



Meeting Minutes

Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization

Date: Wednesday, January 28, 2026

Time: 2:00 PM – 3:17 PM

Location: Hybrid (NMCOG Office and via Zoom)

Attendees: Voting members in Attendance:

- Derek Shooster, representing MassDOT Interim Secretary and CEO, Phillip Eng
- Brian Fallon, representing Undersecretary and Highway Administrator, Jonathan Gulliver
- Pat Wojtas, Northern Middlesex Council of Governments (NMCOG) Representative to the MPO
- Stephen Themelis, NMCOG Chair

Ex-Officio:

- Jason Silva, representing Dunstable.
- Jeff Rosen, representing the needs of people who walk, bike, and roll.

Non-voting attendees:

- Timothy Paris, MassDOT
- Miranda Briseño, MassDOT
- Katherine Duffy, MassDOT
- Justin Howard, LRTA
- Ali Bent, LRTA
- Andrew Jennings
- David Langlais

NMMPO staff: Kelly Lynema, Blake Acton, Amanuel Regassa

1. Welcome & Introductions

Mr. Shooster welcomed the members to the January 28, 2026, meeting for the Northern Middlesex Metropolitan Planning Organization (NMMPO) meeting and called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM via Zoom.

2. Open Forum

Mr. Shooster invited comments from attendees. No public comments were made at this time.

3. Approval of December 3, 2025 NMMPO Meeting Minutes (vote required)

The minutes of December 3, 2025, NMMPO meeting were distributed to all members for review.

Vote: Based on a motion by Mr. Themelis and seconded by Ms. Wojtas, following a roll call vote, the minutes were approved.

4. FFY2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program Amendment Package #2 (vote required)

Mr. Acton shared the details of the Transportation Improvement Program Amendment Package #2.

- Yankee Doodle Bike Path Phase 1: The project is being advertised for construction in the the current federal fiscal year. The project cost has increased by slightly more than \$7 million; approximately \$1.8 million of this increase is attributed to additional traffic management needs for permanent work zone setup and removal along Route 3. Another \$5 million is due to the required redesign or replacement of the ramp truss structure at Elliott Street and Orchard Road, which represents the largest portion of the cost increase. Additional minor cost increases are related to general price escalation, revisions to the bike path spur from the Middlesex parking lot, and updated requirements for excess soil excavation, testing, and disposal.
- Yankee Doodle Phase 2: The project scope and work-hour estimates for Phase 2 are currently being negotiated between the consultant and the Town of Billerica; this will advance the project to 25% design. There is currently no submitted contract or schedule, and the project still requires a redesign to avoid an archaeological site. Due to these factors, the recommendation is to delay Phase 2 by one year as noted in this amendment.
- Dracut George Englesby Elementary School Safe Routes to School Project: Staff are still awaiting narrative details from MassDOT; once received, they will be added to the Amendment #2 summary and presented at the next NMMPO meeting. Additionally, the TIP year for this project is recommended to move from 2029 to 2028, as the project is advancing more quickly than expected.
- LRTA FTA Low-No-Emissions and Bus and Bus Facility Grant Award: This section of Amendment 2 outlines updates related to LRTA's bus purchases. LRTA recently received a Low-No Award for six 35-foot hybrid buses. These buses were already included in the original procurement plan, which listed 18 buses in total. Under this amendment, six buses will shift to a new project ID and be funded through the Low-No Award with toll credits as the match. The remaining 12 buses will stay under the original project and continue to use formula funding.

This adjustment does not change the total number of buses being purchased or the planned procurement timeline. The only change is the funding source for six of the buses. The \$2 million cost difference reflects the updated price quote received during the competitive procurement process; the original amount was based on an estimate.

Discussion: Before the meeting, Ms. Bent and Mr. Shooster discussed consolidating these changes into a single line item for the transit project. This would clearly show the full 18-bus order, with six funded through the Low-No Award and 12 through formula funds for FY28–29. Staff will update the documentation accordingly.

