

BERKSHIRE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)

Meeting of Monday, April 10, 2006

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

MINUTES

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Ken Miller, Director, EOT Planning, Chair (designee of Secretary of Transportation John Cogliano)

Jack Hickey, BRPC Clerk (alternate for Sam Haupt, BRPC Chair)

Ross Dindio, Highway District Director, MassHighway District 1 (designee of MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)

Bruce Collingwood, Public Works Director, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)

Philip Guy, Town of Williamstown, representing North towns

Joseph Dean, BRTA Vice-Chair (alternate for Sandra Lamb, BRTA Chair)

Thomas Szcapaniak, Town of Dalton, alternate from North-Central towns

Cris Irsfeld, Town of Great Barrington, representing Southwest towns

Gordon Bailey, Town of Lee, representing Southeast towns

Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, alternate from Southwest towns

Member Agency Staff Present:

Nat Karns, Executive Director, BRPC

Andrew Lenton, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC

Anuja Koirala, BRPC

Michael Hoffmann, BRPC

Chuck MacNeil, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority

Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1

Mark Moore, Masshighway District 1

Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning

Others Present:

Mark Siegars, Attorney

Jana Brule, Transportation Association of Northern Berkshires

Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall

Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

Sarah Hudson, Town of Tyringham, BRPC Vice-Chair

Steve Warren, Maintenance Supervisor, Connecticut Transit - Hartford (technical advisor to BRTA)

1. Minutes of meeting of February 28, 2006

A motion by Cris Irsfeld, seconded by Gordon Bailey, to approve the minutes of the previous meeting was passed unanimously.

2. Election of Vice-Chair

Ken Miller requested comments regarding the procedure for nominating and electing a Vice-Chair. He noted that Vice-Chair would be elected by the non-State affiliated members of the MPO, and that only the eight non-state members of the MPO are eligible to hold the position. In response to a question from Cris Irsfeld, Andrew Lenton noted that, in accordance with the MOU, alternates cannot serve as Vice-Chair. Copies of the MOU were then passed out to MPO members. Mr. Irsfeld nominated the BRTA representative to serve as Vice-Chair. Joe Dean seconded. In response to a question, Ken Miller explained that the MPO Chair position is not an elected one; it is the Secretary of Transportation. The MPO voted to table Vice-Chair nominations and election until the next MPO meeting; nominations are still open.

3. Amendments to 2006-2010 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Ken Miller noted that the purpose of this agenda item was for the MPO to consider the endorsement of the 2006-2010 TIP Amendments. Andrew Lenton presented the list of TIP amendments and described the changes that were made from the previous draft of the amendments. Mr. Miller defined TIP project categories: “target projects” and “earmark projects”. He noted that the MPO *is not required* to program earmarked projects; but noted that projects must be in the TIP in order to receive federal funding. Nat Karns noted that bridge projects are programmed by MassHighway, which then informs the MPOs which bridge projects to include in their respective TIPs. Mr. Miller commented that MPOs *are not required* to program these bridge projects, but that a failure to do so could result in funding allocated for those projects being spent elsewhere in the state. Phil Guy questioned MassHighway as to the rationale behind the Williamstown bridge project being removed. Mr. Miller described Mass Highway’s Bridge Management prioritization process, and noted that because of the over 30 million dollar decrease in available funding, certain bridge projects around the state had to be removed. Mark Moore noted that in this region bridge projects are chosen on overall “readiness”, and that the Williamstown bridge project was not at a high level of readiness due to ongoing problems between Mass Highway and the project consultant.

