

# Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

## Minutes of September 14, 2005 at the SEED Offices, 4:00 PM

### Members Present:

William Clark, MAPC  
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC  
David A. Tibbetts, South Coast on Track  
Richard Shafer, Taunton IDC  
John Bullard, Vision 2020  
Peter Kortright, Fall River Chamber  
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD

Robert W. Carney, Dartmouth  
Martha White, Easton  
William Roth, Jr., Fairhaven  
James Hartnett, Fall River  
Lou Gitto, Stoughton

### Others Present:

Kyla Bennett, PEER  
David Farmer, Edwards and Kelcey  
Ed Coviello, OCPC  
Charles Kilmer, OCPC  
Bruce Hughes, OCPC  
Andrew Vidal, OCPC  
Louise Daley, SRPEDD  
Greg Guimond, SRPEDD

Linda Grubb, Lakeville and FARE  
Bruce Oliveira, for Rep. Canessa  
Pat Ciaramella, OCPC  
Katalin Parkas, OCPC  
Jim Watson, OCPC  
Marijoan Bull, SRPEDD  
Stephen Smith, SRPEDD

### 1. Call to Order

Steve Smith called the meeting to order at 4:07 PM. The vote to accept the minutes was postponed until after Chair John Bullard's arrival.

### 3. Presentation of Task 2: Old Colony Line

Ed Coviello gave a presentation of redevelopment in Brockton and TOD zoning in Abington since the Old Colony line restoration. OCPC mapped land use changes since 1996, future development proposals and property value changes for parcels within a ¼ mile study area around the station in Brockton and within a ½ mile study area around the Abington station. In Brockton, redevelopment and increased housing is slowly happening around the station. Development activity around the Abington station has been mostly residential. Bruce Hughes reported on the Town's rezoning of vacant industrial land near the station as TOD to allow concentrated development there. The Planning Board also asked the developer of the Woodlands condo development, which is within a ½ mile of the station, to provide pedestrian access to the train. The Abington parking lot is currently at capacity. Ed Coviello noted these cases are in contrast to Kingston and Halifax where the rail stations have not had much impact.

Kyla Bennett asked about what is happening in the entire community. Is what is happening around the station any different than what is happening everywhere? Dr. Sue Peterson suggested a control measure, such as total number of building permits per acre.

Dick Shafer added there has been lots of activity in Taunton, even without the presence of commuter rail. Dr. Peterson asked if there have been more permits issued within the TOD than outside, on a per acre basis? Ed answered that in Abington, there has been more activity outside of the TOD. Kyla said the point is to limit sprawl, but there must be teeth outside of the TOD, such as increasing open space or a building moratorium. TOD needs associated zoning around it, to keep it compact. David Farmer noted there are controls from other parts of the U.S. that can show the impact of a rail station by the growth attracted to a TOD vs. dispersed development.

John Bullard stated that this committee rejected the premise of financing the rail through increased property tax revenues. What is needed is a way to combat sprawl by finding ways to combine increased density (TOD) where it is logical and decrease density elsewhere. If you only increase density somewhere, it results in more people--not reduced sprawl. Should the committee pursue using increased revenues spunoff from TOD to buy development rights elsewhere? Martha White expressed concern over telling communities how their local revenues are spent, saying that is a local decision. John agreed. It is one way to provide resources that finance shifting development away from protection areas. Peter Kortright said the idea is similar to a DIF, where the money from a DIF district is used to make improvements. Martha added that one way to minimize development elsewhere is accomplished by zoning changes, and repeated her concern about giving any local mandates.

## 2. Minutes of meeting, June 8, 2005

It was VOTED UNANIMOUSLY to accept the minutes of June 8, 2005.

## 4. Analysis of Lakeville Train Station Survey results

Louise Daley presented summary results from the survey of commuters at the Lakeville MBTA station from April 26, 2005. The survey noted consistent responses over three surveys in the past six years about commuter rail as a factor in commuters' decisions to live and work where they do. Demographic trends reveal a commuter population that is getting older, more educated and has higher incomes. John Bullard noted that it seemed like Lakeville commuters were less mobile than the population as a whole. The draft survey results are on the SRPEDD website and Louise is seeking comments and questions to investigate further.

