

PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)
Minutes of the Metropolitan Planning Organization Zoom Meeting
Tuesday, March 25, 2025, 10:00 A.M.

Organization Members Present

Stephen Woelfel, MassDOT OTP
Paula Simmons, MassDOT Highway District 2
Walter Gunn, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Joshua A. Garcia, Mayor of Holyoke
Mark Gold, Longmeadow Selectboard, Sub-Region 4
Roger Fuller, Chesterfield Selectboard, Sub-Region 4
Gina-Louise Sciarra, Mayor of Northampton
Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority

Ex-Officio/Non-Voting Members

Kimberley Robinson, Executive Director
Joshua Barber, Federal Highway Administration

Guests

Allison McMordie, City of Westfield
Andrew Wang, MassDOT OTP
Anthony Jones, FHWA
Chris Klem, MassDOT OTP
Peter Frieri, MassDOT Highway District 1
Daryl Amaral, MassDOT Highway District 2
Dianne Rossini-Smith, City of Easthampton
Laura Hanson, MassDOT Highway District 2
Linda Leduc, Town of Belchertown
Mark Berman, Town of East Longmeadow
Mark Moore, MassDOT Highway District 1
Sarah Cannamela, MassDOT Highway District 2
Stephen Thor Johnson, Town of Southampton
Tim Keane, Town of Longmeadow

PVPC Staff Present

Gary Roux, Principal Planner/Traffic Manager
Jeffrey McCollough, Principal Transportation Planner
Andrew McCaul, Senior Transportation Planner II
Carl Jackson, Principal Transit Planner

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

The Metropolitan Planning Organization meeting on March 25, 2025, was called to order at 10:00 a.m. Roll call was taken, and a quorum was noted.

2. Approval of the Minutes of the Metropolitan Planning Organization Meeting Held on February 25, 2025

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY GINA-LOUISE SCIARRA, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 25, 2025, METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION MEETING. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

3. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

4. MPO Membership Update: Approval of Selectboard Member James Whalen (Holland) for Sub-area 4 and Selectboard member Stephen Johnson (Southampton) for Sub-area 5 as Alternate Members on the MPO

Gary Roux sought approval for the appointment of two alternate members to fill vacancies in Subregion 4 and Subregion 5. James Whalen from Holland was proposed for Subregion 4, and Stephen Thor Johnson from Southampton was proposed for Subregion 5.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY MARK GOLD, TO APPROVE SELECTBOARD MEMBER JAMES WHALEN (HOLLAND) FOR SUB-AREA 4 AND SELECTBOARD MEMBER STEPHEN JOHNSON (SOUTHAMPTON) FOR SUB-AREA 5 AS ALTERNATE MEMBERS ON THE MPO. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

5. Review, Discussion, and MPO Approval of Two Administrative Adjustments to the FFY 2025 Transit Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) to Include 5310 Beyond ADA Operating Assistance (Community Transit Grant)

Andrew McCaul outlined the approval of adjustments to transportation funding aimed at enhancing accessibility for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Each year, the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) approves Highway and Transit Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs) based on predetermined funding amounts. However, additional funding is made available through a competitive process. Mr. McCaul discussed the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) category 5310 funds, which are intended to enhance accessibility to transit in areas where regional transit authorities cannot fully commit to their current funding.

The adjustments included operating assistance for services beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and funding for a travel training program. These adjustments were classified as such because the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) anticipated the availability of funding and placed placeholders within the TIPs. This classification enables adjustments to be made without necessitating a full-blown amendment and the associated 21-day public review process, thereby expediting the availability of funds.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY MARK GOLD, TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED ADJUSTMENTS TO THE FFY 2025 TRANSIT TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM AS PRESENTED. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY FOLLOWING A ROLL CALL VOTE.

6. Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) – FFY 2025 and FFY 2026 Updates

Mr. Roux provided an update on the status of the current and proposed work program for transportation planning. The work program summarized the transportation planning tasks anticipated for the federal fiscal year. The development schedule was aligned with the transportation improvement program, and a draft unified planning work program is expected to be released at the April, 2025, MPO meeting for a 21-day public review and comment period.

The major projects in the existing work program were reported to be on schedule, with completion expected by the end of the fiscal year in September. The only task extending into the next work program is the Regional Safety Compass, which analyzes crash experiences across 43 communities.

A slight budget increase of about 1.5% is anticipated, primarily funded by the bipartisan infrastructure law, with additional local funds for pavement management and a Safer Streets for All grant. Most funding is allocated towards transit and safety planning. The MPO actively solicited study requests from municipalities through both email and

direct conversations, with a particular emphasis on safety studies for vulnerable road users. They aim to assist communities with data collection and support for their planning efforts.

