

Draft Memorandum for the Record Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary

December 19, 2024, Meeting

1:00 PM–2:25 PM, Zoom Video Conferencing Platform

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

Decisions

The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee agreed to the following:

- Approve the summary of the meeting of August 22, 2024
- Approve the summary of the meeting of October 17, 2024

Meeting Agenda

1. Introductions

J. Rowe welcomed committee members to the meeting of the TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee. See attendance on page 12.

2. Public Comments

There were no public comments at this time.

3. Action Item: Approval of August 22, 2024, TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- August 22, 2024, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of August 22, 2024, was made by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (Eric Bourassa) and seconded by the City of Somerville (Brad Rawson). The motion carried.

4. Action Item: Approval of October 17, 2024, TIP Process, Engagement, and Readiness Committee Meeting Summary—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- October 17, 2024, Meeting Summary ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

Vote

A motion to approve the minutes of the meeting of October 17, 2024, was made by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (Eric Bourassa) and seconded by the City of Somerville (Brad Rawson). The motion carried.

5. Federal Fiscal Years (FFYs) 2026-30 TIP Universe of Projects Update—*Adriana Jacobsen, Capital Programming Planner*

Documents posted to the MPO meeting calendar

- TIP Universe ([pdf](#)) ([html](#))

A. Jacobsen described the four TIP Universe tables, which include unprogrammed projects, projects programmed in FFYs 2025–29, projects advertised in 2024, and projects removed from the TIP Universe due to inactivity. She explained that this year’s TIP Universe development focused less on adding projects to the Universe and more on organization. For example, every project in the universe now has a project number in the Electronic State Transportation Improvement Program (eSTIP). Many of the projects added this year were evaluated for Design Pilot funding for FFY 2025.

A. Jacobsen then shared the TIP Universe dashboard, an application that is being developed to better view project linework. This dashboard is hosted on ArcGIS Online and provides information on both programmed and unprogrammed projects. The dashboard also includes other layers, including Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) routes, demographic information, flood risk, and more. Although this is not currently accessible by the public, MPO staff are working on making this available for the next TIP cycle. In the meantime, interested parties can use the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Project Viewer, though it lacks information on several funded TIP projects.

E. Lapointe noted that staff will use this information for scoring purposes.

Julia Wallerce (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) asked if it would be possible to view information from past TIP cycles on this dashboard.

A. Jacobsen expressed that this would be a good idea, but that it had not yet been integrated into the dashboard.

E. Bourassa asked if this dashboard will be open to the public and if easily available layers such as equity information could be added to the dashboard.

A. Jacobsen answered that the plan was for the dashboard to be used by the public eventually, and that equity information was already added to the dashboard.

J. Rowe asked when this dashboard would be available for public access.

E. Lapointe mentioned that there used to be a more limited version of this dashboard, but MPO staff want this version to be more detailed and accurate. This will likely be available for the FFYs 2027–31 TIP cycle.

Josh Ostroff (MBTA) asked if the Universe would be updated when new information comes in.

A. Jacobsen answered affirmatively.

J. Rowe asked what type of feedback would be useful and asked where this feedback could be sent.

A. Jacobsen answered that it would be helpful to have feedback on what type of information would be useful to display on the dashboard and expressed that feedback could be emailed to herself and E. Lapointe.

B. Rawson stated that the transparency offered by this dashboard is in line with MPO goals of increasing visibility, scrutiny, and collaboration.

6. December 2024 Quarterly Project Readiness Update (Continued)— *Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

E. Lapointe prefaced that the TIP Universe dashboard will be used not just for scoring new projects, but for rescoring previously funded projects as well. He laid out the topics of his presentation, including a review of the October 17, 2024, TIP Committee meeting, FFY 2026 project updates, major capital project updates, and the scoring process for FFY 2030.

E. Lapointe reviewed the topics discussed in the October 17, 2024, TIP Committee meeting, in which the committee previewed process improvements for the TIP development cycle and reflected on the outcomes of the most recent TIP cycle.

E. Lapointe explained that, similar to the FFYs 2025–29 TIP, several of the projects funded in the first year of the FFYs 2026–30 TIP will experience delays. Four of the nine projects funded in FFY 2026 are expected to be delayed to FFY 2027, amounting to about \$60 million of funding. This does not account for any cost increases that may occur. Last year, six of eight projects in FFY 2025 were delayed, and two of these projects are experiencing a delay for the second TIP cycle in a row.

