

# Report from the Berkshire Transportation Advisory Committee to the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization

~ From the Meeting Held on July 10, 2008 ~

## Summary of Items Discussed

### 1. Review of 2009-2012 TIP commencing October 1, 2008 – September 20, 2012

Mr. Frieri presented the changes to the TIP Evaluation Criteria made since the last TAC meeting. 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 negative score of -1, -2 or -3 under this criterion, depending on the level of impact. 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. The two major project types – preservation and improvement projects – have not changed. Preservation projects are those that stay within the existing footprint of the road and/or include minor changes. Improvements projects include more major improvements, such as widening and realignment projects. In response to questions from TAC members, Mr. Frieri explained that bike path projects do not really fit into the matrix and still need a better method of scoring.

Ms. Church informed the TAC that, until EOT authorizes an air quality conformity determination, there will be no TIP documents released for public review anywhere throughout the State.

Ms. Church presented the highlights of the 6 different TIP funding scenarios that BRPC staff had developed. BRPC staff recommended scheduling improvement projects with high evaluation scores and noted that any projects involving intersections could potentially have CMAQ components. Ms. Church also explained that inflation was taken into account through reduction in the targets.

- Scenario 1 includes four projects that could be completed over four years. These projects are the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 183 preservation project in Lenox, the Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown and the South Street improvement project in Pittsfield. Two of these projects – the Route 183 project in Lenox and the South Street project in Pittsfield – could potentially have CMAQ components. The South Street project in Pittsfield received an evaluation score higher than 10 (10.88). Scenario 1 would leave \$828,620.00 to carry forward into 2013. It is important to note that “carry forward” costs are subject to increased expenses and represent an estimate based on currently available information.
- Scenario 2 includes four projects that could be completed over four years. These projects are the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 183 preservation project in Lenox, the Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown and the East Street improvement project in

Pittsfield. Two of these projects – the Route 183 project in Lenox and the East Street project in Pittsfield – could potentially have CMAQ components. The East Street project in Pittsfield received an evaluation score higher than 12 (12.77). Scenario 2 would leave \$2,005,549.00 to carry forward into 2013.

- Scenario 3 includes four projects that could be completed over four years. These projects are the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 183 preservation project in Lenox, the Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown and the Main Street improvement project in Great Barrington. Two of these projects – the Route 183 project in Lenox and the Main Street project in Great Barrington – could potentially have CMAQ components. The Main Street project in Great Barrington received an evaluation score higher than 10 (10.92). Scenario 3 would leave \$194,451.00 to carry forward into 2013.
- Scenario 4 includes four projects that could be completed over four years. These projects are the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 183 preservation project in Lenox, the Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown and the Mall Road improvement project in Lanesborough, beginning in 2012. One project – the Route 183 project in Lenox – could potentially have CMAQ components. However, under this scenario there would be no projects scheduled with an evaluation score greater than 10. Scenario 4 would leave \$8,588,409.00 to carry forward into 2013.
- Scenario 5 includes three projects that could be completed over four years. These projects are the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 183 preservation project in Lenox, and the Mall Road improvement project in Lanesborough, beginning in 2011. One project – the Route 183 project in Lenox – could potentially have CMAQ components. However, under this scenario there would be no projects scheduled with an evaluation score greater than 10. Scenario 5 would leave \$5,088,409.00 to carry forward into 2013.
- Scenario 6 includes two projects that could be completed over four years. This project is the River Road improvement project in Florida. This scenario includes scheduling the Mall Road improvement project in 2010. Scenario 6 does not include any CMAQ projects or any projects with an evaluation score higher than 10. Scenario 6 would leave \$1,054,041.00 to carry forward into 2013.

Scenarios 1-4 are identical, except for what project would be started in 2012. Scenario 4 introduces the Mall Road project in Lanesborough in 2012. The River Road project in Florida is included in all six scenarios. In Scenarios 1-5, the Route 183 project in Lenox could be completed, which is a fairly high scoring preservation project involving CMAQ components. The only scenarios in which the Route 2 project in Williamstown could be completed are Scenarios 1-4.

