

Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

**Minutes of September 10, 2008 at Mass Highway Department District 5 Office at
4:00 PM**

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC
Lisa Lowney, for Congressman Barney Frank
Austin Lord, for Sen. Scott Brown
Kristina Egan, EOT
Bob Mitchell, EOHED
George Spatcher, Esq., Attleboro Chamber
Kerrie Babin, Taunton Area Chamber
Maria Gooch-Smith, SEED Corp
Susan Jennings, UMD Office of Sustainability
Edward Lambert, UMD Urban Issues Initiative
Melinda Ailes, Mass. Small Business Devt. Ctr.
Arthur Motta, Southeastern Mass. CVB
Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audobon
Kyla Bennett, New England PEER
Robb Johnson, TNC
Leonard Flynn, NRT of Mansfield
David Tibbetts, Southcoast on Track
Dr. Edgar Adams, RWU
Mike Sharff, Peter Pan Bus Lines
Robert Gregory, MHD Dist. 5
Timothy Kochan, MHD Dist. 5
Kostika Spatro, RWU
Jessie Davey-Mallo, RWU
Joshua Lee Freeman
Joe Cohen, NBST
Tim Faulkner, Taunton Gazette
Sue Weinstein, CNC News

Andy Jasmin, Brockton
Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Mark Rousseau, Easton
Byron Holmes, Fall River
Linda Grubb, Lakeville
Chris McGowan, Mansfield
Ruth Geoffroy, Middleborough
Heather Graf, Norton
Rick King, Norwood
Martin Newfield, Raynham
Dan McGaffey, Rochester
George Bailey, Sharon
Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Jim Kern, Swansea
Kevin Shea, Taunton
Steven Oullette, Westport
Chuck Evers, Lakeville
Mark Hess, New Bedford
Erika Ueberbacher, Raynham
Nancy Farrell, RVA
Stephen Smith, SRPEDD
Greg Guimond, SRPEDD
Lilia Cabral, SRPEDD
Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD
Louise Hardiman, SRPEDD
Pat Ciaramella, OCPC
Charles Kilmer, OCPC
Jed Cornock, OCPC

1.Call to Order

Chairman John Bullard called the meeting to order at 4:10 PM.

2.Minutes of Meeting, July 9, 2008

The minutes of July 9, 2008 were approved with one spelling correction.

3.Introduction to the Task Force for New Members

All those present introduced themselves and the community or association of which they are a member. Steve Smith gave a brief history of the Task Force, which originated with the 2001

MEPA finding for the Stoughton route that required a Growth Management Task Force made up of 18 municipalities and 18 other interest groups. In April 2007, Gov. Patrick revisited the project, which is now looking at all alternatives with the result that more communities are potentially affected. Therefore, the Task Force membership has been expanded. Mr. Smith asked that each community have a single official representative.

Mr. Bullard explained that all those who come to the meetings and put their time in will be heard. The group operates by consensus in an informal manner and will continue to do so for as long as possible. While there are advocates for and against certain routes, and for and against rail, the group does not exist to take a position on any of that. Instead, the Task Force is an advocate for local government in a process that is being driven by the State. It is helpful to become familiar with each community and how they see this transportation project fitting in with their goals. Growth is transforming all cities and towns in the region. Adding rail or other significant public transportation improvements accelerates the effects of growth and creates a lot of energy. The challenge is to take that energy and understand what positive impacts it has and then take steps to multiply them. Also, good planning can avoid the negative impacts as much as possible, and minimize and mitigate where necessary. In addition, the Task Force can be an advocate for the best interest of a town that may find it difficult to convey its preferences when it is officially opposed to the project.

4. Project description and status report

South Coast Rail Corridor Plan – Project Manager Kristina Egan said the Smart Growth Corridor Plan is an integral part of the South Coast Rail project. Bob Mitchell of the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development explained that the State sees this project as a major investment and wants to work with municipalities on how best to capture economic and housing opportunities that may come about from this project.

Ms. Egan distributed a draft calendar for the corridor plan schedule. In September, EOT will put out a report on recommended stations for all alternatives. This report will include templates for stations at ¼-mile, ½-mile and 1-mile radii around stations with types of appropriate development for different areas. From November to February, there will be workshops in each community in which a station is proposed. The development templates will be refined with the community and the neighborhoods around stations to prepare a vision of what they want to see around stations. There is a meeting scheduled in New Bedford in November. Architecture students from Roger Williams University are providing ideas through their work and input will be received from the city and the public.

