

**MEETING MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN MIDDLESEX
METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
MAY 26, 2021**

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

In light of the COVID-19 emergency executive order authorizing virtual public meetings, the meeting was called to order at 2:00 P.M. via videoconference headquartered at the office of the Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG), 40 Church Street, Suite 200, Lowell, MA. Attendees included:

Voting Members:

- David Mohler, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning (Representing Acting MassDOT Secretary Jamey Tesler)
- Frank Suszynski, MassDOT District 4 (Representing MassDOT Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver)
- Pat Wojtas, Chelmsford Select Board, NMCOG MPO Representative
- Tom Bomil, Chair, Lowell Regional Transit Authority Board
- Kevin O'Connor, Lowell Regional Transit Authority Board Representative to the MPO
- Andrew Deslaurier, Billerica Select Board, NMCOG Chair

Voting Members Absent:

- Daniel Rourke, Lowell City Councilor, MPO Representative

Stakeholders and Other Attendees:

- Chris Timmel, Federal Highway Administration
- Constance Raphael, MassDOT District 4
- Derek Shooster, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning, MPO Liaison
- Bryan Pounds, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
- Timothy Paris, MassDOT Project Design Engineer
- Brian Fallon, MassDOT Projects Engineer
- Michelle Ho, MassDOT Planning
- Graham Reich, LRTA Director of Procurement and Compliance
- Alan Heredia, City of Lowell Asst. Transportation Engineer
- Josh Trearchis, VHB, Project Manager

NMMPO Staff:

- Beverly Woods, Justin Howard, David Tilton, and Chris Curry, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments

2. APPROVAL OF THE APRIL 28, 2021 NMMPO MEETING MINUTES

NMMPO members were provided with copies of the April 28, 2021 minutes prior to the meeting. Based on a motion by Tom Bomil and seconded by Frank Suszynski, the April 28, 2021 meeting minutes were approved. Kevin O'Connor abstained as he was not present at the meeting.

3. STATUS REPORT ON TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) PROJECTS UNDER DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Connie Raphael updated the NMMPO regarding project information changes since the April 28, 2021 meeting:

- **Andover/Tewksbury – Highway Lighting System Rehabilitation and Repair at the Interchange of Interstate Routes 93 and 495** – Bids were opened May 11, 2021. Coviello Electric was the apparent low bidder and they are waiting for the contract award and notice to proceed.
- **Dunstable – Improvements on Main Street (Route 113), from Pleasant Street to 750 Ft east of Westford Street** – An ENF Form and NOI have been filed with preconstruction plans sent to Army Corp. Highway Plans were approved for acquisition at the end of April. Section 106, no adverse effects were sent to MassHistoric Commission on April 23rd. The Town approved mitigation land for the article 97 and to establish layout. The project is still considered high risk for FFY 2021 construction advertisement.
- **Tewksbury – Resurfacing and Sidewalk Reconstruction on Route 38 beginning at Colonial Drive north to the Intersection of Old Boston Road, approximately 1.5 Miles** – Project is at 100% design.
- **Westford – Bridge Rehabilitation Beaver Brook Road over Beaver Brook** – Project is at 75% design with an updated construction cost estimate of \$2,132,543.
- **Lowell – North Andover – Haverhill – Bridge Superstructure & Substructure Repairs Along I-495** – This is a new project involving bridge repairs on I-495 in multiple communities. The Boylston Street bridge over I-495 in Lowell is included in the project. The construction advertisement date is January 8, 2022, with construction likely occurring in summer of 2022.

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

There were no comments provided.

5. PROPOSED FFY 2022-2026 TIP

Justin Howard reminded the group that at last months MPO meeting the proposed draft FFY 2022-2026 TIP was presented and the MPO voted to release the draft TIP for a 21 day public comment period which ended on May 21, 2021. He gave a brief summary of the comments received and also provided the summary to the MPO prior to the meeting. Two sets of comments were received, one from Federal Highway Administration and one from MassDOT. Comments received from Federal Highway included: ensuring the TIP document is 508 compliant and accessible; a commendation on the citing of the Cares Act and COVID-19 discussion; citation of a good connection as NMCOG relates TIP, RTP and UPWP.

Updates to the Performance Measures and Targets section included adding text from the 2020 mid-period performance report, updating current conditions tables to “2020” conditions though targets are not changing. The next set of comments arose from the Public Participation section and Federal Highway Administration raised the question of how to determine whether all social media comments are considered formal comments. Though staff have not yet received comments via social media on the TIP, this is something to think about going forward as more social media content is provided. Federal Highway suggested this be included in discussion during the Public Participation Plan update, which is scheduled to be conducted this fall. They also suggested an addition to include the date of the public comment meeting. The next two comments were questions on confirmation of whether or not moving a project year forward in the TIP constitutes an amendment or an adjustment. The table itself and the section are outdated and are being updated to include highway and transit amendment/adjustment scenarios based on MassDOT policy. A comment was included commending a graph that had been added to show TIP programming and how it’s categorized for long term RTP investment program and how each TIP project works toward the goals outlined in the RTP. A comment was received to update narrative in Environmental Justice and Regional Equity section. Next comment was to omit duplicated Map 1. Federal Highway added a comment that it could be useful to share why the Regionally Significant Transportation Projects are considered significant. This section will likely be expanded to include more information on each project as the TIP is developed next year. In the RTP Investment Program – TIP Projects section, Federal Highway acknowledged the MPO as having addressed their previous comment from FY21 and that Table 17 and Table 18 might be able to combined in the future.

