

MVMPO June 26, 2024

Voting Members Present

Derek Krevat, representing Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation Monica Tibbitts-Nutt
Brian Fallon, representing Highway Administrator Johnathan Gulliver
Jerrard Whitten, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
Bonnie Mahoney, representing MeVa Board Chair Mayor Kassandra Gove
John Pettis, representing Mayor of Haverhill Melinda Barrett
Neil Harrington, representing Region 2
Rebecca Oldham, representing Region 3 appointee Matt Coogan
Lisa Schwartz, representing Region 4 appointee Paul Materazzo

Others Present

Jerry Klima, representing Region 2 appointee Neil Harrington
Rick Taintor, Newburyport
Tony Collins, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
Elizabeth Maldari, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
Brent Mikael Bergeron, Salisbury
Timothy Parris, MassDOT District 4
Miranda Briseño, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Derek Shooster, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Andrew Shapiro, North Andover
Frank O'Conner, Georgetown
Zach Melcher, North Andover
Kathleen Lambert, Haverhill
David Nelson, Jacobs Engineering
Mel Ball

Item 1

Mr. Krevat called for Mr. Williams to call the roll at 12:01pm. Mr. Williams confirmed that quorum was attained.

Item 2

Mr. Krevat called for public comment. There being no comments, Mr. Krevat moved to the next item.

Item 3

Mr. Krevat called for the adoption of the previous meeting's minutes (May). Mr. Pettis made a motion to approve, which was seconded by Mr. Whitten. The motion passed with one abstention from Ms. Oldham.

Item 4

Mr. Krevat called for staff to move into the next item. Mr. Williams described the four transfer actions related to the proposed FFY24 UPWP Amendment #2 and their rationale, noting that the amendment is primarily for book-keeping purposes. Following a description of the actions, Mr. Williams, noted that while the goal was to have a level balance, April billing resulted in higher than anticipated expenditures in some subtasks, but also noted that all expenditures remain within the budget envelope of the overall task. Mr. Williams noted that Brent Bergeron of Salisbury attended the item's public hearing, but had no comments. Mr. Krevat called for any questions related to the amendment. There being no comments, Mr. Krevat called for a motion to approve the proposed amendment. Mr. Whitten made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Klima. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 5

Mr. Krevat moved to Item 5: FFY24-28 Transportation Improvement Program Amendment #6: Community Transit Grants and asked for an overview from Mr. Williams. Mr. Williams noted that the awards were federal aid packaged as state community transit grants, targeting special populations including individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and veterans. Mr. Williams noted that the awards are discretionary, but as they are federal aid, must be added onto the TIP. Mr. Williams detailed the FFY2024 awards:

- One electric van for Merrimac COA use
- One type E2B for Haverhill COA use
- Six low floor vans for Merrimack Valley Transit (MeVa)

Mr. Williams indicated that, in total, the awards comprised \$1,390,098, and included both the 80-percent grant and their 20-percent share. Mr. Williams noted that staff recommended the Board vote to conditionally approve the amendment, pending any questions during the comment period. Mr. Krevat clarified the conditional approval process and asked for questions. There being none, Mr. Krevat asked for a motion for release for public comment and conditional approval, pending any negative comments during the approval. Mr. Whitten made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Pettis. Mr. Krevat called upon Mr. Derek Shooster (MassDOT OTP). Mr. Shooster requested that the comment release notice include the financial details as included in eSTIP. Mr. Williams called the roll and the motion passed unanimously. During the roll call vote, Mr. Klima noted that Mr. Harrington had joined the meeting and indicated that Mr. Harrington would vote on behalf of subregion 2.

Item 6

Mr. Krevat moved to Item 6. North Andover Commuter Rail Feasibility Study. Mr. Williams indicated that he would turn over screensharing and presentation control to Zach (Melcher) from North Andover). Mr. Melcher noted that his colleague was having technical issues and suggested moving to the next item.

Item 7

Mr. Krevat moved to Item 7, MVMPO Membership MOU: Potential Options. Mr. Williams reminded the Board that in the last meeting, the Board had initial discussions regarding MVMPO membership, including the potential inclusion of a greater number of municipalities and potentially the addition of advocates as voting members to the MPO Board. Mr. Williams noted that staff put together four options for the Board to react to. Mr. Williams listed five goals related to potential revisions to Board membership composition.

