

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 of January 18, 2023

Derek Krevat called the remote meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. Introduction

SIGNATORIES PRESENT

Derek Krevat, MassDOT OTP; Ann Sullivan, MassDOT Dist. 3; Liz Murphy, Fitchburg; Trevor Beauregard, Gardner; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; George Kahale, MART; Rosemarie Meissner, Subregion 2; Tim Kilhart, Subregion 3

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

Andrew Wang, MassDOT OTP; Michelle Ho, MassDOT OTP; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT Dist. 2; Ben Breger, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT Dist. 3; Chris Timmel, FHWA; Nicholas Erickson, Fitchburg; Jasmin Farinacci, Lancaster; Renee Eldredge, Heywood Hospital; Susan Templeton, Sen. John Cronin's Office; Ryan Scott, LUK Inc.; Staci Johnson, Mass Hire North Central Career Center; David Kline, The ARC of Opportunity

STAFF PRESENT

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; Brian Doherty

II. Public Comments

D Krevat asked those present if there were any public comments to be made. There were none.

III. Approval of December 21, 2022 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the December 21, 2022 MPO Meeting Minutes. A motion was made and seconded. The motion passed with 1 abstention.

IV. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Update

- *Update by MassDOT OTP*

D. Krevat stated that the state is in the process of updating our statewide long range transportation plan, called "Beyond Mobility." I will put a link to it in the chat. (<https://beyond-mobility-massdot.hub.arcgis.com/>) If folks are interested in signing up for plan updates, there's a button on the MassDOT Beyond Mobility website for you to do that. We should have some information to share over the next month or two. We have just finished up some extensive public engagement, where we got over 2,500 survey responses to our public survey. The survey asked for priorities on a variety of different funding areas and transportation modes. We will be making the results from that public, as well as some draft vision statements over the next few weeks. If you sign up for our mailing list, then you'll be notified of any updates as they occur.

S. Bean then discussed an upcoming Transportation Seminar that is being put on by MRPC and CHNA9, our local Community Health Network, that will feature a MassDOT presentation on the state plan. It will be held on February 16th at 10:00 am. We will be sending out a notice very soon on the meeting that

will contain information on registering. It will also be placed on the MRPC website under Announcements. We will discuss transportation issues and also discuss the possibility of setting up a Transportation Management Association (TMA).

V. Montachusett FFY 2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- *Review of Comments on Draft Amendment #3 to the Highway Element*
- *MPO Action Related to Amendment #3*
- *Discussion on Other Potential TIP Amendments*
- *MPO Action Related to Other Potential TIP Amendments*

G. Snow stated that the MRPC was contacted by MassDOT about the need for an Amendment to the FFY 2023 Highway Element of the FFY 2023-2027 Montachusett TIP. The amendment is for Project #608784 in Templeton for the Roundabout Construction at the Intersection of Patriots Road, South Main Street, North Main Street and Gardner Road. The amendment is due to an increase in the total cost of the project from \$2,037,795 to \$2,817,313, an increase of \$779,518 or 38.3%. The TIP guidelines state that an increase of more than \$500,000 for projects under \$5 million require that the Amendment process be used. This project is also a target project under Section 1A, Regionally Prioritized Projects. But due to the TIP being under programmed in FFY 2023 by approximately \$2,260,000, the additional increase still leaves FFY under our total target figure and the TIP remains fiscally constrained.

At the last MPO meeting on December 21st, members voted to release the Amendment for a 21-day public review and comment period to run from December 28th until January 17, 2023. The MJTC reviewed this amendment at their January 11th meeting and reached a consensus to recommend that the MPO formally endorse TIP Amendment #3. Additionally, no comments have been received on this Amendment.

A motion was made and seconded for the MPO to endorse TIP Amendment #3. The motion was made and seconded. It passed with one abstention.

VI. MassDOT Safety Performance Measures (PM1) – CY 2023

- *Review & Discussion of State Targets*
- *MPO Action Related to MassDOT PM1 for CY2023*

D. Krevat presented to the members information regarding the development and the reporting of safety targets for the state for this calendar year. Members may recall that this has been discussed in prior years.

