

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

*~ From the Meeting Held on April 8, 2009 ~*

The following TAC representatives were present:

Sam Haupt, Town of Peru Representative, TAC Vice Chair  
Jack Hickey, Town of Lanesborough Representative  
Jana Hunkler Brule, Town of Florida and BerkshireRides Representative  
Bob Malnati, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority Representative  
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham Representative, TAC Chair  
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team  
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall Representative  
Beth VanNess, Town of Becket Representative  
Bruce Collingwood, City of Pittsfield Representative  
Gordon Davis, Town of Washington Representative  
Scott Park, Town of Williamstown Representative  
John Boyle, Town of Dalton Representative

Also present were:

Bill Decelles, Lanesborough Highway Superintendent  
David Fish, Washington Highway Superintendent  
Sean Frank, Savoy Highway Superintendent  
John Tynan, Savoy Selectboard Chair  
Harold House, All States Asphalt, Inc.

Rachel Dargie, Mass Highway District 1  
Peter Frieri, Mass Highway District 1  
Alison Church, BRPC Transportation Program Manager  
Anuja Koirala, BRPC Senior Transportation Planner  
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 February 10<sup>th</sup> TAC Meeting**

Mr. Siegars explained that the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) provides assistance to the Berkshire Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Mr. Siegars encouraged municipal representatives to attend TAC meetings in order to advocate municipal road projects for placement on the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

### **3. Report from the March 6<sup>th</sup> MPO Meeting**

Mr. Siegars noted that the MPO approved several TIP amendments to take advantage of economic stimulus funding available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

#### **4. Presentation by MHD District 1: Opportunities for Advancing Pavement Preservation Projects**

Prior to the MHD presentation, Ms. Church provided a handout summarizing the five projects the MPO added to the 2009 element of the FFY 2007-2010 TIP. These projects will be funded through ARRA. Three of these projects have already been advertised. The Route 116 resurfacing and retaining wall replacement project in Adams has been advertised as of March 14<sup>th</sup>. The Route 7 resurfacing and related work project in Lanesborough and New Ashford has been advertised as of March 21<sup>st</sup>. The Route 8 resurfacing project in Cheshire has been advertised as of March 28<sup>th</sup>. These projects are all pavement preservation projects. The remaining two projects, the Route 7/Route 8 Connector Road reconstruction project in Lanesborough and the Route 7A/Kemble Street reconstruction project in Lenox, are much larger projects that have not yet been advertised.

In response to a question from a TAC member, Mr. Siegars provided a brief overview of the TIP process. In order for projects to be placed on the TIP, they must be eligible for federal aid. The first step in the process is for municipalities to submit Project Need Forms (PNFs) to MHD and BRPC. PNFs can be submitted to MHD throughout the year. Once MHD determines that the project is eligible, towns receive notification to proceed with design work. Design work can be funded through town funds, STRAP grants, PWED grants, etc. BRPC can assist in identifying funding sources for planning and design.

The MHD design review process is very structured. First, projects are placed on the supplemental list of the TIP. The supplement list includes a large number of projects at various stages of readiness. The TIP is a four year planning document that is updated every year. The TIP is financially constrained. Each year of the TIP has a specific funding target that cannot be carried into the next year. It is important to note that the TIP runs according to the federal fiscal year and starts October 1<sup>st</sup>. The MPO identifies projects to be placed on the four year TIP through review of the Regional Transportation Plan and with the assistance of BRPC staff and the TAC. The TIP includes both preservation and improvement projects.

MHD reports on the status of TIP projects at each MPO meeting. The information is also available on the MHD website. Mr. Siegars encouraged those present to attend MPO meetings to learn more about the process. Municipal officials need to act as their own “best advocate” to increase the likelihood that their projects will be placed on the TIP. Municipal officials should find out who their MPO representative is and work closely with MHD and BRPC to advance their projects. Attendees were also encouraged to work with their TAC representative or consider becoming a TAC member if there is no current municipal representative. MPO membership list is available on the BRPC website at: <http://berkshireplanning.org/3/MPO/>. The TAC membership list is available on the BRPC website at: <http://berkshireplanning.org/3/TAC/>

Once the MPO votes a project onto the TIP, the project will stay on the TIP. However, projects may come off the TIP if design work is not completed by the time funding becomes available. Mr. Siegars encouraged municipalities to continue working on design so that the projects will be ready when funding becomes available. It is possible for the Berkshire TIP targets to increase if other regions throughout the state are forced to drop incomplete projects from their TIPs.

The Project Need Forms and associated paperwork is available on the MHD website at:  
<http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/default.asp?pgid=content/projectReview&sid=about#newforms>

BRPC also sent out a TIP solicitation packet to all Selectboards, Planning Boards and DPW Highway Superintendents. Ms. Church encouraged municipalities to submit updated paperwork to MHD and BRPC each year. Municipalities should respond to letters from MHD asking for more information about projects. When municipalities do not respond to letters or other correspondence, it indicates to MHD and BRPC that the municipality does not have an active interest in the project. Ms. Church reiterated that it is important for municipalities to be their own “best advocate.”

