

MVMPO – February 28, 2024

Members Present

Derek Krevat, alternate, representing Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation
Brian Fallon, alternate, representing MassDOT Highway Division Administrator
Jenifer Dunlap, alternate, representing MVPC
Mayor Cassandra Gove, Merrimack Valley Transit Advisory Board Chair
Mayor Melinda Barrett, City of Haverhill
Daniel McCarthy, alternate, representing City of Lawrence
Jerry Klima, alternate, representing Subregion 1
Lisa Schwarz, alternate, representing Subregion 4

Other Staff Present

Derek Shooster, MassDOT, Office of Transportation Planning
John Pettis, City of Haverhill
Kathleen Lambert, City of Haverhill
Noah Berger, Merrimack Valley Transit Administrator
Bonnie Mahoney, Merrimack Valley Transit Chief Compliance Officer
Patrick Reed, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Elizabeth Maldari, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Jonah Williams, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Tim Paris, MassDOT

Item 1. Call to Order

Derek Krevat called the meeting to order at 12:04. Mr. Reed Called the roll and quorum was attained. During the roll call, Mr. Reed mentioned that Mr. Cashell has moved on to work for the City of Woburn and are looking to appoint new board member.

Item 2. Opportunity for Public Comment

Mr. Krevat invited public comment. There being none, Mr. Krevat moved to the next item.

Item 3. Adoption of Previous Meeting's Minutes

Mr. Krevat asked for a motion to adopt the meeting minutes from the January 10, 2024 meeting. Jen Dunlap made the motion and Mayor Gove seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 4. FFY24-28 Amendment #3: Community Transit Grants

Mr. Krevat introduced Amendment #3, Community Transit Grants. Mr. Reed explained the amendment identifying specifically the travel ambassador program, the elder transport with NECC. Mr. Reed noted public

comments, including one general comment for all open hearings to support the distribution of funds, made by Mr. Brent Bergeron of Salisbury during the amendments' public hearings.

Mr. Krevat called for a motion to approve the amendment. Mayor Barrett made the motion to approve the amendment, which was seconded by Ms. Schwarz. The motion was approved unanimously.

Item 5. FFY24-28 Amendment #4: Flex to FTA

Mr. Krevat introduced TIP Amendment #4. Mr. Reed explained the funding freed up from the Salisbury Route 1 project due to August Redistribution resulted in a balance in FFY24. MeVa's proposed amendment allows the authority to purchase four low-floor 29' buses (\$1,858,400) and upgrade a pending purchase of six 35' buses from diesel to diesel hybrid (\$1,786,400). Mr. Reed again noted the general public comment in support of the distribution of funds. Mr. Shooster mentioned an FTA endorsement but noted the funding programs were CMAQ funded. Mr. Krevat requested clarification on remaining funds. Mr. Reed explained there are about \$3.4/\$3.5 million of remaining unprogrammed funds. Mr. Reed also explained the process to allocate unprogrammed funds and reminded attendees about the potential to program additional funding toward the Lawrence to Manchester Rail Trail project.

Mr. Krevat requested a motion to approve the amendment. The motion was made by Mayor Gove and seconded by Ms. Schwarz.

Item 6. FFY24-28 Amendment #5: Highway Project Updates

Mr. Krevat introduced TIP Amendment #5. Mr. Reed stated that the TIP amendment bundled several different action highway-side actions needed to take place, as proposed by MassDOT.

- 606522 – ANDOVER – LAWRENCE – BRIDGE I-495 REHABILITATION:
 - o Project was fully paid in FFY23; action reconciles books
- 605304 – HAVERHILL – BASILIERE BRIDGE REPLACEMENT:
 - o Project will shift in schedule by two months; results in the need to move program year
- 609466 – HAVERHILL – METHUEN – I-495 BRIDGE REPLACEMENT:
 - o Proposed cost increase of \$87 Million
- 607541 – GEORGETOWN – BOXFORD – BORDER TO BOSTON TRAIL:
 - o Shift in readiness determination due (ROW)
- 610924 – LAWRENCE – ROADWAY RECONSTRUCTION ON AMESBURY STREET:
 - o Conversion of federal program from CRRSA to STBG

Mr. Krevat requested a motion to open the 21-day comment period for the proposed amendment. Mayor Barrett made the motion, which was seconded by Ms. Schwarz. Mr. Reed called the roll. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 7. FY24 UPWP Amendment #1 Follow-Up: Previous Years' Carryover

Mr. Krevat moved to the next item, UPWP amendment #1. Mr. Reed explained that this amendment allows MVMPO to access funding that MPOs were not able to spend in previous years at the end of a contract (i.e. contract remainder/carryover). Mr. Reed described how budgeting is complex, but that due to staffing

changes at MVPC and a conservative approach to indirect costs, MVPC has had remainders in previous years and is now requesting access to the funds.

