

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO)

Virtual Meeting

Wednesday, February 23, 2022 – 12:00 p.m.

Attending:

Voting Members:

Dave Mohler, MassDOT, representing MassDOT Secretary Jamey L. Tesler
Frank Suszynski, representing MassDOT Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver
Jerrard Whitten, MVPC Executive Director
Noah Berger, MVRTA Administrator
Neil Harrington, Salisbury, representing MPO Subregion #1
Paul Materazzo, Andover, representing MPO Subregion #4

Others Present:

Anthony Komornick, MVPC	Jean Enright, North Andover
Mary Kay Beninati, MVPC	Derek Shooster, MassDOT Planning
Jim Terlizzi, MVPC	Tim Paris, MassDOT District 4
Nate Robertson, MVPC	Derek Krevat, MassDOT Planning
Kathleen Lambert, MVRTA	Michelle Ho, MassDOT Planning
Andy Port, Newburyport	Brian Fallon, MassDOT District 4
Geordie Vining, Newburyport	Chris Timmel, FHWA
Jerry Klima, Salisbury	Alex Loncarevic, VHB

Agenda Item No. 1: Call to Order

Dave Mohler called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. and asked Anthony Komornick to conduct a roll call vote of members attending the virtual meeting. Mr. Komornick then announced that six members were present.

Agenda Item No. 2: Opportunity for Public Comment

Dave Mohler asked if there were any members of the public present who wished to speak to the MVMPO. No one came forward to do so.

Agenda Item No. 3: Adoption of Minutes of January 26, 2022 Virtual MVMPO Meeting

Vote: Neil Harrington motioned to accept the January 26, 2022 Virtual MVMPO Meeting Minutes. Paul Materazzo seconded the motion.

The motion to accept the January 26, 2022 Virtual MVMPO Meeting Minutes passed by a roll call vote of 6 to 0.

Agenda Item No. 4: Status of Ongoing and FFYs 2022-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Projects

a. Status of TIP Roadway and Bridge Projects

Tim Paris reported on changes to the following projects:

- Lowell – North Andover – Haverhill Bridge Superstructure and Substructure Repairs Along I-495 #612197: The Advertise date has been updated and there were minor changes to the costs.
- Lawrence – Intersection of Marston Street and East Haverhill Street #610923: The costs have been updated.
- Georgetown-Newbury Border-to-Boston Trail project #607542: The TIP year has been updated to 2025 to reflect the year programmed in the current TIP.
- Newbury-Newburyport-Salisbury Resurfacing of Route 1 #608494: The Advertise Date has been updated to May 28.
- Rowley – Safety Improvements at Route 1, Central and Glen Streets #609392: There is a slight change in the costs, and we received the 100% design submittal on February 1.

Geordie Vining said regarding Project #608029, the Intersection of Route 1 and Merrimac Street in Newburyport, that he had received an email from the project manager that said we have been approved for 2025 but that is not what the current list says. Tim Paris answered that it has not been updated in Project Info yet and that the year just means it could be ready to be advertised in 2025. The year still needs to be programmed by the MPO.

Anthony Komornick said that today's packet has an updated list that includes the project as one that can be chosen for the 2023 to 2027 TIP. Frank Suszynski stated that the date is just a readiness date, it is not an Advertise Date or a programming date.

b. Status of Transit Projects

Noah Berger said we have received and accepted all the nine Gillig buses. Given the scheduling challenges with Riverbank Stabilization project where we cannot be in the water at certain times because of the Sturgeon, we will be spending the State funding first since it must be spent by June 30. The contractor is in place and a small amount of work has been done to install tie backs to the wall in the bus storage facility, which is right up against the river. However, Noah noted that the federal funds for the project are still being held up and asked Tony to help in resolving this

problem. Anthony Komornick replied that he thought that the clerical error surrounding this project had been resolved and Mr. Berger said that he did as well.

Noah Berger went on to state that the Authority did finally get the transfer of the Highway funds for repowering the buses and for the new ITS technology.

Noah reported that the big news for the MVRTA is that it is going fare free on March 1. It will be holding a big event on Monday February 28 at 11 at the Buckley Transportation Center. We will be removing a farebox in real time at that event and reported that five mayors, most of the legislative delegation, and many bus riders will be attending. The Boston Globe will be there as well, and he invited all members to attend and be prepared to have your picture in the Globe.

