

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 April 19, 2023

David Mohler called the remote meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. Introduction

SIGNATORIES PRESENT

David Mohler, MassDOT OTP; Ann Sullivan, MassDOT District 3; Trevor Beauregard, Gardner; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; George Kahale, MART; Guy Corbosiero, MRPC; Brian Croteau, Subregion 1; Rosemarie Meissner, Subregion 2; Tim Kilhart, Subregion 3

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

Derek Krevat, MassDOT OTP; Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP; Derek Shooster, MassDOT OTP; Andrew Wang, MassDOT OTP; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT District 2; Ben Berger, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; Tracy Murphy, Winchendon

STAFF PRESENT

Brad Harris; George Snow; Brian Doherty

II. Public Comments

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

III. Approval of March 15, 2023 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the March 15, 2023 MPO Meeting Minutes. The motion was made and seconded and passed unanimously.

IV. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Update

- *Update by MassDOT OTP*

D. Krevat stated that in the next few months, MassDOT will be posting updates to the plan website including problem statements and other materials. Interested individuals should continue to check the MassDOT website.

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

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

B. Harris mentioned that a request has been received from MART regarding the need for an Amendment to the FFY 2023 Transit Element of the current TIP.

G. Kahale then reviewed the request from the Transit Authority. MART stated that due to cost changes and system priorities, one (1) project has been removed, six (6) projects have cost changes, and one (1) project has been added to FFY 2023 Transit Element. Due to the magnitude of the changes, an Amendment is

needed for the current FFY 2023-2027 Montachusett TIP. These changes were then reviewed in detail with the MPO members.

A motion was made to release FFY 2023 Transit Element TIP Amendment #4 for a 21-day public review and comment period. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

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

- *Presentation & Discussion of Draft Document*
- *MPO Action Related to Draft FFY 2024-2028 TIP*

B. Doherty presented members with a draft list of projects for the Target, Statewide and Transit sections of the TIP. He indicated that since the draft was distributed last week for this meeting, there had been a change to the FFY 2024 Route 12 project in Leominster. This project was the main point of discussion at last month's meeting. Since then, there has been a significant price increase in this project from \$13,283,000 to \$21,444,000. Because this is a target project, such a change would have a big impact on the remaining years. MassDOT has indicated a willingness to fund part of the project with statewide TIP funds. Therefore, the Route 12 project will be funded with target funds over 2024 and 2025 along with 2024 statewide funds. This way the project can be listed, and we can maintain the target projects discussed in the draft release in 2025, 2026, 2027 and 2028. B. Doherty then reviewed the target, statewide and transit projects for each year of the TIP.

A motion was made to release for a 21-day public review and comment period the Draft FFY 2024-2028 Montachusett Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

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

- *Review and Discussion of Draft Document*
- *MPO Action Related to Draft FFY 2024 UPWP*

G. Snow presented the members with the latest information regarding the development of the draft UPWP. In regard to the various tasks in the document, he highlighted the usual tasks that are carried each year such as the development of the UPWP and the TIP, our GIS related work, our safety 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 five years. G. Snow then reviewed the selected task requests from the North County Land Trust (NCLT) to conduct some trail planning and mapping. This will include updated trail maps, a regional map suitable for professional printing, and an interactive web map for the NCLT region.

The second local request titled Multi Modal Connections will assist the community of Groton with updating their prior Walkability Study done for the downtown area. The focus will be expanded to include their extensive trail networks and various points of interest that the town has to offer. This study will work to address local access concerns and will help prioritize projects and potential future funding opportunities.

G. Snow then reviewed 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.

A motion was made to release for a 21-day public review and comment period the Draft FFY 2024 Montachusett Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

VIII. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- *Survey Discussion*
- *Planning Scenario Discussion*

B. Harris presented information on the RTP public survey to the members. He reviewed all of the questions and their 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. Probably, the most important question asked respondents to list what issues that they feel need to be addressed over the next 25 years in order of importance. This question can be compared to a similar question in the prior 2020 RTP survey. These results will affect the 2024 RTP planning scenarios.

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 the development of Planning Scenarios for this 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 Multiple Hubs or 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, number 3 is called Strong Community Centers or Intra-Community. This seeks to promote communities that want to develop residential, commercial, industrial, etc. areas within their municipal boundaries. This emphasizes travel with the town. Further information was presented on the development of the Planning Scenarios for the 2024 RTP.

IX. Updates

- *MassDOT Highway Division*

A Sullivan of MassDOT District 3 provided the following updates. Westminster Project #607432 - Route 140, from Patricia Road to Princeton Town Line has an August 12, 2023 ad date. Gardner Project #609279 - Roundabout at Elm Street / Pearl Street / Central Street and Green Street is at PS&E and has an ad date of May 6th. Harvard Project #612620- bridge project on Route 2 over the Nashua River/Tank Road and the Boston & Main Railroad is at 100% with a June 10th date. Fitchburg Project #610631- Route 2 was advertised in February and awarded to J H Lynch with a Notice to Proceed (NTP) issued in late March. Ashby Project #609314 - Greenville Road at Turnpike Road was advertised in August 2022 and a NTP was issued to ETL in October. Gardner Project # 609279 - Elm Street is a Safe Routes to School project is at 100% with an ad date of June 24th.

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, the bid opening was on March 21st., and was awarded to F.M. Morello & Sons on April 5th. For FFY 2024, Project# 608723 - Athol Intersection improvements at Crescent Street and Chestnut Hill Ave has had a 100% design submittal with review comments completed on March 1st. The current ad date is January 6, 2024. Project # 612151 – Athol Bridge Replacement Route 2A Main Street over the B&M Railroad has a 25% due date of August 7th with an ad date of December 7, 2024.

- *Transit*

G. Kahale had no new update for members at this time.

- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*

B. Harris stated that the MJTC will meet next month on Wednesday May 10th at 2:30 pm. The meeting will serve as an opportunity for public comment on the TIP, UPWP and TIP Amendment #4.

Some handouts for discussion were reviewed. 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 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.

Finally, we have engaged an outside vendor for this season's traffic count program. The Traffic Group, Inc. with offices in Maine will be collecting counts for us at up to 75 locations. This will include the counts we need to do for MassDOT this year.

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

G. Corbosiero stated that there are many grants available with few resources available to go after them. However, the MRPC has hired a grant writing consultant to assist our communities and the MRPC to prepare and submit grant proposals. MRPC urges communities to request proposal writing assistance, especially for the Commonwealth's One Stop Grants Program. For more information, please contact Karen Chapman, Planning and Development Director or Glenn Eaton, Executive Director at the MRPC.

There has been an increase in funding to the MRPC which means your regional planning district will be providing additional planning services in FY23, FY24, and beyond. MRPC plans to increase staff capacity this spring to ensure that all services are delivered.

X. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B. Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting is on May 17, 2023 at 1:00 pm.

XI. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 1:51 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 4 19 2023 Agenda

MPO 3 15 2023 Minutes

5 Draft TIP Amendment #4 Announcement & Summary 4 13 2023

6 DRAFT FFY 2024 2028 TIP with Maps

6 DRAFT Highway 2024 2028 TIP

6 DRAFT Transit 2024 2028 TIP

7 DRAFT FFY 2024 UPWP

7 FFY 2024 UPWP Budget

8 Scenario Review 2020 RTP

8 Survey Review 4 2023

9 FHWA PLANNING AND GRANT PROGRAM UPDATES 4 4 2023

9 NOFO the Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program 4 4 2023

9 Northern Tier Mar 2023 Newsletter

9 rt_140_bike_bridge_609108_-_gardner_-_dph_flyer