Mr. Reed then listed the six priorities to use the carryover funds, including trail counter installation, an additional ArcGIS Pro License, additional support for the current Fare Free evaluation project, and additional Active Transportation Plan graphics/planning support. Mr. Reed also noted that ferryboat and bikeshare planning requests were not approved by the state at this time. Mr. Reed also repeated the public comment from Mr. Bergeron, approving distribution of funds.

Mr. Reed stated that following the opening of the amendment for comment, and additional \$30,000 of unspent carryover for third party oversight of trail counter installation was necessary as MVPC needs an experience support contractor to navigate technical installation and the permitting process.

Mr. Klima asked if the trail counter data will be integrated with MassDOT's trail counter data. Mr. Reed mentioned that due to financial limitations, we are not able to collect real-time data, but should be able to feed/support MS2 data. Should the initial counters prove successful, staff may pursue real-time data plans.

Mayor Gove clarified that the ferryboat planning and business development for bikeshare are not currently programed in the UPWP. Mr. Reed affirmed they are not, but explained briefly why they were included in the list providing additional information about requests received to facilitate a regional bikeshare program. Mr. Reed confirmed, however, that the request is not included in the amendment per MassDOT feedback.

Mr. Krevat asked for a motion to endorse UPWP amendment #1. Ms. Schwarz called for the motion, which was seconded by Mayor Gove. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 8. FFY 25-29 TIP Development Process

Mr. Krevat introduced the next item: the FFY25-29 TIP development process. Mr. Reed reviewed the timeline of TIP development process, starting with MassDOT's annual meeting and readiness determination meeting. Mr. Reed noted that the North Andover 114 project was given a readiness determination of 2025 by MassDOT. Mr. Reed also noted that the Georgetown Reconstruction project had slipped in readiness to FFY26. Mr. Reed also mentioned the Haverhill Reconstruction project would be ready for 2027 and stated that all other projects have retained their readiness determinations from the previous cycle.

Mr. Reed then addressed Transportation Evaluation Criteria scoring. He explained the previous scoring system is proposed for replacement and that the new system would be phased-in with new transportation projects. In other words, the new system will not impact previously programed projects. Because no new regional target projects are anticipated to be programmed in this cycle, it is unlikely the new scoring system will be directly relevant to local interests. Mr. Reed then clarified that the MVMPO will only adjust existing scores as a result of significant changes to projects. Mr. Reed shared an example of the new scoring system tool, highlighting how the different drop-down menus would enable applicants to self-score.

Mr. Reed noted that the scoring system is tied back into the weighted system detailed in the MTP (MVision 2050) Mr. Reed also noted the possibility of integrating the scoring system with MapIT's scoping questions to reduce initial data entry work for municipalities.

Mr. Reed then shared a chart to show changes in TIP projects with readiness to the greatest extent possible, noting that the only project which had been bumped is the Andover 133 project due to the accelerated pace of Haverhill's North Avenue project.

Mr. Reed also noted the inclusion of the Groveland project on the project list which is far along in the process, but noted it is unscored and still needs to go through MassDOT's Project Review Committee meeting.

Mr. Reed also mentioned that in the past cycle, staff had recommended the Board retain some regional target funding to facilitate a small capital purchase program. Mr. Reed continued, stating that unfortunately MassDOT's right of way division requires fully endorsed plans, and as such, will not permit the use of funds for capital purchase unless there are recent plans available for the location. Mr. Reed explained that there was limited value in the program based on MassDOT requirements, but that the board could retain this program should it be their pleasure.

Mr. Reed then walked through two regional target scenarios. The second scenario included a reserve for design funds in FFY27 and 29. Mr. Reed explained that one challenge for regional target funding is that there are many large projects. In the event a large project slips, having a roster of small projects ready to go would be beneficial. Offering design support for projects with low cost-ceilings may incentivize lower-cost projects. Mr. Reed also noted that the state provides the required match for construction projects but would not do so for design projects.

Mr. Krevat noted one clarification that the capital improvement requires a right of way, the bike share, would be applicable to use capital purchase, and would not require right of way.

Mr. Klima asked for clarification if they should leave the funds for capital reserve or design reserve. Mr. Krevat noted that unprogrammed funds would not need to be dedicated to one use or the other until a project is identified. Mr. Berger noted that flexibility would be a net positive.

Mr. Reed also noted the pot in the unprogrammed reserve would mean reduced target funding for construction projects. Mr. Reed said that the \$500,000 shown in the second scenario would likely not be enough for a full roadway redesign but could be tapped to support design costs.

Mr. Krevat clarified the timeline for FFY25-29 TIP Development.

