

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 July 26, 2023

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; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; George Kahale, MART; Glenn Eaton, MRPC; Brian Croteau, Subregion 1; Rosemarie Meissner, Subregion 2; Caesar Nuzzolo, 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; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3; Robert Swartz, Gardner; Beth Faxon, Townsend; Tim Kilhart, Harvard; Ben Breger, MassDOT; Elizabeth Williams, MassDOT; Andrew Wang, MassDOT Planning; Michael Melencio, MBTA; Charlotte Weigel, Groton; Carolyn Sellars, Public; Derek Shooster, MassDOT OTP

STAFF PRESENT

Brad Harris; George Snow; Tyler Godin

II. Public Comments

S. Woelfel asked those present if there were any public comments to be made. There were none.

III. Approval of June 28, 2023 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the June 28, 2023 MPO Meeting Minutes. The motion was made, seconded and passed with two abstentions.

IV. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Update

- *Update by MassDOT OTP*

S. Woelfel stated that there were no new updates for the Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan.

V. MA Vehicle Census

- *Presentation by Elizabeth Williams, MassDOT, Director of Data and Policy & Michael Melencio, MBTA*

E. Williams presented the Massachusetts Vehicle Census (MVC), which is the first state level dataset in the nation that joins vehicle-level odometer readings with vehicle attribute and registration transaction histories. This powerful resource allows policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders understand state and local trends in vehicle usage and ownership. Questions that this dataset can answer about actively registered vehicles in the state include:

- Are electric vehicles driven more or less than gas powered vehicles?

- How many vehicles were added (or subtracted) from my city or town between 2021 and 2022?
- What is the difference in the number of passenger vehicles versus commercially registered vehicles?

M. Melencio reviewed the methodology used to create the census, as well as data exclusions and limitations.

C. Weigel had a question related to the MAPCs GHG Inventory. Is it possible to extract a dataset to then update our GHG inventory for more recent years? E. Williams stated that it is not occurring at this time but will follow up with the MAPC about this question and encouraged others to do so as well.

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

- *Review of Comments on FFY 2023 Highway TIP Amendment #5*
- *MPO Action Related to FFY 2023 Highway TIP Amendment #5*
- *Review of FFY 2023 Transit & Highway TIP Amendment #6*
- *MPO Action Related to FFY 2023 TIP Amendment #6*

G. Snow 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., for a net 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.

G. Snow stated that a motion was made, seconded, and passed at the 6/26/23 MPO meeting to release the Amendment for a 21-day public review and comment period. The period commenced on 7/3/23 and closed at the end of business on 7/24/23. At the 7/12/23 MJTC mtg, the MJTC passed a recommendation to the MPO that the amendment receive MPO endorsement. One comment from MassDOT was received on 7/17/23. The total cost of the project increased slightly from \$10,108,853 to \$10,168,809 for a net increase of \$59,956. Target funds will remain fully committed and the cost increase is covered by statewide funds therefore the TIP will remain fiscally constrained. As of 7/24/23, no other comments were received.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously for the MPO to endorse Highway TIP Element Amendment #5.

G. Snow 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.

G. Snow stated that at the MPO meeting held on 6/26/23, the MPO reviewed the proposed Amendment and a motion was made, seconded, and passed that the Amendment be released for an abbreviated and minimum 10-day public review and comment period. The 10-day period for the Amendment is due to MART funding needs. The public review and comment period commenced on 7/3/23 and closed at the end of business on 7/12/23. No comments were received as of that date. At the 7/12/23 MJTC mtg, the MJTC passed a recommendation to the MPO that the amendment receive MPO endorsement. Also, if no comments were 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.

G. Snow stated that the MPO was contacted by MassDOT about the need to amend the TIP due to price increases for two projects in the Highway Element. The first is project #612620, in Harvard is a Bridge Preservation project for Rt 2 over the Nashua River, Tank Rd, and the B&M Railroad. The project has seen a cost increase from about \$2.7 mil to about \$3.7 mil for a net increase of about \$1 mil. Because this represents an increase of more than \$500,000 for a programmed project under \$5 mil, an Amendment to the Highway Element is required. Also, this project is being moved from Section 1B – Earmark or Discretionary Grant Funded Projects to Section 2A – State Prioritized Reliability Projects which does not impact our Target funds. The second project is #610672, in Gardner on Elm St that is a Resurfacing and Sidewalk Improvement Safe Routes to School project. The project has seen a cost increase from about \$1.25 mil to about \$1.81 mil for a net increase of about \$570,000. Because this represents an increase of more than \$500,000 for a programmed project under \$5 mil, an Amendment to the Highway Element is required.

G. Snow stated the action we are seeking today is a vote from the MPO to release the Amendment for an abbreviated 10-day public review and comment period so FHWA has time to approve the action before they close their books at the end of August. The review and comment period would commence on 8/2/23 and close end of business on 8/11/23.

