

**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday, November 14th, 2007, 4PM**

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

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

David Mohler, EOT (designee of Secretary of Transportation Bernard Cohen)
Peter Niles, MassHighway (designee of MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, Southwest Berkshire Representative
Thomas Szczepaniak, Town of Dalton, North Central Berkshire Representative
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman, (BRPC Alternate)
Jack Hickey, BRPC Chair and Representative
Joseph Dean, BRTA Vice Chair and Alternate
Gae Elfenbein, Town of Lanesborough, North Central Berkshire Alternate
Katherine Eade, North Adams Alternate

Member Agency Staff Present:

Nathaniel Karns, Executive Director, BRPC
Alison Church, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, Senior Transportation Planner, BRPC
Christine Neumann, Transportation Planner, BRPC
Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1
Dana Lacasse, MassHighway District 1
Paul Maloney, Federal Highway Administration
Bob Malnati, BRTA

Others Present:

Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Vice Chairman
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Jana Hunkler Brule, Town of Florida/Berkshire RIDES
Greg Federspiel, Lenox Town Manager

1. Introductions/Opening of Meeting

Mr. Mohler welcomed everyone to the meeting; members introduced themselves.

2. Approval of minutes of meeting of August 14, 2007

Mr. Szczepaniak made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 14th meeting.

Mr. Malnati seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

3. Approval of Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan for 30 day public release and conditional approval

Ms. Church briefed the MPO on the Coordinated Plan.

Mr. Lovejoy made a motion to approve the Coordinated Plan for 30 day review.

Mr. Szczepaniak seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

4. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Report

Mr. Haupt discussed the TAC Report from the October 4th meeting. The emphasis of the October 4th TAC meeting was on bicycle facility planning and specifically a series of alternative spending schemes for the \$4 million Congressional earmark. The majority of the TAC expressed the opinion that the existing bike path be extended in both directions rather than develop separated pieces in Lenox or other additional pieces that aren't clearly ready to go. The TAC was unanimous in its support of the Adams project. The majority of the TAC supported the first segment of the Pittsfield project. Mr. Siegars spoke on behalf of the minority. The minority opinion of the TAC was to support the Lenox bike path over the Pittsfield piece because the Lenox project is much farther along than the Pittsfield project. He added that a lot of people use bikes in Lenox already and that creating a piece in South County would encourage other South County communities to work on their sections. Mr. Hickey added that he was the one who made the motion at the TAC meeting to extend the existing trail north and south. He would like to add that support of the Pittsfield piece was not concrete at the TAC meeting. If Pittsfield can't get its issues resolved, decisions should be made to get the Lenox portion started.

5. Appointment of Shep Evans as Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) Representative

Mr. Karns briefly explained that the Executive Director of the MACC in Boston had been willing to serve on the TAC but has not been able to attend the meetings in Pittsfield. The MACC Board of Directors has regional representation and Mr. Evans is the Board member serving Berkshire County. The Executive Director of the MACC suggested Mr. Evans would be an appropriate replacement. The MPO concurred with appointing Mr. Evans to represent the MACC on the TAC.

6. Summary of proposed bike path project status/updates and potential Programming of SAFETEA-LU Bike Path Funding

Ms. Neumann briefed the MPO on the various bike path projects for which PNFs have not been submitted. BRPC is currently developing a feasibility study for the North Adams to Williamstown section and hopes to put out a RFP over the winter. There have been two feasibility studies completed for the Adams to North Adams section. A lot needs to be worked out in terms of right-of-way acquisition and wetland mitigation for this piece.

Mr. Karns suggested that the MPO try to reach some tentative conclusions regarding funding priorities for the different bike path projects in preparation for the winter TIP amendment process in which funds could be allocated for design or construction in 2008 of specific bike path projects. Mr. Frieri mentioned that Lenox has already spent money on preliminary survey and design for the second section of their bike path and is currently looking for a grant to do the design of the third section. For the first section, design has come to the point where it can't be advanced as far as the other pieces. The District has started design on the Adams section and met with the town and received considerable public support.

There was a request for clarification that Pittsfield will not be ready for construction in 2009. Mr. Karns explained that the Pittsfield piece needs to receive right-of-way from the Housatonic Railroad. Mr. Karns emphasized that the rail abandonment process is very lengthy and goes through the Federal Railway Administration. It is unlikely that the state could acquire the right-of-way within a year. Additionally, there will be a need for the following: wetland permitting north of Crane Avenue, a MEPA review and the standard MHD review.

In response to another member asking for clarification that if the money was not spent in 2009, it would still remain available if the MPO decided to wait to program the funds until Pittsfield or some other project was ready, Mr. Karns said yes, but that the communities, including Lenox, are anxious to know where the money will go. Mr. Karns raised the issue that there should not be too much of a monetary allotment going toward design; the majority of the earmark should be used for construction. There is no guarantee that there will be more money for these projects in the next authorization bill; it is not prudent to design more than can be constructed.

Mr. Federspiel, the Town Manager of Lenox, stated that the Town wants their segments to be the spine. The New Lenox Road to Housatonic Street segment in Lenox (segment 1) provides a

connection from the High School to the October Mountain State Forest and the Woods Pond Recreational area. The High School would act as the designated parking facility for trail users and it would also provide the neighborhoods abutting the school access to the trail without having to drive. Mr. Federspiel pointed out that, no matter where the Lenox segments ends, there are multiple options available for Lee and Stockbridge to figure out where the route goes from there. Although Lenox has not had any definitive discussions with Lee or Stockbridge, Mr. Federspiel suggested several options, including going from East Street heading down Walker into Lee or continuing to Blantyre or Route 20 into Lee or going further out and going on Plunkett and going around Laurel Lake and into Lee.

