

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 June 28, 2023 - REVISED

Stephen Woelfel called the remote meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. Introduction

SIGNATORIES PRESENT

Stephen Woelfel, MassDOT OTP; Ann Sullivan, MassDOT District 3; Trevor Beauregard, Gardner; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; George Kahale, MART; Glenn Eaton, MRPC; Brian Croteau, Subregion 1; Tracy Murphy, Subregion 2; Tim Kilhart, Subregion 3

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

Keyna Thomas, MART; David Kline, The ARC of Opportunity; Andrew Schuschu, GAAMHA; Derek Krevat, MassDOT OTP; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT District 2; Arthur Frost, MassDOT District 3; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; Chris Timmel, FHWA; Jacqueline Doherty, Athol; Dan Van Schalkwyk, Ayer; Robert Swartz, Gardner; Jasmin Farinacci, Lancaster; Tim Toth, Templeton; Beth Faxon, Townsend; Kristofer Munroe, Argenta Advisors; Richard Benevento, Tighe & Bond; Cassie Wiinikainen, Rep. Higgins Office;

STAFF PRESENT

Brad Harris; George Snow; Brian Doherty; Sheri Bean

II. Public Comments

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

III. Approval of May 17, 2023 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the May 17, 2023 MPO Meeting Minutes. The motion was made, seconded and passed with one abstention.

IV. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Update

- *Update by MassDOT OTP*

D. Krevat stated that there were no new updates for the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan.

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

- *Review of Possible Transit Amendment and/or Adjustment*
- *Review of Possible Highway Amendment and/or Adjustment*
- *MPO Action Related to Possible Transit and Highway Amendments and/or Adjustments*

B. Harris stated that MassDOT informed us about a cost change to a project in the FFY 2023 Highway Element. Project #607432 Westminster- Rehabilitation & Box Widening on Route 140, from Patricia Road to the Princeton Town Line cost has increased from \$6,375,205 to a new total cost of \$10,108,853., an increase of \$3,733,648 or approximately 58.6%. This is a target project in FFY 2023. In order to maintain fiscal constraint, MassDOT is proposing that the remaining balance of target funds, \$2,260,338, be allocated to this project. The remaining project balance of \$1,473,310 will be made up

of Statewide STBG and TAP funds under Section 2B – State Prioritized Modernization Projects. By doing this the TIP will remain fiscally constrained.

K. Thomas of MART presented information on a FFY 2023 Transit Element Amendment. The Amendment reflects cost changes to six (6) projects and the removal of two (2) projects. These changes are due to increased costs and updated priorities for MART. Each project change was reviewed and discussed with the MPO.

A question was asked if the Transit changes could be done as an Adjustment instead of an Amendment due to timing and funding concerns.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously for the MPO to release the Draft FFY 2023 Highway Element as Amendment #5 for a 21-day public review and comment period.

After a review of Transit Amendment and Adjustment definitions, it was determined that the Transit changes would require the use of the Amendment process due to the removal of the 2 identified projects.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously for the MPO to release the Draft FFY 2023 Transit Element as Amendment #5 for an abbreviated 10-day public review and comment period. Further, if no comments are received during the abbreviated comment period, the Transit Amendment #5 will be considered endorsed and a signature endorsement page will then be requested from the Chair.

VI. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- *Review of Draft 2024 RTP – Journey to 2050*
- *MPO Action to Release 2024 RTP for 21-day Public Review and Comment Period*

B. Doherty presented the Draft 2024 RTP to the MPO members. The members were shown where and how to access the draft document through the MRPC website. Individual chapters as well as the full document can be downloaded from the site. Also, there is a link present for individuals to submit comments through email. We would like the comment period to run from July 3rd to July 24th. In order to have a full 21 days before the next MPO meeting it will be necessary to also move the July meeting date from July 19th to July 26th.

B. Doherty then reviewed information distributed at prior MPO meetings as well as a review of the Executive Summary for the 2024 RTP. Each chapter was summarized and discussed with several points highlighted for the MPO members. This included the documents' Vision Statement; Goals, Objectives and Strategies; Trends; Recommendations; and Financial Constraint issues. It was also mentioned that the MJTC at their last meeting on June 14th recommended that the MPO vote to release the Draft 2024 RTP for a 21-day public review and comment period.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously for the MPO to release the Draft 2024 RTP for a 21-day public review and comment period.