- Determine appropriate municipal representation scheme for Board
- Determine appropriate meaningful public participation for Board, including public representation on the Board
- Clean-up MeVa/MVPC representation
- Formalize selection process and consider rolling representation for municipalities
- Maintain manageable quorum

Mr. Williams provided an overview of the four options, including option 1 (status quo), option 2 (Urban/Coastal/Inland), option 3 (full representation), and option 4 (status quo with ex officio additions). Mr. Williams provided context about each option, including considerations related to quorum size and representation. Mr. Williams noted that the options shown are not exhaustive and open for subsequent discussion and revision. Mr. Krevat call for thoughts/comments. There being no immediate comments, Mr. Krevat asked Mr. Williams to re-show option 2. Mr. Krevat noted that the option changed representation to be based on geography rather than geographic characteristic. Mr. Krevat suggested that additional outreach was necessary, particularly to communities that have a single vote such as Lawrence and Haverhill, noting the implications about reduction in vote authority. Mr. Krevat noted that it would difficult to make the case for reduced MassDOT authority to MassDOT leadership, which may impact the feasibility of the option. Changing to include active transportation or equity groups may be beneficial. Mr. Krevat also noted more municipal involvement is always a good thing. Mr. Klima noted that nothing can be approved without MassDOT approval due to the charter, so he noted its not necessary to reduce representation. As for the advocacy item, Mr. Klima noted that he's participated for a long time and has been effective without voting power. Mr. Klima noted that it could be challenging to determine who gets to select the advocacy interest on the Board. Mr. Klima noted his support for the current make-up of the Board. Mr. Shooster wanted to know if there were any advocate organizations that staff had in mind while putting together the scenarios. Mr. Williams responded that staff would depend on Board input. Mr. Krevat asked if there was a staff recommendation or if the options were preliminary recommendations. Mr. Williams responded that staff were generating discussions and looking for input from the Board. Mr. Williams noted that no action is an option. Mr. Harrington noted that he preferred to keep the MPO the way it currently is. Mr. Pettis asked if the options could be shared. Mr. Krevat suggested that sending the options to individuals would be helpful and that a brief survey or solicitation for comments could be helpful prior to the next meeting. Mr. Klima asked if any of the other MPOs in Massachusetts had advocates on the Board, and if so, how does it work. Mr. Krevat noted that the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission's MPO has a seat for the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, but that they may be more of a business group than an advocacy group. Mr. Krevat mentioned that Central Mass Advisory Group has seats for nonprofit/community organizations. While there is precedent, Pioneer Valley is the only MPO currently. Mr. Krevat noted a short-list of organizations may need to be considered as well. Mr. Krevat noted that too much of a change could be challenging, but that introducing new perspectives could have potential and that more thought was necessary. Mr. Williams noted that we would reach out about potential options. Mr. Krevat suggested meeting to brainstorm further.

Item 6

Mr. Krevat asked if Mr. Melcher was prepared to return to item 6. Mr. Melcher affirmed. Mr. Melcher introduced himself and Mr. David Nelson of Jacob. Mr. Melcher noted that North Andover's Commuter Rail Feasibility Study was included as a task in the City's Master Plan. Mr. Nelson continued, noting that the study

was intended to examine the potential to restore commuter rail service after a hiatus of fifty years. Mr. Nelson noted that Boston has the third heaviest commuter rail ridership of all cities in the United States and that commuter rail service has expanded significantly since the 1980s; has fourteen lines; serves eighty communities; serves five locations in the Merrimack Valley on the Haverhill line. North Andover has a station on Sutton Street which was closed in 1974 due to service uncertainty and the station has never been restored. The line is appx. 33 miles long (65 minutes) end to end, and speeds on the line range between 60-79 mph excluding some slow areas for curves and community impacts. There were 7,000 weekday boardings on the line pre-COVID. Time between North Andover would be approximately 60 minutes. The station could fill in a hole between Lawrence and Bradford.

Mr. Nelson noted described the objectives of the study, discussing the history of the site proposed for the rail and smart growth zoning. Mr. Nelson noted that a portion of the site is in the 3A MBTA Communities is designated to have by-right 15 units/acre of housing, and mentioned that Amazon logistics hub toward the southern end of the site. The planning objectives include station siting, design, and cost. The study will also look at impacts of station siting, forecasts of ridership, and implementation steps. Mr. Nelson noted that the planning work is completed in draft and that the town is reviewing the material and will update the final report to reflect input/suggestions. Ridership forecasts and constructions costs, as well as benefits, not included in the initial report, will follow. Finally, the plan will look at a critical path for implementation assuming the town is still interested in pursuing implementation following the study. Mr. Nelson noted that he believes the study would be completed in August of 2024.