Mr. Frieri noted that the MHD presentation was developed by the District 2 staff and was first presented at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in February.

The presentation provided an overview of how ARRA funding relates to regional transportation funding. Massachusetts anticipates receiving between \$6 and \$9 billion over the next two years for education, healthcare, public safety, housing and other critical programs. From this amount, approximately \$1 billion will be used for infrastructure improvements. Massachusetts will receive \$437.9 million for highway projects. From this amount, the state must obligate or advertise \$153 million worth of “shovel ready” projects within 120 days of apportionment. The ARRA bill was signed by President Obama in mid-February, which means that the 120 days will end sometime in early July. The remainder of the funds must be committed within one year of apportionment and must be completely spent by September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015. ARRA funding has been made available through Title 23 and will be allocated through state transportation departments. This is because not every state has a Chapter 90 program to allow funds to be allocated directly to towns and cities. In response to a question from a TAC member, Mr. Frieri noted that MHD is responsible for the administration of design and construction of TIP projects.

“Shovel ready” projects are those that are fully designed and have received all required permits and right-of-way certification. These projects must be advertised by early July 2009. It is important to note that the state risks losing funds if it cannot advertise projects in a timely manner. The money would be given to other states with projects that are ready to go. This applies to both funding rounds. The state has identified a large number of “shovel ready” projects for funding through the first \$153 million and it is unlikely that the state will lose this money. There are hundreds of road and bridge projects that are potential candidates for the remainder of the funds. It is not clear how much funding will be available in the second round. MPOs are expected to begin considering projects for the second round of funding in late spring/early summer 2009.

Mr. Frieri discussed the difference between standard TIP projects and “book jobs,” that include simple pavement preservation resurfacing projects. “Book jobs” are more simple in scope and do not require the full set of plans required for larger projects, such as total reconstruction projects. Pavement preservation projects are eligible for federal funding and are a good way for regions to stretch its TIP dollars before total reconstruction is needed. Although “book jobs” must follow the standard MHD procedures and approvals, these projects often get through the review process more quickly and easily than larger projects. Because the review process can be so much easier,

Mr. Frieri encouraged communities to get these types of projects “shovel ready” for the second round of ARRA funding. Projects that already have an identified funding source, such as federal earmarks or Accelerated Bridge Program projects, are unlikely candidates for ARRA funding.

Ms. Church added that the pavement preservation projects are good candidates for inclusion on the TIP because they can be programmed at a smaller cost than full depth reconstruction projects and can be more easily “squeezed” into the funding targets for each year. There are three types of highway funding available: Surface Transportation Program funds (STP funds), safety funds (HSIP funds), and congestion mitigation funds (CMAQ funds).

Mr. Frieri concluded his presentation by quickly reviewing the MHD design timeline, including a summary of the information which municipalities must submit to MHD at each stage of review. Review submissions are required four times throughout the review process. Municipalities must submit 25% design plans, 75% design plans, 100% design plans and a final PS&E submission. Mr. Frieri and Mr. Siegars encouraged communities to adhere to the review checklists when making their design submissions. Projects may be held up in review if information is missing or the design requirements are not met. The complete presentation is available on the BRPC website at: [http://berkshireplanning.org/3/TAC/MHD\\_Pavement\\_Presentation](http://berkshireplanning.org/3/TAC/MHD_Pavement_Presentation)

## **5. Member Items for Discussion**

- BRPC staff provided a copy of the “Status of TIP Projects” as provided by MHD at the February 3<sup>rd</sup> MPO meeting. Mr. Frieri noted that the Route7/Route 8 Connector Road reconstruction project will be funded through ARRA and will begin in 2009 rather than 2012, as shown on the handout.
- BRPC staff provided a copy of the Summer 2009 Traffic Count Solicitation Letter which was sent to City/Town Officials and DPWs. BRPC performs traffic counts each year between June and August at no charge to municipalities. Interested municipal officials should submit requests by April 30<sup>th</sup> to Christine Neumann, [cneumann@berkshireplanning.org](mailto:cneumann@berkshireplanning.org)
- BRPC staff provided a copy of a flier soliciting volunteers for the May 2 and May 5 Ashuwillticook Trail Count. Meeting attendees were encouraged to distribute the flier in their communities. People interested in volunteering should contact Christine Neumann.
- Ms. Winn noted that she would be ready to present sometime in the fall on the Massachusetts River and Stream Crossing Standards and the Massachusetts Stormwater Standards and how these standards relate to Wildlife Enhancement and Adaptation funding for road projects.

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

The next TAC meeting will be held on May 20<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m. The TAC will discuss transportation reform legislation, including the proposed gas tax increase.

Mr. Haupt motioned to adjourn at 6:10. Mr. Malnati seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

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

- There were no issues brought to a motion at the April 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.