

## **BERKSHIRE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)**

**Meeting of Tuesday, November 29, 2005**

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, 1 Fenn Street, Pittsfield, Massachusetts

### **MINUTES**

#### **MPO Representatives Present:**

Thomas Cahir, Deputy Secretary, EOT, Chair (representing Secretary of Transportation John Cogliano)

Sandra Lamb, Chair, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority

Sam Haupt, Chair, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

Ross Dindio, MassHighway District 1 Highway Director, (representing MassHighway Commissioner Luisa Paiewonsky)

#### **Agency Staff Present:**

Nat Karns, Executive Director, BRPC

Andrew Lenton, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC

Ethan Abeles, BRPC

Chuck MacNeil, Administrator, BRTA

Mark Moore, MassHighway District 1

Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1

Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning

Bruce Collingwood, Public Works Director, City of Pittsfield

Paul Maloney, Federal Highway Administration

Michael Chong, Federal Highway Administration

#### **Others Present:**

Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT)

#### **1. Minutes of meeting of August 17, 2005**

**Upon a motion by Ross Dindio, seconded by Sandra Lamb, the MPO voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous meeting.**

#### **2. Briefing on South Street Alternatives Study**

Andrew Lenton gave an overview of the Study. He discussed the impetus for the study, which he pointed out came from Congress, the public meetings, and the analysis of current and future no-build conditions. Mr. Lenton then went into detail on the list of alternatives developed by BRPC. The TSM alternative has been analyzed, but the other alternatives will be analyzed only after the 11/29 Public Meeting. Road widening to four lanes appears to be infeasible and unwarranted. Road widening to three lanes in locations that are currently two lanes is feasible, but again may not be warranted by the level of service analysis. The alternatives will be analyzed using criteria similar to the statewide transportation evaluation criteria. Thomas Cahir asked if this is the first time the study will be presented to the public. Nat Karns clarified that the evaluation of the alternatives will not be

presented to the public because that analysis has not been done yet. Discussion ensued concerning the public meeting. Questions arose concerning the publicity of the meeting. Mr. Lenton described the publicity process, which he characterized as sufficient. Sam Haupt responded to an earlier question raised by Mr. Lenton concerning an aspect of the level of service analysis. If more traffic is moved to the already overwhelmed W. Housatonic/ South St. intersection, the conditions at this intersection will worsen even further.

### 3. Briefing on Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study

Nat Karns described the progress of the Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study. BRPC staff is acting as technical reviewers and administrative support. The project is looking to improve access through and into Downtown Pittsfield. Nat described the current conditions. The major problems are primarily at intersections in the north end around the Berkshire Medical Center and the south end around Park Square. The four block area at the south end of downtown is the critical bottleneck affecting all regional mobility. The worst locations are Park Square, First Street between East and Fenn Streets, South Street at Housatonic Street, and First Street at Tyler Street in the north end. The signal equipment is outdated. The alternatives that are being considered are site-specific to the north and south ends. The alternatives included transportation system management throughout the study area, replacing and coordinating the signals, removing some visual obstructions, improving turning radii, lengthening turning lanes, and some parking changes. Traffic calming measures are being considered for some areas. A possible option includes reducing lane widths, but keeping North Street 4 lanes – the reduction of North Street to two lanes does not appear to be viable. Encouraging travel via Center and Seymour Streets is an option. Major changes in the vicinity of the Berkshire Medical Center are being considered. The Medical Center is in the midst on undergoing a master planning process and there is the possibility to coordinate efforts. Nat described a number of other design-level options being considered in the study. A public meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2006. Bruce Collingwood informed the group that Pittsfield has stretched out the schedule to coordinate with the streetscape initiative, and expressed his satisfaction with the consultant's work to date. Thomas Cahir inquired about the outreach for the public meeting. Mr. Karns responded that the City is in control of the outreach component for the meeting. He described the competing goals that these projects face including the difficult balance of moving traffic more efficiently through and around downtown Pittsfield, but not at higher velocities unacceptable to downtown businesses and the residential community who would be impacted.

### 4. Summary of Other 2005 Accomplishments

Andrew Lenton summarized the accomplishments for 2005, which include:

- MPO MOU
- Pictometry
- Traffic Counts for regional planning purposes
- Transit component for the traffic model
- Great Barrington parking and traffic study

- Two major studies (South Street Alternative Study and Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study)
- Phase 1 of the Goods movement study
- Route 8 Corridor Access Management Study for Lanesborough
- South County Community Transit Study
- Pavement management and local technical assistance

Discussion followed concerning the Route 8 access management study. Nat explained that this was an earmark that Congressman Olver included some time ago. Land taking and swapping was discussed. There are additional concerns that will need to be addressed in the future.