A member asked for clarification that the Adams project and the Lenox project have the best chance of being designed and built within the next few years. Mr. Karns and Mr. Niles agreed that these are the two projects that will be ready for construction in 2009. Mr. Niles added that Adams is under design now and it's almost a given that it will be ready for construction, if the money is available. Mr. Dean added that the Adams piece is the easiest piece because the route is located on DCR property and then on property for which the Town already owns the right-of-way down to Lime Street. Mr. Karns added that there are relatively limited environmental constraints for the Adams project because the route is located along flood control structures. Ms. Church mentioned that just as there is no land acquisition needed in Adams, there is no land acquisition needed for the second segment of the Lenox project.

Ms. Church noted that she had met with the Town of Lenox and MHD and it was determined that it would have been nearly impossible to get the second segment of the Lenox project ready for construction in 2008. Mr. Moore agreed that it would be a good candidate for 2009. Mr. Moore noted that it is likely that the second segment of the Lenox project will cost more than the estimate of \$1,200,000. Mr. Moore suggested the price would possibly be closer to \$1,500,000. The cost of the construction can not be definitively resolved until design is complete.

Mr. Haupt stated that the majority of the TAC probably wouldn't have a problem going forward with the Lenox project had the TAC known the Pittsfield project probably wouldn't be ready in 2009. He agreed that the MPO should spend the money as expeditiously as possible. Mr. Karns noted that, by choosing to fund the Adams and the Lenox pieces, (alternative one or two) there would still be roughly \$1 million left over. Mr. Mohler agreed, and said after funding the Adams project and the second segment of Lenox project, the MPO would need to decide whether to use the rest of the money to design the Pittsfield project or the next segment in Lenox.

Mr. Mohler said if the MPO wants to make a motion, MHD can take the second segment of the Lenox project to PRC. This will let Lenox know that the MPO supports their bike path and that they should go ahead and spend the \$50,000 and the rest of the money will be allocated in 2009.

Mr. Mohler decided was very clear that, at the next TIP amendment, BRPC staff should prepare funding the construction of the Adams project and the construction of the second segment of the Lenox project. Members of the MPO agreed.

7. Discussion of potential CMAQ projects for FY2008

Mr. Frieri briefed the MPO on the two traffic signalization projects requesting CMAQ funding for FY2008.

8. Summary of October 22nd quarterly meeting among EOT/MHD/FHWA/RPC staff

Mr. Karns summarized the MARPA Meeting handout by saying that his understanding is that FHWA is expecting the state to allocate \$39 million more to various bridge projects in the current year (FY 2008) and that there is an indication that the regional targets may need to be the source of this. BRPC is bringing this to the MPO for their information but there is no action requested. Mr. Haupt commented that the TAC had a discussion about the use of regional targets. Mr. Karns elaborated that the biggest concern with use of regional targets is that every project's funding will continue to be delayed to the next year until you get to the end where a project previously programmed falls off completely.

9. Transportation Funding Issues, including Recommendations of the Transportation Finance Commission

Mr. Haupt summarized the TAC November 8th meeting's lengthy discussion of the Transportation Finance Report by saying that the TAC approved conceptually all of the revenue recommendations with the exception of the recommendation(s) to (1) use advanced technology to monitor an individual's use of the transportation system and (2) to collect user fees.

Mr. Hickey expressed that the BRPC Executive Committee and the TAC acknowledged the need to increase revenues and were willing to raise the gas tax, but that that money needs to be seriously committed to the municipalities and not rescinded at some later date when the state legislature feels there are other projects they want to fund with that money. He stated that support for an increase in gas tax will only come if the money is given back to the municipalities.

Mr. Lovejoy asked about the consolidation and reorganization of the state transportation agencies.

Mr. Mohler explained that there is a proposal on the table that will combine all the surface transportation agencies – the EOT, MHD, MBTA, the RTAs, and MTA – under a single authority and that transportation will have a dedicated revenue stream. All revenues collected will go into a dedicated trust fund that this single authority will then allocate out based on need. This proposal has not been finalized into a bill; it is being drafted and discussed.

Mr. Mohler continued by saying that the other issue the governor has charged the secretary with is developing a strategic long range transportation plan that will build off the last plan from the previous administration. Mr. Mohler said that the State will provide regular updates and ample opportunity for public participation.

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

Peter Frieri drew the group's attention to the "Status of 2007-2008 TIP Projects" handout and recapped the projects on the 07-08 TIP.

11. Other Business

Ms. Church asked for conditional approval of the Coordinated Plan so that the MPO wouldn't have to meet again before December 25th. A motion was made by Mr. Lovejoy to release the Coordinated Plan on the condition that at the end of the 30 day public comment period, if there were no adverse public comments and pending approval from the FTA and the FHWA, the staff can consider it a final approved document by the MPO. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

If there are adverse comments, or if FTA and FHWA says differently, there will be a MPO meeting to formally approve the document.

12. Next meeting date and agenda

The next MPO meeting date of Tuesday, February 12th was proposed by BRPC staff.

13. Adjournment

Mr. Dean moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:20 PM. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.