

MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (MJTC) MEETING
MINUTES OF November 9, 2022
Meeting Held Online through GoToMeeting.com - Hosted by the MRPC

D. Kilhart, Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

I. Introduction

Members

Roger Hoyt, Ashburnham; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Robert Swartz, Gardner; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Alice Livdahl, Hubbardston; Janet Tice, Shirley; Richard Maki, Sterling; Beth Faxon, Townsend; Brian Croteau, Winchendon

Ex-Officio and Organizations

David Kline, The ARC of Opportunity; Travis Condon, North Central MA Chamber of Commerce; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; Chris Klem, MassDOT; George Kahale, MART; Beth Suedmeyer, Devens Enterprise Commission

Non-Members

Rebecca Merrell, Ashburnham; Alan Manoian, Ayer; Amanda Reid, Lunenburg; William Caldwell, Sterling

Staff

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; Brian Doherty

II. Public Comments

There were no comments at this time.

III. Approval of September 14, 2022 Minutes

A motion was made to accept the September 14, 2022 MJTC Meeting Minutes as presented. Consensus was given to accept the minutes.

IV. FFY 2023-2027 Montachusett Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- Discussion on Draft Amendment #1 to the Highway Element
- MJTC Recommendation to the Montachusett MPO

G Snow stated that the MRPC was contacted by MassDOT about the need for an Amendment to the FFY 2023 Highway Element of the FFY 2023-2027 Montachusett TIP. The amendment is for Project #609314 which is a roundabout project at the Greenville and Turnpike Roads intersection in Ashby. The amendment would remove the project from the TIP due to the advertisement of the project on August 27, 2022. Since the project was advertised in the prior year, that being FFY 2022, it should no longer be considered for inclusion in the current TIP. At the October 19th MPO meeting, this information was presented and discussed. The MPO voted to release this as TIP Amendment #1 for a 21-day public review and comment period that began on October 26th and will run until November 15th. To date, no comments have been received on this Amendment. The MJTC is asked to provide any comments and a recommendation to the MPO on this Amendment.

The MJTC then reached consensus on a recommendation that the MPO endorse TIP Amendment #1 as presented.

V. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update

- Goals, Objectives and Strategies Discussion
- Performance Measures Discussion

B. Doherty mentioned that over the last few meetings, we have provided a handout from the 2020 RTP of the vision statement, goals, objectives, and strategies and performance measures. Over the next few meetings, we will go over all seven of the goals and their associated objectives and strategies to see what can be changed, revised, updated or clarified for the 2024 RTP. Goals are general statements of what we wish to accomplish for the region. For example, goal number one states to “improve and maintain safety and security” in the region. That is a general statement. The objectives for this goal are then more specific items to help achieve this. The strategies are more action items that also help achieve the goal. Finally, performance measures are a quantitative measure to help determine if we are actually meeting the goal. For today’s meeting, we will focus on Goals 1 and 2.

B. Doherty then reviewed the goal, objectives and strategies for goals 1 and 2 in detail with the MJTC in order to solicit their feedback and opinion.

B. Harris mentioned that all of the information presented by Brian is available for download in the online folder established for this meeting. Members can look over what was discussed and provide us with comments at your leisure.

B. Doherty also mentioned that the RTP survey is now available online and can be accessed through the MRPC website. We also plan on having paper copies of the survey placed in each community at the library and the senior center. If any members have any suggestions on other possible locations, please reach out to us and we will look into it.

B. Harris then referred all members to a flyer announcing the date and times for a series of public outreach workshops on the RTP. There are 6 workshops setup that will address each MPO subregion, the cities and transit. All will be available as an online meeting.

B. Faxon expressed concern on the timing of the public forums and whether there was enough time for various departments in a community to respond. B. Harris indicated that communities are not restricted to attending the one meeting identified for their particular municipality. Everyone is welcomed to attend any of the meetings as the formats will be basically the same. Input is also not simply restricted to this one meeting. We invite anyone to send us feedback and input throughout the process. In addition, we plan on holding additional meetings as the RTP process moves along, so this will not be the only opportunity for involvement.

VI. Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Launch Information

- Review of MassDOT Presentation

S. Bean stated that she was going to go over a presentation that was recently provided to the MPO by an individual from MassDOT. For those who unfamiliar with the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, it’s aim is to encourage students to walk and bike to school safely. This is done through a lot of outreach with the school community and through educating students on how to walk and bike safely. Communities are encouraged to sign on to the program in order to take advantage of what the program offers as well as to be eligible to apply for SRTS project funds. Eligible applicants for the program now include kindergarten through high schools. An additional requirement for the program is that the school must be a partner for at least six months before they can apply for program funds.