Justin stated that comments from MassDOT were in line with those from FHWA. He requested the NMMPO consider endorsement of the FFY 2022-2026 TIP with comments addressed.

Based on a motion by Kevin O’Connor and seconded by Pat Wojtas, the MPO voted to approve the FFY 2022-2026 Northern Middlesex Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as presented.

6. FFY 2022 UPWP DEVELOPMENT

Justin Howard reminded the group that at the last meeting the tasks and budget for the next UPWP were presented, beginning October 1, 2021 through September 30, 2022. Since the last meeting, the draft document has been developed by staff and was provided to the MPO last week, along with the executive summary provided for this meeting packet. The UPWP is the MPO work program, listing all activities undertaken by staff and is funded by contract with Federal Highway Administration, Federal Transit Administration, the Lowell Regional Transit Authority and MassDOT.

Justin explained that the budget for this year is \$959,850, which is a decrease of about \$25,000 from the current UPWP. The development of the UPWP ensures activities are designed to address federal, state and regional goals. A public participation process is included and involves an MPO endorsed public participation program, which will be updated to reflect the virtual public involvement process in place since March 2020. Other sections within the document include updates on the current UPWP tasks, a progress report on tasks during FFY 2021 thru the beginning of May 2021.

There are four different task sections for FFY 2022: Management and Support of the Planning Process and Certification Activities, Technical Support and Data Collection, Regional Transportation Planning, and Ongoing Transportation Planning.

Based on a motion by Tom Bomil and seconded by Pat Wojtas, the MPO voted to release the draft FFY 2022 Northern Middlesex UPWP for a twenty-one day public comment period.

7. 2020 NORTHERN MIDDLESEX TRAFFIC VOLUME REPORT

David Tilton presented the 2020 Northern Middlesex Regional Traffic Volume Report and gave a brief explanation of the challenges presented in conducting traffic counts throughout the COVID pandemic timeframe. In June 2020, staff began a modified traffic counting program and compared findings to those of previous years during a non-pandemic commute environment. Counts will continue throughout the next several months as monitoring of traffic demand continues. He noted that the volume of heavy vehicles increased throughout this time, as delivery vehicles were in higher demand as passenger car volumes decreased due to remote work.

8. LRTA DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISE (DBE) GOALS

Chris Curry gave a brief informational presentation of the 3 year DBE goal setting process. He explained that the goals are set by establishing a baseline figure through identifying projects and procurements to be undertaken by NAICS code, identifying total number of businesses within the same NAICS code by county data, and identifying certified disadvantaged businesses from the Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Resources UCP. He stated that there are items that will be procured such as automatic passenger counters and bus lifts, which are specialty items and will be looking nationwide for procurement. Adjustments will be made to the baseline figure based on anticipated spending percentage and LRTA historical DBE participation. Goals change over each three year period based on types of items to be procured. The timeline for the process involves making the draft goals available for public review 45 days prior to due date (June 17, 2021), DBE goal publication 30 days prior to due date (July 2, 2021) through general circulation media, minority-focused media, and trade publications, and a final due date of August 1, 2021.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Derek Shooster shared that a virtual public meeting on the Capital Investment Plan will be held at 6PM this evening for the Northern Middlesex and Merrimack Valley regions. He included an invitation link in the chat field for those who wish to attend or share the information.

Chris Timmel provided a quick update on the NMMPO Certification Review, which was conditionally certified on June 9, 2020. He stated that corrective actions had been addressed and the NMMPO has been formally certified through June 9, 2024. He reminded the group that corrective actions were related to the MPO's MOU which was executed in April 2021 and to the Nashua UZA agreement which the NMMPO is part of and worked with the Nashua partners completed in December 2020. He thanked the group for their work on corrective actions and offered congratulations on their certification.

Frank Suszynski mentioned that Connie Raphael will be retiring in June. He thanked her for 37 years of service to MassDOT and stated that she has been a pleasure to work with, great at her job, a resource for all, and he'd like to send her off with thanks from all. Tim Paris will be replacing Connie in her role as Planning Coordinator.

Beverly Woods inquired as to the Rourke Bridge project and the plans going forward as the timeframe proposed does not line up with the STIP. She also asked about the intent on funding. David Mohler stated that he did not have an answer but will make the inquiry.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Based on a motion made by Pat Wojtas and seconded by Tom Bomil, the MPO voted unanimously to adjourn at 2:40 PM.

The next meeting will be held June 23, 2021 at 2:00 PM.