

# Draft Memorandum for the Record

## Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary

### May 16, 2024, Meeting

1:00 PM–2:32 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

Jen Rowe, Chair, representing Mayor Michelle Wu, City of Boston and the Boston Transportation Department (BTD)

### Meeting Agenda

#### 1. Introductions—*Jen Rowe, Chair, and Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

J. Rowe and E. Lapointe welcomed committee members to the meeting of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee. See attendance on page 10.

J. Rowe stated that the purposes of the meeting were for E. Lapointe to explain some of the changes to the draft TIP and to run through a retroactive activity to help think through what worked well with the previous year's TIP process.

#### 2. Public Comments

There were none.

#### 3. Update on Programming Changes for the Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2025-29 TIP—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

E. Lapointe restated the objective of the presentation, which was to summarize project cost updates and readiness changes that were to be incorporated into the final TIP. These updates were to be reiterated at the MPO meeting when the final TIP is endorsed.

E. Lapointe described the first project update, relating to the Reconstruction of Beacham Street project in Everett, to be funded in FFY 2027. The original cost estimate of the project was done before the 25 percent design submission was completed. As a result of a 25 percent design submission to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) in late March and 25 percent comments in early May, the project cost increased beyond the 2018 estimate from \$10.95 million to \$12.54 million. This increase goes beyond the contingency remaining in FFY 2027, so the MPO staff recommended reducing the Transit Transformation set-aside in FFY 2027 from \$6.5 million to \$5.5 million. This opportunity came because the Woburn Town Common

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project moved from FFY 2027 to FFY 2029. The funding has the potential to be restored if funding becomes available in the next TIP development cycle.

E. Lapointe discussed the second project update, pertaining to the Rehabilitation and Rail Crossing Improvements on Cherry Street project in Ashland. This project was originally funded in FFY 2025; however, during the TIP Readiness Days in February 2024, MassDOT recommended the project to be moved from FFY 2025 to FFY 2028 due to a lack of communication between the Town and the Right of Way team or the Highway District. Issues also remained with federal Quiet Zone requirements on the commuter rail's Framingham/Worcester Line. The most recent update from the Town was in May 2023, and the Town missed the design deadline of September 2023. This delay was not the first time the project has been delayed; during the development of the 2024–28 TIP, the project was moved back to FFY 2025. While this change was already captured in the FFYs 2025–29 TIP, a \$480,000 earmark by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) was rescinded because of the Town's unresponsiveness. The MPO share of the project increased accordingly from \$836,339 to \$1.32 million. As this cost increase would break constraint in FFY 2028, staff recommended reducing the Transit Transformation set-aside by \$500,000 to offset this cost increase. MPO staff planned to communicate with the Town of Ashland to address these issues related to unresponsiveness and project delays.

E. Lapointe discussed the third project update, related to two MassDOT Fill-In Cost-Increases: the Wellington Underpass Project in Medford and the Stratton School Project in Arlington. These cost increases were not a result of any submissions by the municipalities, but instead because of design submissions received before the March 14 MPO meeting to approve these projects for the TIP. The Stratton School project was estimated to cost \$1.63 million, and the Wellington Underpass project was estimated to cost \$4.3 million. At the April 4 MPO meeting, after the vote to fund the project, staff identified that the cost had increased \$5.51 million and factored this change into the final scenario. The cost has since increased to \$6.06 million because of a 100 percent design submission. E. Lapointe explained that, according to correspondence with the City of Medford, these changes are likely due to additional permitting needs of the project. These increases fall within the contingency of FFY 2025. E. Lapointe added that some members are concerned that should contingency in the Federal Target Program deplete in FFY 2025, these projects may need to return back to the Highway Program.

E. Lapointe explained that at the March 14 MPO meeting, MassDOT staff indicated they would have an additional project that would be funded through their statewide highway program given the MPO's regional prioritization of \$8 million of projects from that

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program. In summary, the cost has increased beyond what the MPO previously voted to adopt, and MPO staff sought to learn from MassDOT about what the infill project may be.

E. Lapointe explained the fourth update, which included miscellaneous items. First, a Cape Ann Transportation Authority (CATA) project for On-Demand Microtransit Expansion that was funded in FFY 2025 has not moved forward due to CATA staff turnover and capacity. At the request of CATA, the project is being removed as CATA staff do not believe that they can move forward with the project. With the combination of the removal of this project and the MassDOT cost increases, the final FFY 2025 net reserve is \$1,304,184.

E. Lapointe also stated that the Town of Weston has been successful in securing design funding to advance the Route 30 Reconstruction project, which was one of the projects flagged as having high risk in FFY 2027.

### ***Discussion***

John Bechard, MassDOT, explained some of the reasons for cost increases, including inflation and the disposal of hazardous materials.

Lenard Diggins, Regional Transportation Advisory Council, asked for more detail about the causes of the cost increases and asked for written documentation, and L. Diggins proposed an analysis to better understand project costs and reduce unpredictability.

