

MWRC Minutes

Thursday, May 23, 2024
8:00-9:30 am
Via Zoom

Attendees

Ashland: Alvaro Esparza
Framingham: Rick McKenna
Holliston: Tina Hein, Barbara Peatie
Natick: Amanda Loomis, Morgan Griffiths
Marlborough: Katie Robey
Southborough: Sam Stivers, Meme Luttrell, Leah Emerson, Bill Cundiff
Sherborn: Robert Wolff, Heidi Doyle
Wayland: Mary Antes, Robert Hummel
Wellesley: Eric Arbeene
Weston: Laurie Bent, Imai Aiu
Associate Members: Jason Palitsch, 495 Partnership
MAPC Coordinators: Camille Jonlin, Travis Pollack
MAPC Additional Staff: None
MBTA: Sandy Johnston

Welcome & Roll Call

- Call to order at 8:04 with quorum reached.

Vote to Approve Workplan

- Tina: Discussed workplan in April. Any comments?
- Katie move to approve, Laurie second; approved

Election of Executive Board Members

- Pre-nominations: Yolanda Greaves as Chair, Amanda Loomis as Vice-Chair, Katie Robey as At-Large Member
- Laurie Bent offer to become Clerk, Rick McKenna offer to become At-Large Member
- Imai motion to approve, Barbara second; approved all nominations

MBTA Listening Session

- MBTA Whistle-Stop Tour presentation – Sandy Johnston, MBTA *[see presentation for more details]*
- Sandy works in Strategic Planning group at MBTA, you can reach out to Sandy if you have questions or want discussion with the T
- MBTA's crisis right now requires tough decisions and trade-offs of human, monetary, capital costs
- Partnerships are critical to the T's success, want more transparent decision-making

- MBTA starting long-range strategic capital plan (Program for Mass Transportation) and working on a sustainability assessment
- Want to have conversation with localities on needs, tensions, and conflicts – contact Sandy!
- Morgan Griffiths: what's the plan for third track rail or electrification or other long-range modernization of the Framingham Worcester line? Sandy: can connect us with the right person to discuss this and the Allston project; this is one of the higher priorities of the MBTA.
- Laurie Bent: used to be loyal rider of Fitchburg rail, but COVID changed everything; worried about that line and all commuter rail... worried about downward spiral of fewer riders, then fewer trains, and general spiral; how are you approaching this? Sandy: good question. Commuter rail has had strongest rider return of all MBTA modes since COVID, partially due to things like expanding and changing weekend service to be more consistent than pre-COVID (weekend ridership is now above pre-COVID in some cases) even if there is a bit lower peak hour ridership; trying to expand access to all people which does mean consistent service that's not just 9-5... more regular service on all lines is the goal.
- Laurie: looks like trains are pretty empty, could there be more frequent trains with fewer cars since the more frequent they are the more people use it? Sandy: that's the goal! 30-60 minute service everywhere would be great, maybe more frequent on the inner part of the Framingham-Worcester Line. The highest cost is labor. With the current fleet we can't always have fewer cars/smaller more nimble trains, but could happen when fleet is electrified.
- Laurie: two stops in Weston that closed, they were great since people walked to the train but now people drive to Kendall Green and the capacity for ridership depends on parking availability there, and if people can't count on parking, they won't take the train – so need the walkable stops at Hastings and Silver Hill. Sandy: will pass on question to specific team members, not sure. Some of what happens in Weston depends on progress with the Weston Multimodal Center concept advanced in MassDOT's Route 128 Transportation and Land Use study, which is dependent on a private-sector development.
- Robert Wolff: Assume commuter stations have bike racks, but don't typically have weather-covered facilities or pedal and park facilities; more adults have started using e-bikes; is there any program or budget to upgrade bike storage facilities at commuter rail stations and/or do you need local support for this? Sandy: both/and. New deputy director dedicated to bike and ped access to stations (Pete Robie), but there isn't much money for it; new MPO money for modernizing 12 existing stations for pedal and park facilities. MBTA becoming more willing to work with localities on small-dollar station-specific projects that use Federal funding; MPO Community Connections program is good for location-specific projects like this.
- Katie Robey: Marlborough dealing with last mile to get to Southborough station; do have RTAs but it doesn't run often enough; concern is how often RTA runs, hard for workers to use. Town used to have shuttle that connected to Southborough but was eliminated due lack of funding. Sandy: RTAs have been fortunate in the state budget process, MWRTA is one of the most proactive; frequencies definitely need to be improved with state support; MBTA is moving toward better coordinating schedules between RTA and MBTA, including new weekend service, earlier morning, later at night; MBTA can play the connecting role but it's up to state legislature for RTA funding.
- Sam Stivers: past conversations about adding parking capacity e.g. second level of parking at Southborough, is this possible? Sandy: MBTA doesn't have a good handle on the demand post-COVID, would want to leverage this group's local knowledge; thinks no parking expansions planned in CIP this year but recognize it is fundamental to commuter rail ridership.
- Eric Arbeene: ADA accessibility of commuter rail stations is needed, they're not right now so people can't go to stations. Sandy: recognize this, important across commuter rail stations, piloting an idea for interim mini-high platforms in Beverly and rolling out the concept across the system and need funding to modernize stations.
- Imai Aiu: thank you Sandy for doing this – great to have a real contact at MBTA, including in relation to 3A. Question regarding your past MPO role: we want funding for Route 30 project from the TIP, critical connection from Weston to Riverside and Brandeis; want bike and ped access

