

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 April 21, 2021

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

I. Introduction

SIGNATORIES PRESENT

David Mohler, MassDOT OTP; Ann Sullivan, MassDOT Dist. 3; Guy Corosiero, MRPC; Bonnie Mahoney, MART; Mary Jo Bohart, Fitchburg; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; Rosemarie Meissner, Subregion 2; Tim Kilhart, Subregion 3;

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

Bryan Pounds, MassDOT OTP; Derek Krevat, MassDOT OTP; Paula Simmons, MassDOT Dist. 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT Dist. 3; Olivia Murphy, MassDOT; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Christopher Ryan, Harvard; Brian Croteau, Winchendon; Chris Timmel, FHWA; Jonathan Rockwell, The Engineering Group;

STAFF PRESENT

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

II. Public Comments

D. Mohler asked those present if there were any public comments to be made. There were none at this time.

III. Approval of March 17, 2021 Minutes

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

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

- *FFY 2021 Potential Transit Amendment #3*
- *MPO Action to Release Amendment #3 for 21 Day Public Review & Comment*
- *FFY 2021 Draft Amendment #2 - Fitchburg-Leominster Rail Trail Project #609411*
- *MPO Action to Endorse FFY 2021-2025 TIP Amendment #2*

B. Mahoney presented the MPO members a series of cost changes and project additions to the FFY 2021 Transit Element of the 2021-2025 TIP. She explained the need for the cost changes as well as the project changes based on bid prices and state and federal funding levels. In all the proposed amendment reflects cost changes and adjustments to six line items and the addition of one project under section 5307.

A motion was made to release the FFY 2021 Transit TIP Amendment #3 for a 21-day public review and comment period. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

B. Harris reminded members that at the last MPO meeting, it was voted to release for a 21-day public review and comment period, draft TIP Amendment #2 to the FFY 2021-2025 TIP. This amendment removes one project, the Fitchburg-Leominster Twin Cities Rail Trail Phase II Construction, from FFY 2021 under statewide funding. A number of individuals commented on this proposal at the MPO meeting to express their concerns with the delay and the impact that it would have on the re-development of the area, the local economy and the area residents. After discussion, MassDOT indicated that the Amendment should be to simply remove the project from FFY 2021 in order to make the statewide funds available elsewhere. Its future placement would then be a discussion for the next TIP. TIP Amendment #2 thus went out for review with the project removed from FFY 2021 only. The comment period closed on April 15th and during that time we received two additional comment letters: one from the Leominster Trail Stewards and one from the Montachusett Regional Trail Coalition (MRTC). Both expressed support for the project and the need to limit any delays in the projects advertising. These two comment letters were in addition to four letters presented at the April MPO meeting.

A, Sullivan then briefed the members on the events that have taken place since the last MPO meeting. We have met with the two mayors, Until and the Twin Cities Rail Group. We have developed a list of tasks as well as a timeline and we plan on having monthly meetings with stakeholders so that everyone will be informed and know where the project stands.

B. Mahoney asked about the status of the project in relation to the FFY 2022-2026 TIP. A. Sullivan stated that it will be included in FFY 2024.

A motion was made to endorse the FFY 2021 TIP Amendment #2. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

It was mentioned that due to COVID and virtual meeting restrictions, D. Mohler as Chair would be the only signature on the endorsement page, but his signature is on behalf of the entire MPO and the vote taken.

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

- *Review and Discussion of Draft FFY 2022-2026 TIP Document*
- *MPO Action to Release Draft TIP for 21 Day Public Review & Comment Period*

B. Doherty presented to the MPO members the draft FFY 2022-2026 TIP. At the last MPO meeting, we reviewed two potential funding scenarios along with the recommendation from the MJTC regarding option #2. After significant discussion, the MPO was able to develop a third funding option and then recommended that the draft TIP be built around it. The draft presented today reflects that action. B. Doherty then reviewed each FFY, the associated projects and the fiscal analysis that showed the document to be fiscally constrained. We are looking today for a motion to release the full draft FFY 2022-2026 TIP for a 21-day public review and comment period to run from April 26th to May 17th.

A motion was made to release the draft FFY 2022 - 2026 TIP for a 21-day public review and comment period. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

VI. Endorsement of MPO Self Certification and GWSA Certification

- *Review & Discussion of MPO Self Certification & GWSA Certification Documents*
- *MPO Action to Endorse Montachusett MPO Self Certification & GWSA Certification*

B. Harris reviewed with the members the MPO Self Certification and the Global Warning Solutions Act (GWSA) Certification documents. These documents are required to be reviewed and endorsed on an annual basis. This occurs around the time of the TIP endorsement and they are incorporated into that final document.

