

Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

Minutes of March 14, 2007 at Raynham Town Hall at 4:00 PM

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020
Peter Kortright, Fall River Chamber
Susan Peterson, SRPEDD
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC
Bruce Oliveira, for Rep. Stephen Canessa
Kyla Bennett, PEER
Robb Johnson, TNC
Carolyn LaMarre, TRWA
Priscilla Chapman, Mass. Audobon
Dennis Lyons, Dattco, Inc.
Edgar Adams, Roger Williams Univ.
Pat Ciaramella, OCPC
Stephen Smith, SRPEDD
Greg Guimond, SRPEDD
Roland Hebert, SRPEDD

Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Jim Hartnett, Fall River
Linda Grubb, Lakeville
Jill MacLean, New Bedford
Richard McCarthy, Raynham
Martin Newfield, Raynham
Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Richard Shafer, Taunton
Kevin Shea, Taunton
Michael Mattos, Taunton
Karen Winger, OCPC
Charlie Kilmer, OCPC
Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD
Sandy Conaty, SRPEDD
Louise Daley, SRPEDD

1. Call to Order

John Bullard opened the meeting at 4:05 PM. Richard McCarthy welcomed everyone to the new Raynham Veterans Memorial Town Hall, which is a newly renovated elementary school.

2. Acceptance of Minutes

It was VOTED UNANIMOUSLY to approve the minutes of January 10, 2007 and February 23, 2007.

3. Report on Visit from Lt. Gov. Murray and Secretary Cohen, Feb. 23, 2007

Steve Smith credited John Bullard with getting a commitment from the Secretary to come here. He reported that the task force meeting in Fall River was well-attended and five local meetings were held on the same day. Mr. Smith said that the Secretary commented that it is inappropriate for this group to take on an advocacy role for the project and he also asked about the money for the task force to take their work to the next level. Mr. Bullard asked members in attendance to share their impressions from the day.

Kyla Bennett suggested that the task force look at ways to help communities deal with growth and environmental issues, such as legally taking land off the table for development. Mr. Bullard said that his idea for the work of the task force is to get more

specific about each community's vision and what they want to achieve, and also to move towards a shared vision. He said that he thinks there will be tools and resources to accomplish desired goals; knowing what those goals are and having them put together in one package will garner political support in achieving them.

Peter Kortright heard the Secretary say this project is a planning challenge. Applying for more money makes sense. Mr. Bullard noted from his conversations with Secretary Cohen that he takes his charge seriously as one of four priorities from the Governor. The Task Force is a useful tool and there may be support for keeping it going.

Mr. Smith reported that he met unofficially on behalf of the Task Force with environmental organizations last Thursday. His purpose was to begin preliminary discussions as an opportunity to package mitigation if the project happens. The response was that there is not enough information to outline mitigation and that communities are unprepared for growth and development issues.

Mr. McCarthy noted that communities need help in getting their legislative body (e.g., Town Meeting) to implement growth tools. Raynham has a TDR bylaw but it has never been implemented. The decision makers need to see an example of how it works in a comparable place.

Mr. Bullard asked if the task force has enough representation of environmental groups. Mr. Smith added that when the membership was set up, the Coalition for Buzzards Bay and the TRWA were officially included. The member communities were specified by the EOEI Secretary. Membership by organizations was left open. Carolyn LaMarre said that each town's conservation agent or open space planner should attend. Mr. Bullard encouraged towns to send their conservation agents. Richard Shafer said that all communities were being consulted in identifying priority protection areas and priority development areas. As a member of the Weir Corporation, he will also be paying attention to the problem points within the city from the project. Mr. Bullard encouraged anyone who wants to participate to get put on the notification list and come to meetings. He said that members need to communicate to their towns that things have changed with the new Governor, who has made a commitment about this project. Communities can send more than one person.

Greg Guimond said that funding for open space acquisition is a key to this project and suggested that be a topic for a future meeting.