MassDOT and the MPO's are required per Federal regulation to adopt performance measures in the area of safety. To do that, we look at five categories: total number of fatalities, total rate of fatalities, number of serious injuries, the rate of serious injuries and then a combined indicator for non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries. For the state, we put together information looking at historical data in these areas and then try to project potential future trends in order to set these targets. The data unfortunately, shows that we have begun to trend in the wrong direction, beginning with the 2017 to 2021 5-year averages. There has also been an increase in fatalities nationally, as well as here in Massachusetts. To set our target, the thought process was to not set a target that is higher than what we had already set. Massachusetts is a vision zero state committed to bringing fatalities down to zero in the long term. D. Krevat then discussed the target numbers developed and reported to FHWA.

G. Snow then presented data for the Montachusett Region and how it compared to state figures. As with the state there has been a slight rise in fatalities but overall, we have maintained an average of 15 fatalities per each 5-year period. He then continued to discuss regional trends and comparisons to the state figures.

D. Krevat then indicated that it is part of the federal requirement for the MPO's to either endorse the state targets or set their own. In the past, this region and the other MPO's in the state have all elected to endorse and utilize the state target figures.

B. Harris indicated that in the past we have adopted the state targets and it is our recommendation that we again maintain that and endorse the targets presented for Performance Measure 1 (Safety).

A motion was made and seconded for the MPO to endorse the state's PM1 targets. The motion passed unanimously.

VII. FFY 2024-2028 Montachusett TIP & FFY 2024 Montachusett UPWP

- Review & Discussion of Development Schedules for Next TIP & Next UPWP

B. Doherty informed the members that it is that time of year to begin development on the next Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The new TIP will cover FFY 2024 to FFY 2028. We have developed a memo outlining the upcoming process as well as the meetings where the TIP will be discussed. This memo went out to everyone on our mailing lists inviting anyone with an interest to be part of the TIP development process. In addition, we have developed a schedule that outlines the process as well as the discussion points for upcoming meetings. The goal is to have a fully endorsed TIP by May of 2023.

B. Doherty then discussed the TIP schedule as well as some of the topics for upcoming meetings in more detail with the members. He also mentioned that if any community would like to discuss any projects that they have in the works with the MPO to please contact us so that it can be placed on an upcoming meeting agenda.

A question was asked as to what level a project needs to be at for presentation to the MPO. B. Doherty responded that we do not have a set design standard for something like that. It is basically up to the community as to when they feel comfortable with the project and when it will likely be beneficial to the MPO members to hear about it in more detail.

S. Bean indicated that the development of the FFY 2024 UPWP will follow a similar schedule as the TIP. Both go out for public comment around the same time, and we try to have them endorsed at the same MPO meeting. Currently, we are working on an outreach memo to our communities to solicit some possible task and study ideas. One thing we would like to focus on is the development of more regional studies as opposed to single community projects. This type of spot-based analysis will still be considered but we would like to broaden the scope of some of our tasks.

Also, we encourage any community to reach out to us at any time to discuss ideas and suggestions for consideration. We will be bringing things back to the MPO in future meetings as we continue development of the UPWP.

B. Harris asked MassDOT and FHWA as to when we will start to receive information on financial and narrative guidance in the UPWP and TIP.

D. Krevat responded that all of that information will be coming soon in time for the annual MassDOT MARPA scheduled for next Friday January 27th. C. Timmel answered that FHWA is on the same timeline with their guidance, and it will be coming shortly.

VIII. Montachusett Title VI Assurances and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan

- Review & Discussion

- *Potential MPO Action Related to Title VI Assurances and LEP*

B. Harris stated that MRPC staff recently conducted some work on the annual Title VI report for submittal to MassDOT. As part of that work, we undertook an update to our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan. The MPO is committed to assisting individuals for whom English is not their primary language and to understand and have access to MPO information, benefits or services. Language for many LEP individuals can be a barrier to accessing and exercising important rights, complying with applicable responsibilities, or understanding other information provided by federally funded programs and activities.

