

BERKSHIRE METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)

Meeting of Tuesday, May 16, 2006

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

MINUTES

MPO Representatives and Alternates Present:

Ken Miller, Director, EOT Planning, Chair (designee of Secretary of Transportation John Cogliano)

Sam Haupt, BRPC Chair

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

Bruce Collingwood, Public Works Director, City of Pittsfield (designee of Mayor James Ruberto)

Philip Guy, Town of Williamstown, representing North towns

Joseph Dean, BRTA Vice-Chair (alternate for Sandra Lamb, BRTA Chair)

Ed Goddard, Town of Hinsdale, representing North-Central towns

Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington, alternate from Southwest towns

Member Agency Staff Present:

Nat Karns, Executive Director, BRPC

Andrew Lenton, Transportation Program Manager, BRPC

Anuja Koirala, BRPC

Michael Hoffmann, BRPC

Chuck MacNeil, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority

Peter Frieri, MassHighway District 1

Mark Moore, Masshighway District 1

Mark Guenard, EOT Office of Transportation Planning

Others Present:

Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

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Agenda Item 1: Minutes of meeting of April 10, 2006

A motion to approve minutes of previous meeting, seconded by Edward Goddard, was passed unanimously.

Agenda Item 2: Election of Vice-Chair

Item moved down agenda.

Agenda Item 3: 2007-2011 Transportation Improvement Program Improvement Program (TIP) Development

Item moved down agenda.

Ken Miller suggested skipping to Agenda Item 7.

Agenda Item 7: Status Reports on Planning & Design Projects of Member

Agencies and Others:

Peter Frieri gave update on Mass Highway bridge and highway projects and provided a handout regarding this update.

Ross Dindio noted that the Town of Dalton voted yes to establishing right-of-way for the South Street project.

Chuck MacNeil noted the following in regard to SAFETEA-LU funding: Rural Transportation funds (5311 funds) are being increased; BRTA waiting on how New Freedom funds will be allocated by both the FTA and the State.

[Minutes Author note: New Freedom is an FTA program intended to encourage services and facility improvements to address the transportation needs of persons with disabilities that go beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. New Freedom provides a new formula grant program for associated capital and operating costs. New Freedom funds are allocated through a formula based upon population of persons with disabilities. Allocations are made to designated recipients in areas over 200,000 (60%), to States for areas under 200,000 (20%) and non-urbanized areas (20%); States may transfer funds to urbanized or non-urbanized area programs as long as funds are used for New Freedom Program purposes. States and designated recipients must select grantees competitively. This information was excerpted from the FTA website].

In response to Nat Karns' question, Mr. MacNeil noted that he envisioned FTA Section 5311 funds totaling approximately \$2.1 million.

Andrew Lenton noted that progress was being made with the private consultant for the Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study. Mr. Lenton noted that a presentation by the consultant would be forthcoming at an upcoming MPO meeting. Mr. Lenton also noted that the final draft of the South Street Alternatives Study would be forthcoming and would be accompanied by a presentation to the MPO.

Bruce Collingwood provided an update of Pittsfield's streetscape project.

Agenda Item 3: 2007-2011 Transportation Improvement Program Improvement Program (TIP) Development

Ken Miller spoke about the recent meeting with state RPA's and provided an explanation of "targets" to the MPO. Nat Karns remarked that funding appears flat over the next four (4) years.

Ed Goddard inquired into how the state's "regional mega-projects" were chosen. Ken Miller noted that he was not entirely clear as to how it was done in the past, but that the state is looking into changing from current system to a National Highway System mega-project system in which the choice of mega-projects would be de-politicized. Nat Karns inquired of Mr. Miller whether the MPO would have up/down voting power on programming a regional mega-project into the TIP. Mr. Miller affirmed that the MPO would have this power, and further that Mass Highway couldn't do a project that was not in the Berkshire RTP. Jim Lovejoy

inquired as to whether non-highway mega-projects were ever considered. Mr. Miller responded that transit and other alternate-mode projects are considered.

Andrew Lenton discussed the TIP development worksheet, noting the \$1 million surplus of STP funds for 2007. Mr. Lenton discussed the details of the TIP priority meeting that was held recently with Mass Highway. Mr. Lenton went on to note that the use of the criteria of truck percentage for TIP evaluation was new and was intended to place emphasis on roadways that are important to commerce – Mr. Lenton asked the MPO if there was any objections to the truck percentage scoring approach.

Ed Goddard inquired into whether tourism was gauged in the TIP evaluation. Nat Karns responded that the vehicle volume criteria accounts for tourism.

Ken Miller noted that truck percentage is only a component of the economic development criteria.

Andrew Lenton discussed the difference between the two categories of TIP projects; system preservation and improvements. Ken Miller noted that the evaluation process was in place to help the MPO make a decision – that it did not replace discussion and decision-making to be done by the MPO.

Andrew Lenton discussed the 7.5 percentage factor that was utilized during analysis in an attempt to allow system preservation and improvement projects to be directly compared against one another. Ed Goddard noted that this approach was not statistically sound. Mr. Goddard noted that the adjustment factor should be based on the full range of possible scores, rather than the difference between the maximum possible scores.

