

## DRAFT

### Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

Minutes of the November 19, 2008 meeting held at the Corson building in New Bedford at 4:00 PM.

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020	Steven Ouellette, Westport
Kristina Egan, EOT	Rick King, Norwood
Buddy Rocha, MOBD	Mark Truran
Pedro Amaral for Rep. Rodrigues	Linda Grubb, Lakeville
Jill McLean, New Bedford	Kevin Shea, Taunton
George Bailey, Sharon	Richard O'Flaherty, E. Bridgewater
Erika Ueberbacher, Raynham	Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Jim Purcell, Norton	Marc Rousseau, Easton
Jessica Fernandes, HDC	Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audubon
Jonathan Henry, Marion	Heather Graf, Norton
Carolyn Lamarre, TRWA	George Spatcher, Attleboro Chamber
Arthur Motta, SMCVB	Robb Johnson, TNC
Marguerite Zarrillo, UMass Dartmouth	Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Ralph Medeiros	Lisa Pacheco, Freetown
Charlie Kilmer, OCPC	T. K. Roy
Karen Winger, OCPC	Roy Nascimento, N.B. Chamber
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC	Mayor Scott Lang, New Bedford
Greg Guimond, SRPEDD	Nancy Farrell, RVA
Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD	Claudia Ostiguy
Louise Hardiman, SRPEDD	Joyce Rowley, Middleboro
Stephen Smith, SRPEDD	Jen Gonsalves, NPS
Lilia Cabral, SRPEDD	Robert Gregory, MHD
Bill Roth, Fairhaven	Dr. Edgar Adams, RWU
Megan O'Sadnick, Wheaton College	
Bruce Oliveira for Rep. Canessa	
Mark Hess, New Bedford	

1. Call to Order

Task Force Chair John Bullard called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM.

2. Minutes of Meeting September 10, 2008

The minutes of September 10, 2008 were approved.

### 3. Welcome to New Bedford

In the absence of Mayor Lang, Mr. Bullard welcomed everyone to the renovated Corson Building and to New Bedford.

### 4. Presentation by RWU students

Dr. Edgar Adams and architecture students from Roger Williams University presented conceptual designs for the proposed New Bedford rail station sites. The students presented designs for transit oriented development at the Whale's Tooth site encompassing surrounding amenities, such as Clasky Common Park and the State Pier on New Bedford's waterfront and at the King's Highway site, with its proximity to Route 140 and the New Bedford Regional Airport.

### 5. Lakeville Commuter Rail Ridership Survey

Louise Hardiman of SRPEDD presented the findings of a survey conducted in May 2008 at the Lakeville station. The line opened in 1997 and the first survey was conducted in 1998, and subsequent surveys were conducted in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008. Keeping in mind that gas prices were substantially higher in May, the results were that most riders drive to the station and drive there alone. Most people walk or take the subway to their final destination at the other end of the line in Boston. Lakeville riders tend to be older than the population as a whole in the SRPEDD region, as well as having higher education levels and higher incomes. Top reasons given for riding the train were that it was less stressful than driving (80%), it was cheaper, it helps the environment and finally, lack of parking at their destination. 39% of respondents receive some sort of subsidy to ride the train. All of this information is a useful tool in marketing train service. Responses concerning the importance of the proximity of the train to where riders lived and/or worked led to the conclusion that the availability of commuter rail attracts a younger population with higher incomes and education levels and also allows existing residents to gain higher incomes by connecting them to the Boston job market.

### 6. Update on Technical Assistance available to each municipality

Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Project Manager, started by explaining how technical assistance requests were received from 20 of the 31 eligible communities. Ms. Egan explained how there would be a variety of assistance available, from individual assistance to group workshops, as well as assistance from SRPEDD, from OCPC, from Goody Clancy and some by other state agencies, including the Department of Housing and Community Development. Ms. Egan stated that they will be talking to each community individually.

### 7. Presentation on the Content of the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) Filing

Ms. Egan reviewed how the South Coast Rail Project is to provide new transit service for people from Fall River and New Bedford to south station and back. This entire process started with 65 possible routes. In May 2008 Bernard Cohen, the Secretary of Transportation announced the final 5 alternatives. Detailed rail simulations were run, environmental data was collected and the preferred operations we want to run, which includes 6 peak trains (3 in the morning and 3 in the evening) were considered. Given the

present train traffic, we concluded what infrastructure would need to be built for each of the alternatives.