since this is a first/last mile project to the T. Sandy: not as much conversation on this, but will talk to MPO.

- Rick McKenna: Is MBTA looking into branding and public relations? People ask about MBTA as a broken system - how to change image of MBTA. Sandy: not sure, PR team is working on this. Focus is on restoring service to a state of good repair, and this should translate to PR wins as well.
- Tina: do folks want a subject matter expert to come back? Maybe about first/last mile or parking? Laurie: bicycle connectivity will be increasingly important, we're trying to build bicycle networks in MetroWest and this includes bicycle facilities and last mile, so it would be great to see this multimodal work besides cars. Rick: electrification of the Framingham-Worcester line - would love to hear more about the infrastructure changes
- Camille: When MPO comes back in fall, we can have Sandy and maybe other MBTA staff join.

Legislative Breakfast Updates

- Travis: now Friday June 14 at Marlborough Public Library, getting final legislator count... question: unable to find a caterer to respond to catering, any ideas?
- Leah Emerson restaurant recs: Vin Bin, Nan's Market, or the Donut Stand
- Jason recommends reaching out to Meredith at Marlborough MEDC for catering recommendations

Community Share

- Ashland / Alvaro: Had Town Meeting, have two 40Bs underway and Master Plan work, so will continue MBTA Communities at fall Town Meeting
- Framingham / Rick: continue trail work; MBTA communities have informational approach
- Holliston / Tina: special education focus at Town Meeting, and used general stabilization appropriation; will have a recount for the Select Board election since it's at a one vote margin
- Marlborough / Katie: special ed is a statewide issue; regarding MBTA Communities, communities were noted negatively in the news for zoning in places where there is already multifamily housing; when doing a site plan with a developer, city was able to negotiate for things like parking and the design that the city wanted, so encourage others to really negotiate rather than cave to developers; also, if you're in Marlborough, walk along the new trail!
- Natick / Amanda: new special permit effort and moving toward MBTA in the fall; Morgan: studying mobility improvements, wayfinding, lighting, streetscape in commercial areas, so currently in public engagement and information gathering stage – putting page/survey in the chat: <https://www.natickma.gov/2103/PROJECT-Main-Street-Improvements-in-Nati>
- Sherborn / Robert: modification to solar bylaw – Heidi: submitted solar bylaw to state which put it on hold but it was approved with some modifications; Robert: tried to limit battery storage systems as size-appropriate to a co-located solar facility but the state wants to allow battery storage facilities on their own; Heidi: also working on MBTA Communities for next year
- Southborough / Meme: recent elections; MBTA Communities at meeting in September, have mapping session ongoing for area near train station that former consultant got wrong; have two 40Bs and one has received eligibility with state but hasn't filed with ZBA yet; Select Board exploring regional dispatch, reorganizing housing organizations to function more smoothly, and thinking through a pavement management structure
 - Tina: Holliston and Sherborn recently moved to regional dispatch, can be resources

