

MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (MJTC) MEETING
MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2021
Meeting Held Online through GoToMeeting.com - Hosted by the MRPC

J. Wyman called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

I. Introduction

Members

Jon Wyman, Westminster; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Nicolas Bosonetto, Fitchburg; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Alice Livdahl, Hubbardston; Elizabeth Wood, Leominster; Matthew Brenner, Lunenburg; Janet Tice, Shirley; Richard Maki, Sterling; Kirsten Newman, Sterling; Elizabeth Faxon, Townsend; Guy Corbosiero, Winchendon; Brian Croteau, Winchendon; Michael Fitzgerald, The Arc of Opportunity;

Ex-Officio and Organizations

Paula Simmons, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3;

Non-Members

Veronica Kell, Townsend; Erik Atkins, Green International Engineering

Staff

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; George Kahale

II. Public Comments

No public comments were made.

III. Approval of December 9, 2020 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the December 9, 2020 MJTC Meeting Minutes as presented. Consensus was given to accept the minutes as presented.

IV. Montachusett FFY 2022-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- Review of Project Listing for FFY 2022-2026 TIP

B. Harris started the presentation by reviewing a copy of the memo that was sent out announcing the development of the FFY 2022 to 2026 TIP. This memo went out to all on our outreach list and was posted to the MRPC website inviting any interested individual or group to participate in the preparation of the TIP. It also lists meeting dates for the MJTC, MPO and MRPC where the TIP would be discussed. The next handout was also shown previously and it is a copy of the TIP development schedule that outlines milestones in order to reach MPO endorsement by May 19th. From the schedule, we are slated to discuss and review a preliminary project list, identify any new projects and update project status and cost estimates.

Staff started the process of developing a project list by looking at the 2021-2025 TIP and the projects listed in FFY 2021. Based on information from the MassDOT Project Info website, we see that the current FFY, see that two projects have been advertised in Westminster and Lunenburg; that two projects are at 100% design status in Winchendon and for Gardner Pearson Boulevard; and that the remaining project in Gardner for Route 140 Rumble Strips is at 75% design. So, all of the FFY 2021 projects look to be in good shape to be advertised before September 30, 2021.

The remaining years from this TIP now become the starting point for developing a list of projects for consideration in the new 2022 to 2026 TIP. From these projects we will also identify possible target projects, i.e., those projects that the region can prioritize based upon status, their TEC scores and local input. Actual target figures for this new TIP have not been received yet but they should be available at a meeting later this month.

The next handout is a listing of the current target projects as well as other potential new target projects. As of now, staff has only identified one new project through the MassDOT Project Info website. This is in Clinton on Sterling Street (Route 62) from Willow/Lawrence Street to Main Street. This project will need to be scored through the TEC. In FFY 2026 there are no projects as of yet since this is the newest FFY to be added to the TIP. Staff will be reviewing project status with MassDOT on TIP readiness Day that will be coming up in early February.

The next step in the TIP development will be to finalize the review of all projects, get updates on design and cost estimates, in coordination with MassDOT, finalize the TEC scoring and develop a preliminary prioritized list of target projects. At next month's MJTC we will then review this Priority Listing. We would also like to encourage any community to let us know any information they feel is important for discussion regarding their projects.

A question was asked if for the projects in the Appendix, is there any information as to what level of design they are at? B. Harris stated that we can check on the Project Info website as a first step and then at the upcoming TIP Readiness Day meeting with MassDOT we can get the latest information available as to where they stand in terms of design.

A second question was asked if there was any idea of how much slippage there might be as the projects move forward and costs and designs change. B. Harris responded that at this time we do not know but at TIP Readiness Day, we should have a better idea on that issue but as of now I don't think there will be any 2021 projects sliding out of 2021.

In regard to targets, a question was asked as to what causes changes in the targets from year to year. B. Harris stated that the targets are based on the funding levels set by Congress within the federal legislation. The FAST Act technically ended a year or so ago. That legislation laid out federal authorization figures for multiple years. Since a new multi-year legislation has not been done, Congress has been passing continuing legislation on a year-to-year basis. So, because the legislation is only for one year, FHWA and the state have to make estimates as to what might be available in the outer federal fiscal years. This process is what can cause these target estimates to fluctuate. There are also some other factors, but this is probably the most significant.

V. Study Update: Roundabout Development in the Region

- Review and Discussion of Ongoing Study

G. Snow gave a presentation on a study that MRPC is working on regarding roundabouts within the Region. The presentation described what a roundabout is; the differences between roundabouts and rotaries; roundabout design elements; roundabout safety improvement vs traditional intersection designs; the roundabouts that have been constructed and those that are being planned in the MRPC Region; and how safety improved significantly at Route 70 at Old Union Turnpike in Lancaster but less so at Route 31 at John Fitch Highway in Fitchburg after roundabouts were constructed at these intersections.