S. Woelfel stated that the Highway amendment is going out for the comment period and we're doing a separate action on the Transit amendment. D. Krevat verified that comment with a clarification for the Gardner project that needs to be amended off the current TIP. The project is not going to be ready for FFY 2023 along with the cost increase.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously by the MPO for the amendment to be released for an abbreviated 14-day public review and comment period.

D. Krevat stated that this Federal 5310 funding is available from FTA to specifically provide transportation for older adults and people with disabilities. This amendment is to add these three projects to the FFY 2023 Transit Element of the TIP. GAAMHA will be the receiving agency for two E2b vans and MART will receive four E2b vans. Because of the timing of these projects and that the FTA system closes in August, the comment period needs to be shortened to make sure that these projects can get processed prior to that system closing down, and to make sure that the funding to be made available.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously by the MPO for the amendment to be released for an abbreviated 14-day public review and comment period.

VII. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- *Review of Comments Received on Draft 2024 RTP – Journey to 2050*
- *MPO Action Related to Draft 2024 RTP – Journey to 2050*
- *MPO Action Related to Self-Certification of Montachusett Transportation Planning Process*
- *MPO Action Related to Self-Certification of Montachusett Green House Gas Requirements*

T. Godin presented the comments of the Draft 2024 RTP to the MPO members. T. Godin stated that during the public comment period, we received an official comment from MassDOT as well as supplemental information from MART, which we will incorporate into the final document. T. Godin proceeded to review the comments within each of the categories. The MJTC at its meeting on July 12th, made a recommendation to the MPO to officially endorse the 2024 RTP.

C. Weigel stated that comments were sent from the Groton Sustainability Commission and the North Central Climate Change Coalition Group. B. Harris stated staff will check to see if the comments are available.

S. Woelfel stated that because there are outstanding comments we could wait for an August vote. This will give the staff to determine what comments were submitted, why they were not included and to also prepare appropriate responses to the comments. Staff will then send these out to the MPO before the next meeting. The MPO agreed with this decision and approach.

VIII. 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 had a May ad date and was awarded to ????. 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 26th 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 but will not be ready for the current TIP year as discussed previously.

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. Project# 608424 for FFY 2026 Templeton reconstruction of Rt 68 from Rt 202 to the Phillipston TL. The design is at 75% and the 100% design is due on December 30th, 2023.

- *Transit*

G. Kahale stated that he has no new updates.

- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*

B. Harris The MJTC met last July 12th and held elections of offices for the upcoming year. Robert Schwartz Gardner was elected Chair, Travis Condon of the North Central Mass Chamber of Commerce was re-elected as Vice Chair and Beth Faxon of Townsend was elected as the Secretary. The next MJTC meeting is scheduled for August 9th at 2:30 PM.

Some handouts for discussion were reviewed. The first is the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study newsletter for June 30th. The newsletter states, the state team has been focused on refining the initiative service alternatives and advancing work on Tasks Four which the Potential Service Plans and Alternatives. Task Five Alternatives Evaluation and Cost Estimate. Information from these tasks is expected to be presented an upcoming working group and public meetings. The newsletter also discusses the benefit cost analysis that will be conducted on the alternatives being evaluated. This newsletter is available on the MRPC website.

The second handout is from the USDOT that is related to a Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program. It has up to \$3.6 billion available for planning and construction projects. It combines two major discretionary grant opportunities, the Respective Communities Pilot Program, and the Neighborhood Access and Equity Programs. They will remain

separate programs for the purpose of award, but the programs share many common characteristics. This is also available on our website.

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

G. Eaton stated that he posted in the chat that the MRPC is still looking for personnel in the Planning and Development Department..

IX. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B. Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting is Wednesday August 16th at 1:00 pm.

X. Adjournment

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

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 7 26 2023 Agenda
MPO 6 28 2023 Minutes
5 Massachusetts Vehicle Census (MVC) Overview
6A Int Parties Draft TIP Amendment #5 6 29 2023
6B FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #5 Summary
6C Int Parties Draft Transit TIP Amendment #5 6 29 2023
6D FFY 2023 Transit Amendment #5 Update 6 28 2023
6E Highway TIP Revisions 7.17.23 Amendment #6
6F FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #6 Summary
6G Transit TIP Revisions Amendment #6 7 26 2023
6H FFY 2023 Transit Amendment #6 Summary
7A Int Parties Draft 2024 RTP 6 29 2023
7B RTP Comments
7C Executive Summary DRAFT
7D 3C Endorsement Formatted 7 26 2023
7E GHG Endorsement Formatted 7 26 2023
8 2023 RC Announcement 7 5 2023
8 MPO Monthly Report 7-26-23 GE
8 Northern Tier June 2023 Newsletter
MPO ENDORSEMENT PG Highway Amendment 5 7 26 2023