

Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization Docket February 28, 2024

Item 4 – FFY 2024-2028 TIP Amendment #3 Community Transit Grants

Context: MassDOT administers Section 5310 Federal Aid, packaging this funding stream as *Community Transit Grants*. This discretionary program supports transit services for target populations, including individuals with disabilities, individuals who are over the age of 65, and veterans.

Discussion: This cycle, the Merrimack Valley was the recipient of several awards, which must be amended onto the TIP:

- Merrimack Valley Transit – Travel Ambassador Program (\$125,000)
- Northern Essex Elder Transport (NEET) – Driving for Health and Wellness (\$38,000)
- Groveland – Demand Response for Transportation to Groveland for 60+ Residents (\$5,000)

Staff held public hearings during the comment period on February 21, 2024. Two members of the public attended the hearing, where staff described the proposed actions. One member of the public had no comments, and the other, Mr. Brent Bergeron of Salisbury, commented that he supported the distribution of funds.

The attached TIP Revisions Report provides the financial detail for the proposed amendment.

Proposed Action: Close the comment period and approve the proposed amendment.

Item 5 – FFY 2024-2028 TIP Amendment #4: Flex to FTA

Context: Apportioned Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) funds may be “flexed” to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) following approval of the relevant MPO board.

Discussion: As a result of August Redistribution, funds were added to the Salisbury Reconstruction of Route 1 project in FFY24, which freed up regional target program authority within the same fiscal year. The region has no projects that are ready to advance from their current years of programming forward into FFY24. To retain funds within the region, at the January 10, 2024 MVMPO meeting the board voted to advance two potential flexes to the 21-day comment period. These flexes are described as follows:

- Replace 3 model year 2012 29' Gillig and 1 model year 2012 35' bus with 4 new 29' buses delivered in late CY24/FY25. (Former RTA project # MVRTA 011636)
- Additional Funding to Upgrade Replacement Purchase of six (6) year 2011 35-foot buses (Project ID # RTD0010753) from diesel to hybrid diesel.

Staff held public hearings during the comment period on February 21, 2024. Two members of the public attended the hearing, where staff described the proposed actions. One member of the public had no comments, and the other, Mr. Brent Bergeron of Salisbury, commented that he supported the distribution of funds.

The attached TIP Revisions Report provides the financial detail for the proposed amendment.

Proposed Action: Approve the proposed amendment.

Item 6 – FFY 2024-2028 TIP Amendment #5: Highway Project Updates

Context: MassDOT manages the “statewide” portfolio of projects on the region’s Transportation Improvement Program. These projects are selected, designed, and implemented by MassDOT with federal aid; however, similar to “regional target” projects, these projects are still subject to MVMPO approval and the same amendment thresholds/triggers.

Discussion: MassDOT has requested the following amendments be released for public comment:

- 606522 - ANDOVER- LAWRENCE- BRIDGE REHABILITATION, A-09-036, I-495 OVER ST 28 (SB), A-09-037, I-495 OVER B&M AND MBTA, A-09-041, I-495 OVER ST 28 (NB): *This project was fully paid for in FFY2023, but the action occurred after the release of the FFY2024-2024 TIP. The proposed action reconciles the TIP with the previous payment schedule. No further funding is necessary for this project.*
- 605304 - HAVERHILL- BRIDGE REPLACEMENT, H-12-007 & H-12-025, BRIDGE STREET (SR 125) OVER THE MERRIMACK RIVER AND THE ABANDONED B&M RR (PROPOSED BIKEWAY): *This project is more commonly known as the Basiliere Bridge. The project’s advertisement schedule will be shifted two months back. As this shift occurs between federal fiscal years, the projects funding will consequently shift out of FFY24. The proposed action will adjust programming to accommodate the project’s schedule.*
- 609466 - HAVERHILL- METHUEN- BRIDGE REPLACEMENT, H-12-040=M-17-030, I-495 (NB & SB) OVER MERRIMACK RIVER AND M-17-031, I-495 (NB & SB) OVER ROUTE 110 AND H-12-056, INDUSTRIAL AVENUE (EB & WB) OVER I-495: *This project requires a cost increase of approximately \$87 million dollars. Due to the need to remain in fiscal constraint with federal aid program limitations, the funding programs for this project are proposed to be adjusted.*
- 607541 - GEORGETOWN- BOXFORD- BORDER TO BOSTON TRAIL, FROM GEORGETOWN ROAD TO WEST MAIN STREET (ROUTE 97): *This project’s readiness determination has shifted, and as*

such, programming must be shifted from FFY24 to outyears. The proposed action programs funding in FFY25 instead of FFY24.

- 610924 - LAWRENCE- ROADWAY RECONSTRUCTION ON AMESBURY STREET: Due to the expiration of Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSA) funding, MassDOT has converted the funding program for this project to the Surface Transportation Block Grant program. This proposed action will accept this conversion.

The attached TIP Revisions Report provides the financial detail and program names for the proposed changes.

Proposed Action: Open the 21-day comment period for the proposed amendment.

Item 7 – FFY 2024 UPWP Amendment #1: Previous Years’ Carryover

Context: Metropolitan Planning (PL) is an apportioned federal funding program that supports Metropolitan Planning Organizations, funding staff, studies, and research included within a region’s Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP). Unobligated PL funds may carryover across years; however, in Massachusetts, the state’s annual PL contracts prohibit carryover of unobligated balances. Due to a large remainder of unspent PL, the state is reconsidering this practice. MPOs were informed in September of 2023 that they may submit requests to MassDOT for use of previous years’ unobligated balances.