Mr. Krevat asked if the MBTA was aware of the study. Mr. Nelson responded affirmatively. Mr. Fallon asked if there would be any roadway improvements or upgrades to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure to 125. Mr. Nelson responded that while not in scope, it would have to be considered if the station were to be implemented. Mr. Nelson continued by noting that determining how TOD investment would impact ridership is included in scope. Mr. Andrew Shapiro of North Andover noted that when Amazon's facility was completed that they added some improvements, including a segment of a shared use path to connect to future features. Mr. Shapiro reminded the attendees that the station is conceptual in nature and that the task is fulfilling the request of the master plan. Mr. Williams asked if the study would consider and articulate the capital improvements that would need to be made for the commuter rail to be implemented and always asked how MeVa bus service would promote ridership at the new station. Mr. Nelson addressed the question about MBTA's single-track first. The line that runs between Boston and Haverhill is less than 50% double track which constrains service and freight impacts service. Around Reading, single track is a severe constraint. Mr. Nelson continued that plans are in place to increase double tracking, which would improve the MBTA's ability to support increased service, but that plans have stalled due to lack of funding. Andover, Lawrence, and Ballardvale stations would need to be updated, ideally, to serve both tracks. The MBTA, which owns the line, allowed Amtrak to improve some doubletrack. When the work is finally completed MBTA's capacity to provide increased service will increase. Mr. Nelson continued noting that the MBTA has other immediate needs, which has impacted funding availability for some commuter rail improvements. Mr. Williams repeated his question about bus service. Mr. Nelson stated there is no service on 125 and service would need to be reworked; however, Mr. Shapiro mentioned that service to the area and that it serves the Amazon portion of the Osgood site and mentioned that future MeVa service could be reoriented to serve the station in the future. Mr. Shapiro also mentioned MeVa's Innovation grant award to provide additional service down 125 toward the Lawrence MBTA station. Ms. Bonnie Mahoney noted that MeVa does run down to Osgood and noted that Amazon put a bus shelter in; Ms. Mahoney also mentioned that the

innovation grant extends route 14 which provides service in the area, and offered to be a resource. Mr. Tony Collins of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission noted that the 125 corridor was identified as an east-west route as an important route for pedestrian and bicycle improvements, particularly a connection between Lawrence at Merrimack/Sutton to 125. Mr. Krevat thanked Mr. Nelson and North Andover Staff. Mr. Krevat caught a question in the chat from Ms. Kathleen Lambert from the City of Haverhill and read it aloud: Has the MBTA discussed travel times and double track issues? Mr. Nelson responded that the MBTA understands the double-track issues, and that it's a matter of prioritization. Mr. Nelson also noted the Rail Vision project that MBTA and MassDOT completed in 2019 (which was impacted by COVID), which seeks to increase the frequency of service and provided some history of the doubletracking and its potential if restored. Mr. Nelson noted that Amtrak runs five trips a day seven days a week in each direction and only stops in Haverhill in the Merrimack Valley. Mr. Nelson noted that hundreds take Amtrak from Haverhill to Boston. Mr. Krevat repeated his thanks.

Item 8

Mr. Krevat moved to item update are requested transit updates. Ms. Mahoney noted that the McGovern project's concrete and asphalt projects are done resulting in eight bus births. MeVa updated its website and Facebook with service changes now that the service will run from McGovern instead of Buckley. Ms. Mahoney noted that 14 new buses will be going online between September and October. She continued that MeVa hired two architecture and engineering firms to provide study water runoff and drainage issues at the McGovern Center. Ms. Mahoney noted that the station would be enlivened with MeVa style to make the environment more passenger friendly. She continued noting that MeVa is going to have a new interior design of its office space due to increase in staffing and to increase the number of maintenance bays. MeVa has begun discussions with MBTA about partnering/easements for expansion/construction.

Mr. Tim Paris provided an update of highway projects, moving through his project spreadsheet accessible in the presentation. Mr. Anthony Collins asked if it is possible to see final designs for projects. Mr. Paris noted that the plan sets are available. Mr. Fallon noted that plans are larger and can be shared by setting up a dropbox or something similar.

Item 9

Mr. Krevat moved to other business, asking if the MPO had any other business to consider. Mr. Williams introduce Ms. Elizabeth Maldari of the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission to provide an update on Vision Zero. Ms. Maldari provided a brief Vision Zero update, noting that walk audits are now complete. Ms. Maldari provided an updated project schedule, noting that due to changing grant schedules MVPC to shift its own project schedule to be more comprehensive. Ms. Maldari noted that she anticipated bringing the draft Vision Zero Plan to the Board in August, which would result in a potential September endorsement. Mr. Shooster commended Elizabeth for her walk audit efforts and hopes that the plan translates to safety projects in the future.

Mr. Krevat introduced Mr. Tony Collins. Mr. Collins discussed the Active Transportation Committee's six priority projects, with the top being River Street in Haverhill between Washington Square and Maxwell Street, Canal Street between the Lawrence Rail Trail and Spicket River Greenway, the Amesbury Riverwalk Extension, the Shawsheen River Path in Lawrence, and Newbury's Parker Street sidepath, and a connector in Georgetown between the Groveland Community path and future Border to Boston Trail. Mr. Collins

discussed the availability of funding for future conceptual design work for one or more of the prioritized projects.

Mr. Krevat inquired about the July schedule. Mr. Williams responded that if there were no items, the MPO would cancel the July meeting.

Item 10

Mr. Krevat moved to the final item, adjournment. Mr. Pettis made the motion, which was seconded by Mr. Whitten. The meeting was adjourned unanimously by voice vote at 1:14pm.