

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

~ From the Meeting Held on October 14, 2008 ~

Summary of Items Discussed

1. Report from the September 25th TAC meeting

Mr. Karns clarified that the FY2008 – 2011 TIP was approved by the MPO last year. Due to air quality conformance issues in the eastern part of the State, the FY2008 – 2011 TIP never took effect. The only three projects under consideration in the FY2009 – 2012 TIP that were listed for programming in the FY2008 – 2011 TIP were the Florida River Road project, the Williamstown Route 2 project and the Lenox West Street project.

2. Review of 2009 – 2012 TIP and development of TAC recommendation

Alison Church, BRPC staff member, provided handouts of TIP funding scenarios. Ms. Church briefly described why BRPC staff recommended advancing some scenarios for discussion and eliminating others.

BRPC staff recommended eliminating Scenarios A and B because they included programming the Pittsfield South Street project in 2010, which would be an aggressive timeline for the project based on its current readiness. Although Scenario J, which BRPC staff recommended for further discussion, also programs the Pittsfield South Street project in 2010, Scenario J does a better job at including other projects.

BRPC staff recommended eliminating Scenario E because it does not include the Pittsfield South Street project. Although Scenario H, which BRPC staff recommended for further discussion, also does not include the Pittsfield South Street project, it was perceived as being a better scenario than Scenario E.

BRPC staff recommended eliminating Scenario G because it does not include the Williamstown Taconic Trail (Route 2) project.

BRPC staff recommended eliminating Scenario I because Scenario L is an improved version of this scenario.

After discussion with MHD1 staff, BRPC staff recommended eliminating Scenario K because this scenario included leaving \$425,000 unspent in 2010. It should be noted that Scenarios C and D, which BRPC staff recommended for further discussion, also include leaving \$425,050 unspent in 2010. Scenario D includes the Pittsfield South Street project in 2011, whereas Scenario K has this project programmed for 2012, during the second year of the Lenox Route 183 project.

The group determined by consensus that Scenarios A, B, E, G, H, I and K should be dropped from further consideration.

Ms. Church briefly described the differences in the remaining scenarios. The difference between Scenario C and D is that in Scenario C, the Lanesborough Connector Road project would start in 2011 before the Lenox Route 183 project, which would start in 2012. In Scenario D, the timing is reversed – the Lanesborough Connector Road project would start in 2012 and the Lenox Route 183 project would start in 2011. Both Scenarios C and D include the Williamstown Taconic Trail project in 2010 for a cost of \$1.9 million and the Pittsfield South Street project in 2011. Both Scenarios C and D leave \$425,050 unspent in 2010. The target for 2010 is \$3.9 million and no other project can fit within the remaining target funds for that year.

The difference between Scenario L and M is that in Scenario L, the Williamstown Taconic Trail project would be programmed for 2010 and the Lenox Route 183 project would start in 2010 and be carried into 2011. It should be noted that the Lenox project would only have a small portion of its total cost funded in 2010. The Lanesborough Connector Road project would start in 2012. In Scenario M, the Williamstown Taconic Trail project would be programmed for 2010 and the Lanesborough Connector Road project would start in 2010 and be carried into 2011. The Lenox Route 183 project would start in 2012. Both Scenario L and M include the Pittsfield South Street project in 2012. Neither Scenario L nor M leave any money unspent. Ms. Church noted that Scenario M is problematic because it includes programming the Lanesborough Connector Road project in 2010. For a project to be programmed in the first two years of the TIP, there needs to be commitment for full funding.

Scenario F includes programming the Lenox Route 183 project in 2010 and carrying it through to 2011. The Lanesborough Connector Road project would start in 2011 and be carried into 2012. The Williamstown Taconic Trail project would be programmed for 2012. The Pittsfield South Street project was not included in Scenario F.

Scenario J includes programming the Pittsfield South Street project in 2010. The Williamstown Taconic Trail project would be programmed for 2011. The Lanesborough Connector Road project would start in 2011 and be carried into 2012. The Lenox Route 183 project would start in 2012.

Ms. Church noted that the targets for each year of the TIP were provided in the handouts. It should be noted that the target decreases each year due to inflation. Further, the total project costs include a 25% contingency which is not meant to cover inflation costs, but is included in anticipation of unexpected construction, engineering and police detail expenses.

Ms. Church clarified that the Pittsfield South Street project cannot be split over two years because its total cost is less than the target.

Mark Siegars, TAC Vice Chair, expressed his concern that the \$700,000 which the Town of Lenox has committed to the Route 183 project is not reflected in the project cost. A copy of the letter from the Town of Lenox dated October 14th, in which the Town commits to providing \$700,000 was provided at the meeting. Ms. Church suggested that a notation be added to the handout to delineate this.