- Wayland / Robert: Had MBTA Communities passed at Town Meeting last week with plenty of support; have two zones where there is existing housing and two zones ripe for development including near Wayland town center which would help businesses
- Wellesley / Eric: Had Town Meeting, passed MBTA Communities with one minor edit that needs to be made; have transportation staff position open in Wellesley; starting strategic housing plan including affordable housing, senior homes, multifamily, etc – have June 18 public meeting
- Weston / Laurie: Had Town Meeting a couple weeks ago and Route 30 passed and still on the TIP and this will be a regional asset; working to build water tanks in town, need multiple pieces to fall into place to get them built; petition to move Select Board from 3 to 5 members so a government committee is exploring the pros and cons of this, want to hear thoughts on this... do have strong Town Manager, and the 3 current slots are uncontested so not sure where new people would come from; Imai MBTA Communities – had mapping workshop, good conversation with another upcoming public meeting in June
 - Other communities want to hear the Select Board expansion considerations
- Jason 495/MW Partnership: closed employer survey and will provide an analysis, including optimism of business performance, concerns on workforce and cost of living; Partnership participated in housing conversation on public messaging and leveraging business community to speak to the public about the housing crisis... don't want to overpromise, but understand that many votes happening in fall, CHAPA helping
 - Leah: thanks for taking this initiative
 - Katie: biggest issue is the cost of housing and nothing in MBTA Communities that talks about affordable housing... Jason: we need to change the public discourse on housing, beyond MBTA Communities
 - Travis: hope the housing research pamphlet is helpful; also, MAPC happy to help

Other Business Not Known at Time of Posting

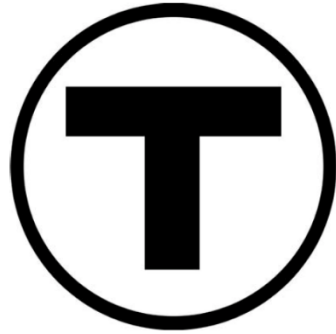
- Tina: Can adjourn early – thank you to Travis and Camille
- Travis: we won't meet in summer, but reach out if you want to chat or ask anything of the group

Motion to Adjourn was made by Imai, second by Barbara

Meeting adjourned at 9:26am

Attachments: MBTA Presentation

Minutes compiled by Camille Jonlin, MAPC



**Massachusetts Bay
Transportation Authority**

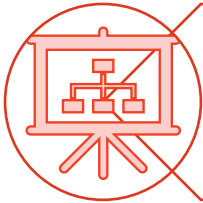
MBTA Whistle-Stop Tour: Strategic Planning

Sandy Johnston, Deputy Director of Regional Transit Planning

Goals for Today



Begin to build a relationship between MBTA Strategic Planning and municipalities/subregions



Familiarize attendees with MBTA Strategic Planning as a department and as a process



Introduce Sandy Johnston as a point of contact and helper navigating the MBTA



Identify points of interest (projects, processes, plans) for future MBTA presentation and discussion



Why Partnership Matters

“Commuter Rail tracks were damaged when severe flash flooding on September 11 overwhelmed the City’s drainage system and washed away the ground under both Commuter Rail tracks near Leominster Station...In partnership with the City of Leominster, Keolis crews laid 188 feet of concrete pipe to repair and improve the drainage system in the area.”

