

MONTACHUSETT METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MMPO) MEETING

**Held Remotely via GoToMeeting.com
Hosted by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
464 Abbott Avenue, Leominster, MA 01453**

Minutes March 17, 2021

Stephen Woelfel representing Acting Secretary Jamey Tesler called the remote meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. Introduction

SIGNATORIES PRESENT

Stephen Woelfel, MassDOT OTP; Arthur Frost, MassDOT; Guy Corosiero, MRPC; Bonnie Mahoney, MART; Mayor Stephen DiNatale, Fitchburg; Gordon Robertson, Leominster; Tracy Murphy, Subregion 1; Rosemarie Meissner, Subregion 2; Michael-Ray Jeffreys, Subregion 3;

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

MA State Rep. Michael Kushmerek; MA State Rep. Natalie Higgins; MA State Sen. John Cronin Bryan Pounds, MassDOT OTP; Derek Krevat, MassDOT OTP; Paula Simmons, MassDOT Dist. 2; Ann Sullivan, MassDOT Dist. 3; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT Dist. 3; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Shaun Copeland, Ayer; Mary Jo Bohart, Fitchburg; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; Brian Croteau, Winchendon; Roy Nascimento, NCMCC; Travis Condon, NCMCC; Chris Timmel, FHWA; Susan Templeton, Sen. Cronin's Office; Patricia Pistone, MOC; Thomas Skwierawski, Fitchburg; Amy LeBlanc, Fitchburg; Larry Casassa, Fitchburg; Nikki Peters, Leominster; Jonathan Rockwell, The Engineering Group; Rich Benevento, World Tech Engineering; Bennie DiNardo, Twin Cities Rail Trail Group; Dick O'Brien, Leominster Trail Stewards; Joyce Leger, Twin Cities Rail Trail Group; Jake Fleming

STAFF PRESENT

Brad Harris; Brian Doherty; George Snow; George Kahale;

II. Public Comments

S. Woelfel asked those present if there were any public comments to be made. Several individuals expressed comments related to an upcoming agenda item for a proposed FFY 2021 TIP Amendment #2 that involves moving funding for the Twin Cities Rail Trail Phase II Construction from FFY 2021 to off the current TIP. The project would then be incorporated into the FFY 2022-2026 TIP currently under development in FFY 2024. The comments given all strongly supported the Twin Cities Rail Trail construction as soon as possible and that the funding delay of 3 years from FFY 2021 to FFY 2024 was unacceptable and potentially devastating to the cities of Fitchburg and Leominster and the Region. A delay of such length would present not only a serious economic impact but would also slow the redevelopment efforts under way in Fitchburg and Leominster. All commenters asked MassDOT to seriously reconsider such a lengthy delay to the project and to do everything possible to expediate solutions to any issues so that the trail could be completed within a more reasonable time frame.

Individuals who spoke on this matter were: MA State Senator John Cronin; MA State Representative Natalie Higgins; MA State Representative Michael Kushmerek; Fitchburg Mayor Stephen DiNatalie; Tom Skwierawski; Patricia Pistone; Larry Casassa; Dick O'Brien; Roy Nascimento; Travis Condon; Mary Jo Bohart.

B. Doherty showed the members how to access the comment letters received regarding this project online through the Cloud meeting folder.

III. Approval of February 17, 2021 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the February 17, 2021 MPO Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

IV. Montachusett FFY 2021-2025 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- *FFY 2021 Proposed Transit Amendment/Adjustment #2*
- *FFY 2021 Proposed Amendment #2 - Fitchburg-Leominster Rail Trail Project #609411*
- *MPO Action to Release Amendment #2 for 21 Day Public Review & Comment*

B. Mahoney reviewed with the MPO members a series of cost changes and project additions to the FFY 2021 Transit Element of the 2021-2025 TIP. These changes reflect recent funding apportionments as well as adjustments to capital procurements. This was originally going to be presented as a possible adjustment but after the most recent changes, this will need to be considered as an Amendment to the TIP. MART has sent this information to MassDOT Rail and Transit for their review.

S. Woelfel stated that since MassDOT Rail and Transit has received these changes but still need to review and consider them. Therefore, MassDOT's preference would be to not take this up today until Rail and Transit has had time to consider the implications of these actions. B. Mahoney of MART agreed to bring this back next month.

