



Franklin Regional Council of Governments

Franklin Regional Planning Board— *MINUTES*

Date & Time:	Thursday, January 21, 2021 / 6:00 – 7:300 p.m.
Meeting Link:	https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84812697279?pwd=WFZwMTh3dVpTNGtndFBHakZ2SVdBdz09
Facilitator:	Jerry Lund, Chair - FRPB; Peggy Sloan, Planning Director - FRCOG

FRPB MEMBERS

- Jerry Lund**, Chair, Leyden, At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Julia Blyth**, Clerk, Northfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, Rep. to the Connecticut River Streambank Erosion Committee
- James Basford**, Orange At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee, FRPB Rep. to the FRCOG Council, FRCOG Executive Committee, Rep. to the Route 2 Task Force
- Steven Blinder**, New Salem Planning Board
- Marybeth Chichester**, Colrain Planning Board
- Ron Coler**, Ashfield At-Large
- Stanley Garland**, Bernardston Select Board
- Jennifer Gross**, Wendell Select Board, FRPB Executive Committee
- Wayne Hachey**, New Salem Select Board, FRCOG Council
- Thomas Hutcheson**, 1st Vice Chair, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Exec. Comm., Rep. to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee
- Elizabeth (Betsy) Irving**, Montague Planning Board
- Richard Nathhorst**, Leverett Planning Board
- Charles Olchowski**, Greenfield At-Large, FRPB Executive Committee
- Bill Perlman**, FRCOG Executive Committee – Regionally Elected
- Phil Pless**, Ashfield At-Large
- Dana Roscoe**, Sunderland Planning Board
- Mike Shaffer**, Erving Planning Board
- Jane Shaney**, Ashfield Planning Board
- David Travers**, Heath Select Board, FRPB representative to the Transportation Planning Organization
- Alec Wade**, Orange Select Board
- Chuck Washer**, Shelburne Select Board, FRPB Rep. to the REPC
- Analee Wulfkuhle**, Deerfield Planning Board

FRCOG STAFF

Peggy Sloan, Planning & Development Director; **Maureen Mullaney**, Transportation & GIS Program Manager II; **Meghan Rhodes**, Sr. Transportation & Land Use Planner; **Liz Jacobson-Carroll**, Administrative Services Assistant;

PRESENTERS/GUESTS

Robert Cherdak, Ashfield Planning Board

1. Introductions and Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes	J. Lund, Chair – FRPB & FRPB Members
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J. Lund convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. **Members introduced themselves as they voiced their vote on a motion by Olchowski, that was seconded by Hutcheson, to approve the minutes of the 11/05/20 meeting; the motion passed with three abstentions (Blinder, Chichester, Roscoe)**

2. Presentations and Discussion on Transportation Planning Projects – Passenger Rail [<i>East-West Study & Valley Flyer Marketing</i>], Transportation & Climate Initiative, Microtransit Program and Rideshare Project	M. Mullaney, Transportation and GIS Program Manager II and Megan Rhodes, Sr. Transportation & Land Use Planner II - FRCOG
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Mullaney provided an overview of the passenger rail in the region, focusing on the recently completed East-West study, and on the currently paused Valley Flyer marketing initiative. The study, rather than concluding with the selection of a single route, selected three (of the six options considered) for further study, she said, and recommended that attendees read the report available on the mass.gov site. (<https://www.mass.gov/lists/east-west-passenger-rail-study-documents#east-west-passenger-rail-study-final-report>). The three possibilities include:

Alternative 3:

- Upgraded track between Pittsfield and Springfield, restores missing double track
- Shared CSX track from Springfield to Worcester, Shared MBTA track east of Worcester
- 8 roundtrips per weekday
- 3:09 Pittsfield to Boston/1:57 Springfield to Boston
- 922-1188 passengers per weekday
- Up to 70 mph Pittsfield to Sprfld; 80-90 mph east
- 30 at grade crossing improvements required
- \$2.4 billion

Alternative 4:

- Upgraded track between Pittsfield and Springfield, restores missing double track
- New independent track in shared CSX corridor between Springfield and Worcester, and shared MBTA track east of Worcester
- 10 roundtrips per weekday
- 2:59 Pittsfield to Boston/1:47 Springfield to Boston
- 1157-1379 passengers per weekday
- Up to 70 mph Pittsfield to Sprfld; up to 110 mph east
- 30 at grade crossing improvements required
- \$3.9 billion

A Hybrid of Alternatives 3 & 4:

