

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
1 FENN STREET, SUITE 201, PITTSFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS 01201
TELEPHONE (413) 442-1521 · FAX (413) 442-1523
www.berkshireplanning.org

**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday December 19, 2006, 2:00 PM.**

At the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission office
1 Fenn Street, Suite 201, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Ken Miller, Chair, Director EOT Planning (designee of Secretary of Transportation John Cogliano)
Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning
John Hickey, BRPC Chair
Chuck MacNeil, Administrator, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
Joseph Dean, Vice Chairman, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
Clayton Chaffee, Town of Otis, Southeast Berkshire Representative
Cristopher Irsfeld, Town of Stockbridge, Southwest Berkshire Representative
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, Southwest Berkshire Alternate
Edward MacDonald, Town of Adams, North Berkshire Representative

Member Agency Staff Present:

Nathaniel Karns, Executive Director, BRPC
Alison Church, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, Senior Transportation Planner, BRPC
Michael Hoffmann, Transportation Planner, BRPC
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1

Others Present:

Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman
Mark Siegars, Berkshire Mall
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall

1. Minutes of meeting of October 17, 2006
Mr. Irsfeld moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously.
2. Report on Subregional Representation Meetings / Introduction of New Subregional Representatives / Alternates
Mr. Karns updated the MPO on changes to the subregional representatives and alternate designations.
Mr. Miller observed that North Adams is without a representative. Mr. Karns stated that he will contact Mayor Barrett.

3. Introduction of Alison Church, BRPC Transportation Program Manager
Mr. Karns introduced Ms. Church to the MPO

4. Financial Components for FFY2007-2030 Regional Transportation Plan
Mr. Miller provided a background on the federal requirements for financial components within the RTP. The state EOT provides MPO's with estimates on the total amount of funding available. Scheduled payments for the Central Artery project are subtracted from the total, as well as planning funds. Large projects, such as interchanges, receive additional allocations. Congress does not currently earmark funds for projects marked as priority by MPO's.
Interstate maintenance funding and bridge program funding are based upon the current level of funding, with bonds subtracted.
Suballocations are made to each region.
Major infrastructure funding is allocated to each region based on a formula.
Bridge funding is allocated to regions based only on the number of bridges, and not on their conditions.
Interstate maintenance funds do not include the Turnpike; since the Turnpike is the only interstate in Berkshire County the Berkshire MPO does not receive an allocation.
The state EOT has provided a breakdown of funding allocations, but the MPO may elect to alter the individual allocation amounts, as long as the total dollar amount remains the same. EOT has estimated that 85% of the total earmark be dedicated to operation, maintenance and improvement.
Mr. Karns stated that many regions are having trouble realistically predicting and estimating the cost of operation and maintenance.
Mr. Miller cautioned that if an estimate is created which is significantly larger than the state EOT prediction, less federal funding will be available for funding for other projects.
Mr. Karns stated that the state Transportation Finance Commission requires all regions to document base level needs, which is often difficult.
Discussion followed regarding rising transportation costs.

5. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Report
Mr. Karns stated that the Berkshire TAC was created to advise the MPO, and that all recommendations regarding the pros and cons of individual projects are intended to be forwarded to the MPO to provide a broad range of regional perspectives.
Mr. Haupt stated that the meetings have been well attended.
Mr. Miller stated that TAC's in other regions have struggled with the role of the Committee, and suggested that some future MPO meetings be coordinated with the TAC.
Discussion followed regarding preferred times.
Mr. Siegars stated that it may be beneficial to hold a workshop for TAC members regarding design guidelines and technical issues.
Mr. Karns stated that a briefing for town officials was held when the updated MHD design guidelines were released.
Mr. Haupt stated that the TAC involves people with very little technical experience, and that Mr. Hoffmann has provided overviews of specific issues, and has made it clear to the Committee that the RTP is in the final stages of the current update. The TAC looks forward to feedback from the MPO.
Mr. Hoffmann stated that the TAC has one new non-municipal representative, and this appointment needs to be approved by the MPO as according to the MOU. Mr. Hickey moved to approve the appointment of Ron Tinkham, representative from the Baker Hill Road District. Seconded by Mr. Irsfeld. The motion carried unanimously.

