

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

*~ From the Meeting Held on August 6, 2009 ~*

The following TAC representatives were present:

Wayne Burkhart, Town of Monterey  
Gordon Davis, Town of Washington  
Frank Feigin, Town of Windsor  
Sam Haupt, Town of Peru, TAC Vice Chair  
Jack Hickey, Town of Lanesborough  
Bob Malnati, Berkshire Regional Transit Authority  
John McNinch, Town of Lenox  
Bill Mulholland, Berkshire Community College  
Joe Scelsi, Berkshire Mall  
Mark Siegars, Town of Tyringham, TAC Chair  
Ron Tinkham, Baker Hill Road District  
Kevin O'Donnell, Town of Great Barrington  
Scott Park, Town of Williamstown  
Jane Winn, Berkshire Environmental Action Team

Also present were:

Nat Karns, BRPC Executive Director  
Dave Daskal, BRPC Transportation Program Manager  
Anuja Koirala, BRPC Senior Transportation Planner  
Christine Neumann, BRPC Transportation Planner  
Peter Frieri, Mass Highway District 1  
Bruce Collingwood, Town of Pittsfield  
David Fish, Washington Highway Superintendent  
Doug Haskins, Peru Board of Selectmen  
Sarah Hudson, Tyringham citizen  
Tim Kaiser, Williamstown Department of Public Works  
Jim Lovejoy, Town of Mount Washington (Southwest Berkshire MPO Representative)  
Bob Nason, Lee Town Administrator  
Jason Ostrander, Economic Development Specialist for Congressman John Olver  
Ed Richards, Peru Board of Selectmen  
Curt Wilton, West Stockbridge Board of Selectmen and Highway Superintendent

## **Summary of Items Discussed**

### **1. Introductions**

TAC Chair, Mark Siegars, called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. All attendees introduced themselves.

### **2. Report from June 25<sup>th</sup> TAC Meeting**

There were no comments.

### **3. Report from the July 15<sup>th</sup> MPO Meeting**

Mr. Siegars summarized the July 15<sup>th</sup> MPO meeting. In addition to releasing for public comment the highway and transit amendments to the FFY09 element of the FFY07-10 TIP and the draft 2010 UPWP, the MPO also released a revised scenario of the FFY2010-2013 TIP for public comment. The revised scenario included the same projects in 2010, 2011 and 2012 that were presented to the TAC previously. At its July 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, the MPO voted to program the Main Street project in Great Barrington for FFY2013 rather than the East Street project in Pittsfield or the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida. At its June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, the TAC had recommended programming the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida for FFY2013.

There were no additional comments.

### **4. Review of Draft Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) FFY2010-2013 scenario developed by the Berkshire MPO**

Ms. Koirala summarized the revised scenario developed by the Berkshire MPO for the FFY2010-2013 TIP. The revised scenario included the same projects for 2010, 2011 and 2012 that were presented to the TAC previously. At its July 15<sup>th</sup> meeting, the MPO voted to program the Main Street project in Great Barrington for FFY2013 rather than the East Street project in Pittsfield or the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida. At its June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, the TAC had recommended programming the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida for FFY2013.

BRPC staff provided status summaries for the three projects. The major difference between the three projects is that the Main Street project in Great Barrington and the East Street project in Pittsfield both include CMAQ components, whereas the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida does not.

The Main Street project in Great Barrington had been programmed in previous TIPs. The project had been programmed for year 2006 of the 2004-2008 TIP, year 2007 of the 2005-2009 TIP and year 2008 of the 2006-2010 TIP. The East Street project in Pittsfield had been programmed in previous TIPS as well. This project had been programmed for year 2009 of the 2005-2009 TIP and year 2009 of the 2006-2010 TIP. The Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida has never been programmed in the TIP.

Mr. O'Donnell briefly described the Main Street project in Great Barrington. The Town acknowledges that, for many reasons, progress on this project had lagged for many years. However, the project is again moving forward under the Town's new administration. The project begins at St. James Place and extends to Cottage Street for a distance of approximately 0.5 miles. The project includes replacement and optimization of traffic signals, road reconstruction, safety improvements, downtown streetscape improvements and sidewalk improvements. The project cost is \$3,806,255. Most of the project cost will be funded through the STP regional target. The balance of the project cost will be paid through the CMAQ program. The Town is currently negotiating a contract with Fuss & O'Neill to design this project. Mr. O'Donnell noted that he expects the Selectboard to approve the design contract at its meeting on August 17<sup>th</sup>. Once the consultant is on board, the Town anticipates that the designs will be complete within 25 months and ready for construction in 2013.