Also from November to February, communities will receive technical assistance from SRPEDD and the other regional planning agencies, as well as from Goody Clancy. Ms. Egan asked Task Force members for assistance in getting their communities to respond to the offer of technical assistance related to this project by October 10.

In the Spring, the Task Force will review a regional priority map that knits together the results of meetings with nearly all of the 31 communities in the study corridor. Some regional environmental groups have given input on protection areas. The Task Force will review the map; the groups help is needed to help to prioritize development areas, in particular.

The State is developing priority development and protection criteria for parcels from a state perspective. The Task Force will be asked to provide a regional viewpoint. They are also drafting regional strategies or policy recommendations to bring to the state level, such as a regional TDR bank.

In late Spring, the Task Force will have a full draft plan to review. There will be regional meetings for public review as well as meetings with municipalities to see how they want to implement it. The State is providing a major investment; in turn, it is asking localities to make the land use changes needed to bring jobs, economic development and preservation.

Kyla Bennett asked about the resources to do all this work prior to a route being chosen. Ms. Egan said that most of the growth impacts will happen in the southern part of the corridor where there is no existing transit and where the project is expected to induce more growth. Where train service already exists, additional trains are not expected to bring a large growth impact. The State is investing more money where they expect more growth, and that is the area where there will be impacts regardless of the corridor chosen. Stoughton and Easton and Raynham are in the northern area but there is no train service (Stoughton has some). How much assistance goes there will be based on the route chosen. Mr. Bullard noted that having this kind of planning assistance provided by the State is significant. He added that the Task Force is not just about rail. Here is an opportunity for every town in the corridor to think about how it plans and grows, regardless of rail.

Station selection issues; responses to public comments – Ms. Egan said that she received many thoughtful comments about station locations along all of the rail alternatives. She received no comments on the bus alternative station sites. She distributed summary notes from an open house held at the SRPEDD office on July 30, 2008 on stations. EOT will put out a final report in September with recommendations for station sites for all alternatives. The report will include all comment letters received and a matrix of EOT's responses to the issues. The report will be distributed on the Web; hard copies may be requested. Ms. Egan added that all maps and aerials of all stations are on the SRPEDD website. Ms. Egan explained that it is necessary to select stations now in order to put them into a ridership model as part of the alternatives comparison. Station locations are also needed to figure out how much economic development to expect from the project.

Environmental Review Update – Ms. Egan reported that work on the rail and highway operations modeling has continued over the summer. Operational capabilities (e.g., number of vehicles, speed, trip time) for each alternative feed into the ridership numbers. Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) has to build out a model from the Boston metropolitan area to the south coast. Ridership numbers are not expected until after the first of the year. They are building an operations plan for each alternative, and then putting it through a simulation, in order to come up with ridership estimates. Mr. Bullard asked if the price of gas is a big variable in the model. Ms. Egan said that CTPS uses the 2006 price of gas. The model is not designed to forecast ridership if gas prices increase. Mr. Smith said he had argued with the modelers on this point. They say eventually, the cost of transit fares will rise also. Mr. Bullard said that a lot of this decision is based on ridership numbers from the model. If it is understood that ridership goes up with the price of gas, and it's not reflected in the model, the final decision is based on an inaccurate model. Ms. Egan said it is likely the ridership numbers will be conservative. She added that the model being used is considered the best available. Mr. Bullard said that conservative is another way of saying inaccurate.

Ms. Egan explained that the ridership numbers from CTPS are being shared with Goody Clancy, to determine the economic development the region can anticipate from the project in terms of jobs and growth. There is no quantification of access to affordable housing. CTPS will be taking the corridor plan to develop a smart growth scenario of ridership. Therefore, there will

be two sets of ridership numbers. Ms. Egan offered to bring the modelers to the Task Force to go through the model, if members are interested.

In response to a question about monorails along the highway, Ms. Egan noted that the project website now features a series of papers, called "Taking a Fresh Look" that address issues that are often raised, such as putting rails on the highways.