Our last LEP was conducted in 2019 and utilize the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) five-year census estimates. At that time for the region, approximately 4.6% of the total working population over the age of five spoke English less than very well. Further analysis indicated that three languages, Spanish, or Spanish Creole, French and Portuguese had limited English proficiency populations greater than the regional average. For this update, we used the newest ACS estimates the 2021 five-year estimates. We found out that the language categories for the data had change and been redefined by the Census Bureau. Spanish or Spanish Creole is now just Spanish; French now also includes Haitian or Cajun. And there is no separate breakdown for Portuguese. Instead, it is included in the category of other Indo-European languages which includes Portuguese with other languages of Europe, like Italian, Dutch, etc. So this made it difficult to do a direct comparison with the prior data. Based on the 2021 ACS estimates, the regional average of the population that speaks English less than very well came in at 5.02%, a slight increase from the 2019 LEP of 4.6%. B. Harris continued to review the LEP with members in greater detail.

A question was asked as to how a non-English speaking individual would know that they have the opportunity to ask for translation services. B. Harris indicated that there are posters in our conference room in the 3 most popular regional languages providing people information on their rights and protections. We also include information on our meeting notices and agendas, as well as some of our project notices and the MRPC website includes language translation options through Google Translate.

R. Eldredge stated that while the information is posted, that there still is a huge barrier to those non-English speaking individuals to access the information where you have it posted versus being right on the actual mode of transportation that they are using. B. Harris stated that that is a concern and that MART, as the Transit Authority, must also address these issues for their clientele. I know that they have been working on those issues with updated schedules and through training videos in different languages.

A motion was made and seconded for the MPO to release the LEP Update for a 21-day public review and comment period. The motion was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

S. Bean presented to the members the updated, non-discrimination assurances that were sent by FTA and FHWA as part of our Title VI annual report. These assurances need to be signed by the Title VI Coordinator for those recipients and sub-recipients of federal funds. Our Executive Director, Glenn Eaton, is the Title VI coordinator for our agency. We are seeking MPO approval to have these assurances signed and submitted to MassDOT as required for our Annual Title VI report.

A motion was made and seconded to approve of the signing of the Title VI assurances. The motion passed unanimously.

IX. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- *Progress Update*

B. Doherty stated that at this meeting he wanted to provide a brief update on the development of the RTP. Staff is continuing to review with the MJTC, the goals, objectives and strategies from the last RTP as well as the various performance measures that are linked to those strategies. We will still welcome comments from individuals throughout the RTP process.

Also, the RTP survey is still out and available online. We have been promoting this at our meetings. In addition, staff has placed paper surveys and collection boxes at all of the senior centers and libraries in the region. As of now, staff is still on track to have a draft RTP document out for review pending, MPO approval at the May meeting, and hopefully have an endorsement in June.

X. Updates

- MassDOT Highway Division

A Sullivan of MassDOT District 3 provided the following updates.

Westminster - Route 140, from Patricia Road to Princeton Town Line is at PS&E and has an August 2023 ad date. Gardner - Roundabout at Elm Street / Pearl Street / Central Street and Green Street, has an ad date of April 22nd. Harvard - bridge Project Rt 2 to over Nashua River / Tank Road and Boston and Main Railroad is an in-house book job and has an ad date in May. Fitchburg - Rt 2 is at 100% with an ad date of February 4th. Ashby - Greenville Road at Turnpike Road was advertised in FFY 2022 and a Notice to Proceed has been issued. Gardner - Elm Street is a Safe Routes to School project and is at 100%, and has a September ad date.

D Amaral of MassDOT District 2 provided the following updates. For FFY 23, Project# 608784 - Templeton Roundabout at the intersection of Patriots Road/South Main Street/North Main Street/Gardner Road was submitted in December and review was completed December 19th. It has a current ad date of February 11, 2023.