Agenda Item No. 5: Update on MVMPO Draft FFYs 2023-2027 TIP

a. Review of Financial Assumptions

Anthony Komornick said that on January 28 we met with all the other RPAs, staff from MassDOT, Federal Highway and Federal Transit to go over all the funding assumptions to be used in developing the TIPs. He said that there is 15% to 18% additional funding coming into the Commonwealth for FFYs 2022 to 2026. For the MVMPO, this means we are going to be seeing approximately \$2 million more per year for our regional targets. He noted that these additional funds are not available to Massachusetts or any other state yet as Congress still needs to pass an appropriations bill.

MassDOT also has provided us with guidance for what should be included in the TIP, and it is pretty much the same as our current TIP including sections on Project Scoring, Performance Management and Target Setting and a review of the financial assumptions that are used in developing the document.

b. Status of Potential Projects

Tony then noted that TIP Day for the MVMPO was February 9 when MPO staff met with staff from MassDOT from all the departments involved in the project process to go over all the projects that can be included in the 2023 to 2027 TIP.

Mary Kay Beninati said MVPC has put together a list of potential Target funded projects based on the project readiness discussed at that meeting.

We started with the projects currently programmed in 2022 because there are two intersection projects in Lawrence that require Right-of-Way that the project manager said if that Right-of-Way has not progressed enough by June or July then we would have to move these projects to 2023 and that would change the programming for the projects we are looking at here for 2023 to 2027.

Anthony Komornick said that he and Jerrard met with Mayor De Peña of Lawrence last week and there was a discussion about the Right-of-Way issues with these projects. We were assured by the Mayor and his staff that they are going to be ready. They understood that failure to do so would affect other communities' projects.

Mary Kay Beninati said the projects here are just the Regional Target projects, we do not have the Statewide project list yet, which is mostly bike/ped projects, and the Statewide bridge project list. We should be getting the Statewide project lists in the next couple of weeks.

The Salisbury Reconstruction of Route 1 project was expected to be ready for 2023 so it can stay programmed to start in 2023 and continue in 2024, as it is a two-year project.

The Methuen Intersection Improvements at Riverside Drive and Burnham Road is a 4(f) environmental project because it is at a park and has additional environmental requirements, which will take longer to address, so this project will not be ready in 2023 and must move to 2024.

The North Andover Route 114 project from Route 125 to Stop and Shop should be ready to start in 2024. Actually, the project limits are from Waverly Road to the Stop and Shop Driveway and MassDOT is going to update that description. It is a \$34 million, four-year project, so it also uses up all of the 2025 and 2026 funding.

Moving on to 2027, the Amesbury Riverwalk project that connects the Amesbury Riverwalk to the Salisbury Ghost Trail, which goes from the Riverwalk, behind the plaza on Rt 110 to Elm Street could be ready in 2027 and costs \$2.4 million. Anthony Komornick said the cost of this project could be reduced significantly because it is no longer going to go through wetlands.

Mary Kay Beninati said another project that has been in the works is the Andover Route 133 project, from Shawsheen Road to Route 28, but District 4 needs more design information to know whether it could be ready for 2027.

The Georgetown reconstruction of Route 97 could be ready for 2027.

The Newburyport Intersection Improvements at Route 1 and Merrimac Street, which is the project Geordie asked about earlier, could be ready for 2025.

The regional target for 2027 is \$13.6 million. As this list appears now, the North Andover Route 114 project would still need \$680,420 of that, so there is \$12.93 million available for these projects which would cost more than that. Mary Kay noted that a smaller project, if it could be ready, could be programmed in an earlier year and then more funding would be spent in 2027 for the Route 114 project.

These costs are inflated from the 2023 cost to the start year of the project by 4% per year.

Neil Harrington asked about the extra \$2 million from the new legislation he has been hearing about. Jerrard Whitten answered that at the Commission meeting last week and earlier at this meeting it was said that the extra \$2 million a year is in the Regional Targets.

Mr. Harrington then asked if, because the Route 114 project takes up all the Regional Target funding in 2025 and 2026, whether the State can provide some of that funding so that other projects can move forward also?

Derek Shooster answered that MassDOT has received a request from the MVPC staff to do that. The Statewide Program Managers are aware of this and will consider that as they put their programs together. We should know the answer in the next couple of weeks.

Dave Mohler then asked what are the next steps for the TIP? Mr. Komornick replied that the MPO would soon be receiving information from MassDOT on Statewide projects, including bridges, and from the MVRTA on transit projects. Anthony Komornick said we will be meeting with MassDOT to score the projects and we will present those scores at the March 23rd meeting. At that meeting, we will hear presentations from MPO members and public officials as to why their project(s) should be programmed in the document. We will be reaching out to MPO members and local officials to alert them of this opportunity.

