

MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (MJTC) MEETING

MINUTES OF APRIL 12, 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

Roger Hoyt, Ashburnham; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Jacqueline Doherty, Athol; Nicholas Erikson, Fitchburg; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Janet Tice, Shirley; Veronica Kell, Townsend; Brian Croteau, Winchendon

Ex-Officio and Organizations

Travis Condon, North Central MA Chamber of Commerce; David Kline, The ARC of Opportunity; George Kahale, MART; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT District 2; Ben Breger, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP;

Non-Members

Randy Williams, Ashburnham; Erica Dack, Hubbardston; Susan Templeton, Sen. Cronin's Office; Alex Tsoukalas, Green International

Staff

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; Brian Doherty

II. Public Comments

There were no comments at this time.

III. Approval of March 8, 2023 Minutes

A consensus was reached to accept the minutes for March 8, 2023 as presented.

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

- Review and Discussion of Draft UPWP
- MJTC Recommendation to MPO Regarding Draft UPWP

S. Bean presented the members with the latest information regarding the development of the draft UPWP. Related to the various tasks in the document, she highlighted the usual tasks that are carried each year such as the development of the UPWP and the TIP, our GIS related work, the pavement management program and the data collection task, which includes our yearly traffic count program. We also received requests for three new tasks based upon the memo that was sent out to our municipalities. Based on our equity analysis that we are required to do for the UPWP, we selected two community requests and declined one. The one that was declined was for a Townsend Corridor Study. The Geographic Equity Analysis showed us that there has been a lot of work done in Townsend over the past 5 years. Because of this, we wanted to be sure to include another community that had not requested a UPWP task over the past few years. We did encourage Townsend to reapply next year. S. Bean then reviewed the selected task requests from the North County Land Trust (NCLT) to conduct some trail planning and mapping. We will conduct a trail inventory for all the NCLT properties and then create updated trail maps for all of the properties, as well as a regional map suitable for professional printing. An interactive web map for the NCLT region will also be created.

The second local request is titled Multi Modal Connections. The objective of this task will be to assist the community of Groton with updating their prior Walkability Study that was for the downtown area. We will expand the focus to include the extensive trail networks and points of interest that the town has to offer. With an increase in bicycle and pedestrian activity in the town and various complete streets concepts, defining multi-modal connections to the town trails, schools, parks, cultural and historical venues, and commercial establishments has become a focus of the community. This study will work to address these concerns that will help establish prioritized projects and potential future funding opportunities.

S. Bean then went on to review the budget information for the UPWP and its various tasks. The budget shows the dollar amount allocated to each task as well as the breakdown for FHWA/FTA and MassDOT shares.

The MJTC then reached consensus to recommend to the MPO that the Draft UPWP be released for a 21-day public review and comment period.

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

- Review and Discussion of Draft Funding Scenario and TIP
- MJTC Recommendation to MPO Regarding Draft TIP

B. Doherty presented members with a draft list of projects for the Target, Statewide and Transit sections of the TIP. The Target section projects developed into the draft were derived from the preferred list of projects selected by the MJTC at the March meeting. The Statewide selections were developed by MassDOT. The Transit projects were developed by MART. He reviewed projects in each program year with the members.

A question was asked about the status of the Blair Square project in Winchendon. B. Doherty stated that although it was considered in one of the scenarios the group discussed in March, ultimately that particular scenario was not selected and it will remain listed in the Appendix. As it moves forward in design it will be a candidate to move up, especially as other projects are adjusted accordingly. It will be revisited at the latest in the development of next year's TIP.

The MJTC then reached consensus to recommend to the MPO that the Draft FFY 2024-2028 TIP be released for a 21-day public review and comment period.

VI. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update

- Survey Results
- Planning Scenarios Discussion

B. Harris presented information on the RTP public survey to the members. He reviewed questions 3 to 9 and the results based upon almost 300 responses. The questions provided insight on how individuals commuted to work before and after the pandemic, the average travel times, again pre and post pandemic, and what impacted their commute the most. One question asked respondents to list what issues that they feel need to be addressed over the next 25 years in order of importance. The results of this question were compared to a similar question in the prior 2020 RTP survey. These results affect the development of the 2024 RTP planning scenarios. Further discussion ensued on how the planning scenarios were impacted.