Mr. McCarthy noted that Raynham's Board of Selectmen voted to put a non-binding question on the spring election ballot on April 28 that asks residents for their position on commuter rail. There are three possible positions: in favor of rail, opposed and the town should fight it, or opposed but think it wiser to spend resources to address impacts rather than fighting against it. Mr. Smith noted that a survey in Freetown for a zoning update and open space plan also deals with rail issues.

4. Analysis of Proposed Station Locations and TOD Suitability

Mr. Guimond presented Part III of his analysis of station and layover locations, moving from Myricks Junction to Battleship Cove on the Fall River Branch. The last presentation will address the New Bedford branch. The analysis looks at a set of criteria, proposed MBTA sites and alternative sites and TOD potential. Criteria have been developed and refined as part of the process. Land use information was updated with 2005 air photos.

The MBTA proposed site in Freetown was opposed by the Board of Selectmen from the beginning and is now a potential site for Boston Beer. An alternative site is recommended south of that site. Three alternate layover sites were evaluated. In reviewing the Davol Street site in Fall River, Mr. Guimond noted issues of pedestrian connections, the possible elimination of the Route 79 highway and river views of existing housing. He suggested that an existing Master Plan effort be expanded to encompass a 25-acre TOD area bounded by Turner Street, Routes 79 and 138, President Ave. and North Main Street. The Battleship Cove site, proposed to have only six parking spaces, is difficult to connect with neighborhoods. One recommendation is to connect Pond Street to Mulberry and Columbia streets. He also noted that SRTA needs a new facility in Fall River.

The presentation also discussed locomotive emissions and options for equipment to provide better air quality results. The MBTA presently runs diesel-electric locomotives that can run on any line. To electrify the entire system would cost \$5 billion. Mr. Guimond recommends that the MBTA only buy hybrid motors, which can be used in the entire system. He also proposes substations powered by wind turbines at layovers to reduce emissions. Ms. Chapman asked about the amount of the reductions using these technologies. Mr. Guimond said that the Tier II locomotives, required by the EPA in 2005 for all new locomotives represent a 60% reduction. The Tier III requirement will be another 10-15% reduction. Ms. Bennett suggested that solar may be better than wind for the substations. Mr. Hartnett asked about the additional cost to seek these recommendations. Ms. Peterson said there is a long-term payback as well.

Mr. Bullard appreciated the work and provocative suggestions. He asked about the decision-making process for the ultimate sites. Mr. Guimond said it would be this task force or individual towns in negotiation with EOT/MBTA, in a proactive and rational process. In addition to land use and the other criteria, it has to work operationally for the MBTA.

Mr. Gitto questioned the occupancy percentage of trains, citing a document that states trains have an average occupancy of 36%, minimizing emission benefits. Mr. Guimond says if the MBTA and the task force do their job right, the trains will get the ridership to make it work and be worthwhile.

Mr. Bullard sees three steps to decision-making: 1) Mr. Guimond should take the next step forward, making recommendations based on the pros and cons; 2) consult with each affected community, seeing how closely their choices align with Mr. Guimond's

recommendations; and 3) ask the task force for endorsements, town by town. If the MBTA's recommendations differ from the towns, the task force and the communities could be in a better position to negotiate. Mr. Bullard asked if the task force agreed with his view. Mr. Gitto asked about his role when he has neither the knowledge of nor an interest in the Fall River site. Mr. Bullard said if there is a difference in opinion between the MBTA and the locals, the task force should stand with the locals. As a group, everyone has more power. That may be the scenario of where the task force is headed. Mr. Gitto said he is happy to support the communities, although he does not know what value he adds. Mr. Guimond said that he what he envisions is getting feedback from the task force on the work he has done. He will then go to the communities and get more feedback. Then, a third party will be involved in discussions with EOT and the MBTA. In the past, it was individual communities who negotiated. Now, it is better to be higher on the food chain. The value of all the task force members, including Mr. Gitto, is that there are more eyes reviewing all of the information and recommendations.

5. Future Meetings

The next meeting will be held on May 9 at a place to be determined.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Bullard adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.