Secondly, Mr. Siegars noted that the total cost of the Lanesborough Connector Road project is less than the \$9.7 noted on the handouts. Ms. Church clarified that the total costs were based on MHD

estimates and that the total cost will be confirmed and/or corrected prior to the MPO meeting next week. [Subsequent to the TAC meeting, the cost estimate of the Connector Road project was confirmed to be \$9,712,356.]

Finally, Mr. Siegars asked why projects currently not at 25% design are being considered for programming. Ms. Church clarified that, at the last TAC meeting, the Town of Lenox indicated that, once the Town holds its 25% design hearing, the Route 183 project will advance quickly. Representatives from the Town of Lenox clarified that the 25% design hearing has not yet been scheduled. The City of Pittsfield anticipates being ready for 25% design sometime in the spring.

Peter Frieri, Mass Highway District 1, noted that the Town of Lenox had submitted a 25% design plan over a year ago and that the revised 25% design plan will be submitted tomorrow.

Tom Szczepaniak, North Central MPO Delegate, asked how the Town of Lenox plans to commit the \$700,000. Jeff Vincent, Lenox DPW Superintendent, indicated that the money would most likely come from a combination of sources. In a letter dated October 15th, Greg Federspiel, Lenox Town Manager, indicated that the \$700,000 is available through unspent town transportation bond funds.

Frank Feigin, TAC representative from Windsor, asked how the evaluation scores were determined, particularly in terms of safety improvements. Ms. Church noted that the TAC had gone over the evaluation criteria at a previous meeting. There are two evaluation criteria directly pertaining to safety improvements. The Williamstown Taconic Trail project, for example, has a score of 8.5 due to its safety component.

Mr. Feigin asked if there will be enough construction industry capacity to get these projects constructed in this timeframe. Nat Karns, BRPC Executive Director, explained that there is adequate construction capacity on a statewide basis to manage a construction program of this size.

Mr. Siegars asked if there are any projects with a total project cost of \$425,000. Mr. Karns noted that a total project cost of \$425,000 is typical only of some enhancement projects. Due to the existing funding constraints, Mr. Karns noted that enhancement projects have not been solicited. Mr. Frieri indicated that Mass Highway District 1 is not aware of any such projects.

It was determined by consensus that Scenario F should be dropped from further consideration because it does not include the Pittsfield South Street project.

It was determined by consensus that Scenario C and D should be dropped from further consideration because they both leave \$425,050 unspent in 2010.

Jack Hickey, TAC representative from Lanesborough, suggested that a funding decision be delayed due to the fact that several projects are not at 25% design or do not have committed funding and that the STP will not be released until the air quality conformance issues in the eastern part of the State are resolved. Mr. Karns explained that it would be best if the MPO could be in a position whereby the draft TIP could be released for the 30 day public comment period as soon as the STP is released. TAC Chairman Sam Haupt agreed that the TAC should not delay any further.

Mr. Siegars asked if there is a possibility that the 2007 TIP would need to be amended to include the 2010 element. Mr. Karns explained that this could be a possibility, but that it would not occur for another 6-8 months, by which time, the 2009 – 2012 TIP will be approved.

Mr. Haupt suggested eliminating Scenario J from further discussion because it includes the Pittsfield South Street project in 2010 and the Williamstown Taconic Trail project in 2011. It was Mr. Haupt's opinion that the Williamstown Taconic Trail project should get started as soon as possible and that the Pittsfield South Street project may not be ready by 2010. Further, Mr. Haupt noted that the Lenox Route 183 project was included in previous TIPs. Scenario J includes starting the Lenox Route 183 project in 2012. Mr. Haupt expressed his preference for Scenario L because, in his opinion, this scenario did the best job of meeting FHWA requirements.

Mr. Scelsi suggested keeping Scenario J for further discussion because it is the closest to the original TAC recommendation. Mr. Scelsi suggested that, if the Pittsfield South Street project was not ready in 2010, then the Williamstown Taconic Trail project could be moved up. Mr. Scelsi added that if the Town of Lenox is being given the benefit of the doubt that they will be ready for 25% design, then the City of Pittsfield should be given the same consideration. Scenario L includes starting the Lanesborough Connector Road project in 2012.

Ms. Church reminded everyone that there is a seven month differential between the submittal of 25% design plans for Lenox (this week) and the submittal of the Pittsfield South Street 25% design plans (next spring).

Mr. Karns noted that, if the Pittsfield South Street project wasn't ready in 2010 and the Williamstown Taconic Trail were to move up, that would create Scenario D which would include leaving \$425,000 left unspent in 2010.

Mr. Karns clarified that the Lanesborough Connector Road project has been on the supplemental list of previous TIPs, but has never been programmed for construction within the four years of previous TIPs.

It was determined by consensus that Scenario M should be dropped from further consideration because it includes programming the Lanesborough Connector Road project in 2010. For a project to be programmed in the first two years of the TIP, the full funding needs to be committed.

