

**Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting  
Wednesday, July 16th, 2008, 4PM**

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

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

David Mohler, EOT (designee of Secretary of Transportation Bernard Cohen)  
Peter Niles, MassHighway (designee of MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)  
Gary Shepard, BRTA Administrator (BRTA Alternate)  
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)  
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Chairman, (BRPC Alternate)  
Jack Hickey, BRPC Chair (BRPC Representative)  
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington (Southwest Berkshire Representative)  
Thomas Szczepaniak, Town of Dalton (North Central Berkshire Representative)

Member Agency Staff Present:

Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning  
Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1  
Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1  
Nathaniel Karns, Executive Director, BRPC  
Alison Church, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC  
Anuja Koirala, Senior Transportation Planner, BRPC  
Christine Neumann, Transportation Planner, BRPC

Others Present:

Jana Brule, Town of Florida and Berkshire RIDES  
Jeff Cook, Cain, Hibbard, Myers & Cook, Counsel for Boston Symphony Orchestra  
Greg Federspiel, Lenox Town Manager  
John Goerlach, Town of Lanesborough Selectboard  
Sarah Hudson, BRPC Vice-Chair and Tyringham Alternate  
Dana Huff, Tighe and Bond, Inc., representing City of North Adams  
Jason Ostrander, Economic Development Specialist for Congressman John Olver  
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall  
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Vice Chairman  
Ron Tinkham, Baker Hill Road District  
Jeff Vincent, Lenox DPW  
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

**1. Introductions**

Mr. Mohler welcomed everyone to the meeting; members and those present introduced themselves.

**2. Minutes of May 28, 2008 MPO Meeting**

Mr. Hickey moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion carried unanimously, with Mr. Mohler abstaining since he was not present.

**3. Reports from June 18<sup>th</sup> and July 10<sup>th</sup> TAC meetings**

Mr. Siegars summarized the report from the June 18<sup>th</sup> TAC meeting. At the June meeting, the TAC discussed the TIP Evaluation Criteria and requested BRPC give a presentation on the economic forecasting model used in the Regional Transportation Plan at a future meeting. Mr. Haupt summarized the report from the July 10<sup>th</sup> TAC meeting. At the July meeting, the TAC reviewed TIP funding scenarios prepared by BRPC staff and made a recommendation to program the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown, the South Street improvement project in Pittsfield and begin the Mall Road project in Lanesborough in 2011. The Route 183 project in Lenox was not identified as part of the TAC's recommendation.

#### **4. Discussion and Vote to Approve Release of 2009 UPWP**

Ms. Church summarized the changes to the 2009 UPWP made in consideration of comments from TAC members.

- Task 1.3: Public Participation: TAC meetings were included as part of Item 5 of the proposed activities
- Task 2.4: Regional Travel Demand Model: An assessment of the Regional Model's ability to reflect changing travel patterns due to increases in fuel prices has been included under proposed activities
- Task 3.1: Special Studies: An assessment of the impact of high fuel prices on travel patterns has been included under proposed activities
- Task 3.5: Regional Transit Planning: The preparation of a BRTA Needs Assessment and Analysis of Service has been included under proposed activities, along with the preparation of a Central Berkshire Transit Study
- Task 3.9: Assessment of Intermodal Connectors and Goods Movement Study, Phase 2: An assessment of the impact of high fuel costs on goods movement has been included under proposed activities
- Task 3.10: Regional Transportation Plan: This task will focus on the preliminary preparation for the 2011 major update of the Regional Transportation Plan
- Task 4.2: Local Technical Assistance: Acquiring proficiency with the new greenhouse gas emissions component of the Air Quality Analysis under MEPA has been included under proposed activities

Mr. Lovejoy made a motion to release the 2009 UPWP for public review. Mr. Haupt seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **5. Review and Discussion of 2009-2012 TIP**

Mr. Frieri presented the changes to the TIP Evaluation Criteria. Based on suggestions made by TAC members, scoring for Criteria VII-D: Effects on Wildlife Habitat and Rare/Endangered Species has been updated. Projects which improve wildlife accommodations or avoid impacts would now receive a score of 3. Projects that provide some degree of wildlife protection or minimize impacts would receive a score of 2. Projects that provide signage to heighten awareness and/or are within endangered species habitat but avoid impacts would receive a score of 1. It is also possible for projects to now receive a score of negative1, negative2 or negative3 under this criterion, depending on the level of impact. Revised scores were calculated based on these changes. A handout of these revised scores was provided. Another change to the Evaluation Criteria was the use of N/A. Previously, if some criteria did not apply, projects would receive a score of 0, which was included in the total average. Now, if a criterion does not apply, the project will receive an N/A for that criterion, which will not be factored into the average.

