

**MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES OF WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2010**

D. Manugian called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

I. INTRODUCTION/ MEMBERS PRESENT

David Manugian, Groton; Craig Bardenheuer, Harvard; Mohammed Khan, MART; Pauline Hamel, Ayer

GUESTS

Frank Maxant, Ayer; Peter Johnston, Ayer, Pauline Conley, Ayer; Robert Pontbriand, Ayer; Mary Hadad Arata, Ayer Public Spirit

STAFF

George Kahale, Brad Harris, Brian Doherty, George Snow, Sheri Bean

II. APPROVAL OF JULY 21, 2010 MINUTES

No quorum being present, the approval of the July 21, 2010 minutes was postponed until the next MJTC meeting.

III. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE – PROGRESS AND STATUS

B. Harris, referring to a slide presentation stated that two Regional Plan Update workshop meetings were held over the past two months. There was marginal turnout but good responses. The purpose of the presentation is to introduce the public to what is involved in the RTP planning process, who is involved and who we represent. The RTP provides guidance to local and state officials in deciding how to spend federal and state transportation funds. It is not a wish list but a plan with recommended projects that have a reasonable chance of being funded and implemented over the life of the plan.

F. Maxant commented that Devens is not a city or town but its own regional enterprise. It is a very common misconception. It may be helpful to reiterate that during the information sessions.

B. Harris replied that there is a lot of activity going on in Devens it is important to keep them informed and involved.

B. Harris went through the RTP presentation (see handout) with the members as well as the comments (see handout) from participants at both meetings (Gardner/Leominster). The comments will be incorporated as appropriate into any new goals and chapters to the RTP. Additional meetings and workshops will be scheduled.

F. Maxant stated that he was very impressed that the comments corresponded to things the MJTC is already concerned about and working on. This means that there is concern among the general public and when political support is needed we have somewhere to turn.

B. Harris replied that it is nice to know that it is not just staff and committee members that have concerns. We will be using a web-based survey to solicit input from the public. Staff is looking for input and suggestions on the survey. A specific municipal officials survey may go out, separate from the general public one. The thought is to focus more on specific municipal concerns such as past project issues, interactions with MassDOT etc.

C. Bardenheuer commented that the general public survey is sent to the people on the MRPC mailing list. This is only a part of the general public. Is there a way to get it out to a broader base of the general public, i.e. local newspapers, local television?

B. Harris indicated that we plan on doing press releases, web notices and that local public access will also be investigated.

IV. JARC AND NEW FREEDOMS APPLICATION REVIEW AND ACTION

B. Harris stated that Job Access Reverse Commute (JARC) and New Freedoms are transit related funding programs to develop projects that target certain populations: low income individuals, elderly and disabled. A Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan was developed by the MRPC with MART. The plan identified gaps in services and needs. These programs and projects help address those gaps and needs. The funds for our region are controlled by MassDOT.

G. Kahale stated on July 20th MRPC solicited projects for JARC and New Freedoms programs. We received three applications from MART (see handouts).

- Proposal A – Capital Improvements under the New Freedom funds. MART is looking for funds to do same day ride users. Presently the Para transit offered by MART requires a 24 hour advance phone call. It is a successful program but many riders can not use this service. The same day ride service can happen by using new technology such as Automated Vehicle Location (AVL), GPS and same day automatic scheduling. The same day ride service area would cover the entire MRPC and MART area as well as the fixed route service offered by the Franklin Regional Transit Authority and Worcester Regional Transit Authority. \$135,000 is needed from the New Freedoms program.
- Proposal B – Operations Service. This is a successful existing service for the G-Link. It's a fixed bus route between Gardner and Orange using MART busses and the Franklin Regional Transit Authority which connects with MART in Athol and Orange all the way to Greenfield. The other component is from Gardner to Winchendon. \$150,000 is needed.
- Proposal C – Affordable Employment Transportation Options. This is not available in any part of the state. This program is proposing to use web based and other technologies to allow individuals seeking employment to examine options on how to get people from home to a job. Providers will be able to bid on the trips keeping the costs as affordable as possible. \$292,800 is needed.

