

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the October 12, 2011 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Rooms 2 and 3 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA.

1. Introductions – *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

Steve Olanoff, Chair (Westwood) called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM. Attendees introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

2. Chair's Report – *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

The Membership Committee will meet on November 9 at 2:00 PM. They will discuss attendance by existing members, recruitment of new members representing advocacy groups in economic development and the environment, and non-profit groups serving low income and minority areas, and discuss adding MPO members to the Advisory Council as full voting members. Currently, they are non-voting members of the Advisory Council.

A Candidates Forum for the upcoming MPO election will be held after the Advisory Council's meeting in Conference Rooms 2 and 3. The candidates for the municipal seats are the following: Everett and Newton for the two open at-large city seats; Arlington, Lexington, Natick, and Needham for the two open at-large town seats; Beverly for the North Shore Task Force seat; Woburn for the North Suburban Planning Council seat; Hopkinton and Medway for the SouthWest Advisory Planning Committee seat; and Norwood for the Three Rivers Interlocal Council seat.

Karl Quackenbush was selected by the MPO to be the executive director of its staff, the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS).

3. Approval of the Meeting Minutes of September 14, 2011 – *Laura Wiener, Chair*

A motion to adopt the meeting minutes of September 14, 2011 was made by Richard Canale (MAGIC) and seconded by Laura Wiener (Arlington). The minutes of September 14, 2011 were unanimously approved.

4. An Update on Federal Transportation Initiatives – *Pamela Stephenson, Administrator, FHWA – Massachusetts Division*

P. Stephenson thanked the Advisory Council for inviting her to address them and stated that she looks forward to a continuous dialogue with the group. It is important to listen to what groups such as the Advisory Council have to say. Groups such as the Advisory Council play an important role as voices of the public. You represent many different perspectives in the Boston region. Hearing all voices is very important in transportation.

It is important to have robust and lively conversations in order to plan a system that meets everyone's needs.

She became the division administrator in Massachusetts five months ago. She has a background working in historic preservation and environmental review. She has experience working in state and federal government, and private consulting.

Partnerships and collaboration on all levels are critical. All parties must be brought together including the state DOT, MPOs, consultants, designers, and the general public. Collaboration is important because it will yield the best solution. After hearing different perspectives, it may change how you view a problem or solution from what was first thought. It's important to work with the towns, the planners, and the advocacy groups. This is critical in order to get what is truly needed. This collaboration can be helpful for identifying the problems that our engineers are very good at solving.

An example of where collaboration worked well is the Fast 14 bridge project in Medford. It worked very well because of the collaboration and partnership. Everyone was pulled into the room including the designers, the workers, the DOT, FHWA, the town, and police. They came together to brainstorm what might go wrong and how it could be fixed. One of the potential problems actually came up during the project, but it was handled and did not cause any delay because the group had considered it and the project managers knew how to react. This type of proactive thinking is a key to success. Being proactive is behind the FHWA's Everyday Count Initiative. It's about looking at the solutions that have been identified over the years to many problems, but nothing has been done to advance the solution. This initiative is about using every tool in the toolbox to do things faster, smarter, and better. It's about speeding up project delivery. It is difficult to be proactive when you are busy being reactive. A good example is developing a more robust purpose and need statement that helps speed up the environmental review process.

Another initiative in transportation is the US DOT – HUD – EPA Partnership for Sustainable Communities. The Federal Transit Administration has taken the lead for US DOT on the Partnership. This is another example of the importance of collaboration. People tend to think about livability as more transit, but it's really about collaboration and giving cities and towns the multi-modal systems they need. The modes should work together and every option should be on the table. In 2010 US DOT put out a statement calling for bicycle and pedestrian accommodations in all new and rehabilitation projects. Within two weeks of her arrival, there was a FHWA livability workshop in Cambridge. Attendees complained about funding for livability projects and the difficulty convincing people to support livability projects. However, livability should be a part of all projects. Elements of livability should not be thought of as something nice we do on the side. It's important to make decisions that fit within the environment and to involve the stakeholders and public in the design process. The context sensitive design principles adopted in 1998 are:

- Strive towards a shared stakeholder vision to provide a basis for decisions.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the context.

- Foster continuing communication and collaboration to achieve consensus.
- Exercise flexibility and creativity to shape effective transportation solutions, while preserving and enhancing community and natural environments.

