

Massachusetts Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Board Meeting Notes
Wednesday, November 20, 2024, 1:00 – 3:00 PM
Berkshire Innovation Center, Pittsfield

Welcome & Introductions: Pete Sutton, ex-officio, called the meeting to order and called roll.

Discussion around MassDOT's Beyond Mobility Study Priority Area: Travel Experience

Derek Krevat, Manager of MPO Activities, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning provided a brief update (attached) on MassDOT's Beyond Mobility long-range planning tool. The Massachusetts 2050 Transportation Plan is a planning process that will result in a blueprint for guiding transportation decision-making and investments in Massachusetts in a way that advances MassDOT's goals and maximizes the equity and resiliency of the transportation system. Input was sought regarding reliability action items being prioritized in the plan, specifically:

- Problem statements including Massachusetts travelers by any mode experience congestion and travel delay, resulting in low confidence about the conditions they will encounter and diminished access to everyday needs; Roadway congestion diminishes the reliability of public transit bus service, limiting its attractiveness and competitiveness
- Key facts from data collection and survey respondents
- Tracking connectivity action items including regional rail services, multimodal freight movement and coordination with rail-based freight providers

Questions and comments included:

- In terms of transit reliability, there's been some struggles to get full staffing on bus routes. You'll see many alerts that bus service has been reduced, or early and late routes have been truncated. If there's a way we can work towards getting full staffing at our regional transit authority (RTA), that would be a big help for the transit reliability in general around the Berkshires
- There was talk recently regarding bus driver training at Berkshire Community College – has that happened yet?
 - There has been some driver training for commercial drivers licensing (CDL) due to its more lucrative nature. It is also worth noting that if you drive a bus in Berkshire County, you're not an employee of Berkshire Regional Transit Authority - it's another company (Berkshire Transit Management). They are two separate entities.
- Recently there was a press release about many regional transit authorities statewide waiving their fares - basically providing free service. Do you think that will result in increased ridership and more service? Do the two go hand in hand? Could it be a possibility?
 - Definitely think so. The data that we've seen from RTAs that have offered fair free service is very much showing that it does increase ridership. Worcester Regional Transit Authority in particular has experienced a pretty significant ridership boost
 - Beyond Mobility plan makes the case for fair-free service, referencing the ongoing efforts that some RTAs are implementing and MBTA as well. It's an important policy going forward
 - City of Pittsfield confirms that ridership within BRTA has increased since free fares were introduced
- In terms of micro mobility, let's take the example of Valley Bike or scooter share. In Pittsfield, for instance, you had a public service (for e-scooters) that was privately funded. The funding dries up, the service goes away. Specifically for the biking and walking aspect of things, I'm wondering if there's something that MassDOT can do to bolster, support, underline, and make more resilient these types of micro mobility shares? I think it was very successful in Pittsfield
 - MassDOT has had some success in the past with metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) to fund things like bike share. Valley Bike - the original contract with Bewegen - was funded through Federal funds through the Pioneer Valley MPO
 - Using Federal formula funds, such as CMAQ funding - at least capital purchases for bike share are all eligible under that source, and it's upwards to \$1 million plus dollars available
- Is there something that Beyond Mobility could have as one of its goals - of not having to be like a positive business model? But rather some sort of business model support similar to the RTA systems where bike share micromobility share is not at the whim of venture capital?
 - MassDOT would like to explore more options using state funding - there's less strings attached than with federal funding. They'll only fund 3 to 5 years of bike share. It's not necessarily a sustainable source of funding

