

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday February 6, 2006, 4:00 PM.**

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

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning (representing Ken Miller, designee of Secretary of Transportation Bernard Cohen)
John Hickey, BRPC Chair
Peter Niles, MassHighway (designee of MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)
Joseph Dean, Vice Chairman, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
Ed Goddard, Town of Williamstown, North Central Berkshire Representative
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, Southwest Berkshire Alternate
Edward MacDonald, Town of Adams, North Berkshire Representative

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
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1
Bob Malnati, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority

Others Present:

Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Vice Chairman
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

1. Minutes of meeting of December 19, 2006
Mr. Goddard moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously.
2. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC Report)
Mr. Siegars provided an overview of the January 18 TAC meeting. Two actions were taken, to combine two Great Barrington projects and list them as short-term, to create a short-term passenger rail needs study at the regional level, and to recommend to the MPO that a state-wide policy on passenger rail be suggested.
Mr. Siegars suggested that a technical training session for TAC members would be beneficial. Mr. Karns stated that a TAC work session meeting regarding the MassHighway Design Manual and the TIP is planned. Ms. Church added that a letter regarding the Manual will be

mailed to towns from MassHighway. Mr. Guenard stated that links to the Manual are on the EOT and MassHighway websites, and that Chapter 2 of the Manual discusses project development.

3. Draft 2007 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

Mr. Hoffmann stated that the recommended study and project tables have been revised to include the TAC suggestions, and to include associated costs.

Mr. Karns pointed out that the action requested of the MPO is to release the draft document for public comment, and added that the MPO will meet again to review the document before it is finalized. Mr. Hoffmann added that four public meetings have been conducted.

Ms. Church stated that the recommended project list in the RTP is separate from the TIP process, and that the recommended projects in the RTP are a 'wish list' of projects.

Mr. Haupt requested the status of the undetermined funding projects listed in the TIP.

Mr. Karns replied that almost all of those are reconstruction projects in compliance with the RTP policies, and discussed the difference between new facility and reconstruction projects.

Mr. Hoffmann stated that the list of recommended projects is what BRPC staff will be doing over the next 20 years, and the list of recommended projects details how the pool of capacity money will be spent.

Ms. Church pointed out that there is an additional note on the table regarding the TIP and additional capacity funding.

Mr. Guenard pointed out that the RTP does not need to be specific to dollar amounts, but does need to show fiscal constraints.

Discussion followed regarding the number of lanes to which East Street in Pittsfield will be widened, language in RTP will not state a specific number of lanes, since the final number has not yet been determined.

Ms. Church provided an overview of the RTP financial chapter, including projected increases in the elderly population, and a projected shortfall in the BRTA operations and maintenance.

Mr. Malnati pointed out that BRTA fares will be increased, and also that the BRTA budget must be balanced each year.

Mr. Karns stated that many regional transit authorities will be confronted with the same structural issues.

Mr. Guenard stated that a consideration for the UPWP will be a plan to address future projected revenue shortfalls.

Mr. MacDonald pointed out that the BRTA services many people of poverty-level, and those routes, fuel costs, and other expenses should be evaluated to increase revenue, since there was a large outcry when rates were last raised.

Mr. Guenard pointed out that there many options besides fare-box increases are available.

Mr. Karns stated that the roadway and bridge operations and maintenance projections assume that the overall pavement and bridge conditions in the system are currently adequate, and also assumes that these conditions will not be increased.

Mr. Hickey asked how the total transit operations and maintenance costs were arrived at.

Ms. Church replied that a two percent annual increase from 2006 funding levels was assumed.

Discussion followed regarding Route 116.

4. Vote to Release Draft 2007 Regional Transportation Plan for Public Comment

Mr. Karns provided the MPO with an overview of TAC recommendations, including the suggestion to combine two Great Barrington projects, and to undertake a passenger rail study.

Mr. MacDonald moved to release the draft RTP with the incorporation of the TAC suggestions for public comment, seconded by Mr. Dean. The motion carried unanimously.

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

Mr. Malnati reported that BRTA ridership was up for the first six months of 2006, showing the

highest numbers since 2000.

Mr. Frieri, MHD, reported on funding levels for 2007 TIP projects. The Pittsfield and Sandisfield bridges will be delayed, and the Washington and Williamstown bridges will be advertised in FY07. Improvements to Barker Road are ready to advertise, as well as the Sheffield enhancement project. Road reclamation will be recommended for the North Adams Reservoir Road project to reduce costs, and MassHighway is working towards a public meeting for the Access Management Implementation project.

Mr. Siegars asked when the Mount Greylock project will be begun. Mr. Guenard replied that the byway project will be started in the spring, and added that bids received were under the estimate.

Mr. Frieri stated that a public meeting for the Pittsfield Downtown Streetscape project will be held in mid-March, and that the Egremont bridge project could possibly move from FY08 to FY07.

Mr. Niles stated that a hearing on the Hadley overpass in North Adams will be held in March, and that an informational meeting for the Ashuwillticook Trail extension will be coming up in Adams.

Mr. Guenard stated that the state should be providing the MPO with revised bridge numbers, and that the TIP can then be amended.

Discussion followed regarding a potential schedule for TIP amendments.

6. Other Business

Mr. Karns provided an overview of ongoing staff work, including the Southern Berkshire Transit Study, the Lee Alternatives Study, and corridor access management and scenic byway projects for Route 2.

Mr. Karns also pointed out that preparation for the 2010 Census is beginning, and that it is important that town and city clerks pay attention to preparation work so that accurate counts may be obtained.

Mr. Guenard added that congressional seats and federal funding are tied to population counts.

7. Next meeting date and agenda

Consensus that the next MPO meeting will be held on March 20th at 4:00.

Mr. Dean moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. MacDonald. The motion carried unanimously.