7. Review and Discussion of the Development of the FFY 2026-2030 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)-Project Scenario Discussion

Mr. McCaul outlined a preferred list of projects that will undergo analysis in the coming month, with the goal of presenting them for public review and endorsement by the end of April and May 2025, respectively. Mr. McCaul covered both transit and highway projects, detailing anticipated budgets, project rankings, and funding scenarios for the next five years. This included updates on bus replacements, shelter upgrades, ADA compliance, and facilities improvements, with a total spending of just under \$200 million. Additionally, A. McCaul discussed the ranking system for highway projects competing for regional discretionary money, highlighting specific projects that are either advancing or facing delays. Two scenarios for project funding and scheduling were presented, aiming to balance budgets and address cost increases.

Mayor Garcia inquired about the high-end Maple project and its placement in the funding list, indicating it may be funded in 2030 with a current cost of over \$16 million. Mr. McCaul responded that the project will likely be the next project to be funded in 2030, based on the current process. The current cost is slightly over \$16 million, and it is the second-highest-ranked project in the region. Mr. McCaul stated that the project will be included on the list when the draft is returned and explained that they had to adjust the current TIP to ensure projects were allocated in the appropriate funding year. A. McCaul presented two scenarios, with Scenario 2 being the better option, as it allows four projects to be funded in the first year.

Walter Gunn asked if the construction process for Long Meadow in Scenario 2 would be extended from 2025 into 2026 due to its length. Mr. McCaul confirmed that the criteria for advance construct projects are if they were going to take multiple construction seasons.

Stephen Woelfel asked about the graph showing all the cost overruns and where they typically occurred. Paula Simmons explained that they recently started a team called the SCEI team, for Scope Creep Elimination Initiative. They took a deep dive into all projects to pinpoint when and why cost increases and scope increases happened.

Joshua A. Garcia expressed frustration over the high-end Maple project taking too long and being delayed for over 10 years. He noted a desire to ensure there are no new conflicts that would add more years to the project. L. Hanson mentioned that there would be a road safety audit in Holyoke for the upcoming week and offered to forward the invitation.

8. 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 projects, focusing on their current statuses and timelines. The Longmeadow project is currently at the Preliminary Study and Engineering (PS&E) stage, with environmental clearance pending following the issuance of the Right-of-Way certificate on March 12, 2025. Review comments were completed on March 7, 2025. The Springfield I91 project has issued a Notice to Proceed (NTP) to Eurovia Atlantic on March 18, 2025, with construction commencement awaited. The AGWAM project also received an NTP on March 12, 2025, and bids for the West Hampton bridge maintenance were opened on March 11, 2025. For Fiscal Year 2026, the South Hadley Main Street reconstruction project is under review after submitting a revised 25% plan on March 19, 2025. Meanwhile, another project is awaiting environmental clearance and completion of the right-of-way process.

District One provided updates, noting that in the current Federal Fiscal Year 2025, MassDOT is overseeing two bridge preservation projects. The first project, located in Cummington on Route 9 over the Westfield River, is currently in the final design phase. The designer is addressing comments from the Department of Environmental Protection regarding stormwater mitigation. The second project is located in Huntington, on Route 112, spanning the CSX railroad over the Westfield River, which has experienced cost increases primarily due to steel repairs. For Fiscal Year 2026, the reconstruction of Mountain Street in Williamsburg is progressing, with a 75% design received from Hoyle, Tanner & Associates, and MassDOT is currently wrapping up its review. Additionally, the Chesterfield project for the reconstruction of North Road and Damon Pond Road is awaiting permit approval from the Office of Dam Safety within the Department of Conservation and Recreation, which is anticipated to be received this summer. The town has already conducted its town meeting to approve the right-of-way acquisition process.

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

Sandra Sheehan reported that the PVTA recently held an advisory board meeting, during which several significant updates were discussed. The Board approved new services effective March 23, 2025, including the Crosstown Route X94, which will operate seven days a week between East Longmeadow, Springfield, and Ludlow. Additionally, Sunday service was approved for the B17 route on Wilbraham Road in Springfield, as well as the G19 and R22 routes serving Holyoke, South Hadley, and Chicopee.

A Title 6 analysis will be conducted for proposed service improvements in the fall, focusing on routes between Amherst, South Hadley, and Holyoke. Construction updates were provided for the UMass transit facility, which is undergoing an \$8 million expansion, and the Cottage Street facility, which has a construction kickoff meeting the week of March 31 for its \$32 million expansion. Furthermore, new buses ordered in the fall are expected to arrive in 2026 due to an 18-month manufacturing schedule.

10. Other Business

The next MPO meeting is scheduled for April 22, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

There being no further discussion, a motion was called to adjourn the meeting.

MOVED BY WALTER GUNN, SECONDED BY MARK GOLD, TO ADJOURN TODAY'S METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION MEETING. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 10:52 A.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

List of Documents and Other Items Distributed at the March 25, 2025, Meeting

1. Metropolitan Planning Organization March 25, 2025, Presentation