Environmental fieldwork has been conducted over the summer. Technical studies will be forthcoming. EOT is planning to file an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) on October 31. At the same time, the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) will file a federal Notice of Intent (NOI) for the NEPA process. Two scoping meetings will take place after these filings--one in Taunton and one further south. At those meetings, the public provides input to the state and federal agencies on what alternatives should be studied in the Environmental Impact Review (EIR) and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). EOT is trying to produce a joint state/federal document with the COE. After receiving a scope, EOT will develop a draft EIR/S in late spring, which will be followed by public hearings. Because the project has no federal funding, the COE is the lead federal agency rather than the Federal Transit Administration. They can give a permit for only one alternative, which is deemed the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (LEDPA) according to the Clean Water Act. Because the COE wants a firewall between the project proponent (EOT) and their deliberative process, EOT has issued a RFR for a separate consultant to draft the EIS for the COE. The actual analysis will be done by the COE and their consultant. If the EIS is acceptable to EOT, it will be accepted as the EIR as well. Usually, the project proponent and their consultant would do both. The COE consultant will be onboard by October at the latest. EOT will hire this third-party consultant.

Ms. Bennett asked about how the DEIR/S would address the federal and state project purposes, which are not identical. Ms. Egan said these are issues to work out with the Interagency Group. She said the smart growth part of the state's project purpose will be in the EIR. Whether COE considers it in its LEDPA determination, they will have to decide.

Mr. Bullard asked when the state recommends a route. Ms. Egan said they are figuring out the process as they go forward. It is hoped that an alternative will be named when the DEIR/S comes out, about eight months from now, assuming that all of the agencies agree. In Summer 2009, they will begin developing a Final EIR/S that will take the final alternative to a higher design.

5. Technical Assistance available to each municipality

As part of the Corridor Plan, there is funding in place to provide some limited technical assistance in key areas related to rail and the sustainable development objectives of the Commonwealth. Municipalities should receive a letter early next week with this offer and a list of the types of services available. They need to send a form back, signed by the Chief Elected Official, naming three types of assistance they would like. Assistance could be for how to implement priority mapping, zoning options, growth area redevelopment, ways to improve infrastructure, zoning around stations, design principles for stations or growth areas, housing strategies to advance affordable housing and smart growth housing, open space and cluster development bylaws, TDR bylaws, developing open space plans, low impact development, renewable energy strategies, intermodal planning or a RFP for a parking management study. EOT is putting together an overall technical assistance plan for all 31 communities with the regional planning agencies. Responses are needed by October 10.

6. Positive and Negative Impacts

Steve Smith explained that the Task Force mistakenly received only half of a handout of the results of meetings last February and April, at which they brainstormed about positive and negative impacts of the project. He will send out the full document. The intention is not to debate if every impact is listed, but to use it as an internal task force document in the discussion of mitigation to have a sense of the possible impacts. Mr. Smith asked members to email any additional thoughts within a week or so on impacts and ways to maximize or minimize them. Erica Ueberbacher asked if more specific town mitigation would happen at any point. Ms. Egan proposed to provide a panel of experts on mitigation to discuss what is legally required and what is optional. Ms. Egan said it would be helpful for this group to develop principles for equitable distribution of mitigation before a route is picked, when everyone has a stake and before members have to represent an individual town. Mr. Bullard added that if the State had all the money, Ms. Egan's answer is complete; but they don't have all the money. As the Legislature figures out how to pay for this, there will be wheeling and dealing. There could be a conversation about where the money goes that takes place between people who have not thought about this project as much as this group. If we have a fair plan for the region on how to decide where the money goes, it is possible our legislators will be informed and that conversation between the dealmakers will benefit from us having done our homework in advance.

7. Lakeville Commuter Rail Ridership Survey

This item was postponed until next month.

8. Other Business

There was none.

9. Future Meetings

After much discussion about future meeting dates and topics, it was decided to abandon the October meeting. The meeting of November 19 will be about the technical assistance program and the ENF. The Roger Williams University students will present their New Bedford station ideas from 3:00 to 4:00. The following meeting will be on December 10. There was a consensus to have all of the meetings at the current Taunton location as long as the room is available.

10. Adjourn

Chairman Bullard adjourned the meeting at 5:53 PM.