<https://www.mbtta.com/news/2023-09-19/commuter-rail-track-repairs-complete-leominster-following-flash-floods>



<https://twitter.com/MBTA/status/1704163935769776235>

About MBTA Strategic Planning



Context | The MBTA Needs to Make Big Changes

At a critical inflection point, the MBTA faces a unique opportunity to define internal goals to ensure the agency adapts & evolves alongside the changing region.

Guided by our stated values and newly defined goals, we will measure success or determine course corrections via data-driven analytics.

ACTIONS

- Create a clear roadmap of how to prioritize among different projects.
- Clarify and articulate **multimodal priorities** aligned to **our values**.
- Consider human and monetary capital **costs and trade-offs** when decision-making.
- Empower departments and staff to create **project and team-based action plans to achieve objectives** based on priorities of Governor Healey, the Secretary, the Board, and GM Eng.
- Provide a forum for public engagement in **required planning activities**, such as Program for Mass Transportation (PMT) and the Capital Investment Plan (CIP).

What Does Our Team Do?



STRATEGIC PLANNING

Strategic planning
Metrics and targets
Telling the story



REGIONAL PLANNING & PARTNERSHIPS

Partner engagement
Shaping/influencing policy
State of the practice
Convening across modes and
departments



REGIONAL PROJECTS

Multi-modal coordination
Context-sensitive decisions
Connecting planning to projects



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Culture Committee
Data analysis
Communication
Leadership Development



LONG-RANGE PLANNING

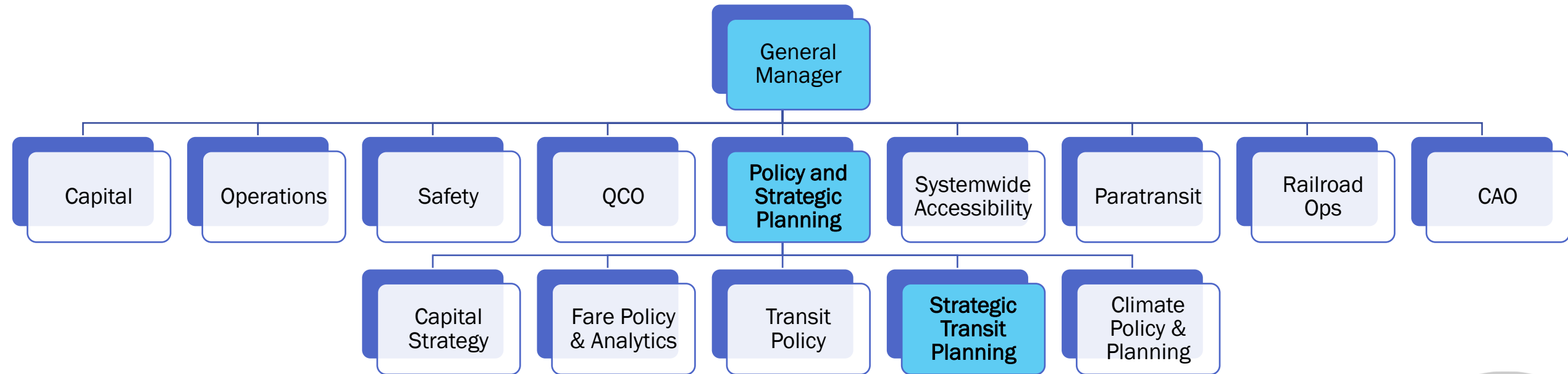
Long-range plans and studies
Internal and external plans
Defining operational needs
Strategic thinking ahead