Mary Kay Beninati said that the MPO will have to choose which projects to program in the 2023 to 2027 TIP at the March meeting so that we can produce a Draft 2023 to 2027 TIP based on that list for the April meeting.

Agenda Item No. 6: Update on MVMPO Draft FFY 2023 Unified Planning Work Program

a. Review of Financial Assumptions

Anthony Komornick said that at the same meeting on January 28 we also reviewed funding for the UPWPs. Overall statewide federal planning funding for MPOs will increase by 17.8% for FFY 2023. [Note: MVPC Staff was subsequently notified OTP staff that the correct figure was 16.1%]

b. USDOT and MassDOT Guidance

Anthony Komornick noted that we also received several recommendations and guidance from USDOT and MassDOT as to what tasks and analyses should be considered for inclusion in the document.

MassDOT has emphasized that there should be a task, with sufficient funding provided, for the MPOs to develop their 2024 Metropolitan Transportation Plans.

USDOT provided an updated list of Planning Emphasis Areas, which Mr. Komornick briefly touched upon and described how the MPO was addressing them.

Tackling the Climate Crisis

Right now, we are looking into ways to remove any barriers to the construction of Electric Vehicle Chargers in the region.

In the upcoming UPWP, MVPC may be preparing a Regionwide Hazard Mitigation Plan in which we would identify bridges and roadways and other transportation infrastructure that could be at risk due to climate change.

We assisted communities in developing their Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plans and now we will continue to assist some with implementation of those plans.

Equity and Justice

One example given to ensure equity and justice in transportation is reducing transit fares, which falls right in line with the MVRTA's fare free program which will begin on March 1.

Complete Streets

Tony emphasized that this is a concept that has really taken hold in Massachusetts. We have many TIP projects that are Complete Streets projects. The Route 114 project is a bottleneck/congestion reduction project and a Complete Streets project.

Public Involvement

One of the Certification Review recommendations made by USDOT was to expand our outreach to low income and disadvantaged populations, which we will do. We will also continue to use Virtual Public Involvement as we all have recognized the benefits of this approach during the Pandemic.

Agenda Item No. 7: Discussion and Potential Action to Endorse Proposed Amendments to MVMPO's FFY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program

Anthony Komornick said we are proposing to increase funding for task #2.8 - Safety Monitoring System by about \$8,500. This is being done since MVPC is devoting more time than expected to develop our regional Top 100 Crash Locations list. We have proposed moving small amounts of funding from several other tasks to cover the increase as shown in the table in the meeting packet.

We received no negative comments on these proposed changes during the public review period, so we are set to take action to endorse the amendments if we want.

Vote: Noah Berger motioned to Endorse the Proposed Amendments to the MVMPO's FFY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program. Paul Materazzo seconded the motion. **The motion to endorse the Proposed Amendments to MVMPO's FFY 2022 Unified Planning Work Program passed by a roll call vote of 6 to 0.**

Agenda Item No. 8: Draft Update to Merrimack Valley MPO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Anthony Komornick stated that it was a Finding in our Federal Planning Certification Review that the MVMPO must update its MOU by March 31, 2022. The MVMPO MOU outlines membership and functions of the members. Mr. Komornick noted that he had changed some elements of the MOU compared to the current one. For example, the Representatives for the Subregions are referred to as representatives from each of the Subregion Numbers rather than from the communities currently serving as the representative of that subregion.

Major USDOT comments on the MPO's current MOU were that it needed to describe in more detail how the representatives of the Subregions are chosen, must include specific reference to how the MPO must develop the financial plans needed as part of the MTP and TIP, and the development of the annual listing of obligated projects. These changes are included in the Draft MOU that has been distributed to members.

The existing MOU states that the MPO members have 30 days to review any updates to the MOU. Since the Draft was sent to members a few days ago, we will be able to adopt it next month. The MOU must also be sent to the mayors, boards of selectman,

and the city and town managers for their review which we will do, and we will send it to the MVTC for their March meeting. We will discuss and potentially endorse the MVMPO MOU at our March 23rd meeting.

Chris Timmel said that the MOU seems to address USDOT's concerns, but he will take a closer look and send Tony any comments he has.

Agenda Item No. 9: Other

The next meeting will be March 23 when we will choose projects for the 2023 to 2027 Draft TIP.

Agenda Item No. 10: Adjourn

Vote: Robert Snow made a motion to adjourn the meeting and John Pettis seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously, with no objections, by voice vote.

The meeting was Adjourned at 1:02 pm.