

MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (MJTC) MEETING

MINUTES OF August 9, 2023

Meeting Held Online through GoToMeeting.com - Hosted by the MRPC

R. Swartz, Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

I. Introduction

Members

Rebecca Merrell, Ashburnham; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Robert Swartz, Gardner; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Elizabeth Wood, Leominster; Beth Faxon, Townsend; Guy Corbosiero, Winchendon; Travis Condon, NCMCC

Ex-Officio and Organizations

Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; George Kahale, MART

Non-Members

Brian Doheny, Ashburnham; Amanda Reid, Lunenburg; Tracy Murphy, Westminster; Chelsey Patriss, CHNA

Staff

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; Brian Doherty; Tyler Godin

II. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

III. Approval of July 12, 2023 Minutes

A consensus was reached to accept the minutes for July 12, 2023 as presented.

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

- Review of Transit and Highway Amendment #6 Comments
- MJTC Recommendation to MPO Regarding Transit and Highway Amendment #6

G. Snow reviewed highway amendment #6 with the members. MassDOT has notified the MPO that 2 projects under consideration in FFY 2023 have seen cost increase and timing issues. The first is a bridge project in Harvard that went from \$2,694,992 to \$3,706,048; an increase of \$1,011,056 or approximately 37.5%. This represents an increase of more than \$500,000 for a programmed project under \$5,000,000, and based on the amendment definition in the TIP, requires an Amendment to the FFY 2023 Highway Element. for the current FFY 2023-2027 Montachusett TIP. This project will also move from Section 1B – Earmark or Discretionary Grant Funded Projects to Section 2A – State Prioritized Reliability Projects. The second project is a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) project in Gardner that increased from \$1,246,511 to \$1,814,944; an increase of \$568,433 or 45.6%. In addition, the project is not expected to be ready for advertisement in FFY 2023 and needs to be moved to FFY 2024. The cost change represents an increase of more than \$500,000 for a programmed project under \$5,000,000 and therefore also requires an Amendment. The movement of the project back one FFY also requires an Amendment.

G. Snow mentioned that the MPO voted to release this Amendment #6 for a reduced 14 day comment period due to time constraints and the need for FHWA to approve of the change. To date, we have not received any comments on this Highway Amendment.

A question was asked related to the Harvard bridge project and whether the rail company had any responsibility for the project. It was stated that because the roadway is MassDOT's jurisdiction, and the repair is for the roadway that it then becomes MassDOT's responsibility. The rail way is involved in the discussion but it is likely due to the work being done.

Consensus was given by the MJTC to recommend to the MPO that the Highway Amendment #6 be approved and endorsed.

G. Snow then reviewed Transit Amendment #6. The Amendment reflects the addition of 2 new projects to FFY 2023 due to recent funding awards. This is handled as an amendment due to the requirement that states that project additions are treated as amendments if the project was not part of any previously approved STIP that has been vetted through the public process. The projects allow for the purchase of vans for MART and GAAMHA. So, because these projects are new to the TIP process and therefore require an Amendment for the current FFY 2023-2027 Montachusett TIP. The MPO also voted to release this Transit Amendment #6 for a reduced 14 day comment period due to time constraints. To date, we have not received any comments on this Transit Amendment.

Consensus was given by the MJTC to recommend to the MPO that the Highway Amendment #6 be approved and endorsed.

V. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan

- Review of Additional Comment and Responses to Draft 2024 RTP
- MJTC Recommendation to MPO Regarding Draft RTP

B. Doherty mentioned that last month at the MPO meeting, the comments received for the draft RTP were reviewed and discussed. However, before the MPO was able to vote on endorsement, we were made aware of 3 additional comment letters that were overlooked by staff. The comments came in at the end of the comment period and somehow slipped through the cracks and had therefore not been addressed. The MPO then decided to hold off on endorsement of the RTP so that staff could review the three comment letters and respond to them accordingly. The endorsement of the RTP was therefore delayed until the September MPO meeting.

B. Doherty then proceeded to review in detail the additional comment letters with the MJTC. He summarized the concerns and issues as well as the prepared responses to those concerns.

A point was raised in the meeting chat that stated "that there's a significant difference between lobbying and advocating/educating. While MRPC cannot "lobby" for EV vehicle purchasing, you certainly can make communities aware of the benefits and opportunities to do so." B. Harris indicated that that is true and as information and programs come across our desks, we try to make them known to our member communities.

A question was asked regarding culverts and the design standard that they be based on 100-year flood projections. B. Doherty responded that although that is likely the case, as with most infrastructure, a lot have not been upgraded or addressed in a number of years. Because of this we try to let our communities know about any of these programs.

A question was asked if there was any indication in the plan that shows what was edited, deleted or added to the RTP. B. Doherty stated that nothing was deleted from the draft, but references were added to some of the plans mentioned in the comment letters. Additionally, in the appendix for the comments and responses, there is a table listing of the responses developed for each comment.

The consensus of the MJTC was to make a recommendation that the MPO Endorse the 2024 RTP at its next meeting.