Project# 609107 – Rt 2 Phillipston/Templeton Pavement Preservation and related work on Route 2 was advertised on November 5th and the bid opening was on December 13th. On January 3rd, it was awarded to P.J. Keating Company with a low bid of \$9.8 million. For FFY 24, Project# 608723 - Athol Intersection improvements at Crescent Street and Chestnut Hill Ave is at 75% design with the 100% due January 20th and it has a current ad date of January 6, 2024.

- Transit

G. Kahale mentioned that MART recently received funding through the Shared Streets and Spaces program for FFY 2023 of \$180,000 for the purchase of bus shelters. MART has and will be installing the shelters in Gardner, Fitchburg and Athol.

- Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)

B. Harris stated that the MJTC met last week on Wednesday January 11th. Discussions focused on the start of the TIP, UPWP and the RTP. The MJTC will resume its regular monthly schedule as the TIP and RTP development continues. The next MJTC meeting is set for Wednesday February 9th at 2:30 pm.

There was a virtual public workshop for the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study held last week on January 11th. The Study team presented information on the first 2 service plan alternatives that were labelled low investment and high investment options. The full presentation will be available online at the MassDOT Northern Tier Study website. We will also be posting a link to the site on the MRPC website under Announcements.

The MassTrails Grant Program has announced that the 2023 Grant Round is now open. Now through February 1, 2023, applications can be submitted to receive funds for project development, design, engineering, permitting, construction, and maintenance of recreational trails, shared use pathways and amenities that support trails.

There is a copy of a press release from MassDOT announcing \$6.65 million in Complete Streets Funding Awards. For FY 2023 Round 2, the state has awarded 15 communities funds for *local multimodal infrastructure projects that improve travel for bicyclists, pedestrians, public transit users, and people using other forms of transportation. This is the fourteenth overall grant round for this program. In our region, the town of Shirley was awarded \$500,000 to construct a permanent shared use path on Front Street between Hospital Road and the Harvard town line. The project will include curb ramps, bicycle and pedestrian warning signs, crosswalk improvements, solar-powered speed feedback signage and bicycle racks at the Town Hall and Town Library Complex.*

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

B. Harris provided the following updates. On January 12th, MRPC was awarded a contract from the Commonwealth to provide grant writing assistance and planning services to Montachusett Region communities. The District Local Technical Assistance Augmentation (DLTA-A) fund terminates on June 30, 2024. MRPC urges communities to request proposal writing assistance, especially for the Commonwealth's One Stop Grants Program (<https://www.mass.gov/guides/community-one-stop-for-growth>).

State organizations and their respective programs available under the One Stop Program include:

1. Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
 - a. MassWorks Infrastructure Program
 - b. Urban Agenda Grant Program
2. Department of Housing and Community Development
 - a. Housing Choice Grant Program
 - b. Massachusetts Downtown Initiative
 - c. Community Planning Grant Program
 - d. Rural and Small Town Development Fund
3. MassDevelopment
 - a. Brownfields Redevelopment Fund
 - b. Site Readiness Program
 - c. Underutilized Properties Program
 - d. Collaborative Workspace Program
 - e. Real Estate Services Technical Assistance
 - f. Commonwealth Places Programs

For more information, please contact Karen Chapman, Planning and Development Director at kchapman@mrpc.org or Glenn Eaton, Executive Director at geaton@mrpc.org.

XI. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting is on February 15, 2023 at 1:00 pm.

XII. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 1 18 2023 Agenda

MPO 12 21 2022 Minutes

5 DRAFT FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #3 Summary 12 28 2022

5 Draft TIP Schedule FFY 2024 2028

5 Int Parties Draft TIP Amendment #3 12 21 2022

6 Draft PM1 Charts State MMPO Fatal Injury Crashes 2023

6 MPO Presentation Safety Performance Targets Statewide Updated Nov 22

7 Draft UPWP Schedule FFY 2023

7 TIP Development Memo 1 6 2023

8 LEP DRAFT 2022 12 2022

8 Title VI Nondiscr Assurances signed JT & GE

9 G,O,S, Recommended Changes

9 PM Recommended Changes

10 Complete Streets Press Release 1 5 2023

10 Mass Trail Grant Notice 11 2022

10 Northern Tier Dec 2022 Newsletter