

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES

Merrimack Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO)

Virtual Meeting

Wednesday, November 24, 2021 – 12:00 p.m.

Attending:

Voting Members:

Dave Mohler, MassDOT, representing MassDOT Acting Secretary Jamey L. Tesler
Frank Suszynski, representing MassDOT Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver
Jerrard Whitten, MVPC Executive Director
Noah Berger, MVRTA Administrator
John Pettis, representing the City of Haverhill
Neil Harrington, Salisbury, representing MPO Subregion #1
John Cashell, Georgetown, representing MPO Subregion #3
Paul Materazzo, Andover, representing MPO Subregion #4

Others Present:

Anthony Komornick, MVPC	Tim Paris, MassDOT District 4
Mary Kay Beninati, MVPC	Gus Norrbom, MassDOT Planning
Betsy Goodrich, MVPC	Wesley Lickus, MassDOT Planning
Brian Fallon, MassDOT District 4	Mayor Fiorentini, Haverhill
Derek Shooster, MassDOT Planning	Alex Loncarevic, VHB
Geordie Vining, Newburyport	Derek Krevat, MassDOT Planning

Agenda Item No. 1: Call to Order

Due to a technical issue with David Mohler's connection to the meeting, Derek Shooster called the meeting to order at 12:01 p.m. and asked Anthony Komornick to conduct a roll call vote of members attending the virtual meeting. Mr. Komornick then announced that seven members were present (Mr. Harrington joined the meeting at 12:05 p.m.).

Agenda Item No. 2: Opportunity for Public Comment

Derek Shooster 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 October 27, 2021 Virtual MVMPO Meeting

Vote: John Pettis motioned to accept the October 27, 2021 Virtual MVMPO Meeting Minutes. Frank Suszynski seconded the motion.

The motion to accept the October 27, 2021 Virtual MVMPO Meeting Minutes passed by a roll call vote of 7 to 0 with one abstention.

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 of MassDOT District 4 reported on the following projects:

- A Notice to Proceed was issued in June for the Andover/Tewksbury Lighting Project at the I-93 and I-495 interchange project.
- A Notice to Proceed was issued on September 27 for the Groveland Community Trail project.
- The Haverhill Route 108 at Route 110 Intersection Reconstruction project was issued a Notice to Proceed on October 22.
- MassDOT received the 25% design plans for Methuen improvements at Riverside Drive and Burnham Road in March.
- The Advertising Date for the resurfacing and related work project on Route 1 in Newbury/Newburyport/Salisbury project has been moved to January 29, 2022 and the project cost has increased to \$15,735,772.25.
- The Haverhill bridge replacement of Bridge H-12-040 that carries I-495 northbound and southbound over the Merrimack River between Methuen and Haverhill has been moved to TIP year 2024.
- The Design Public Hearing for the Route 114 Reconstruction project in North Andover was held on October 28.
- The Rehabilitation of the I-495 Bridge over Route 28 and the MBTA and B&M Railroad Tracks project in Andover had its Design Public Hearing on November 17.
- The Advertising Date for the Safety Improvements project at the Route 1/Central St./Glen St. intersection in Rowley has been set for October 3, 2022.
- The Reconstruction of the Marston St./East Haverhill St/ intersection project in Lawrence now has advanced to 100% design and has an Advertising Date of March 12, 2022 and an estimated cost of \$1,811,167.10.
- Daniel Wilk is the new project manager for the Lawrence Safe Routes to School project.
- The I-495 bridge maintenance project in Lowell, North Andover, and Haverhill now has an Advertise Date of February 26, 2022 with a Total Federal Participating Cost change to \$5,800,000.
- The Haverhill Bradford Rail Trail construction project is now 35% complete and has an expected completion date of August 2022.
- Construction is now 90% complete on the replacement of Bridge H-012-39 that carries I-495 over the Merrimack River in Haverhill. The expected completion date of the project is June 2022.

- The Newburyport Nock Middle School and Molin Upper Elementary School Safe Routes to Schools project was completed as of June 23, 2021.