VI. Discussion of MJTC Bylaws and Possible Updates

- MJTC Membership & Schedule for Election of Officers

B. Harris stated that recently, during the annual MJTC appointment process, a question was raised as to whether or not one individual could serve as the MJTC representative for more than 1 community. In this case, two communities have nominated the same person to be their Planning Board representative to the MJTC. Currently, the By-Laws do not offer any clarification on this matter. At the same time, it may be an opportunity to address any issues with the process to elect officers. Currently it is a 3 month process where a Nominating Committee is selected in May, they then meet in June to select and present a slate and then the election is held in July.

The current By-Laws states that they may be amended after a notice to that effect has been sent with the announcements of two successive regular meetings of the MJTC to all municipalities and representatives on record. The proposed amendment will be on the agenda of the first meeting for discussion only and on the agenda of the second meeting for action.

After discussion of the reasons behind the representative, it was decided to make this an agenda item at the next MJTC meeting. Issues to address would be related to how this would work if there was a need for a formal vote and how to properly craft the By-Law.

VII. Contract Status Report

- FTA/RTA

G. Kahale mentioned that work is ongoing at the main MART Facility on Water Street. This work includes changes to the parking areas off of Carey Street, security fencing, new storm drainage, and placing the utilities underground. The work will be completed in September/October. Secondly, MART had received grant funding of \$180,000 for bus shelters. We have just received 18 shelters and will be installing them in Gardner, Athol and Fitchburg.

A question was asked in the recent amendment discussed, are those the first electric vehicles for MART. G. Kahale indicated that yes they are. There are also a lot of infrastructure needed to support them. A second question was whether MART had considered a conversion to hydrogen power. G. Kahale indicated that no that had not been discussed yet but he will raise the issue for discussion.

- MassDOT 3C

B. Harris mentioned that the MPO will be meeting next week on Wednesday August 16th at 1:00 PM. The main action will be the endorsement of the 2024 RTP.

From the MassDOT Safe Routes to School Program is an announcement of the launch of the Signs & Lines Program AND the Infrastructure Grant Program that is happening at the same time this year. Both application periods will open on Wednesday, August 23, 2023 and one informational webinar will be held on August 23rd at 12:00 pm Noon. Municipal staff, school and school district staff, SRTS task force members, and anyone else interested in Safe Routes to School is encouraged to attend. The webinar will provide details on both application processes and expected project timelines, as well as review some examples of eligible and ineligible projects. This information is also posted on the MRPC web page.

A handout from The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) is available announcing a new funding opportunity for private and public entities to replace eligible diesel vehicles and equipment. Through the VW settlement, MassDEP is allocating \$7.5 million for zero-emission technologies. As part of the initiative in the 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan, funded by the Climate Protection and Mitigation Expendable

Trust (CMT), MassDEP is allocating \$4 million to replace municipal waste-serving refuse trucks with more efficient options. This competitive Solicitation has an application deadline of 5 PM September 26, 2023. The handout lists eligible project types as well as how to find more information. This announcement is also on the MRPC website.

There is a handout from FHWA regarding planning updates for August. This is provided for informational purposes. Like the others, it is also on our website.

Last is an announcement that came in this morning. FHWA is announcing a webinar related to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). A historic amount of funding is available to transportation programs. Approximately \$567 billion is available for transportation funding across all modes over 5 years and about \$351 billion of that is for highway-specific programs. There are also many new formula programs and new, competitive, discretionary programs. This training gives basic program familiarization awareness, including some content of the BIL, as well as key Federal program and project requirements. This training will not make you an expert in everything you need to know about these topics; however, it should greatly assist you in being able to identify what some of your program or project issues might be before you apply for a grant and who/where to get the answers to some of your questions. This training is focused on local agencies. A webinar is scheduled for Wednesday, September 6th at 2:00 pm EST. The training is approximately 90 minutes with a question-and-answer session to follow. Pre-registration is required for all participants. This info will also be available through the MRPC website.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- Next MJTC Meeting

The next meeting will be held on September 13th at 2:30.

IX. Adjournment

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn at 3:25 pm.

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

- 8 9 2023 Agenda
- 7 12 2023 MJTC minutes
- 4A Int Parties Draft Highway TIP Amendment #6 7 28 2023
- 4B FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #6 Summary
- 4C Int Parties Draft Transit TIP Amendment #6 7 28 2023
- 4D FFY 2023 Transit Amendment #6 Summary
- 5A 20230718 Letter to MRPC
- 5B NC4 24July 21 comments to the MRPC on the Draft 2024 Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan
- 5C CSellers comments on MRPC RTP 24July2023
- 5D RTP Appendix C Comments
- 6 MJTC Bylaws 9 17 2014 Highlighted MJTC 8 9 2023
- 7 FHWA Flyer_-_BIL_and_Fed_Requirements
- 7 FHWA PLANNING UPDATES FOR AUGUST 2023
- 7 massdep_vw_and_refuse_truck_electric_solicitation_grant_announced_7_27_2023
- 7 SRTS Grant Opportunities 8 3 2023