## 5. Commuter Rail Station – Route 138, Easton

Martha White emphasized that Easton still opposes the rail; it does, however, agree with the general purpose of the task force—to grow in a smart way. She noted several concerns about the proposed MBTA site for a rail station in Easton at the Roche Brothers Plaza on the Stoughton line. Future office and retail is currently proposed on the station site. The proposed size of the lot would make it the second largest lot in the entire commuter rail system, and, it is not located near a limited access highway. She questions the need for such a large lot. The draft EIR calls for mitigation that includes installing signals at every intersection on Route 138. This station would be about two miles from the existing Stoughton station. There are no opportunities for TOD or smart growth at this site.

OCPC looked at other station opportunities in Easton. Other options include the existing DPW on Center Street, in a residential area. This site was rejected. Another option is the historic station in North Easton. Martha added that this idea is just part of a brainstorming exercise to consider interesting possibilities for mixed use development. Gaining community approval would be a challenge.

Greg added that in 1993, there were 339 Easton commuters using rail. He agreed that the proposed MBTA station site could be downsized, or the parking land could be considered as banked for future mixed use development. He suggested that the MBTA should consider different size stations: regional stations with much parking and good highway access; and, local stations with minimal parking to encourage walking and local shuttles.

Mr. Bullard thanked Martha for participating in the task force and brainstorming ideas. Willingness to discuss alternatives does not reduce the town's opposition to rail. It would be good to have Raynham participate in the same way. This task force is formed by the MBTA, but our allegiance is not to them but to the communities we represent. As a group, we ought to consider advocating for options. This is difficult for Easton, which wants no tracks. How can this group help Easton achieve a vision, and explore alternatives—many of which are relevant, with or without rail. What if you took rail out of the equation and concentrate on design around North Easton center to create more activity? What is Easton's vision for the area around the historic station?

Martha said that in terms of smart growth, the proposed station site is so objectionable that an alternative site—one that makes sense for smart growth--must be considered. Easton does not want rail, but if rail is going to come, they do want a station. Sue Peterson restated that sentiment as, if rail is coming, we want a station here—not there; and we oppose rail. Jim Watson noted that many of the people in Hingham who did not want a station, now use the commuter rail and ask, why is the station in such a dumb place? John Bullard said that is the reaction we want to avoid in our communities.

Lou Gitto noted that Stoughton is also not in favor of the rail expansion.

Mr. Bullard stated that as the committee gets deeper into design issues, Easton is one place where it could be most helpful. A site analysis of stations in Easton could be helpful.

Mr. Gitto noted there are transportation issues in downtown Stoughton and the Town is looking at the Stoughton station location before making a presentation. Added trains will just make Route 138 worse.

Mr. Bullard said the goal is to end up with a regional plan that is the best designed plan. Individual communities can still oppose rail, but their knowledge is shared. Steve Smith noted that he spoke with officials in Raynham who were surprised that Easton and Stoughton are actively participating. It was believed that their absence at this meeting was due more to scheduling, rather than their opposition to rail.

#### 6. Strategic Environmental Permitting Plan (SEPP)

Mr. Smith will participate, on behalf of John Bullard, in the interviews of consultants bidding on the permitting plan of the project. The interviews will be led by Andrew Brennan of the MBTA and are taking place September 26. He is looking for questions to ask from the task force. Mr. Tibbetts suggested that, in addition to the scheduling of coordinated permits, the question of federal permitting, which would add 3-5 years to the timeframe of the project, should be raised. Other question areas suggested by the committee included: experience in innovative financing, physical design, innovative zoning, regulatory environment for complex projects with significant opposition, a case study with their role, and finding common ground.

#### 7. Future meetings

November 9, 2005 is the next meeting.

January 11, 2006 is the following meeting.