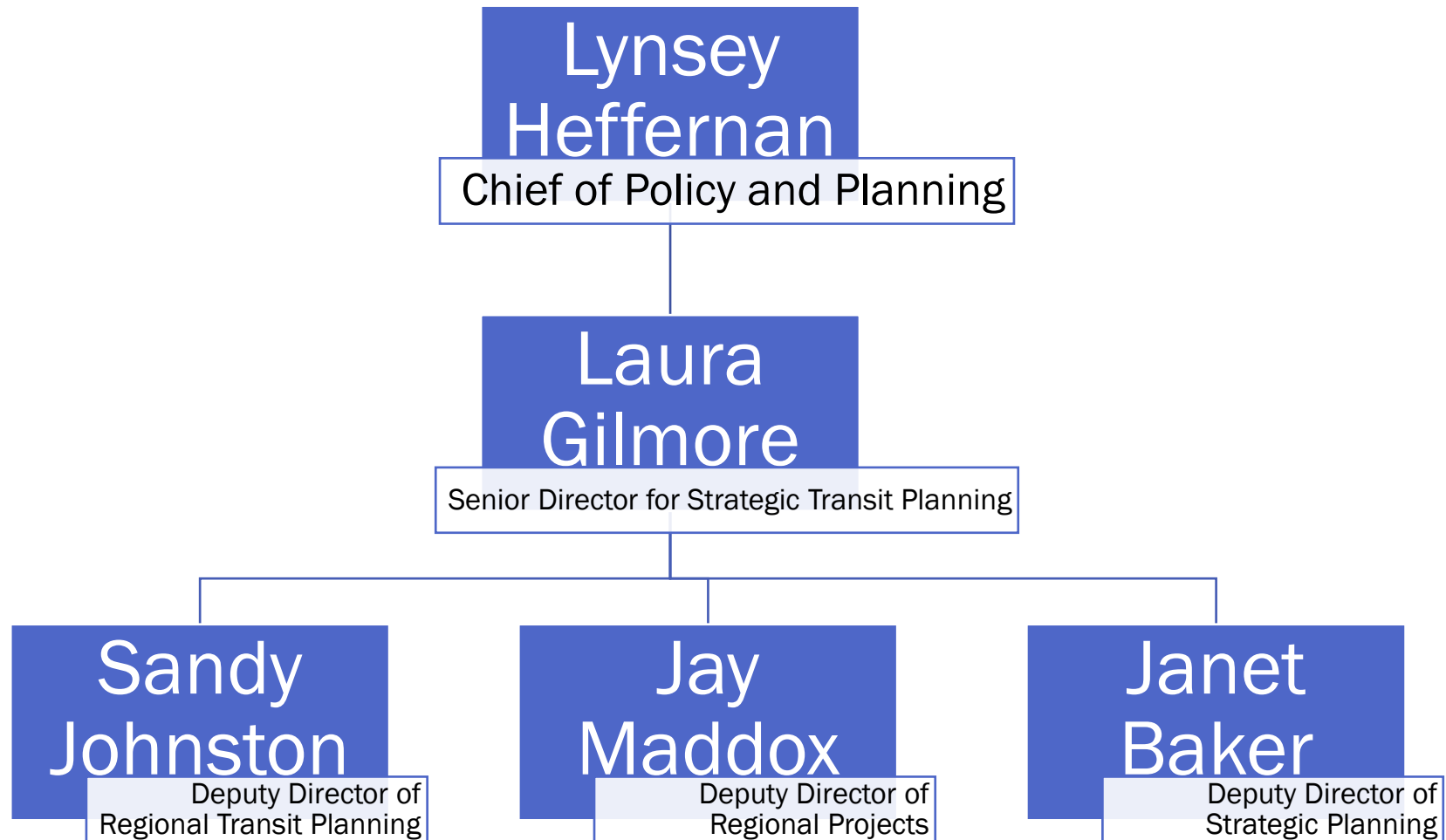
STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Innovation
Climate
Funding strategy

Who's Doing the Work



Strategic Transit Planning



Mission, Vision, Values



Mission

We serve the public by providing safe, reliable, and accessible transportation



Vision

We envision a thriving region enabled by a best-in-class transit system.

Values



Safety: We put safety at the forefront of our work.



Service: We endeavor to deliver superior service connecting people and communities.



Equity: We commit to prioritizing the needs of our transit-dependent riders, our employees, and the economic regions we service in decision-making processes to eliminate unjust and unintentional consequences.