E. Lapointe then described a table of FFY 2026 Project Updates, which listed information on the four delayed projects, including their initial TIP status, their latest design milestone, and their statuses in the FFYs 2024–28, FFYs 2025–29, and FFYs 2026–30 TIP cycles. These four projects are 605857: Norwood Intersection Improvements at Route 1 and University Avenue/Everett Street; 606453: Boston Improvements on Boylston Street from Intersection of Brookline Avenue and Park Drive to Ipswich Street; 608045: Milford (MassDOT is the project proponent) Rehabilitation on Route 16 from Route 109 to Beaver Street; and 609252: Lynn Rehabilitation of Essex Street. All of these projects have been delayed multiple times, and two have experienced significant cost increases or predicted significant cost increases in the past two TIP cycles.

E. Lapointe stated that MPO staff have learned of a delay for Boston’s Rutherford Avenue project from FFY 2028 to 2029 and for MassDOT’s McGrath Highway project in Somerville from FFY 2027 to 2028.

E. Lapointe pointed out that both the Rutherford Avenue project and the McGrath Highway project are advanced construction projects, meaning that they are funded in multiple years. He explained that a delay into FFY 2029 for the Rutherford Avenue project would change the funding window from 2028–32 to 2029–33. This delay would move the project into the next LRTP window of FFYs 2029–33.

B. Rawson noted that the advertisement date for the McGrath Highway project, as stated in the MPO board meeting held earlier that morning, was July 2027. He expressed the importance of having these projects advertised as soon as possible.

E. Lapointe then described a project table that he had discussed in the October 17, 2024, TIP Committee meeting, and prefaced this discussion by saying that what he said in that meeting was incorrect. Based on the expectations that the MPO staff had in

October, there would be about \$84 million of funding in FFY 2030 available for new projects. However, due to cost increases for the McGrath Highway project and the request for a project design funding set-aside, this funding availability would likely be closer to \$44 million. This does not consider any cost increases that may happen within the next few years.

E. Lapointe recalled that at the previous TIP Committee meeting, he had said that MPO staff expected application levels to stabilize in the FFYs 2026–30 TIP cycle after several years of declining application volume. Contrary to those predictions, MPO staff are now expecting at least seven applications for Core Investment Programs for the FFYs 2026–30 TIP. Most of these will be competing for funding within FFY 2030. This number is not nearly as high as the numbers in previous years, for example, in the FFYs 2021–25 TIP cycle, there were 17 applications. However, there may be more applications than expected, including applications that may come in for the nearer years (FFYs 2026–29).

Dennis Giombetti (MetroWest Regional Collaborative) asked how many of the seven projects were municipal-proponent projects.

E. Lapointe responded that all seven had a municipal proponent.

E. Lapointe reiterated that application volumes are rebounding, after years of decline. There will also be more than a dozen Transit Transformation applications throughout the region, which will be scored by MPO staff. Staff will also be rescoring programmed projects that were evaluated several years ago under different metrics.

E. Lapointe explained that even though the delays are less severe in this year compared to last year (four of nine projects are delayed, compared to six of eight projects), the financial impact of these delays is still quite large. Due to these delays, there will likely be a deficit in the middle to outer years of the TIP (for example, FFYs 2027–30) and a surplus in FFY 2026. High application volumes for FFY 2030 may add to the domino effect of project delays. More cost increases and delays may occur in the future, as there are significant numbers of projects without new design submissions since 2021. However, these predictions are subject to change in the coming months.

E. Lapointe gave a preview of some issues with the Wakefield Comprehensive Downtown Transportation Improvement project, which is currently funded in FFY 2028 for \$18.4 million. Multiple projects were initiated and scoped within the full body of work, and multiple consultants were involved with the design. Due to miscommunication involving the scopes of these projects, the project cost is likely to increase substantially.

MassDOT, the Town of Wakefield, and MPO staff are working to obtain clarity on the details of this cost increase.

E. Lapointe reiterated the next steps. TIP Readiness Day is February 5. The next Quarterly Readiness Update is the full TIP Readiness Day Debrief on February 20, where MPO staff will request that proponents of projects discussed in this presentation will be available to provide updates. Subregional Readiness Days will be held between January 14 to 16. The next scheduled TIP Committee meeting is March 13, 2025, but MPO staff will try to schedule a meeting in February to provide interim status updates to the TIP Committee members.

J. Rowe thanked E. Lapointe for making these predictions and anticipating these trends, even though they might not pan out as expected. These updates have helped the City of Boston be more proactive with project delays within the city, including with the Boylston Street project.

J. Ostroff stated that he was planning on providing some information about MBTA Transit Transformation projects to MPO staff and asked if February 20 would be a good date to do so.

E. Lapointe responded that transit agencies and municipalities could incorporate and anticipate readiness days for their own projects. March 7 is the final scoring day for new projects, and the information from the MBTA would also be helpful then.

