

Minutes of the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Zoom Meeting
Tuesday, October 24, 2023

MPO Members Present:

David Mohler	MassDOT Executive Director of Planning
Mark Moore	MassDOT Highway District 1
Joshua Garcia	Mayor, City of Holyoke
Walter Gunn	Chair, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)
Nicole LaChapelle	Mayor, City of Easthampton
William Reichelt	Mayor, Town of West Springfield
Douglas Slaughter	Chair, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
Rick Sullivan	President and CEO, Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts

Guests and PVPC Staff Present:

Rana Al-Jammal	Senior Planner Specialist
Daryl Amaral	MassDOT District Two Office, Acting State Aid Engineer
Ben Breger	MassDOT Highway District 2
Timothy Keane	Town of Longmeadow
Christopher Klem	MassDOT Planning
Derek Krevat	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Andrew McCaul	Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) – Transportation Section
Dawn Nims	City of Holyoke
Andrew Wang	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Sandra Sheehan	Administrator, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
Joshua Barber	FHWA
Dan McCormack	Toole Design Group
Ava Schmoelzer	Transit Intern
Dawn Scaparotti	Goshen Town Administrator
Linda Leduc	Town of Belchertown
James B. Winston	Business Northampton
Carolyn Misch	City of Northampton,
Mike McCabe	Mayor of Westfield
Jackie Balance	Resident Florence
Judy Udes Herrell	Business Owner Northampton
Victoria Houle	
Peggy O'Neal	Town of Worthington
Rutherford Platt	Umass Amherst
Derek Shooster	MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Peter Frieri	MassDOT Highway District 1

Note: Because this meeting was held via Zoom, not all those present are included, as some participants were only identified by a phone number, and no name was available.

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome and Opening Remarks

The October 24, 2023, meeting of the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) was called to order at 10:00 a.m. The virtual meeting format was reviewed, and it was noted that the meeting was being recorded.

PVPC Principal Planner Dana Roscoe took roll call, and the following MPO members responded that they were present; David Mohler, MassDOT; Mark Moore, MassDOT Highway District 1; Walter Gunn, Chair PVPC; William Reichelt, Mayor Town of West Springfield; Nicole LaChapelle, Mayor City of Easthampton; Rick Sullivan, Western Mass EDC; Mr. Roscoe confirmed that this roll call constitutes a quorum.

2. MPO Approval of Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Pioneer Valley MPO Held Remotely on July 25, 2023

Mr. Mohler called for a motion to approve the July 25, 2023, meeting minutes of the Pioneer Valley MPO.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY RICK SULLIVAN, TO APPROVE THE JULY 25, 2023, MEETING MINUTES OF

THE PIONEER VALLEY MPO. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED BY A ROLL CALL VOTE.

3. Opportunity for Public Comment

There was one comment from a resident of Northampton. He stated that there was a concerned group resident and business owners about the present redesign. The group hired an architect to develop a proposed alternate design. The proposal includes alternatives to bike lanes that would be safer. It was asked for the option to be investigated to ensure that the project is safe and sensible.

4. Review and Discussion of the Current Slate PF Project Programmed in the FFY 2024-2028 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

PVPC Senior Transportation Planner Andrew McCaul reported on the transit side of the TIP. The transit side included purchasing of vehicles and updating maintaining the facilities, and moving toward more electric equipment. In the Spring, PVTA was awarded two large grants to begin electrifying the bus system. In year one, the expenditure was just over \$41 million. In year two, the expenditure was \$64 million. The reason for the increase was due to the biggest portion of the grants being spent. In 2026, there was just under \$41 million being spent. In 2027, there was \$30 million being spent. In 2028, there was \$37 million being spent.

Mr. McCaul reported on the highway side of the TIP. There was one project in quarter one proposed to be advertised, which was the interstate between Springfield and Chicopee. In quarter two, there were three projects, including reconstruction, a bridge, and resurfacing. In quarter three, there were three projects, including bridge works and a school safety project. In quarter four, there were two projects, including reconstruction in Wales and Springfield.

Mr. McCaul presented the document that was approved. In year one, it was programmed within \$1 million of the allocation. In year two, it was programmed within \$100,000 of the project. MassDOT was committing a lot of money to bridges. In 2026, it was programmed with no money left over. In 2027, it was programmed with \$300 available. In 2028, it was programmed with \$2.4 million available. He reminded everyone that it was anticipated that changes would have to be made to the document.

It was commented by Judith Herrell of Northampton that the Northampton Project should be revisited because it was dangerous. It was stated that an architect was creating an alternative plan. The City of Northampton was asked to work with the group on making the project safer.

5. Review, Discussion, and MPO Approval to Release the Proposed Amendment to the FFY 2024 Highway TIP for the Required 21-day Public Review Period

Mr. McCaul reported that the amendment included a cost increase in project 612106 from \$15,900,816 to \$23,667,942, adding Springfield Safer Streets Funding for All (SS4A) in the amount of \$15,012,800 and adding \$75,000 to the CMMPO for the purchase of a Hybrid Van for the use by the Quaboag Community Development Corporation. The project 612106 was scheduled to be advertised in quarter one. The purchase of a hybrid van would go on the Central Massachusetts TIP, but PVTA would be purchasing the van. None of the changes impacted the local target money.