B. Harris stated that feedback is needed from the MJTC to prioritize the project proposals because there are limited funds available. They all meet the requirements of the programs. Internally the staff looked at the proposals and has the following prioritized suggestion: Proposal B, Proposal C and then Proposal A. Discussion with MART indicate that their prioritization is the same.

C. Bardenheuer asked if there is a sense of the number of individual people affected by the three options.

B. Harris replied that there is no estimate right now as to the size of the population that may be attracted to the programs. It is the development of the technology and the establishment of those connections that the proposal is seeking to fund.

M. Khan stated that Proposal B will have involvement of the private sector. A lot of individual van and taxi companies are already working for MART in their Human Service Transportation. If they have room or space they have an opportunity to provide more services. This is a new experiment utilizing the private sector into the process. It is a unique prospective.

C. Bardenheuer commented that it is not a question of the value of these services. We are prioritizing because dollars are scarce and we need to maximize the impact of every dollar spent.

D. Manugian asked if there were any concerns about the prioritized list that staff has put together.

F. Maxant stated that the most legitimate function of the government is to provide information. So that individuals can make decisions. If something is to be done it's going to be done much better by the private sector than the government. Proposal C provides information for the private sector people to make business decisions.

The members prioritized the proposals as follows:

1. Proposal B
2. Proposal C (the members noted that they liked the novelty of the public/private partnership)
3. Proposal A

V. CONTRACT STATUS REPORT

D. Manugian requested that MassDOT be reviewed first to give the Town of Ayer more time to discuss their concerns.

MassDOT 3C

B. Harris gave a brief summary of the MassDOT/3C activities.

- At the August MPO meeting the FY2011-2014 TIP was endorsed with the following changes from what was discussed at the last MJTC meeting.
 - FFY2011, South Street, Westminster project has been increased from \$3,007,450 to \$3,257,000. The cost is spread over the following three funding categories: STP, HSIP and CMAQ. This project should be able to qualify for CMAQ funding. CMAQ projects need to show an air quality benefit and this project will improve the delay at the intersection of South and Main Streets. This leaves enough flexibility in our target to add in the resurfacing and related work project on Route 32 in Athol for approximately \$950,000. This would be a new project listed under the STP category. The result being that we are under our total target by approximately \$9,000.

- FFY2012, there were changes made to the cost of the Fitchburg and Templeton projects. The result is that we are under our target by approximately \$191,000. The Leominster Merriam Ave/Lindell Ave project was moved into FFY2012 as an STP project.
- FFY2013, the Merriam Ave. & Lindell Ave., Leominster project was moved from FFY2013 as a CMAQ project to FFY2012 as a STP project. The result is that we are under our total target by approximately \$891,000 because we no longer have an identified 2013 CMAQ project.
- FFY2014, Athol/Petersham project costs have been reduced by the amount of money that was taken out to create the new FFY2011 Route 32 project. Overall, we are under our total target by approximately \$2,800,000.
- Additionally, the Ayer Parking Garage project was moved from FFY2012 to the Appendix based on input from the state related to available funding concerns.
- The MPO also endorsed the Unified Planning Work Program with minimum changes.
- The State TIP will soon be made available for public comment.
- The Route 140 Safety Improvement Task Force meeting has been postponed until September 16th in Princeton.

