

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

~ From the Meeting Held on February 10, 2009 ~

The following TAC representatives were present:

Wayne Burkhart, Town of Monterey Representative
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru Representative, TAC Vice Chair
Jack Hickey, Town of Lanesborough Representative
Jana Hunkler Brule, Town of Florida and BerkshireRides Representative
Christine Ludwiszewski, Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
Bob Malnati, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority Representative
Roger Manzolini, Town of Richmond Representative
Bill Mulholland, BCC
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham Representative, TAC Chair
Jim Stakenas, MCLA
Ron Tinkham, Baker Hill Road District Representative
Jeff Vincent, Town of Lenox Representative
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

Also present were:

Alison Church, BRPC Transportation Program Manager
Peter Frieri, Mass Highway District 1
Coleen Henry, Berkshire Mall
Christine Neumann, BRPC Transportation Planner

Summary of Items Discussed

1. Introductions

TAC Chairman Mark Siegars called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m, Attendees introduced themselves.

2. Report from the January 20th TAC Meeting

Mr. Tinkham noted he was incorrectly listed as the TAC Vice Chair in the January 20th TAC Report. This change was noted. There were no other comments.

3. Report from the February 3rd MPO Meeting

Minutes from the February 3rd MPO meeting were not available at this time. Mr. Siegars explained that the MPO met to review amendments to the 2009 element of the FY2007-2010 TIP to include projects to be funded through the economic stimulus package and to release the amendments for a 15 day public comment period. A copy of the amendments was provided. Mr. Siegars noted that a prioritized list of economic stimulus projects was not provided at the MPO meeting. Mr. Frieri added that this amendment is for “shovel ready” projects and that there may be a second amendment later in the year to add other projects. The list of highway and transit amendments can be found on the BRPC website at <http://berkshireplanning.org/3/5/1/>.

Ms. Church noted that the MPO moved to release the amendment for a 15 day public comment period – which began on February 6th to coincide with the passing of the federal economic stimulus package. The MPO will reconvene on February 27th to approve the TIP amendment.

Mr. Siegars noted two important topics discussed at the MPO meeting. First, it was discussed that the Commonwealth is trying to incorporate a supplemental Chapter 90 program into the economic stimulus package which would allow towns and cities to access the funds directly. MPO members encouraged the communities to lobby the two U.S. Senators to either amend the economic stimulus package to include a supplemental Chapter 90 program for projects on local roads that may not qualify for federal aid. If this program is not included in the economic stimulus package, it may be useful to lobby to make this program part of the next round of funding. It was verified after the TAC meeting that Mr. Karns had, at the request of Mr. Hickey, sent out a notice to each community in Berkshire County encouraging them to contact the U.S. Senators.

Secondly, Mr. Siegars reiterated that the MPO encouraged communities to continue to move forward on other projects for the second round of funding that may include some money for planning, engineering and design as well as construction. Mr. Siegars encouraged the communities to talk with BRPC or MHD to become better prepared for the second round of funding. Mr. Hickey added that the second round of funding may be an opportunity for the City of Pittsfield to acquire planning and design funding to extend the Ashuwillticook Trail southward through the City.

4. Discussion regarding 2007-2010 TIP Amendment

Mr. Siegars noted that the Berkshire Mall Drive has been officially renamed the Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road. Appropriate signage has been installed. Mr. Siegars asked that the name of the project be changed on the TIP documents.

Mr. Haupt asked if the Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road project has included any further consideration of designing a better intersection with the Ashuwillticook Trail near Route 8. Mr. Siegars noted that this issue was addressed some time ago and that the Mall had corresponded with BRPC. No further consideration has been given at this time.

Mr. Haupt moved that the TAC endorse the proposed amendments to the FY2007-2010 TIP. Mr. Tinkham seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Member Items for Discussion

- Ms. Winn asked if it would be possible to have a representative from DEP serve on the Berkshire TAC. There are two DEP employees living in Berkshire County. Mr. Siegars noted that the representative would be able to participate immediately, but would need MPO approval in order to vote on action items. It was determined that Ms. Winn would look into potential representatives before the next MPO meeting and the idea would be brought to the MPO.