M. Jefferies asked a question about the automatic passenger counter purchase mentioned in the presentation. He asked if they are for the buses or the transfer station, etc. B. Mahoney indicated that these are for the fixed route buses, both the larger buses and the smaller ones coming in May.

S. Woelfel moved onto the agenda item related to the proposed TIP Amendment #2 that involves the Twin Cities Rail Trail project. He wanted to assure the members that the action being considered today is to remove it from the current FFY 2021 Highway Element. Also, MassDOT is committed to looking at the project over the next few weeks in order to address the comments made today. MassDOT does recognize how important this project is to the cities as well as the region and we will meet before the April MPO meeting to see what can be done with the schedule. A. Frost then reviewed with the MPO some of the issues and challenges that are facing this project. They include the bridge alignment over the Nashua River and a planned MBTA signal tower, subsurface utilities, an Army Corps of Engineering Chapter 91 permit and any hazmat material. We do expect to see the 25% design sometime between May and July of this year. He also restated that the proposed amendment would be to remove it from FFY 2021 in the 2021-2025 TIP only because we are sure that it will not be ready for advertisement.

S. Woelfel also wanted to clarify to the members that the action to be undertaken is to move the project out of FFY 2021 only and not to put it into FFY 2024. There will be discussions with the communities and the legislative delegation over the next few weeks to see what can be done on the next TIP.

Additional questions were asked on how the project got to this point, what are the causes of the delay and if there were anyone that could be motivated to move faster on the project due to its regional support and economic development impacts. MassDOT responded by repeating their commitment to move forward on this project and to emphasize their overall support for the Twin Cities Rail Trail. We will meet over the next few weeks to discuss issues and to respond back to those that have spoken on this project. It was then understood by all that the proposed TIP Amendment #2 would only remove the Twin Cities Rail Trail project from FFY 2021 of the FFY 2021-2025 TIP.

A motion was made to release the FFY 2021 TIP Amendment #2 for a 21-day review and comment period to run from March 26th to May 15th. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

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

- *FFY 2022-2026 Transit Element Project Review*
- *Review of Statewide Projects in the Region*
- *Final Project TEC Priority Listing*
- *Review and Discussion of Target Funding Scenarios*
- *Selection of Preferred FFY 2022-2026 Funding Scenario*

B. Doherty updated the MPO members as to the status of the TIP development process. In regard to the projects scheduled for the region, he first turned matters over to Bonnie Mahoney from MART to discuss the proposed FFY 2022-2026 Transit Element of the next TIP.

B. Mahoney proceeded to review the projects listed in each FFY of the TIP with the MPO. She highlighted several projects and their importance to the transit authority.

B. Doherty then reviewed the list of statewide and bridge projects scheduled for the upcoming FFY's. These priorities were developed by the state. The next section of the TIP to focus on is the target projects and their prioritization within each fiscal year. In order to develop a fiscally constrained TIP, each MPO is provided with a federal aid target funding estimate for each year. We then review these targets as well as the cost and status of all the projects in order to maximize the region's spending under each fiscal year. MPO staff developed two funding scenarios and presented them to the MJTC last week for their review and feedback. It was the consensus of the MJTC to recommend to the MPO that Scenario 2 appeared to be the best option at this time.

B. Doherty then proceeded to review the two funding scenarios developed for the members to discuss. Both scenarios contained the same projects for FFY 2022 and 2023. All the differences occur in the outer three years of the TIP. B. Doherty then reviewed the scenarios in more detail.

MPO members discussed in detail the project differences between the two scenarios versus the prior TIP project lists for FFY 2024 and 2025. After significant discussion of the various project merits, input and support comments from members related to specific projects, and the ability to utilize advanced construction funding for a project across FFY 2026 and FFY 2027, a third funding alternative was developed. This third scenario would be fiscally constrained.

The MPO then recommended that the staff move forward with the development of a draft FFY 2022-2026 TIP document based upon the third funding scenario and that it then be brought to the MPO next month for consideration of releasing for a 21-day public review and comment period.

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

- *Review Final Local Task List*
- *Review and Discussion of FFY 2022 UPWP Budget*

B. Harris presented to the members an updated listing of tasks for the UPWP based upon the requests received and our review of MassDOT's guidance letter. Additionally, we have developed a draft budget for the UPWP tasks based upon our anticipated PL and FTA Section 5303 funds. B. Harris then reviewed the various sections of the UPWP and what tasks are to be included in each one. Individual tasks were previewed and their scopes were highlighted.

