

Minutes of the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Meeting
Tuesday, February 3rd 2009, 4:30 PM
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)
Jay Green, City of North Adams (designee of Mayor John Barrett)
Jack Hickey, BRPC Chair (BRPC Representative)
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington (Southwest Berkshire Representative)
Julie Hannum, Town of Sheffield (Southwest Berkshire Alternate)
Thomas Szczepaniak, Town of Dalton (North Central Berkshire Representative)
Ron Turbin, Town of Williamstown (North 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
Christine Neumann, Transportation Planner, BRPC
Bob Malnati, BRTA

Others Present:

Colleen Henry, Berkshire Mall
Sarah Hudson, Town of Tyringham
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Chairman
Ron Tinkham, Baker Hill Road District
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team
Jason Ostrander, Economic Development Specialist for Congressman John Olver

1. Introductions

Mr. Mohler welcomed everyone to the meeting; members and those present introduced themselves. Mr. Jay Green, the new MPO designee from North Adams, was introduced and welcomed.

2. Minutes of October 21st MPO meeting

Mr. Hickey moved to approve the minutes from the October meeting. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Report of January 20th TAC meeting

Mr. Siegars summarized the report from the January 20th meeting at which elections for FFY2009 were held. Mr. Siegars was elected Chair. Mr. Haupt was elected Vice Chair. BRPC staff provided a presentation on the Lee Traffic Study which described the existing conditions and alternatives under consideration. The TAC will have an opportunity to review and comment on the final report and recommendations before they are brought before the Berkshire MPO. The TAC is scheduled to meet on February 10th to review the FY 2007-2010 TIP amendments under consideration at today's meeting.

4. Opportunity for Public Comment

Mr. Green explained that the design funding for the North Adams downtown streetscape project had been capped at \$180,000 when the project was first developed. The scope of the project has expanded to include a larger area of the downtown. The City's consultant, Tighe & Bond, Inc., estimate the revised final design cost at \$270,400. On behalf of the City of North Adams, Mr. Green requested that the FY2009 program year in the FY2007-2010 TIP be amended to move \$90,400 into the design funding from the amount allocated for construction of the project. Mr. Mohler indicated that Mr. Green's request would be considered under agenda item #6.

5. Review and Discussion of Federal Economic Stimulus Package

Mr. Mohler clarified that, although the economic stimulus package was approved by the House of Representatives, it has not yet been approved by the Senate. If the economic stimulus package is approved, it will contain approximately \$500 million for highway projects and approximately \$300 million for transit projects throughout the Commonwealth. Mr. Mohler explained that each State will be required to obligate at least half of these funds within 90 days. For MHD projects, this means that the project must be ready to be advertised within 90 days. For transit projects, this means that the RTA must have a contract awarded within 90 days.

Mr. Mohler explained that the Commonwealth plans to obligate \$250 million right away to projects that are ready to go. The additional funds will be allocated later through the 2010 TIP development process. EOT is amending TIPs across the Commonwealth to include as many projects as possible that can be ready within 90 days. Mr. Mohler noted that if the Commonwealth cannot obligate these funds, the money will be given to other States. If the Commonwealth obligates all of its funds, it may be able to obtain additional funds from states which were not able to do so.

EOT solicited transportation projects primarily from state and regional implementing agencies, including RTAs, MHD, Mass Turnpike, Mass Aeronautics Commission and DCR. EOT did not solicit individual projects directly from cities and towns.

The Lieutenant Governor's Office solicited projects directly and cities and towns. The 351 cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth submitted 4,500 projects. Out of these 4,500 projects, approximately 1,500 were transportation projects. EOT is in the process of determining how many of these projects are federal aid eligible and are ready to be advertised within 90 days. In response to a question from Mr. Karns, Mr. Mohler clarified that projects will be selected based on readiness and geographic distribution.

Mr. Mohler explained that there is currently no provision in the economic stimulus package for cities and towns to be able to access this money directly. These projects must be within the existing federal aid system and must be overseen by MHD.

Mr. Mohler added that the administration of Massachusetts is recommending to Congress that the transportation portion of the economic stimulus package include a supplemental Chapter 90 program that would not require projects to be within the existing federal aid system nor to be overseen by MHD so that cities and towns can access the remaining funds directly for local transportation projects that can be completed quickly.

Assuming that individual communities support this idea, Mr. Mohler encouraged everyone to lobby the two U.S. senators to include a supplemental Chapter 90 program in the economic stimulus package. Later, Mr. Hickey suggested that BRPC circulate a letter to this effect to all of the communities in Berkshire County as well as to colleagues at other regional planning commissions across the Commonwealth.

6. Vote to Approve for Public Release an FY09 amendment to the FY07-10 TIP

Mr. Mohler explained that the MPO is voting to approve an FY09 amendment to the FY07-10 TIP for a 15 day public comment period, rather than the typical 30 day period so that these projects can begin as soon as the economic stimulus package passes the Senate.

There are three additions and one revised cost to highway projects.

- Bridge replacement on Old Pleasant Street over the Housatonic River, Lee
This project will be added to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP. It will be funded through federal aid Special Bridge funds developed by the federal government after the Minneapolis bridge collapse in 2007.

- Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road reconstruction, Lanesborough
This project will be added to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP. It will be funded through economic stimulus funds. By funding this project through the economic stimulus package, more funds will be available through the Berkshire County TIP.
- Route 7A, Kemble Street reconstruction, Lenox
This project will be added to the list of amendments at the request of MHD. It will be added to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP and funded through economic stimulus funds. This project has been at 100% design for six years. The Right-of-Way process is almost complete. The total cost for this project is \$4.4 million.

