

Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

Minutes of the September 9, 2009 meeting held at the MassHighway District 5 office in Taunton at 4:00 PM.

Present:

John Bullard, Vision2020, Chair

Kristina Egan, EOT

Pat Ciaramello, OCPC

Lou Gitto, Stoughton

George Spatcher, United Regional
Chamber

Bill Roth, Town of Fairhaven

Charles Kilmer, OCPC

Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audubon

Traci Herrick, Sen. Pacheco's
Office

Carolyn Lamarre, TRWA

Louise Hardiman, SRPEDD

Susan Peterson, SRPEDD

Jed Cornock, OCPC

Robert Overholtzer, OCPC

Linda Grubb, Lakeville

Heather Graf, Norton/CCATS

Bob Moitozo, Rehoboth

Greg Guimond, SRPEDD

Bob Mitchell, EOHEd

Karen Winger, OCPC

Melinda Ailes, MSBDC

Rick King, Norwood

Robert Gregory, MassHighway

Kyla Bennett, PEER

Roland Hebert, SRTA

Nancy Farrell, RVA

Robb Johnson, TNC

Jill Maclean, City of N.B.

Lilia Cabral, SRPEDD

Kevin Shea, Taunton

Roy Nascimento, N.B. Area Chamber

Pamela Haznar, MHD District 5

Leonard Flynn, Mansfield

Scott Turner

Walter Cruz, Wareham

Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD

Richard L. Shafer, Taunton

Erik Hove, RVA

1. Call to Order

Task Force Chair John Bullard called the meeting to order at 4:05 PM

2. Introduction of New Members.

Mr. Bullard asked that this meeting start with introductions since there may be new members. Everyone present introduced themselves.

3. Minutes of the meeting July 15, 2009

A request was made to add a sentence to page 2 of the second paragraph to reflect the concern expressed at the previous meeting and Mr. Bullard agreed.

4. The South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan.

Kristina Egan presented a slide show of the plan. She explained how the plan involved the train itself, as well as economic development effects. She explained how the corridor map was developed, as well as the overall vision of stations and how they could serve and fit into each community. The plan projected “value capture potential” surrounding the stations. This includes real estate taxes from new development and if a portion could help pay for the train.

The South Coast Rail Team has also been working with various state agencies to implement policy changes, as well as with the communities with technical assistance. Communities need to implement zoning changes, etc to complete the process.

Ms. Egan continued by reviewing each of the potential train stations.

A question was asked concerning the number of jobs around each of the stations and if they are current or projected. The response was that the number represented existing jobs within one mile of each station in 2006.

A question was asked concerning the relevance of job numbers around the stations and what these existing job numbers are telling us. Ms. Egan explained that these numbers are showing how these areas are centers of economic activity and this is where there are already jobs.

A question was asked if there was still any discussion on depressing any part of the track. Ms. Egan responded that this is not an option. It is not a reasonable capital expense.

A question was asked as to why Mansfield station is not part of this plan. Ms. Egan replied that this is not part of the corridor plan, but is still part of the environmental impacts reports. Mr. Bullard further explained that this corridor plan is trying to design the transportation around the existing environment and to locate the transportation where people already live and work.

A question was asked why this map doesn't display the Attleboro bypass and how it goes through one of the most environmentally sensitive areas of Mansfield. Ms. Egan replied that the environmental review document shows all of those impacts in great detail. The process and the document that we are discussing today involves the smart growth corridor work. This is an entirely different process from route selection. The environmental review encompasses environmental, economic, natural and social resources.

Erik Hove continued the presentation on the corridor plan process with economic effects of the train, including new jobs created by a model call Treadis. The projections from this model are that 400,000 more people will be within a 60 minute commute to the Boston area from this transportation investment. The Stoughton diesel, the two electric and the bus alternative were looked at and analyzed using this model.

A question was asked concerning the fact that the train will not be self-sufficient and the fares collected are not enough to cover the costs of construction, operation and maintenance. Where is the deficit addressed?

Kristina Egan responded that this chart does not address that. She then asked if the question concerned the public subsidy or the cost effectiveness?

The response was since the discussion was about the economy, then where is the amount that the state will be spending and not re-couping?

Ms. Egan responded that this is not typically how these things are done. It doesn't take that cost into account in this process, but in the capital expense part. We are looking at nearly half a billion dollars in new economic impact a year, compared to construction costs, which means it would take three years in economic impact dollars to pay off this project and even removing the operating costs this is a pretty darn worthwhile payoff.