Len Diggins (Regional Transportation Advisory Council) asked if E. Lapointe had noticed any patterns in these delays. He asked if the MPO staff would reconsider their policy of not having a reserve of funding.

E. Lapointe answered that delays have made it very difficult to fund projects in the outer years of the TIP. Only approximately 27 percent of funding in FFY 2030 is available for new projects. As project applications rebound, this outer-year deficit restricts the portion of projects that the MPO can fund. He also explained that the amount of Regional Target Funding that the MPO receives is dependent on grant anticipatory note debt service payments. This debt repayment will be completed in FFY 2027, which has led to an additional \$30 million per year in Regional Target Funding. When debt service payments reemerge FFY 2032, this may affect the amount of funding that the MPO receives. This will further constrain the MPO's ability to fund new projects. E. Lapointe stated that he believed that this debt service is related to the Next-Generation Bridge Program.

B. Rawson encouraged committee members to channel these discussions into important dialogue taking place on Beacon Hill about sustainable and equitable funding for regional transit authorities and MassDOT Highway projects. When bailouts are focused on the MBTA alone, it is difficult to create powerful coalitions on a regional level. If state leaders are aware of these broader issues concerning Regional Target Funding, this might support coalition building across the state. B. Rawson also asked the committee if the recent presentations to the MPO board from the Allston, McGrath, and Rutherford project proponents have been helpful, and if presentations from other projects proponents such as ones from the Western Avenue project and the Wakefield project would be helpful.

E. Lapointe answered that he hopes that MPO board members will tell MPO staff when they are interested in hearing from project proponents, because staff can help coordinate these presentations.

L. Diggins commented that it would be helpful to view presentations given about projects before the MPO board meetings take place, so that he would have time to formulate questions.

J. Rowe agreed that this preview of information could be useful.

E. Lapointe noted that A. Jacobsen has been collecting information about TIP delays and cost increases, using information from eSTIP and from past TIP documents. This information includes the original score, budget, and funding year of each funded project for a given TIP cycle. Scope change information could also be included, but this is more difficult to track down. This data could be added to the TIP document as an appendix.

L. Diggins inquired about why there was difficulty in obtaining details about scope changes.

E. Lapointe answered that scope information is usually taken from application materials, and projects that have been programmed for seven to 10 years may no longer have available application materials.

L. Diggins stated that he believed that it would be a good idea to keep an eye on scope changes, especially if these changes result in a score change.

J. Rowe explained that there can be compelling reasons to change the project. The scope of the Boylston Street project changed following a crash that resulted in the death of a cyclist adjacent to the project limits. This fatality prompted the City to alter the

scope to include the location of the crash. They agreed with L. Diggins that transparency about scope changes was important.

E. Lapointe concluded the discussion by reiterating that project updates would be shared with board members when they are available.

7. Project Prioritization Policy Discussion—*Ethan Lapointe, TIP Manager*

E. Lapointe laid out the purpose of this next discussion, which was to lay the groundwork for subsequent discussions at TIP Committee meetings about how to prioritize projects based on municipal compliance with the MBTA 3A Communities Act. After these discussions have taken place, if the committee members agree, the committee could propose a project prioritization approach to be adopted by the full MPO board for this upcoming TIP cycle.

E. Lapointe explained that the MPO has historically adopted TIP evaluation criteria that prioritize projects near affordable housing for many years. He added that not only is the MBTA Communities Act a state law, but it also is consistent with the MPO's vision, goals, and objectives to support transportation that connects residents with key destinations, encourages mode shift, and enables an economically vibrant region. Last year, MPO staff adopted an evaluation criterion that incorporated a five-point penalty for projects in noncompliant communities. However, as most communities within the Boston region had a compliance deadline of December 31, 2024, this was not relevant to many applications. Notably, the deadline for rapid-transit communities was December 31, 2023; the Town of Milton did not meet this deadline and made a public comment against the five-point penalty.

MPO staff noticed that, as the deadline for the rest of the communities approached, several municipalities that were planning on applying for TIP funding were not on track to become compliant. Due to their noncompliance, these municipalities would soon become ineligible for funding from other state programs, such as MassWorks. Therefore, they were deliberately seeking TIP funding due to their ineligibility for other funding sources. Ineligibility for TIP funding had been a topic of conversation as a possible opportunity cost for noncompliance with the MBTA Communities Act in some communities that were not on track to comply with the law, and some of these municipalities had reached out to MPO staff to inquire about their eligibility status. On the other hand, some municipalities were not only compliant with the MBTA Communities Act but were planning on applying for projects within their 3A districts. Deciding how to prioritize this issue prior to discussing programming scenarios will be important, especially considering the limited amount of funding available in FFY 2030.

