025 Meeting

1:00 PM–2:55 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 9.

2. Public Comments

There were none.

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

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

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

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of March 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. Draft Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2026-30 TIP Updates—*Adriana Jacobsen, MPO Staff*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- Draft TIP FFYs 2026-30 Document Change Tracker ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Ethan Lapointe (MPO staff) introduced the three main topics of discussion for the meeting. These include the updates to the draft FFYs 2026–30 TIP, a debrief of this

year's TIP development process, and a presentation of research on TIP readiness policy improvements.

Adriana Jacobsen (MPO staff) gave an overview of the changes to the draft TIP. Most of the changes were minor administrative edits or discrepancies between the HTML and PDF versions of the document. There were only 22 edits this year compared to 111 edits last year due to process improvements. There are no programming changes to the Regional Target Program, but the MPO board will discuss whether to program the Chelsea Park Street and Pearl Street Reconstruction project (project ID 611983) during the upcoming MPO board meeting on June 5, 2025.

MPO staff are carefully monitoring project cost risks, particularly on two projects: the Procurement and Installation of Six Air Quality Sensors for Greenhouse Gas Monitoring (S13291) and the Belmont Component of the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail (Phase I) (609204). Due to new federal import tax policies, the cost of the air quality sensors has increased from \$43,000 to \$63,700. This increase will likely be addressed with a TIP adjustment in October at the start of the federal fiscal year. The Belmont Community Path project, which experienced a cost increase of about \$7 million earlier this year, is showing an increased cost estimate of exactly \$5.25 million. This brings the total cost estimate to \$32,556,266. As cost increases of round numbers are unusual, this estimate may also be due to contingency for expected tariffs. MPO staff are not recommending taking any action currently due to a lack of information about the details of the cost increase and due to limited funding to accommodate this increase in FFYs 2026 or 2027.

A. Jacobsen also noted that MPO staff are monitoring changes to the Statewide Highway Program. About a dozen projects that were programmed in the FFYs 2025–29 TIP have been removed. Most of these are bridge repair or replacement projects programmed in FFYs 2026 and 2027.

B. Rawson asked for additional information about the changes to the Statewide Highway Program.

E. Lapointe replied that these changes are not changes to the FFYs 2026–30 TIP that occurred between the release of the draft and final document; instead, these are projects that were programmed in the FFYs 2025–29 TIP that are no longer included in the upcoming TIP.

Dennis Giombetti (City of Framingham) asked when the committee would receive more information about the reasons for the changes to the Statewide Highway Program.

J. Rowe explained that John Bechard (Deputy Chief Engineer of Project Development at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation [MassDOT]) and David Mohler (Executive Director of Planning at MassDOT) had spoken about some of the reasons for the removal of these projects, including readiness issues and changes in priorities.

5. Draft FFYs 2026-30 TIP Debrief—*Ethan Lapointe, MPO Staff*

E. Lapointe introduced the debrief of the FFYs 2026–30 TIP development process. He noted that MPO staff will send board and committee members a survey based on last year's TIP "futurespective" exercise and discuss the results at the upcoming meeting on June 12, 2025. Last year's TIP process was characterized by declines in project application volumes and widespread delays and cost increases in projects. There was limited time to score fill-in projects or to make project selection decisions. Advanced construction projects were often delayed or growing in cost, meaning that future TIPs would have to set aside more money for existing obligations instead of new funding opportunities. Last spring, the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee engaged in a "futurespective" exercise that asked the members to consider what a successful TIP development season would look like. This spring, MPO staff are asking the committee members to fill out a survey on how this year's TIP development process met the goals set in the previous year.

Eric Bourassa (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) suggested requiring proponents to submit information earlier and developing readiness guidelines for TIP projects. He also expressed interest in hearing from consultants regarding the challenges they are facing in the design process, perhaps in an anonymous manner in order to encourage honesty.

J. Rowe noted that Subregional Readiness Days had been piloted this past fall, but they were not well attended. This spring, the MPO board formally requested that project proponents share updated information, but most proponents did not respond.

Erin Chute (Town of Brookline) agreed that hearing feedback from consultants as well as from project proponents would be useful.

B. Rawson applauded the committee members for their continued attendance and participation, noting that the TIP requires significant investment of time and effort. He

underscored the need for information-sharing on all sides. Lastly, he stressed the importance of defining the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee's role through conversation with the MPO board to determine whether the committee is only for coordination and advocacy or if the group is tasked with developing guidelines and adjusting scenarios.

J. Rowe stated that this topic will be discussed at the upcoming TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting on June 12, 2025.