In response to questions from TAC members, Mr. Collingwood noted that this timeframe seemed reasonable. Mr. Karns explained that the Main Street project in Great Barrington will use the entire funding allocation for 2013, except for the HSIP allocation.

The Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida and the East Street project in Pittsfield are both being designed by MassHighway. Mr. Frieri summarized the Route 2 project in North Adams and Florida. Emergency repairs were required along Route 2 after intense flooding occurred during 2005. Some of these emergency repairs now need to be made permanent. The project will consist of spot improvements and slope stabilization measures at three specific locations. One location is in North Adams, west of the Hairpin Turn. The other two locations are in Florida, east of Whitcomb Hill Road. MHD District 1 is actively preparing the 25% design plans. The project cost is \$3,094,326. This project will most likely require temporary slope easements, which have not yet been quantified. Required environmental permits have not yet been determined.

Mr. Frieri then summarized the East Street project in Pittsfield. The project begins at Lyman Street and proceeds easterly to the Merrill Road intersection for a distance of approximately 0.6 miles. The project includes roadway reconstruction and widening, sidewalk reconstruction, drainage improvements, landscaping, new traffic signs/markings, and new traffic signals at Silver Lake Boulevard and Woodlawn Avenue. From Lyman Street to the mid-point between Silver Lake Blvd. and Woodlawn Ave., there will be a transition section where the roadway will gradually widen from a two-lane undivided section to a four-lane section divided by a median. The four-lane (with median) section will continue eastward to Merrill Rd. When complete, on-road bike lanes and sidewalks will run continuously along both sides of East Street throughout the project length. The project cost is \$6,572,000. Because the project is CMAQ eligible, some of the project costs could be paid through the CMAQ program. The 25% design plans are currently under review by MassHighway. MassHighway anticipates holding the 25% design public hearing during the fall. Preliminary plans indicate that 12 permanent easements, 5 drainage easements, and 27 temporary construction easements will be required. An Environmental Notification Form and a Notice of Intent need to be filed with the local Conservation Commission.

Mr. Collingwood added that G.E. has indicated a willingness to cooperate on this project. Mr. Collingwood noted that, although no funding has been identified for right-of-way acquisition, the right-of-way process should not be very lengthy.

In response to a question from a TAC member, Mr. Karns explained that the East Street project in Pittsfield would use the entire funding allocation for 2013, as well as a portion of the funding allocation for 2014. The East Street project may be eligible for CMAQ funding, but it may not be eligible for HSIP funding if there is no compelling accident data. Mr. Karns added that this is may also be true for the Main Street project in Great Barrington.

Mr. Tinkham noted that the MPO seemed concerned about the status of the East Street project west of Lyman Street to Elm Street. Mr. Collingwood responded that the City is responsible for this portion of the project, but that no work has been done on this portion.

Mr. Haupt noted that the revised scenario developed by the Berkshire MPO, which included programming the Great Barrington Main Street project in 2013, has already gone out for public review. The TAC did not take any further action regarding the 2010-2013 TIP funding scenario that was developed by the MPO.

##### **5. Discussion of priorities for highway funding in the next round of ARRA funding**

BRPC staff provided a list of highway projects in Berkshire County that are eligible for the second round of funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Mr. Karns explained that a number of Berkshire County municipalities submitted transportation projects to the Lieutenant Governor in January. Six of the projects under consideration today were submitted at that time. Another two projects were submitted subsequent to the development of the Lieutenant Governor's list. These were the reconstruction project of Skyline Trail in Peru and a resurfacing project for several arterial streets in Pittsfield. Mr. Karns noted that BRPC staff has not attempted to prioritize these eight projects.

EOT Planning is responsible for assessing the transportation projects. MHD is required to administer the funds, which means that eligible projects must meet MHD design guidelines. Eligible projects must also be federal-aid eligible. This means that local street projects not on federal-aid highways are ineligible. It was unclear if the bridge repairs project in Lee or the Skyline Trail project in Peru are federal-aid eligible. These issues will be resolved by the MPO meeting on August 26<sup>th</sup>.

