

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

~ From the Meeting Held on September 25, 2008 ~

## Summary of Items Discussed

### 1. Briefing of TIP highway projects under consideration

TAC Chairman Sam Haupt clarified that the TAC provides a recommendation to the MPO on TIP funding allocations and not BRPC staff. He emphasized that towns and organizations need to participate in the process.

Alison Church, BRPC staff member, indicated that at its September 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, the MPO had asked that the TAC re-convene, allow presentations by all project proponents, and provide a new recommendation to the MPO.

Municipalities/organizations with a project on the 4 year TIP were asked to give a brief presentation on what their project consists of and its current design readiness status.

#### Route 7 – Route 8 Connector Road, Lanesborough

TAC member Ron Tinkham, representing the Baker Hill Road District, introduced the Lanesborough Route 7 – Route 8 Connector Road (Mall Road) improvement project. The Connector Road is a public way in the Town of Lanesborough. The Town created the Baker Hill Road District to manage the road. The original alignment of the road was changed during the DEP wetland permitting process. The road was approved by the DEP and built in 1988 for passenger vehicles and limited commercial deliveries. However, soon after the road was opened, heavy commercial truck traffic was banned from surrounding roads connecting Route 7 and Route 8, including Crane Avenue in Pittsfield and Summer Street in Lanesborough. The Connector Road is a vital link between Route 7 and Route 8. It is a federally classified arterial roadway and has evolved into the only major east-west commercial/industrial truck route between downtown Pittsfield and Route 2 in North Adams and Williamstown. It is estimated that retail traffic within four miles of the Connector Road has an annual economic impact of more than \$1 billion. Approximately 88% of the County's largest employers are located within eight miles of the road.

Frank Astone, of Jacobs, Edwards and Kelcey (the District's consultant) presented on the design of the Connector Road reconstruction project. The Connector Road is approximately two miles long. Over the past twenty years, the Connector Road has deteriorated, in part due to the large amount of vehicle traffic and truck traffic for which the road was not originally intended. The reconstruction would remedy several deficiencies, including the fact that the pavement base is not thick enough to accommodate the heavy truck traffic and there is inadequate drainage. The project will also remedy safety and congestion issues.

The project would involve full depth reconstruction, which would include taking out the 4" layer of asphalt and the 12" layer of gravel in order to build a pavement structure that will support the heavy truck traffic. A physical design of the pavement base was submitted to Mass Highway's Pavement Design section. Mass Highway's suggestions have been incorporated into the design.

Subdrains will be added along the western half of the road as well as down into some of the cut sections near Route 8. Measures will also be taken to improve the water quality by implementing the new DEP storm water best management practices, including the addition of grass swales and deep sump catch basins. Under the new design, the road will be realigned between Partridge Road and Route 8 to be a straight, non-stop route past the Mall, with new intersections to connect to the Mall Ring Road.

The 100% design plan is currently under review by Mass Highway. Once the final comments are received, Mr. Astone anticipates that the project will be ready to go to bid within two to four weeks. All environmental permits have been issued and an ENF certificate has been received. An Order of Conditions from the Lanesborough Conservation Commission has also been received.

Mr. Tinkham noted that the project has been on the TIP since 1998. A handout was provided outlining the Connector Road's design status and cost saving measures. An existing bridge will be salvaged at an estimated savings of \$3.2 million, and a detour plan has been approved at an estimated savings of approximately \$1 million. Reclamation of the existing roadway will provide a cost savings of \$600,000.

In response to a question from a TAC member regarding how the project will interact with the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail, Mr. Astone explained that the project will include the addition of sidewalks from the Mall to the trail parking lot and from the Route 8 intersection to the trail parking lot. The Connector Road will be designed to comply with the 2006 Mass Highway Design Guide Book, which allows for bike lanes on roadways. The Connector Road will be widened two to four feet along the entire length in order to accommodate bike lanes. The total cost of the Connector Road project would be \$9.7 million.