#### 5. Status of MOU Implementation

Thomas Cahir gave a little background on the MPO MOU, and the importance of the process. Mr. Cahir asked about the selection of MPO board members from the Selectmen's Association. Nat Karns stated that the mayors are not the problem, but that selecting representative Select Persons will be a challenge. Mr. Karns and Ross Dindio reported that they had met with the Selectmen's Association, which declined to be the vehicle for the election of sub-regional representatives as called for in the MOU. Karns & Dindio are working to resolve South-Central geography, with a meeting set for 12/1, and a North County meeting on 12/15. The other two sub-regional meetings remained to be scheduled. Mr. Cahir described similar efforts in other parts of the state. Mr. Dindio expressed the parochialism present among some of the towns making it difficult for some towns to work together and appoint a single representative. Michael Chong brought up the PowerPoint presentation FHWA has developed for new MPO members and how it may be helpful in educating new MPO members. A discussion of the transportation committee and transportation advisory committee followed a comment by Paul Maloney. Sam Haupt said the difficulty of getting selectmen to participate in MPO is similar to the difficulty of recruiting BRPC delegates and alternates. Paul Maloney attested to this process working well and smoothly in other regions. Mr. Karns asked for help from EOT and FHWA in identifying successful transportation advisory committees that have worked particularly well in other parts of the state. He stated that the need for an established transportation committee is real. The BRPC transportation committee has fulfilled this role, but it is too small. Conversely, the Berkshire Transportation Forum is much too large. He expressed the need to have all interests at the table, citing Jane Winn, a committed environmentalist, as an example. Andrew Lenton inquired about the origins of the adjective 'joint' in Joint Transportation Committee. Mark Guenard responded that in some regions the adjective describes both the highway and transit components of transportation committee.

#### 6. 2006 Regional Transportation Plan Update – Scope of Work

Andrew Lenton described the RTP Plan update work scope. Mark Guenard stated that the last determination was in December 2003, but that the Plan update should be endorsed by September 30, 2006. Nat Karns pointed out that under the current

schedule set by EOT there is more spending at the back end on review and process then on the actual RTP update work. Tom Cahir responded that projects must be in the RTP in order to make it into the TIP. Mr. Karns pointed out that the all three certification documents are currently scheduled to be acted on by the MPO in a single meeting in August, and he suggested that the RTP be considered at its own meeting. Mr. Lenton stated that TEA-21 will be the guiding regulation for the Plan update. Michael Chong responded that this is acceptable to FHWA. He asked if FHWA can get the draft document earlier in the process. Mr. Lenton responded that FHWA will receive a copy when the MPO does since FHWA is on the distribution list.

#### 7. Status Reports on Planning & Design Projects of Member Agencies

Peter Frieri sent around a handout with details on TIP projects advertised in 2005. This summary includes four highway projects totaling \$5.2 million, and four bridge projects totaling \$5.3 million. Nat Karns asked about the status of the rest of the fiscal year 2006 projects. Mark Moore gave an update on the Dalton South Street project. There have been meetings with the consultant and weekly updates with the consultant, but there are a number of environmental permits that need to be acquired and other potential issues holding up progress. Ross Dindio discussed the difficulties associated with the Dalton South Street Project in detail, but assured the group that the project would be ready for bids in an acceptable timeframe. He reported that he had met with the town and stated that the project must go forward. According to Dindio, there will be an adverse taking. Mr. Karns asked about the status of the Pittsfield East Street project design. Bruce Collingwood stated that his department (DPW) had been charged with the task of contracting a consultant and had started developing the Request for Qualifications (RFQ). Mark Moore informed the group that the South Street & Housatonic Street intersection design is heading toward 100%.

#### 8. Other Business

Andrew Lenton stated that there are a couple of TIP-related items for discussion. He described \$375,000 of eligible CMAQ funding that is available for BRTA to purchase two hybrid buses. Mark Guenard reported that it is a bit premature to pursue this because the State is still waiting on final numbers from Congress. He continued that if there is a CMAQ eligible project, it does not hurt to get the process started.

Nat Karns and Mark Guenard discussed the earmarks that have been set aside for the region.

Mr. Lenton mentioned that BRPC has prepared an Appendix to the 2006-2010 Transportation Improvement Program and that copies are available. Most present received a copy.

Sam Haupt extended his appreciation for EOT's efforts relating to collecting public comments on the Statewide Transportation Plan. Mr. Haupt also

expressed his concern as to whether the comments will be adequately addressed and responded to by the State. Tom Cahir reported that the EOT has received “literally thousands” of comments and that the public participation process has been a very fruitful one. Mr. Cahir and Mark Guenard offered their assurances that a task force had been created to address the comments and incorporate them into the final document, but the time table for this would be somewhat delayed by a maternity leave. Comments will be published on the Web.

9. Next meeting date and agenda

Mark Guenard informed the group that Pioneer Valley has an MPO meeting tentatively scheduled for Wednesday 1/11/06. The desire of the EOT representatives to schedule both of these Western Massachusetts MPO meetings on the same day may require that the Berkshire MPO also meet on this day in the afternoon. A preliminary agenda was discussed, including discussion of TIP amendments, the Regional Transportation Plan, and the South Street Alternatives Study Public Meeting.