In his capacity as the spokesperson for the Baker Hill Road District, Mr. Siegars presented on the Mall Road improvement project. The Working Group for this project includes Selectmen from the Town of Lanesborough and representatives from the Baker Hill Road District and the Berkshire Mall. The Mall Road connects Route 7 and Route 8. The road was built in 1989 by the Berkshire Mall Group for a total of \$10 million. As part of the financing, the Group obtained General Obligation Bonds. Consequently, the Baker Hill Road District, a public entity, was created as a fiduciary to guarantee repayment of the bonds. The Baker Hill Road District holds the title to the Mall Road. The only entity within the Road District is the Berkshire Mall. The Baker Hill Road District is funded entirely by the Berkshire Mall. Since the road was built in 1989, the Mall has invested over \$35 million in construction and maintenance. After the road was acquired by the

Baker Hill Road District, agreements were created with the Berkshire Mall. These agreements are essentially funded by the Mall for maintenance, paying off the bonds and future work.

Currently, people travelling on the Mall Road are forced to make two right hand, or two left hand turns in order to navigate the Mall ring road. Under the redesign, the Mall Road would be a straight, non-stop route past the Mall with turning lanes to access the Mall. The redesign will essentially remain within the existing footprint with a 15' change in elevation to allow adequate stopping sight distance and the addition of 5' shoulders which will increase the total width of the road by 10'. The project will require full depth reconstruction. This will include the excavation of 4' from underneath the road in order to add subdrains and 2' of gravel or special fill. The road base will be rebuilt so that there will be 7.5" of asphalt on top. The existing detention structures will be retained. The design speed is 45 mph. The current estimated use of the Mall Road is about 6,400 trips per day. It will be limited access highway. There will be one curb cut to allow Petricca access and two other curb cuts to access the Mall. No other curb cuts will be permitted without Town of Lanesborough approval. The Mall Road has recently been renamed the Route 7 – Route 8 Connector Road. The total cost of the Connector Road project is estimated to be \$8.6 million. With a detour plan, the total cost would be decreased to \$7.4 million. The project will potentially receive a \$3 million earmark when the Transportation Bond bill is approved by the Senate. The maintenance of the Connector Road is currently undertaken by the Mall. It is expected that a maintenance agreement will be necessary. The final Right of Way plans have been submitted. The layout plans have been submitted and reviewed. All environmental permits have been issued and an ENF certificate has been received. The easement and takings documents are being reviewed. Mass Highway is currently reviewing the 100% design plan and detour plans to close the Connector Road for 7 months during the reconstruction. The detour plan, which has received approval from the Lanesborough Selectmen, will include using Swamp Road and Partridge Road. Some intersection improvements and repaving on these roads will be necessary.

Mr. Karns suggested that something other than an at-grade crossing be considered for the bike path crossing near the Route 8 entrance in order to allow safe bicycle passage southward. BRPC suggested building an underpass with adequate sight distance as part of the redesign of the Connector Road. Mr. Siegars explained there are plans to add a sidewalk from the Mall parking lot down to the trail but that major flooding and wetlands are an issue.

Mr. Burdick presented on the Florida River Road project. The Town of Florida has been working on this project for over ten years. The Town has made changes to the project in order to comply with DCR, DEP and other State and Federal regulations. The project is currently being reviewed by MEPA. The Town has submitted the plan to Mass Highway and will be making changes based on Mass Highway's suggestions. The Town also anticipates receiving the temporary and permanent easements within the next few weeks. In terms of design and permitting and contingent on MEPA approval, Mr. Frieri indicated that Mass Highway believes the project will be ready to move forward within the next fiscal year.