Ken Miller noted that Mass Highway prefers the use of two different scoring scales – one for system preservation projects and one for improvement projects. Nat Karns remarked that the BRPC attempt to allow for an apples-to-apples evaluation was rooted in the Berkshire Region's limited project funding dollar. Mr. Miller remarked to the MPO that the MPO will need to decide which evaluation scoring approach should be used, and that he would recommend the second, unweighted scoring approach.

Ross Dindio noted that, given the new makeup of the MPO, it might be prudent to allow the MPO members to decide on the regional significance of projects once the evaluation is done – at which point the MPO will need to make the hard decisions based on local knowledge.

Jim Lovejoy inquired as to whether the type of TIP evaluation criteria being discussed was mandated by the federal government. Ken Miller responded that there is no federal requirement for such an evaluation, but that Mass Highway recommends evaluation to make the decision process as transparent and

objective as possible. Mr. Miller reiterated that the evaluation is intended as supporting information – that the evaluation is not a substitute for MPO decision-making. Andrew Lenton noted the history of TIP project evaluation – from the old “ADT only” evaluation to today’s more multi-faceted approach.

Ken Miller remarked that he would like to see the following changes to TIP project evaluation table: describe the project (don’t simply include the name of the road); don’t score on cost effectiveness; provide scoring methodology; note earmark funded projects; note “readiness” of project, note CMAQ eligibility.

Jim Lovejoy noted that he would like to see BRPC staff produce a filtered “suggested list”. Nat Karns noted that the problem with such a filtered list is that each community wants to see that its project was scored and wants to know why it ranked lower.

Ken Miller reiterated that he would like to see a table which took into account his suggested changes. Ed Goddard noted that he would like to see system preservation and improvement projects on separate evaluation scoring tables.

Ken Miller noted that minor rural collectors are eligible under new SAFETEA-LU stipulations.

Nat Karns noted to the MPO that Federal Transit Authority CMAQ funds for transit projects, unlike STP funds, can be flexed from year to year.

Agenda Item 2: Election of Vice-Chair

Ken Miller opened the floor for nominations. Nat Karns noted that the nomination from the previous meeting, that of the BRTA Chair, was still on the table. Jim Lovejoy nominated Gordon Bailey in Mr. Bailey’s absence. Mr. Miller noted that there were now two nominations.

In response to a question from Ed Goddard, Mr. Miller noted that the role of the Vice-Chair was to conduct the MPO meeting when the Chair representative was not able to attend.

Mr. Lovejoy motioned to close the nominations, Bruce Collingwood seconded the motion. After a consensus vote, Mr. Miller declared that the motion to close nominations was carried.

Mr. Miller asked the MPO if a vote by hand was acceptable to all – to which all members consented it was. The final vote by hand resulted in three votes for Gordon Bailey and two votes for the BRTA Chair. Mr. Miller noted that the motion for Gordon Bailey as Vice-Chair was passed.

Nat Karns noted that the next MPO memorandum of understanding (MOU) should take into account the issue of a change in elected officials – Mr. Karns also

suggested that the next election of MPO representatives should be done following region-wide town elections.

~Agenda Item 3 discussed earlier~

Agenda Item 4: Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Update

Andrew Lenton provided a general description of the UPWP. Mr. Lenton noted that the 2007 UPWP had not progressed to document form yet – that a first draft of the 2007 UPWP would be made available at the June MPO meeting. Mr. Lenton noted that the UPWP was on the same development schedule as the TIP process.

Ken Miller requested that Andrew provide MPO members a draft of the UPWP a week before the June MPO meeting.

Nat Karns discussed UPWP funding.

In response to Ed Goddard, Mr. Karns noted that planning study nominations come from various sources – local communities, MPO members, etc.

Agenda Item 5: Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Update

Michael Hoffmann discussed BRPC staff approach to updating RTP goals and objectives.

Ken Miller noted that there should be a relationship between TIP scoring criteria and the RTP goals and objectives. Mr. Miller also remarked that there were currently no goals for improving mobility or sustainable transportation development in the RTP. Mr. Miller also noted that he would like to see the topics of security and environmental justice included in the RTP goals and objectives.

Nat Karns noted that the existing RTP goals and objectives mirrored the *Regional Plan for the Berkshires*, and that it should remain so. Mr. Miller responded that the *Regional Plan for the Berkshires* was not a product of the MPO, whereas the RTP is.

Agenda Item 6: Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC)

Michael Hoffmann discussed the solicitation-of-interest letters sent out to towns, state agencies, and other transportation-stakeholder agencies. Mr. Hoffmann noted that only four (4) responses had been received up to this time.

Ken Miller, speaking about the issue of TAC member composition, noted that the Boston MPO sets aside a set number of slots for different groups so as to ensure a balanced representation of interests. Mr. Miller also suggested that colleges in the region should be solicited for their interest in being on the TAC.

Ross Dindio offered the services of Mass Highway District One staff to help contact and assemble potential TAC members.

~Agenda Item 7 discussed earlier~

Agenda Item 8: Other Business

No remarks.

Agenda Item 9: Next Meeting Date

The MPO agreed to meet next on Tuesday, June 20, 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.