- BRPC is trying to bring bike share out here to Berkshire County as well, with start-up funding being a main issue - you need some type of state dollars program or other subsidy to assist
 - City of Pittsfield estimated \$1 million per year to operate bike share – cost-prohibitive to some despite the strong support and ridership
- What are the economics on a bike share program versus the MassBike-sponsored Worcester e-bike lending program?
 - They are different models, but I would say, if you compare it to other public transit services - what's the return on investment on funding a bus or running a train or re-striping a highway? - I think it's pennies to the dollar
 - If you think of it as transit or public mobility, and less as something that could make money per user - which is kind of defeats point about all this movement to fare free - takes that fare box collection out of the equation when you're thinking about budget
- What are MassBike's thoughts on getting cyclists their own e-bikes as opposed to using e-bike share?
 - The City of Boston is currently utilizing both – and MassBike is monitoring the effects
- People are riding bikes. They're not using the highway. So that's cost savings down the road. Get less people on the road. You know you're saving money in the long run. Boston is a unique example, because the Blue Bikes are heavily subsidized by Blue Cross/Blue Shield (which is why they're called Blue Bikes). They have a major financial backer. You're not going to find that anywhere else in the state - the critical mass of people. It just doesn't exist out here for better or for worse
- Valley Bike is mostly supporting the colleges: UMASS Amherst has 50,000 students. You're not going to buy bikes for all of those students. This is where bike share is most effective.
- There's data that has been circulated around in multiple studies: the true cost (or hidden cost) of moving around and what is really subsidized: when we start flipping the argument that driving is heavily subsidized, and the only thing we think about being subsidized is public transportation
- We need to start thinking about how much money we all spend as a society, for every dollar spent on driving versus public transportation, biking, walking and reframing it that way. I think this issue is important, though difficult to communicate
- Is there any data yet from the free bus service resulting in riders ditching their cars?
 - MassDOT isn't aware of any data yet, but is something we're interested in, particularly one angle would just be not driving but then also if they're actually no longer owning a car
 - It could be something to pitch within MassDOT's Office of Performance, Management and Innovation - this sounds like something would be right up their alley. I would imagine that as more fare-free service comes online, there will probably be some kind of intercept survey or something related, just asking people: Would you have driven instead?
- I think the ability to put bikes on the bus is critical. My husband fixes bikes, which we then give away to immigrants. The lengthy distances here between where the bus stops and where people have to go is just not workable unless you can use both in tandem
- Why aren't e-bikes not allowed on buses?
 - Many e-bikes are simply too heavy or the battery prevents the bike from fitting onto a standard rack in front of a bus. But it is a good example of the first-last mile connection. That's the whole appeal of bike share and scooter share in general: where it's a little bit too far to walk, and you don't want to drive. That's the sweet spot right there
- Regarding reliability, proper access to and from transit hubs or stations, and then secure bike parking with charging stations is needed. I think that's something MassDOT can double-down on
- We've had the back-and-forth discussion about bikes on the commuter rail at certain hours and on certain trains. I think that adds to the unreliability of using the system holistically
- Making sure that there are both pathways and safe walking to and from the stations to prevent people from being feeling safe to ride there and then also, when they get there, where they can leave their bike in a secure way that's under watch and lock and key and charge
- Many transit riders in the Berkshires tend to flag a bus instead of going to a station, so having reliably safe streets and roads to walk on, including more sidewalks and designated bus stops instead of standing in the grass by the side of the road
- It's unlikely that bus stops would be built every quarter mile along a road like Route 7, but Pittsfield will benefit from more actual discrete bus stops in the city, at least
- I don't know exactly when the bus is going to pass the point where I need to flag it, and so, if I miss it, then I missed it for an hour, so that's a big reliability issue. That's a bit of a disincentive to ride the bus. I'd sooner walk or borrow a relative's car or bike instead

- As far as Beyond Mobility goes - is the fact MassDOT is not really focusing on roadway expansion. This is particularly relevant in North Adams, where there's potential to remove some excess roadway. The Route 2/8 overpass that crosses right through the heart of downtown. Would that fall under that rubric of roadway reduction?
 - Yes, there is an ongoing study funded by a federal Reconnecting Communities grant
 - There are community input sessions currently taking place - being overseen by MassDOT
- Ensure there are crosswalks adjacent to bus stops. There are few bus stops on Route 9 in Hadley where people run across traffic because it's a half a mile or more to the next marked crossing
 - MassDOT is paying more attention to these areas, especially in terms of all the work that we're doing now with vulnerable road users, so duly noted
- There is a bus stop in front of Tourists on Route 2 that there's a matching one across the street. When it was installed, a crosswalk was painted there to get to the other side. It washed away, and was never repainted, and that was seven years ago, and I have given up trying to get it repainted. If anybody can get a crosswalk back there that would be spectacular
 - Noted by MassDOT District 1

Overview on Pittsfield Bicycle/Pedestrian Projects and Initiatives Ricardo Morales, Commissioner of Public Utilities gave an overview presentation (attached) on Complete Streets improvements to roadways in the downtown area such as North St, Tyler St, East St, First St and West St. New roundabout construction was also highlighted as well as safety upgrades near Berkshire Medical Center. Questions and comments included:

- Are there any improvements in the works as far as connectivity to the Amtrak station?
 - The City plans to improve local connections via a Reconnecting Communities grant pending its continuation with the new Administration in 2025. There may also be opportunities for station access improvements with state funding tied to the East-West Rail expansion between Boston and Albany
- Is there a physical divider between the pedestrian sidewalk and the separated bike lane on North St? This is an issue for pedestrians with vision loss
 - Presently, there is a curb separating the buffered bike lanes (at street level) with the sidewalk. Future designs will have both bike lanes and sidewalks at the same level separated by a buffer for utility poles, seating and other street furniture

Updates and input on BRPC's Safety Action Plan Nick Russo, Senior Transportation Planner, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission presented on the latest developments (attached) related to improving safety on the region's roads through the federally funded Safe Streets and Roads for All program. Steps being taken currently include:

- A long-term project to reduce fatalities and serious injuries down to zero, as part of the national "Vision Zero" framework
- Focus resources equitably to communities who stand to benefit the most from reducing casualties and increasing transportation options
- Early 2025: publish Action Plan
- The years ahead: continue tracking safety statistics in the Berkshires and apply for implementation grants for proposed projects

Questions and comments included:

- Glad to see MassDOT data being used, such as the crash IMPACT website and all the other stats that go along with it. We're using that on a daily basis internally as well. And we're about to roll out the next phase of our bike and pedestrian plan updates, which is the Next Generation Bike/Ped Vision Map that a lot of people who are regular MABPAB attendees have been seeing updates and presentations on throughout the year
- The City of Pittsfield is also using this data to make the case for safety upgrades on First St, which was recently selected as a high priority within MassDOT's Municipal Paving program. It is hoped that other minor safety upgrades - such as raised crosswalks - can also be included
- Is there a breakout cohort of all the other 12 regional planning agencies that are doing this? And if not, how can BRPC do some skill sharing because you're doing great work for the county. And I understand your needs are different than Cape Cod, for example. But similar practices, similar challenges are being met. MassBike is encouraging, a broader statewide push

- I think the MA Vision Zero Coalition could be an ideal forum for this kind of outreach, even though they are largely advocacy based. Some municipalities are establishing their own Vision Zero initiatives
- Great that this kind of work is happening all across the state: in and around Boston, Lynn, Somerville, Quincy have been doing similar studies, and I'm glad to see it's reach basically in every corner of the Commonwealth

Updates and input on upcoming MassDOT projects in District 1 Chris Sorensen, Complete Streets Engineer, MassDOT District 1 presented on a list of projects (attached) funded for construction within MassDOT's 2025-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), including:

- Extensions to the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail into North Adams and Pittsfield (along Route 9)
- Complete Streets projects on Ashland St in North Adams and Rte 112 in Buckland
- Lee Bikeway

Questions and comments included:

- Is there another project (in Dalton) on Dalton Division Road. And is that going to have some bike and pedestrian upgrades to it as well?
 - Yes MassDOT is currently working with the Town on preliminary design. It is unique in the fact that the road bisects the town municipalities – Pittsfield and Dalton

Other Announcements

- Pete Sutton mentioned 2025 the MassTrails grant round is now open and accepting applications until February 3
- Tourists Resort and BRPC along with the town of Adams, the City of North Adams, Mass. MOCA and the Town of Williamstown applied for a Federal RAISE grant (Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity). The application received an 8 out of 8 score, yet despite that was not funded. Instead it was short-listed as a Project of Merit to undergo further review within the next couple of months. Any support at the local or national level is now needed
- Next MAPBPAB meeting: January 22, virtual, 1-3 pm.
- List of board members in attendance (see below)
- Other attendees:
 - Dawn Nims (MassDOT D2)
 - Cheryl Ann Senior (MassDOT D5)
 - Josh Grzegorzewski (FHWA)
 - Peter Frieri (MassDOT D1)
 - Lorenzo Varone (MassDOT)
 - Joyia Smikle (CCC)
 - Casey Cooper (CTPS)
 - Jess Slavin (MassBike)
 - Barbara Lachance (MassDOT D5)
 - Tony Collins (MVRPC)
 - Jon Gray (SRPEDD)
 - Kyle Mowatt (OCPC)
 - Francisco Lovera (MassDOT)
 - Shawn Bailey (OCPC)
 - Mark Moore (MassDOT D1)
 - Amanda Lewis (DCR)
 - Courtney Worhunsky (MassDOT)
 - Emily Paskewicz (ECGA)
 - Anthony Vona (MassDOT D1)
 - Alexandria Papadimoulis (DPH)
 - Sarah Cannamela (MassDOT D2)
 - Adam Wriggins (CMRPC)
 - Phoebe Whitwell (MassDOT)

- Pedro Hernandez (MassDOT)
- Sandy Johnston (MBTA)
- Mike Burns (NPEDC)
- Kelly Lynema (NMCOCG)
- Ben Muller (MassDOT D6)
- Ryan Griffis (BRPC)
- Alexis Hosea-Abbott (MassBike)
- Marge Cohan (Berkshire Bike Path Committee)
- Eric Kerns (Tourists Resort)
- Morgan Everett (Mass MOCA)

MA BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN ADVISORY BOARD

Board Member Sign-In Sheet November 20, 2024 – Pittsfield

Member Name	Attended	Notes
Tom DiPaolo MassDOT-Highway	no	
Peter Robie MBTA	no	
Pete Sutton MassDOT-Planning	yes	
Kurt Gaertner EOEEA	no	
Gerald Autler DCR	no	
Jaclyn Youngblood MassDOT	no	
Kirby Lecy DPH	yes	
Charlie Ticotsky MOTT	yes	
Andrea Papa EOPSS	no	
Jeff McCollough MARPA	no	
Jessica Boulanger MARPA	no	
Jackie Jones MARPA	yes	
Jeff Larason – public member	no	
Keith MacDonald – public member (South Coast Bikeway Alliance)	no	
Galen Mook – MassBike	yes	
Karin Goins – public member (Walk/Bike Worcester)	yes	
Seun Oluwole – public member	no	
James Fuccione - public member (Mass. Healthy Aging Collaborative)	yes	
Cheryl Casper – public member	no	
Sam Squalia – public member (Fitchburg City Council)	yes	

Brendan Kearney - WalkBoston	yes	
Maureen White - public member	no	
Ed Sinofsky – public member (Cape Cod Cycling Club)	yes	
Karen Foster – public member (All Out Adventures)	no	
Meg Robertson – public member	yes	
Alice Brown – public member (Boston Harbor Now)	no	

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