

# Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

## Minutes of April 6, 2005 at the SEED Offices, 4:00 PM.

### Members Present:

Reinald Ledoux, BAT	Henry Young, Acushnet
Peter F. Kortright, Fall River Area Ch. of C.	Robert Carney, Dartmouth
William Clark, MAPC	William Roth, Jr., Fairhaven
Christopher Cooney, Metrosouth Ch. of C.	James Hartnett, Fall River
Robert Luongo, New Bedford EDC	Matthew Thomas, New Bedford
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC	Jerry MacDonald, Stoughton
Jennifer Menard, South Coast Dev. Part.	
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD	
Lou Pettine, SRTA	
Diana Shearstone, TACC	
John Bullard, Vision 2020	

### Others Present:

Astrid Glynn, EOT	Luisa Paiewonsky, EOT
Tobias M. Paulo, Rep. Robert M. Koczera	Bruce Oliveira, Rep. Stephen Canessa
Colleen Murray-Hackett, Sen. Joan Menard	Sharon Wason, Mass Audubon
Linda Grubb, Lakeville and FARE	Kyla Bennett, PEER
Tom Maloney, Nature Conservancy	Ed Coviello, OCPC
Pat Ciaramella, OCPC	Charles Kilmer, OCPC
Roland Hebert, SRPEDD	Stephen Smith, SRPEDD
Louise Daley, SRPEDD	Greg Guimond, SRPEDD

### 1. Call to Order

Chairman John Bullard called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

### 2. Acceptance of Minutes

It was VOTED UNANIMOUSLY to accept the minutes of February 9, 2005.

*Chairman Bullard opted to diverge from the agenda items of discussion in order to allow time for latecomers to arrive.*

### 6. Future Meetings

Mr. Bullard asked for a community to volunteer to go before the Task Force at the next meeting—either to present their vision for the area around a proposed commuter rail station, or to get ideas if they have nothing to present. Steve Smith mentioned that he had met with representatives from Taunton and the MBTA to discuss the City's desire to sell its parcel on Dean Street where a rail station is proposed. It was VOTED UNANIMOUSLY to invite Taunton to be the community for a discussion at the next meeting.

Mr. Bullard asked the committee for their views on whether or not they feel it is worthwhile to continue on as a Task Force at this time, given the uncertain timeframe of the commuter rail project. Roland Hebert said that the State's permitting process, which will take place over the next 9-12 months, will have some answers relative to the timing of the project. The permitting process will determine whether or not the project will qualify for federal funding and if so, how much funding it is likely to receive and how long the project would have to wait to receive federal funds.

Robert Luongo questioned if this group is spinning its wheels if the project is too far ahead in the future. Henry Young stated that the FEIR required a Growth Management Task Force for the project and if it is not done, that may injure the process. Peter Kortright recalled that at a meeting with Senator Montigny, Douglas Foy, Dan Grabauskas, Steve Smith and others, that Foy and Grabauskas agreed the Task Force should be in business and that they could play a role looking at the impacts of the project as well as other issues. He added that this Task Force is the only vehicle in which to stay engaged as a regional community and that the region needs to make it happen.

The next meeting will be held on June 8, 2005 at 4:00 PM at the SEED Office.

### 3. Commuter Rail Station – Vision for New Bedford, Matthew Thomas, City of New Bedford Development Attorney

At this time, Matthew Thomas made a presentation of New Bedford's planning effort for areas around the site of the future New Bedford rail station. These plans include redevelopment of the Hicks-Logan area. Important parts of the City's plan include:

- use of a rail spur to the waterfront that is being used to ship out contaminated sediment from the harbor;
- redevelopment of brownfields and portfields;
- creation of a Downtown Business Overlay District, that allows residential uses above commercial uses;
- use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDRs);
- a progressive Harbor Master Plan;
- a Designated Port Area that prevent nuisance complaints against legitimate port uses;
- an unconventional Mixed Use District as part of an urban renewal plan
- building infrastructure using DIF;
- development of a Marine Science Technology Park behind the waterfront;
- a Marina district;
- redevelopment of Wamsutta Mills to include a mix of housing and commercial uses;
- an intermodal center, whether or not or whenever commuter rail is introduced.

