

# MEETING MINUTES OF THE NORTHERN MIDDLESEX METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION

## November 29, 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 Secretary and CEO Monica Tibbits-Nutt
- Brian Fallon, MassDOT D4 (Representing MassDOT Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver)
- Pat Wojtas, Chelmsford Select Board Chair, NMCOG Representative
- Tom Bomil, LRTA Board Chair
- Karyn Puleo, LRTA MPO Representative
- Andrew Deslaurier, Billerica Select Board, NMCOG Chair

#### **Stakeholders and Other Attendees:**

- Andrew Jennings, LRTA Advisory Board – Town of Billerica
- Derek Shooster, MassDOT
- Andrew Wang, MassDOT Planning
- Josh Levin, MassDot D4
- Ali Bent, LRTA
- Joshua Barber, FHWA
- Brandon Burns, FTA

#### **NMMPO Staff:**

- NMMPO staff Jessica Boulanger, Blake Acton, Austen Torres Davis, Paul Christner

### 2. APPROVAL OF THE OCTOBER 25, 2023 NMMPO MEETING MINUTES

NMMPO members were provided with copies of the October 25, 2023 NMMPO minutes prior to the meeting. Based on a motion by Pat Wojtas and seconded by Karen Puleo, the October 25, 2023 NMMPO meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

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

- Updates on existing projects:
  - Project 612658 - Tewksbury Bridge preservation of 495 over Route 133 and route 38. Our system is no longer showing a TIP year and cost.
  - Project 612656 – Bridge. Preservation of 495 over Concord and Boston Road in Westford. Same situation.
  - Project 612631 - Chelmsford Bridge replacement of Gorham Street, over 495, and Westford Street, also over 495. This project has gone down a little bit in cost. It is now 100% design.
  - Project 608816 - Resurfacing and related work on Route 110 and Lowell, Dracut, Methuen. The ad date was pushed back by two months. It is now going to be May 2024.
  - Project 608861 - Westford Bridge. Rehabilitation of Stonybrook Road over the Stonybrook - New TIP year.
  - Project 607887 - This is Lowell Rourke Bridge replacement. Wood Street extension over Boston and Main Railroad and Merrimack River - the ad date has been pushed back two weeks.
  - Project 610704 - Burlington and Billerica resurfacing and related work on route 3A. This also had a removal of the TIP year and cost, and a new project manager, Joseph, Yoo.
  - Project 609035 - the total cost is increased by 4 million, and has reached 100% design.

### 4. OPEN FORUM - Opportunity for Comments from MPO Members, Community Stakeholders, and the Public

None at this time.

### 5. ACTION ITEM TO ENDORSE FFY 2024-2028 NMMPO TIP ADJUSTMENT

Paul Christner summarized the adjustment to the FFY 2024-2028 NMMPO TIP. It involves several changes to existing LRTA projects to update State matches to 2023 Community Transit Grants. The current match funds are zero. The proposed match for the grants are shown. The adjustment does require an endorsement vote of the MPO. It does not require a 21-day public comment period. He asked the board to vote to endorse this adjustment and displayed the TIP revisions report.

Karen Puleo asked: Were these already planned for replacement? And now that this is the funding source, for it. Are we just moving forward a little bit earlier, or was there another original funding source for it.

Ali Bent responded: Paul, I can jump in here. We apply for community transit grants to replace the Paratransit vehicles for the roadrunner and the cost, and once they're awarded, then they go on the TIP. These were on last year's TIP, but there was a little bit of delay in the vehicle delivery. And I think it's just the carryover into fiscal 24

There were no additional questions. Based on a motion by Pat Wojtas and seconded by Karen Puleo, the FFY 2024-2028 NMMPO TIP Adjustment was approved unanimously.

## 6. LRTA TAM TARGETS FY 2024

Ali Bent, LRTA, presented an overview of the Acton Item to Endorse LRTA FY24 TAM Targets. For the LRTA annual TAM target, LRTA reports in three different categories, which includes 35-foot buses, which have a useful life of 10 to 12 years respectively, our Cutaway busses, which are largely for paratransit, road runner, and councils on ageing, and one Minivan which is at Dracut COA.

LRTA has a robust replacement schedule for the buses – we are replacing our oldest fixed-route bus in the spring. And we're confident that we'll meet our 2024 target of zero buses past their useful life in age. For the cutaways, the 2024 target for the cutaways, you'll see this is a higher target of 53.06 percent, and that's really due to the Paratransit vehicles. The TAM targets are required to be set based on age. The mileage isn't really as high as on a fixed route bus, and the vehicles tend to be, and they're still in good shape, considering the age. Also just on the last TIP adjustment, there have been vehicle delivery delays post-COVID. The minivan is 100% and is past its age, but the mileage is low. That we're dealing with that has influenced that number as well. Then, the Minivan, being 100, is just a small sample size. We only have one, and it is past its useful life in age. But again, the mileage isn't really that high, and it's still in good shape for equipment. This covers our non-revenue service vehicles for automobiles. And again, for both of these categories we do prioritize replacing our revenue vehicles.

