



October 19, 2018

Leah Sirmin  
Federal Transit Administration  
55 Broadway, Suite 920  
Cambridge, MA 02142

Nelson Hoffman  
Federal Highway Administration  
55 Broadway, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Cambridge, MA 02142

RE: evaluation of Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization transportation planning process

Dear Leah and Nelson,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the transportation planning process for the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). As a statewide pedestrian advocacy organization, WalkBoston recognizes and appreciates the significant work the MPO does to advance major transportation projects throughout Eastern Massachusetts. We offer the following comments as to how the MPO might even better serve the public to help realize its ambitious planning goals.

First, at a broad level the MPO meetings are structured primarily for agency and municipal input. This is reflected in the composition of the MPO's board as well. We encourage the MPO to create clearer mechanisms for public engagement and to consider changing its meeting and decision-making structures to encourage a greater ease of public comment. For example, the MPO could consider adding representation of residents and community-based organizations to its board and committee structures. The MPO could also ask municipalities to share reports on public comments they have received on local projects to help ensure that residents' perspectives are reflected in the MPO's proceedings.

Second, we are concerned that a lack of public access to the data and analyses prepared by MPO staff precludes the public's ability to meaningfully engage in the MPO process. This also raises questions about the underlying factors that influence how major decisions are ultimately made. We offer two illustrative examples: the South Boston Waterfront Sustainable Transportation Plan and the Lower Mystic Regional Working Group study. The data underpinning the South Boston Plan were never released to the public despite repeated requests, and as a new study is now being done about the future roadway elements of the Northern Avenue Bridge, the lack of information from the previous study makes it difficult to understand the full picture about future transportation options. Similarly, the technical information and modeling results behind the Lower Mystic Regional Working Group study were

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not shared with the public, despite great public interest in how the findings were being used to influence decisions about the design of Sullivan Square and Rutherford Avenue.

Transparency is critical to ensure the public's trust in shaping transportation projects that may impact our region for generations. We understand that the MPO often prepares studies for other agencies and as a result might not have full control over the data in question. That said, we encourage the MPO to work with its client partners to ensure that the assumptions and data behind important studies and projects are released to the public in a clear and timely fashion.

Finally, we encourage the MPO to present information about projects to the public in more accessible formats. The data tables that describe Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) projects are often large and unwieldy and as a result can be difficult to read and interpret. While we appreciate the depth of information these tables provide, we encourage the MPO to also consider different formats so that members of the public can better grasp the mix, timing and content of TIP projects.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on these issues and feel free to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Landman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Landman  
Executive Director

Cc: Karl Quackenbush, MPO