



## Regional Transportation Advisory Council Meeting

### February 11, 2015 Meeting

3:00 PM, State Transportation Building, Conference Room 4, 10 Park Plaza, Boston, MA

### Draft Meeting Summary

#### Introductions

Mike Gowing, Chair (Acton) called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. (For attendance list, see page 7)

#### Chair's Report—*Mike Gowing, Chair*

M. Gowing stated that many meetings over the last several weeks have been cancelled due to the heavy snow storms this year. He recommended the Council address the chronic state of under-funding the MBTA transit system.

#### Minutes - November 12, 2014

Approval of the minutes for the November 12, 2014 Advisory Council meeting was postponed to a future meeting.

#### Subregional Priority Roadway Study—Washington Street in Newton – *Chen-Yuan Wang, MPO Staff*

C. Wang delivered a brief overview of this Boston Region MPO study which was funded as part of the MPO's 2014 UPWP and is a continuing effort to address transportation needs in the MAPC subregions. The objectives of this study are to identify safety, mobility, access, and other transportation-related problems in the study corridor and to develop multimodal transportation solutions.

The study began in 2014 with the review of nearly 30 candidate corridors in the MPO region and the selection of Washington Street in Newton for the MPO's approval. Once the City had completed a community meeting seeking inputs for the study, staff collected and analyzed data. Alternatives for improvement were developed and reviewed with Newton's Transportation Team followed by the presentation of the draft project report to the City's transportation committee; the study was subsequently approved by the MPO on January 22, 2015.

The study corridor covers nearly two miles of Washington Street from Chestnut Street in West Newton to Church Street near Newton Corner. This urban minor arterial roadway is under the City's jurisdiction. The dense roadway network serves regional traffic from adjacent communities containing major roadways, bike routes, bus routes, and commuter rail service running parallel to I-90 including two commuter rail stations.

C. Wang described the operational characteristics of the roadway indicating that sidewalks exist on both sides of the roadway, and that there are no dedicated bike lanes in the corridor.

The major issues raised at the community meeting concerned the high travel speeds and unsafe conditions for all users in the corridor, especially for pedestrians crossing four lanes of fast-moving traffic to reach their destinations.

Safety and operational analyses conducted to address the community concerns included the collections of traffic counts along the corridor. The traffic accident experience along the corridor was also reviewed, indicating that two intersections in the corridor experienced relatively high crash rates. Non-intersection roadway segments with commercial developments with generally higher crash rates were reviewed along with the pedestrian and bicycle crashes that occurred in the past 7 years. A depiction of the accident analysis was presented.

At the Walnut Street Intersection, there were a high number of left-turn crashes. One reason for this is that the left turn traffic on Washington Street is forced to share its lane with through movements without protected signal phases. It was determined that crashes resulting from vehicles turning to or from adjacent developments and parking areas could be reduced by redesigning the road.

Traffic volumes of fewer than 20,000 vehicles per day in many segments of the project prompted the proposed "road diet" to reduce the number of travel lanes in order to achieve functional improvements. The study proposed a three-lane design that includes a median turning lane to improve turning movements.

Road segments that were not suitable for a "road diet" were designed with four narrower lanes allowing for the two bicycle lanes and a parking lane on one side to the roadway.

In evaluating the proposed roadway modifications under predicted future traffic conditions, two future-year traffic growth scenarios were studied. The moderate traffic growth scenario predicts about 3–5% growth and the significant traffic growth scenario predicts about 8–10% traffic growth in the next ten years. The study found that projected travel activity based on the significant growth scenario would still operate under acceptable levels of service.

Based on safety and operational analyses, a series of short- and long-term improvements were proposed. Short-term improvements are generally low-cost and could be implemented as soon as funding resources could be allocated.

The long-term improvement proposes redesign of the corridor which would see three components; the removal of one travel lane to create a center traffic median/turn lane; dedicated bike lanes; and some parking removal to allow for continuous bike lanes.

Several essential elements of the redesign include crosswalks, curb extensions, and widening sidewalks. With all these improvements, the roadway's speed limits then can be adjusted from 35 to 30 MPH. The study finds a need to further review the parking conditions and access management and further examine lighting, landscape, and noise reduction strategies at the design stages.

C. Wang presented several slides of the locations and layouts of the proposed long-term improvements in a series of conceptual plans for the complete corridor. He concluded that the proposed long-term improvements have a number of benefits, including slowing down traffic, providing safe access to adjacent developments, accommodating bicycles and pedestrians, and improving safety, access and mobility for all users in the corridor.

The Newton Washington Street Study (PDF or HTML) with the graphics of the corridor's conceptual design can be downloaded from the MPO website ([click here](#)).

## Questions and Comments

In response to a question from a member, C. Wang explained that he attempted to add a cycle track to the conceptual layout but there were right-of-way constraints. (C. Porter)

Asked if he considered designing bike tracks between the parking and the roadway lane and lowering the design speed to 25 mph. C. Wang reiterated that the right-of-way constraints precluded that possibility. He stated that on minor urban arterial streets, speeds of 25 mph are hard to enforce. (J. Read)

Regarding roadway ownership, C. Wang pointed out that the corridor is a City of Newton roadway, but MassDOT District Six was consulted in the roadway study. (S. Larrabee)

C. Wang stated that the cost of the corridor improvements were estimated to be between 12-15 \$M. Due to the cost, the project was divided into three phases. (J. Read)

Future traffic growth resulting from the proposed design measures was modeled using traffic data and future year projections analysis. Level of service analysis suggests that some of the intersections will still have diminished level of service even with the enhanced turning movements as some of the roadway sections are heavily travelled. (M. Gowing, J. Read, D. Montgomery)