6. 2006 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update
Mr. Karns thanked Mr. Hoffmann and Ms. Koirala for their commendable work in the absence of a full Transportation Program Manager.

The current update is not insignificant, but the extensive public participation conducted during the previous major update will not be duplicated. Mr. Karns added that staff has been surprised with some of the changes in projections and estimates.

Mr. Miller added that there is a federal requirement that a new plan must be in place by June 30, 2007. Federal agencies have 90 days to comment and review the Plan, so the MPO endorsed plan must be received by March 31.

Mr. Karns added that there must be a 30 day public comment period must be added, so the MPO must endorse the Plan for public review by the end of February.

Mr. Hoffmann presented Chapter 3, including an inventory of existing transportation facilities and conditions as required by federal law.

Deficiencies in existing conditions were highlighted, including mass transit deficiencies as noted in a MARTA study, and recommendations for bicycle facilities.

A safety assessment is included in the chapter, mainly an analysis of crash data provided by the State.

Intersection data is fairly easy to analyze, since intersections are exact locations, but exact locations were not provided for the non-intersection crash data, making it difficult to determine which segments of roadway are the most dangerous. MassHighway is currently working on ways to determine more precise locations for crash data.

Intersections with high crash rates are highlighted in the chapter, based on six years of crash data. Intersections which have been, or will be addressed, are noted. Information about pending projects was gathered from MassHighway and town highway departments, but there may be some projects which are not included. Future crash rates should reflect intersection improvements, and a safety index will also likely be used for future analysis. One of the RTP's recommendations is for a study to accurately compare road segment crash rates.

Mr. Lovejoy suggested that it would be important to include a cost/benefit analysis for intersection improvements, so that small improvements, such as additional stop signs can be analyzed.

Mr. Miller suggested that it may be beneficial to note the actual improvement completed or planned for each intersection in the body of the Plan.

Discussion followed regarding intersections with high crash rates which have not been identified as addressed.

Mr. Karns stated that he believes that the top intersections identified in the 2003 RTP were addressed in some form.

Mr. Hickey suggested that it may be helpful to segregate intersections by community, and then prioritize by crash rate.

Mr. Hoffmann stated that 89 percent of all accidents occur in Pittsfield, as do 91 percent of all intersection accidents.

Mr. Karns noted that accident percentages in Pittsfield indicate a transportation system under stress.

Mr. Irsfeld recalled a very inexpensive project in which a flashing light was replaced with a mandatory stop, and stated that the intersection was greatly improved as a result.

Discussion followed regarding ways to increase intersection safety and reduce congestion.

Mr. Hickey noted that the purpose of the intersection crash rate analysis is to provide guidance to the staff as to which intersections to focus upon.

Mr. Miller stated that the RTP identifies issues, which lead to studies, and those to projects. The RTP is the centerpiece of an MPO's activities because it is related to the TIP and the UPWP.

Mr. Siegars stated that one of the issues raised at the TAC meeting was the lack of seasonal data, and asked whether it would be possible to examine the crash data seasonally.

Mr. Karns stated that a detailed study would look at accident report.

Mr. Hoffmann stated that a crash index would take into account the severity of accidents.

Mr. Hickey asked about the conceptual framework of roadway type.

Mr. Karns explained the different types of roadway, from local roads to interstate highways,

and the differences as related to access management.

Mr. Hickey observed that traffic volume trend numbers end in 2003, and asked whether more recent data is available.

Mr. Hoffmann stated that it would be possible to add data from 2004 which has been received from MassHighway.

Ms. Koirala presented a volume to capacity map, and explained that census data is incorporated into traffic volume numbers to generate current volume to capacity ratios and predictions. The higher the volume to capacity ratio is, the greater traffic problems are indicated. Above 1 indicates significant problems.