P. Stephenson then spoke about what the next surface transportation bill might include. Likely, it will include a focus on performance measures. Using performance measures to guide investments will help make sure we are getting the biggest bang for the buck. We need to think about what is really needed and the tradeoffs involved between building new infrastructure and maintaining what we already have. It will also require MPOs and DOTs to understand their assets and what they need to continue working properly. Performance goals need to be set for each of the assets. The next bill will also probably include provisions that give the states more flexibility in how they spend transportation funds. Reducing crashes and fatalities on the transportation system will also likely be emphasized in the bill. This is a good idea of a performance measure that will be included in a Long-Range Transportation Plan. There are competing visions and it will be interesting to see how the reauthorization plays out. Some envision a bill that will heavily emphasize maintenance and eliminate things such as transportation enhancements. The Administration is promoting a more multi-modal bill that embraces things such as the transportation enhancements program. It's unclear what the final bill will look like.

Questions

In response to members' questions, P. Stephenson made the following additional comments:

- The authorization to collect the gasoline tax and the authorization to spend the proceeds through the surface transportation bill (SAFETEA-LU) both had to be extended this year. There was a fear that funding could shut down, but SAFETEA-LU was extended through March of 2012. However, another continuing resolution will be necessary in November to be able to continue collecting the gasoline tax. Transportation wrangling is very intense now as we enter an election year. There is a lot of uncertainty as to what will happen.
- Tolling has to be initiated by the state in which the tolls will be implemented, and approved by the Secretary of US DOT. Tolling proposals are subject to hard scrutiny.
- Freight is one of the planning factors that MPOs must address. There is an emphasis on freight planning as part of our economic development. How freight planning is treated is a decision that should be made with the help of groups such as the Advisory Council.
- Every state and FHWA division administrator is thinking about funding and what can be done. Transportation funds could be cut deeply. States need to look at all of the tools at their disposal. The FHWA also reviews finance plans for large projects. However, FHWA does not make decisions about how a state will address a debt problem. Solutions to debt problems are run through the FHWA office and they will offer guidance as to whether or not the solution is viable.
- Land use should be a consideration in performance measures. Maryland and New Jersey have tied transportation investments with land use planning. However, no one wants it to be prescriptive.

- There are three questions that people involved in transportation should ask: What do we do well? What needs improvement? What should simply stop?

Comments

- It is important that FHWA ask MassDOT what they are doing for freight planning. A champion for freight is lacking at MassDOT. (Dom D’Eramo, Millis)
- The Advisory Council’s Freight Committee encourages participation by FHWA in the Committee’s meetings. (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)

5. FFY 2012 Committee Sign Up – Steve Olanoff, Chair

A sign-up sheet for the Advisory Council’s committees was distributed. The following members signed up for the committees at the meeting:

- Membership:** Monica Tibbits and Laura Wiener
- Regional Transportation Plan:** Monica Tibbits, Richard Canale, and Schuyler Larrabee
- Transportation Improvement Program:** Monica Tibbits, Richard Canale, John Gillon, Tom O’Rourke, Laura Wiener, and Chan Rogers
- Unified Planning Work Program:** Richard Canale
- Freight:** Dom D’Eramo, Frank DeMasi, Walter Bonin, Marilyn Wellons, and Schuyler Larrabee
- Programs:** Frank DeMasi and Laura Wiener

6. Member Announcements

S. Olanoff announced that Advisory Council and MPO meeting materials will now be available in large print. As a result of a recent accessibility complaint, the MPO and Advisory Council are providing large print. The MPO will be using a microphone system now to make it easier to hear what speakers are saying. Assisted listening devices are available at all meetings.

D. D’Eramo announced that the Massachusetts Infrastructure Investment Coalition will be hosting a series of forums called Infrastructure in the Afternoon from 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the Boston Public Library on November 1, 15, and 29. The meeting on the 15th will address transportation and creative finance.

7. Committee Reports

There were none.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:20 PM.

ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for October 12, 2011

Cities and Towns

Laura Wiener, Arlington
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Jeff Rosenblum, Cambridge
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Dom D'Eramo, Millis
John Gillon, Quincy and ITE
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies

Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (MAGIC)
Steven Rawding, MassDOT Aeronautics
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)
Catherine Pasnelle, MassRIDES
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council

Citizen Groups

Mary Ann Murray, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA (AACT)
Tom Daly, American Council of Engineering Companies
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects
Darl Kurlay, MassCommute
Tom O'Rourke, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
Monica Tibbits, Route 128 Business Council

Guests and Visitors

Michael Chong, FHWA
Kristina Johnson, City of Quincy
Ed Lowney, Malden resident
Pamela S. Stephenson, FHWA

MPO Staff

Walter Bennett
Mike Callahan
Anne McGahan
Sean Pfalzer
Pam Wolfe