In response to a question, C. Wang stated that peak hour counts per lane are addressed in studying the impacts of the proposed design. (J. Read)

M. Gowing explained that this presentation is being presented as part of a UPWP study that brings information to the Advisory Council so that better informed consultation can be made to the MPO. (J. Read)

In response to a question, C. Wang stated that MassDOT Engineering Directive for Complete Streets would likely allow for the proposed lane widths for this corridor. At the design stage, the City should consult with MassDOT early. (T. Kadzis)

## **Long-Range Transportation Plan Committee Report – *Chris Porter, Chair***

The Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Committee met before the full Advisory Council meeting on February 11, 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to be updated on the progress of the LRTP. The time frame of the LRTP, which is updated every four years, spans the 2015 – 2040 planning years this cycle. A major plan element is showing how the expected discretionary funds of the MPO will be spent within that time frame. The MPO funds are not part of the State's capital program. The LRTP estimates discretionary funds of about \$2B to be available over the 25 year period of the plan, or about \$75M per year.

The MPO staff has completed various sections of a foundational document for the LRTP. It is the Needs Assessment for the LRTP and includes the existing conditions report; a chapter on transportation and land use; a chapter on recommended needs which lists projects and programs identified as needed in all the modes. The next step in LRTP development is the work on scenario planning. Currently, there are three scenarios being reviewed for presentation to the MPO and the Base Case Scenario. The 2040 No-Build Scenario (Base Case) considers a plan that has no improvements to the existing transportation network other than those that are currently under construction, advertised for construction, or included in the first year of the 2015–18 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP); The Current-LRTP Scenario reflects the MPO's current spending patterns; The Operations and Management (O&M) Scenario

focuses on lower-cost O&M improvements such as intersection improvements and Complete Streets solutions; and a High-Capital Investment (High-Cap) Congestion Management Scenario includes a large percentage of high-cost capital infrastructure improvements, such as interchange upgrades and major bottleneck reconstructions.

The O&M Scenario would shift about 4/5<sup>th</sup> of the funds into smaller projects while the High Capital Scenario would move about 4/5<sup>th</sup> into larger projects. Currently, the two scenarios are being modeled. The results will be presented at the March 19 MPO meeting.

Several issues being considered by the MPO include:

- The benefits of funding a few high-cost projects vs. many lower-cost projects
- Whether to adopt an approach that sets aside funding for programs covering different project types and allowing those projects to be determined in the TIP development process
- Whether to leave some LRTP funds unallocated, to be specified later
- Whether to flex some federal highway funding to transit projects

C. Porter described the funding differences between the projects in the O&M and the High Cap scenarios being tested.

D. Montgomery stated that an added benefit of programming for smaller projects is that more local buy-in will occur making the O&M scenario an attractive option.

C. Porter stated that the MPO is spending much of its funding on only a few projects in the TIP which absorb most of the available funds. M. Gowing added that these are good but very expensive projects, and in a limited funding environment, \$75M does not go very far.

C. Porter suggested program spending be considered for the O&M projects as it makes more sense to have one budget available for intersection improvements rather than include individual intersection improvements over a 25 year period. So if a project is under \$20M and does not add capacity to the system, it can be put on the TIP and in the program approach to funding, the project would be in one of the program categories in the LRTP. S. Ringler stated that the general program spending approach gives more flexibility to funding.

T. Kadzis felt that current practice already allows for flexibility in the LRTP and stated that anything over 5 years out in the LRTP is semi-meaningless in the long-range plan.

Now, project development process is 7 years, up to 10 years to bid. Many things on the TIP have been on the LRTP for a long time. When they have finally gotten programmed—and sometimes they need to be reprogrammed in another year—this affects the programming of other projects. The idea of a “bucket” program approach merely reflects the current reality. T. Kadzis added that the costs of transportation projects are difficult to ascertain. The impact of the cost changes can have a significant impact on the plan as a whole.

C. Porter suggested proposing a look at a scenario with more funding. He recommended researching different funding commitments in order to determine the impact of more funding. This could be done after the current LRTP is completed.

D. Montgomery stated that the MPO uses the LRTP as a backdrop to the annual development of the TIP and that the Advisory Council needs to understand the relationship between the LRTP and the TIP.

M. Sanborn suggested that flexing highway funding to transit and selecting the O&M Scenario were the preferences of the LRTP Committee today. C. Porter added that MPO does not have a large amount of funding for large cap projects.

M. Gowing was concerned about the commitment of a funding source for transportation infrastructure. T. Kadzis emphasized that political pressure does play an important role in the funding of transportation.

Committee members discussed means of advocating for increased funding for transportation projects while maintaining the primary mission; providing advice to the MPO.

## **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 PM.

## ATTENDANCE

### **Agencies (Voting)**

MassRides

### **Municipalities (Voting)**

Acton

Cambridge

Needham

### **Citizen Groups (Voting)**

APA - Massachusetts Chapter

Boston Society of Architects

Massachusetts Bus Association

MassBike

MoveMassachusetts

### **Other (Non-Voting)**

Boston

### **Guests**

John McDougall

Susan Ringler

Scott Zadakis

### **Staff**

David Fargen

Matt Archer

Chen-Yuan Wang

### **Attendees**

Catherine Paquette

Mike Gowing

Cleo Stoughton

David Montgomery

John (Tad) Read

Schuyler Larrabee

Mark Sanborn

Chris Porter

Jon Seward

Tom Kadzis

350MA

350MA

CrossTown Connect