Mr. Miller observed that roads cannot ever be operating at more than capacity, and since local roads are not included in the model, the predictions are not fully accurate. The general congestion represented by the model is valid.

Ms. Koirala added that the model depicts conditions in 2030 if no improvements are made to roads

Mr. Hoffmann provided an overview of Chapter 5, including summaries of projects completed since the 2003 RTP.

Mr. Miller asked whether any of the project recommendations from the prior RTP are represented.

Mr. Karns stated that assessment studies and standard reconstruction and rehabilitation projects completed since the previous RTP are not listed.

Mr. Miller requested that the wording of projects be modified to specify studies.

Mr. Hoffmann presented an overview of Chapter 6, which includes how RTP projects are evaluated, and the recommendations made in the 2007 RTP, including a project list.

The 2003 was a major update of the RTP, and explored a great deal of projects. A core screening of all alternatives based on the four RTP goals was completed, and then a fine screening process based on the RTP objectives. All projects which stood out as viable alternatives after both screening processes were included in the RTP.

In the 2007 update, the project recommendations remaining from the 2003 RTP were evaluated to see if they are still valid. This process is based on the revised 2007 RTP goals and objectives. No new alternatives were created.

Mr. Hickey asked when the Chapters will need to be approved.

Mr. Karns stated that the MPO will need to approve release of the 2007 RTP for public comment by the end of January. After the public comment period, it is possible that the document may be changed. The staff will need guidance from the MPO that the overall process is reasonable so that evaluation of projects can be done in January.

Mr. Hoffmann provided an overview of the sources of the 2007 RTP physical improvement and study recommendations. Those which were identified in 2003 and have not yet been addressed are one source; recommendations also come from existing conditions analysis findings, traffic model analysis findings, safety analysis findings and recommendations from studies completed since the 2003 RTP. Projects identified in the traffic model will need to be evaluated using the updated evaluation process.

Mr. Irsfeld asked about the feasibility of specific projects listed.

Mr. Karns explained that the projects listed are a summary of the full range of alternatives considered, not recommended.

Mr. Irsfeld suggested that rejected projects not be included.

Mr. Karns explained that it is important to document the alternatives considered, but that those alternatives could be represented in another format.

Mr. Hoffmann presented an update of the policy recommendations from 2003.

Mr. Karns stated that there were some recommendations made in the 2003 plan that were not recommendations for studies or improvements, and those are noted as policy recommendations.

A discussion of terminology and titles followed.

Mr. Karns observed that one of the things that came out was a need for accommodations such as shuttles, for special events. This was listed as a policy because it did not fit into either study or projects.

Mr. Miller requested that the policy tables be merged with the study and project tables, and that major infrastructure projects be estimated.

Mr. Karns stated that fiscal constraint will become a factor rather quickly. Another supplemental project list might be added to list projects which would be priorities if additional funding was available.

A discussion followed regarding the timeline for completion.

Mr. Karns stated that it will be important to have MPO discussion on the recommended project list in January.

7. Status Reports on Planning & Design Projects of Member Agencies and Others

BRTA: Mr. MacNeil stated that there are 2 manufacturing orders out for buses, one is hybrid. Buses are scheduled to be delivered in the summer.

A pilot transportation program was implemented in April for people who are not able to access existing public transportation which has been very successful, and funds will be sought this year to expand the program into South County.

MassHighway: Mr. Moore provided an update on project need forms received.

Mr. Miller observed that the MPO can send signals to communities if PNF projects are not priorities.

Mr. Karns observed that projects low on the supplemental list have very long time frames for funding, if they are to be funded at all.

Discussion followed regarding the possibility of evaluating projects at the beginning of the process.

8. Next meeting date and agenda

Consensus that the next MPO meeting will be held on January 23 at 2:00.

Mr. Hickey moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:30 pm, seconded by Mr. Irsfeld. The motion carried unanimously.