Mr. Acton inquired as to why the amount for the buses increased by 2 million. Ms. Bent responded that at the beginning when the programming was done it was only an estimate, then the actual price quote was received.

Vote: Based on a motion by Ms. Wojtas and seconded by Mr. Themelis, following a roll call vote the motion to release the amendment for a 21-day public comment period was approved

5. **MASSDOT CY26 Safety Performance Measure Update (vote required)**

Sam Taylor, Regional Planning Coordinator of MPO Activities at Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), presented an overview of federally required performance measures established in 2016. These measures fall into three categories: PM1 (Safety), PM2 (Bridge and Pavement Condition), and PM3 (System Performance, including congestion reduction). MPOs are required to adopt PM1 safety targets annually by the end of February. While MassDOT sets numeric targets in accordance with federal requirements, its overarching goal remains zero fatalities and zero serious injuries.

The five required PM1 safety measures are:

- Number of roadway fatalities
- Number of serious injuries
- Fatality rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- Serious injury rate per 100 million VMT
- Total non-motorized fatalities and serious injuries

All measures are reported as five-year rolling averages. The 2026 statewide targets reflect averages from 2022–2026.

- **Fatalities:** Target development began in July using the most current data and trend analysis. Safety outcomes worsened during 2020–2022 due to increased speeding and reduced VMT. Although fatalities rose again in 2024, early 2025 data shows improvement. The adopted 2022–2026 target is 357 fatalities. Estimates for full-year 2025 were calculated by scaling year-to-date data (noting that 46% of annual fatalities typically occur between January 1 and July 1) and applying a 3% annual reduction through 2026. If this reduction continues, the projected 2028 five-year average is 323 fatalities. The fatality rate target is 0.5 fatalities per 100 million VMT, with the same rate projected for 2028.
- **Serious Injuries:** Using the same methodology (with 46% of injuries typically occurring between January 1 and July 1), the 2022–2026 target is 2,562 serious

injuries. With continued 3% annual reductions, the projected 2028 five-year average is 2,184. The serious injury rate target is 4.03 per 100 million VMT, with a projected 2028 rate of 3.38.

- **Non-Motorized Fatalities and Serious Injuries:** This measure includes individuals walking, biking, or rolling. Although figures have fluctuated in recent years, early 2025 data indicates a decline from a 2023 peak. Approximately 45% of annual non-motorized injuries occur between January and July. Reflecting the state's focus on vulnerable road user safety, a 5% annual reduction was assumed for projections. The 2022–2026 target is 512, with a projected 2028 five-year average of 416 if reductions continue.

Vote: Based on a motion by Mr. Themelis and seconded by Ms. Wojtas, following a roll call vote, MASSDOT CY26 Safety Performance Measure Update was endorsed.

6. LRTA TAM Target Adjustment (vote required)

Ms. Bent shared that the process of completing our annual FTA National Transit Database (NTD) reporting. During the review, we identified that a new vehicle in our equipment fleet—a Chrysler Voyager—was incorrectly classified as an automobile. It should instead be categorized under “trucks and other rubber-tire vehicles.”

Because these two categories represent separate asset classes, the correction affects our target calculations.

- **Automobiles:** The class now includes 2 vehicles instead of 3, adjusting the target to 50%.
- **Trucks and Other Rubber-Tire Vehicles:** With the Voyager added, the class increases from 8 to 9 vehicles, adjusting the target from 12% to 11%.

Vote: Based on a motion by Mr. Themelis and seconded by Ms. Wojtas, following a roll call vote the update to the targets outlined was approved.

7. TIP FUNDING PROGRAM STUDY

Ms. Lynema and Mr. Blake summarized the UPWP funding study, which evaluates two pilot programs for the next NMMPO TIP cycle.