Discussion: MVPC has historically spent most of its PL funding; however, MVPC has also taken a conservative approach to maximizing fund usage to account for potential year to year deviations in our provisional overhead rate vs. our actual rate. This has resulted in several years where a portion of funds remain unspent. Additionally, unexpected use of fringe benefits, retirements, and other staffing departures have resulted in occasional unanticipated remainders. As MassDOT has allowed MPOs to request access to previous years’ funds, MVPC has submitted requested support for the items listed below.

- **Priority 1 – Trail Counter Installation:** MVPC purchased fixed trail counters in FFY23 and requests additional support to install these counters to ensure expeditious deployment. This request is in the public interest and ensures the immediate impact of federal aid expended in FFY23.
- **Priority 2 – Additional ArcGIS Pro License:** MVPC requires an additional perpetual ArcGIS license for its program manager to ensure efficient sharing and optimization of spatial materials. In FFY23, MVPC paid a contractor to develop point in time vector files. Improving internal access will optimize the use of these new spatial materials.
- **Priority 3 – Additional Fare Free Support (Contractor Support):** In FFY24, MVPC proposes to complete a Fare Free Analysis report in support of Regional Transit Authority MeVa. Based on the scope, needs appear to exceed budget. We request additional support to fund a contractor to undertake business case analysis for the region’s fare free program.
- **Priority 4 – Additional Active Transportation Plan Graphic Support (Contractor Support):** In FFY24, MVPC will finalize the first phase of its Active Transportation Plan. MVPC seeks additional graphic production support to help deliver planning concepts in a consumable manner for member

communities. Graphics will be specifically tied to locations (vs. general concept designs, which are available from various other sources such as NACTO, FHWA, and MassDOT).

- **Priority 5 – Ferry Boat Planning & Business Plan Development (Contractor Support):** Regional Transit Authority MeVa received a grant to develop a solar-powered ferry. Additional planning support is necessary to hire an expert with ferry-boat experience. MVPC will rely on the selected contractor to examine and inventory needs—such as marina needs—identify operating constraints (such as navigable speeds) and develop a manageable business plan for future deployment.
- **Priority 6 – Docked Bikeshare Business Plan Assessment & Development (Contractor Support):** MVPC is interested in understanding the benefits of a docked bikeshare program but acknowledges that such a program would require significant operating resources, including operating subsidies. MVPC wishes to contract with an external party to understand and assess existing business models, as well as develop an optimal business plan for the region, were it to enter the bikeshare space.

MassDOT approved requests to fund the first four of the MPO's requested priorities. Support for priorities five and six was not provided at this time. At the January 10, 2024 MVMPO meeting, the board voted to open the 21-day comment period to amend the FFY24 contract to add additional carryover in support of priorities 1-4. Following the opening of the comment period, staff's work on counter installation advanced, and staff will request an additional \$30,000 of funding to support third party oversight of trail counter installation.

Staff held public hearings during the comment period on February 21, 2024. Two members of the public attended the hearing, where staff described the proposed actions. One member of the public had no comments, and the other, Mr. Brent Bergeron of Salisbury, commented that he supported the distribution of funds.

Proposed Action: Close the comment period and approve the proposed amendment.

Item 8 – FFY 2025-2029 TIP Development Process

Context: Each year, MVMPO staff develop the region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP is a five-year plan for capital improvements that are candidates for federal aid. The TIP programs apportioned and discretionary funding administered by both the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). In Massachusetts, highway side funding is typically broken into two portfolios: "regional target" funding and "statewide" funding. State staff develop and propose a program of "statewide" projects for MVMPO board review and approval. For "regional target" funding, MPO staff coordinate with municipal officials and MassDOT to develop a proposed program for board review.

MVMPO staff inform initial program scenarios with two primary measures: a "readiness" determination and a project score. Staff coordinate with MassDOT to determine a project's design and engineering status. MassDOT assigns each project a year in which the MassDOT project manager believes the project will be able to advertise and obligate funds. Programming a project prior to the readiness year is allowable, but not advised as failure to obligate funding each year of programming essentially forfeits access to such funds. A project score is developed based on a given project's alignment with MVMPO board goals and priorities.

Discussion: Several factors inform MVMPO staff's proposed FFY25-29 regional target program. First, the North Andover 114 Corridor Improvements project has been assigned a readiness determination of FFY25. The Georgetown Reconstruction of Route 97 project has been assigned a readiness determination of FFY26—a year beyond its current program year—and Haverhill's North Avenue Reconstruction project has been assigned a readiness year of FFY27. Because these three projects, in addition to Andover's Reconstruction of Route 133 project, are relatively high cost, no new projects are proposed for programming. Staff are in the process of update the region's TIP scoring system, but as no new projects will be programmed and no significant changes are anticipated in existing projects, the project scores have been retained from the previous program year.

Project design is an eligible use of funds for various FHWA programs. MassDOT recently issued guidance on project design, noting that it will not fund the match of any federal aid programmed on the TIP specifically to design projects. Staff will request the board to provide direction on the potential value of a program reserve to fund the design of future federal aid projects. Should it be the board's pleasure, staff will recommend the board consider programming any requested reserve in an outyear to allow staff time to develop eligibility criteria. Of note, staff will propose the board consider a cost ceiling to encourage the development of low or moderate cost projects as the current program's projects are primarily composed of multiyear projects.

Action: Receive the update and provide guidance on future scenarios.

Attachments:

A. TIP Revisions Report