

Draft Minutes of the Southeastern Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization (SMMPO) Meeting on Tuesday, October 21, 2025, at 1:00 PM - Held remotely via Zoom.

The following members were in attendance:

Derek Shooster-----Representing Monica Tibbits-Nutt, Acting MassDOT Secretary, **Chair**
Shaun Handy-----Representing Jonathan Gulliver, MassDOT Highway Div. Administrator
Stacy Forte-----Representing Mary Ellen DeFrias, GATRA
Christina Mendoza-----Representing Erik Rousseau, SRTA
Cathleen DeSimone-----Mayor of Attleboro
Daniel Aguiar-----Representing Paul Coogan, Mayor of Fall River
Jamie Ponte-----Representing Jon Mitchell, Mayor of New Bedford
Josh Reinke-----Representing Michael Feck, Town of Mansfield
Sarah Hewins-----Town of Carver
Matthew Chabot-----Town of Berkley
Marie Clarner-----SRPEDD Commission Chair

No Ex-Officio, non-voting members were in attendance

The following were also in attendance:

Diane Hayes-----Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Barbara Lachance-----Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Arnav Chatterjee-----Massachusetts Department of Transportation
Dana Hanson-----Office of Congressman Auchincloss
Alan Slavin-----JTPG At-Large Commissioner/Wareham
Chris McDermott-----City of Attleboro
Miles Grant-----Town of Fairhaven
Laura Dias-----Town of Rehoboth
Bonnie Roalsen-----Aecom, MassDOT Safe Routes to School
Lisa Estrela-Pedro-----SRPEDD
Jackie Jones-----SRPEDD
Rebekah Rose-----SRPEDD
Dan Brogan-----SRPEDD
Noah Soutier-----SRPEDD
Jen Chaves-----SRPEDD

Handouts:

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order and Roll Call-

Chairman Derek Shooster called the SMMPO meeting to order at 1:00 pm. Ms. Lisa Estrela-Pedro asked all MPO members and designees to please unmute themselves so she could call the roll for attendance. She then called the complete roll of MPO members, with the following being present at the time of the roll call:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes
City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

2. Approval of Minutes – September 16, 2025 (Materials Attached and Roll Call Vote Needed)

Chairman Shooster requested a motion to approve the minutes from the September 16, 2025, SMMPO meeting. The motion was made by Jamie Ponte and seconded by Dan Aguiar. Ms. Estrela-Pedro then called the roll:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes
City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. Public Comments

Chairman Shooster invited members of the public to make comments. There were no comments presented.

4. Regional Transit Authorities Report – RTA Updates

Stacy Forte from GATRA provided an update on the Gateway Link service, which began operating in early August. Ridership has been steadily increasing, with approximately 2,266 riders over the past two months. The service connects Fall River, Taunton, and Brockton, allowing riders to transfer to additional regional hubs. Ms. Forte also noted that GATRA experienced a two-day strike at the end of September, though an agreement has been reached with the union. Once finalized, this agreement will allow for expanded service in the future, including Sunday and holiday operations.

Christina Mendoza from SRTA reported continued growth in ridership following the implementation of expanded Micro Connector zones and the addition of new service vans. Last week, the service reached a record high of 127 ride requests, marking the highest volume to date. Ridership has also continued to increase with the ongoing fare-free service. Ms. Mendoza noted that staff are working with MassDOT to develop the Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan (CRTP) and are pursuing several additional planning efforts, which include updates to public-facing schedules, revising Fall River Tribute Route schedules to be user-friendly, and beginning work on the 2025 Fiscal Year Ridership Report.

5. Draft Regional Evacuation Route Plan Discussion ([Link](#), Roll Call Vote Needed to Endorse)

Jackie Jones reported that the Draft Evacuation Route Study was released for public comment at the last MPO meeting. During the comment period, two well-attended public meetings were held, drawing a diverse group of participants who provided valuable feedback. Most comments focused on the next steps, aligning closely with related items in this year's work program. There was significant interest in tabletop exercises to test evacuation scenarios and in improving public communication during emergency events. In response, SRPEDD has incorporated additional work into this year's program to expand upon the study's recommendations.

Ms. Jones noted that minor revisions were made to the draft document, primarily formatting and word edits to improve clarity and readability by using more plain language in place of technical terms. The final version of the study is now available. She reminded members that voting to endorse the study; they are also endorsing the proposed evacuation routes. These designations reflect the expected traffic hierarchy during an evacuation. Ms. Jones added that SRPEDD has coordinated with MassDOT to integrate these routes into their databases to ensure consistency across agencies.