Ms. Church briefed the MPO on the different funding scenarios generated by BRPC staff. There were seven scenarios, each with an "A" or "B" version. She asked that the once the MPO is presented with the "A Series" and "B Series" that the MPO choose one or the other before the seven primary scenarios are presented. The "A Series" scenarios allocated CMAQ money to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension project in Adams and HSIP money to reimbursing the City of Pittsfield for overages spent on the Park Square intersection safety improvement project. The "B Series" scenarios allocated both the CMAQ and HSIP monies to an intersection improvement project in the City of North Adams. This project would include signal upgrades at four intersections in the City of North Adams, including River Street at Houghton Street and Main Street at State Street, which were identified as high accident intersections in the 2007 RTP; the River Street at Houghton Street is the intersection with the highest number of accidents in all of Berkshire County. The City of North Adams has hired Tighe and Bond for this project. Tighe and Bond is actively working on this project. MHD indicated that the project could be ready for 2009.

BRPC staff recommended eliminating the "A Series" because the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension project in Adams can be funded through a Congressional earmark and the "B series" would result in completion of an important improvement to safety in the region. Seeing no objection from the MPO members, Mr. Mohler agreed to have BRPC staff proceed with focus on choosing a funding scenario from the "B Series."

Ms. Church explained that TIP funding is constrained in the following ways. First, if the target money is greater than the estimated cost of a project, the project must be completed within one year. Second, the targets cannot be exceeded.

From the TAC's recommendation, BRPC staff developed Scenario 7B which includes completing the Main Road project in Tyringham in 2009, scheduling the River Road project in Florida for 2009-2010, the South Street project in Pittsfield in 2010, the Route 2 project in Williamstown in 2011, and commencement of the Berkshire Mall Drive project (Connector Road) in Lanesborough in 2012.

Since the Lenox Route 183 project was programmed in the existing four year TIP and Scenario 7B, as the scenario derived from the TAC recommendation but subsequent to the TAC meeting, does not include the Route 183 project in Lenox, BRPC staff created Scenario 7B.1 by which completion of the Main Road project in Tyringham will be in 2009, scheduling the River Road project in Florida for 2009-2010, the South Street project in Pittsfield in 2010, the Route 2 project in Williamstown in 2011, the Route 183 project in Lenox would be scheduled for 2012-2013 and the Connector Road project would be moved back to 2013.

Mr. Hickey made a motion to approve Scenario 7B for the TIP funding and to release a draft TIP for public comment. Mr. Collingwood seconded the motion. The motion was left open for discussion.

Mr. Szczepaniak expressed his concern for leaving the Connector Road project to 2012. Mr. Karns explained that the Connector Road project could cost as much as \$9 million, and with only approximately \$4 million in the target for each year, the timing of the Connector Road project greatly influences how many other projects can be funded. Until other funding sources are finalized, FHWA requires the MPO to show funding for the full project cost.

Mr. Scelsi added that the Connector Road project has public support, is important to the regional economy, and will have other funding sources. Mr. Siegars explained that the Baker Hill Road District has received a commitment from the Commissioner for 1/3 of the needed funding; there was some discussion as to "commitment." The Baker Hill Road District has also requested a federal earmark for another third of the necessary funding. Mass Highway is actively reviewing the Connector Road's 100% design plan and the project should be ready to go out to bid by next year.

Mr. Goerlach spoke on behalf of the Lanesborough Selectboard and indicated that the Town of Lanesborough supports the Connector Road project.

Mr. Lovejoy asked Ms. Church to repeat the information of Scenario 7B.1. Ms. Church repeated that the funding sequencing is the same as Scenario 7B until 2012, when instead of the Connector Road, the first year of the Lenox Route 183 project would be programmed. As such, the Connector Road would commence in 2013, with a remaining balance from the second year of the Lenox route 183 project.

Mr. Karns explained that this if the MPO were to vote in favor of this scenario (7B.1), there would be an implicit commitment into the fifth year.