FTA/RTA

G. Kahale gave a brief overview of the FTA/RTA projects.

- **Wachusett Commuter Rail Station and Layover Facility**
MART has submitted the Environmental Assessment report to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) with the comments received during the public review and comment period. The proposed project of the Wachusett Station and the layover facility involves construction of a new passenger station and parking facility.
- **Expansion of MART Storage Facility**
The construction of the expansion of the Vehicle Storage and Bus Wash Facility is progressing. The removal of the contaminated soil, the roof installation over the existing building, the erection of steel, wall studs and the roof installation over the new building have been completed. After the construction delay caused by the clean up of the contaminated soil discovered on site MART now anticipates completion of the construction of the expansion of the Vehicle Storage and Bus Wash Facility by April 2011.
- **Parking Expansion at N. Leominster Station**
Mr. Kahale continued to work with the consultant Jacobs Engineering of Boston on the architectural and engineering design alternatives for the expansion of North Leominster parking garage for the four-hundred (400) plus parking spaces to be constructed at the North Leominster Train Station. MART anticipates a completion of the architecture and engineering design by September 2010, and to go out for construction bids in the fall of 2010.

- **MART Advisory Board**

The next meeting of the MART Advisory Board will be held at 10:30 AM on Tuesday, September 21, 2010 at MART Water Street offices.

- **Ayer Parking Facility**

M. Khan stated that MassDOT provided MRPC and MART with a letter clarifying their position both on the potential design project for the station as well as construction of the commuter rail parking garage project. It is MassDOT's position that there are a number of concerns regarding the planning phase of the parking garage (see handout). The comments summarized as follows:

- The proposed cost of \$17,500 per parking space does not reflect the recent experience of the MBTA which uses a hard unit cost of \$25,000 per space. After all factors are considered the MBTA's estimated unit cost is generally \$30,000 per space while MART's estimation comes to \$25,000 per space.
- The Ayer Parking Garage Impact Analysis put together by MRPC indicated that the current levels of service at downtown intersections are experiencing delay and qualify for signal warrants. The future build scenario indicates that some of these levels of service would be further degraded. It is MassDOT's concern that the parking garage would worsen the level of service on Groton School Road, a state owned facility. The scope of work does not reflect the recommendations of the Analysis document.
- The impact analysis also raises concerns with ADA compliance of the platform. Currently, the platform at the Ayer commuter station does not have mini-high boarding platforms. This poses a complication to the proposed parking garage, as there would not be a completely accessible path of travel. The scope of work does not indicate how this issue will be addressed. Consequently, there is a risk that the FTA or MAAB will raise objections to this project.
- The distance from the garage to the station may pose a problem. The FTA may classify it as a municipal garage rather than a transit facility.
- MassDOT expects that if a project utilizes funds for design, that there are also funds available to construct the project as designed. The estimated construction cost of the garage exceeds the amount currently available through previously earmarked funds. No other funds have been identified to bridge the projected gap which results in a lack of fiscal constraint in the TIP.

M. Khan commented that most of the issues raised are easily resolved. The projects that do not move forward must send the funds back to Washington. We are in danger of losing the \$3.2 million earmark. We have been working with the state for the last four years and these issues have never been discussed. The project has been removed from the TIP at the last MPO meeting. A letter of appeal has gone out to the Secretary. This project will tremendously benefit the Town. The Ayer station is one of the highest rider counts (@400 a day one way), bringing in over 300 cars into the town. It is clogging the traffic and parking of the Town. The parking garage would solve this problem. The Governor is an advocate for this project.

D. Manugian stated that the MJTC does support this project.

F. Maxant stated that this parking at the rail trail is the best example of multi use parking. It is a very affective use of dollars. Most of the commuters coming to the station are coming from the north and the west and presently they need to get into that intersection to get to the parking. This parking garage will improve the service level of that intersection. There is strong support from the community.

R. Pontbriand stated that Mr. Khan has done an effective job responding to the technical concerns. It is Ayer's intention to come back to the MPO with full committed funds and have it moved, by amendment, from the appendix and back onto the regular TIP. Last night the Board of Selectmen in Ayer authorized the release of two letters. One to Secretary Mullen and the other to Lt. Governor Murray as an appeal for the state funding of \$800,000 for this project. The Lt. Governor is a key person. Previously he has championed connecting the rail from Worcester to Boston which puts Ayer in the nexus of that project. The Governor has historically been very responsive to North Central Massachusetts. Ayer is currently working very closely with Senator Eldridge to secure the \$800,000 from the Secretary of Transportation, we are moving forward with those meetings. We are aware the clock is ticking in regards to the Sunset Clause of the legislation to rescind earmarked funds. We are committed to getting the state match and appreciate the continued support.