E. Lapointe noted that the MPO board has historically made decisions to prioritize projects in a way that meets the letter of state law, but also reinforces the spirit of the law and is consistent with the MPO's vision, goals, and objectives. As an example, he brought up that MassDOT design guidelines to do not explicitly preclude or ban highway expansion projects from being funded, but the MPO would be very unlikely to fund this type of project.

E. Lapointe then laid out four different approaches of prioritizing or deprioritizing projects based on MBTA Communities compliance. These methods were conceived of by various committee members. The first approach would be to retain the five-point penalty or to expand it, such as having a 10-point penalty instead. The second approach would be to have projects in compliant communities ranked first within all programming scenarios, followed by contingencies, and rank projects in noncompliant communities last. This would mean that all projects in compliant communities would be funded before any projects in noncompliant communities. The third approach would be to have noncompliant municipalities provide the 20 percent match, typically provided by state funds. The fourth approach would be to allow noncompliant municipalities to apply for funding but have them be ineligible for programming if they were still noncompliant at the time of scenario adoption. This approach might raise some legal concerns. This approach would allow for exceptions to be made in situations where safety risks may arise if a project is not funded in a timely manner. For example, if a bridge is in danger of collapse, a scoring penalty could be waived. None of the approaches would affect communities that are exempt from Section 3A, such as Boston, transit authorities, Massachusetts Port Authority, or other applicant types.

E. Lapointe opened the floor up for discussion on these four approaches.

D. Giombetti inquired about the legality of creating additional penalties outside of the existing legislative language.

E. Lapointe answered that this legal ambiguity was the reason why Approach 4 (full exclusion from funding opportunities) was not being considered as fully as the other approaches.

John Alessi (Town of Arlington) inquired about Approach 3. He asked if there were any municipalities besides Boston that could afford the 20 percent match. Approach 3 would likely dissuade many small towns from applying because of the lack of funds to cover the match.

E. Lapointe answered that the MPO staff had not done a financial analysis to determine this. He reminded committee members that this approach would not have an effect on the MPO's funds.

L. Diggins asked if it was in the purview of the MPO to tell the State whether or not to use matching funds.

E. Lapointe responded that he believed that this would be a discussion that would occur during scenario development.

L. Diggins stated that Approach 2 would be the best option, as he believed that board members would already prioritize projects in compliant municipalities regardless of whether or not the approach was formally adopted.

J. Ostroff noted that legal advice would be essential for this discussion, as this issue is particularly contentious. He acknowledged his role as an employee of the MBTA and offered his opinion that transit projects should be exempt from these approaches and highway projects should not be.

D. Giombetti asked for a clarification as to if this policy would be retroactive or would only affect new projects.

E. Lapointe responded that these approaches would only affect new applications.

J. Alessi indicated a preference for Approach 2. From his perspective as an employee of the Town of Arlington, a municipality that has made significant strides to comply with the MBTA Communities Act and that has funded projects within its 3A districts, this approach would reward communities that have done the work to meet requirements. However, he is still open to Approach 1, and he is interested in how much it would affect scoring. Another alternative could be giving a bonus to compliant communities instead of taking a penalty from noncompliant ones.

J. Rowe thanked the group for the discussion.

8. Members' Items

J. Wallerice asked for clarification about if there would be a decision on which approach to take before March, because the upcoming Milton ruling will likely dictate some of these decisions.

E. Lapointe responded that the decision would likely be made by the MPO board in March. He noted that, due to competition for limited funding for this TIP cycle, the question would come up regardless of Milton's ruling.

9. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Lenard Diggins) and seconded by the Town of Arlington (John Alessi). The motion carried.

Attendance

Members	Representatives and Alternates
City of Boston	Jen Rowe
Inner Core Committee (City of Somerville)	Brad Rawson
Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Eric Bourassa
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	Chris Klem
Massachusetts Department of Transportation	John Bechard
MetroWest Regional Transit Authority	Tyler Terrasi
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	-

Other Attendees	Affiliation
Barbara Lachance	MassDOT
Benjamin Coulombe	MetroWest Regional Transit Authority
John Romano	MassDOT
Josh Ostroff	Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
Julia Wallerce	Metropolitan Area Planning Council
Marcia Rasmussen	Town of Sudbury
Meghan McNamara	Town of Lexington
Ned Codd	City of Newton
Sheila Page	Town of Wellesley

MPO Staff/Central Transportation Planning Staff

Tegin Teich, Executive Director

Annette Demchur

Adriana Jacobsen

Dave Hong

Erin Maguire

Ethan Lapointe

Lauren Magee

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