

**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday October 17, 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)
Larry Salvatore, Acting Director MassHighway District 1 (designee of the Commissioner of the
Massachusetts Highway Department Luisa Paiewonsky)
John Hickey, BRPC Chair
Bruce Collingwood, Public Works Director, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)
Philip Guy, Town of Williamstown, North Berkshire Representative
Cristopher Irsfeld, Town of Stockbridge, Southwest Berkshire Representative
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, Southwest Berkshire Alternate
Thomas Szczepaniak, Town of Dalton, North-Central Berkshire Alternate

Member Agency Staff Present:

Nathaniel Karns, Executive Director, BRPC
Tom Matuszko, Acting Transportation Manager, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, Senior Transportation Planner, BRPC
Michael Hoffmann, Transportation Planner, BRPC
Sarah Izatt, Associate Planner, BRPC
Chuck MacNeil, Administrator, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1
Michael Chong, Federal Highway Administration
Promise Otaluka, Federal Highway Administration

Others Present:

Mark Siegars, Berkshire Mall
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall
Ron Tinkham, Baker Hill Road District
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

1. Minutes of meeting of August 8, 2006
Mr. Hickey moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Miller. The motion carried unanimously.
2. Appointment of Non-Municipal Representatives to the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)
Mr. Karns provided a brief overview of the TAC, and advised the MPO that any non-municipal appointments to the Committee require MPO approval.

Mr. Scelsi stated that he was advised that Berkshire Mall could not be represented on the TAC due to its status as a for-profit entity, and raised an objection to the inclusion of Petricca Industries. Mr. Karns stated that he did not see any reason that for-profit entities should be excluded. Mr. Miller stated that is unaware of any federal regulations prohibiting for-profit entities from participating in advisory groups. MPO consensus that the Berkshire Mall be represented on the TAC.

Mr. Irsfeld asked how solicitations were gathered from municipalities. Mr. Hoffmann stated that letters were sent to selectboards. Mr. Irsfeld suggested that the subregional delegates should also solicit municipal participation.

Mr. Collingwood asked whether Berkshire Medical Center was contacted as a non-municipal participant. Mr. Hoffmann stated that the BMC was solicited for participation.

Mr. Miller stated that the objective of having a TAC is to solicit advice. The TAC should not act as a parallel to the MPO, and that the MPO is the decision-making entity. Other MPO's have had joint meetings with advisory committees when appropriate, and that new TAC members may wish to attend MPO meetings.

Mr. Guy moved to endorse the non-municipal TAC appointments with the inclusion of Mr. Seigars, representing the Berkshire Mall. Seconded by Mr. Hickey. The motion carried unanimously.

3. 2006 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update

Mr. Hoffmann provided an overview presentation of the RTP, including the purpose of the RTP, the updating process, federal transportation legislation, and RTP findings.

Mr. Guenard asked whether data regarding commuting trends is available in absolute numbers as well as percents. Mr. Hoffmann stated that data is available.

Mr. Miller pointed out that commuting trips refer only to work trips, which account for only twenty to thirty percent of total trips.

Mr. Irsfeld asked from where the anticipated population increase referred to in the population projection graph is expected to come, and stated that sixty-four percent of the homes in Stockbridge are second homes, and that many of these will become year-round retirement homes. Mr. Hoffmann stated that projection is based upon existing trends, and does not include incoming retirees.

Mr. Guy asked whether the traffic volume projections include planned development projects. Mr. Karns stated that projections are done on a county-wide level, and the accuracy of the projections decrease when reduced to the city and town level. Large projects, such as the redevelopment of the GE site, are included in the projections; smaller local projects are not specifically included, but are factored into the overall calculation. Mr. Karns also stated that accuracy within ten percent for any projection would be considered excellent.

Mr. Lovejoy asked whether there is a way to focus on rural areas within the County for growth projections.

Mr. Karns stated that the amount of remaining developable land is factored into the projections, but that the amount of development fluctuates, and is difficult to predict. This is evident in the building permit data for the past ten years.

Mr. Matuszko stated that it is important to remember that the projections in the RTP will be used to identify potential transportation problems which may affect the transportation network.

Mr. Lovejoy stated that he would like to see how the RTP and its projections will affect rural areas.

Mr. Miller replied that the RTP will examine safety and traffic data for all areas.

Mr. Irsfeld stated that there are currently many large developments underway in Stockbridge, and asked how sensitive the projections are to these types of projects.

Mr. Karns replied that commercial development projects are factored into employment data, and also pointed out that both projections and current available data contain a lack of information and a data gap regarding seasonal residents.

Mr. Miller stated that Cape Cod uses summer weekdays as models, to reflect the presence of tourists.

