

BERKSHIRE REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
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**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Monday July 9, 2007, 4:00 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)
David Mohler, EOT (designee of Secretary of Transportation Bernard Cohen)
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
Chuck MacNeil, (Berkshire Regional Transit Authority, Alternate)
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman, (BRPC Alternate)

Member Agency Staff Present:

Nathaniel Karns, Executive Director, BRPC
Alison Church, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC
Anuja Koirala, Senior Transportation Planner, BRPC
Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1
Paul Maloney, Federal Highway Administration

Others Present:

Les Beebe, Town of Tyringham Highway Department
Susan Brown, Town of Florida Administrator
Jana Brule, Town of Florida and Berkshire Rides
Peter Curtin, Town of Tyringham Selectboard
Mary Curtin-Schaefer, Town of Tyringham
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Vice Chairman
Ron Tinkham, Baker Hill Rd. District
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Deanna Ruffer, City of Pittsfield, Community Development Director

1. Minutes of meeting of May 15, 2007
Tom Szczepaniak moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously (with the abstention of Mr. Haupt, who had not been present). Mr. Haupt summarized the last TAC meeting with discussion about the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP); he mentioned that the TAC would like to endorse the 3A scenario of the TIP. Mr. Haupt asked the MPO to give written assurances to the Town of Florida for the River Road project if it so happened that the Tyringham Main Road project was chosen for 2008.
Mr. Siegars presented the minority report discussing 3 major issues to consider.

2. Vote to Approve Public Participation Plan
Ms. Church mentioned that she send out a copy of the PPP and then went into further detail about concerns from the FHWA. She discussed how each comment made by the FHWA was either corrected or already included in the PPP
Mr. Collingwood made a motion to approve the PPP; Mr. Lovejoy seconded. The motion carried, unanimously.
3. Vote to Approve the 2007-2008 TIP Amendment
Ms. Church discussed the items of significance subsequent to the May 15th MPO meeting. There was some discussion about the following:
Norfolk Road bridge rehabilitation in Sandisfield – due to cost increases, this bridge project will move to 2009, per updated bridge list from MassHighway, dated June 13th
River Street project in North Adams – the issue discussed was readiness for construction
Mr. Cavanaugh made a motion to move the River Street project from 2007 to 2009; Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. The motion carried by a vote of 6-2.

Subsequently, Mr. Mohler asked for approval of the TIP amendment, as amended in its entirety, reiterating the two major changes including the bridge project moving to 2009, and the River Street project also moving to the 2009 TIP.

Mr. Niles moved and Mr. Lovejoy seconded, motion carried.

4. Vote to Approve Release of the 2008 TIP
Ms. Church provided information on the various scenarios, including the advantages and disadvantages of each while stating the 3A and 3B alternatives have no disadvantages. She mentioned the yearly allocation of funds and that with Scenarios 3A and 3B making optimal use of the available funding, the BRPC staff recommendation is for either scenario 3A or 3B.
Mr. Karns mentioned that Tyringham may or may not cost the amount stated and may alter some. Also mentioned the TAC and their decisions for the Tyringham project to go in 2009 and that the Pittsfield and River Road projects go in the 2008.
Mr. Haupt stated that the TAC recommended 3A and that the minority report requested an alternate scenario in which the Pittsfield Park Square project was not funded in 2008.
Mr. Szczepaniak went into discussion about the importance of the Berkshire Mall Rd. He stated that it is a very important connector road between routes 7 and 8. The design plans are fully completed and he would like the MPO to consider programming 2 million dollars for this reconstruction project if federal earmark funds are made available.
Mr. Karns stated that the programming needed to be laid out and that there is not a way to put 2 million of a 10 million dollar project in the TIP. There was discussion about the “Catch 22” nature of trying to procure federal earmarks without the local (approved by MPO) allocation of money (i.e. through TIP programming)
Mr. Siegars assured that Mall drive could be ready soon in 2008 and reiterated his hope for local support by the MPO before going to congressional or the state delegates for the rest of the funding.
Mr. Szczepaniak reiterated his request for a verbal commitment for 2 million dollars if the federal earmark funds become available.
Mr. Lovejoy expressed concern for the other projects that have been waiting for a while for funding and feel that this project is no more valuable than other projects.
Mr. Collingwood agreed that each project should get funded if it is already on the table, and stated that readiness is the “if” factor.
Mr. Haupt suggested the chance for private funds
Mr. Siegars stated that this is not a new project and discussed the importance of the reconstruction of this road due to the fact that it is the only way for heavily loaded trucks to get through north of Pittsfield and south of Route 2. He emphasized that it is a public road;

as such, private funding is misplaced.

Mr. Karns discussed the process which is used to evaluate projects and stated that the Mall Road is in the middle of the pack of projects on the supplemental list. He continued, saying that the MPO has never promised the Mall Road a "slot" on the 4-5 year program.

Mr. Curtin mentioned that Tyringham Main Road has been on the agenda for a while, also having bad conditions, and has been ready for some time.

Mr. Scelsi stated that there is a misconception about the ranking of projects.

Ms. Ruffer stated that every project goes through its own "life cycle" and struggles to get funding and that projects which are ready, still have to wait their turn. This is a process which only funds ready to go projects. She stated that asking the MPO to speculatively commit to funding is an inappropriate use of the organization.

