

Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Boston Region MPO Board
10 Park Plaza, Suite 2150
Boston, MA 02116

Re: Draft Federal Fiscal Years 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program

Dear Members of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Board:

The Regional Transportation Advisory Council (Advisory Council) is an independent group of citizen and regional advocacy groups, municipal officials, and agencies charged with providing public input on transportation planning and programming to the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

The Advisory Council reviewed the MPO's Federal Fiscal Year 2024 to 2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). We offer the following comments for your consideration:

- We appreciate that MPO staff have more closely involved us in the development of the TIP. Ethan Lapointe, the TIP manager, has given excellent presentations and participated in helpful question-and-answer sessions at several meetings.
- In the Executive Summary, Figure ES-3 compares the funding within the subregions of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council as to the percent of population, percent of employment, and percent of Federal Aid Roadway Miles. We think it worthwhile to discuss how this data can be better used to determine which projects receive design assistance as well as which projects are selected. We also thank you for the increasing clarity over the last few years of the six evaluation criteria and six investment programs that guide the funding decisions.
- We continue to encourage the MPO and staff to closely track how projects progress through each stage of the TIP funding process. We appreciate the MPO's decision to establish a pilot program that will help get municipalities to a design readiness of at least 25%. This could also become a more holistic assessment of the support that we provide for project design and the stage at which projects are programmed into the TIP. We are hopeful that this pilot program will succeed and become an annual support program, as we see that some municipalities are less equipped than others to bring projects to that level of design. The allocated \$4 million is a good start to what is likely to be a crucial step in the project development process. We hope this program is well-publicized and easily accessed.
- We support the MPO's recognition that there can be overlap between investment programs. For example, transit and complete streets elements can be a part of major infrastructure projects. With this recognition, projects can receive the higher scores that they deserve.. Furthermore, we emphasize that transit does not stop at town lines, RTA lines, or even MPO

lines. The Advisory Council recommends a focus on funding of better inter-regional transit connections.

- The Advisory Council would like to understand the history and policy for late-stage additions to the TIP. We encourage the MPO to have a bank of scored projects, be they MBTA or MassDOT projects, that we can evaluate by the MPO's criteria and priorities when there is a surplus of funds due to the unexpected delay of one or more projects.

- We understand that there are often large increases in the costs of projects, and we are concerned about the low level of unprogrammed money to help in these situations. Therefore, we emphasize the need for the MPO staff to keep a more watchful eye on projects as they come closer to the 100% design stage and keep the Board aware of impacts on the TIP sooner rather than later.

- We are pleased the Boston Region MPO included an annual funding stream in the TIP for state of good repair for Bikeshare in the region and support for municipalities adding bicycle infrastructure or Bikeshare expansion, including the addition of electric bikes.

- When there are successful initiatives of promising technology funded in one area of the Boston MPO Region (microtransit pilots, for example), we recommend a top-down look from the MPO at how the same service or technology could be tested in other parts of the region. Rather than being reactive, and receiving applications from parts of the region or municipalities that enjoy active local leadership at the time, we recommend that the MPO, on its own initiative, declare certain efforts as worthy of application regionally and offer technical assistance and funding of similar pilots in multiple areas. Without that regional view, planning and execution of creative efforts may be sporadic, geographically lopsided, and more difficult to scale up.

- The Advisory Council encourages the MPO to consider projects in light of climate resiliency and how their design will adapt to and/or improve the investment in that regard. Further, the MPO should even consider the long-term concept of strategic retreat/migration in the face of the continuing and worsening effects of climate change. We suggest that the MPO explore establishing stronger climate-responsive parameters. The Advisory Council would like to know where the MPO will draw the line and score repeated rehabilitation projects lower. Similar to the recent focus on transit and complete streets, we would like to see a willingness to increase points for projects that include a sustainability and climate resiliency component.

Thank you for your attention and for being great colleagues as we all strive to make transportation better for everyone in our region.

Sincerely,
The Advisory Council