The Chair asked if there were any questions on the Regional Evacuation Route Plan and seeing none asked for a motion to endorse the Regional Evacuation Route Plan. The motion was made by Dan Aguiar and seconded by Josh Reinke. The Chair asked Ms. Estrela-Pedro to read the roll as follows:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes
City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. Draft SMMPO Public Participation Plan Update ([Link](#), Roll Call Vote Needed to release to 45-day public comment period)

Ms. Estrela-Pedro provided an overview of the Draft 2025 Public Participation Plan (PPP) Update. She explained that the PPP guides SMMPO staff in conducting public outreach and engagement during the development of transportation plans, projects, and services, with the goal of ensuring all residents have opportunities to participate in a continuous, cooperative, and comprehensive (3C) planning process. The update reflects recent policy changes, federal certification requirements, and lessons learned from recent engagement efforts such as community tabling and partner collaboration. Major updates include revised virtual meeting procedures, clarification of the public participation process for MPO work products, and significant restructuring to make the document easier to navigate. The plan now includes public engagement goals, principles, and evaluation of metrics focused on educating, emboldening, encouraging, and evaluating participation. The updated plan adds detailed public participation steps for each MPO work product, as well as clear explanations of outreach and engagement methods used by staff. Ms. Estrela-Pedro noted updates to the alternative meeting notice process, which now designates the SRPEDD website as the official posting location, and described new Zoom webinar procedures designed to enhance security and accessibility of meetings.

Marie Clarner commented on the presentation, noting the effective use of alliteration in several slides. She remarked that using this technique helps audiences better remember key points.

The Chair asked if there were any questions on the Draft Public Participation Plan Updates and seeing none asked for a motion to release it to a 45-day public comment period as presented. The motion was made by Marie Clarner and seconded by Cathleen DeSimone. The Chair asked Ms. Estrela-Pedro to read the roll as follows:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes
City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

7. Draft SMMPO Language Assistance Plan Update ([Link](#), Roll Call Vote Needed to release to 45-day public comment period)

Jen Chaves presented an update on the Language Assistance Plan (LAP), which was last updated in 2022. She explained that the plan ensures individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have equal access to SRPEDD’s programs, activities, and services, in accordance with Safe Harbor requirements. Vital documents must be translated when a language group represents 5% or 1,000 individuals in the service area, whichever is less. The plan is structured around a four-factor analysis, which assesses regional LEP populations and informs strategies for meaningful language assistance.

Factor 1 examines the number and proportion of LEP individuals in the region. While prior analyses relied on ACS data, newer ACS datasets group certain languages (e.g., Portuguese) into broader categories. To provide more detailed insight, SRPEDD also used data from the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) and the Department of Education. PUMS data, which covers ages 5 and older and includes a broader geographic area, identifies 47 languages, with top languages including Portuguese, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Department of Education data, which tracks English Language Learners (ELLs) in all school districts, identifies Spanish, Portuguese, and Creole as the top languages. Across all sources, Spanish consistently

emerges as the most prominent language, with Portuguese and Creole also significant. Ms. Chaves stated that while these datasets provide a foundation, outreach is tailored to local contexts, incorporating input from community partners to ensure effective communication.

Factor 2 considers the frequency of contact with LEP individuals, which primarily occurs during public events, MPO-hosted meetings, and coordination with social service organizations and advocates. Factor 3 addresses the importance of SRPEDD programs, activities, and services, ensuring the public understands planning processes and has opportunities to provide feedback. Factor 4 evaluates available resources, including funding for translation and interpreter services. SRPEDD provides assistance through translated documents, interpreter services on request, bilingual staff support, and a contract with the Language Line, which offers on-demand interpretation in over 170 languages. Outreach materials and surveys are routinely translated, and the SRPEDD website features Google Translate integration. Staff continually review Census and Department of Education data to monitor language trends and update the plan as needed. Ms. Chaves noted that the LAP is an integral part of SRPEDD's Title VI Program and is updated whenever significant changes in regional language demographics occur.

The Chair asked about the relationship between the Language Assistance Plan (LAP) update and the Public Participation Plan (PPP) update. Ms. Chaves explained that the two plans are coordinated to the extent possible. However, updates may occur independently if, for example, there is a major change in regional language demographics that requires a LAP update while the PPP does not require changes.

Laura Dias, an attendee from Rehoboth, inquired whether the discussion was specific to her community. The Chair clarified that the meeting was a Southeast Massachusetts MPO session, and that no Rehoboth-specific agenda items were being discussed. Laura noted that, while not directly on the agenda, her community is experiencing urban sprawl, gentrification, and external development pressures, which are impacting local employment, population stability, substance abuse, crime, and environmental resources, particularly water sources. She emphasized the challenges small towns face in regulating development through planning and zoning boards, citing a lack of consistency and protections for local residents, and expressed the community's desire to maintain its rural and agricultural identity. Ms. Dias also suggested literature to help understand ethical and local planning considerations, including John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*, and drew parallels to issues faced by farmers dealing with outside investors. The Chair thanked Ms. Dias for her comments and further clarified that the MPO is a decision-making body for surface transportation investments and the allocation of federal funds. Ms. Estrela-Pedro commented that broader concerns regarding urban sprawl, crime, and community planning fall outside the MPO's direct purview. She advised Laura to follow up with SRPEDD's Comprehensive Planning Department, offering to connect her with appropriate staff who could address these broader planning concerns.

