

PIONEER VALLEY METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION
Minutes of the Hybrid Meeting held on Tuesday, March 26, 2024

Organization Members Present

Stephen Woelfel	Deputy Director of Planning; MassDOT, Representing MPO Chair Monica Tibetts-Nutt Secretary of Transportation and Chief Executive Officer	
Paula Simmons	MassDOT Highway District 2 Representing Massachusetts Department of Transportation Highway Division Administrator Jonathan Gulliver	
Roger Fuller	Selectboard Member	Town of Chesterfield
Joshua A. Garcia	Mayor	City of Holyoke
Mark Gold	Select Board Member	Town of Longmeadow
Walter Gunn	Chair	PVPC Executive Committee
Michael McCabe	Mayor	City of Westfield
Gina-Louise Sciarra	Mayor	City of Northampton
Douglas Slaughter	Chair	Pioneer Valley Transit Authority Advisory Board
Richard Sullivan	Economic Development Council	Western Massachusetts
*Joi Singh	Division Administrator	FHWA Massachusetts
*William Dwyer	JTC Chair	Hadley
*Sandra Sheehan	Administrator	Pioneer Valley Transit Authority

(* denotes ex-officio non-voting member)

PVPC Staff Present

Andrew McCaul, Senior Transportation Planner II
Carl Jackson, Principal Planner
Gary Roux, Principal Planner
Dana Roscoe, Principal Planner

Guests

Cassie Ostrander, FHWA
Jacqueline McCreanor, Resident, Northampton
Kate Norton, Norton Communications
Peggy O'Neal, Executive Assistant, Worthington
Alex Forrest, PVTA
Andrew Wang, MassDOT Planning
Matthew Minihan, Operations Engineer, MassDOT D2
Carolyn Misch, Director of Planning and Sustainability, Northampton
John Broderick, Director of Public Works, South Hadley
Daryl Amaral, District Planner, MassDOT Highway District 2
Peter Frieri, Project Development Engineer, MassDOT Highway District 1
Aaron Vega, Director of Planning, City of Holyoke
Ben Breger, Assistant District Planner, MassDOT Highway District 2
Van Kacoyannakis, VHB
Derek Krevat, Manager of MPO Activities, MassDOT OTP
Linda Leduc, Director of Public Works, Belchertown
Mark Moore, Project Development Engineer, MassDOT Highway District 1
Dawn Scaparotti, Town Administrator, Goshen Town
Joshua Barber, Community Planner, Federal Highway Administration

1. Call to Order, Welcome, and Announcement of Quorum

The Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting on March 26, 2024, was called to order at 10:00 a.m. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was noted.

2. Approval of the February 27, 2024, Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting Minutes

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY MICHAEL MCCABE, TO APPROVE THE FEBRUARY 27, 2024, METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION MINUTES. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

3. Public Comments

Jacqueline McCreanor from Northampton expressed concerns that the city's leadership in Northampton is faltering. Residents were growing more discontented as city staff and elected officials became more disconnected from constituents and community stakeholders. Three key areas where current Northampton officials and community stakeholders diverge in opinion significantly are climate action, land use policy, and the proposed Picture Main Street project. The city has lost Carol Collins, the first director of the new Climate Action and Project Administration Kappa Department. She held the position for approximately six months. Stakeholders question why she left, as her departure concerns Northampton stakeholders. The new interim director, Ben Weil, will be able to successfully lead the city forward through climate challenges and take adequate measures to protect the environment and Northampton's resources.

Ms. McCreanor shared that Northampton community stakeholders have also long been questioning land use decisions and amendments to residential zoning ordinances. The city continues to turn a blind eye to residents' rational concerns regarding the prioritization of developer privileges at the expense of new and longstanding residents, aging city infrastructure, strained natural resources, and the environment. Finally, the proposed Picture Main Street project has inflicted a wound on the community that is so deep it cannot heal. If Northampton city staff and elected officials continue to ignore stakeholders' input and feedback on the project, this could diminish a fantastic opportunity for the city and the community to come together in partnership to create an incredible vision for the revitalization of the historic and beloved downtown.

Ms. McCreanor expressed concerns over the Pioneer Valley's cultural, commercial, and culinary gem that has devolved into a scenario in which many stakeholders believe they are facing an increasingly ineffective, antagonistic, and autocratic city government. Many residents and surrounding community members strongly oppose the Picture Main Street project as it currently stands.