The MPO Self Certification identifies a number of Federal and State regulations, guidelines and laws that must be part of our regular transportation planning process work. As a staff, we work to ensure that we abide by these regulations to the best of our abilities.

The GWSA certification also presents a list of regulations related to the GWSA enacted by the Commonwealth for MassDOT and the transportation sector. It identifies a number of items that MPOs must do and consider as part of their planning efforts.

A motion was made to endorse the MPO Self Certification and the GWSA Certification for the Montachusett MPO. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

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

- *Review and Discussion of Draft FFY 2022 UPWP*
- *MPO Action to Release Draft UPWP for 21 Day Public Review & Comment Period*

S. Bean presented to the members the full draft FFY 2022 UPWP. The UPWP is a budget and task tool that guides our work efforts over the next Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) which begins on October 1st. She then reviewed the four major elements of the UPWP as well as some of the results of the equity analysis conducted for the document. Individual tasks and budgets were also discussed in more detail. The draft UPWP was presented to the MJTC last week and they recommended that the MPO consider releasing it for a 21-day public review and comment period. That is what we are looking for from the MPO today. This comment period will also follow the same time frame as the one for the draft TIP.

A motion was made to release the draft FFY 2022 UPWP for a 21-day public review and comment period. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

VIII. Updates

- *MassDOT Highway Division*

P. Simmons of MassDOT District 2 stated that there were only a couple of quick updates; for FFY21 Route 202, Winchendon, the PS&E is expected on May 18th; in FFY 2023, the Templeton Roundabout project 75% design has come in and is under review. In FFY 2024, the Phillipston/Templeton Route 2 project PS&E is due in late June and finally, one project not programmed as of yet, in Athol #608723 Crescent Street and Chestnut Hill, the 75% designs were just received.

A. Sullivan of MassDOT District 3 mentioned that for FFY 2021 projects, Westminster was advertised in January; Gardner, Pearson Boulevard the revised 100% is under review; the Lunenburg bridge was advertised in early December; the Gardner Route 140 Rumble Strip 100% was just received.

- *Transit*

B. Mahoney mentioned that MART will be updating and re-instating a number of routes that were suspended previously due to COVID restrictions. They are also in talks with Littleton on what version of the Littleton Shuttle will be brought back. MART has been working with the vendors for the "Where's My Bus" project and they are hoping to go live with it by the end of the fiscal year. MART has received a number of bids for new fare boxes, and they will be evaluating them soon. Finally, MART will be renovating some office space for their brokerage services. MART is now the largest brokerage service in the state covering two of the three areas defined by the state Human Services department.

G. Kahale mentioned that MART just received a letter from the state approving a request from the town of Barre to join the transit authority. The MART Advisory Board must now review and act upon this request to see if Barre can become a member.

- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*

B. Harris mentioned that the next MJTC meeting will be May 12th and we will begin the election process for a new slate of officers. A nominating Committee will be selected. Our current Chair Jon Wyman will be retiring and leaving as our Chair. We have interviewed and hired one individual as a traffic intern to assist us with the traffic count program. We are still in need of a second individual, so if anyone knows of an individual that is looking for summer employment, please point them to our website at mrpc.org and see the news announcement for further details. Finally, we attended a steering committee meeting for the "John Fitch Highway – A Climate Resilient Corridor Study" in Fitchburg. This study is looking at the John Fitch Highway and possible alternatives and improvements that could lead to some TIP projects.

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

G. Corbosiero indicated that the MRPC offices remain closed but will open in the near future for a skeleton crew. If everything continues to improve, we are looking at a full opening sometime in the summer. Funding in the Brownfields program have been fully committed. Staff continues to work on two community health assessments and a small business grant program.

IX. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B. Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting is on May 19, 2021 at 1:00 pm.

X. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 1:44 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 4 21 2021 Agenda

MPO 3 17 2021 Minutes

4 Draft Transit FY21-25 TIP Amend #3 Revised 4 13 2021

4 FFY 2021 Highway Amendment #2 Summary

4 Int Parties Draft TIP Amendment #2

4 MPO ENDORSEMENT PG Amendment 2 Apr 21 2021

4 TIP Amend 2 Comment Ltrs

5 DRAFT FFY 2022 2026 TIP 4 13 2021

5 DRAFT FFY 2022 2026 TIP Summary 4 13 2021

6 Self Cert & GWSA Endorse Pages

7 DRAFT FFY 2022 UPWP Reduced File 4 13 2021