

MVMPO – May 22, 2024: Meeting Minutes

Members Present

Derek Krevat, alternate, representing Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation
Tim Paris, alternate, representing MassDOT Highway Division Administrator
Jerrard Whitten, representing Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Mayor Cassandra Gove, MeVa Advisory Board Chair
John Pettis, alternate, representing City of Haverhill
Dan McCarthy, alternate, representing City of Lawrence
Niel Harrington, representing Subregion 1
Matthew Coogan, representing Subregion 3
Paul Materazzo, representing Subregion 4

Others Present

Derek Shooster, MassDOT
Brian Fallon, MassDOT
Miranda Briseño, MassDOT
Noah Berger, MeVa
Bonnie Mahoney, MeVa
Jerry Klima, Salisbury
Rick Taintor, Newburyport
Kathleen Lambert, Haverhill
Jennifer Dunlap, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Patrick Reed, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Tony Collins, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Jonah Williams, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Elizabeth Maldari, Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Brent Bergeron, Salisbury resident

Call to Order

Derek Krevat called the meeting to order at 12:07pm. Patrick Reed called the roll and quorum was established.

Opportunity for Public Comment

Mr. Krevat asked for public comments, there being none, he moved on to the next item.

Adoption of Previous Meeting's Minutes

Mr. Krevat called for a motion to adopt the previous meeting's minutes. Mr. Whitten made the motion and Mr. Pettis seconded. Adoption of the minutes was approved unanimously.

Updates on Next Year's TIP Project Scoring Application

Jonah Williams provided an update on the Transportation Improvement Program Scoring Application. Mr. Williams reviewed how the MVMPO staff had developed a merit scoring system based on funding categories set forth in the region's Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Mr. Williams discussed how the merit scoring system led to larger, more expensive projects scoring much higher than smaller projects that can still have significant benefits. He then provided an overview of a return-on-investment scoring system developed by MVMPO staff in which projects receive a score based on cost per merit score point. The final Transportation Evaluation Criteria (TEC) Score is the average of the merit score and the return-on-investment score. Mr. Reed added that the goal of this scoring system is to normalize based on cost and not just bring forward large projects, given the constraints of regional target funding. Mr. Berger asked if the staff has looked at how previous projects would score based on this system and if there were any unintended consequences. Mr. Williams responded that the return-on-investment scores were informed by recent year's projects and current TIP projects and that the updated scoring system led to a more evenly distributed range of scores. Mr. Shooster commented on the ROI scoring system, and asked if staff had considered cases where projects have large cost changes. Mr. Reed responded that while these cost changes could affect scoring, it is the discretion of the board to decide how to program projects and the TEC scores serve as guidance. Mr. Reed highlighted that the scoring system is a living document, and scores would be updated as projects move throughout the TIP process.

ACTION ITEM: FFY25-29 Transportation Improvement Program

Mr. Reed provided an overview of the funding in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Mr. Reed went through updates to the TIP since the last MPO meeting. These included making a qualitative note regarding the emissions factors for MeVa rolling stock replacements, adding planning emphasis area and performance measure information and narratives about the regional target projects and an acronym list. Mr. Reed concluded saying that the proposed action was to approve the FFY25-29 TIP.

Mr. Krevat called for a motion to approve the TIP. Mr. Coogan made the motion and Mr. Materazzo seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

ACTION ITEM: FFY25 Unified Planning Work Program

Mr. Reed introduced the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), the work program for the MVMPO staff for FFY25 that directs how staff time and resources are distributed. Mr. Reed provided an overview of major deliverables in the UPWP. Mr. Reed highlighted tasks that have been moved from FFY24 to FFY25, and the next steps for the region's Active Transportation Plan. The UPWP includes tasks supporting MeVa including funding for a ferryboat pilot business plan development. Mr. Reed also explained the UPWP includes staff time for safety quick build projects as well as review of regional target TIP projects. He also discussed a task for safety capacity building in the region. Mr. Reed then provided an overview of updates based on comments from MassDOT.

