

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday May 15, 2007, 4:30 PM.**

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

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Katherine Eade, City of North Adams (designee of Mayor John Barrett)
Joseph Dean, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
David Mohler, EOT (designee of Secretary of Transportation Bernard Cohen)
Jack Hickey, BRPC Chair
Ed MacDonald, North Berkshire Delegate
Peter Niles, MassHighway (designee of MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, Southwest Berkshire Alternate
Thomas Szczepaniak, North Central Berkshire Alternate

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
Chuck MacNeil, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1

Others Present:

Les Beebe, Town of Tyringham Highway Department
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Vice Chairman
Alan Wilcot, Town of Tyringham Selectboard
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

1. Minutes of meeting of March 20, 2007
Mr. Hickey moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously, with abstentions by Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Dean, not having been present.
2. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC Report)
Mr. Haupt provided an overview of the May 3 TAC meeting. Suggestions were made to amend the Public Participation Plan, which have been incorporated into the draft. A suggestion was also made to reduce the Berkshire Transportation Forum List.
There was concern as to whether there would be enough time to evaluate the 2008-2011 TIP

between the next scheduled TAC meeting and the August MPO meeting.

Ms. Church stated that evaluation of the TIP projects has been completed, and that the target amounts should be received in the next week.

Mr. Mohler suggested that a TAC meeting could be held in June.

There was consensus that a TAC meeting will be held on June 21.

3. Vote to Approve Distribution of Public Participation Plan (PPP) for Public Comment

Ms. Church stated that the draft PPP incorporates changes suggested at the TAC meeting.

Mr. Frieri provided an overview of MassHighway comments. The project advisory group is not within the parameters of MPO activity, and should be removed from the PPP.

Mr. Karns stated that he is not in complete agreement, noting that the Williamstown Spring Street project had an ongoing working group, and that property owners and contractors had meetings.

Mr. Niles stated that these meetings were not part of the planning process. Mr. Karns agreed that they were not, but they were a part of the public participation process, and should be included in the PPP to document an additional stage of public involvement.

Mr. Guenard pointed out that the PPP is for the MPO, but that MassHighway may set up ad hoc committees if projects warrant.

Mr. Karns stated that an ideal project would have a group of people involved from the beginning stages, especially when difficult situations arise. Issues may come up during construction which go back to the design stages of a project, and that a communication loop can be useful. Mr. Karns provided the issue of a retaining wall near Pontoosuc Lake as an example.

Mr. Niles asked to whom comments would be directed.

Mr. Karns suggested that the implementing agency could coordinate a working group if it felt it was warranted.

Mr. MacDonald stated that the advisory group does not belong in the PPP. The MPO can bring issues to MassHighway, and MassHighway will deal with problems as they arise.

Mr. Hickey stated that public participation is encouraged, adding that it makes life easier. If an advisory group was in place during the Route 7 issue, it could have been avoided.

Mr. Frieri continued outlining MassHighway comments on the PPP, asking if emailed comments would be accepted.

Mr. Karns stated that emails are acceptable, and that the PPP will be updated to include email.

Mr. Frieri stated that TIP projects cannot be submitted by "interested parties," and that this language should be stricken.

A public hearing is required at the 25 percent design stage, and an additional hearing during the design process is only sometimes required.

Mr. Karns stated that staff will work on clarification language during the public comment period.

Mr. Dean moved to approve the changes in the PPP suggested by MassHighway, seconded by Mr. Niles. The motion carried, 7-2, with Mr. Hickey and Mr. Lovejoy voting nay.

Mr. MacDonald moved to release the PPP for public comment, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried, unanimously.

4. Vote to Approve 2007-2010 TIP Amendment

Ms. Koirala outlined the proposed amendments, noting that all bridges programmed for 2007 will be moved to 2008.

Mr. Hickey stated that changes are being made to the bridge program across the state, and that staff looked into the impacts of the changes statewide. Berkshire County had four bridges programmed for 2007, and this will be reduced to zero.

Mr. Mohler noted that construction costs have risen, and that bridge projects were reduced in all regions.

Mr. Niles added that some projects were not completed in time. Mr. Karns explained that the

MPO perview ends at the point of advertising, and that advertised projects no longer appear on the TIP.

Mr. Moore stated that the projects will be programmed for early in the fiscal year, and will be part of the same construction season that they would have been if programmed for 2007.

Mr. Lovejoy asked why the cost of the Route 41 bridge rose so much.

Mr. Moore replied that the project had a significant design change.

Mr. Hickey stated that he would like to have it noted that the region is upset about the bridge program changes.

Mr. Lovejoy asked to where the transportation bond money is going.

Mr. Mohler replied that some advertised 2006 projects did not receive awards, and the emergency bond funding will go towards those projects.

Ms. Eade stated that North Adams would like to have a project added to the TIP.

Mr. Karns stated that the proposed amendments are to the current TIP, and that the 2008-2011 TIP is under development.

Ms. Eade stated that the project is hoped to be ready to go to bid by September. Mr. Moore stated that MassHighway would not be able to put the project through their process between May and September.

Mr. Mohler suggested that the project could be put into the 2008-2011 TIP, but for the same construction season.

Mr. Karns stated that a timeline for the project would need to be put together.

Mr. Mohler added that the project should not be added to the TIP if it is not able to be programmed.

Mr. Karns suggested that it could be added for public comment purposes.

Ms. Eade moved to include the North Adams project in the current TIP for public comment, seconded by Mr. MacDonald.

A discussion followed regarding the North Adams project, including its cost and needed scope.

The motion carried, unanimously.

Ms. Koirala provided an overview of the proposed amendments to not-in-target projects.

Mr. Karns noted that the North Adams historic preservation is not a design project, and asked whether it would be possible not to carry into FY08.

Mr. Mohler suggested that the project be left in during the comment period.

Ms. Koirala stated that the BRTA is requesting CMAQ funds for a bus.

Mr. MacNeil stated that some funds for the project were flexed over, and added that EOT provided the local matching funds.

Mr. MacDonald moved to approve the FY 2007-2010 TIP amendment to change the bridge list, add the North Adams project and leave the BRTA project funded, seconded by Mr. Niles. The motion carried unanimously.

5. TIP Status

Ms. Koirala provided a summary of the TIP evaluation, noting that the scores do not incorporate cost effectiveness and that the preservation projects are not evaluated on all criteria. Requests were made by the municipalities to remove the Bonnie Rigg Hill and Algeria Road projects.

Mr. Szczepaniak asked for clarification on the MHD "design-on-hold" projects.

Mr. Moore stated that this references resources being devoted to other projects.

Mr. Karns added that the recommendations to the towns is not to spend engineering funds on projects which are not able to be programmed; and that MassHighway is doing the same thing.

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

Mr. Frieri provided an overview of MassHighway projects, noting that Sheffield was given a right of way certificate, that the Hadley Overpass project is at 75 percent design, and that several public hearings are scheduled.

A discussion followed regarding the Dalton South Street project.
Ms. Church provided a report on planning projects, and added that the 2008-2011 TIP should be ready for MPO review soon.

7. Other Business

Mr. Karns informed the MPO of the resignation of Transportation Planner Michael Hoffmann, and thanked him for his hard work.

Mr. MacDonald moved to issue Mr. Hoffmann a letter of commendation, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Next Meeting Date and Agenda

Mr. Guenard stated that the PPP will be out for a 45 day public comment period, and will need to be endorsed by July 1 to comply with federal regulations.

There was consensus that the next MPO meeting will be scheduled for June 26.

Mr. Dean moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:40 p.m., seconded by Mr. MacDonald. The motion carried unanimously.