B. Harris then discussed the community requests that were received and how they are being incorporated into several of the new tasks. Basically, all the requests received have been worked into the UPWP. Response letters have gone out to the communities informing them of their inclusion in the UPWP.

Staff will now be working on the compilation of a draft UPWP for public release after the April MPO meeting. As part of the draft, we will conduct an equity analysis to see what communities, if any, have not received any planning assistance over the last few years. Our goal in doing this is to see that all our municipalities can share in this planning program.

VII. Updates

- MassDOT Highway Division

P. Simmons of MassDOT District 2 stated that the FFY21 projects are moving forward and should be ready for advertisement; in FFY22 the Petersham Bridge project is on track for the 100% submission while the Templeton Roundabout project 75% design is due this week.

A. Frost of MassDOT District 3 mentioned that for FFY 2021 projects, Gardner - Pearson Boulevard is at about 100% and we expect to advertise in September; the Gardner Route 140 Rumble Strip project is at 75% with the public hearing upcoming and a May advertisement date; and the Leominster Route 12 at Hamilton Street is on track for September advertisement.

- Transit

B. Mahoney mentioned that on February 23rd MART started a shuttle running from Fitchburg, to Leominster through Clinton and on to Worcester for commuters. Other than that, there are a couple of marketing campaigns that are beginning.

- Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)

The MJTC met on March 10th and reviewed much of the same information presented today on the TIP and the UPWP. The next MJTC meeting will be April 14th at 2:30. Major topics will be the continued development of the TIP and UPWP. We will also have a presentation by some WPI students that conducted an intersection analysis in Fitchburg.

Staff learned after the March meeting that the Chair Jon Wyman would be retiring from the Westminster Planning Board. As such, he will be leaving as our Chair. Jon stepped up back in 2015 to become the chair and he has served every year since. We will miss his leadership and insights. He has helped to grow attendance at these meetings over the last few years.

We are currently in the market for 2 part time traffic interns to assist us with the traffic count program. We anticipate conducting approximately 120 counts this season. As of yet we have not received any inquiries so if anyone knows of a high school or college aged individual that has access to a vehicle as well as a driver's license. Please point them to our website at mrpc.org and see the news announcement for further details.

There is a copy of a news article from the Greenfield Recorder stating that the Mohawk Trail from Athol westward through Franklin County and into Berkshire County ending in Williamstown has been named a National Scenic Byway by the U. S. DOT. The Mohawk Trail was one of 15 new All-American Roads and 34 new National Scenic Byways. An application was submitted by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) in cooperation with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and the MRPC.

Also there is a notice of a MassDOT Design Public Hearing on project # 609314 in Ashby for the proposed Intersection Improvements at Greenville Road (Route 31) and Turnpike Road. This pre-recorded hearing will be available April 12th.

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

G. Corbosiero mentioned that due to time he would just like to say that there is a Status Report handout available that covers what is going on with the MRPC and members are welcomed to look it over. The only other thing is that staff is still working remotely and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B. Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting is on April 21, 2021 at 1:00 pm.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:26 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 3 17 2021 Agenda

MPO 2 17 2021 Minutes

3-16-21_City of Fitchburg-MayorStephenDiNatale_ Montachusett MPO re TCRT Objection to 3 yr Delay

CRONIN'S LETTER OF SUPPORT TWIN CITIES RAIL TRAIL_

Twin Cities Rail Trail to MMPO March 16 2021

NCMCC Letter to the Montachusett MPO Regarding Twin Cities Rail Trail (003)

4 DRAFT FFY 2021 Highway Amendment #2 Summary

4 Transit Draft FY21-25 TIP_Revised Amendment

5 FFY 2022 2026 TEC Scores

5 MART Preliminary 22-26 CIP Project List

5 Statewide Priority Listing

5 Target Project Scenario 1

5 Target Project Scenario 2

5 Target Project Status List

6 DRAFT FFY 2022 UPWP Budget Est 3 16 2021

6 UPWP Task List

Ashby Public Hearing 609314 DPHFlyer

Mohawk Trail receives national recognition 2 18 2021

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