Mr. Karns and Mr. Frieri briefly described the other projects under consideration. The Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown includes the rehabilitation of a large retaining wall near the State line that is in an advanced state of deterioration. 25% design plans have been submitted for this project. Mr. Frieri noted that it is a high priority of District 1 to fix the retaining wall. The

Route 183 preservation project in Lenox encompasses the area from the village center to the Stockbridge Town Line near Tanglewood. This project would involve rehabilitation of the pavement and sidewalk widening. The Main Street improvement project in Great Barrington was part of the recommendations included in the Great Barrington Circulation Study done by BRPC. This project is still at the pre-25% design stage but could be a relatively short term project at relatively low cost. The project would include minor intersection adjustments and safety improvements including improvements to pedestrian crosswalks and possibly traffic signalization improvements. Neither the South Street project in Pittsfield nor the Main Street project in Great Barrington is ready for design. Both of these projects have congestion issues and obsolete traffic signal systems.

The TAC discussed the various alternatives and asked for a BRPC staff recommendation. After much discussion, the TAC reached the conclusion to recommend to the MPO to program the River Road improvement project in Florida, the Route 2 preservation project in Williamstown, the South Street improvement project in Pittsfield and schedule the Connector Road project in Lanesborough for 2011. Mr. Hickey made a motion to recommend this scenario to the MPO for consideration. Mr. Feigin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Koirala briefly described the bridge and transit projects. The only non-federally funded bridge project is the Hadley overpass project which would be completed in 2011. There were no new transit projects.

## **2. Review of 2009 UPWP**

Ms. Church briefed the TAC on the updated Draft UPWP and summarized the changes from the last meeting.

- Task 2.4: Regional Travel Demand Model has been updated to include an assessment of the Regional Model's ability to reflect changing travel patterns due to increases in fuel prices.
- Task 3.1: Special Studies has been updated to include an assessment of the impact of high fuel prices on travel patterns.
- Task 3.5: Regional Transit Planning has been updated to include the preparation of a BRTA Needs Assessment and Analysis of Service. This project will analyze how well the BRTA fixed bus routes serve the community and will provide recommendations for improvement. This study will include an analysis of ridership versus fuel costs as well as possibilities for loop routes. Along with this, BRPC will begin the Central Berkshire Transit Study which will include an evaluation of transit services in Central County as well as the needs of different age and gender groups. In response to a question from a TAC member, Ms. Church clarified that BRPC will also be consulting with BRTA, Amtrak, private bus companies and surrounding MPOs to pursue inter-city passenger transportation service to and from the Berkshires, including passenger rail service, under this task.
- Task 3.9: Assessment of Intermodal Connectors and Goods Movement Study, Phase 2 will include an assessment of access roads from the airport and rail terminals to shipper's warehouses. Phase 2 of the Good Movement Study will focus on alternatives analysis and recommendations related to Goods Movement in general and intermodal connectors in particular.
- Task 3.10: Regional Transportation Plan will be focused on the preliminary preparation for the 2011 major update.

- Task 4.2: Local Technical Assistance has been updated to include acquiring proficiency with the new greenhouse gas emissions component of the Air Quality Analysis under MEPA.

Mr. Hickey moved to recommend the UPWP to the MPO for adoption. Mr. Siegars seconded the motion. Ms. Winn abstained. The motion passed.

### **3. Member Items for Discussion**

Ms. Winn mentioned the upcoming Northeast Transportation and Wildlife conference which will be held September 21-24, 2008 at The Inns at Mill Falls in Meredith, New Hampshire. Tom Tynning, professor at Berkshire Community College, will be the dinner speaker on Monday evening. For more information about the conference, please contact Jane Winn at [jane@thebeatnews.org](mailto:jane@thebeatnews.org).

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

The next TAC meeting will be scheduled contingent upon the results of the July 16<sup>th</sup> MPO meeting. If the MPO votes to release a different version of the TIP than what the TAC has recommended, the TAC will meet to address the differences.

### **Report on Issues Brought to a Motion**

- The UPWP was approved by the TAC. There was one abstention.
- The TAC approved recommending the following funding scenario to the MPO: River Road, Florida; Route 2, Williamstown; South Street; Pittsfield and schedule the Connector Road project in Lanesborough for 2011. The motion passed unanimously.