L. Diggins highlighted the importance of reducing uncertainty in the readiness process with clear, standard guidelines

J. Rowe agreed and reiterated the difficulty of addressing delays in not just the first year of the developing TIP, but also the first year of the current TIP—an issue that arose for the first time during this TIP development cycle.

Tom Bent (City of Somerville) stated his interest in enforcing deadlines for consultants in the design process.

L. Diggins suggested developing stricter consequences for projects that do not meet expected deadlines, such as automatic delays. He noted that there is more lenience for projects programmed on the TIP than for projects in many grant programs, for instance.

E. Lapointe agreed with the need for readiness guidelines and noted that this topic will be discussed further at the next TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting. The topic of rescoring projects will also be addressed.

E. Chute mentioned that the 25 percent design development can take longer for more transformative and equity-focused projects, as they can have substantial community engagement processes and multiple redesigns. She encouraged flexibility for the 25 percent design requirement to not disincentivize important projects simply because they do not have the support in the early stage to reach design milestones at a fast pace.

6. TIP Readiness Policy Improvements—*Ethan Lapointe, MPO Staff, and Adriana Jacobsen, MPO Staff*

A. Jacobsen described the research that she had done regarding the milestone timelines of recently advertised TIP projects. Currently, the MPO board requires a 25 percent design submission for new projects; however, there are no benchmarks for

existing projects, and the 25 percent standard might not provide enough readiness information. Therefore, it would be useful to determine expected time between key milestones in order to develop data-based guidelines for project readiness.

A. Jacobsen described the analysis that she had done on 13 projects in the Regional Target Program advertised between 2022 and 2024. First, she explained a typical project timeline. Usually, new core investment projects are programmed in the final year of the TIP, giving the project 4.5 to 5.5 years to advertise after it is programmed during TIP development season. The median time from a 25 percent design submission to its advertisement date is 4.6 years, but there is a large variance between the slowest and fastest projects to reach advertisement. A project at the 15th percentile of project speed takes 3.8 years, while one at the 85th percentile takes 7.5 years. Therefore, there could be a large range between when two projects advertise for construction even if they submit a 25 percent submission at the same time.

A. Jacobsen described the average pace of projects after the 25 percent Design Public Hearing (DPH), which is often held after the 25 percent design submission is approved. The median time from a 25 percent DPH to its advertisement date is 3.1 years, and there is a smaller variance between the slowest and fastest projects when compared to the 25 percent design submission. A project at the 15th percentile of project speed takes 2.2 years, while one at the 85th percentile takes 4.0 years. She explained that the MPO board could develop potential readiness guidelines based on these statistics. For example, if projects are assumed to be moving at an average pace, then a project programmed in FFY 2031 could be required to have its DPH by TIP development season in the spring of 2028. Alternatively, if the MPO board is interested in stricter requirements, then guidelines could be based on the assumption that projects will move slower and, therefore, should require a DPH by the spring of 2027 instead. If these standards are applied to the current TIP cycle, only two of the seven projects programmed in FFY 2028 are meeting the more relaxed requirement, and none of the projects in FFY 2029 are meeting the stricter requirement.

A. Jacobsen described the average pace of projects after the 75 percent design submission. The median time from a 75 percent design submission to its advertisement date is 2.2 years, and there is a smaller variance between the slowest and fastest projects when compared to the 25 percent design submission. A project at the 15th percentile of project speed takes 1.5 years, while one at the 85th percentile takes 3.4 years. As with the 25 percent DPH, she explained that they could develop potential readiness guidelines based on these statistics. For example, if projects are assumed to

be moving at an average pace, then a project programmed in FFY 2031 could be required to have a 75 percent design submission by TIP development season in the spring of 2029. Alternatively, if the MPO board is interested in stricter requirements, then guidelines could be based on the assumption that projects will move slower and therefore should require a 75 percent design submission by the spring of 2028 instead. If these standards are applied to the current TIP cycle, only two of the eight projects programmed in FFY 2027 are meeting the more relaxed requirement, and none of the projects in FFY 2028 are meeting the stricter requirement.

