

MONTACHUSETT JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (MJTC) MEETING
MINUTES OF June 14, 2023
Meeting Held Online through GoToMeeting.com - Hosted by the MRPC

Due to technical issues, B. Harris on behalf of D. Kilhart, Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:34 p.m.

I. Introduction

Members

Roger Hoyt, Ashburnham; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Janet Tice, Shirley; Beth Faxon, Townsend; Brian Croteau, Winchendon

Ex-Officio and Organizations

David Kline, The ARC of Opportunity; George Kahale, MART; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT District 2; Ben Breger, MassDOT District 2; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT District 3

Non-Members

Amanda Reid, Lunenburg; Susan Templeton, Sen. Cronin's Office; Erica Dack, Hubbardston; Kelly Dolan, HHS Director, Lancaster

Staff

Brad Harris; George Snow; Sheri Bean; Brian Doherty

II. Public Comments

A question was asked as to whether a town's MJTC representative has to be a resident of that community. B. Harris responded, no they do not. What is important is that the town is confident and satisfied with the appointee that they will report back to the town as needed.

III. Approval of May 10, 2023 Minutes

A consensus was reached to accept the minutes for May 10, 2023 as presented.

IV. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- Review of Draft 2024 RTP – Journey to 2050
- Population Projections
- MJTC Recommendation to MPO Regarding Draft RTP

B. Harris informed the MJTC members of the current status of the development of the draft RTP. Previous sections of the RTP have been presented to the MJTC and various discussions were held. We will be presenting the full RTP to the MPO at their meeting rescheduled for July 28th at which time we will seek their approval to release the document for a 21-day public review and comment period. The RTP will then be posted to the MRPC website for everyone to review. As of now, we expect the comment period to run from Monday July 3rd to Monday July 24th. The July 12th meeting of the MJTC will serve as a public meeting for comments to the RTP.

G. Snow presented information related to the Safety chapter of the RTP. He indicated that safety trends related to the number of fatalities in the region, based on a five-year rolling average, have shown a slight upward trend recently. At the same time, the five-year rolling average for serious injuries have trended downward. Within the chapter, there are a number of safety recommendations and safety action items for planning and implementation where possible. The chapter also identifies 106 intersections as the region's top high crash

intersection locations and an additional 160 high crash road segments. These are locations to be investigated or addressed.

S. Bean presented the Bicycle and Pedestrian chapter of the RTP. In general, as the region has increased, the desire for multimodal transportation options has also increased significantly over the past couple of years. There is growing trail support each year and at the same time funding options, along with programs, such as complete streets and Safe Routes to School, are growing. The state is also contributing more financial aid to trail projects through a Mass Trails Grant program. Within the chapter are various recommendations such as continuing to study and plan on trail related developments; identify priority trails and trail connections that are key for alternate modes of transportation. Action items include continuing to encourage and support our communities to participate in the Complete Streets, and Safe Routes to School programs, as well as to take advantage of funding programs, such as Mass Trails.

B. Doherty presented information from the Infrastructure chapter of the RTP. By infrastructure, what we mean is, basically, roads and bridges and we took the same general approaches to develop some trends in the region. There are 326 Bridges in the region. Of these, the number of structurally deficient bridges is reviewed. These are bridges that not necessarily are unsafe, but they should be monitored and possibly repaired. In 2008, it was determined that the state was going in the wrong direction with the number of these structurally deficient bridges increasing. The state initiated the Accelerated Bridge Program, which invested more money into getting back on the right track. In 2006, there were 50 of these bridges in the region. By 2018, when the program ended, this number had been reduced to 32 such bridges. Looking at pavement, in the 2016 RTP, we set a performance measure that said, we'd like to increase the percentage of excellent and good pavement condition classified roads in the region over a certain period of time. In the last five years, since 2017, we've determined that we've actually seen that improvement. As for recommendations, we want to continue to invest an appropriate amount of funds to these maintenance projects on these important assets.

B. Harris reviewed the Transit chapter with the members. He stated that due to the impacts of COVID over the last few years, it is not possible to conduct a serious comparison of transit data with figures from the 2020 RTP. Ridership figures were reduced substantially across all forms of transit due to the COVID restrictions and closures enacted by the federal, state, and local governments. The chapter does look at some of the projects done in response to the pandemic and whether they have remained in place as well as an identification of long-term transit recommendations.

