

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

~ From the Meeting Held on June 25, 2009 ~

The following TAC representatives were present:

Gordon Davis, Town of Washington
Frank Feigin, Town of Windsor
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Vice Chair
Jack Hickey, Town of Lanesborough
Jana Hunkler Brule, Town of Florida and Berkshire Rides
Bob Malnati, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority
John McNinch, Town of Lenox
Bill Mulholland, Berkshire Community College
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

Also present were:

Nat Karns, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Executive Director
Anuja Koirala, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Senior Transportation Planner
Peter Frieri, Mass Highway District 1, Lenox
Roger Bolton, Williamstown citizen
Sarah Hudson, Tyringham citizen
Justin Daigle, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Intern

Summary of Items Discussed

1. Introductions

TAC Vice Chair, Sam Haupt, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. All attendees introduced themselves.

2. Report from May 20th TAC Meeting

There were no comments.

3. Consideration of Draft FFY2010 – 2013 TIP

Mr. Frieri provided a handout regarding the status of highway TIP projects for 2009-2012. Mr. Frieri explained that MassHighway acts as the implementing agency of federal highway funds. Therefore, all federal aid highway and bridge projects are administered by MassHighway. Mr. Frieri also noted that the FFY 2010-2012 TIP schedule is subject to MPO revision during development of the FFY 2010-2013 TIP.

2009

Eight of the nine 2009 TIP highway projects have been advertised. Contracts for these eight projects have also been awarded. The Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road reconstruction project in Lanesborough has cleared the environmental section. It needs to receive its Right-of-Way clearance. 75% design plans are expected to be submitted next month for the Downtown Streetscape and traffic signal improvements project in North Adams. This project needs a federal Right-of-Way certificate and environmental permits. 75% design plans for the Old Pleasant Street

bridge project in Lee were received by MHD in April. The Right-of-Way process and environmental permits are advancing for this project.

2010

The Route 2 retaining wall replacement project in Williamstown is being designed by MHD. The 25% design plans were submitted in July of 2008. The environmental section has reviewed the 25% design plans. No Right-of-Way certificate is currently required. MHD is currently exploring options for additional slope stabilization areas and coordinating with the geotech section in Boston.

The Route 183 reconstruction project in Lenox is being designed by Foresight Land Services. The 25% design plans have been approved by MHD. A public hearing was held on June 22, 2009. The Right-of-Way process and environmental permits are advancing for this project.

Phase II of the Downtown Streetscape project in Pittsfield is being designed by Fuss & O'Neill. MHD is currently awaiting the 25% design submission.

The extension of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail in Adams is being designed by MHD. The district anticipates completing 25% design plans by the end of this summer. This project needs a public hearing, environmental permits and Right-of-Way certificate.

The bike path project in Lenox from the High School to Woods Pond along Housatonic Street is being designed by Foresight Land Services. The 25% design plans were received in April 2009 and are currently under review by MHD. This project needs a public hearing, environmental permits and Right-of-Way certificate.

2011

Because the cost of the Route 183 reconstruction project in Lenox is greater than the amount of federal funds available for one year, the MPO decided to program this project over two years.

2012

The Route 7 resurfacing and traffic signal improvement project in Pittsfield is currently slated for 2012. This project will implement recommendations from the South Street Alternatives Study, which was approved by the MPO last year. This project is eligible for CMAQ funding. Mr. Frieri repeated that the list of projects to be funded between 2010 and 2012 are subject to MPO revision during the development of the FFY2010-2013 TIP.

There are no CMAQ projects currently identified for FFY2010 or 2011. There are no Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) projects currently identified for FFY2010, 2011 or 2012. The complete TIP Project Status handout provided by MHD is available on the BRPC website at: <http://berkshireplanning.org/3/5/1/>

Each year, BRPC staff meets with staff from EOT and MassHighway District 1 to evaluate each highway project for which TIP forms have been received. Ms. Koirala summarized the MPO staff evaluation of highway projects. A score sheet was provided that sorted each project by score, as well as a table summarizing the TIP project evaluation criteria. The score sheet shows the details about each project, including the current design status, the current estimated cost, and CMAQ eligibility. The TIP project evaluation criteria had been presented to the TAC last year. The

evaluation criteria were set by the state in 2004. Last year, the MPO added additional environmental criteria in response to suggestions made by TAC members.

