

MEETING MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN MIDDLESEX METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

October 25, 2023

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO) meeting was called to order at 2:00 P.M. via video conference headquartered at the office of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG), 40 Church Street, Suite 200, Lowell, MA. Attendees included:

Voting Members in Attendance:

- Derek Krevat, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning (Representing MassDOT Acting Secretary and CEO Monica Tibbits-Nutt)
- Brian Fallon, MassDOT District 4 (Representing MassDOT Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver)
- Andrew Deslaurier, Billerica Select Board, NMCOG Chair
- Karyn Puleo, LRTA MPO Representative

Stakeholders and Other Attendees:

- Andrew Jennings, LRTA Advisory Board - Town of Billerica
- Derek Shooster, MassDOT
- Andrew Wang, MassDOT Planning
- Josh Levin, MassDOT District 4
- Ali Bent, LRTA

NMMPO Staff:

- Jennifer Raitt Executive Director, Kelly Lynema Deputy Director, and NMMPO staff Jessica Boulanger, Blake Acton, Austen Torres Davis, Paul Christner, and Carlin Andrus

Paul Christner introduced himself as the new Transportation Planning Program Manager for NMCOG. He was previously at the Boston MPO. He is excited to get to work on the various projects in the greater Lowell region.

2. APPROVAL OF THE AUGUST 23, 2023 NMMPO MEETING MINUTES

NMMPO members were provided with copies of the August 23, 2023 NMMPO minutes prior to the meeting. Based on a motion by Andrew Deslaurier and seconded by Karen Puleo, the August 23, 2023 NMMPO meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

3. STATUS REPORT ON TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) PROJECTS UNDER DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION (Timothy Paris, MassDOT District 4)

- Updates – new projects
 - Project 613562 - This is a new project - Tewksbury improvements at Shushing Road, Foster Road, Patton Road, and Beech Street and estimated at roughly \$3 million
- Updates on existing projects:
 - Project 613213 - Bedford, Billerica, Chelmsford, Tyngsborough Bridge preservation of 41 bridges on the Route 3 corridor. This has a date for funding and roughly \$10 million set aside
 - Project 612977 - Chelmsford Vinyl Square safety improvements that has been added to 2028 on the TIP with \$6.68 million
 - Project 612631 - Chelmsford Bridge replacement, Gorham Street over 495, and replacement of Westford Street over 495 – the new TIP cost of \$44 million.
 - Project 612609 - Tewksbury intersection improvements at Main Street, Pleasant Street, and North Street and East Street – the new TIP cost of \$4,694,000
 - Project 612096 - Westford interstate maintenance and related work on 495 – the new TIP cost of \$5.7 million
 - Project 610719 - Burlington to Tyngsborough - Pavement preservation on Route 3 - has a slight reduction of the TIP cost down to \$17.5 million
 - Project 608816 - Lowell Dracut and Methuen, resurfacing related work on Route 110 - has a new TIP cost \$18 million
 - Project 609510 - Dracut improvements at George Inglesby Elementary School. It's a safe routes to school project that is now on the TIP on 2025 for \$1.16 million.
 - Project 604694 - Lowell Connector Reconstruction from Thorndike Street to Gorham Street has been added in 2028 at \$6.5 million.
 - Project 607401 - Chelmsford traffic signal installation at route 110 and 495 - 2 locations – has a new cost of \$1.26 million
 - Project 607887 - Lowell Rourke Bridge replacement, Wood Street extension over Boston & Maine Railroad and the Merrimack River - A new TIP cost of \$169 million, down from \$175 million
 - Project 609317 - change in the TIP cost to \$11.8 million, and the new project manager is Jonathan Freeman.
 - Project 608227 - Billerica Yankee Doodle bike path Construction (Phase I) new TIP costs of \$15.8 million
 - Project 609250 – Billerica intersection improvements at Boston Road, Lexington Street and Glad Valley Road - added to TIP in 2025 moved from 2026, and roughly \$5.5 million.
 - Project 609035 - Westford rehabilitation of Boston Road - A slight change in the cost of on the TIP of \$10.2 million
 - Project 605966 - Lowell Reconstruction related work on VFW Highway - It has some minor changes to the costs for the TIP and the estimate the project.
 - Project 608774 - Lowell Tewksbury Route, 38 - Intersection improvements. We have some changes on the construction cost estimate.