The design and location of the MBTA commuter rail station were incorporated into the City's plans. The rail facility and the potential of commuter rail are already affecting property values in the City through real estate speculation. Of concern if the project is delayed, is what will happen to properties purchased with variable rate mortgages. The rail depot will be complete in four months. The Harbor Master Plan 5-year objectives have been completed, except for the intermodal center. With the completion of the commuter rail

extension, New Bedford will be the only port where people can “take the T to the Islands”. The existing fast ferry to Martha’s Vineyard is a 3-minute shuttle ride to the proposed intermodal center.

The Committee praised the City’s efforts. Mr. Bullard asked about the level of effort made without the promise of commuter rail. Mr. Thomas responded that once the announcement of rail is made, it is too late for planning. The potential of commuter rail gave the City the impetus to start planning and their efforts were designed around the future commuter rail. Kyla Bennett questioned the real estate value appreciation being attributed to commuter rail when all areas have experienced such increases. Mr. Thomas responded that continuous contact with real estate brokers confirms that for the first time, outside investors are buying in New Bedford based on the future MBTA project. Ms. Bennett also asked about the expected users of the commuter rail. Mr. Thomas said that he expects the rail will attract middle-class residents back to the area, thereby positively impacting quality of life. He also said there would be some reverse commuting to the Marine Technology Park.

#### 4. State Transportation Plan – Astrid Glynn, Deputy Secretary of Planning, Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation

Astrid Glynn gave an overview of the State’s Transportation Plan, which she described as a draft for discussion over the next several months. The primary sources of projects in the plan are from the MPO plans and from the Regional Competitiveness Councils. She stated that the Plan prioritizes projects that can get federal support, have strong local support and leadership, are in communities with comprehensive corridor plans and have a way to make a local financial contribution. The goal is to have communities prepare for the project and not just mitigate for it.

John Bullard commented that with the addition of a federal funding requirement, it feels like the rules have changed. He questioned if the estimated project start date of 2012 is so far ahead that there is no point in planning for it now. Ms. Glynn stated that the Plan presents what is just a possible sequence of projects and that with large transportation projects, time is a resource. She referred to Mr. Thomas’ earlier presentation that noted that the impacts of commuter rail are already being felt in the region. She added that the Task Force can work to grapple with that effect and it can also have an impact on the timeframe of the project. She pointed out that the Governor states in Chapter 14 of the State Plan that the commuter rail extension is a top priority for the Commonwealth.

Steve Smith asked what specific actions municipalities can take now. Ms. Glynn stated that TOD is very important and zoning to support it. Communities should look at their housing and how future growth fits into their economic profile. She suggested that a comprehensive corridor study looks at the problem area, which is determined by the people in the region who are affected by the project—if it happens and if it does not happen. The project is where the opportunity for a solution exists. The corridor plan is an opportunity to look at zoning and other factors such as TOD and DIF opportunities, circulation, open space and affordable housing.

Kyla Bennett stated that the project does not have complete support of local officials or permitting agencies. She also said the estimated cost is higher than the Plan estimate. Ms. Glynn responded that cost estimates in the Plan are based on published numbers, such as the costs listed in the MBTA's capital plan.

Greg Guimond stated that the timeframe for commuter rail has to be clear. He said that cities cannot just hold onto developable land around proposed stations when they have budget issues.

Peter Kortright asked if commuter rail to Fall River is inevitable in the next 20 years. Ms. Glynn responded that it makes a lot of sense. She hopes that it happens with more positives and fewer negatives. She added that Governor Romney stated that commuter rail is his top priority for this region.

5. Review of Work Program - Task 2: Old Colony Line – Changes in Land Use and Demand (OCPC)

*Due to the hour, this agenda item was postponed.*

7. Adjournment

Chair John Bullard adjourned the meeting at 6:03 PM.