The State has spent approximately half of the \$400 million the State had for highway projects. There is approximately \$200-250 million left available statewide. Projects receiving this funding must be advertised by February 2010 in order to meet the three year expenditure limit established by Congress. Mr. Frieri noted that it took the consultant for the North Adams resurfacing project about five months to get the project to 100% design. Mr. Frieri added that there is no guarantee that any of the eight projects will be funded. There are no regional allocations required for the second round.

Mr. Karns expressed his concern that some of the projects on the list do not yet have MHD project ID numbers. Project identification numbers are necessary for MHD staff to begin any work on the project. Municipalities with projects without project identification numbers or that have not submitted a Project Need Form, need to contact MassHighway District 1 as soon as possible to complete the necessary paperwork.

In response to a question from a TAC member, Mr. Karns explained that the Berkshire MPO does not have to program any CMAQ funds in 2010, 2011 or 2012. This is because the State is under a legal requirement to implement improvements to the Fitchburg MBTA rail line. The State has received \$75 million from the federal government to upgrade the rail line. The State is obligated to match the federal funds. In order to use CMAQ funds to cover the state match, the state reduced funding for statewide programs, as well as the regional TIP targets. The trade off is that the MPOs do not have to program CMAQ projects for three years. However, if there are projects with CMAQ components, it is still beneficial to program CMAQ funds, but that funding would come out of the regional targets.

Representatives were asked to describe each eligible project:

- Resurfacing and partial reconstruction of Tyringham Road in Lee (Project ID: 601320):  
Mr. Nason, Lee Town Administrator, summarized the Tyringham Road project in Lee. The project would include roadway resurfacing and partial reconstruction of Tyringham Road, which links the Towns of Lee and Tyringham. The Town has been working on this project for at least three years. The current project cost is \$4 million. The 25% design plans have been submitted. The Town is currently awaiting comments and MHD approval before scheduling the 25% design public hearing. A design modification request has been approved so that the road will not need to be widened. The environmental review is well underway and a MEPA Certificate was issued in July 2009. The project may need environmental surveys for rare species. The Town also needs to secure a right-of-way certificate.

- Miscellaneous repairs of 15 and ½ town owned bridges in Lee (Project ID: Not Yet Assigned):  
Mr. Nason summarized the bridge repairs project. The project would include miscellaneous repairs to 15 and ½ town owned bridges. The Town has been working on this project since 2003. At that time, Foresight Land Services reviewed the conditions of the Town's bridges. The current project cost is \$5 million. The Town has set aside \$1 million of Chapter 90 funds for this project. The project needs MHD's Project Review Committee (PRC) approval to be eligible for ARRA funding.

Mr. Nason mentioned that the Town of Lee has suffered economically over the past two years from the closing of four of the five paper mills in Lee. This project will play an important role in the economic reinvention of the community. One bridge in particular, the Meadow Street bridge, is one of the two main bridges that need repairs. This bridge is currently laden in lead paint and leads to the Oak and Spruce Resort, which is one of the community's largest tax payers. Although the majority of the repairs are not extensive, a substantial portion of the repair costs will go toward the removal of the lead paint on the Meadow Street bridge. Another bridge leads to the Willow Mill, the one remaining paper mill still in operation.

- Resurfacing of Route 23 in Monterey (Project ID: Not Yet Assigned):  
Mr. Burkhart, Monterey Selectboard Chair, summarized the Route 23 project in Monterey. This project would include roadway resurfacing of 7.14 miles along Route 23 from the Otis town line to the Great Barrington town line. This is a numbered route that is not maintained by the state. The current project cost is \$1,590,192. The Town applied for a strap grant of \$500,000 for this project prior to the project being considered for ARRA funding. The Town is currently in the process of hiring a design firm. The project needs PRC approval to be eligible for ARRA funding.

Mr. Burkhart noted that the road is in such poor condition that if it is not resurfaced now, it will have to be reconstructed at a much higher cost. About 10% of the road was resurfaced in 1992, with most of the road last repaired over 20 years ago. Some local town work will precede this project, including drainage improvements. Mr. Burkhart noted that the Town DPW will complete the necessary paperwork to receive a project ID number.

