

MONTACHUSETT METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MMPO) MEETING

Held Remotely via GoToMeeting.com
Hosted by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
464 Abbott Avenue, Leominster, MA 01453

Minutes October 19, 2022

Steve Woelfel called the remote meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

I. Introduction

SIGNATORIES PRESENT

Steve Woelfel, MassDOT OTP; Ann Sullivan, MassDOT Dist. 3; Mark Piermarini, Leominster; George Kahale, MART; Rosemarie Meissner, Subregion 2; Guy Corbosiero, MRPC; Tim Kilhart, Subregion 3

MEMBERS AND GUESTS PRESENT

Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP; Derek Krevat, MassDOT OTP; Andrew Wang, MassDOT OTP; Sarah Bradbury, MassDOT Dist. 3.; Daryl Amaral, MassDOT Dist. 2; Chris Timmel, FHWA; Alan S. Manoian, Ayer; Dick Kilhart, Athol; Frank O'Connor, Harvard; Miranda Briseño, MassDOT OTP; Rebecca Merrell, Ashburnham; Bob Szocik, Templeton; Michelle Ho, MassDOT OTP; Robert J. Swartz, Gardner

STAFF PRESENT

Brad Harris; George Snow

II. Public Comments

Steve Woelfel asked those present if there were any public comments to be made. There were none.

III. Approval of August, 2022 Minutes

A motion was made to approve the August 17, 2022 MPO Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

IV. Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan Update

- *Update by MassDOT OTP*

C Klem wanted to encourage people to take a second survey available at <https://beyond-mobility-massdot.hub.arcgis.com> asking the public to assess investment priorities and tradeoffs. There are also a couple of new documents available, one of which discusses the results from the previous survey.

V. Safe Routes to School Infrastructure Launch Information

- *MassDOT Presentation*

M Briseno stated that the Safe Routes to School infrastructure grant program was launched on Monday, October 3rd, 2022 and proceeded to provide an overview of the program. Eligible applicants for the program now include high schools. Part of the requirement is that schools need to be partners for at least six months. The program would like to see schools apply that represent diverse socio-economic communities. Some eligible projects that the grant program funds include transportation, construction, and capital improvement projects that focus on improving safety, or increase the number of children walking and biking to school. Projects must be located within two miles of a K-12 school whose students must be the primary beneficiaries of the project, and they must be ADA accessible. Example projects

include sidewalk improvements, Traffic, calming, crossing improvements, and a wide range of bicycle facilities. The project needs to be aligned with the goals of the program. For more on the program, please go to: <https://www.mass.gov/news/massdot-launches-the-2022-2023-safe-routes-to-school-infrastructure-funding-program>.

VI. Montachusett FFY 2023-2027 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

- *Review of Potential Amendment Actions – Highway and Transit*
- *MPO Action Related to Potential Amendment(s)*

B Harris stated that the MRPC was contacted by MassDOT that Project # 609314: Ashby – Intersection Improvements at Greenville Rd (Rt31) and Turnpike Rd be removed from consideration in the TIP for fiscal year 2023 due to the successful advertisement of the project on August 27th of this year. The total cost of the project is \$2,339,055. The removal of a project from the TIP requires an amendment. The potential project amendment is being presented to the MPO for action to release this amendment for 21-day public review and comment period.

A motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously for the MPO to release Potential TIP Amendment #1 for a 21-day public review and comment period.

VII. Montachusett Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)

- *Final Vision Statement*
- *Final Survey Presentation*
- *Goals, Objectives, Performance Measures Discussion*
- *Schedule of Outreach Meetings*

G Snow provided the RTP updates to the MPO.

Vision Statement: After receiving additional recommendations, and consulting with the MJTC and MPO, it was decided that the following 3rd draft version of the statement will be used going forward. The statement reads:

The Montachusett Metropolitan Planning Organization seeks to provide a multi-modal and inclusionary transportation system that is safe, secure, efficient, and affordable to all individuals while supporting and encouraging environmentally sustainable economic development, growth, and revitalization in the Montachusett Region.

This version takes the version agreed upon at the August MPO meeting and adds the word inclusionary. Used here, it is meant to include all transportation options for people of all means and all physical abilities. Staff have been moving on to other RTP related topics. If there is a need to revisit the statement in the future staff will do so.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies: Staff is now reviewing the Goals, Objectives and Strategies of the 2020 RTP and plan to present minor revisions at the next MPO meeting. They will not be totally re-created, but staff will investigate where any tweaks can be made to better reflect MPO values going forward.

Final Survey: Staff recently finalized the RTP Outreach Survey which will serve to help prioritize the transportation needs of the region. Staff hope to incorporate this survey into our public outreach workshops and the public will be encouraged to complete it. A link to the survey is now available on the MRPC website and hardcopies will be distributed to communities.

6 Public Outreach Workshops have been scheduled:

- One virtual workshop will focus on Fitchburg, Gardner, and Leominster;

- Each of the four MPO subregions will have its own virtual workshop that will focus on each subregion;
- One in-person workshop is scheduled at MART that will focus on transit;
- The public will be invited to attend any of the workshops;

Staff also completed a flyer that list the workshops and provides a general description of what an RTP is. A link to the flyer is now available on the MRPC website and hardcopies are also available.

