

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday March 20, 2007, 4:00 PM.**

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

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Ken Miller, EOT (designee of Secretary of Transportation Bernard Cohen)
Jack Hickey, BRPC Chair
Peter Niles, MassHighway (designee of MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, Southwest Berkshire Alternate
Chuck Mac Neil, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority

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
Sarah Izatt, Associate Planner, BRPC
Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1

Others Present:

Les Beebe, Town of Tyringham Highway Department
Peter Curtin, Selectman, Town of Tyringham
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Vice Chairman

1. Minutes of meeting of February 6, 2007
Mr. Hickey moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously, with an abstention by Mr. Miller, not having been present.
2. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC Report)
Mr. Haupt provided an overview of the March 1 TAC meeting. BRPC and MassHighway staff presented a workshop on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) process. The next TAC meeting will be held May 3.
3. Vote to Approve 2007 Regional Transportation Plan
Mr. Karns reminded the MPO that the RTP was released for public comment at the February 6 meeting, and that the comment period will extend until March 23. No significant public comments have been received; comments from MHD and EOT have been incorporated into the document.
Mr. Hoffmann stated that comments from FHWA were incorporated, but did not result in major substantive changes. Responses to FHWA comments were distributed, and the highlighted

changes were the only changes made to the document.

Mr. Miller asked about public comments.

Mr. Hoffmann stated that none of the public comments received affected the Plan. Mr. Karns added that many of the comments received dealt with congestion relief in Lee, and were already addressed in the RTP.

Mr. Miller asked what the process was for addressing comments.

Mr. Hoffmann replied that a list of people to be contacted directly during the Lee study was compiled.

Mr. Miller suggested that the document state the number of letters received on a topic and the response action taken could be noted.

Mr. Karns stated that no letters, but some emails were received, and these could be included in an appendix.

Mr. Hoffmann added that the MPO has not yet seen the RTP appendices, and that the 200+ page technical appendix can be made available.

Ms. Koirala presented the air quality chapter, and stated that the 2007 RTP is in compliance with the state's implementation plan.

Mr. Collingwood submitted comments from the City of Pittsfield, that the Hubbard Avenue and Tamarack Road studies be moved to short-term.

Mr. Karns stated that both of the roads identified by the City are likely substandard, and could be moved to short-term. Discussions of individual funding allocations are made during the UPWP process.

Mr. Collingwood stated that the business park project area is becoming critical to both Dalton and Pittsfield, so that the Hubbard Avenue study should be ahead of the Tamarack study.

Mr. Miller stated that since there is no funding tied to the studies as of yet, there would be no harm to change the priorities.

Mr. Karns stated that major studies take approximately two years to complete, and that one major and a few minor studies can be completed each year.

Mr. Siegars expressed concern that the MPO can eliminate TAC recommendations at the last minute, and asked what role the TAC plays.

Mr. Miller stated that the TAC is a big component of the input process, but it is up to the MPO to decide how to weigh all the input received.

Ms. Church pointed out that Pittsfield made recommendations based on the city's priorities.

Mr. Siegars stated that if the MPO gives priority to certain projects, the TAC may see itself as unimportant.

Mr. Miller pointed out that the MPO is the decision-making body, and it is within the MPO's purview to make these types of decisions, and the TAC can formally disagree with an MPO decision. If MPO staff has safety or other issues to bring up, the MPO could take those into advisement.

Mr. Karns stated that the studies are broken into short, medium and long-term to show that resources are always scarce, and that regardless of the source of a comment, the MPO must consider all comments it receives.

Mr. Miller observed that changing only the priorities of studies could be considered when the UPWP is discussed.

Mr. Haupt agreed that the issue could be dealt with in the UPWP.

Mr. Miller provided an overview of the UPWP process, and stated that the study decision with regards to the RTP is not particularly important.

Mr. Hickey asked why the City is placing particular importance on Hubbard and Tamarack Avenues.

Mr. Collingwood stated that Hubbard Avenue would have an economic benefit to both Dalton and Pittsfield.

Mr. Karns added that Hubbard Avenue is a commercial and industrial corridor which has many issues as it is configured. It is also under active consideration for a business development site.