The Chair asked if there were any other questions on the Draft SMMPO Language Assistance Plan Updates and seeing none asked for a motion to release it to a 45-day public comment period as presented. The motion was made by Marie Clarner and seconded by Dan Aguiar. The Chair asked Ms. Estrela-Pedro to read the roll as follows:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes
City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

8. FFY2026-2030 TIP Proposed Adjustment #1 – 1) Dartmouth- Corridor Improvements on Route 6, from Faunce Corner Road to Hathaway Road in FFY2026 - Funding Category Change & 2) New Bedford SS4A - Two Demonstration Projects Move from FFY2025 to FFY2026 and Funding Category Change (Materials Attached, Roll Call Vote Needed to Endorse)

Ms. Estrela-Pedro presented the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026–2030 TIP Proposed Adjustments. The adjustments affect FFY 2026 and involve two projects. The first is Project 607871, the Dartmouth Corridor Improvements on Route 6 from Faunce Corner Road to Hathaway Road, which is currently programmed with approximately \$11 million in regional target funds. The proposal reallocates part of the project, approximately \$3.6 million, with two discretionary earmarks, freeing additional regional target funds for other smaller projects that might be ready. The second change involves the New Bedford SS4A Demonstration Projects discretionary grant, originally programmed for 2025 but could not be advertised within that timeframe, and is now moved into FFY 2026.

The Chair asked if there were any other questions on the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026–2030 TIP Proposed Adjustments for Dartmouth and New Bedford and seeing none asked for a motion to approve these adjustments as presented. The motion was made by Marie Clarner and seconded by Dan Aguiar. The Chair asked Ms. Estrela-Pedro to read the roll as follows:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes
City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

9. FFY2026-2030 TIP Proposed Amendment #1 – 1) Addition of Flex Funds to Federal Transit Administration in FFY2026 for Mansfield to Logan Shuttle Bus (Blue Apple Bus) Year 4 Funding & 2) New Bedford Intersection Improvements at Mount Pleasant Street and Nash Road in FFY2028 - Cost Increase & Funding Category Change (Materials Attached, Roll Call Vote Needed to release to 21-day public comment period)

Ms. Estrela-Pedro presented the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026–2030 TIP Proposed Amendments. In FFY 2026, the amendment includes funding for the FTA Mansfield-to-Logan shuttle bus, the Blue Apple bus service, in its fourth year of funding. For FFY 2028, there is a cost increase for Project 610798, the New Bedford intersection improvements at Mount Pleasant Street and Nash Road, along with a change in funding category: while the project was previously funded entirely with regional target funds, approximately \$1.2 million will now be covered by a discretionary earmark.

The Chair asked if there were any other questions on the Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2026–2030 TIP Proposed Amendments for Mansfield and New Bedford and seeing none asked for a motion to release it to a 21-day public comment period as presented. The motion was made by Sarah Hewins and seconded by Dan Aguiar. The Chair asked Ms. Estrela-Pedro to read the roll as follows:

MassDOT Chair-----Yes
MassDOT Administrator-----Yes
City of Attleboro-----Yes

City of Fall River-----Yes
City of New Bedford-----Yes
Town of Mansfield-----Yes
Town of Carver-----Yes
Town of Berkley-----Yes
SRPEDD Commission Chair-----Yes
SRTA-----Yes
GATRA-----Yes

THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The Chair reminded communities that any discretionary grants, such as SS4A, must be programmed into the TIP before obligating or spending funds as part of their contracts. The earlier TIP adjustment for SS4A was necessary because it had been programmed in a previous TIP but not the current one. The Chair stated that TIP programming is required for all federal-aid investments and requested that communities promptly communicate any changes, including newly awarded or rescinded grants, to SMMPO staff. This ensures proper coordination with MassDOT and compliance with federal requirements. The Chair noted that the MPO is currently operating under the FFY 2026–2030 TIP program.

10. Other Business

Ms. Estrela-Pedro stated that a design public hearing for the Mattapoisett Corridor Improvements on Main, Water, Beacon, and Marion Roads, scheduled for December 4th, 2025, at 6:30 PM at Old Rochester Regional High School. Attendees were invited to reach out for additional information. The Chair reminded the group about the MassDOT “Moving Together” Conference, co-hosted with the UMass Transportation Center, taking place next Tuesday at the Sheraton Boston. The Chair noted that the event is currently at capacity but highlighted that the Innovation Conference in the spring will offer another opportunity for participation.

11. Date and Time for Next Meeting

The Chair announced that the next SMMPO meeting will be on November 18, 2025, at 1:00 pm, held virtually.

12. Adjourn

The Chair asked for a motion and second to adjourn. Cathleen DeSimone made the motion and Sarah Hewins seconded. The Chair asked that all in favor say aye. All ayes were heard. The Chair thanked everyone, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:50 PM.