L. Diggins also asked for elaboration on the Ashland project.

J. Bechard explained that the FHWA earmark was removed from the Ashland project due to unresponsiveness on the part of the Town.

L. Diggins expressed hesitation to continue funding the Ashland project and reiterated the ask for better documentation of cost increases.

J. Bechard stated that he is willing to explain cost increases in detail to the MPO board.

J. Bechard explained that an allocation of an earmark does not indicate the project's readiness. To accommodate the time pressure of the earmark, an awarded project might be pushed to the front of the line despite that the project might not be ready for construction.

E. Lapointe reiterated that no decision had to be made today; instead, the objective of the discussion was to compile a scenario of options for projects, and that this will be reiterated at the June 6 MPO meeting.

Dennis Giombetti, MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham), asked who the MPO staff is reaching out to in Ashland, noting that he has been speaking with the Town Manager. He offered to help facilitate discussion between Ashland and MPO staff. He also explained the delay in the project is related to a recent fatality at the at-grade crossing included in the project area. The community has engaged with a design firm and is waiting on the final design, which he suggested might explain the unresponsiveness.

John Alessi, Town of Arlington, asked for clarification about whether the Ashland project had a MassDOT project manager.

E. Lapointe responded yes.

J. Alessi asked for clarification about the level of unresponsiveness from Ashland.

E. Lapointe responded that the last point of contact with the Town was in May 2023.

J. Alessi expressed his discomfort with funding a cost increase for a project with this level of responsiveness.

Erin Chute, Town of Brookline, stated that there may be reasons for the unresponsiveness that the group does not have context for, and E. Chute reiterated the importance of the project explained by D. Giombetti.

E. Chute stated her agreement with L. Diggins that there should be better anticipation of cost increases, and that communities should not be penalized for inflation costs.

D. Giombetti offered to help broker a meeting with the Town Manager.

J. Bechard stated that MassDOT does not necessarily reach out to the community after the deadlines are missed. He reiterated that the recommendation to move the project out of FFY 2025 was because MassDOT did not believe that the project will be ready by that time. He expressed that MassDOT is willing to engage with the community and be proactive, but also explained that the community has a responsibility on the programming side.

D. Giombetti explained that he had relayed the change in the funding year to the Town. He stated that he did not know who MassDOT was speaking with, and reiterated his offer to help broker communication.

J. Bechard noted that he would follow up with his team regarding D. Giombetti's offer.

Derek Krevat, MassDOT, offered clarification on the earmark. He explained that the funds were received over 10 years ago, but the window for using the earmark has since closed. The unresponsiveness of the Town is not related to the earmark being pulled.

Kristen Guichard, Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton), expressed support for pushing the funding back due to the Town's unresponsiveness, but also expressed concern that there might be bigger issues that the group was unaware of. She stated her support for more engagement with the Town and noted that this level of unresponsiveness is unusual.

J. Rowe summarized that there is an interest within the committee for more communication with the Town before any decisions are made.

L. Diggins recommended that the Town Manager is always copied in all communication.

J. Rowe asked for more clarification about the cost increases and about what has replaced the Arlington and Medford projects in the MassDOT state TIP.

J. Bechard responded that MassDOT previously had confidence in the cost estimates of both projects as of the 75 percent design submission. As for the Medford project, he explained that the concrete standards were updated from 4000 to 5000 PSI concrete and that helical piles were installed; both of these factors contributed to cost increases and uncertainty in the original estimate. Cost increases to the Arlington project were due to hazardous material disposal, which now needs to be done out of state.

J. Bechard explained that he did not have specifics on the replacement projects, but could look into it for the June 6 meeting.

J. Rowe asked if the two projects had reached 100 percent design.

J. Bechard answered that the Medford project was still at 75 percent design, but changes that would result in a project cost increase were not expected.

Brad Rawson, Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville), expressed support for both projects. He asked if there could be standard operating procedures to evaluate risk and

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cost increases for fill-in or municipal proponent projects. He suggested that unscored, 11<sup>th</sup>-hour projects could have a specific decision-making framework.

L. Diggins expressed agreement with B. Rawson.

#### **4. Reviewing the FFYs 2025-29 TIP Development Process—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager***

J. Rowe introduced the discussion of a retroactive analysis of the TIP development process. Members were asked to list items in five categories: “Keep doing,” “To improve,” “Less of,” “Start doing,” “Stop doing.”

E. Lapointe suggested looking at the processes through which information is shared to have a better understanding of project readiness.

D. Krevat proposed hearing comments from project proponents in anticipation of TIP Readiness Day.

L. Diggins spoke about when the best times for public comment would be. He also suggested developing a set of expectations for communication with project proponents.

Tegin Teich, Executive Director of the MPO staff, noted that there is an existing structure of coordination to build upon, including quarterly readiness updates, that could spread out comments throughout the year.