Staff dedicated work hours in the FFY2026 Unified Planning Work Program to evaluate two potential pilot funding programs for the NMMPO TIP. These pilots would be implemented beginning with the next TIP development cycle.

The first program focuses on supporting municipalities with early-stage design and pre-construction work to help advance projects to TIP readiness. Securing design funding has been a persistent challenge for many communities, and this program aims to reduce that barrier and increase the number of viable TIP applications particularly from municipalities that have not recently had projects included.

- **Design Advancement Program:** Pre-construction activities are an eligible expense under federal regulations, and MassDOT has been working with MPOs statewide to

improve access to design funding. Engagement with municipal engineers has generated strong interest, with approximately six to seven potential projects that could begin as early as FFY26, depending on available surplus funds.

The program's goals include:

- Supporting pre-construction activities needed for TIP readiness.
- Increasing participation from communities with limited recent TIP activity
- Providing a consistent source of design funding to reduce project delays and cost escalation
- Allowing staff to monitor project development and maintain schedule confidence more closely.

Funding scenarios under development will propose dedicating a portion of the regional target annually to the program. Design project proposals would be scored and presented to the NMMPO for approval; after final bids on the projects are negotiated, the NMMPO would authorize a TIP amendment or adjustment to program the specific project onto the TIP, with municipalities participating in a competitive application process. Applications would be scored using a simplified version of the transportation evaluation criteria, and selected projects would be incorporated via TIP amendment or adjustment.

Municipalities receiving design funding must provide a 20% local match. They must also follow MassDOT processes, including:

- Not issuing an RFQ or RFP before TIP funding is awarded.
- Developing procurement documents in accordance with MassDOT guidelines
- Selecting from MassDOT-pre-qualified design firms
- Obtaining MassDOT review and approval of procurement documents and draft contracts

Projects funded through this program must be designed to MassDOT standards to ensure eligibility for future TIP construction funding.

- **Micromobility Funding Program:** The second program, presented by Blake Acton, explores a small-scale bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure initiative. This program would provide funding for lower-cost, standalone, or quick-build active transportation improvements. To date, staff have reviewed similar programs from other MPOs, consulted with MassDOT, and examined available federal funding sources. Work began in December to develop program recommendations and application criteria. Stakeholder outreach is ongoing, including conversations with municipal engineers and planners to identify project interests and understand how those needs align with the proposed pilot programs.

As part of the FY2027–2031 TIP development, staff will present scenarios that incorporate these pilot programs. The MPO will have an opportunity to provide

feedback and vote on how these programs should be integrated into the TIP. A final report including full criteria and the rationale behind the recommended pilot structure will be issued ahead of the next MPO meeting.

Discussion:

Mr. Themelis questioned the proposed sidewalk extension project near the middle and elementary schools in Pepperell. Would this project qualify as a micro-project, allowing it to proceed through a pre-design phase at no cost to the town, with work completed by NMCOG through the TIP process? Additionally, if the project were accepted and advanced, would the required 20% design match be eligible for Chapter 90 funding?

Mr. Shooster responded, regarding the match requirement, Chapter 90 funds *maybe* used for the local design match. However, because this project would use federal funding, any right-of-way needs would require the project to go through the MassDOT project initiation process. For that reason, this specific sidewalk extension may not be an ideal fit for the pilot program presented by Mr. Lynema and Mr. Acton. Larger sidewalk or trail connections are often better suited for programs such as Safe Routes to School or state and regional bicycle and pedestrian investment programs. A project of this scale could escalate to a full TIP project.

As a general guideline, if a project can be fully funded with Chapter 90, that is often the most efficient path. If the project is expected to grow into a larger initiative, using Chapter 90 funds as the town's design commitment for an initiated MassDOT project may be the better approach.