Questions and Comments:

Derek Shooster | MassDOT: Gave some context to the project list. The TIP cost doesn't change unless an MPO action takes place. Since we last met, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts received STIP approval from our Federal partners on the FFY 2024 to 2028 STIP, which includes the FFY24 to FFY28 Northern Middlesex MPO TIP that was endorsed earlier this calendar year. The TIP cost changes on the sheet are updated to reflect that approval, and the new Federal fiscal year 2024 begins this month. The second item of note - project 613213 - that is an inter-regional project so we call it statewide in the STIP. But because the town of Bedford is in the Boston MPO region, and the other projects along the corridor are in the Northern Middlesex Region, MassDot has historically advanced those project types as a statewide project due to a corrective action from Federal Highway and FTA. These will need to be amended on to the Northern Middlesex and Boston MPO TIPs before they can proceed with advertisement. That will happen when the projects are further along in design to perform it as a single action. This would be the case for any other projects that might skirt between the Northern Middlesex region and Merrimack Valley or Boston or Montachusett or any of the abutting regions. Those changes will be queued up throughout the year.

Andrew Deslaurier, Billerica Select Board, NMCOG Chair - In terms of the impact on other projects that are only within this one MPO - does this project move ahead or behind? Does it change ordering of projects, or does it move independently?

Derek Shooster | MassDOT: It shouldn't affect the project advertisement, the timeline, or the program year, unless the change that we're making is not only the region, but the funding makeup and whether or not it's fiscally constrained or whether it's not ready to deliver in a certain year. But for now, that project, for example, we believe to be on track for an advertisement this fiscal year. It needs to procedurally go through the process of being presented for a 21 day public comment by the MPOs it touches and get a formal endorsement by each region.

MassDOT will provide updates as we get further along in the design for that project. I think there are two others this fiscal year that affect the Northern Middlesex region. I know there were some across all the years that as we get further detail from our district partners on which municipalities these touch we will have further direction on which MPO's need to go through this process.

4. OPEN FORUM – OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMENTS FROM MPO MEMBERS, COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS, AND THE PUBLIC

No comments

5. UPDATES ON MPO ACTIVITIES – 2023 TRAFFIC COUNTING, SS4A CONTRACT AND NEXT STEPS, TRANSIT PLANNING

Paul Christner noted that we will postpone the transit planning updates until the next meeting. NMMPO staff will give an update on our traffic counting and the SS4A contract with Austin going first and then Jessica.

Austen Torres Davis (NMCOG): For those of you who I have not already met my name is Austin Torres Davis. I started with NMCOG mid-August and I'm happy to be here. Among other things I've picked up this year is the traffic counting program so I just wanted to provide some status updates. Counts for the 2023 traffic counting season took place over the months of July, August, September, and now October. These counts are both for our NMCOG member communities, as well as some that are requested by MassDOT. As of today we've received 58 counts out of a total of 76 for this season. These are being conducted this year by a contractor Southern Traffic Services (STS for short) and the remaining counts for the season are scheduled for October, and they're actually taking place as we speak this week going from the twenty-third through the twenty-seventh. Our contract with STS ends at the end of November. Between now and then we will be working together to fix any errors. Sometimes counters actually need to be reset or they get ripped up. These will eventually get uploaded into a transportation data management system. Thereafter we could use this data to inform reports, provide general assistance to our member communities, and generally just compile that data over the years. We should have all 76 counts by the end of this week and thereafter we'll know if we are in need of any edits or any that need to be recounted.