Mr. Hickey pointed out that except for Great Barrington, all the medium-term studies are in

Pittsfield, and asked how significant the Great Barrington studies are as compared to the Pittsfield studies.

Mr. Hoffmann stated that many road segments are grouped into priorities by level of service, and that studies identified as long-term do not currently have a poor level of service, but are projected to. Hubbard and Tamarack have poor geometry, but do not currently have a poor level of service. The Great Barrington area is currently poor.

Mr. Hickey asked if the Hubbard and Tamarack studies will be completed before the work in Great Barrington if they are moved to short-term, and asked which is most important to the region.

Mr. Hoffmann replied that the short-term list will not likely be accomplished in 3-5 years.

Mr. Karns stated that it is difficult to compare the Hubbard and Tamarack Avenue studies with the Great Barrington studies, as the Pittsfield studies are not intended to address documented safety or/ congestion problems, and added that it would be a policy choice of the MPO to move the studies.

Mr. Miller stated that it would not be inconsistent with MPO policies to move the studies, and suggested that the studies be moved according to the City's recommendation, and staff can prioritize the studies during the UPWP process.

Mr. Lovejoy stated that he sees no compelling reason to move up the studies.

Mr. Hickey observed that the Great Barrington studies are intended to investigate safety improvements.

Mr. Miller pointed out that Pittsfield approved the RTP draft as presented, and did not provide prior comments.

Ms. Church suggested that phrasing be added stating that the final study priorities will be determined at the time of the UPWP. MPO consensus that this approach is appropriate.

Mr. Collingwood pointed out that the City met with the BRPC during the public comment period. Mr. Karns added that the City was encouraged to submit comments, and that MPO member communities should not be penalized. The decision making body should be adaptive to change.

Mr. Miller asked if there are any other issues with approval of the document.

Mr. Karns pointed out that approval is contingent on the close of the public comment period.

Mr. Hickey moved to endorse the 2007 RTP with the inclusion of wording about study priorities, and contingent on the closure of the public comment period, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously, with an abstention by Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller thanked the staff, the MPO, and the BRPC. Mr. Karns expressed his appreciation to Mark Guenard and MassHighway District 1.

4. TIP Status

Mr. Miller informed the MPO that final 2007 apportion amounts have not yet been received from FHWA. The TIP will likely need to be amended due to increases in project estimates.

Mr. Karns stated that there are no earmarks to deal with as of yet. Mr. Miller observed that earmarking often takes away from set-aside funds.

Mr. Karns informed the MPO that project solicitations for the FY07 TIP have gone out, and that the TAC is receiving information about the TIP process. Many communities were not aware that the design process was laid out in the new design manual.

Ms. Church stated that MHD and the BRPC will be going to Savoy to provide training on PNF's, and that a training offer was extended to all communities.

Mr. Miller stated that PNF's are also sent to the MPO, which can weigh-in on projects before any development money is spent. Staff can identify high and low-priority projects.

Mr. Karns stated that communities have been encouraged not to spend engineering funds until TIP projects are programmed.

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

Mr. Frieri stated that costs for the Washington and Williamstown bridge projects are rising, and that a hearing for the Downtown Streetscape project will be scheduled for late April.

Mr. Moore informed the MPO that bridges are funded through a state set-aside and are not a regional issue.

Mr. Karns asked about the Barker Road and Sheffield Village Green projects.

Mr. Niles stated that the Sheffield project has some utility issues. Mr. Miller added that it is being recommended that funds not be allocated until the TIP is prioritized.

A discussion followed regarding a hybrid bus on order for the BRTA.

Mr. Miller stated that the FHWA will not be allocating the funds; the MPO could re-prioritize the TIP for the bus project.

Ms. Church distributed a status list of BRPC transportation studies.

Mr. Miller asked when the MPO will be discussing the TIP, noting that discussion should be held before the draft document is presented.

Mr. Karns stated that in past years, staffs have evaluated projects and submitted the scoring results to the MPO. Ms. Church stated that this process will be completed for the next MPO meeting.

6. Other Business

No other issues were raised.

7. Next meeting date and agenda

Consensus that the next MPO meeting will be held on May 15th at 4:00.

Mr. Hickey moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously.