

MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (MJTC) MEETING
MINUTES OF MARCH 8, 2023
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

Dick Kilhart, Athol; Nicholas Erikson, Fitchburg; Robert Swartz, Gardner; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Janet Tice, Shirley; Robert Szocik, Templeton; Veronica Kell, Townsend; Beth Faxon, Townsend; Brian Croteau, Winchendon

Ex-Officio and Organizations

Travis Condon, North Central MA Chamber of Commerce; Bob Breger, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP; George Kahale, MART

Non-Members

Rebecca Merrell, Ashburnham; Brian Doheny, Ashburnham; Randy Williams, Ashburnham; Lyndsy Butler, Gardner; Amanda Reid, Lunenburg; Susan Templeton, Sen. Cronin's Office; Jared Linhares, Weston & Sampson; Alex Fagnand, Tighe & Bond

Staff

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; Brian Doherty

II. Public Comments

There were no comments at this time.

III. Approval of February 8, 2023 Minutes

Consensus was reached to accept the minutes for February 8, 2023 as presented.

IV. FFY 2024 Montachusett Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

— Review and Discussion of Budget and Tasks

S. Bean updated the members on the status of the development of the FFY 2024 UPWP. She reviewed the memo sent out to communities soliciting possible project/studies for the program year. The MRPC set a February 28TH deadline for official request submittals. S. Bean then briefly reviewed the three requests received and explained that a final decision has not been reached as of yet as staff still needs to fully review what is being asked and what the full scope of the work might be. Part of this review involves an equity analysis to ensure that all of our communities have a fair chance for funding. This analysis shows us where we have worked in the past and what communities might be lacking in studies, etc.

S. Bean then reviewed the budget data for the upcoming program year. On March 2nd, we received an updated allocation budget from MassDOT that contained revised population figures and final FTA allotments. The overall result is that the FFY 2024 year will be budgeted at \$944,066. This is an increase of approximately \$17,000 from our current program year of \$927,037.

S. Bean then indicated that a full draft of the UPWP should be available at the next MJTC meeting that will contain the equity analysis, the tasks to be done and the budgets for each task.

V. FFY 2024-2028 Montachusett Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- Review and Discussion of Project Listing
- Review and Discussion of Updated TEC Scores
- Project Discussion for Gardner - Park Street North Central Pathway Connector

B. Doherty updated members on the development of the next TIP. He first reviewed an updated project listing of target eligible projects and their TEC scores. Since last month two new projects have been added to this list, one in Winchendon and one in Sterling.

B. Doherty then reviewed several possible funding scenarios for the target eligible projects. We would like a recommendation from the members to the MPO of a preferred scenario that can then be built into a draft TIP. The biggest issue involves the status of the Route 12 project #604499 in Leominster. In the prior TIP, this project is listed in FFY 2024 and FFY 2025 through the advanced construction funding option due to its cost and our target limits for each FFY. At the TIP Readiness Day meeting with MassDOT, there was concern from the Right-of-Way section that this project would not be ready to go in 2024. They recommended that it be moved to FFY 2025. Doing so creates a ripple that affects all of the remaining FFY's and projects. In addition, we would be left with no projects in 2024 due to the current status of the remaining projects. None of the others would be sufficiently far enough along to justify placement in 2024. B. Doherty then reviewed in detail three specific fiscally constrained options for target funding for FFY 2024 to 2028.

A question was asked regarding the Ashburnham project #609244 Route 101 and what would it take to get it ready for 2024. B. Doherty responded that there is concern that it might not be ready for 2025. It needs to have its design move forward. The best thing to do would be to contact the MassDOT District 3 office to discuss its status.

A comment was made that the project in Winchendon for Route 202 from Vine Street to Glenallen Street had already been completed by MassDOT within the last two years and therefore it can be removed from consideration.

Additional questions were asked regarding projects and their status and what needs to be done to see them move forward. It was recommended that the town keep in contact with their consultants and the MassDOT district offices in order to monitor the project's status.

After further discussion, it was the consensus of the MJTC to recommend scenario 3 to the MPO for development into a draft TIP. Scenario 3 maintains the Route 12 Leominster project in 2024 and thus requires MassDOT to address the ROW issues as quickly as possible.

A presentation was then given by Alex Fagnand from Tighe & Bond on behalf of the city of Gardner for a new project in the city called the Park Street Connector along the North Central Pathway. This would add a trail connection along the west side of Crystal Lake northward to Rt. 140 where an overpass is currently under design. A. Fagnand reviewed the project route and its connections in detail with the MJTC members.

B. Harris mentioned a recent voicemail from MassDOT informing us of a planned Design Public Hearing for a project to construct a pedestrian bridge over Route 140 as part of the North Central Pathway on April 25th at 6:30 pm. When we get further details, we will let everyone know.

VI. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update

- Preliminary Survey Results
- Financial Plan Discussion

B. Harris presented some preliminary information on the RTP public survey to the members. We have closed the survey and collected paper surveys from the boxes that were set up at each communities library and senior center. Those paper surveys are currently being entered into SurveyMonkey. To date we have 259 recorded responses with maybe 30 to 40 left to enter. Additional data on the community responses and distribution throughout the region was presented.

B. Doherty presented information on the financial section of the RTP. He reviewed in detail the funding estimates prepared by MassDOT for each RPA in order to develop the financial elements. A comparison with figures from the last RTP was also discussed.

VII. Contract Status Reports

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

G. Kahale stated that the roof replacement project at the Intermodal Transportation Center in Fitchburg has been completed. In addition, MART received a request from the town of Townsend to join the regional transit authority. The request will be discussed and decided on at the Advisory Board meeting scheduled for tomorrow March 9th. Finally, MART received funding through the Shared Streets and Spaces program for FFY 2023 of \$180,000 for the purchase of bus shelters. If any communities have a location that they wish to see have a shelter, please contact MART and we will look into it.

V. Kell asked about the time of the MART Advisory Board meeting and if anyone can attend. G. Kahale replied that the meeting will be virtual and start at 10:30 am. It is a public meeting, and I will have the information sent out to you.

- MassDOT 3C

B. Harris stated that the MPO will meet next week on Wednesday March 15th at 1:00 pm. Discussions will continue on the TIP, UPWP and the RTP. In addition, the MPO will receive presentations on the state targets for PM 2 - Pavement & Bridge Condition and PM 3 - System Performance, Congestion Reduction, & Emissions. MPO endorsement of those PM's will be sought.

Some handouts for discussion:

From MassDOT, there is the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study newsletter for February 28th. The newsletter discusses the study and the next step in the study process which involves the development of four additional potential service plans (also known as "alternatives") for passenger rail service along the North Adams-Greenfield-Boston corridor. They will also be looking at various attractors and notable points of interest that could drive ridership. On the MRPC web page under announcements, is a link to a recording of the January 11th Public Workshop as well as for this newsletter.

The Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game, Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), has announced a Notice of Grant Opportunity under the Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance grant program. They are seeking proposals from Massachusetts local government units interested in replacing undersized, perched, and/or degraded culverts and bridges located in areas of high ecological value. The purpose of this funding is to encourage eligible applicants to replace structures with better designed crossings that meet improved structural and environmental design standards and climate resiliency criteria. In general, individual awards have ranged from \$25,000 to \$400,000 for single stream crossing replacements, depending on the project phases and work proposed. Awards over \$200,000 are anticipated for construction projects only. Interested communities should view the full announcement, including funding, eligibility and evaluation criteria that can be found on COMMBUYS. The announcement with appropriate links is also on the MRPC website under announcements.

There is a new handout that we received yesterday from FTA. It is a newsletter from FTA Region 1 which covers Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island. It highlights some new projects and programs that involved FTA. It is also posted on our website under Announcements.

Last month, a Transportation Open Forum sponsored by MassDOT, the Health Equity Partnership of North Central Mass (CHNA 9) and the MRPC was held. A large group of interested individuals met to hear about the state's Long Range Transportation Plan as well as the Montachusett RTP. Several comments and issues were presented by those in attendance. We expect many of the comments will be incorporated into the RTP. A recording of the forum can be found through the MRPC web page through the announcements section.

We received word from the US DOT that our application for a planning grant under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program for the study of a possible new interchange off of Route 2 at South Athol Road in Athol was not selected for funding. We plan on meeting with the town in the future to discuss other possible options for funding such a planning study.

We received a voicemail yesterday from MassDOT requesting us to notify our member communities about a MassDOT public hearing for the North Central Pathway pedestrian bridge project. The meeting is scheduled for 4/25/23 at 6:30 pm. A meeting notice will be sent to us and when we have it we will post it to our website as well as make it available at upcoming MJTC and MPO meetings. Again, the meeting will be for the North Central Pathway pedestrian bridge project and is scheduled for 4/25/23 at 6:30.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- Next MJTC Meeting

B. Harris stated that the next meeting will be on Wednesday April 12, 2023, at its regular start time of 2:30 pm.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

- 3 8 2023 Agenda
- 2 8 2023 MJTC minutes
- 4 2024 UPWP Project Solicitation Memo 1 24 2023
- 4 FFY 2024 PL and SPR Guidance - REVISED 3 2 2023
- 4 FFY 2024 UPWP Financial Guidance Highlighted
- 4 FFY 2024 UPWP Narrative Guidance
- 5 FFY 2024 2028 TEC Scores
- 5 NCP Park Street Connector - Overview
- 5 TEC Template
- 5 TIP Target Project Master List
- 6 Summary Regional Transportation Plan Survey Q1
- 7 Culvert Replacement Municipal Assistance (CRMA) Grant RFR Notice 3 6 2023
- 7 Final Region 1 Newsletter March 2023
- 7 Northern Tier Feb 2023 Newsletter