N. Bosonetto mentioned that communities need to be careful regarding the application of roundabouts. They have become popular over the last few years, but every location is not always right for a roundabout. They really need to be placed in areas that are right for them.

N. Bosonetto stated that he felt it is important for communities that receive funding through grants, like MassWorks, that will implement some type of transportation project, that they need to go through an engineering review at the least by the local DPW.

A question was asked as to what determines if you are dealing with a mini-roundabout or a full sized one. G. Snow indicated that a whole process needs to be followed and that an engineering review would determine what is appropriate. E. Atkins stated that FHWA and MassDOT have developed guidelines related to the design and implementation of roundabouts. An extensive engineering review would address all concerns and issues in order to establish what is best and appropriate.

VI. Montachusett FFY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)

- Development Schedule
- Review and Discussion of Potential Tasks

S. Bean presented to the members the development process for the upcoming FFY 2022 UPWP. A copy of a memo sent to all communities in the MPO, solicitating their interest in a potential task for inclusion in the UPWP was discussed. In addition, a development schedule was reviewed that outlined the process for having the UPWP endorsed by the MPO in May of this year.

S. Bean then discussed the types of work tasks that communities may be interested in as well as some of the regular tasks that we will maintain in the new UPWP. A brief discussion was given related to the initial feedback the MRPC had received from communities regarding potential tasks. To date, we have received inquiries from three municipalities. A couple have put together official requests from their chief elected officials (CEO). Other asked questions related to ideas and thoughts they had on potential tasks. Information was provided to them and we let them know that they would also need to send an official request from the CEO.

S. Bean stated that once we have all of the requests, staff will conduct a review, determine what is feasible, what may be covered under other existing tasks and what can be standalone activities. We will also review guidance information from MassDOT, FHWA and FTA related to the new UPWP. This information, along with budget figures provided by MassDOT, will allow us to formulate the full UPWP. Additionally, we will do an equity analysis of past work efforts in order to try to maintain an equitable distribution of task funds around the region. Regarding the budget, we expect to receive figures at the upcoming MARPA/MassDOT meeting next week.

S. Bean then stated that at the next meeting, we will discuss the requests in more detail, the overall budget and what we believe will be able to be accomplished in the next work program.

VII. Contract Status Reports

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

G. Kahale mentioned that the Ayer is on hold for now due to the weather. What is left is the construction of the restroom. Staff is also working on improvements at the Shirley Commuter Rail Station. We will be working with the town and MBTA to see what can be done. The commuter bus shuttle from Fitchburg and Leominster to Clinton and Worcester will start soon. There are several stops planned after Fitchburg and Leominster. They include the Clinton Hospital, downtown Clinton and the Porter and Chester Institute Court House and Union Station in Worcester. Also, just recently, MART has decided to have Saturday service in Athol starting this coming Saturday.

- MassDOT 3C

B. Harris stated that staff continues to work on several projects as part of this year's work program. This includes a Route 12 Corridor Study. Staff will be meeting with officials from Fitchburg within a few weeks to discuss the scope and local issues. Walkability studies are in the data collection phase and are ongoing in Sterling and Townsend. We will be ramping up the traffic count program over the next few months by looking to hire two traffic interns to conduct counts throughout the summer. There are two separate handouts for your information. The first is from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) announcing a new electric vehicle charging infrastructure program and enhancements to three existing programs under the Massachusetts Electric Vehicle Incentive Program (MassEVIP). The second handout is from the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER), Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game. They are seeking proposals from Massachusetts municipalities interested in replacing an undersized, perched, and/or degraded culvert located in an area of high ecological value. The purpose of this funding is to encourage municipalities to replace culverts with better designed crossings that meet improved structural and environmental design standards and climate resiliency criteria. Both are posted on the MRPC website under News and Announcements.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- Next MJTC Meeting

The next meeting will be on Wednesday February 10th at 2:30pm.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:34 p.m.

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

- 1 13 21 Agenda
- 12 9 2020 MJTC minutes
- 4 21-25 TIP as Submitted
- 4 22-26 Target Project First Look
- 4 TIP Development Memo 11 13 2020
- 4 TIP Schedule FFY 2022 2026
- 5 Roundabout Handout 1-13-21 MJTC
- 6 Draft UPWP Schedule FFY 2022
- 6 UPWP Project Solicitation Memo
- FINAL FY22_CRMA_PreRFR Announcement
- MassDEP Electric Vehicle Prog Annce and Matrix Jan 2021