Mr. Mohler explained that, although the Transportation Bond Bill has almost 500 earmarks totaling over \$800 million, earmark money is not guaranteed. In response to questions from MPO members regarding making commitments for funding in 2013, Mr. Mohler explained that, under federal regulations, the MPO cannot add a 5<sup>th</sup> year to the TIP. It could be possible to add an off-line commitment, but making commitments so far in the future does not guarantee that the project will continue to move forward.

Mr. Federspiel explained that the Route 183 project in Lenox was awarded a footprint project designation in 2004. The project is critical to the Town of Lenox, Tanglewood and the region. The Town has already committed over \$150,000 and has hired an engineer. The Town plans on spending an additional \$200,000 to finish the engineering work. The Town held a third public meeting in June and received public support for this project. Mr. Federspiel added that the Route 183 project is timed to coincide with major infrastructure improvements within Tanglewood. Mr. Cook explained that Tanglewood is in the process of developing a Master Plan. Over the next 8–10 years, Tanglewood plans to spend approximately \$20–30 million dollars to upgrade the facilities and improve accessibility. Tanglewood is also looking to link into the municipal sewer system. The best opportunity to link into the municipal sewer system is to add a force main on Route 183. The Route 183 project will include the development of this municipal sewer line.

Mr. Hickey's motion to approve Scenario 7B was brought to a vote. Four MPO members voted in favor. Three MPO members voted "no." The motion passed.

Mr. Karns clarified that the TIP cannot be released for the 30 day public comment period until the MPO receives the Air Quality Conformity Determination. Mr. Mohler noted that EOT expects to send out the Air Quality Conformity Determination by September. Mr. Karns added that, based on this time frame, the TIP will not be in place on October 1<sup>st</sup>.

Ms. Koirala briefly described the bridge and transit projects. The only programmed bridge project is the Hadley overpass project. This project has already been advertised and will be completed in 2011. There were no new transit projects.

Mr. Shepard made a motion to adopt the transit portion of the TIP. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hickey made a motion to authorize BRPC to release the Draft TIP for public comment once the Air Quality Conformity Determination is received. Mr. Niles seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Mr. Frieri briefed the MPO on 2008 TIP Bridge and Highway projects (see handout).

**Bridge Projects:** The Sandisfield bridge project on Norfolk Road has been advertised as of 6/21/08. The Egremont bridge project on Route 41 is at 100% design, but has yet to be advertised due to pending environmental issues. A Right of Way Certificate is also needed for this project.

**Highway Projects:** Mass Highway is currently reviewing the Pittsfield Park Square project. The Right of Way process is almost complete. The project will be advertised before the end of the fiscal year (i.e. September 2008). Mass Highway submitted revised 100% PS&E on 6/27/08 for the Tyringham Main Road project. This project has received its Right of Way Certificate. There was a public hearing on July 9<sup>th</sup> for the West St./Center St. signal & intersection improvements. Mass Highway expects to get this project to 75% design by the end of the month.

**Non-Target Projects:** The consultants for the Reservoir Road project in North Adams are currently preparing revised 100% design plans. The design waiver for this project is under review by Mass Highway. The scope for the Downtown Roadway and Streetscape Improvements project in North Adams has been approved by FHWA. The City and Mass Highway will execute a design contract. Minor modifications are needed to the South Street project in Pittsfield to coordinate project limits with the Park Square project. The Right of Way process for this project is almost complete. The National Highway Preservation project to resurface Route 7 in Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge has been advertised as of 6/28/08.

A handout was provided outlining the status of 2008 UPWP projects. Mr. Karns briefly outlined the highlights. The second public meeting for the Lee Area Traffic Study will be held on August 27<sup>th</sup>. Active coordination has been ongoing between Lee, Lenox and Stockbridge to formulate possible bike trail routes between these communities. BRPC will be issuing the final report of the Southern Berkshire Community Transit Study by August. BRPC plans to initiate a fixed route study with BRTA immediately.

## **7. Other Business**

There was no other business.

## **8. Next Meeting Date and Agenda**

The next meeting of the Berkshire MPO will be held on Tuesday, August 26<sup>th</sup> at 4:00pm. At this meeting, the MPO will vote to approve the UPWP.

Mr. Hickey made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 5:30. Mr. Niles seconded. The motion carried unanimously.