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Summary: Annual Meeting-Fall River Country Club
Guest speaker: Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollock
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Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollock discussed the planning process and the series of related stages or steps that involve multiple agencies, studies, project coordination, funding mechanisms, and public participation. There is often an extended period of planning (sometimes years) from when an idea is first proposed to when an actual transportation project becomes reality. The five steps include:

1. Planning Studies

The first step of the project development process, a planning study, begins with a comprehensive evaluation of the existing and expected future transportation issues. Next, a set of alternatives is developed and screened based on a set of evaluation criteria established through an extensive public outreach effort. The study concludes with a set of recommendations to address the identified transportation issues. Many Massachusetts transportation agencies conduct these studies, including the MassDOT, the MassDOT Highway Division, the MBTA, MassPort, and the Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

2. Environmental Study

In the second step, the recommendations of the Planning Study are brought through the necessary permitting processes in an environmental study. Depending on the location and scale of the project, it may require permits at the local, state and/or federal level before it proceeds. The most common and comprehensive permitting processes are those of the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). Each of these processes requires a project to avoid, minimize and/or mitigate its impacts on environmental, cultural, and historical resources.

3. Funding Process

Once a project has been completed preliminary design, the project proponents -- the Town, MassDOT, the MBTA, or the RTA -- need to identify funding for the project. Commonly this is done through the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) process. An MPO is a regional transportation policy-making organization consisting of representatives from local government, regional transit operators, and state transportation agencies. MPOs create a fair and impartial setting for effective regional decision making in the metropolitan area with inclusionary approaches to effectively engage communities and stakeholders.

4. Final Design

With funding in place, the next phase of project development is the final design. During this phase of the project the final layout of the project and the design details are determined, and project proponents must also prepare final specifications and estimates. The final plans, specifications, and estimates must be submitted for review by the appropriate MassDOT Division and approved.

5. Implementation

The final step of the project development process is implementation of the project. During this phase, the project or service is advertised for bidding, a contract is awarded and the improvements are constructed under the supervision of the responsible MassDOT division.

Bicycles and walking

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) is committed to promoting bicycling and walking as an important mode that can help reduce emissions and support healthy lifestyles. Comprehensive efforts to increase bicycling and walking need to include ways to make walking and bicycling safer and more convenient, as well as public education efforts and promotion of walking as a viable mode of travel for residents and tourists.