4. Review, Discussion, and MPO Approval to Change the Functional Classification of Belmont Avenue, Burlington Street, and Ormond Street in Springfield as Part of Project 608717, The "X."

Gary Roux presented the proposed changes to the functional classification, as well as the national highway system designation of a portion of Belmont Street around the intersection commonly known as the "X." The "X" project is currently on the transportation improvement program for funding. As a result of changes in the alignment of Belmont Street it came to the city's attention that there was a need to address functional classification and the alignment of the national highway system. The functional classification is the framework for identifying the role of a roadway. One of the determining factors for federal aid is the functional classification of roadways in the region.

Mr. Roux noted that as part of the proposed improvement project, the roadway will no longer be a through street. The changes were discussed with the MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning, which recommended that the MPO endorse this change so that it can be advanced to the federal highway for their consideration and determination.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY MARK GOLD, TO APPROVE THE CHANGE TO THE FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION OF BELMONT AVENUE, BURLINGTON STREET, AND ORMOND STREET IN SPRINGFIELD AS PART OF PROJECT 608717, THE "X.". THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

5. Discussion of New Green House Gas (GHG) Performance Measure: The MPO is Required to Adopt a Declining Four-Year Target by August 2024

Mr. McCaul presented GHG performance measures that the MPO needs to adopt by August 2024. He shared the importance of the same target-setting requirements for State DOTs for two-and four-year targets and the MPOs for four-year targets. The presentation included information on the formula developed that MassDOT is using to measure GHG emissions, the formula uses vehicle miles traveled (VMT) related to tailpipe emissions. The state has set a target of 7.9% reduction in GHG emissions. Staff informed the MPO that GHG targets for the Pioneer Valley region will be developed in collaboration with MassDOT and the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) and brought back to the MPO for discussion prior to approval in August of 2024.

6. FFY 2025-2029 TIP – Review and Discussion of Proposed Project Scenarios

Mr. McCaul provided an overview of the development schedule and program activity for transportation projects. He presented the project funding, design updates, and challenges faced by such funding. Feedback on potential projects for funding was requested from the group. It was noted that if a new project were added to the list, it would have to wait for post-2029. Gina-Louise Sciarra expressed concerns about the timeline of the Valley Bike share project, which comprises multiple communities in the region. Mr. McCaul noted that if there was an argument to move a project up and it received the support of the MPO, they would make it happen. He added that projects programmed in the outyears of the TIP (2026-2029) might need reassessing in the future. The members were asked to provide updates on their projects.

7. FFY 2025 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Development

Mr. Roux provided updates on the UPWP, noting that the UPWP is on the same development schedule as TIP, to be brought to the MPO at their April 2024 meeting for consideration for official release, for public review and comment, and then ideally to be endorsed at the MPO's May 2024 meeting. He briefly discussed the staff development, funding, and UPWP tasks.

8. Vulnerable Road User Safety Planning Studies – Three Locations Identified

Mr. Roux provided the locations selected for a vulnerable roadway user safety study, including Springfield, Ludlow, and Northampton. The study aims to identify areas with high crash rates for vulnerable users and planning efforts to improve safety for all roadway users. Mr. Roux discussed the intersections, highlighting their potential for bicycle and pedestrian users and the plans for data collection and safety audits.

The following three locations were noted:

- Intersection of Belmont, Locust, Mill, and Fort Pleasant in Springfield;
- East Street from Center Street to Chapin Street in Ludlow;
- Intersection of Nonotuck, South Main, Federal, Elm Street in Northampton.

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

District Two provided updates on various transportation projects, including Wales reconstruction improvement, Springfield reconstruction, and Complete Streets corridor intersection improvements. Design status for some projects is delayed, such as the Wales project, which is still waiting for a response from the project manager.

District One provided updates on the Worthington Route 143 reconstruction phase two progress, including any needed additions after the final design review at 75%. Bridge preservation projects on route nine over Westfield River and Westfield Brook in Cummington, specifically regarding current status post combined design reviews at 25% and 75%, were awaiting further feedback from MassDOT.

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

Sandra Sheehan noted that the PVTA reported increased ridership and service enhancements starting in April 2024. All those changes were made possible because PVTA improved the staffing levels at all the garages. The Board approved micro-transit services for the elderly and disabled, as well as connecting communities in the City of Holyoke.

11. Other Business

The date of the next Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting will be held on April 23, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.

12. Adjournment

There being no further discussion, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY MARK GOLD, TO ADJOURN THE MARCH 26, 2024, METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 11:00 A.M. THE MOTION CARRIED.