Mayor Fiorentini asked for the status of the Basiliere Bridge project in Haverhill. Frank Suszynski responded that construction is expected to start in 2024.

b. Status of Transit Projects

Noah Berger stated that since the last meeting there was a demonstration run of the Bus-On-Shoulder on I-93 to Boston, which Betsy Goodrich and Tony Komornick participated in. He noted that it would be a good idea to paint information in the shoulder to say it is a bus lane as they have done in Boston. He said that the Bus-On-Shoulder service will reduce travel time from the Merrimack Valley to Boston by 15%.

Also, the MVRTA is seeking to re-route the bus within Boston, and perhaps in the Merrimack Valley, for more efficient service, by making runs more direct. And we are going to open the service up to folks going in the reverse commute direction so that we have service in both directions. While it is unclear what the demand for this reverse service will be, the marginal cost would be zero since we are already operating the bus in that direction.

For the other fixed routes on the system, the Authority is seeking to make runs more direct to be more competitive with the private automobile. It is looking at providing service on Route 125 in North Andover, particularly with more new businesses coming there. Similarly, it is looking at more direct service between Lawrence and Haverhill while still providing service to key destinations off the main line, such as to The Loop.

Agenda Item No. 5: Discussion and Potential Action to Release Proposed Amendment to FFY 2022 Statewide Element of MVMPO's FFYs 2022-2026 TIP

- a. Increase in Cost of Newbury – Newburyport – Salisbury – Resurfacing and Related Work on Route 1 (Project #608494)

Anthony Komornick stated that the proposed amendment is to increase the programmed cost of Project #608494, resurfacing and related work on Route 1 in Newbury, Newburyport, and Salisbury. The anticipated cost in the TIP of just over \$9.7 million has gone up markedly. The project is to be funded with Statewide funding. The TIP needs to be amended to maintain fiscal constraint because the District 4 construction cost estimate for the project is now \$15,735,772.25.

Frank Suszynski said that MassDOT has been working for approximately

the last year and a half with the City of Newburyport on a shared-use east-west path crossing of the rotary so they were unable to update the cost estimate while working through several rounds of alternatives for the project. Agreement was reached on the preferred path crossing option and additional paving on the collector roads on either side of Route 1 at the approach to the Circle was also included in the project. He noted that there also is an intersection in Newbury that is going to be reconstructed in concrete, so MassDOT needed to include a cost estimate for that element of the project. These are three major items that have changed, causing that cost increase.

Dave Mohler asked Tony to confirm that these are not target funds and that the funds will be coming from the State. Anthony Komornick responded that is correct.

Vote: John Pettis motioned to release the Proposed Amendment to Increase the Cost of the Newbury – Newburyport -Salisbury - Route 1 Resurfacing and related work project for a 21-day review period. Noah Berger seconded the motion.

The motion to release the proposed amendment to increase the cost of the Newbury – Newburyport – Salisbury - Route 1 Resurfacing and related work project for a 21-day review period, passed by a roll call vote of 8 to 0.

Agenda Item No. 6: Other

Mayor Fiorentini asked if anyone from the State could tell us anything about the new Infrastructure Act? He has heard that most of the money will go through the MPOs and wondered if this is true, and if so, what will be the process to get more projects approved and get them approved more speedily?

Dave Mohler replied that the Infrastructure Act contains both formula funds and discretionary funds. A large amount of that money is discretionary, which means that cities and towns, the State, and others will apply for funding on a competitive basis. Those projects will not be put into a TIP unless they are approved for discretionary funding through the competitive process. There is also increased formula funding, which is the money that comes to the MPOs. MassDOT does not have any estimates as to the actual amounts of funding that will be coming into the state. He said that MassDOT had been informed by USDOT that these estimates will be made available in January. MassDOT will then work with the regional planning agencies to determine the appropriate amount of money to go to each MPO. The MPOs will then be asked to amend their TIPS to add additional projects, or cover cost increases or whatever else

might be appropriate at the time.