- Reconstruction and rehabilitation of Skyline Trail in Peru (Project ID: 601739):

Mr. Richards, Peru Selectboard member, summarized the Skyline Trail project in Peru. This project would include the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Skyline Trail (Middlefield Rd.) from the Hinsdale/Peru town line to the Middlefield/Peru town line. Mr. Frieri explained that the Skyline Trail project in Hinsdale and Peru has been split into two separate projects. The Hinsdale section of the project has significant right-of-way and environmental issues and is not currently under active design. The Peru section of this project is under active design by MassHighway. The current project cost for the Peru section is \$6.673 million. The 75% design plans have been submitted for the Peru section and are currently under review by MHD. All of the necessary environmental permits have been acquired for this portion of the project. The project still requires the approval of a design modification request to avoid widening the roadway. MHD District 1 is currently investigating the eligibility of the project for federal aid.

Mr. Richards noted that this project has been in the works for approximately eighteen years. Middlefield Road is a main bus route for Central Berkshire Regional School District and for vocational schools in Middlefield and Chester. It is the only emergency route from Middlefield to the BMC in Pittsfield. There is a new manufacturing facility in Westfield which has increased the number of large trucks on the road. Middlefield Road is used as a bypass for people coming from Huntington and Chester who do not want to use Route 8 or Route 20. This is particularly true for gravel trucks and other large trucks heading into Hinsdale, Dalton and Pittsfield.

A fatality on the road early in the spring of 2009 was attributed to the Town's inability to adequately plow the road due to its many sinkholes. The road is particularly dangerous in the winter at several locations where poor drainage causes the roadway to be covered in several inches of ice. Over the last two years, the Town has used \$39,000 of its own highway department resources to patch the sinkholes. Two years ago, MHD added 700 tons of temporary patching to the roadway on Cole Hill to repair damages incurred during heavy rainstorms. This area is now back to its previous condition. The Berkshire MPO delegate from the north central subregion has indicated his support of the project. Mr. Haupt commented that, because a substantial portion of the projects in Berkshire County funded through the first round of ARRA funding were located in urban areas, it would be beneficial for rural areas to see some funding during the second round.

- Intersection improvements on Wahconah Street in Pittsfield (Project ID: Not Yet Assigned):

Mr. Collingwood, Pittsfield Commissioner of Public Works, summarized the Wahconah Street project. The project would include intersection improvements and the addition of a traffic signal at the lower Wahconah Street/North Street intersection. The current project cost is \$660,000. The project is currently under design by the City. The project will be presented to the PRC for review on August 13<sup>th</sup>. In response to a question from a TAC member, Mr. Collingwood explained this project will not include the realignment of the lower Wahconah Street/North Street intersection. This project may be eligible for HSP funding.

- Resurfacing of several arterial streets in Pittsfield (Project ID: 605695)

Mr. Collingwood summarized the resurfacing project on several arterial streets in Pittsfield. The project will include resurfacing on First Street, Barker Road, Holmes Road and Valentine Road on sections where pavement base conditions need improvement. Improvements will be made

within the existing edge of roadway pavement or curbing, with adjustments to rims of existing utility structures as needed. Traffic loops in the pavement at signalized intersections will be replaced. The current project cost is \$2.8 million. The City's consultant is currently preparing the 25% design plans. This project has already received PRC approval.

- Downtown enhancements on Main Street in West Stockbridge (Project ID: Not Yet Assigned) Mr. Wilton, West Stockbridge Highway Superintendent, summarized the downtown enhancements project in West Stockbridge. The project will include beautification improvements to approximately 900 feet of roadway along Route 102 in the West Stockbridge Village Center. Improvements will include the installation of new concrete sidewalks, crosswalks, granite curbing, lighting and landscaping. The project will not include any road repairs, but will make the area more accessible for pedestrians. The current project cost is \$1 million. The design plans were at approximately 50% as of July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The project needs approval from the State Enhancement Committee in order to be eligible for ARRA funding.

Mr. Wilton noted that the town had applied for a PWED grant. The grant was not awarded due to the angled parking in West Stockbridge, which does not meet MHD design standards. Mr. Frieri noted that the Town could obtain a design waiver, but the Town will need to show that the number of accidents will not increase if the angled parking remains the same.