Mr. Karns stated that Cape Cod's tourist population is seasonal, but that the Berkshires have a part-time resident population which exists year-round.

Mr. Miller pointed out that projects which are not included in the RTP cannot be included in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). The RTP identifies problem areas and recommends studies, and study results are identified in the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

Mr. Karns requests consensus that the MPO is comfortable with the presentation and provided information regarding the RTP update.

Mr. Hickey stated that he is comfortable with both the presentation and overall process, but that he has issues with specific portions of the actual RTP, but that he will contact Mr. Hoffmann regarding those points.

Mr. Miller stated that members should contact Mr. Hoffmann with specific issues.

Mr. Irsfeld inquired about the specific purpose of the planned updates to the problem areas section.

Mr. Karns replied that the need for studies is outlined in the problem areas, and that project recommendations are derived from studies.

Mr. Irsfeld stated that the RTP presentation was good.

Mr. Karns stated that the issues of an air quality analysis and financial constraint will need to be addressed with MassHighway, and that financial constraint will be especially important.

4. Approval to Release "Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization Public Participation Process for Transportation Planning" for the 30 Day Public Comment Period

Mr. Matuszko presented the draft public involvement plan. The plan identifies participants in the public involvement process, and identifies types of outreach to occur. The plan addresses only the RTP update, and is separate from the overall public participation process.

Mr. Hoffmann asked Mr. Chong whether a separate public participation plan for the RTP is specifically required by SAFETEA-LU and the FHWA.

Mr. Chong replied that a public participation plan is required, but that a separate RTP plan is the option of the MPO.

Mr. Miller stated that SAFETEA-LU requirements will need to be met in July.

Mr. Guenard stated that some SAFETEA-LU rulemaking requirements will not be finalized until January.

Mr. Miller stated that although the RTP public participation plan is not required, it would be

beneficial.

Mr. Matuszko requested MPO approval to release the RTP update public participation plans for public review and comment.

Mr. Miller stated that the RTP is required to be updated every four years, but can be amended by the MPO as needed.

Mr. Karns stated that there are certain minimal requirements for public involvements, and that the Berkshire MPO has typically had extensive public involvement.

Mr. Irsfeld moved to release the Public Involvement Plan for the RTP update for public review, seconded by Mr. Collingwood. The motion carried unanimously.

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

MassHighway

Mr. Friere provided a status update of bridge, highway, and non-target 2006-2007 TIP projects.

Mr. Miller pointed out that some project ad costs exceeded TIP costs, and that Massachusetts received 89 million dollars in redistribution funding from FHWA. \$25 million from that funding will go towards the water chestnut program, and \$25 to 30 million will contribute to the additional costs of projects advertised in FY05 due to forty percent increases in construction costs. Mr. Miller also stated that costs of FY07 projects will also likely be much higher than TIP projections.

Berkshire Regional Transit Authority

Mr. MacNeil stated that the bus order was placed during the summer, and the buses will go to production in January for a summer 2007 delivery. The BRTA is also working with EOT to access funding provided for in SAFETEA-LU. The non-fixed route system is using older job access reverse commute funds, but that funding will no longer be available.

Mr. Hickey stated that the BRPC never received a response to the comments provided on the statewide transportation plan, and asked whether the document was ever finalized.

Mr. Miller replied that not all comments were responded to, and that the final plan has not yet been released.

Pittsfield DPW

Mr. Collingwood stated that the Park Square project is advancing and that the streetscape phase one is nearly at twenty-five percent.

Mr. Miller stated that each MPO can decide the level of appropriate input as outlined in the project design guidebook.

Mr. Moore stated that the BRPC ENF comment procedure works well.

Mr. Karns provided an overview of the Route 2 reconstruction project. The BRPC distributed the project need form to local officials and requested feedback about the projects before the project entered the design phase.

Mr. Miller stated that the proponent creates a project need form for the MassHighway local district, and project initiation forms can then be submitted to MassHighway for approval. If approved, the projects return to the MPO for funding consideration.

6. Status Report on Subregional Representation Meetings

No subregional representation meetings have occurred

7. Other Business

No other issues were raised.

8. Next meeting date and agenda

Mr. Karns stated that progress should be made at the next meeting on the RTP, and that the analysis portion of the plan should be complete by that date.

Mr. Hoffman stated that studies, as opposed to projects, will likely be the recommendations of the RTP.

Mr. Miller stated that tentative projects can be included in the RTP without detailed cost estimates.

Mr. Karns stated that safety projects may be included, but that other types of projects will not likely be included.

Consensus that the next MPO meeting will be held on December 19 at 2:00. A tentative meeting was also scheduled for November 28 if needed.

Mr. Irsfeld moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:50 pm, seconded by Mr. Collingwood. The motion carried unanimously.