VII. Updates

- *MassDOT Highway Division*
- *Transit*
- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*
- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

A. Sullivan of MassDOT District 3 provided the following updates. Westminster Project #607432 - Route 140, from Patricia Road to Princeton Town Line is at PS&E and 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 September 2nd. Harvard Project #612620- bridge project on Route 2 over the Nashua River/Tank Road and the Boston & Main Railroad is at 100% with an August 5th ad date. Fitchburg Project #610631- Route 2 was advertised and awarded to J H Lynch. Ashby Project #609314 - Greenville Road at Turnpike Road was advertised and awarded to ETL. Gardner Project # 610672 - Elm Street is a Safe Routes to School project is at PS&E with an ad date of September 2nd.

A question was asked about when the city of Gardner can expect to receive the final plans for the Elm Street project. A. Sullivan responded that she does not know but will have the District reach out to the city with the information.

D. Amaral of MassDOT District 2 provided the following updates. For FFY 2024, Project# 608723 - Athol Intersection improvements at Crescent Street and Chestnut Hill Ave is at 100% design and review comments were completed on March 1st. PS&E is due on December 6th. Project # 612151 – Athol Bridge Replacement Route 2A Main Street over the B&M Railroad is at pre-25% design with 25% due on February 11, 2024.

- *Transit*

G. Kahale presented information on a new shuttle service that will run from Townsend to the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Station at the Intermodal Transportation Center on Main Street in Fitchburg. The shuttle was developed after a request from the town. The shuttle will leave from Townsend at two separate times in the AM and then leave the Rail Station at two different times in the PM. The service will be fare free and start July 5th. MART has also just started a new project behind the Water Street facility on Carey Street. It involves the complete reconstruction of the current parking area on Carey Street with 50 parking spaces. This will increase our available parking for employees and visitors. In addition, the project will include new security features, improved drainage and the burial of utilities. It is anticipated that the project will be completed by the end of September.

- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*

B. Harris stated that the MRPC at their meeting on June 8th, approved the hiring of Tyler Godin as a full-time principal planner with the MRPC. Tyler is currently a planner in our Comprehensive Planning department, and he will be switching over to Transportation beginning July 1st.

The MJTC Officer Election process has begun. A Nominating Committee has been put together to select a slate that announced at the next meeting on July 12th. An election will be held at that same meeting to be effective immediately. The process is slightly behind but by doing it this way, things will be back on track.

Some handouts for discussion were reviewed. There is a FHWA Announcement on DOT Discretionary Grants Dashboard. They have announced the launch of a Discretionary Grants Dashboard that provides communities with an overview of discretionary grant opportunities that can help meet their transportation infrastructure needs. Designed with all communities in mind, the Dashboard identifies grant programs with rural and Tribal set-asides or match waivers available. The Dashboard also includes Federal grant programs outside of DOT that may be of particular interest to rural communities. The Dashboard is updated weekly. This notice is available on the MRPC website.

A second handout from FHWA regarding Local Aid Support is also available. The one is a Notice of Funding Opportunity or NOFO for a new pilot program for technical assistance that opened last week.

The Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program offers technical assistance grants to rural and tribal communities. The NOFO combines two years of funding (Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023), \$3.4 million in total, to eligible applicants on a first-come, first-served basis. Individual awards will range in value up to the statutory limit of \$360,000. There is no local funding match required to participate in this program. The grants may be used to hire staff or advisors to assist with early development-phase activities including, but not limited to, feasibility studies; preliminary engineering and design; environmental review; revenue forecasting; financial feasibility analysis; statutory and regulatory analysis and drafting and negotiation of agreements.

Eligible applicants include local governments or political subdivisions with projects located outside of an urbanized area with a population of more than 150,000 residents as determined by the Census and state governments applying on behalf of a project in an area outside an urbanized area of more than 150,000 residents. The Build America Bureau has created a simple, four-page funding application, available online and will begin accepting submissions at 2 PM ET on August 14, 2023. This notice is also on our MRPC website.

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

G. Eaton stated projects for the MRPC are increasing and as such we are in the process of looking to expand our staff through the advertisement of several new positions. The information is available through our website, and we ask members to help us spread the word about these positions.

VIII. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B. Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting will be moved from July 19th to July 26th at 1:00 pm.

The Chair then recognized Arthur Frost from MassDOT District 3. A. Frost stated that this would be his last MPO meeting as he will be officially retiring next month. He thanked all those present for their work and assistance over the years. S. Woelfel thanked A. Frost for all of his work with MassDOT and the MPO and expressed his gratitude and best of luck.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 1:42 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 6 28 2023 Agenda
MPO 5 17 2023 Minutes
4 2024 RTP Executive Summary
5 FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #5 Summary
5 FFY 2023 Transit Amendment #5 Update 6 26 2023
5 FFY 2023 Transit Amendment #5
7 DOT Discretionary Grants Dashboard 6 1 2023
7 FHWA Local Support News 6 27 2023
7 Townsend Shuttle Flyer