

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 February 15, 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; Trevor Beauregard, Gardner; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; George Kahale, MART; Tim Kilhart, Subregion 3; Guy Corborsiero, MRPC

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT Dist. 2; Susan Templeton, Sen. John Cronin's Office; Frank O'Connor, Harvard; Roger Hoyt, Ashburnham; Alan Manoian, Ayer; Lyndsy Butler, Gardner; Robert J Swartz, Gardner; Richard Benevento, Tighe & Bond; Alex Fagnand, Tighe & Bond

STAFF PRESENT

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 January 18, 2023 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 18, 2023 MPO Meeting Minutes. The motion was made and seconded. The motion passed.

IV. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Update

- *Update by MassDOT OTP*

D. Krevat stated that this line item will stay on the meeting agendas throughout the development of the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan update. He had nothing further to add at this time as MassDOT is currently compiling the public outreach feedback that they received. He will continue to update the MPO with any updates moving forward.

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

- *Discussion on Potential TIP Amendments/Adjustments*
- *MPO Action Related to Potential TIP Amendments/Adjustments*

B. Doherty stated that this is a standing line item on the agenda. There are no updates or amendments at this time.

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

- *Review and Discussion of Project Listings*
- *Review and Discussion of Regional Targets*
- *Project Presentation by Tighe & Bond for Gardner - Park Street North Central Pathway Connector*

B. Doherty presented the new MassDOT target allotments for the upcoming TIP and referenced the handout which shows a comparison of the dollar amounts for each federal fiscal year between the current and upcoming TIPs. The dollar amounts appear to stay the same for FFY 2024, 2025 & 2026. There is a large increase in 2027 of just under \$2.4 million. This increase is due to the Federal Grant Anticipation Notes (GANs) when the accelerated bridge program payments will be completed in 2027 which is why there is an increase. This increase carries into 2028 as well.

The next handout showed all the possible TIP projects and their Transportation Evaluation Criteria (TEC) scores and rankings. Some projects have already been assigned a TIP year, but the majority have not. There are two projects that have been added since last year – Sterling intersection improvements at Route 140 & 62 and Winchendon intersection improvements at Blair Square. The TEC scoring for these two projects is currently in development. If any community wants to discuss their TEC or has additional information which might change or improve their score please reach out to us so we can incorporate this info.

The current FFY 2024-2028 TIP project listing was presented. It carries over the current FFY 2023-2027 TIP projects and adds FFY 2028. The only project listed in FFY 2024 is project #604499 - Leominster reconstruction/rehab along Rt. 12 (Central St). This project also extends into FFY 2025. It looks like this project might have to be pushed out a year which would create a large hole in 2024. There doesn't appear to be any projects ready to go that we could fill this gap with. The MRPC is working hard to try to come up with a solution. There will be a presentation on project scenarios at the March MPO meeting.

R. Benevento, from Tighe & Bond is representing the town of Ayer and mentioned that the town has two projects in the appendix – 606640 & 609227. He wanted to re-state how important the downtown project (Park St & Main St – 609227) is to the town. They will be reaching out to the MRPC to help with the TEC scoring.

A presentation was given from Alex Fagnand from Tighe & Bond for a new project in the City of Gardner called the Park Street Connector along the North Central Pathway. This would add a trail connection along the west side of Crystal Lake northward to Rt. 140 where an overpass is currently under design.

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

- Review and Discussion of Outreach Memo & Feedback

S. Bean mentioned that a memo was sent out on 2/2/23 for project solicitation for the upcoming FFY 2024 UPWP. The MRPC is focusing on regional projects but local projects will also be considered. If a community has a project in mind they can reach out to MRPC staff to determine eligibility and a formal request will have to be made by the highest ranking official in the community. The deadline for submittals is 2/28/23.

VIII. Montachusett Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan

- Review and Discussion of Draft Comments

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

S. Bean noted that the Draft LEP was developed as part of Title VI Annual Report. The last LEP was completed in 2019 and utilized 2015 ACS Census Data. This update was prepared using 2021 ACS 5 Year Estimates. From that data, the leading languages identified for the region were Spanish, and French, Haitian, or Cajun. These 2 categories exceeded the regional average of 5.02% of the Total Regional Population Over the Age of 5 that are identified as Speaks English Less Than Very Well. The LEP then outlines the way the MPO will monitor the LEP population, how to provide outreach services when

requested, and how to handle translation requests or complaints. The LEP was released last month for a 21-day comment period that began on January 24th and closed February 13th. During that time, we did not receive any comments. The plan was presented to the MJTC last week on February 8th. At that meeting, two comments were brought up by members. The first comment asked about efforts to provide this information to those that do not speak English. Staff identified the current efforts to provide notices in Spanish when possible, the postings to the website where the ability is available to translate the site through Google Translate and the extensive outreach mailing lists that we have available. We also encourage members to provide us with individuals, groups or organizations that serve certain populations that we can contact or add to our list. The second comment was from Devens Enterprise Commission that stated that there are some census data available related to Devens that could help with the demographics review. We indicated that we would look into that to see what was available. The comments will be added to the LEP but they will not change the results of the LEP. We are therefore looking to have the MPO formally endorse this LEP as presented.

A motion was made and seconded to endorse the 2023 LEP update. The motion passed unanimously.

IX. 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 12, 2023 ad date. Gardner - Roundabout at Elm Street / Pearl Street / Central Street and Green Street is also at PS&E and has an ad date of April 22nd. Harvard - bridge Project Rt 2 over Nashua River / Tank Road and Boston and Main Railroad has an ad date of June 10, 2023. Fitchburg - Rt 2 was advertised on February 4th and bids will be opened in early March. 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 the ad date is in June.