Ms. Koirala noted that preservation projects are scored differently than improvement projects. The maximum score for preservation projects is 9, while the maximum score for improvement projects is 18. Ms. Koirala added that the “cost effectiveness” score is not calculated into the total scores. Ms. Koirala also noted that only those projects that have received identification numbers from the MHD Project Review Committee are evaluated.

In order to compare the two types of projects, MPO staff calculated a ratio of each project’s score to the maximum score possible. Both preservation and improvement projects were sorted by these ratios. The preservation projects with the highest scores were the Route 2 retaining wall replacement project in Williamstown and the Route 2 project North Adams/Florida. Both of the projects received a score of 0.94. The improvement project with the highest score was the East Street project in Pittsfield. This project received a score of 0.71.

In response to questions from TAC members, Mr. Frieri explained that construction cost estimates have increased over the last few years. Mr. Frieri also noted that the Skyline Trail project in Hinsdale and Peru has been split into two separate projects. The Peru section of this project is already at the 75% design stage. Mr. Frieri noted that the First Street project in Pittsfield is currently at the pre-25% design phase. The score sheet incorrectly shows this project at 100% design.

Mr. Karns suggested that communities with projects on the four year TIP need to continue active design and continue to submit updated data forms. The scores are merely a tool for the MPO to refer to, and do not necessarily guarantee that projects with the highest scores will be placed on the TIP; the project’s current design status is also important.

Ms. Koirala presented the highlights of two different FFY2010-2013 TIP scenarios for highway projects, which BRPC staff developed. The scenarios are the same for FFY 2010, 2011 and 2012 and represent the same program that was approved by the MPO last year for the FFY2009-2012 TIP, although the costs may have changed. The two scenarios under consideration at tonight’s meeting only differ in FFY2013.

Both scenarios include the following:

2010

2010 Regional Highway Target (including CMAQ and HSIP): \$5,223,641

- River Road improvement project in Florida (\$608,125)
- Route 2 retaining wall replacement project in Williamstown (\$2 million)
- Route 183 preservation project in Lenox (\$1,547,623)
- CMAQ: Bike path project from the High School to Woods Pond in Lenox (\$711,929)
- HSIP project to be determined by the MPO (\$355,964)

2011

2011 Regional Highway Target (including CMAQ and HSIP): \$4,763,741

- Route 183 preservation project in Lenox (\$3,252,377)
- CMAQ: Ashuwillticook Rail Trail extension in Adams (\$711,929)
- HSIP project to be determined by the MPO (\$355,964)

2012

2012 Regional Highway Target (including CMAQ and HSIP): \$4,541,170

- South Street resurfacing improvement project in Pittsfield (\$3,473,277)
- CMAQ: South Street traffic signal improvement project in Pittsfield (\$711,929)
- HSIP project to be determined by the MPO (\$355,964)

2013 (Scenario 1)

2013 Regional Highway Target (including CMAQ and HSIP): \$4,162,219

- Route 2 preservation project in North Adams/Florida (\$3,094,326)
- CMAQ (\$711,929) and HSIP (\$355,964) projects to be determined by the MPO

2013 (Scenario 2)

2013 Regional Highway Target (including CMAQ and HSIP): \$4,162,219

- East Street improvement project in Pittsfield (\$3,094,326)
- CMAQ: East Street traffic signal improvement project in Pittsfield (\$711,929)
- HSIP project to be determined by the MPO (\$355,964)

Mr. Karns explained that it is difficult to find CMAQ eligible projects in Berkshire County. Because the Lenox bike path project is eligible for CMAQ funding, a portion of the funding for this project will come from the yearly CMAQ allocation. The additional funding will come from a federal earmark. Mr. Karns also noted that, within the next four years, the region should be able to identify projects for CMAQ and HSIP funding.

Ms. Koirala explained that the Route 2 preservation project in North Adams/Florida has an estimated cost of \$3 million, but an additional \$94,326 was added to the project in scenario 1 in order to address future cost increases and to have the regional highway target allocated with no remaining funds. The total cost of the East Street improvement project in Pittsfield is estimated at \$6.75 million. Therefore, in scenario 2, the project would need to be split over two years and completed in 2014. This project includes improvements to three signalized intersections along East Street. Because at least one of these intersections is eligible for CMAQ funding, a portion of the funding for this project could come from the CMAQ allocation, possibly for two years.