VIII. Updates

- *MassDOT Highway Division*

A Sullivan of MassDOT District 3 provided the following updates on FFY 2023 projects. The Westminster Rt 140 Project #607432 is currently at PS&E 11/22/2022 but has some Article 97 and ROW issues. The Gardner roundabout Project #609279 is at 100% design and PS&E is due on 11/22/2022. The 100% design is due on 11/4/2022 for Project #612620 - Harvard Rt 2 over the Nashua River bridge. The Fitchburg Rt 2 Project #610731 is at 75% design and the 100% and PS&E is due 12/12/2022. The Ashby Greenville Road and Turnpike Road project #609314 was advertised on 8/27/2022. Gardner Elm St Safe Routes to School Project #610672 is at 100% design and the PS&E is due on 12/1/2022.

D Amaral of MassDOT District 2 provided the following updates. For FFY 2022 projects, the Notice To Proceed for Petersham Project #60885 Glen Valley Road over the Swift River bridge replacement was issued on 8/16/2022 with a construction cost of \$2.14 million. In 2023, Project #608784 Templeton roundabout project at the intersection of Patriots' Road / South Main Street / North Main Street / Gardner Road has the design at 100% and reviews have been completed PS&E was due on 9/16/2022 with outreach and waiting updates. The current advertisement date is 1/14/2023. Project #609107 Phillipston and Templeton pavement preservation and related work on Rt 2 design is at PS&E current add date of 11/19/2022. In 2024 Project #60872 Athol intersection improvement at Crescent Street and Chestnut Hill is at design 75% and 100% is due 1/20/2023.

- *Transit*

G. Kahale of MART provided the following transit updates. Ayer Depot Square is 90% complete. MART is waiting for the transformer to be installed. Also in Ayer is the installation of fencing near the parking garage. The ITC roof replacement is 50% complete. MART is working on the Athol depot building. The façade is being changed and new windows are being installed and the project is 40% complete. MART updated the Athol-Orange shuttle schedule that will be implemented on 10/31/2022 and a new stop location has been added north of the city hall to improve services to the communities.

- *Montachusett Joint Transportation Committee (MJTC)*

B Harris provided the following updates. The MJTC did not meet this month. The next meeting of the MJTC will be Wednesday, November 9th, at 2:30 PM. After that, the MJTC will probably not meet in December. Beginning January 11, 2023 the MJTC will be back on a monthly schedule for the development of the new TIP and the RTP.

Staff successfully concluded the traffic count program for this year by utilizing an outside contractor. The contractor completed some 60 plus traffic and turning movement counts, they have been reviewed by staff and uploaded to MassDOT. Amos Engineering was the contractor and staff will consider using this approach again for the next count season.

Staff submitted two separate applications to the USDOT under new funding opportunities from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The first was for a region wide planning grant under the Safe Streets for All Program. This application will seek to develop a safety action plan for the entire region, so that the

MRPC and the communities within the region can be eligible to apply for implementation grants through the same program in following years. The second was for a planning grant that focused on Athol under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot program. Athol wished us to proceed with the application even though there's some question about whether it would be applicable to the program. The study will examine the possibility of establishing a new interchange on Rt 2 at S Athol Rd.

There are two handouts for discussion. The first, from MassDOT is the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study newsletter from September 29th, that outlines the next few steps in the process. It also indicates that MassDOT will be holding a public workshop this fall which will address issues related to the two-phase analysis portion of this project. No date has been provided, but if anyone is interested in this program, and the public workshop, please take a look at the Northern Tier website, which can be found online at www.mass.gov/northern-tier-passenger-rail-study. Individuals can also check the MRPC Announcements page on its website, www.mrpc.org. The second handout is from the US Department of Transportation. It's a Notice of Funding Opportunity Announcement for the National Culvert Removal Replacement and Restoration Grants Program. Eligible activities for this program include projects to replace, remove or repair culverts that would meaningfully improve fish passage. The deadline for applications is February 23, 2023. Please let staff know if you need assistance.

- *Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC)*

B Harris provided the following updates. The MRPC is providing, Digital Equity Planning and assistance with the development of multifamily zoning bylaws/ordinances for the "MBTA Communities" located within the Montachusett Region. For additional information, please contact Karen Chapman at kchapman@mrpc.org for additional information.

IX. Administrative Matters

- *Next MPO Meeting*

B Harris stated that the next scheduled MPO meeting is on November 16, 2022 at 1:00 pm.

S Woelfel stated that if anyone is planning to attend the Moving Together conference, which is November 1st, registration is very close to shutting down. So please make a note, if anyone has any intention of going, please sign up very soon because registration is going to hit capacity and registration will need to close.

B Harris stated that Chris Timmel (FHWA) wanted to share (shared through chat) that the FHWA is currently accepting requests for technical assistance across a wide variety of topics (e.g., civil rights, environ, finance, performance/asset management, freight, data analytics, safety, operations, realty, etc.). FHWA is accepting requests through 11/4/22. Please let him know if you have needs or would like to discuss. The MRPC should also have some of the details on this. C. Timmel can be reached at chris.timmel@dot.gov. This will not be the only time to submit requests, but it helps with planning for the year.

X. Adjournment

There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

DOCUMENT/EXHIBITS PRESENTED AT MEETING

MPO 10 19 2022 Agenda
MPO 8 17 2022 Minutes
5 STRS Infrastructure Presentation

6 DRAFT FFY 2023 Highway Amendment #1 Summary
6 FFY 2023 2027 TIP Project Listings Only
7 Draft Vision Statement
7 Public Survey Print Version
7 RTP 2020 GO&S
7 RTP Workshop Flyer 10 17 2022
8 National Culvert Program NOFO Announcement
8 Northern Tier Sep 2022 Newsletter