P. Conley indicated that she is an Ayer resident on the opposite side of the parking facility issue. It should not be located at the rail trail. It is not to not locate a facility in Ayer it is that we are campaigning to not have it located at the rail trail. The Selectmen have opted not to afford any other option other than a hybrid solution. It was mentioned that there were "multiple" town meeting votes in support of this project. There were three citizen partition articles for the May 2007 annual town meeting. One partition article was removed; one partition article was to not locate the parking facility at the rail trail. It was 60 in favor and 59 against. One vote the other way and it would have been a no vote. The last citizen partition article that was an overwhelming vote was only after multiple amendments. Whether that is a valid partition article or not is another issue. It was simply to use the federal funds to locate a parking facility in Ayer without the need to create a garage at the rail trail. People were overwhelmingly in support of not having a garage at the rail trail. Copies of the votes can be provided. You are being told that everyone in Ayer supports this and that is simply not true. The group that does not support this has been actively collecting the information and support. Those in appointed position know that people do not speak up. It is important that everyone be heard. The Ayer Board of Selectmen is not listening to its citizens. If MART would consider alternate locations then there would be overwhelming support in Ayer.

D. Manugian stated that we can not take any action tonight since there is not a quorum. He then asked if anyone had any other comments from staff on the next steps.

M. Khan commented that a letter of support dated after August 10th is needed. At the same time we can request one from the MRPC also. MART has gone through many locations for this project. This was the third choice. The Town received a gift from DCR of land to build the garage. One of the elements is that there is no money involved for the cost of the project there. That gives us some advantage of building a 200 car facility within that \$4 million because it is free land given to the town.

Mary Hadad Arata, a representative of the Ayer Public Spirit, asked if we are proposing a paved lot for 200 spaces and if it is one deck?

M. Khan stated yes, one deck using the street level and adding property to the existing DCR facility and the present 50 car parking could be expanded to 200. The scope of the project is no longer going to be 400.

M. Arata asked how many parcels are needed to be taken under this smaller plan.

M. Khan stated that it's \$10 million for 5 parcels and \$5 million for 1 parcel. The money will be spent in buying the property and creating a deck which is less expensive than building a garage. The Town will not have to spend any money. The parcel will be spent under the \$4 million project.

M. Arata asked if this is a phased project.

M. Khan stated that is a question for an architect. It is doable at \$4 million.

M. Arata stated that Mr. Maxant's proposal seeks an open air design for safety reasons vs. having barriers.

M. Khan stated that Mr. Maxant's proposal is less costly. If you do not build a wall around it you don't have to pay for it. Whether that is doable is up to the architect.

M. Arata asked if there was another community that could be used as a potential example.

M. Khan stated he was not sure. The whole purpose right now is to tell the state to give us \$800,000 as a state match and we will be able to build a parking facility for at least 200 cars.

D. Manugian asked if everyone was comfortable putting this as a formal action item on the agenda at the next meeting.

There was no opposition.

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

.There were no administrative matters.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

The next MJTC meeting will be held on September 15, 2010 at 7:00 p.m.

There is no MPO meeting in September.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, D. Manugian adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.

X. HANDOUTS

- Agenda

- Minutes – July 21, 2010
- MPO Endorsed Summary Project List
- RTP Presentation
- Memo – From Glenn Eaton, Executive Director/MRPC, To: Interested Parties, RE: Solicitation for Projects (JARC & New Freedom Programs)
- Gardner RTP Meeting Public Comments
- Leominster RTP Meeting Public Comments
- Letter from Jeff Mullan, MA DOT
- Draft 2011 RTP Survey
- Letter from MA DOT regarding the Ayer project
- Three Applications from MART for funding