

Report from the Berkshire Transportation Advisory Committee to the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization

~ From the Meetings Held on June 21 and July 5, 2007 ~

Summary of Items Discussed

- **From the June 21, 2007 Meeting:**
 - **Public Participation Plan for Berkshire County**

The draft document had not received any comments from the public since it was made available to the public. The final document was essentially the draft, with only minor changes made. Committee members had over a month to review the comments before voting to recommend it to the MPO. One committee member abstained from the vote.
 - **Unified Transportation Planning Work Program (UPWP)**

Staff began this subject by highlighting the technical work that the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission does, which includes pavement management, traffic counts, etc. Three new tasks were then introduced: online mapping, safety studies and disaster preparedness. Online mapping refers to a potential online, user friendly resource that could inform a researcher of traffic information regarding specific sites. Safety studies hope to make accident information more accurate, as accident locations are quite vague under the current system. Disaster preparedness is to be studied under the scope of a case study involving a pandemic that would require many individuals to access specific safety points. Other topics included scenic byways and census data. A motion carried to have the document released by the MPO for public comment.
 - **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**

Three possible spending scenarios were presented to the committee by the staff with the understanding that a fourth scenario may arise at a later date. The BRPC outlined their three motives regarding the TIP: follow the existing approved TIP, use the budget in its entirety and respect priority projects. Consensus could not be achieved with the current list of scenarios, and the group agreed to meet on July 5, where a fourth scenario would be unveiled.
 - **Coordinated Public Transit- Human Services Transportation Plan discussion**

Staff explained how areas of high unemployment and poverty generally had a stronger need for public transit. The Mass Department of Mental Retardation was mentioned as having an interest in being involved with the document's updating.
- **From the July 5, 2007 Meeting:**

- **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Alternative Scenarios**
Staff presented the committee with eight possible spending scenarios. The first four scenarios were developed by the BRPC while the remaining four were developed by MassHighway. The majority of the discussion revolved around the order that three projects (TYR Main Rd., FLA River Rd., PTS Park Square) would be constructed, which ultimately led to the committee recommending BRPC scenario 3.
- **CMAQ Funding**
The staff makes the committee aware that there are currently no CMAQ projects slated for 2008 or beyond. A motion carries to use the funding to improve two Pittsfield traffic lights in 2008 and delay further plans until more options are made available.
- **TIP Bridge Program**
Staff outlines the various upcoming bridge projects in the region. A motion carries to approve the bridge program.
- **Transit TIP**
After the Transit TIP was presented, a representative from TANB expressed her concern about being funded in 2009 and not 2008. A motion was carried to pass the document with the addition of 2008 TANB funding.
- **Next Meeting Date**
It has been decided that the next meeting will be held on an “as needed” basis. If public comments make it necessary, a meeting will be held on August 9, 2007 at 5:00PM.

Majority Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

- The Minutes of the May 3, 2007 TAC Meeting were approved unanimously by the TAC on June 21, 2007.
- The Public Participation Plan for Berkshire County was approved by the TAC on June 21, 2007 with one abstention.
- The Unified Transportation Planning Work Program was approved unanimously by the TAC on June 21, 2007.
- TIP Scenario 3, as developed and presented by the BRPC, was approved by a vote of 8 to 3 by the TAC on July 5, 2007.
- CMAQ spending proposal for traffic lights was approved unanimously by the TAC on July 5, 2007.
- The TIP Bridge Program was approved by the TAC on July 5, 2007 with one abstention.
- The Transit TIP, including 2008 funding for TANB, was approved unanimously by the TAC on July 5, 2007.

Minority Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

- In regards to the TIP spending scenarios, a recurring topic of discontent among the committee's minority was the process of pushing forward so-called priority projects. In this case, some committee members felt the process was tainted when Pittsfield's Park Square leapt to the front of the agenda shortly after filing for funding. The minority cited Park Square's low percentage of design completion as a large factor in their unrest. The minority believes the factors that lead to the priority status of Park Square (i.e. high accident rate) would serve as a perpetual reason to continue delaying less prioritized (but not less deserving) projects in the region. Some minority members also believe that the Park Square improvements are merely a displacement of traffic issues (more specifically, the improvements on Park Square will in turn put a lot of traffic pressure near the BMC).