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 advertised on February 11th and the bid opening is set for March 21st. 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% submitted on January 25th with review and comments due February 24th. The current ad date is January 6, 2024. There is also a virtual design public hearing tomorrow, 2/16/23, at 6:00pm for project 609469 - ADA Retrofits at various locations. There is a handout for this in the meeting folder.

- *Transit*

G. Kahale had no update for the MPO at this time.

- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*

B. Doherty gave a brief status update on the Regional Transportation Plan. There will be a Transportation Open Forum sponsored by MassDOT, the Health Equity Partnership of North Central Mass (CHNA 9) and the MRPC. The group will collect input about what transportation investments are most important to our communities. The feedback will inform both statewide and regional transportation plans. They will also be gauging interest in the possibility of creating a Transportation Management Association for the region. The forum is set for Thursday February 16th at 10:00 AM.

Registration is required. A handout has been provided that includes a link to sign up for the forum. This flyer is also available on our webpage under Announcements. A link to the registration was also given in the chat.

The next MJTC meeting will be held on March 8th at 2:30pm.

Handouts

From MassDOT, there is the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study announcement regarding the availability of the January 11th Public Workshop presentation and the recording for review. The announcement provides the link to the study website and a comment form to submit comments and questions. This handout is also available on the MRPC website with all of the links under Announcements.

From MassDOT is an announcement of a Virtual Design Public Hearing on February 16th at 6:00 pm where they will present designs for ADA retrofits at various locations in District 2 including in the town of Winchendon. If interested, please see this handout and the qr code or the link provided for more information.

There is a notice on the MA Freight Plan from MassDOT. MassDOT let us know that the second Freight Advisory Committee meeting has been scheduled for Thursday, February 23, 2023 at 11:00 am. This meeting will be held virtually and is open to the public. At this meeting, the Plan team will present work completed since the first meeting and solicit feedback. For more information or to review materials from the 2017 Plan, please visit the Freight Plan [website](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/freight-plan) (<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/freight-plan>). As part of the Plan process, MassDOT will also host multiple small focus groups between February – March 2023 to discuss various topics including safety, access to employment, small business needs, and general freight industry trends and challenges. To participate in a focus group or to complete the Plan survey, please use the links on the handout. This info is also available on our website.

Finally, there is a copy of a press release from the US DOT announcing awards through the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) discretionary grant program under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation. The proposal submitted by the MRPC in conjunction with MART and our communities, was selected for funding. As such, we will be receiving \$750,000 in federal funds to develop Safety Action Plan for the region. This amount will be matched with funds from MassDOT, the MRPC and MART to bring it to a total grant of \$979,500. We anticipate that this will be a 2-year study and that we will be hiring an outside consultant to complete the plan. US DOT will be working with awardees to set up all necessary agreements between the parties, so we don't expect to begin for a few months. On the handout is the official US DOT press release, the second page is the email we received announcing our award and the last pages list the other SS4A awards to Massachusetts.

- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)

G. Corbosiero stated that MRPC is in the process of applying for an Economic Adjustment Assistance (EAA) planning grant to the Federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) for \$170,814 to fund the following project: Future Industrial Lands for Long Term Economic Resilience and Recovery (FILLTERR). MRPC will examine all possible spaces that would be conducive to the development of industrial and business parks in the region. All existing plans and local and regional planning efforts in process at the time of the study will be analyzed and relevant information drawn into the FILLTERR planning project. MRPC will also seek public input from officials and the general public to ensure we create a comprehensive plan over the next two years. The total project cost is \$341,628.

There are significant resources available to our communities this year. Cities and towns in the Montachusett Region should not miss out on the plethora of grants available in FY23, FY 24 and beyond.

The annual District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) program has been funded for the 16th year for \$207,474. Another \$138,316 in one-time “DLTA Augmentation” funds have also been provided to the MRPC. Much of the “Augmentation” dollars may be used for grant writing purposes. Communities should take advantage of this free assistance available from the MRPC. DLTA Augmentation activities and projects may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Identification and understanding of top project priorities;
- Research, assessment, and identification of federal, state and other funding opportunities;
- Review of grant application guidelines and preparation of applications and/or identification of specialty skills needed (e.g. specialized technical assessment, engineering, cost benefit analysis);
- Provision of needed procurement services; and
- Assessment of municipal grant reporting capacity and determination if assistance is needed by the RPA.

Communities should also apply for funds in the Commonwealth’s “One Stop Program.” Expressions of interest are open until March 17, 2023. Applications are now available. Full application submittal opens May 2023 and ends June 2, 2023. These grants last 18 months to two years. MRPC can assist with applications available here: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/community-one-stop-for-growth#-how-to-apply->

X. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

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

XI. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 2 15 2023 Agenda

MPO 1 18 2022 Minutes

6 2024 2028 Target Comparison 1 30 2023

6 FFY 2024 2028 TEC Scores

6 NCP Park Street Connector – Overview

6 Project Master List 24-28

7 2024 UPWP Project Solicitation Memo 1 24 2023

8 Int Parties Draft LEP 1 20 2023

8 LEP DRAFT 2022 12 2022

9.1 Northern Tier Study Jan 11 2023 Recording Flyer

9.2 District 2 ADA Flyer

9.3 ncma_transportation_open_forum_2_16_2023

9.4 2023 Massachusetts Freight Plan – Flyer

9.5 SS4A MJTC MPO Release 2 8 2023

9.6 MRPC Status 2 15 2023