Bob Mitchell then began his presentation on state policy recommendations and the process happening at the state level that concerns the Development Cabinet, which consists of the Secretaries of Transportation, Housing and Economic Development, Energy and Environmental Affairs, Labor and Workforce, Administration and Finance. These Secretaries meet regularly with each other and the governor to talk about policy and the SouthCoast Rail team has been meeting with them, as well.

What developed from these meetings are 6 items of state action to support this plan. These are Transit Oriented Development (TOD), Strategic Investments, Lead by Example, Affordable Housing, Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) and capture value.

A concern was expressed about creating housing in poorer downtown areas by tearing down existing housing as opposed to fixing existing structures.

Mr. Mitchell responded that there has been technical assistance available to communities for downtown revitalization and how to change zoning to accommodate more housing in downtown areas by utilizing existing structures.

Ms. Egan mentioned Wamsutta Mills as an example of adaptive re-use in terms of housing being converted from old mills.

A comment was made that in New Bedford, Fall River and Taunton there are great opportunities for re-investment for housing.

A comment was made expressing two concerns, the first being that many of these planning tools are not mandatory, so when you encourage a town to change zoning, that doesn't insure that the Priority Protection Area will be saved. The second concern is the economic effect to municipalities in terms of housing projected and these TODs are encouraging dense development around the stations.

Mr. Mitchell responded that all the stations are different as will be the level of development surrounding them.

The same concern was reiterated that the train will spur development and that encouraging development around these stations, especially in smaller communities, will then perhaps cause the Priority Protection Areas to be taken off the table. Then the taxes lost to the community from capture value will add to the negative impact on small municipalities. The build-out that results will be bigger than the town can handle.

Mr. Mitchell responded that once again, the state cannot mandate zoning, it can only encourage and provide incentives and that some responsibility still remains at the local level to do things that will not result in negative impacts. We are in this together and we are working toward making this the best plan.

A comment was then made that without a regional bank to facilitate Transfer of Development Rights across town lines it is difficult to imagine. The idea is not to force denser development on one municipality and ignore other areas of that municipality in exchange for open space in another municipality. There would have to be constraints and rules and regulations.

Another comment was offered that we are all in this together and residential development will hit these towns the hardest and the resulting costs in community services. We would all like these to be mixed use developments.

Mr. Bullard then explained that all of these concerns are happening in our towns already, without the train. The tax base is already being eroded with residential sprawl, so we have a chance to use this process and this project to form a plan to address these concerns. The Transit Oriented Development and the capture value are tied to the train, but these other efforts are not, which means that in the meantime we can work on protecting these areas and implementing these plans.

Erik Hove then explained that the state will be stepping up the assistance and the funding to implement this plan. The second round of technical assistance funding is available to help communities. The primary providers of this assistance will be the regional planning agencies. There are applications available.

Ms. Egan then announced civic engagement meetings for next week in a workshop format. She informed the group that they will not be posting the technical reports online because the Army Corps of Engineers will not be providing us a schedule for the Draft Environmental Impact Study and posting the reports will just delay the process.

She informed the group that they would be releasing some of the preliminary results, including ridership, capital costs, wetlands, rare species, station layouts and impacts, etc at the public workshops.

There was a question concerning the ENF and how it was stated that there was a necessity for a third rail and where is the alignment for that and can't that be posted before these public meetings? Ms. Egan replied that she would consult with her team and see what they could do.

A question was posed concerning the ridership numbers and if these figures have been completed and will those be posted? Can Attleboro have a higher ridership than Stoughton? Ms. Egan replied that yes, those were the latest figures.

Ms. Egan then announced that these public meetings would be held on September 14 at 5:30 in Raynham and on September 17 at 6:00 in Fall River.

A comment was made concerning the different issues of "practicability", time of travel, ridership and economic impact and some of these issues are not being addressed at these public meetings. Ms. Egan responded that there will be people at these meetings to address each of those issues.

Ms. Egan then announced an upcoming workshop called Railvolution and available scholarships for this workshop.

Mr. Bullard then announced the times and places of the next meetings and places. Tentatively the next meeting will be October 14th at the MassHighway District 5 office and the November meeting on the 18th at Bristol Community College.

Mr. Bullard adjourned the meeting at 6:05 pm.