Mr. McCaul reported that the adjustment was for an existing project that was awarded. It was programmed in the 2023-2027 TIP and involved the electrification of the buses. When the project was approved, the bulk of the federal money would be allocated in 2023, but that was not able to happen. The adjustment moved money around to allocate the funding in 2024. The state was providing the twenty percent matching funding to ensure that the project could be supported financially.

Mr. Mohler called for a motion to release the proposed amendments to the FFY2024 Highway Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for the 21-day public review period.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY RICK SULLIVAN, TO RELEASE THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE FFY 2024 HIGHWAY TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (TIP) FOR THE REQUIRED 21-DAY PUBLIC REVIEW PERIOD.

Mr. Roscoe took roll call, and each MPO member in attendance responded affirmatively.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS, THE MOTION WAS APPROVED.

Mr. Mohler noted that the adjustments were made to the FY2024 Highway TIP.

6. Review and Discussion of the Proposed 2020 Urbanized Area Update

PVPC Principal Planner Gary Roux reported that there was a change in the urbanized area as a result of the 2020 US Census. The change has implications for federal funding and in determining urban area populations. The federal requirements for determining the urbanized areas were presented. The process was a joint process between the federal highway administration, the state, and the MPO. The urban area has implications on what is required to be an MPO. It was noted that the MPO still meets the requirements. In 2020, there was a new definition for defining the urban area. In 2010, the population had to be greater than 2,500. In 2020, the population was required to be greater than 5,000, along with having at least 2,000 housing units. The adjusted urban area boundaries guidelines were presented. The functional class system of minor collectors was affected. All roadways classified as minor collectors or higher were eligible for federal funds if they were in an urban area. Roadways in rural areas were now required to be classified as major collectors or higher to receive federal funding. A map was presented to compare the urban areas in 2010 and 2020. In 2010, the urban area extended south into Connecticut. In 2020, there is now an Amherst-Northampton-Eastampton urban area.

The Springfield urban area now ends at the Massachusetts-Connecticut state line, as recommended by MassDOT. The recommended expansion of the two urban areas was presented on the map. The Amherst-Northampton-Eastampton urban area extends north, and it will be required for collaboration to be done with the community in Franklin. There were additional expansion areas proposed, including expanding to include the entire town of Ludlow and an additional area in the Town of Monson. It was also recommended that the area in Belchertown be included in the Amherst-Northampton-Eastampton urban area. The state school area in Belchertown, the additional area in Hadley, and the additional area in Hatfield were recommended to be included in the urban area. It was recommended that the northern portion of Holyoke be a part of the Springfield urban area. It was recommended that a portion of South Hampton be a part of the Amherst-Northampton-Eastampton urban area. There would not be impacts on funding for roadways based on the recommended changes.

The rough draft comments will be provided to MassDOT by the beginning of November. The recommendations to MassDOT will be refined by the end of November. The comments need to go to Federal Highway by the end of the calendar year.

It was discussed that the MPO boundary was being used in the urbanized areas, but there would likely be no impact on the amount of funding received.

It was asked if the areas were still part of Metro Springfield. It was reported that there might be a switch to the area that was designated. However, on applications, it will still be noted that the area was part of the Pioneer Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization. There were concerns raised about receiving federal money and including communities with higher median incomes in the urban areas. It was stated that development and potential development were also included in looking at whether an area was urban. In regard to raising the average household income, that would be done annually, and it would have to be shown that the low-income communities were not negatively impacted. It was discussed that the census-designated the areas, and the areas might not be able to be changed. Everything was built off the census definitions of the urban areas, and any changes must be approved. It was asked for any feedback to be emailed to Mr. Roux.

7. Discussion MPO Recruitment Efforts and Current Vacancies

Mr. McCaul reminded everyone that there were five subregions. Subregion one has two representatives on the MPO, and the other subregions have one representative. Municipalities are routinely reached out to in order to gain interest in sitting on the MPO. There are currently three vacant alternate seats. The three sub-regions for the

vacancies were reached out, but there was not much interest. Some of the municipalities have spring election cycles, while others have fall election cycles. It was noted that it was important to have full representation for the MPO and that there were alternates in place. In Subregion 2, it was noted that the Mayor of Agawam was not running for re-election, and that position would need to be filled. Westfield was interested in filling the seat. It was clarified that the alternate automatically moves to the membership if the main representative left. The MOU that governs the MPO requires that all members and alternates be elected officials.

8. Updates from MassDOT District One and District Two Officials on Relevant Transportation Issues and Projects of Interest to the Pioneer Valley MPO Members

Peter, MassDOT District One, provided the following updates:

2023 Project: The retaining wall in Cummington that was advertised in July received a notice to proceed with the contractors. That project is under construction.