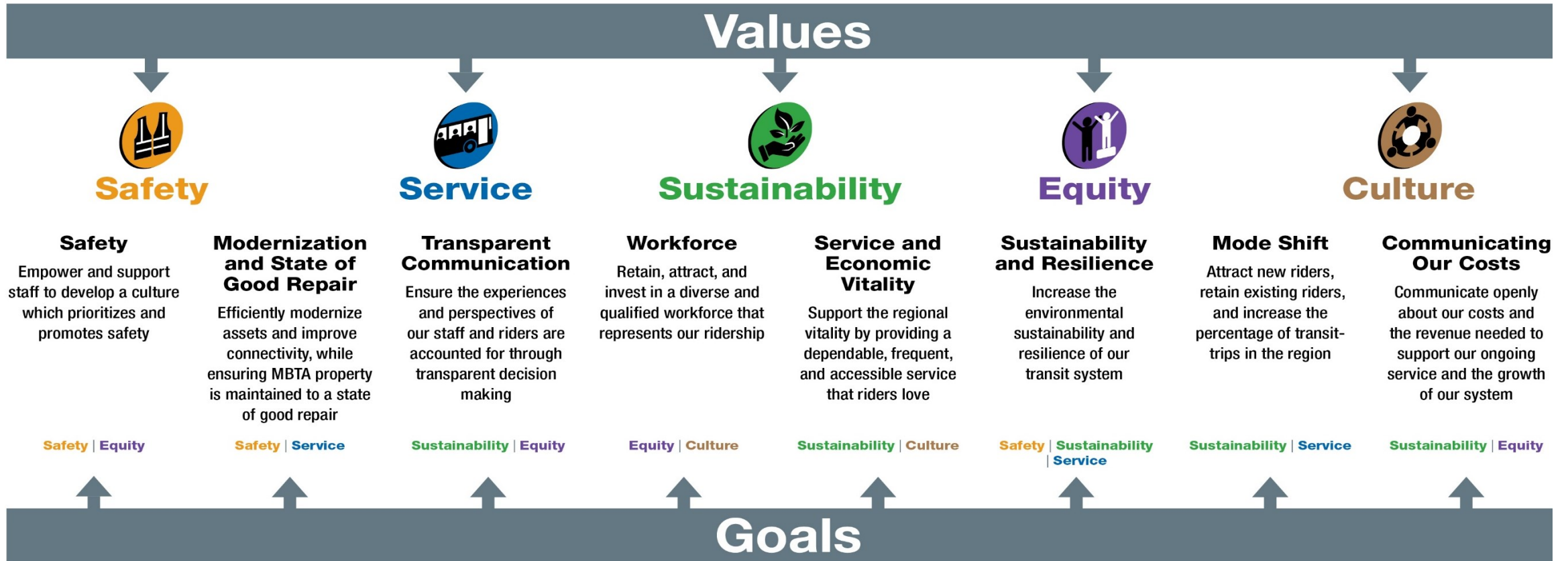
Sustainability: We invest resources wisely in solutions for our team, our communities, and our environment.



