

Massachusetts Statewide Community Transportation Coordination Conference May 5, 2015

Understanding Regional Planning Agencies and Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Presenters:

- Nick Burnham, Assistant Transportation Planner - Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission
- Angie Azevedo, Senior Transportation Planner & Mobility Manager - Southeastern Regional Economic Development District
- Chris Kuschel, Regional Planner - Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Nick Burnham provided an overview of the structure and function of Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). RPAs provide a variety of services including economic development, community, environmental and transportation planning. There are 13 RPAs statewide, CMRPC does planning for Worcester and 39 surrounding towns. RPAs also act as staff to the MPOs, which are federally mandated consortia consisting of governmental bodies, transit agencies, planning agencies and local officials. MPOs are responsible for programming federal transportation funds. See also the accompanying PowerPoint presentation.

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is a 20 year plan, updated every 4 years, which identifies regional investment priorities in land use, community issues, economic development, livability and, climate change. Public input is important. Suggestions for priorities and projects can come from municipalities, MassDOT, RTAs, private carriers, citizen ideas and public outreach.

Angie Azevedo described her role as a transit planner working with two regional transit agencies (SRTA and GATRA), including maintaining SRTA's website and Facebook page, running sample programs, route planning, and conducting local studies and rider surveys. SRPEDD also was contracted to complete SRTA's comprehensive service assessment and is consulting with GATRA to do theirs. Angie also participates in regional meetings, including the Regional Coordinating Council, and helps with outreach events. She has been active in coordination efforts for a long time, including the SE Mass Transportation Alliance and is focused on how to better use resources.

Chris Kuschel works for MAPC, which covers the metro Boston area and is the sister agency to the Central Transportation Planning Service (CTPS), both of which are members and staff to the Boston MPO. MAPC focuses on high level, long-term, master planning, including setting principles and visions. They also conduct transportation specific planning, especially for municipalities around such things as bike path planning and parking analysis. They operate with a variety of funding sources; some communities provide funding.

Chris focuses on “Complete Streets”, which are streets and roads comfortable and safe for everyone – drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. They do a lot of education and outreach to increase awareness and buy in for complete streets policies. In the metro Boston area a dozen communities have adopted or are developing such policies; in 2013 Littleton won best complete streets policy in the US and Acton was in the top 10. Communities can start with low cost short term solutions such as creating bike lanes through reallocating space and painting lines. This is all part of the smart growth approach to addressing how people get around. Audience members wanted more information on how to get input into the planning process. Panelists described the public forums and methods of notification when a 30 day comment period begins for a particular plan. It is a good idea to check the website of the planning agency or ask to be put on their mailing list. For major projects, they will notify homes and businesses in the area.