Mr. Haupt pointed out that the East Street project currently under consideration will include the length of East Street from Lyman Street to Merrill Road. The rest of the project, from Lyman Street to Elm Street is being developed by the City of Pittsfield. This piece of the project is still in its very preliminary stages.

Mr. Frieri explained that the federal aid portion of the Route 183 project in Lenox is estimated at \$4.8 million. The cost of this project has been split over two years: \$1.5 million in 2010 and

\$3.2 million in 2011. The Town of Lenox is prepared to use approximately \$600,000 of its own money to complete the project. It is expected that the Town could get this project to 100% design during FFY2010.

Mr. Karns explained that the HSIP monies only became available last year. HSIP funding may be used for projects on federal aid eligible roadways, including major collectors, which have a “demonstrated need” for safety improvements. A demonstration of need may include compelling accident data. In Berkshire County, typical HSIP projects are those that improve the safety of high accident locations. Mr. Karns urged communities to encourage their police departments to accurately report accident information, including intersections and street names, as well as distance to major intersections if accidents occur along a segment of roadway.

Mr. Frieri noted that five ARRA projects were amended to 2009 element of the 2007-2010 TIP. These are:

- Route 116 resurfacing project in Adams
- Route 7 resurfacing project in Lanesborough/New Ashford
- Route 8 resurfacing project in Cheshire
- Route 7A (Kemble Street) reconstruction project in Lenox
- Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road reconstruction project in Lanesborough

The Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road project is the only one of the five ARRA projects that has yet to be advertised.

Mr. Karns suggested that the TAC may want to recommend projects to the MPO that would be eligible for the second round of ARRA transportation funds, which will become available within the next six to eight months. Projects receiving funding from the second round need to be advertised by February 2010. There is a three year expenditure limit. Mr. Karns suggested that projects eligible for the second round of funding probably need to be at 75% design phase in order to be advertised by February. Mr. Frieri explained that MHD has been providing EOT with project status updates for consideration of the second round of funding. It was determined that the TAC would meet again next month to develop a recommendation for the second funding round.

There was some discussion about the East Street project in Pittsfield. Mr. Frieri noted that, from the MHD D1 perspective, the East Street project is a large priority because it has been included in previous Regional Transportation Plans. Mr. Hickey expressed his concern that the majority of funds will be spent in Pittsfield, to the detriment of worthwhile projects in other areas.

Mr. Hickey moved to adopt scenario 1, which adds the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida to the 2013 year of the FFY2010 – 2013 TIP. Ms. Winn seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Koirala noted that there is only one bridge project in Berkshire County – the Hadley Overpass Bridge in North Adams – that will receive federal funding. This four year project began in 2009. No vote was required for bridge projects.

Mr. Malnati summarized the transit component of the FFY2010-2013 TIP. Transit funding is separate from highway funding. Therefore, the highway targets mentioned above do not include transit funding. BRTA will use ARRA funds for capital and facility updates as well as the purchase of six new minibus vehicles. BRTA also plans to replace paratransit vehicles in each of the four years of the TIP. Ms. Brule suggested adding the TANB grant funding (Transportation Association of Northern Berkshire, Inc.) to the TIP. No vote was required for transit projects.

Ms. Koirala summarized the FFY2010 – 2013 TIP development schedule. The Berkshire MPO is meeting on July 15th to release the draft TIP for public comment. The MPO will meet again in August to endorse the TIP.

Mr. Karns explained that, due to financial constraints and air quality conformity issues, eastern Massachusetts may not have a TIP in place by October 1st. Western Massachusetts is considered a different air quality attainment area, and is assessed separately. Therefore, the three western Massachusetts regions can work independently to approve their TIPs and have them in place by early fall. However, the state may not be ready to submit the compiled State Transportation Improvement Plan (STP) until the regions in eastern Massachusetts can complete their TIPs. Therefore, it is possible that the state may not have approval from FHWA and FTA to release STP funding by October.

4. Consideration of Draft UPWP commencing October 1, 2009 - September 30, 2010

Mr. Karns summarized the Draft UPWP. Task 1 includes activities associated with the management and administration of the 3C processes. Task 2 involves activities associated with data collection and technical support which BRPC performs every year. Task 3 involves regional planning studies. The bulk of the planning funds are spent under this task. Task 4 involves all other work activities that are performed each year. During the next year, Mr. Karns noted that BRPC transportation staff will be focused on performing a major update to the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). FHWA requires Regional Transportation Plans to be updated every four years. In 2007, BRPC performed a minor update to the RTP. Development of the new RTP will involve in-depth assessment and greater public outreach. The new RTP will need to be adopted by March 2011.