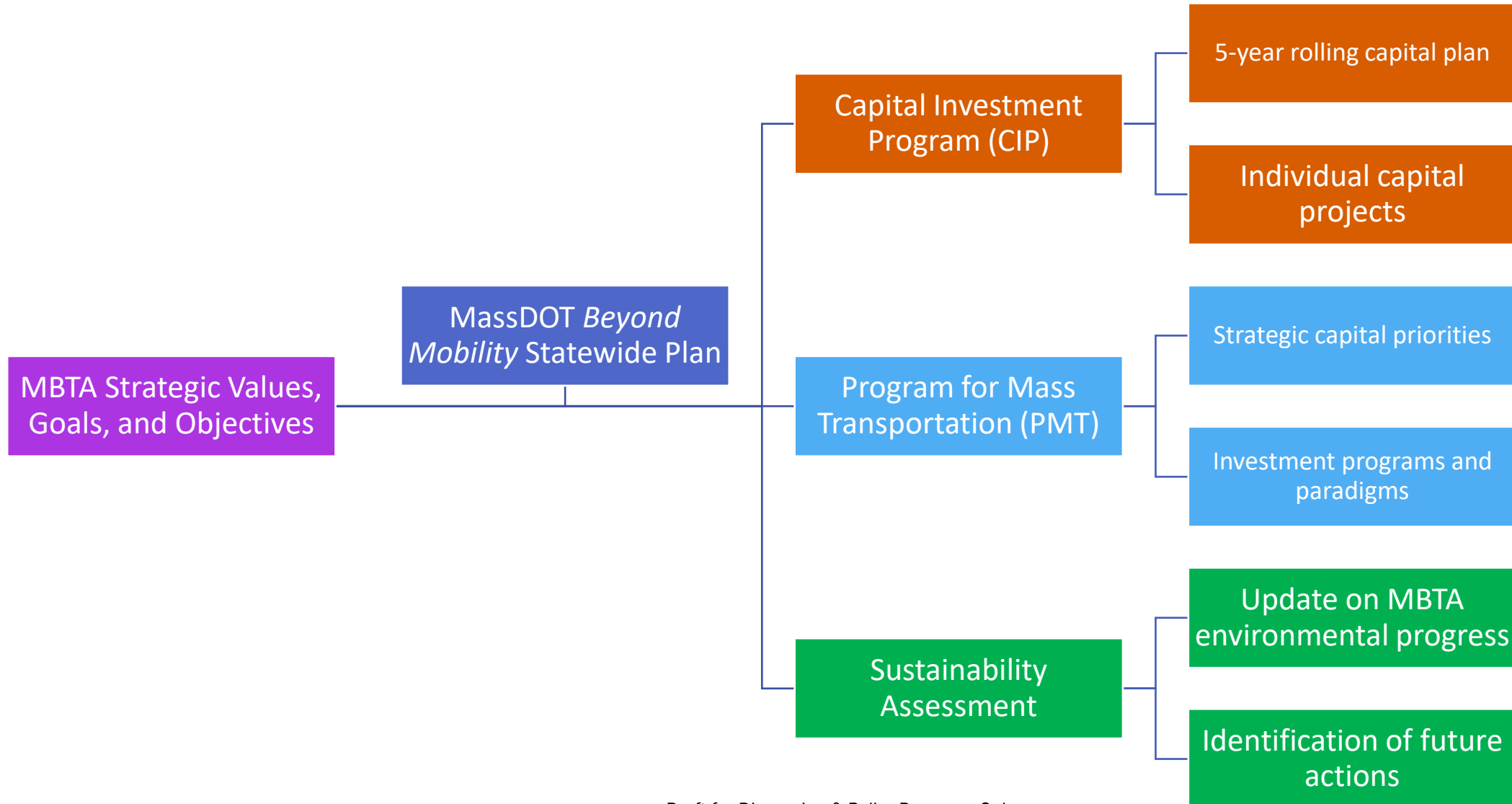
Culture: We aspire to transform our culture into one that keeps people's well-being and safety at the center of everything we do.