Jessica Boulanger, NMCOG She/ Her: Hi, everyone. My name is Jessica Boulanger. I'm the Transportation Mobility Specialist with NMCOG. NMCOG was one of 10 regional planning agencies across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that was awarded funds under the bipartisan infrastructure law under the Safe Streets and Roads for All Grant program. This program was a funds match with MassDOT, and also Federal Highway. I'm excited to share that we now have a fully executed contract with WSP. They are the consultant that will be working directly with us to help us develop a Regional Safety Action Plan for our Greater Lowell Vision Zero project. WSP is one of the world's leading professional services firms. They're a global leader in transportation solutions and they played a meaningful role in the Vision Zero revolution. They work to develop plans in places like Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, and the US.

The Swedish Government was the first government to actually adopt a Vision Zero plan so we are really excited to be working with them. Currently, we're hosting kickoff meetings. We held our first Vision Zero Advisory Committee meeting last week and we will continue to hold those meetings throughout the duration of the planning process. Information about the Advisory Committee can be found on our website. Going forward I will continue to update the MPO on our planning process. There will be several opportunities for public participation and also participation and comments from the MPO members. If you have any questions on the planning process, please don't hesitate to reach out to me directly.

6. UPDATES ON 2020 CENSUS URBANIZED AREAS

Charlotte Mays from MassDOT displayed a web map that she sent to the MPOs of expanded urban boundaries: Our methodology was to take the 2010 urban expanded urban boundaries, then layer on top of that, the 2020 census urban areas. Then expanded it out the 2010 areas where the census had grown in 2020. We didn't want to retract anything from 2010. But since this is just a draft, we certainly can. We expanded out to the nearest feature, which in most cases was a roadway but it could have been a river or a railway.

Derek Krevat, MassDOT: For context, as part of the 2020 census update, they provided new data on where there are urbanized area populations. The definitions actually changed. Places with higher population density places – places with population changes that would be considered urbanized for the purposes of categorizing within the US. Census. Every 10 years this is updated. We're just getting the new data now from the 2020 census. That's what Charlotte is showing here. There's a process with the Federal Highway Administration where they ask us to work with all of the MPOs - a coordinated effort between the State DOT and the MPOs and municipalities to essentially ground truth or fact check the data that they've provided us and get back to them if we have any proposed changes. We've made this data available to all the MPO's and if there are changes in the boundaries of what's considered urbanized or there are things like development happening that you think might increase population in areas that aren't considered organized - that's all information that we're looking for within the next month or so in order for our GIS team to properly to respond to our Federal agencies on what our new data will be. There are, of course, implications for what it means to be urbanized. We have different funding formulas. We're not anticipating any drastic changes in the amount of funding resulting from changes in the urbanized areas. But nonetheless, we do use that for different things and roadway classifications, and what you might be eligible for under Federal grants if you're considered rural versus urban.

Questions:

Paul Christner, NMCOG: Is there a deadline for feedback? If folks have feedback on this you mentioned in the next month or so?

Derek Krevat, MassDOT: We've asked for feedback from Planning Agency staff by November 3rd. What will happen is planning commission staff will know or will already recommend changes earlier on, but they'll want an official endorsement from the MPO Boards. If there are changes we are open to taking changes until the end of November. But if you know of changes that you're likely going to be proposing we'd like those earlier on because Charlotte and her team have a lot of processing to do of the data and quite a bit of work before the final deadline, which is the end of the calendar year. So if there are changes, we've asked for those in November. If there are municipalities that would like to request changes we're accepting those throughout November. We can work with you and make sure you have this data and if there's anyone that might have changes will be sure to document that. Many regions don't have changes, especially in Eastern Massachusetts because most of Eastern Massachusetts is mostly urban. Nonetheless, just giving this due diligence, since it is in the regulations that we all coordinate on this process and update.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Paul Christner, NMCOG: We typically have the MPO meeting on the fourth Wednesday, but because of the Thanksgiving holiday, which would fall on the afternoon before Thanksgiving, we are pushing our next meeting to November 29 at 2 pm.

The second thing is a reminder - our office move date is December 1st so it'll be right after that MPO meeting.

Derek Krevat, MassDOT: And where is the new address?

Paul Christner, NMCOG: 672 Suffolk Street in Lowell.

8. Adjournment

Based on a motion made by Andrew Deslaurier and seconded by Karyn Puleo, the MPO voted unanimously to adjourn at 2:36 PM.