Communication with NMCOG early in the process is essential particularly regarding right-of-way needs, feasibility concerns, or challenges in meeting MassDOT Complete Streets standards. In some cases, a feasibility study may be required before advancing to design, which NMCOG may be able to incorporate into the UPWP if needed. Certain CMAC-funded project types such as wayfinding, signage, and some safety improvements may qualify for a waiver of the local match requirement, pending FHWA approval. However, repair of existing trails or bike paths is **not** CMAC-eligible, though it may be funded under TAP or STBG.

In all cases, NMCOG should be the first point of contact as the region prepares for the development of the FY27–31 TIP.

8. FFY2027-2031 TIP and FFY2027 UPWP Development Timeline.

Ms. Lynema outlined the development schedule for the 2027–2031 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and the next Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP).

On January 30, MassDOT and the Massachusetts Association of Regional Planning Agencies will meet to discuss STIP/TIP development guidance and funding allocations for both the TIP and the UPWP. Staff will present updated financial targets for the next five years at the February NMMPO meeting.

TIP Readiness Days will follow, during which NMCOG staff, MassDOT staff, and local partners will review the readiness of currently programmed and potential new projects. Afterward, NMCOG staff will score projects using the MPO-approved transportation evaluation criteria.

In March, staff will present several funding scenarios, including those incorporating pilot programs for design funding and micro-projects. The board will review these scenarios and select one for the next five years of TIP funding. A full report will be presented in April, including project narratives and funding details. At that meeting, the board will decide vote to release the draft TIP for a 21-day public comment period. A public meeting will be held in early May, and all comments will be brought back to the MPO at the May 20 meeting. If endorsed, the TIP will be posted, shared with federal partners, and become effective on October 1, 2026.

Regarding the Unified Planning Work Program, NMCOG receives approximately \$1.2 million annually to support staff, equipment, software, and consultant services. Staff will present the UPWP development schedule to the NMCOG Council in February and share the allocation amounts with both the Council and MPO at their February meetings.

In March and April, staff will evaluate potential tasks and studies for the upcoming UPWP. These activities will be presented for discussion at the March meeting, with additional review possible in April. In May, the draft UPWP will be presented for release for a 21-day public comment period, followed by a public meeting in early June. Final endorsement is expected at the end of June. Once approved, the UPWP will be posted in July and shared with federal partners.

9. Greater Lowell Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Update

In December, staff continued working with the Advisory Committee on the Greater Lowell Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. After extensive public engagement last summer and early fall, a draft network was released following our November public meeting along with a region-wide survey to gather feedback on how well the proposed network aligned with community priorities.

Staff are now incorporating those comments into a revised draft network. This updated version will be presented to the Advisory Committee in February. Following the committee's feedback, staff will hold an additional public workshop to present the recommended network, review the draft plan, and collect further public input.

A full draft of the planning document is expected to be presented to the MPO in March. At that time, the MPO board will be asked to release the draft for a formal public comment period and will also have the opportunity to provide feedback. The finalized plan will then be returned to the MPO for endorsement.

This study, funded under the current UPWP, will provide a recommended bicycle and pedestrian network, design typologies illustrating preferred treatments in different contexts, prioritization guidance for near, medium, and long-term implementation, and

policy recommendations related to complete streets, bike facilities, signage, wayfinding, sidewalks, and pedestrian improvements.

10. Status Report on Transportation Improvement program (TIP) Projects Under Design & Construction

Mr. Paris shared the following update:

- Project 613562, Tewksbury Improvements at Shawsheen Road, Foster Road, Patton Road, and Beach Street: cost increase of approximately \$2 Million.
- Project 613109, Chelmsford/Lowell Deck Replacement on the Lowell Connector over I-495: advertisement date was revised to October 2027, moving it back by one year.

11. Other Business

The next MPO meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 25 at 2 p.m. You are welcome to attend in person at the NMCOG offices or join remotely via Zoom. Meeting details will be posted on our calendar.

12. Adjournment

Based on a motion by Themelis and seconded by Ms. Wojtas, the meeting was adjourned at 3:17 PM.