MBTA Strategic Planning Values and Goals



Expression and Implementation of MBTA Strategic Planning



What We're Up To

Staff and Work Area Development

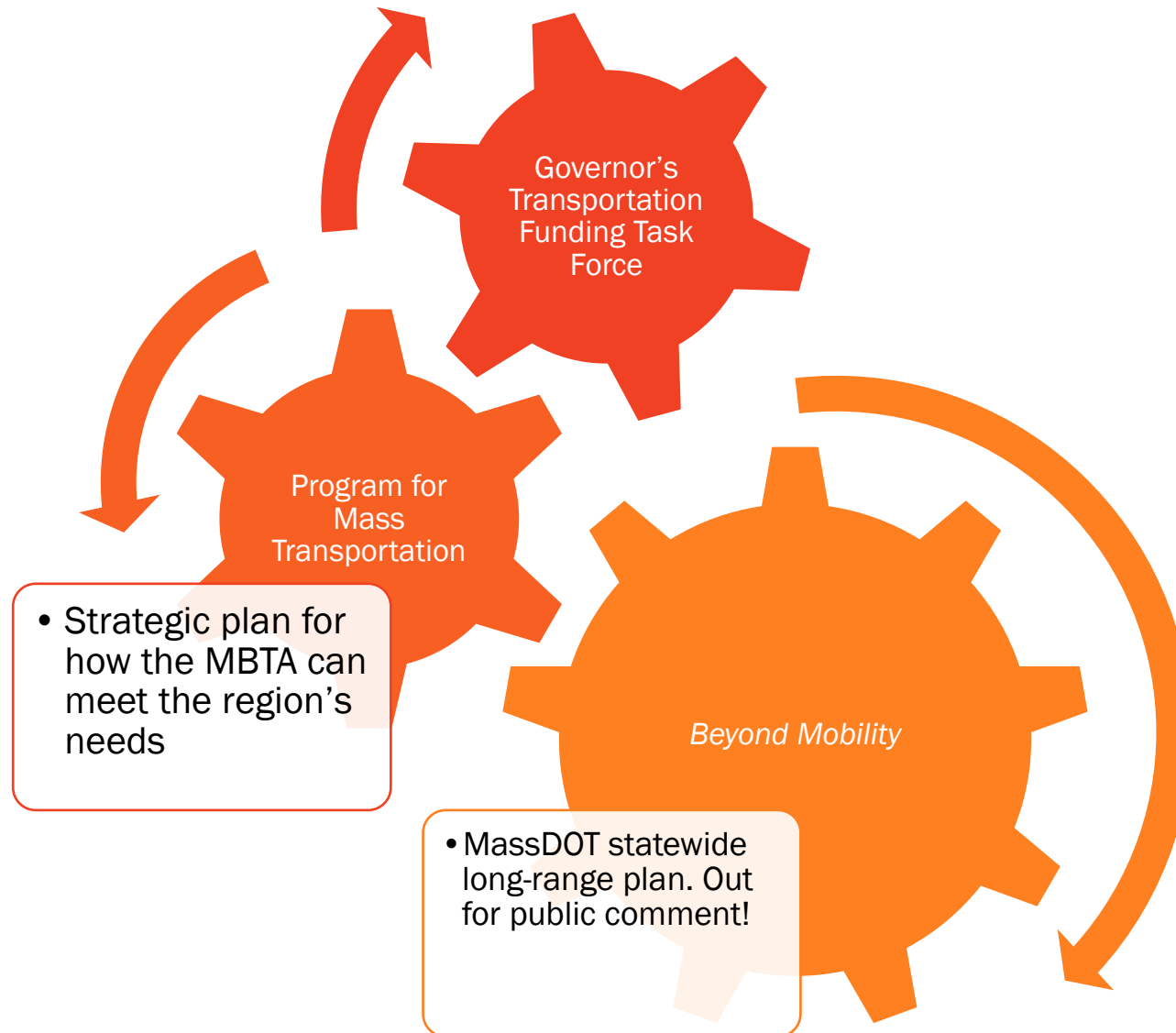
- Capital program planning brought under Policy and Strategic Planning
 - New Capital Strategy team
 - Expanded discretionary grant team
- New staff
 - Senior Director of Climate Policy and Planning
 - Deputy Directors for Regional Projects and Strategic Planning

Work Products

- Capital Needs Assessment Inventory
- MBTA FYs 2025-29 CIP
- Climate Assessment (upcoming)



Critical Planning is Going on Right Now



Building Lasting Partnerships

What We Can Offer

- Guide to how the MBTA thinks, makes decisions, and confronts tradeoffs
- Help navigating the MBTA
- Coordination and collaboration on shared needs and identification of tensions and conflicts

How We Can Work Together

- Build lasting relationships
- Share needs, values, goals, and ways of approaching issues
- What do you want to hear about?
- Ongoing conversations on topics of interest



Thank You!

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