Ms. Koirala summarized the UPWP development schedule. At its July 15th meeting, the Berkshire MPO will also vote to release the draft UPWP for public comments. The MPO will endorse the UPWP at its August meeting. The UPWP must be published by October.

5. Update on Transportation Reform Legislation

Mr. Karns summarized the transportation reform legislation that was passed by the state legislature last week. A copy of the presentation will be available on the BRPC website. Highlights from the reform legislation include:

- Creation of a single, unified, accountable Mass Dept. of Transportation (MassDOT) to streamline transportation planning and programming. This action will also consolidate legal, human resources, IT and procurement departments into shared services.
- Creation of an Office of Performance Measurement to impose accountability and performance measures on the new Authority.

- Consolidate the Office of Planning and Programming to coordinate transportation planning and financing. This Office is solely responsible for developing all transportation plans. This Office becomes the primary interface between the MPOs and the federal government by replacing the Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works. The work of this Office will enhance fiscal scrutiny of major capital expansion projects by requiring proof that sufficient revenues exist to operate and maintain the project.
- The governor appoints a 5 member board and designates a board chairman. The governor appoints a Secretary of Transportation to be the CEO of MassDOT.
- Reconstitute the Highway Fund as the Commonwealth Transportation Fund and establish a Transportation Trust Fund. The Commonwealth Transportation Fund will use gas tax and registry fee revenues to pay debt service and contract assistance. Any remaining revenues will be annually transferred into the Transportation Trust Fund. The Commonwealth Transportation Fund is subject to annual appropriation by the Legislature. The Transportation Trust Fund will include all other transportation revenues, including tolls from the Turnpike and the Tobin Bridge, and departmental revenue. The funds will be used to pay for MassDOT operations and special obligation debt assumed by MassDOT, such as the metropolitan highway system bonds. The Transportation Trust Fund will be managed by MassDOT and will not be subject to annual appropriation by the Legislature.
- The Highway Division will expand upon Mass Highway to include the MTA, eight DCR roads, all DCR bridges, Western Turnpike, Metropolitan Highway System, and the Tobin Bridge, which had previously been controlled by MassPort. Tolls from the Tobin Bridge will now be placed in the Commonwealth Transportation Fund. The new Division will require MassDOT to pay employee salaries out of operating revenues – not from the Commonwealth’s capital budget. The Division will transition to a single Asset Management System to track road and bridge maintenance needs. The MTA will be eliminated. DCR employees will still work on former DCR assets within MassDOT.
- MassTransit will have two components: (1) MBTA and (2) the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs). The MBTA will remain an independent authority but will be managed by the MassDOT Board. MBTA Planning will be transferred to the Office of Planning and Programming of MassDOT for comprehensive transportation planning and financing. A reformed Advisory Board will streamline MBTA planning and processes. Effective January 1, 2010, all active MBTA employees and retirees are transferred to the Commonwealth’s Group Insurance Commission. The benefits structure and health care premiums will be exactly the same as all other state employees and state retirees. This will amount to nearly a \$1 billion health care savings over 20 years. The MBTA pension program was also reformed. Effective July 1, 2009, the new pension program will eliminate the “23 years and out” for future MBTA employees and will require those employees to reach 25 years of service and 55 years of age in order to collect retirement benefits. The separate MBTA retirement fund will be preserved. The Regional Transit Authorities will continue to operate independently, while MassDOT will provide improved central oversight and funding. The RTAs will be forward funded by MassDOT by 2012, which will allow RTAs to know how much funding they will receive at the beginning of each year.
- The RMV will remain an independent entity
- Aeronautics replaces the former Mass Aeronautics Commission and will retain control over all municipal airports
- MassPort will remain an independent agency

6. Member Items for Discussion

There were no member items for discussion.

7. Next Meeting Date and Agenda

The Berkshire MPO will meet on July 15th and will meet again in August. The next TAC meeting was scheduled for August 6th at 4pm. The primary agenda item will be a discussion of priorities for highway funding in the next round of ARRA funding.

Mr. McNinch motioned to adjourn. Mr. Malnati seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

- The TAC approved recommending to the MPO to program the Route 2 preservation project in North Adams/Florida in FY2013 of the FFY2010-2013 TIP.