Mr. Coogan asked about the ferryboat planning study and the possible routes served. Mr. Berger provided an overview of the proposed ferry routes providing service between Haverhill, Amesbury, and Newburyport in the morning and evening, and between Amesbury and Newburyport throughout the day. Mr. Klima asked about the possibility of serving Salisbury Beach. Mr. Berger responded that this is very dependent on the tide level but can be explored in the planning study. Mr. Reed and Mr. Berger both emphasized working with a consultant with expertise in ferry service will help answers many questions regarding establishing a ferry service.

Mr. Coogan made the motion to adopt the FFY25 UPWP. Mr. Whitten seconded. Mr. Krevat asked whether the UPWP detailed what tasks would be funded with PL carryover. Mr. Reed responded affirmatively and stated these funds would go towards the safety capacity building task. Mr. Reed called the roll and the motion passed unanimously.

ACTION ITEM: FFY24 UPWP Amendment #2

Mr. Reed explained that this is a bookkeeping amendment and provided an update on the status of current year's UPWP tasks. Mr. Reed also provided an overview of local technical assistance tasks completed during the past year.

The first bookkeeping action transfers funds from Subtasks 1.3 (Unified Planning Work Program) and 3.4 (Regional Vitality) to Subtask 1.1 (Program Management). Mr. Reed explained that this is because staff anticipate minimal further expenses for the UPWP and due to staffing limitations in the Community and Economic Development Program, budget allocated toward the Commission's Priority Growth Strategy may be reallocated elsewhere.

The second action transfers funds from Subtask 2.3 (Supportive GIS and Information Technology) to Subtask 1.4 (Transportation Improvement Program). Mr. Reed explained the rationale for this is that most of the time developing the new TIP scoring application was billed to Subtask 1.4, however the majority of work was GIS focused.

The third action transfers the funds from Subtask 2.4 (Travel Time Reliability and Competitiveness) and Subtask 2.5 (Benchmarks and Performance Measures) to Subtask 4.2 (Local Technical Assistance). Mr. Reed explained that this is because staff have taken on local technical assistance tasks that were not initially programmed and beyond anticipated time needs. The main deliverable for Subtask 2.4 has been moved to FFY25 and Subtask 2.5 was completed in February 2024.

Action 4 transfers funds from Subtask 3.4 (Regional Vitality) to Subtask 4.1 (County and State Planning Support). Mr. Reed explained that this is because staff supported review of MassDOT's Community Transit Grants, which was billed to Subtask 4.1 so this action leads to a level balance in this subtask. Mr. Reed explained that these actions set staff up to maximize the use of PL funds before the end of the federal fiscal year.

Mr. Krevat commented that the amount of funds in local technical assistance seemed high and asked if this was comparable to the amount for FFY25. Mr. Reed responded that this is because staff have taken on additional LTA tasks this year and completed grant applications such as the RAISE grant application.

Mr. Krevat asked for a motion to release the amendment for the 21-day comment period. Mr. Coogan made the motion and Mr. Harrington seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Preliminary Discussion: Updates to the Board's MOU in FFY25

Mr. Reed explained that the board's MOU is a document between MassDOT and the communities that sets forth the vision and mission of the MPO. Mr. Reed went on to discuss the current makeup of the board with larger cities represented by Mayors and smaller communities grouped in subregions. He mentioned a desire from some communities to have more active involvement in the MPO board as well as the possibility of advocates being represented on the board. He talked about how some MPOs throughout the state have a joint transportation committee that provides recommendations to the board, but that he sees more benefit to having advocates in the room with the board either in a voting or advisory capacity. Mr. Reed then opened the discussion for input from the board and meeting attendees.