B. Rawson expressed that he did not think that it was required to insert municipal participants in the internal MassDOT readiness process. He stated that he wanted to make sure that more work and responsibility was not placed upon MassDOT while trying to gain more municipal input.

D. Krevat agreed with B. Rawson.

E. Lapointe spoke to a comment suggesting creating guidelines for the types of fill-in projects that the group would like to see from MassDOT and the MBTA. E. Lapointe suggested including other entities such as regional transit authorities (RTAs), the Massachusetts Port Authority (MassPort), and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

J. Rowe agreed, noting that the group should anticipate the need for fill-in projects and that receiving information about the projects earlier on would be helpful.

K. Guichard asked if the group could loop DCR in with some of the existing MPO committees.

E. Lapointe stated that in recent years, MPO staff have spoken to DCR staff about integrating some of DCR's projects, in particular trails projects as some originated with MassDOT and many align with MPO goals. He explained that the MPO is already looking into this process.

T. Teich explained that one of the challenges with working with DCR compared to MassPort or the MBTA is that the latter two agencies are on the board and are familiar with the processes. She noted that it was important that DCR is involved with the Vision Zero discussions.

B. Rawson suggested inviting the Commissioner of DCR to one of the board meetings.

J. Rowe asked for comment on a suggestion for the MPO to build staff capacity related to design and construction skill sets.

B. Rawson explained that designers and engineers are required to go out to job sites and have crossover knowledge. He asked if the MPO has a designated construction liaison to better bridge these gaps.

T. Teich responded that B. Rawson's suggestion was great and that the Boston Region MPO in particular is lighter on the implementation side and focuses more on planning and engagement. Once a project is programmed in the TIP, in-depth staff involvement and engagement lightens up in comparison to the outreach, engagement, and scoring processes that occur during the TIP development period. One of the reasons for this is limited staff capacity and resources. She agreed that figuring out the balances of resources within the MPO to support technical expertise would be helpful.

L. Diggins noted that there was a project manager bottleneck on the Design Pilot, and asked for the reason behind this.

T. Teich answered that the MPO does not typically hire people with this type of expertise but that MassDOT has many.

L. Diggins asked how this expertise could be developed, including within the board. He inquired again about the project manager bottleneck on the MassDOT side, saying that the whole point of the Design Pilot was to help communities out with the design portion of projects.

E. Lapointe responded that there was a capacity issue with MPO staff as well, and there was a need for an evaluation process to identify process improvements before it becomes a full-fledged program. This was limited by MPO staff capacity.

D. Krevat added that there are tough questions that come up with applying federal funds for design. It is not strictly a staff capacity issue.

J. Rowe asked for clarification about a comment suggesting to “establish a mechanism for ‘post-project reporting.’”

B. Rawson clarified that this comment was made on behalf of Tom Bent, who could not attend. There have been several UPWP studies, but they have been a little isolated instead of feeding into systemic change.

J. Rowe asked for clarification about a comment suggesting to “leverage MassDOT/MBTA expertise in project development/design/bidding by offering formal training on these topics to municipal proponents.”

K. Guichard responded that some communities have Department of Public Works directors or staff who are well versed with these processes. Other communities do not always know about the design standards or communicate regularly with MassDOT.

D. Krevat shared information about a program called Bay State Roads, a training program run by MassDOT that could be useful for communities.

T. Teich added that communication to cities and towns on these subjects can be challenging, but that this could be an important place for the MPO to step in and supplement connections to relevant training instead of duplicating existing ones.

J. Rowe asked for clarification about a comment suggesting use of artificial intelligence (AI).

L. Diggins responded that AI could be useful for making quick decisions, documentation, and categorization.

J. Rowe thanked the members for their comments and asked for a motion to adjourn.

## **5. Members’ Items**

There were none.



## **6. Adjourn**

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (L. Diggins) and seconded by the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton) (K. Guichard). The motion carried.

## Attendance

<b>Members</b>	<b>Representatives and Alternates</b>
City of Boston	Jen Rowe
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Brad Rawson
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Derek Krevat
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	John Bechard
MetroWest Regional Collaborative (City of Framingham)	Dennis Giombetti
Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination (Town of Acton)	Kristen Guichard
Regional Transportation Advisory Council	Lenard Diggins
Town of Arlington	John Alessi
Town of Brookline	Erin Chute

<b>Other Attendees</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
Vanessa White	CAPDEL
Yem Lip	City of Malden
Miranda Briseño	MassDOT
Anil Gurcan	MassDOT
Joy Glynn	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Tyler Terrasi	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Jim Nee	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
Rick Azzalina	Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.
Jon Rockwell	TEC, Inc.
Jesse Riedle	Town of Bellingham
Logan Casey	Town of Marblehead
Heidi Doyle	Town of Sherborn

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**MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff**

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Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Annette Demchur

Dave Hong

Ethan Lapointe

Samuel Taylor

Erin Maguire

Srilekha Murthy

Stella Jordan

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