There was some discussion about the two remaining scenarios - Scenario J and Scenario L. In Scenario J, the Pittsfield South Street project would be programmed for 2010. The Williamstown Taconic Trail project would be programmed for 2011. The Lanesborough Connector Road project would be programmed for 2011-2012 and the Lenox Route 183 project would begin in 2012. In Scenario L, the Williamstown Taconic Trail project would be programmed for 2010. The Lenox Route 183 project would be programmed for 2010-2011. The Pittsfield South Street project would be programmed for 2012 and the Lanesborough Connector Road project would begin in 2012. Ms. Church noted that the 2009 and 2010 elements are the most important components of the TIP and it would be possible to reframe years 2011 and 2012 in the future.

In response to questions from TAC members, Ms. Church clarified that neither the Williamstown Taconic Trail project nor the Pittsfield South Street project could be split over two years. Mr. Karns clarified that it is possible to split the Lenox Route 183 project over two years because the FHWA regulations allow projects to begin in one year when the bulk of the cost will be covered in the subsequent year. Although Scenario L shows the Lenox project starting in 2010, the bulk of the cost would be covered in 2011.

Ron Tinkham, TAC representative from the Baker Hill Road District, expressed his preference for Scenario J due to the degree of deterioration of the Connector Road and the benefits to transportation, especially heavy truck traffic. Mr. Haupt pointed out that Scenario J has the Pittsfield South Street project programmed in front of the Connector Road project.

In response to a question from a TAC member regarding what would happen if the TAC chose Scenario L and the Lenox Route 183 project was not ready in 2010, Ms. Church explained that a TIP amendment could be developed at that time in order to move projects up.

Mr. Siegars moved to endorse Scenario J. Mr. Tinkham seconded the motion. Six TAC members voted in favor of endorsing Scenario J. Five TAC members voted against Scenario J.

Mr. Feigin moved to endorse Scenario L. Mr. Malnati, TAC representative from the BRTA, seconded the motion. Five TAC members voted in favor of endorsing Scenario L. Five TAC members voted against Scenario L. One TAC member abstained.

There was some discussion on TAC membership. Only TAC members are allowed to vote. Selectboard members, if they are not the TAC representative from their community, are not permitted to vote. Municipal TAC representatives do not need to be Selectboard members or other municipal officials.

Ms. Winn, TAC representative from the Berkshire Environmental Action Team, recommended that the minority report reflect the importance of the Williamstown Taconic Trail project in terms of safety improvements. Ms. Winn also recommended that the minority report mention the fact that there is a strong contingent which feels that, due to its level of transportation improvements, the Lanesborough Connector Road is the more important project to move forward with first, but that, in terms of funding constraints, Scenario L is the better option.

3. Member Items for Discussion

Mr. Siegars announced that the Mass Highway Right-of-Way Bureau will be holding a seminar the Right-of-Way Acquisition Process for municipalities on October 28th at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge. The cost to attend is \$50.00.

Ms. Church announced that EOT is holding public stakeholder meetings to discuss the State Freight and Rail Plan which is currently under development. The State Freight and Rail Plan is a comprehensive evaluation of all modes - air, rail, truck and maritime transportation. The Plan will address freight and rail infrastructure and operations as well as the policy and regulatory environment. It will also include a detailed analysis of all rail infrastructure and operations, both freight and passenger.

The meeting for the Western Region of Massachusetts will be held on Thursday, October 30th from 3:00 to 5:00pm at the Kasparian Center, 60 Alton Street, Springfield, MA.

For more information, please contact EOT Project Manager Ned Codd at 617-973-7473 or visit the study website at: www.massfreightandrailplan.com.

4. Next Meeting Date and Agenda

Mr. Hickey moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:30. Mr. Scelsi seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

It was determined to leave the scheduling of the next TAC meeting open. Mr. Karns noted that a TAC meeting may be needed in the next few months so that BRPC staff can present on the Lee Area Traffic Study.

Majority Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

- TIP Scenario J, as developed and presented by BRPC staff, was approved by a vote of 6 to 5 by the TAC. Scenario J includes the Pittsfield South Street project in 2010, the Williamstown Taconic Trail project in 2011, and the Lanesborough Connector Road project in 2011-2012. The Lenox Route 183 project would begin in 2012.

Minority Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

- TIP Scenario L, as developed and presented by BRPC staff, was endorsed as the minority opinion of the TAC by a vote of 5 to 5, with one abstention. Scenario L includes the Williamstown Taconic Trail project in 2010, the Lenox Route 183 project in 2010-2011 and the Pittsfield South Street program in 2012. The Lanesborough Connector Road project would begin in 2012.

A minority of the TAC wished to acknowledge the importance of the Williamstown Taconic Trail project in terms of safety improvements. A strong contingent of the TAC agreed that, due to its level of transportation improvements, the Lanesborough Connector Road is the more important project to move forward with first. However, due to the funding constraints, the minority feels that Scenario L is the better option.