A. Jacobsen explained how project cost impacts project pace. First, she noted that project cost distributions have shifted. Previously, there was a relatively even distribution of projects costs from about \$3 million to about \$25 million. Now, there are still several projects under \$5 million, but there are very few medium-sized projects—instead, these projects have increased in cost to more than \$30 million. Then, she explained that project cost does have an impact on project size, but only in the initial stages of design. Larger projects (\$10 million or more) take about 10 years from Project Review Committee (PRC) Approval to their advertisement date on average, but smaller projects (\$5 million or less) take fewer than six years on average. However, once projects hold a 25 percent DPH, they tend to move at a similar pace regardless of size. She also noted that projects are now taking longer to reach the 25 percent design submission, but they are taking less time to reach the 75 percent design stage once they have submitted a 25 percent design. MPO staff have heard from project proponents that the 25 percent requirement is becoming more difficult and expensive to achieve, but once that stage has been approved there is less work to do for the rest of the design process.

A. Jacobsen concluded the presentation with a few takeaways. She noted that the 25 percent design submission can be a useful metric, but it does not provide the whole context for a project's readiness. Instead, having guidelines for each federal fiscal year could help to keep projects on track. She explained that this discussion would continue at the following TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee meeting, where E. Lapointe would share some of the preliminary readiness guidelines.

Discussion

D. Giombetti agreed that there should be frequent readiness requirements to keep projects on track for their advertisement dates.

L. Diggins asked if larger projects tended to take place in larger municipalities.

A. Jacobsen responded that there was not a correlation between larger projects and larger municipalities; however, the sample size was small.

L. Diggins expressed concern that smaller municipalities may not have the same resources to achieve design milestones. He reminded the committee that there was not much support given to project proponents to help them to reach the 25 percent design stage.

Tegin Teich (Executive Director of the MPO staff) noted that many MPOs across the country have struggled with similar issues and have developed different models on how to support locally prioritized projects. Usually, this requires close coordination with the state departments of transportation.

E. Chute questioned if the consultants are overestimating the project schedules and suggested that these schedules be examined and shared.

A. Jacobsen noted that not only are the requirements for 25 percent design increasing, but the cost to reach the early design milestones is growing as well. Municipalities have to commit a significant amount of design funding to a project before they are sure that it will be programmed on the TIP.

Kristen Guichard (Town of Acton) explained that there can be a large range in terms of how much time a project takes to move through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements and the Right of Way (ROW) requirements. For example, some projects might need to do a time-consuming impact study, while others do not.

B. Rawson agreed with K. Guichard and added that utility coordination may also affect the pace of a project. He also encouraged the MPO staff to continue to build a database of project information in order to incorporate more variables into the analysis.

John Bechard (MassDOT) explained how he had advocated for more communication in the project development process. He introduced a new program management team to help determine what roadblocks the project might experience during its design process. This team developed a scoping checklist to make sure that municipalities were prepared for all issues they might encounter. J. Bechard noted that the initial design stages are now costing up to 50 percent of the total design budget. However, the projects are now in a more mature stage once they have their 25 percent design approval than they were

when the design requirements were more relaxed. Other issues may arise from the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) requirements. For example, if a project is near to an environmental justice (EJ) community, other permits will be triggered.

J. Bechard also noted that a new project information site is being built. This can serve as an extensive project database and provide services that the current project information site is unable to accomplish.

B. Rawson suggested that project proponents could come up with categorial variables that describe, for example, how difficult a ROW acquisition is likely to be.

L. Diggins asked about the reason for the additional requirements placed on projects near EJ communities.

J. Bechard answered that the policy was put into place by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. EJ communities may be less likely to attend public outreach meetings, so additional outreach and environmental review are required.

J. Bechard also remarked that eight years ago MassDOT was processing 600 right-of-way actions per year. Now, it is typical to process 900 per year. Some of this growth is due to utility relocations, as this used to be left to the responsibility of the owners of the utilities until coordination problems arose.

7. Members' Items

J. Rowe encouraged the committee members to fill out the TIP retrospective survey sent out by E. Lapointe.

8. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Inner Core Committee (B. Rawson) and seconded by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (L. Diggins). 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)	John Bechard
Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)	Chris Klem
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 (RTAC)	Lenard Diggins
Town of Arlington	-
Town of Brookline	Erin Chute

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Aleida Leza	-
Barbara Lachance	MassDOT District 5
Ben Muller	MassDOT
Jay Monty	City of Everett
Jeff Coletti	-
John Strauss	Town of Burlington
Josh Ostroff	MBTA
JR Frey	Town of Hingham
Marzie	-
Melissa Santley	MassDOT District 6
Marc Older	-
Rich Benevento	VHB
Rick Azzalina	Stantec
Ron Chick	MetroWest Greenway Coalition

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Adriana Jacobsen

Annette Demchur

Dave Hong

Erin Maguire

Ethan Lapointe

Gina Perille

Lauren Magee

Olivia Saccocia

Priyanka Chapekar

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