

2012 Regional Transportation Plan

Chapter VIII Recommendations



Chapter VIII – Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Regional Transportation Plan identifies capital projects – roads, bridges, buses, and bike paths – that address Regional needs with Federal investments. The RTP also considers problems that may not be solved with a straight forward project or procurement. Comments from stakeholders and public involvement participants, in addition to the inventories and analysis, point to situations that require wither much more specific or much more systemic study than a single project.

Many complex factors exacerbate some transportation problems to the point where resurfacing a road, adding a turn lane, or re-decking a bridge are not the solution. Truck traffic in small downtowns without freeway access is an example– new routes are costly, damage the environment, and run the risk of diverting traffic through neighborhoods and away from businesses. Also, there are many issues unique to the Berkshire’s geography, ecology, and history that require atypical approaches.

These issues, and many others, need consideration in the MPO’s significant certification processes, the annual Unified Planning Work Project (UPWP–the document that directs the MPO’s tasks and planning functions) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP–the document that assigns funding for projects). The following recommendations do not address a particular construction project, rather should apply to how we consider the Berkshire’s entire transportation system. Programs and projects that result from these ongoing and detailed examinations will feed into the next RTP. The recommendations may also consider how state and Federal policies affect our region and the MPO’s assessment of how they positively or negatively impact the Berkshires.

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A. REGIONAL DATA COLLECTION, FORECASTING, AND ANALYSIS

- Use the annual traffic count program to devise appropriate day-month-season adjustment factors based on the Berkshire's large share of weekend homeowners and our tourism-influenced economy.
- The MPO should work with MassDOT and FHWA to review the Federal Aid Urban Boundaries and National Functional Classification System.
- The Berkshire MPO should annually update data on the condition of the Federal-Aid road system in the County.
- Update the Berkshire MPO's Environmental Justice analysis with the most recent and accurate data available. Compare the Berkshires to statewide, New England, and national trends in comparable regions.

B. BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN PLANNING

- Integrate pedestrian and non-motorized improvements into all Federal-Aid projects according to the MassDOT 'Complete Streets' policies.
- Plan, design, and construct additional segments of the Berkshire Bike Path, the north-south bicycle arterial planned from Williamstown to Sheffield.
- Inventory bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Help communities plan for nonmotorized improvements that foster healthier, walkable communities.
- Participate with local communities in MassDOT's Safe Routes to School program.
- Update the Berkshire Bike Path Implementation Plan.

C. SAFETY INITIATIVES

- Analyze vehicle/animal collision data to identify potential priority areas for animal crossings, particularly areas bounded by open spaces on both sides of the road.
- Reduce crash potential in concert with federal aid road projects.
- Annually monitor crash data and identify high crash locations in the Berkshires.
- Conduct Road Safety Audits with MassDOT, FHWA and local communities for one to three high crash locations each year.

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D. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- Support BRTA's capital and service improvement efforts, including reducing headways during peak periods, offering weekend hours, and Sunday service.
- Promote expanded public transportation options and ridership campaigns.
- Help coordinate social service public transportation providers.

E. TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

- Work with employers to reduce commuting miles through travel demand management techniques like car/vanpooling, flexible hours and four day workweeks, and telecommuting.
- Catalog and evaluate the signal operations and equipment in the northern, central, and southern areas of the county. Gather data, simulate traffic conditions, and analyze signal phasing when local communities request assistance.
- Conceive a system of dynamic message boards or other information technology to direct tourist traffic during special events like Tanglewood concerts and 3rd Thursday's in downtown Pittsfield.
- Use ITS technology to manage and monitor transportation resources during emergency events.

F. FREIGHT AND GOODS MOVEMENT

- Overcome the Region's lack of access to the Interstate Highway System by planning an expedited access route from I-90 to Pittsfield and continuing to North Adams. This effort is accomplished with a combination of transportation systems management, roadway widening and realignment, intersection improvements, and/or limited access facilities.
- Mitigate the impacts of truck traffic on the Berkshire's unique and quaint downtowns.
- Examine opportunities for intermodal freight transfers to alleviate the lack of access to the Interstate Highway System suffered by the County's heavy industry.
- Enhance opportunities for the region's airports to develop complimentary industry and improve safe operations.
- Study the adequacy of rail sidings, and land development opportunities in proximity to rail facilities.
- Expansion of freight rail service as recommended by the Statewide Rail and Freight Plan, and associated infrastructure requirements (including upgrades to the Hoosac tunnel and clearances along the CSX line to allow for modern double-stack rail cars).

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G. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION

- Substantially increase the use of alternative modes of transportation with significant improvements to transit service, increased pedestrian and bicycle connectivity, and vastly expanded passenger rail service.
- Design transportation improvements to adequately handle increased frequency and severity of rain events resulting from climate change. Limit expansion of impervious surfaces during road improvement projects, especially where runoff impacts environmentally sensitive areas and flood zones.
- Incorporate Low Impact Development into stormwater management systems and use pervious pavements where appropriate.
- All construction projects should consider the ecological integrity of the area they impact and allow for habitat migration resulting from climate change.
- Educate planning boards, conservation commissions, and DPW Superintendents on LID in transportation projects.
- Support efficiency standards similar to those proposed by California or EPA and incentivize fuel efficient vehicles to replace gas guzzlers, and support low carbon fuels.
- Educate drivers about ways to improve mileage (vehicle and tire maintenance, drive the speed limit, etc.)
- Enact MassDOT's GreenDOT, Global Warming, Healthy Transportation Compact, Complete Streets and Baystate Greenways initiatives, reducing greenhouse gas emissions through promoting alternate modes of transportation and mitigating congestion.



H. LOCAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

- Assisting local communities in programming their own funds for local street improvements outside of the Federal-Aid program and Chapter 90 program.
- Assist Berkshire communities with establishing pavement management systems to cost-effectively allocate scarce road maintenance funding.
- Develop example bylaws that require on-site storage and pre-treatment of stormwater; consider the projected impacts of global warming on storm frequency and severity and incorporate higher stormwater design standards for all highway and bridge reconstruction and new construction projects.
- Encourage the use of "best management practices" on gravel roads that mitigate negative impacts.
- Assist communities with compliance plans for upgrading retroreflectivity of regulatory, warning, and ground mounted guide signs by January 22, 2015. Upgrade sign retroreflectivity of stop and caution signs with HSIP funds, if an annual HSIP allocation does not coordinate with other region target funds.
- Provide technical assistance for anti-idling programs that enforce state laws limiting idling to 5 minutes.
- Conduct safety audits, speed studies, traffic counts, and other traffic engineering studies for local communities.

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I. LAND USE AND CONNECTIONS

- Coordinate purpose and need, evaluation metrics, and recommendations of all MPO activities with the 2012 RTP Goals and Objectives.
- Apply the SAFETEA-LU, or successor legislation, planning factors to transportation planning activities at the Berkshire MPO.
- Coordinate land use, transportation, and economic development through the Regional Sustainability Plan.
- Encourage Smart Growth and Sustainable Development Practices, particularly redevelopment/infill in existing urban areas.
- Coordinate potential north-south passenger rail service with land development and other transportation improvements.
- Consider the transportation/land use connection for the Berkshire's housing options and economy.

J. TRANSPORTATION FINANCE

- Replace the fixed per gallon gas tax at the state and Federal levels with transportation revenues that recognize the reduction of gas usage but increased needs for infrastructure and services. Examples include a tax rate indexed to inflation or the price of oil and a tax on vehicle miles traveled.
- Promote legislation to allow local or regional sales taxes for transportation infrastructure improvements.
- Ensure that the BRTA is Forward Funded as adopted in the Transportation Reform Act.
- Work at the state level to equitably distribute –to all regional transit authorities– the one cent statewide sales tax that the MBTA receives.
- Exploring District Improvement Financing for transportation infrastructure projects strategically for economic development.
- Reinstating toll collection on the Western Turnpike to increase overall transportation funding and improve maintenance on and access to the Berkshire's only Interstate Highway.
- Pursuing transportation improvement financing from other Federal resources (e.g. HUD and EDA) as it becomes available.
- Advance national investment in the Berkshires within federal authorization and appropriations legislation.

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K. SPECIAL STUDIES

- Monitor operations along corridors and intersections in congested areas where projects are proposed or were implemented. (Park Square in Pittsfield, South St. in Pittsfield, Main St. in Great Barrington, etc.)
- Study East St. between Elm and Merrill in Pittsfield. This study should examine traffic operations, different modes of transportation, existing, and proposed land uses.
- The next phase of the Lee Area Traffic Study should consider more specific improvements and detailed traffic operations through downtown and on Rte 20 to the Lenox Bypass and complete the detailed evaluation of freeway interchange locations in the vicinity of the Lee/Stockbridge town line as recommended by the Lee Area Traffic Study.
- Implement the 7/20 Access Management Study zoning and permitting recommendations.
- Evaluate access management in Great Barrington along State and Stockbridge Roads.
- Complete the next phase of Route 8 Corridor Study between Adams and North Adams due to recent fatal crashes and proposed developments that will change traffic.
- Determine specific future traffic operations and capacity needs in the next phase of the Hubbard Avenue Study.
- Survey of a cross section of the region's people to define the Berkshires' existing and desired level of personal mobility and best how to best address gaps, regardless of transportation mode.
- Conduct an evaluation and identify ways to overcome impediments to serving populations with special needs in meeting their transportation needs.

L. PASSENGER RAIL






- Assist the Housatonic Railroad Corporation to acquire funding to implement passenger rail service northward, from Danbury to Pittsfield.
- Advocate for more frequent and timely AMTRAK service through Pittsfield from Albany and Boston.
- Establish facility and space needs for stations and parking areas along the north-south Housatonic Railroad.

The annual Transportation Improvement Program identifies projects through an evaluation that considers how Environmental Justice (EJ) populations are impacted by the MPO's Federal funding decisions and scores projects more favorably if they have a favorable impact on EJ populations. There are 8 HSIP eligible intersections within census blocks that meet three or more EJ thresholds. Although only a fraction of the road projects submitted by communities for the RTP (2%) are in within census blocks that meet three or more EJ thresholds arguably one of the projects with the greatest opportunity to improve access and mobility for EJ populations – the BMC area improvements– is current funding priority for the MPO. Public transportation projects inherently benefit persons with lack of access and mobility, thus the 20-year transit vision has a tremendous benefit to EJ populations.

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Environmental Justice & 2012 RTP Projects

Legend

-  Exceeds 3 EJ Thresholds
-  Submitted Projects
-  HSIP Eligible Sites
-  Roads
-  Local Boundaries



0 1.5 3 6 Miles

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