Mr. Niles moved to add the Kemble Street project to the list of amendments for placement in the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP to be funded through the economic stimulus package. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- Downtown Roadway and Streetscape Improvements, North Adams
The scope for this project has been expanded to include a larger area of the downtown. As such, Mr. Green requested that \$90,400 be moved out of the amount programmed for construction and into the design funding.

Mr. Green moved to amend the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP to allow \$90,400 to be moved from construction costs into design costs. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hickey moved to approve the highway portion of the FY07-10 TIP amendments. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

There were three additions and one revised cost to transit projects. Mr. Shepard noted that these changes are in line with the BRTA's long range plan.

- Facility Upgrade
The cost of this project has increased by \$30,000 for a revised total cost of \$85,000.
- Revenue Vehicles and Fareboxes: 4 23' 17 passenger minibus and fareboxes
This project will be added to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP.
- Revenue Vehicles and Fareboxes: 1 26' 23 passenger minibus and fareboxes
This project will be added to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP.
- Phase 1 ITS Implementation
This project will be added to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP.

Mr. Hickey moved to approve the transit portion of the FY07-10 TIP amendments. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Niles moved to release the complete FY07-10 TIP amendments for a 15 day public comment period. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The public comment period will begin on Friday, February 6th with the publication of a public notice in the Berkshire Eagle.

7. Review and Discussion of 2009-2012 TIP

Mr. Mohler explained that the 2009-2012 TIP cannot be released until the Boston MPO completes its air quality conformity analysis of its Regional Transportation Plan. The Boston MPO's Regional Transportation Plan cannot be adopted until the Boston MPO receives financial information from EOT. Mr. Mohler noted that EOT anticipates getting this information to the Boston MPO by the end of this month. The Boston MPO's Regional Transportation Plan will be ready for adoption sometime in April or May. Once that is complete, FY 2009-2012 TIPs will be ready for adoption.

There was a brief discussion about potentially not needing an FY09 TIP because all of the 2009 projects in Berkshire County have been or will be advertised shortly. Mr. Mohler indicated that it may be possible to eliminate a FY09 TIP because of the amendments to the FY09 element of the FY07-10 TIP. The next TIP would be for the

period from 2010 through 2013. This will need to be discussed with the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies (MARPA) and if it makes sense, the MPO will consider the possibility of eliminating an FY09 TIP in May. Ms. Church added that solicitation of projects for the FY2010 – 2013 TIP will commence this month.

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

Mr. Frieri briefed the MPO on the status of 2008-2012 TIP Bridge and Highway projects (see handout). All of the 2008 projects have been advertised. Regarding 2009 projects, Mr. Frieri noted that the target projects have been advertised and that the City of North Adams is continuing to work on the design of their downtown streetscape project. Mr. Frieri clarified that the Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road project will be taken off the 2012 TIP program and will be funded through the economic stimulus package. Mr. Frieri explained that each year's target funds must be spent within that year but that non-target/earmark project funding may be carried over to the following year if conditions warrant.

Mr. Karns announced that money has been re-allocated for the Route 7/20 Corridor Access Management project. BRPC would like this project to begin as of July 1st.

Mr. Karns briefed the MPO on the Lee Traffic Study and the BRTA Needs Assessment Study. Regarding the Lee Traffic Study, BRPC staff provided an overview of the study to the TAC at their January 20th meeting. The last public meeting was held on January 21st. BRPC staff is currently preparing the final report and recommendations. BRPC staff will present the final recommendations to the MPO at a meeting to be held in late March or early April.

Mr. Lovejoy noted that he attended the last public meeting. His perception was that it is unfortunate that there may not be the political will to take this project to the next step. There did not appear to be any alternative that anyone liked. Ms. Church noted that there are also costs and impacts associated with not making any changes to the existing system. Mr. Lovejoy and Ms. Hudson commented that these costs should be more clearly presented. Mr. Hickey complimented the staff on their effort.

Regarding the BRTA Needs Assessment Study, Ms. Church made a presentation to the BRTA Advisory Board last week. The analysis completed by BRPC staff shows that there are some routes that are not utilized as much as others and there may be potential for better utilization of resources.

Mr. Karns noted that Ms. Neumann has been working with town bike trail committees in Lee and Stockbridge to develop early feasibility study work for a continuation of the Ashuwillticook through South County.

Mr. Karns noted that BRPC staff is developing an update to the Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan for Jacob's Ladder Trail which was first written in 1994.

9. Other Business

Mr. Karns explained that the previous Executive Director of the Southern Chamber of Commerce had also been their TAC representative. The new Executive Director, Christine Ludwiszewski, has requested that she be the TAC representative. Mr. Hickey moved to approve Ms. Ludwiszewski as the new TAC representative from the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Szczepaniak seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

There was some discussion about the Housatonic Street project in Dalton and the Bash Bish Falls Road project in Mount Washington. Mr. Karns encouraged the towns to submit new project data forms to BRPC for consideration in the 2010-2013 TIP. Mr. Mohler added these projects could receive economic stimulus money in 2010.

10. Next Meeting Date and Agenda

The next meeting of the Berkshire MPO will be held on Friday, February 27th at 4:30 p.m. to approve the amendment to the FY 2007-2010 TIP.

Mr. Hickey moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:20 P.M. Mr. Niles seconded. The motion carried unanimously.