Mr. Szczepaniak would like to move to approve for the consideration of the project for the MPO. Since there was not a second to the motion, the motion failed.

Mr. Moore read a letter from the MassHighway Commissioner, discussing how that the Tyringham project and its redesign illustrate how rural roadways should be designed; the Commissioner's letter cited that the project is ready for construction.

Ms. Brown mentioned the River Road project, and how the costs were cut down. She would like to see the project go in 2008.

Mr. Karns stated that an aspect of Park Square being funded/constructed in 2008 is that we can advance other projects if it fails to be ready on time. The readiness – or perceived by some as lack thereof – of this project does not make a difference to the funding of the Tyringham or Florida projects.

Mr. Karns stated that the amount of the project can actually determine the priority, as defined by the parameter of advanced construction.

Ms. Church stated that it is her understanding that there cannot be two advanced construction projects run simultaneously, that if there are two projects that exceed the annual target, a choice must be made.

Mr. Maloney further clarified aspects of advance construction.

Ms. Ruffer promised that Pittsfield Park Square will be ready.

Mr. Siegars disagreed with the programming of Pittsfield Park Square.

There was additional discussion about the readiness of Pittsfield Park Square.

In response to Mr. Lovejoy's concern for a better way to decide what gets funded and what does not and agreement with Mr. Siegars that if a project is not ready, it should not be funded, Ms. Church stated that if Pittsfield fails to complete their design, they will be bumped to next year and the money will then be used to fund the Tyringham and Florida projects. She mentioned how important the Park Square project is for improving safety.

Ms. Ruffer stated that Pittsfield has been put on the TIP and taken off and put back on again. She then mentioned the safety issues associated with this project and reiterate its importance. She also mentioned that the City of Pittsfield will absorb some of the costs.

Ms. Eade made a motion to have the North Adams River Street project moved to 2009 from 2008. Mr. Niles seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Collingwood moved to approve scenario 3B. Mr. Lovejoy seconded.

During discussion, Ms. Brown expressed her objection to this motion stating that she would like to move Florida to 2008. She also mentioned her discouragement by broken promises after hard work to keep the project up to ready standards.

Mr. Moore agreed that the Town of Florida had made great efforts to maintain the viability of the River Road project; he stated that he believes that with the changes, the town is right on target.

Mr. Karns stated that the staff has struggled hard with trying to find a good outcome.

Discussed both projects and the commitments made to both communities. He encouraged the MPO to follow through. Asks the MPO to help Florida be ready to go in 2009 should this project not be programmed in 2008.

Ms. Brule would like the MPO to give another form of commitment for 2009. With a motion and a second having been made, Mr. Mohler asked for the MPO to vote on the 3B scenario. The motion carried, unanimously.

Mr. Haupt moved to have the MPO make an effort to commit for Florida by written commitment. During discussion, Mr. Lovejoy expressed concern for making a commitment. Mr. Mohler suggested the MPO, through the BRPC staff, write a letter to the Florida board of selectmen and that said letter be presented to the MPO in draft form for comment at the next MPO meeting.

Mr. Haupt moved to have a draft written for approval. Mr. Niles seconded. Motion carried.

Ms. Church discussed the rest of the TIP including all the planned bridge projects. Mr. Karns mentioned that most of the projects in 2007 are moving in to 2008. Ms. Church stated that alternate bike paths will be discussed at the next MPO meeting and Mr. Karns stated that the bike paths are just programmed for design and not for construction at this time.

Mr. Lovejoy made the motion to approve bridge list. Mr. Collingwood seconded the motion, passed unanimously.

Mr. Collingwood made a motion to advertise the TIP proposal for Public Comment; Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

5. Discussion and Vote to Approve Release of 2008 UPWP

Mr. Church discussed the changes in the UPWP including the three following additional tasks:

- Creation of clickable, interactive on line mapping that delineates traffic count data, accident data, RTP study locations, etc
- A pilot safety study by which a map and database of actual accident locations (i.e. a point rather than a roadway line segment)
- A pilot evacuation study, by which the emergency readiness of an existing road network be assessed (i.e. how long would it take to get to an emergency dispensing site)

Mr. Niles made the motion to approve the UPWP for public review. Mr. Lovejoy second. Motion passed unanimously.

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

Mr. Frieri mentioned that all bridge projects that were for 2007 have been moved to 2008 and 2009. Also mentioned a correction for the Sandisfield Bridge is NFA and not NA. Also stated that on June 14th MassHighway held a meeting to help projects reach 100%. Also thanked Ms. Church for input and support.

7. Other Business

Ms. Church discussed CMAQ projects

Mr. Karns mentioned that Christie Hodges will be replacing Michael Hoffman as the Transportation Planner for the BRPC.

Mr. Mohler stated that Mr. McNeal will be leaving the BRTA.

Mr. McNeal thanked all members and stated his appreciation and support.

8. Next Meeting Date and Agenda

Ms. Church asked if the next meeting date would be August 14th at 4:00PM. There was consensus.

Mr. Haupt moved to adjourn the meeting at 5.50 p.m., seconded by Mr. Lovejoy. The motion carried unanimously.