For Equipment, this covers non-revenue service vehicles. For the automobiles, the LRTA has a small sample size - just 2 in our fleet- and one of those is past its useful life in age. Our trucks and other rubber tire vehicles including plows, our security trucks, and maintenance vehicles. Again, for both of these categories we do prioritize replacing our revenue vehicles. These ten vehicles, especially with the service trucks, these stay on our property. So, although the target is required to be set based on age, the mileage, is a little bit lower, and so the wear and tear isn't quite as high as you'd anticipate given the age.

For facilities, we use the term scale. That's a one through five reading, one being poor and 5 being excellent. LRTA has a robust maintenance program for all our facilities and all the equipment. We program every year 5307 in State RTA Cap funds to address terminal and equipment maintenance. LRTA anticipates that they will be able to keep our facilities overall in a state of good repair for fiscal year 2024. I'm happy to answer any questions, and these do go for a vote.

There were no additional questions. Based on a motion by Tom Bomil and seconded by Andrew Deslaurier, the LRTA TAM TARGETS were approved unanimously.

## 7. FHWA/FTA CERTIFICATION REVIEW

Brandon Burns from FTA and Joshua Barber from FHWA provided an overview of the 2024 Federal Certification Review. Joshua Barber explained that we asked for some time on the agenda for your MPO Board agenda, to let you all know that we've officially kicked off the Northern Middlesex MPO. Federal Certification Review. The review is currently underway. Joshua highlighted the requirements

and talked about the process.

The US Department of Transportation - Federal Highway and Federal Transit - are required to review and certify the transportation planning process of MPOs in urbanized areas with a population of over 200,000 people at least once every four years. Northern Middlesex MPO, which is in the Boston TMA was last certified in June of 2020. The purpose of these reviews is to evaluate your planning process and compliance with Federal regulations and the United States code the United States Code. FHWA wants to provide an open forum for the exchanging information and ideas to everyone to identify effective practices and opportunities for improvement. Joshua explained that we really want to stress that these certification reviews are not just a review of the MPO and its staff and its processes, but rather a review of the planning process conducted by all of the planning partners charged with cooperatively carrying out this process on a daily basis. That includes NMOCG, MassDot, the local Elected officials, LRTA and your coordination with other MPOs (Boston/Nashua) etc..

A few highlights of kind of the general process - the notification letter was sent a few weeks ago, they are coordinating with Paul on our desk review and FHWA has requested material and just try to understand what work the MPO has been doing. They will have an on-site visit. There's a public engagement process as well. A final report will be issued that documents observations and findings.

Brandon Burns reviewed where they are in the process and what to expect over the new several months. Currently, they are gathering information, the processes, organizational structure and other documents that will be prepared. This will be used to review the MPO and how they carry out the transportation planning process. They may ask advanced questions over the next several weeks before the site visit. Currently the site visit is planned for February 8<sup>th</sup>. MPO members are encouraged to attend. Topics might include financial planning on the TIP, organizational structure of the MPO, public outreach, Title VI, freight planning, environmental mitigation and resiliency.

As part of the Certification Review process, FHWA and FTA plan to have opportunities for the public to get involved and provide feedback. They would like to hear from members of the public and stakeholders concerning their views of the transportation planning process. They are planning to hold a public meeting during the public involvement session at the January MPO meeting.

## 8. UPDATE ON TITLE VI REPORT

Paul Christner gave an update on the 2023 NMMPO Title VI Report. NMCOG submitted the 2022 report earlier this year, and they received comments from the MassDOT Office of Diversity and Civil Rights. In lieu of submitting a new report this year, they are asking NMCOG to update the 2022 report. They have given us several things we need to address and submit a new report by the end of this calendar year, which we are working on. I am going to turn it over to Blake Acton in a moment to go over some of those individual items for the report. But I did want to give a little bit of background on what Title VI is; you will see a link to our current Title VI report at the bottom of the slide. This report is available on our website.

Blake Acton, the Regional Transit Planner at NMCOG, discussed in more detail some of NMCOG's plans and progress regarding the nine required action items we received from ODCR. Blake reviewed the individual-identified issues from ODCR and reviewed NMCOG actions to address each issue. They are due December 31, 2023.

Deslaurier, Andrew /US: Just a quick comment. This is long overdue, and I think really pertinent for our region. Given the changes that we're seeing. This feeds into all the different strategies that are going beyond transportation, but for housing and such like that. So this is going to be this day will be leveraged in several places. So I appreciate the investment.

## 9. OTHER BUSINESS

Paul Christner proposed alternative meeting dates for the next MPO meeting:

December 20, 2023

January 3, 2024

January 24, 2024

Paul Christner will follow-up with board members through email.

Paul Christner announced the NMCOG office move will happen next week on December 1<sup>st</sup> and our new address is:

672 Suffolk Street – Suite 100, Lowell, MA 01854

## 10. ADJOURNMENT

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