#### River Road, Florida

Glenn Burdick, Florida Highway Superintendent, presented on the Florida River Road improvement project. The project has been on the TIP since 1998. The Town has made changes to the project in order to comply with DCR, DEP and other State and federal requirements. The Town of Florida Conservation Commission will review the project at its October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting. DCR is reviewing a conservation restriction. Mark Moore, MHD1 Projects Engineer, noted that the final review package is due within one month. When the Conservation Commission permit is received, the project will clear the MEPA review. The 100% design plan has been approved. Mass Highway is currently reviewing the PS&E package. The final Right of Way and the Right of Way Certificate still need to be issued. Mr. Moore noted that Mass Highway District 1 tentatively anticipates an October 18<sup>th</sup> advertising date for the project. From a Mass Highway standpoint, the project will be ready to go when the TIP is cleared. The cost of the project is currently \$4.4 million, including a 25% Mass Highway contingency. This is down from the previous \$4.7 million cost estimate.

#### Route 2, Williamstown

Mr. Moore presented on the Williamstown Route 2 preservation project. A large retaining wall west of Torrey Woods Road is in an advanced state of deterioration. The proposal is to replace the existing retaining wall with an evergreen wall, which is a bin-type wall with pockets which can be planted. The project originally included the replacement of the retaining wall and resurfacing of

Route 2 at a cost of \$3.4 million. The scope of the project has been scaled back to include just the replacement of the retaining wall and improvements to the immediate roadway. The 25% design plan has been submitted to the State. The new project cost is \$1.9 million.

### South Street, Pittsfield

Matt Billetter, Pittsfield City Engineer, summarized the Pittsfield South Street project. South Street is a major regional north-south route and one of the highest traffic volume roadways in the County carrying over 20,000 vehicles a day. The project limits are from Housatonic Street south to South Mountain Road. The roadway currently experiences a lot of congestion. The road structure has deteriorated. There is currently no continuous sidewalk access. The city has retained the consulting firm of Fuss & O'Neill, Inc. for the project. The 25% design plan is expected to be completed early in the spring of 2009. The project would include the replacement and optimization of traffic signals at Crofut Street, Gamwell Avenue and South Mountain Road as well as a pedestrian signal at Spadina Parkway. The project will also include bridge and culvert improvements, resurfacing of South Street and the addition of continuous sidewalks on both sides of South Street. All of the work will be done within the existing Right of Way. The traffic signal improvements were included as recommendations in the South Street Study prepared by BRPC. This project was not part of the Downtown Pittsfield Circulation Study, also prepared by BRPC. The current cost estimate provided on the Project Information Form is \$2.7 million, which includes a CMAQ funding allocation of approximately \$700,000. The project is currently carrying \$2.1 million on the STP, which includes a 10% Mass Highway contingency. With a 25% contingency, the project cost is approximately \$3.1 million. In response to questions from a TAC member, Ms. Church noted that the project is eligible for one year of CMAQ funding. Nat Karns, BRPC Executive Director, noted that one problem associated with splitting the project into two pieces (intersection improvements versus pavement rehabilitation), is that the traffic signal improvements will most likely include hard wiring, which will continue to degrade the road surface.

### Route 183, Lenox

Jeff Vincent, Lenox Highway Superintendent, introduced the Lenox Route 183 project. The project began as a footprint project. The scope has since evolved considerably. The project spans 1.53 miles of roadway. The roadway will be widened to include 4' bike lanes on either side of the road, and the existing 4-5' sidewalks will be widened to 6' and extended past Tanglewood almost as far as the Stockbridge Town Line. The bike lane on the northern side of Route 183 would terminate at Under Mountain Road, which is an existing bike route. The bike lane on the southern side of Route 183 would terminate at Tanglewood. The width of the travel lanes would remain the same. The project will also include the replacement of the existing drainage system and the construction of a sewer main along approximately one mile of the road. Tanglewood has committed to fully funding their portion of the sewer main. The Town has also committed funding for their portion of the sewer main.

The Town has held two public meetings and has had specific public input. At the second meeting on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Lenox residents recommended to the Select Board to widen the roadway to include bike lanes and add a 6' sidewalk rather than construct an 8' multi use path adjacent to the roadway. The Select Board ultimately agreed with the residents' recommendation. A handout of the construction timeline was provided. The Functional Design Report will be submitted next month. The Town plans to submit 25% design plans next month as well, which will include an engineering

cost estimate. The 25% design public hearing will be held in February 2009. The Town expects to be approved for 75% design by July 2009. This would allow the project to be advertised in October 2009, with construction to begin in the spring of 2010.