B. Harris reviewed the MassDOT developed Socio-economic Population, Housing and Employment Projections for the MRPC region. It was stressed that these projections are used only for planning purposes and have no impact on funding for any community.

A question was asked regarding the projection numbers, if the effect of the MBTA's community housing mandate figures into these numbers. Also, it was asked if the numbers take into account the growing prison population numbers. B. Harris stated he was not sure, but zoning is usually a component of the projection development process. We would need to look further into the household and group quarters figures to see if there is any correlation there.

The MJTC then reached consensus to recommend to the MPO that the Draft 2024 RTP be released for a 21-day public comment and review period.

V. Twin Cities Rail Trail – Phase 2 Status

- Review of Public Informational Meeting

B. Harris presented to the members present information from a MassDOT informational public meeting held on April 13th in Fitchburg. The meeting reviewed the modified design for the Twin Cities Rail Trail Phase 2 project, specifically the planned bridge over the MBTA Rail line and its connection to the Intermodal Transportation

Center on lower Main Street. A slide show ran through the original concept and the major revisions made to it due to the possible blockage of train safety signals. In addition, a video was shown that was produced that showed the planned bridge and how it will operate for users of the trail.

VI. Contract Status Reports

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Regional Transit Authority (RTA)

G. Kahale discussed and presented information on a new shuttle service that will run from Townsend to the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Station at the Intermodal Transportation Center on Main Street in Fitchburg. The shuttle was developed after a request from the town. The shuttle will leave from Townsend at two separate times in the AM and then leave the Rail Station at two different times in the PM.

- MassDOT 3C

B. Harris stated that the MRPC at their meeting last week on June 8th, approved the hiring of Tyler Godin as a full-time principal planner with the MRPC. Tyler is currently a planner in our Comprehensive Planning department. He will be switching over to Transportation beginning July 1st.

Handouts for discussion:

A FHWA Announcement on DOT Discretionary Grants – They have announced a Discretionary Grants Dashboard that provides communities with an overview of discretionary grant opportunities that can help meet their transportation infrastructure needs. Designed with all communities in mind, the Dashboard identifies grant programs with rural and Tribal set-asides or match waivers available. The Dashboard also includes Federal grant programs outside of DOT that may be of particular interest to rural communities. The Dashboard is updated weekly.

We sent out with the meeting notice a list of MJTC appointments that highlighted those that had been returned. That has been updated within the last day. We have received 14 appointment forms. We would like to encourage any members to remind their towns to send these back to us as soon as they can.

There is a special notice regarding the date change for the June MPO meeting. It is being moved from June 21st to June 28th at the same start time of 1:00 pm. We will also be asking for the July MPO meeting to move from July 19th to July 26th so that the 21-day comment period for the RTP can be closed by Monday July 24th.

B. Harris stated that in the rush regarding the RTP, he had forgotten to begin the MJTC Officer Election process last month. A Nominating Committee should have been put together to select a slate that would be announced today with the election in July. To get us back on track, I would like to do that now and if agreeable have a slate announced at the next meeting and then hold the election right after it is announced.

A Nominating Committee of George Kahale, Brian Croteau and Beth Faxon was selected. A Nominating Committee Meeting will be held just before the July 12th MJTC meeting at 2:00 PM.

VII. Administrative Matters

- Next MJTC Meeting

B. Harris stated that the next meeting will be on Wednesday July 12, 2023, at its regular start time of 2:30 pm.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

DOCUMENTS/EXHIBITS AVAILABLE AT MEETING:

- 6 14 2023 Agenda
- 5 10 2023 MJTC minutes
- 4 MRPC Projections Pop HHs Employ MJTC 6 14 2023
- 4 Transit RTP Rec 6 14 2023
- 5 MJTC TCRT Info 4-13-23
- 6 2023_2024 MJTC Member List Responses Highlighted 6 6 2023
- 6 DOT Discretionary Grants Dashboard 6 1 2023
- 6 Meeting Reschedule Notice 6 28 2023
- 6 Townsend Shuttle Flyer
- 6 UPDATED 2023_2024 MJTC Member List Responded Highlighted