A question was asked if there was any survey question that asked if people were working remotely now instead of commuting. B. Harris replied that there was no direct question that asked about remote work but if we look more closely at the survey results, we may be able to ascertain some information. We will be looking to analyze the results in more depth.

B. Harris then presented information on the Planning Scenarios developed for the last RTP and how the survey results and public input received at the workshops affected their development for this RTP. We established three scenarios for the RTP. Scenario 1 is titled Status Quo that basically promotes project development in the

manner that has been undertaken in the past, i.e., address a problem as it occurs. Scenario 2 is called Inter-Community Development that emphasizes projects that improve accessibility across communities, i.e., from one municipality to another. This promotes communities to develop as regional commercial, business or residential centers that attract users from across the region. The final scenario is titled Intra-Community Development and it seeks to promote communities that want to develop residential, commercial, industrial, etc. areas within their municipal boundaries. This emphasizes travel with the town. Additional discussion on the planning scenarios occurred.

VII. Contract Status Reports

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

G. Kahale stated that the only update he has at this time was related to the MART Advisory Board meeting held last month. At that meeting, the Advisory Board voted to accept the request from the Town of Townsend to join MART as a new community member. This brings the number of MART member communities to 25.

- MassDOT 3C

B. Harris stated that the MPO will meet next week on Wednesday April 19th at 1:00 pm. Release of the TIP and UPWP will be sought. In addition, MART will be presenting a TIP amendment for the FFY 2023 TIP.

Handouts for discussion:

From MassDOT, there is the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study newsletter for March 31st. The newsletter discusses the next step in the study process. Ridership forecasts are part of the four additional potential service plans. The newsletter discusses the basics of forecast development.

There is a FHWA Planning and Grant Program Update for review. This discusses some of their upcoming grant programs and how interested parties can get additional information. There is also some information on a webinar on transportation utility fees. The webinar was held on April 5th but if you go to the linked website there should be a copy of the webinar for review.

There is a handout from FHWA on a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Wildlife Crossing Pilot Program for FFY 2022 and 2023. The program seeks to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and improve habitat connectivity for terrestrial and aquatic species. The funding may be used for construction and non-construction projects.

There is an announcement from MassDOT regarding a Public Information Meeting on April 13th at 7:00 PM. The purpose of this informational meeting is to provide the public with the opportunity to become fully acquainted with the proposed Twin Cities Rail Trail, Phase 2. The proposed project is to provide safer and improved transportation access for bicycle users and pedestrians between the Cities of Leominster and Fitchburg and to provide a safe connection to the MART Intermodal Transportation Center in downtown Fitchburg. Information is included on how to register. This notice is also on our website under Announcements.

There is a second announcement from MassDOT for a Virtual Design Public Hearing for the Bike Path Bridge over Route 140 in Gardner for the North Central Pathway. This meeting will be held on April 25th at 6:30 pm. Information on how to register is included on the flyer. This flyer is also available on our website under Announcements.

Lastly, just a heads up. We are approaching that time of year when we will be sending out appointment forms to Planning Boards/Departments and Select Boards/Mayors for our communities and organizations. We just want people to be aware that this will be coming soon and if any members wish to continue to be a

representative or if they wish to have someone else be appointed in their place to be on the lookout for these forms. MJTC terms run from July to June so beginning in May we will begin sending these out.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- Next MJTC Meeting

B. Harris stated that the next meeting will be on Wednesday May 10, 2023, at its regular start time of 2:30 pm.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

- 4 12 2023 Agenda
- 3 8 2023 MJTC minutes
- 4 FFY 2024 UPWP Budget
- 5 DRAFT Highway 2024 2028 TIP
- 5 DRAFT Transit 2024 2028 TIP
- 6 Scenario Review 2020 RTP
- 6 Survey Review 4 2023
- 7 609411_pim_flyer_fitchburg
- 7 FHWA PLANNING AND GRANT PROGRAM UPDATES 4 4 2023
- 7 NOFO the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program 4 4 2023
- 7 Northern Tier Mar 2023 Newsletter
- 7 Rt 140 Bike Bridge 609108 - Gardner - DPH Flyer