The Environmental Notification Form is being filed on Monday. The next step is to produce a draft Environmental Impact Report and Statement. This a joint document by the Army Corp of Engineers and MEPA. The EIS will then become the EIR and become a joint document. Between this environmental notification and draft findings we will have scoping meetings for public comment on Dec 2 & 3, 2008. The Army Corp of Engineers and MEPA will then issue a joint scope on what we need to study at the end of January 2009. Following that a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Statement will come out in spring 2009. There will be hearings and after that we will begin to look in more detail at the preferred alternative in spring 2010. Following that, permits will be issued and construction will begin in 2012.

Ms. Egan then presented the 5 alternatives:

Alternative 1- through Attleboro-

With this alternative, only one additional train could be added without adding infrastructure. There would be a need for a third track to provide a quality service and that would push completion back 4 years to 2020 and would raise the cost to 1.5 times the working budget of 1.4 billion dollars. Another constraint would be the re-building of the Sharon-Mansfield station which includes the Canton Viaduct, which is on the national register. Recreating the stonework would be costly. There are also wetlands to consider with this alternative. To avoid Chartley Pond would be complicated and raise trip time. There are 3 ACEC's (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) here. This alternative would have the highest impact on wetlands on an acreage basis.

Alternative 2 – through Middleboro-

The first version (Middleboro simple) would enable us to run 3 peak-period trains and would have very few environmental impacts. This would be an extension of existing Lakeville service. This is also slightly below the budget goal. The second version (full Middleboro) will create a bottleneck in Braintree and would force a double track, as well as a tunnel through Quincy center of 1.3 miles. This would be 2.4 times the working budget and a have 4 year delay. Present plans are not to close the Lakeville station, but since trains would not back in, a shuttle service would be available from the Lakeville parking area to the stop at Middleborough Center.

Alternative 3 - through Attleboro and Middleboro-

This would entail adding a third track and very large wetland impacts and this alternative is no longer feasible in EOT's judgment.

Alternative 4 – through Stoughton-

This alternative is within budget and timetables. A variation is this alternative avoids Pine Swamp, and would be the deciding factor between Dean St. station or Whittendon station. The budget also includes a trestle through the Hockomock Swamp. This alternative would not entail adding a third track and this route is easier to "slot in" trains

during peak periods on the Northeast Corridor. This would also accommodate the 6 peak trains.

#### Alternative 5 – Rapid Bus

This alternative provides a dedicated lane solely for buses north of I-495, including a reversible lane or a zipper lane. This alternative has the fastest travel time and is the least costly at only 1/3 the working budget. It would go through the Hockomock Swamp. The two problems are where to store the buses and if this alternative will meet ridership demands.

EOT is recommending that only 3 alternatives be further investigated in the DEIR/S. The decision is up to the Army Corps and MEPA and will be decided by them in a scope that will be issued at the end of January.

Ms. Egan then reviewed the comparisons of time and cost for all alternatives. The timetable or time goal is 90 minutes per train/transit trip. Comparing all alternatives, the rapid bus is the quickest at 65 minutes, the longest are the Middleboro ones and the Stoughton and Attleboro are comparable. All are under the 90 minute goal.

The cost goal is 1.4 billion. The rapid bus is 1/3 of that. Stoughton is at the limit, Attleboro is 1.5 times the budget and the Middleboro is the highest at 2.5 times the working budget.

The construction goal is the year 2016 for completion. All alternatives meet this except for the Attleboro, Attleboro-Middleborough hybrid and the full build Middleborough.

Ms. Egan explained how they are recommending the elimination of the Attleboro alternative, the Attleboro-Middleborough hybrid and the Middleborough full version. They would like to advance the following 3 alternatives for further study: the simple Middleborough alternative, the Stoughton alternative and the rapid bus alternative.

EOT is making these recommendations to the Army Corp of Engineers and to NEPA and these agencies will choose the preferred alternative based on the which is “least environmentally damaging and practicable.”

Mayor Scott Lang expressed that the Rapid Bus is not an alternative in lieu of the train, but should be a compliment to train service and that any workable alternative needs to go through Taunton.

Ms. Egan recommended that if anyone had comments on any of the alternatives or anything included in the ENF, these comments need to be submitted in writing to both the Army Corp of Engineers and MEPA.

Mr. Bullard announced the next meeting on Dec. 10 in Taunton. He then thanked Professor Adams and the students from RWU and he adjourned the meeting at 6:11 PM.