

Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

Minutes of the February 11, 2009 meeting held at the MassHighway District 5 office in Taunton at 4:00 PM.

Present:

John Bullard, Chair	Arthur Motta, SMCVB
Kristina Egan, EOT	Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Robert Carney, Dartmouth	Karen Winger, OCPC
Pat Ciaramella, OCPC	Susan Peterson, SRPEDD
Linda Grubb, Lakeville	Stephen Smith, SRPEDD
Jed Cornock, OCPC	Byron Holmes, Fall River
Susan McGrath, OCPC	Peter Kortright, New Bedford
Richard O'Flaherty	Greg Guimond, SRPEDD
Charles Kilmer, OCPC	Jill Maclean, New Bedford
Lilia Cabral, SRPEDD	Karen Porter, SRPEDD
Kyla Bennett, PEER	Nancy Farrell, RVA
Martin Newfield, Raynham	George Spatcher, United Regional Chamber
Joshua Freeman	Jim Watson, OCPC
Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD	Heather Graf, Norton
Traci Herrick, Senator Pacheco's Office	Carolyn LaMarre, TRWA
Robert L. Gregory, MHD District 5	Ruth Geoffroy, Middleboro
Erika Ueberbacher, Raynham Cons. Comm.	Robert Moitozo, Rehoboth
Susan Jennings, UMass Dartmouth	Lisa Pacheco, East Freetown
Robb Johnson, TNC	Bob Mitchell, EOHED
Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audubon	
Joan Marchitto, North Attleboro	
Lisa Lowney, Congressman Barney Frank	
Jennifer Menard, SouthCoast Development Partnership	

1. Call to Order

Task Force Chair John Bullard called the meeting to order at 4:10 PM.

2. Minutes of the meeting January 14, 2009

It was pointed out that the schedule of station area workshops that Kristina mentioned at the end of the meeting was not listed in the minutes. It was agreed they would be added. It was suggested that a comment on the next to last paragraph be clarified and that was agreed to.

3. Presentation on Ridership Projections

Scott Peterson of the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) started his presentation by giving an overview of the Travel Demand Model. CTPS maintains a travel model for air quality conformity and to examine regional transportation and transit projects. It tries to examine how people's behavior and travel habits change as there are changes in the transportation system. Taken into consideration are projections in population, land use and jobs to calculate trips. These demographic variables were provided by the Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs). This model is multi-modal, which means it takes into consideration vehicle trips, transit trips and walking trips. The model projected ridership, travel time and reductions in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). Savings in VMTs reduce pollutants and improve air quality.

The ridership projections from the Travel Demand Model are as follows:

Stoughton Electric – 76 minutes – 6,300 round-trips – 241,900 reduced VMTs

Stoughton Diesel – 85 minutes – 5,600 round-trips – 195,000 reduced VMTs

Attleboro Electric – 75 minutes – 6,000 round trips – 278,000 reduced VMTs

Attleboro Diesel – 84 minutes – 5,300 round trips – 178,600 reduced VMTs

Middleboro Full-Build – 90 minutes - 3,900 round -trips – 163,800 reduced VMTs

Middleboro Simple-build – 90 minutes – 1,700 round-trips – 64,400 reduced VMTs

Rapid Bus – 68 minutes – 3,400 round-trips – 157,500 reduced VMTs

It was pointed out that these ridership numbers could be considered conservative.

Mr. Bullard then asked the task force if they would be interested in inviting the new Secretary of Transportation, James Aloisi, to the next meeting. There was general agreement to this.

4. Status Report

Kristina Egan started by introducing Erik Hove. Mr. Hove is now working full time on SouthCoast Rail for Regina Villa Associates. Ms. Egan continued by reviewing the process. The completed ENF was filed in November and the comment period ended in January. MEPA is extending the period to file so that the ridership numbers can be included and a full ridership report will be attached to the Draft EIS. Another public comment period will then follow and then MEPA will come out with its scope and which alternatives will be advancing. We are studying environmental consequences which include rare species, aquatic resources, noise and vibration, environmental justice, etc. There are 16 or 17 resource categories we are studying. The Army Corps of Engineers is doing their own analysis and will be coming out with a Draft EIS which will be completed by late summer and we'll still be on target for Spring 2010 for the final.

A question was asked concerning the comment period to the Army Corps and Ms. Egan responded that comments are always welcome to the Army Corps, but a call to the Army Corp would clarify this.

A question was raised on whether the Army Corp issues a scope and Ms. Egan answered that her understanding is no, but that she cannot speak for them and contact with the Army Corp would be recommended.

Ms. Egan then reviewed the schedule of station area workshops: that evening (February 11) in Stoughton; February 12 in Taunton; February 18 in Middleboro, as well as a civic engagement meeting in Easton on March 3.

Erik Hove then reviewed the process on technical assistance to communities. A letter was sent to communities to get their top 2 or 3 priorities. This effort is to help communities with housing, zoning, open space, etc and provide them with assistance on these and on things such as smart growth. They are developing workshops on friendly housing and sewer and water issues for communities to attend. We will also be offering assistance with potential new station sites, such as conceptual plans for parking and mixed use.

Ms. Egan then announced a Policy Charette taking place the next day in Boston looking at Smart Growth policies and what needs to be changed and asked the group to share their ideas on policy or legislation change to aid this process.

It was announced that OCPC would be hosting a regional meeting tentatively scheduled for February 25.

5. Regional Priority Development/Priority Protection Areas

Greg Guimond displayed drafts of regional maps that will be converted into electronic form and placed online for viewing. He pointed out areas that are already protected, as well as priority areas. He and Karen Porter demonstrated various layers of this map and how these layers can be added on or taken off and which colors would be used to signify various areas of development, protection, etc. He explained how there are still areas of conflict between communities since each town has its own priorities and how we need to find a balance. He added that we need to take into consideration all communities, regardless of the route, because this is a regional growth management plan.

Ms. Egan explained how, with these maps as input, we are working toward what the state can do to work in partnership with municipalities to make this real.

Mr. Guimond continued by explaining how they are looking for regional connectivity in protection areas and water resources, as well as property that fronts the Taunton River for protection.

A question was asked about the failure to include Rhode Island on the map. It was deemed to be a good idea and discussion ensued.

Mr. Guimond suggested that to view the map, it should be downloaded first and then you will be able to remove layers, zoom in, etc.

A comment was made concerning the Raynham dog track site as a station site and discussion ensued concerning zoning there and how it should be considered an environmentally sensitive area. This is a case where local desires and regional priorities might be different. Ms. Egan added that if this site were chosen as a station site, then there could be some mitigation opportunity and any development there would have to be sensitive to the environment. If this site is a station site, then it should be a regional development priority.

There was a comment made that the (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) ACECs should be a regional priority. We should take the opportunity to expand protected areas.

Mr. Guimond explained that the digital map would be more uniform in color and these areas would be easier to distinguish on the digital map.

A comment was made to OCPC to be careful to be clear to their communities about what this information will be used for, since there seemed to be some miscommunication within the town of Easton. Ms. Egan explained how Easton and Stoughton were included in the same process.

John Bullard informed the group of another opportunity for comments and input on March 2 at SRPEDD and at the next task force meeting on March 11.

Mr. Bullard reminded the group that there are other uses and opportunities for mapping Priority Protected and Priority Development areas for each community and as a region.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:10 pm.