Greg Federspiel, Lenox Town Manager, emphasized that work on this project has not been stalled. The project has been on the TIP since 2005. The project was originally on the TIP for construction in 2009, and had been moved to 2010-2011. The Town pulled back their design work to meet the 2010 schedule. The Town has retained Foresight Engineers for this project. Mr. Federspiel emphasized that the Town has leveraged other monies. Lenox voters approved \$1.5 million for a complimentary Village Improvement Project which will include street and sidewalk improvements. The Town has also submitted a PWED grant application for \$1 million for funding of the combined projects. The Town will request STRAP funding of \$500,000 for construction of the Route 183 project and if the STRAP grant is not successful, the Town will commit \$500,000 of Town funds for this project. Lenox voters approved \$200,000 for design of the Route 183 project. The Town has letters of support from over fifty businesses for the combined projects. Mr. Federspiel noted that there is the potential for over \$35 million in private investments as well. The restoration of two historic estates are part of the Town's PWED application. The Spring Lawn restoration project is currently underway along with the restoration of smaller estate on Yokun Avenue. These investments are contingent upon the infrastructure improvements within the Village.

Route 183 carries approximately 5,000 vehicles per day. This is considerably higher during the summer months when Tanglewood sees about 350,000 visitors. Mr. Federspiel referred to the Boston Symphony Orchestra Economic and Community Impact Study which assessed that Tanglewood has an approximate \$60 million impact on the region. Other institutions along Route 183 will also benefit from this project, including Lenox Morris Elementary School, Boston University Summer Institute, Berkshire Country Day School, and Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health.

Steve Mack, of Foresight Land Services (the Town's consultant) added that along with bike lanes and improved sidewalks which will benefit the several substantial pedestrian generators along Route 183, the project will also include complete drainage reconstruction and will conform to the new storm water best management practices. In addition, the Town will replace two culverts with open bottom culverts.

The current cost estimate for this project is \$4.74 million, which may include the \$500,000 from the Town's STRAP grant as well as the 25% Mass Highway contingency. There was some discussion of how this cost estimate was determined. The project will include full depth reclamation within the existing roadway and boxing out at full depth of the widened shoulders.

The intersection improvement is not part of the \$4.74 million estimate and is not currently part of the project scope. If the intersection improvement component is eligible for CMAQ funding, the Town would modify the funding request to include the intersection. The Town is currently asking to program \$4.2 in STP funds. Mr. Moore noted that the Mass Highway Design Review Committee approved the project without the intersection improvement component.

## **2. Review of 2009-2012 TIP commencing October 1, 2008 – September 20, 2012 and development of TAC recommendation**

There was some discussion regarding the cost estimate for the Lenox Route 183 project. The Project Data Form had called for \$5.2 million. With the new cost estimate provided by Lenox this evening, the funding scenarios prepared by BRPC staff no longer apply. Further, due to several components of the project, including the addition of bike lanes and sidewalks, community support and economic vitality, this project has been reevaluated as an improvement project rather than a preservation project. Its current score is 9.17 out of 18. The score of the Route 7 – Route 8 Connector Road project also increased to 8.83. Improvement projects are rated on a different scale than preservation projects, so it is not appropriate to compare scores between different types of projects.

Because of the new information provided at tonight's meeting, it was determined that BRPC staff should prepare new funding scenarios and a second meeting should be scheduled.

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

Ms. Church welcomed Kevin O'Donnell, Great Barrington Town Manager. Mr. O'Donnell will serve as Great Barrington's TAC representative.

Mr. Karns announced that EOT is preparing a Strategic Transportation Plan to develop priorities for transportation improvements across the State. As part of this, EOT will hold public workshops to talk to Massachusetts residents about their experiences using the transportation system. Berkshire County's public workshop will be held on Thursday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6:00 P.M. at the North Adams City Hall. Mr. Karns encouraged TAC members to attend. The website [www.youMoveMassachusetts.org](http://www.youMoveMassachusetts.org) has more information about the plan and features for providing your input about transportation gaps and challenges.

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

Mark Siegars, TAC Vice Chair, motioned to adjourn the meeting at 6:20 p.m. Mr. Tinkham seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The next TAC meeting will be held on Tuesday, October 14<sup>th</sup> at 5:00. The sole agenda item will be the review of 2009-2012 TIP and development of a TAC recommendation.

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

- There were no issues brought to a motion at the September 25<sup>th</sup> meeting.