Ms. Lambert commented that she sees the benefits of all communities being represented on the board as this helps build awareness of the MPO's role and the benefits of the MPO for the communities. Mr. Coogan added that it can feel like a bit of telephone working through a subregional representative, but that also as a small community it can be a challenge to make it to the meeting. Mr. Materazzo commented that he sees the value of all towns being represented on the board, and that it would be preferable for towns to be represented by staff as opposed to residents. Mr. Coogan responded that having a staff member attend the meetings may be more challenging for a small community and that maintaining quorum could become an issue. Mr. Berger commented that he sees the value of all towns being represented in theory, but that it's important to think about the weight of each vote as there are vast differences in the size of communities. Mayor Gove commented that having representation on the board can help build understanding of the MPO process, so more communities can benefit from the MPO. Mr. Shooster mentioned the possibility of having a more formal elections process for subregional representatives with the other communities as ex officio members. Mr. Reed wrapped up the discussion by saying that staff will bring possible scenarios to the following meeting for further discussion.

Brief Vision Zero and Active Transportation Project Updates

Ms. Maldari began the update on the Vision Zero plan talking about how 5 walk audits have been scheduled and MassDOT has been invited to walk audits taking place on state roads. She went on to talk about how she will start to write the plan and finalize project lists. She went on to talk about an event she attended in Andover where she distributed bike lights and information about the vision zero plan, and how she received an email from a child who had attended the event with his family regarding safety

improvements for pedestrians, demonstrating the influence of being out in communities and fostering conversations around safety.

Mr. Collins began his update on the Active Transportation Plan reminding everyone that this phase of the plan focuses on paths throughout the region. He discussed how he has been working with an active transportation committee that has arrived at six projects throughout the region. In the coastal area, these projects are an extension of the Amesbury Riverwalk through the downtown area, and an extension of the path along Parker Street in Newbury to Rolfe's Lane. In the Lawrence area, a connection along Union Street and Jackson Street in Lawrence and an extension of the 114 project to better connect Lawrence and North Andover. In the central region, the projects are River Street in Haverhill and an off-road connection between the Groveland Community path and Georgetown Border to Boston segment.

Status of Ongoing and FFYs 2024-2028 TIP Projects

Status of Transit Projects

Mr. Berger began the transit update by providing an update on the McGovern remodeling and the vision of creating a comfortable and inviting space for bus riders to wait. He talked about how MeVa has brought on two A&E firms for capital projects, the Esplanada- the courtyard next to McGovern, and the MeVa headquarters to maximize office space and bus maintenance facilities.

Mr. Berger went on to discuss operations updates. Bus service in Lawrence will operate out of McGovern starting in September with some routes using the double decker bridge to avoid congestion on the downtown bridges. The Route 1 bus will provide more direct service between Lawrence and Haverhill and the 4 will serve the Loop, previously served by the 1. The 6 will serve medical facilities and senior housing. Mr. Berger mentioned that MVMPO staff had supported creating maps for the Transit Innovation Grant, and MeVa had received \$1.9 million to extend the 14 bus from Osgood Landing to Lawrence and create the route 11 which will be a quasi-express route between Lawrence, Haverhill and Newburyport to provide faster service. In July the beach bus will also run on Sundays, and in Haverhill the 15 and 16 buses will be staggered to provide more frequent bus departures.

Status of TIP Roadway and Bridge Projects

Mr. Paris provided an update on highway projects. Several projects had changes in ad dates. Mr. Reed asked about the rationale for the ad date moving back for the North Andover 114 project. Mr. Paris said it could just be based on scheduling with other projects. Mr. Fallon added that there has been additional drainage work needed for this project, leading to the delay, but it is still expected to advertise in 2025. Mr. Shooster added that in general ad date changes are updates reflected in the 25-29 TIP.

Other Business

Mr. Reed thanked everyone staying through the meeting and mentioned that the next meeting in June would be virtual.

Adjourn

The motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Coogan. The motion was seconded by Mr. Paris and the meeting was adjourned by a voice vote.