Introduced this year is an infrastructure grant component consisting of Signs and Lines Grants and SRTS Infrastructure Grants. Signs and Lines Grants provides up to a \$6,000 reimbursement to the municipality and an additional \$4,000 in assessment and design services from an outside consultant. The SRTS Infrastructure Grants range from \$200,000 to \$2 million. Types of projects that may be funded include Transportation, construction, and capital improvement projects that improve safety and/or increase the number of children walking/biking to

school. They also must be located within 2 miles of a K-12 school/school campus and be within the public way or a bicycle/pedestrian pathway. S. Bean to review the SRTS presentation with the MJTC members.

VII. Contract Status Reports

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

G. Kahale stated that MART is doing some roof replacement work in Fitchburg at the Intermodal Transportation Center. The roof color is also going to be changed from green to blue. MART anticipated that the work will be completed by next month in December.

MART was awarded \$180,000 for bus shelters through the Shared Streets and Spaces program for FFY 2023. We will be installing shelters in Gardner, Fitchburg and Athol.

Two shelters were recently installed in Gardner and Fitchburg under a 5307-funding program. The local feedback from officials and the public has been extremely positive.

The last project update is for the Depot Square Pedestrian Plaza in Ayer that had a ribbon cutting on two days ago on November 7th. A. Manoian stated that the Depot Square Park is the final part of a project that incorporates the parking deck for the Nashua River Rail Trail, new pedestrian signalization across Main Street, Depot Square and the Commuter Rail platform. It is serving as the “cradle” for the transformation of downtown Ayer.

A. Manoian also stated that Ayer was just awarded a MVP (Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness) Action Grant with Devens to plant a Miyawaki forest at Depot Square to transform the heat island that is there. Finally, MART is working on the Athol-Orange bus route with a new schedule that started October 31st as part of MART’s system wide bus route evaluation and schedule update.

- MassDOT 3C

B. Harris stated the MPO will meet next week on Wednesday November 16 at 1:00 pm.

Since the last MJTC meeting in September, MRPC staff has submitted 2 separate grant applications to the U.S. DOT under new funding opportunities from the BIL act. The first was for a region wide safety action plan grant for the Safe Streets for All program as was discussed last time. The second grant application was also for a planning grant for the town of Athol under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot program. The planning grant would seek to examine the possibility of establishing a new interchange on Route 2 at South Athol Road. There is a question as to whether this would meet the requirements of the RCP program but it was felt that the application should go in and the US DOT could make that determination.

Some handouts for discussion:

From MassDOT, there is the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study newsletter for October 31, 2022. The newsletter discusses the types of railroad signal systems that are in place and how they operate. There is also a brief discussion related to cost estimation and how they are derived. No further information is provided on the next public meeting for this study. When we receive further information on this workshop, we will post it on the MRPC website under Announcements.

The second handout is from the U.S. Department of Transportation announcing the availability of a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the National Culvert Removal, Replacement, and Restoration Grants (Culvert AOP) Program. Eligible activities for the program include projects to replace, remove, or repair culverts that would meaningfully improve or restore fish passage for anadromous fish and projects to replace, remove, or

repair weirs that would meaningfully improve or restore fish passage for anadromous fish. Eligible applicants include states, local governments, and recognized Indian tribes; applications are due February 23, 2023. This announcement is available through the MRPC website.

The last handout is a brief overview and discussion of the U.S. DOT Thriving Communities Program. The Thriving Communities Program (TCP) aims to ensure that disadvantaged communities adversely or disproportionately affected by environmental, climate, and human health policy outcomes have the technical tools and organizational capacity to compete for federal aid and deliver quality infrastructure projects that enable their communities and neighborhoods to thrive.

TCP facilitates the planning and development of transportation and community revitalization activities and provides tools to ensure that under-resourced communities can access the historic funding provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). For fiscal year (FY) 2022 funding, the Thriving Communities Program (TCP) offers two separate response opportunities for potential applicants: a Letter of Interest and a Notice of Funding Opportunity, that are describe in more detail in the handout. There is also a page with links to the U.S. DOT website that has additional information.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- Next MJTC Meeting

B. Harris stated that we had decided previously to not meet in December so the next meeting will be on Wednesday January 11, 2023 at 2:30 pm.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:24 p.m.

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

- 11 9 2022 Agenda
- 9 14 2022 MJTC minutes
- 4 FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #1 Summary
- 4 Int Parties Draft TIP Amendment #1 10 21 2022
- 5 GO&S 6 19 19
- 5 Performance Measures 6 21 19
- 5 Public Survey Print Version
- 5 Workshop flyer UPDATE 10 17 2022
- 6 SRTS Infrastructure Presentation - October 2022
- 7 National Culvert Program NOFO Announcement
- 7 Northern Tier Sep 2022 Newsletter
- 7 Northern Tier Oct 2022 Newsletter
- 7 Thriving Communities Info 11 9 2022