- Ms. Winn also noted that B.E.A.T. records all of the Berkshire MPO meetings. DVDs of the meetings are available for purchase by contacting PCTV at (413) 445-4234 or via email: info@pittsfieldtv.org.

- Mr. Tinkham asked for more information on the possibility of not having a 2009-2013 TIP that was discussed at the MPO meeting. Mr. Siegars explained that although nothing was decided, the MPO discussed forgoing a 2009-2013 TIP since the 2007-2010 TIP will be amended to include all of the 2009 projects. The next TIP would be for FY2010-2014. This has been discussed at several other MPO meetings across the Commonwealth and will be discussed at the next MARPA meeting.
- There was some discussion about a potential gas tax hike reported in a recent edition of the Berkshire Eagle. Mr. Haupt noted that the TAC discussed this idea in November 2007 during the review of the Transportation Finance Commission Report. Mr. Haupt asked if the TAC wanted to have a further discussion of revenue options and provide comment to the MPO. Mr. Haupt added the news article did not specify a timeline for implementation. Mr. Hickey suggested the administration is floating the idea to gauge public reaction. Mr. Burkhart noted that State Representative Pignatelli had sent a letter out to his constituent communities to get a sense of whether the communities would support a gas tax. Mr. Hickey suggested it would be worthwhile for the TAC to talk about the potential gas tax and to pass comments along to the MPO. Mr. Siegars requested that BRPC staff follow up with EOT and get a comprehensive list of all revenue increasing measures for the TAC to review. Mr. Haupt added that the TAC might start with a review of the minutes from their previous discussion.
- Mr. Siegars asked about a recent article in the Berkshire Record which cited that \$80 million would be provided in the economic stimulus package to study the extension of passenger rail service from Connecticut to Pittsfield. Ms. Church explained that Mr. Karns sent the list of economic stimulus projects to the Berkshire Record's news editor.
- Mr. Siegars asked Ms. Church to follow up on a comment made by Mr. Karns at the MPO's September 9th meeting. Mr. Karns had mentioned that the Metro North commuter rail has been doing an environmental impact study of extending commuter rail on the Danbury line north to New Milford. Mr. Siegars asked if the possibility of extending commuter rail into the Commonwealth was part of this study. Ms. Church clarified that the consulting firm hired by Connecticut DOT to investigate rail service has not yet provided a scope of work and thus Ms. Church could not comment on the status of extending rail service into the Commonwealth.
- Mr. Haupt suggested that the TAC act as a proponent to extend commuter rail service from Boston to Springfield and that the TAC advocate that the study include the possibility of using existing infrastructure to provide commuter rail into Berkshire County.
- Ms. Ludwiszewski noted that she has joined the TAC on behalf of the business community throughout the nine towns which the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce represents. In response to a question from a TAC member, Ms. Ludwiszewski agreed to encourage the Town of Great Barrington to participate in the TAC so that the Town is not left out of the TIP process.
- Ms. Winn noted that there are several large environmental organizations working to get federal money for Wildlife Enhancement and Adaptation funding for road projects. Ms. Winn suggested the Commonwealth position itself to take advantage of this funding by making major road repair projects adhere to the Massachusetts River and Stream Crossing Standards and the Massachusetts

Stormwater Standards. These standards are already in place for new road projects. Ms. Winn suggested that these standards will help prepare roads for larger storms and floods storms due to climate change as well allow wildlife and farm animals to pass under roads more easily. Ms. Winn suggested the TAC review the materials she provided and that the TAC consider taking some formal action in the future. Mr. Siegars suggested that Ms. Winn present on these standards at a future TAC meeting and that these standards could potentially be added to the TIP evaluation criteria.

Mr. Siegars encouraged communities to look at the new MS4 stormwater standards issued by EPA (municipal separate storm sewer systems) as well as the RIA (Regulated Impervious Areas) standards issued by DEP which include a new annual storm water licensing requirement. These standards may apply to some road projects.

6. Next Meeting Date and Agenda

The date of the next TAC meeting will be set after the February 27th MPO meeting. The TAC will meet prior to the following MPO meeting to discuss the proposed gas tax. Mr. Malnati motioned to adjourn at 5:40. Mr. Tinkham seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Report on Issues Brought to a Motion

- The motion to endorse the proposed amendments to the FY2007-2010 TIP carried unanimously.