Andrew Lenton explained the CMAQ project funding process. The group debated the merits of allocating available CMAQ funding to two projects: the hybrid electric bus engine for BRTA and the South Street/Dalton Division Road Intersection. Mr. Lenton explained that one option is to expend CMAQ funds exclusively on the South Street project, but that this option would leave 90K of CMAQ funding on the table. Chuck MacNeil explained the rationale and benefits of purchasing a hybrid bus engine. In response to a question, he described the cost-savings of the hybrid technology over time – about how it would eventually be more cost-efficient in

terms of fuel, as gas prices continue to rise over time; also, the hybrid engine will be more efficient in terms of operating costs when compared with current diesel engine buses due to a greatly reduced need to do engine and brake maintenance. He also noted that the hybrid engine will easily meet the new EPA emissions standards for new bus purchases. Ross Dindio asked if the BRTA had consulted with New York State regarding their use of compressed natural gas (CNG) diesel engine technology, to which Mr. MacNeil responded that BRTA has, and that New York State is actually currently canceling further orders for CNG engines. In response to further questioning from Mr. Dindio regarding CNG technology meeting the new EPA standards, Mr. MacNeil replied that it would meet the standards. In response to a question from Phil Guy regarding the comparative efficiency of hybrid versus CNG engines, Steve Warren noted that Connecticut Transit's experience with the two types was that the hybrid engine was more efficient both in terms of cost-savings and reduced emissions, and that in general Connecticut Transit was very impressed with the performance of the hybrid buses. Nat Karns noted that the ability of the hybrid engine to reduce operating BRTA costs was a huge advantage. Ken Miller reviewed the options for allocating CMAQ funding:

- 1) As proposed in the amendment – \$250,000 going to the BRTA for the hybrid bus engine; or
- 2) Use as much 2006 CMAQ funding as possible for the South Street/Dalton intersection project (which would leave 90K of available 2006 CMAQ funds on the table); or
- 3) 90K to BRTA for the hybrid bus engine – remainder of 2006 CMAQ funds to South Street/Dalton intersection project (remaining dollars necessary to completely fund hybrid bus engine to come from 2007 CMAQ funds).

A motion was made by Cris Irsfeld, seconded by Joe Dean, to amend 2006-2010 TIP to reflect option 3. There being no further comments, the 2006-2010 TIP amendments were thereby endorsed by MPO Board. Andrew Lenton said he will make the necessary changes to the 2006-2010 TIP and forward it to MPO members.

4. Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study (DPCS)

Andrew Lenton reported that the study remains stalled due to contractual issues with the consultants, who had completed most of the work and had presented a recommended action plan at a public meeting, but were withholding deliverables pending resolution of the contract issues. He noted that he is setting a final deadline of June 30 for the consultant to submit contracted deliverables. He noted that a final presentation on the DPCS project would be given by the consultants to the MPO Board a short time after consultant deliverables were received; at that time, the MPO Board would be asked to endorse the DPCS project. Ken Miller asked that BRPC staff send consultant deliverables to MPO as soon as they are received from the consultant.

5. South Street Alternatives Study

Andrew Lenton said more stakeholder outreach was needed before the final draft of this study can be put before the MPO for endorsement. He referred to Technical Memo #2 of the study, printed copies of which were handed out to MPO members, and CD versions of which are available to all other interested parties. Ken Miller commended Anuja Koirala on the quality of work in Tech Memo #2. He expressed agreement with the first preliminary recommendation [“Implement Transportation System Management in near term”], but added that, as a preliminary observation, regarding the second recommendation [“Advance Alternative 4C1 to the next phase for mid-range implementation”] he was not in initial agreement that the incremental benefits of the new road are worth the incremental costs. Nat Karns responded that the intersection of West Housatonic & South Streets has the highest congestion in the area and is the location of many accidents. He noted that Alternative 4C1 is the best solution to remedy the situation, short of building a full bypass, and that any solution would incur sizeable costs. Mr. Lenton noted that a final draft report of record will be prepared and made available to the MPO and that after MPO endorsement the final report will be recorded on CD. Ken Miller asked that the final draft copy of the report be labeled “Draft”. Andrew agreed to do this.

6. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

Andrew Lenton introduced Michael Hoffmann, newly hired Transportation Planner for the BRPC and noted that Mr. Hoffman had prepared a memo in regard to formation of the TAC. a copy of which was distributed to MPO members. Mr. Lenton noted that the memo contained a preliminary list of potential TAC members assembled in interest categories. Ken Miller noted that a good general approach to TAC formation would be to just invite local folks, and then let the TAC form gradually. Nat Karns noted that first the BRPC would meet with the municipalities to solicit TAC members and recommendations for community members who would be suitable and interested in being on the TAC – and afterwards solicit other groups as needed to balance the stakeholder mix on the TAC. He said that municipal representatives should be staff-level people. Mr. Miller said it was important to make sure that the TAC not be dominated by just the towns. Ross Dindio noted that there will be a strong interest among bicycle and environmental advocacy groups to have a voice on the TAC. Gordon Bailey suggested publishing a public notice for interested parties. Mr. Karns agreed in principle with this idea, but expressed concern that a blanket solicitation could cause a skewing of interests represented. Mr. Gordon suggested that the public notice could be addressed to “interested agency representatives”. Mr. Miller suggested issuing a press release as well. He also noted that there is no limit on the size of TAC membership.

7. 2007-2011 TIP Development

Andrew Lenton enumerated the 2007-2010 TIP Project Information Forms (PIF's) that have been received from Berkshire County towns, saying that he is still waiting on the towns of Lee and Otis to submit the PIF's for their respective town-led

projects. He distributed the TIP Update schedule to the MPO Board. He said that he is hoping to have a preliminary list of projects ready for the MPO and public listing by June. Ken Miller commented that the MPO should have a chance to review BRPC staff project evaluations before putting a draft 2007-2010 TIP together. He noted that an MPO meeting should be held in May to discuss TIP project evaluations. Andrew Lenton agreed to add this May meeting to the 2007-2010 TIP schedule.

8. 2006 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update – Status Report

Andrew Lenton spoke about the RTP Update scope of work, in which there are four major tasks. He explained that SAFETEA-LU changed the time cycle for RTP updates from three to four years. He noted that the RTP Updated should be ready for MPO endorsement by March of 2007. He noted that the public participation process will be ongoing and that he foresees the TAC being heavily involved in the update process. Nat Karns noted that the MPO should review the Goals and Objectives contained in the current RTP. Ken Miller explained that the RTP is the main document they will deal with – that no project can be programmed in the TIP if it is not in the RTP. He recommended that BRPC prepare a draft of updated RTP Goals and Objectives to be presented at the May MPO meeting and a draft of project recommendations by the June MPO meeting. Nat Karns responded that a draft of project recommendations by June was not likely feasible.

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

Peter Frieri reviewed 2006 Mass Highway District 1 projects. Chuck MacNeil reviewed status of \$500,000 bus washer replacement project, and described the BRTA's new after-hours transit service program. Jim Lovejoy inquired as to where this service is being made available by BRTA. Mr. MacNeil responded that currently the service is being used in Pittsfield and adjoining communities, as a pilot test to gauge demand for the service, but that the service could be expanded thereafter pending a successful start. Gordon Bailey inquired as to what type of vehicle the BRTA is using for this service, to which Mr. MacNeil responded that they are using an existing 9-person, wheelchair-accessible van. Jack Hickey asked how the BRTA advertised this service, to which Mr. MacNeil responded that the BRTA did press releases and had the service advertised at local employment boards. Nat Karns commented that this was a good service that was well needed, noting that an estimated 13% of Berkshire County residents do not have access to a private vehicle. Ken Miller explained the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) to the MPO members and suggested that the BRPC do a workshop on the UPWP for new MPO members following an upcoming MPO meeting.

10. Other Business

No comments were made in regard to this agenda item.

11. Next Meeting Date

The MPO tentatively agreed to meet again on Thursday, May 18 at 1:30. This date and time to be finalized by the MPO in the coming weeks.