Mayor Fiorentini asked if Dave has any idea what the competitive process will be?

Dave Mohler replied that there are a whole host of different grants. He asked Tony to forward information sent out from the Federal Highway Administration earlier in the week that includes a list of all the competitive discretionary grant programs and the amount available Nationwide. That information will provide some sense of how many programs there are and provides a general description of what they are for. Each grant program will be subject to Federal Rule Making and Federal Guidance, so some of them may not be available this year, but we will know more in January.

Mayor Fiorentini asked what do you mean by this year, this calendar year, or this fiscal year? Dave Mohler answered this fiscal year. He noted that even though Congress passed the Infrastructure Act, it still needs to pass an appropriations bill that funds the legislation. The Infrastructure Act Formula Program was for FFY 2022, which is the current year we are in, and FFYs 2023-2026. With the passage of the appropriations bill, there should be new money for all the years contained in the current TIP.

Mayor Fiorentini asked if there was a point person at MassDOT that can be contacted if we have more questions about this issue. Dave Mohler answered that for now if you have questions feel free to contact me, Derek Shooster, Derek Krevat, or anyone in the MPO Planning group.

Noah Berger said that Mayor Fiorentini raises some really good points in terms of understanding what is in this legislation. He emphasized that what many people do not fully understand is that much of the new legislation is really the re-authorization of the FAST Act, which was going to happen anyway. That being said, it also includes a lot more money than the previous legislation. He added that there are two important issues facing the State related to the legislation. The first issue, at least on the transit side, is that we are looking at a 77% increase in funding over what was contained in the FAST Act. This means that there is going to have to be a larger local match associated with that extra Federal money. It would be fabulous if the State would step up and match what the Feds have done. Secondly, and as David alluded to, much of the funding in the new legislation will come through discretionary programs. Having been on the Federal side in evaluating project applications for such programs, he said that one of the things that is looked at is whether the project is included on the TIP/STIP. Massachusetts has always had a policy that a project that will be funded through a discretionary grant cannot be programmed in the TIP/STIP until those funds have been awarded. This often puts the project at a competitive disadvantage in the project selection/evaluation process. He said that it would be worth looking at putting vision projects on the TIP to address this issue so long as it is fully disclosed that the

project is contingent upon its selection in a competitive grant process. It would then be moved to the appropriate part of the TIP should that happen. He suggested that those would be good things to look at going forward now that we have the new legislation.

Mayor Fiorentini asked if the State is likely to allocate any of this money towards increased Chapter 90 money? Dave Mohler replied that was not possible because MassDOT does not use Federal funds for Chapter 90, and he wasn't sure how that could be accomplished because projects would have to be programmed in the TIP to access these funds.

Mayor Fiorentini said he would urge you to urge the Governor and others to double the amount of money that goes towards Chapter 90 since it would put people to work immediately as these are almost all book jobs and we can pave more streets and fix more sidewalks and do it much more quickly.

Anthony Komornick then asked for confirmation that none of the earmarked projects that we were asked to provide to our senators and representatives made it into the legislation.

Dave Mohler said there are no earmarked projects in the Infrastructure Act. The House members had earmarked projects in their re-authorization act, but these were removed from the final legislation. He noted that, to the extent that an MPO wants to further one of those earmark projects, it might look to develop and program it once it is known how much more money will be available under the Infrastructure Act and/or the State line items, if appropriate.

Betsy Goodrich stated the next Transportation Committee Meeting will be on December 9 at 1 pm and noted that she had placed a link to the meeting in the chat. Alternatively, people can go to the Events Calendar on the MVPC website to get a link to register for the meeting and receive a calendar hold.

Dave Mohler stated that Derek Shooster has put his contact information into the chat so that anyone can contact him for further information on the Infrastructure Act, or you can contact him.

Anthony Komornick said the next meeting of the MPO will be December 22.

Agenda Item No. 7: Adjourn

Vote: Frank Suszynski 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 12:34 pm.