2024 Project:

- **Project 609287** - Phase 2 Worthington Route 143 Reconstruction: the project was advertised several years ago; the PS&E is due on December 8; the town has begun the right-of-way process, and it was well underway; it should be in good shape for the early second quarter advertising.

2026 Projects:

- The municipal bridge replacement in Williamsburg had its 25% design public hearing in July, and comments were being compiled.
- Mountain Street in Williamsburg was anticipating a 75% design from Hoyle Tanner Associates in December 2023

Ben Breger, MassDOT District Two, provided the following updates:

2023 Projects:

- **Project 606895** – Granby improvements at 2 locations on Route 202, School Street and Five Corners; the advertisement occurred in September; the bids were opened on October 11, and the award and notice to proceed were being waited on.
- **Project 608073** – Westfield River Levee multi-use path construction; the project was advertised on September 9, 2023, and the bids will open on November 7th.
- **Project 604209** - Holyoke, West Springfield rehab of Route 5; the project was advertised on July 29th, bids were opened on September 19th, the lowest eligible bid was from Ludlow construction, and further determination from headquarters and the federal highway was being waited on due to the bid being higher than anticipated.
- **Project 608847:** Wales bridge replacement; the project was advertised on June 24th; the notice to proceed was issued in August.

2024 Projects:

- **Project 608163** – Wales reconstruction improvements on Monson Road from Monson town line to Reed Hill Road; design is at 75%; the 75% revised copy was being waited on and should be complete sometime during the current week.
- **Project 608717** – The X Project; design is at 100%; awaiting environmental permits; 100% design is complete; the PS&E is due January 30, 2024; the current ad date is August 31st, 2024.

2025 Projects:

- **Project 608881** – Longmeadow Springfield resurfacing and intersection improvements; design is at 100%; the current ad date is January 18, 2025.
- **Project 609065** – resurfacing and related work in Holyoke on Cabbage Street and Race Street; the design is at 75%; the 100% design is due December 15, 2023; the current ad date is February 22, 2025.
- **Project 609286** – Northampton downtown complete streets and intersection improvements; the design is at 25%; the 75% design is due December 5, 2023.
- **Project 613320** – Holyoke improvements on High and Maple Streets; the older project (606450; Holyoke traffic signals upgrade) was deactivated; the kickoff meeting was held in December 2022; GPI was brought on as a consultant and was collecting and analyzing traffic data; a check-in meeting was held in May 2023; GPI was working on operational analysis; they submitted a report; MassDOT requested roll plans to analyze further; as of October 2023, the MassDOT in District 2 confirmed that the comments were addressed and they plan to meet

with the city soon on the status of their analysis.

In July, the utilities coordination was asked about. Mr. Breger confirmed that the utility department was asked for information regarding the 608881 project. There had been coordination with utilities between Verizon and Comcast.

It was asked if it would be another 8-10 years before project 613320 would come to fruition or if the previous project could be amended so it would take less time. Mr. Breger reported that there were analyses that could be used from the old project, although deactivating was a way to bring a new consultant on Board and come up with newer projects. The traffic signals had not met the warrant, and different options had to be revisited. Mr. Breger stated that options would be provided.

It was asked if there was a completion date on the bridge in Westfield. Mr. Breger stated that he would get back to Mr. Sullivan. It was reported that there was a scheduled ad date for the bridge project of September 2025, but there was work being done to move that ahead.

9. Updates from PVTA Administrator Sandra Sheehan on Relevant Transit-Related Issues and Projects of Interest to the Pioneer Valley MPO Members

PVTA Administrator Sandra Sheehan reported that FY23 ridership was a bit lower than FY19 ridership. She reported that July ridership was 22% higher, August was 12% higher, and preliminary figures showed that September ridership was 17% higher than the previous year. Routes 30 and 31 each had approximately 100,000 passengers. Routes 33, 35, and 43 had higher ridership than 2019 for the month of September. Ridership for this fiscal year was looking optimistic. There were two routes extended, B7 and B17, into Wilbraham, and it was averaging 53 boards per day. The mobile ticketing program in August resulted in an all-time high activation of 76,000 activations. Some validators will be introduced in the next few months, which will make it easier for riders to board. She reported that staffing continued to be an issue at PVTA. MassDOT launched a statewide media campaign to support the efforts of recruitment. There was a new training program that included CDL license training, and employees would be paid for their time spent training.

10. Other Business

Mr. Mohler noted that the next JTC meeting was scheduled for November 8, 2023, and the next MPO meeting is scheduled hybrid on November 28, 2023. It was noted that the secretary was expected to chair the November 28 meeting.

There being no other business to conduct, Mr. Mohler called for a motion to adjourn.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY RICK SULLIVAN, TO ADJOURN THE OCTOBER 24, 2023, MEETING OF THE PIONEER VALLEY MPO. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 11:09 A.M. WITHOUT OBJECTION.

Respectfully submitted,
Minutes Services

List of Documents Distributed at the October 24, 2023 MPO Meeting

1. MPO Agenda: October 24, 2023
2. July 25, 2023, MPO Meeting Minutes