- Upgraded track between Pittsfield and Springfield, restores missing double track
- New independent track with high speed shortcuts in shared CSX corridor between Springfield and Worcester, and shared MBTA track east of Worcester
- 10 roundtrips per weekday
- 2:49 Pittsfield to Boston/1:37 Springfield to Boston
- 1296-1554 passengers per weekday
- Up to 70 mph Pittsfield to Sprfld; up to 110 mph east

- 27 at grade crossing improvements required
- \$4.6 billion

Mullaney reviewed the pros and cons of each, but explained that there is a need for further evaluation; the first study did not adequately take into account the environmental or community impacts of each alternative (nor did it accurately gauge ridership, she and others believe). Further, there will be additional discussion and evaluation of CSX, economic and community benefits, potential governance structures, and funding. She added that this work will continue apace in order to enable the legislative delegation to include it in the anticipated federal infrastructure bill. In response to questions, and some discontent, Mullaney explained that there will be a subsequent study of passenger rail for the Northern tier of the state. Hutcheson spoke of the need of a comprehensive statewide policy that takes into account broader considerations such as global warming and long-term economic sustainability. Nathorst voiced his support for electric trains.

Mullaney brought the group up to date regarding the Valley Flyer, which was exceeding ridership expectations soon after it launched in August 2019, but has been negatively affected by the pandemic. She shared images and the overall strategy of the planned marketing campaign – originally scheduled to begin in April 2020, now planned to start in April 2021 at the earliest.

Massachusetts has now formally joined the Transportation Climate Initiative (TCI), a collaboration between 12 states and the District of Columbia to lessen pollution created by the transportation sector, Mullaney was pleased to report. TCI will generate income by taxing energy-generating companies that will then invest in energy-saving technologies and infrastructure. Each jurisdiction (the Commonwealth of MA, for instance) will determine how to spend its own proceeds; all of them pledge to distribute the resulting benefits equitably within their populations. Investments might involve making infrastructure more resilient to climate change, improving public transit, subsidizing clean vehicles, and promoting smart-growth communities, among other possibilities.

Rhodes described the ongoing pilot of a micro-transit ride-sharing program in Franklin County, run by the FRTA, serving recipients of seven social service agencies through a partnership created by the FRCOG. The program introduces flexibility into the existing system, enabling it to respond to the needs of agency clients with customized stops along and near regular routes to and from local senior centers, as van capacity and schedule allow. While the needs of senior citizens and individuals with disabilities served by the established routes retain priority, the algorithm-based dispatch system is filling vans and successfully serving a broader clientele, she said. Post-pandemic, the program will expand to enable trained agency staff to schedule subsidized rides for clients in private rideshare vehicles when transit van pickup is not practical. FRCOG will report on this demonstration project, suggesting ways to replicate and scale the system for other populations and regions. There was discussion about the needs of particular towns, and marketing strategies. Rhodes will send a website link and brochures to members following the meeting.

3. Nomination and Vote for E. Johnson – Deerfield, for FRPB Executive Committee	J. Lund, Chair FRPB Executive Committee
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Roscoe moved to nominate and vote for Emily Johnson, FRPB Deerfield At-Large, to become a member of the FRPB Executive Committee; Basford seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Update on FERC Relicensing	P. Sloan, Planning Director – FRCOG
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Sloan reviewed the re-licensing status of FirstLight to generate hydro-power at Northfield Mountain in Turners Falls, noting that it had submitted its application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in December for a license to operate for the next 30 to 50 years. Area environmental organizations and municipalities, collaborating with FRCOG, have articulated deficiencies in the company’s environmental analysis, specifically noting that its impact on erosion in the Connecticut River between the two sites is far greater than documented. These groups will hire a consultant to conduct environmental analysis, submit comments to FERC, and apply to FERC for intervenor status in the application review process. More specifically, the collaborators will argue that the hydro-power operation is causing significant loss of farmland and habitat, and that license should not be granted – especially to pump a greater volume of water – without ample mitigation efforts undertaken first. Further, it will advocate for new and improved recreational facilities in affected towns, including ADA-compliant sites.

5. Other Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting/Adjourn/Public Comment	J. Lund, Chair - FRPB
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Blyth moved to adjourn the meeting, Travers seconded the motion, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 PM.

Documents Distributed / Presentations Viewed:

- Agenda
- FRPB Minutes, November 5, 2020 – DRAFT
- FRPB 1-21-21 Transportation PowerPoint (presentation by Mullaney)
- (presentation by Rhodes)

The next meeting will be held on , 2021. Copies of all documents are available. Please contact Liz Jacobson-Carroll at ljc@frcog.org or 413-774-3167 x101.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Blythe, Clerk - FRPB