- Widening of Water Street in Williamstown (Project ID: Not Yet Assigned) Mr. Kaiser, Williamstown Director of Public Works, summarized the Water Street project in Williamstown. The project will include improvements to a portion of Water Street (Route 43) in the vicinity of the old General Cable Mill. The project will include the widening of Water Street to the full width of the existing layout (50' right-of-way) in order to accommodate adequate shoulders for bicycles and parallel parking on one side. Sidewalks on both sides will be widened and improved to meet current ADA accessibility. The project will also include some streetscape elements. The current project cost is \$1,495,396. The Town has retained a design firm as of July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009. The project needs PRC approval to be eligible for ARRA funding.

Mr. Kaiser explained that the project is located in an old industrial neighborhood, and although the project area is immediately adjacent to the central commercial district on Spring Street, Water Street is very isolated because of the poor conditions and street layout. The poor street and sidewalk conditions are not conducive to the redevelopment of the neighborhood, including the small businesses in the area. A private developer will be redeveloping the General Cable Mill into 84 units of market-rate and affordable housing condominiums at an anticipated cost of \$22 million. This project would contribute to the economic development of the area.

Mr. Kaiser also noted that the Town has been working with MHD on cost estimates for both ARRA and PWED applications and that he was in the process of completing the Project Need Form. Mr. Kaiser noted that it would not be too difficult to get the project to 25% design phase and that it seemed reasonable that the project could be ready to be advertised by February 2010.

In response to questions from TAC members, Mr. Karns explained that any projects funded during the second round of ARRA will be programmed in the 2010 element of the 2010-2013

TIP. Mr. Karns continued to explain that the lower Wahconah Street traffic signalization project is the only one of the eight projects to have a potential impact on air quality.

Three of the eight projects have MHD project ID numbers. These are the Tyringham Road project in Lee, the Skyline Trail project in Peru, and the resurfacing project of several arterial streets in Pittsfield. These three projects could be fully designed by February 2010.

In framing a motion for the TAC to consider, Mr. Siegars suggested separating the projects into two groups; those with MHD project ID numbers and those without. On behalf of the Town of Peru, Mr. Richards moved to recommend to the Berkshire MPO that those ARRA eligible projects which have MHD project ID numbers be funded through the second round of ARRA funding and programmed in year 2010 of the 2010-2013 TIP. Mr. Malnati seconded. Mr. Siegars noted that the 2010 TIP year begins October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009.

Mr. Burkhart questioned whether it was fair to exclude projects that do not currently have MHD Project ID numbers. Mr. Collingwood added that the lower Wahconah Street traffic signalization project will be reviewed by the PRC next week and will receive a project ID number at that time. Mr. Siegars suggested amending the motion to include in the list of projects recommended to the Berkshire MPO for funding through the second round of ARRA any other projects that could receive MHD project ID numbers prior to the MPO meeting on August 26<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Richards and Mr. Malnati agreed. Mr. Karns noted that the MPO could meet as needed in the fall in order to address projects that continue to advance or to eliminate projects from the list that have not advanced. The motion carried unanimously.

## **6. Member Items for Discussion**

In response to questions from TAC members, Mr. Frieri explained what is meant by the term “pavement preservation.” Pavement preservation has become a more common strategy employed by MHD as a means to stretch limited dollars. One technique for pavement preservation is called ‘thin lift pavements.’ Mr. Frieri explained the basics of thin lift pavements which includes a thin surface coating and may also include limited remilling, depending on the roadway conditions. This technique is used for roadways that still have structurally sound foundations. This technique costs about half as much per mile as conventional resurfacing.

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

The Berkshire MPO will meet on August 26<sup>th</sup>. The next TAC meeting date was left open. Mr. Karns noted that BRPC staff will want to brief the TAC sometime in the fall on some recent planning work products, including the Southern Berkshire Community Transit Study, the BRTA Needs Assessment and Analysis of Fixed Route Bus System Study, and the Lee Area Traffic Study.

Mr. Tinkham motioned to adjourn. Mr. Feigin seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

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

- The motion to recommend to the Berkshire MPO funding those ARRA eligible projects which currently have MHD project ID numbers, as well as those projects that can receive MHD project ID numbers prior to the MPO meeting on August 26<sup>th</sup> and programming them in year 2010 of the 2010-2013 TIP, carried unanimously.