Mr. Reed emphasized the importance of putting new projects in MapIT.

Item 9. Status of Ongoing and FFYs 2024-2028 TIP Projects

Mr. Krevat then moved to the next item.

Mr. Paris read through the changes to FHWA federal aid projects noting all changes were cost changes.

- Cost change to the abandoned BNM railroad
- Cost Change to the Haverhill roadway reconstruction

- Cost change to Lawrence bridge replacement over Spickett River
- Cost Change to the Lawrence community Day Arlington improvements (SRTS) – also project manager changed.
- Cost change to Border to Boston trail had minor decrease in contract cost
- Cost change to Lafayette Road to a tip decrease.

Mr. Krevat asked for questions.

Mr. Reed shared a question from several communities about the earmarks for the Border to Boston trail explaining respectfully that it would be helpful to keep up with the status of the project.

Mr. Berger began transit updates acknowledging two years of fare free service.

Mr. Berger mentioned that there has been some anxiety on social media regarding a potential vote for fare free service, iterating the success of the project evidenced by the increase in ridership. Mr. Berger then said that it is important to reassure riders they will not have to begin paying this Friday, which was incorrectly circulating on social media. Mr. Berger noted that Fare Free will continue through the fall of next year, and the MeVa would work with MVPC to develop an assessment and justification of the program.

Mr. Berger then noted a contract has been signed for the first-floor redesign of the McGovern Center. Mr. Berger explained future engagement will begin to gather feedback about routes into McGovern to support transit riders as they enter the bus area and travel through and around Lawrence. Mr. Berger then also shared some changes to be expected with the MeVa bus service.

Mr. Berger shared a quick story about the challenges of bus stop deployment and encouraged concerned parties to direct thoughts/concerns to MeVa staff and not its riders.

Mr. Berger noted that there would be a public meeting in Newburyport for a redesign of the number 19 bus. Mr. Berger then called notice to challenges associated with planning service along particular residential streets in Newburyport and framed the solution of the 19 as a better connected with the 17. Mr. Berger also explained that a challenge is serving the Anna Jaque's hospital, which is not bus friendly. Mr. Berger also noted that there have been pro-transit voices coming to the surface along with the negative comments.

Mr. Berger then also noted that the Number 13 bus will increase frequency. It is the higher ridership route, even surpassing some of the Lawrence routes which have a 30-minute headways. The bus will not come every 30 minutes rather than every 50 minutes.

Mr. Berger then noted the Governor put together a transit action task force. Mr. Berger noted that RTAs serve 267 of the Commonwealth's cities and towns. Mr. Berger wanted to note the vital role that the 15 RTAs play in transportation and that while the MBTA will get all the headlines, he wanted to make sure people are aware that public transit in the Commonwealth involves more than the MBTA, and that the task force should be representative of all transit voices.

Mr. Berger then expressed gratitude to the MPO for being supportive of the amendments.

Mr. Krevat noted his admiration that Mr. Berger is staying true to his north star of keeping transit accessible, particularly in regard to the challenges Mr. Berger noted related to bus stop placement.

Mr. Krevat requested questions; there being none, Mr. Krevat moved to Item 10.

Item 10. Other Business

Mr. Krevat asked if there was any other MVMPO business. Mr. Reed noted MVPC's RAISE Grant application, discussing the two Border to Boston crossings that would require design funding. MVPC is requesting full design funding for the Boxford crossing over I-95 and noted that MVPC has requested 10 percent design funding for the River crossing. Mr. Reed noted that for the river crossing, both the town and city are looking to do some alternative analyses if there is potential to use the existing rail structure or combine the a crossing with a rebuilt Gillis Bridge. Mr. Reed noted that this is a competitive grant, but worth the time and potential for feedback. Mr. Reed MVPC's noted the letter of support for the Lawrence Raise Grant.

Mr. McCarthy noted the viability of their RAISE Grant is tied with the McGovern Hub move.

Ms. Lambert asked if there were any plans for the Buckley Transportation Center after the RTA move. Mr. McCarthy noted that it would be helpful as a parking structure. Mr. McCarthy also noted the plan for Amesbury street to become a two-way street, which will be optimal for the move. Mr. McCarthy then noted the challenge of the three bridge crossings.

Mr. Krevat also reminded members of MassDOT's May Innovation Conference.

Mr. Shooster asked about an RFP for North Andover's Osgood Landing Commuter Rail Feasibility Study. Mr. Shooster asked if there was an opportunity for a presentation from North Andover on the outcome of that process. Mr. Reed affirmed that was likely possible.

Item 11. Adjournment

Mr. Krevat then moved to request a motion to adjourn. Ms. Shwartz moved, Mayor Barrett seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.