

# Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

**Minutes of March 12, 2008 at the Silver City Galleria in Taunton at 4:00 PM**

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020	Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD	William Roth, Jr., Fairhaven
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC	Lisa Pacheco, Freetown
Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Project Mgr.	Linda Grubb, Lakeville
Robert Mitchell, EOHED	Chris McGowan, Mansfield
David Tibbetts, South Coast on Track	Ruth Geoffroy, Middleborough
Lisa Lowney, Cong. Barney Frank	Jill Maclean, New Bedford
Mary Wasyluk, Sen. Marc Pacheco	Heather Graf, Norton
Eric Robbie, Rep. Patricia Haddad	Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Kyla Bennett, New England PEER	Kevin Shea, Taunton
Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audobon	Melinda Ailes, MSBDC, UMD
Robb Johnson, TNC	Frank Spetrini, DET
George Spatcher, Esq., Attleboro Chamber	Mark Rousseau, Easton
Peter Kortright, Fall River Chamber	William Kenney, Esq., Fall River
Todd Castro, Asst. to Mayor Crowley	Byron Holmes, Fall River
Rachel Bain, EOT	Leonard Flynn, Mansfield
Roland Hebert, SRTA	Brendan Morse, Middleborough
Alan Anacheka-Nasemann, U.S. Army COE	Marc Draisen, MAPC
Mike McArdle, VHB	Susan McGrath, OCPC
Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Assocs.	Karen Winger, OCPC
Shundreka Givan, FHWA	Pat Ciamarella, OCPC
Stephen Smith, SRPEDD	Charles Kilmer, OCPC
Greg Guimond, SRPEDD	Louise Daley, SRPEDD
Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD	

1. Call to Order

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

2. Minutes of Meeting, February 13, 2008

Chair John Bullard asked that changes to the minutes of the last meeting, including comments to be added to the previous discussion of potential benefits and how to maximize them, be forwarded to SRPEDD.

Mr. Bullard noted two handouts distributed at the meeting: one is a letter from Steve Smith and John Bullard to Kristina Egan stressing the importance of timing and level of service to the South Coast Rail project; the second is a list of future meeting dates and topics. He asked that members forward any other priorities for future meetings to Mr. Smith at SRPEDD. There was discussion of the letter sent to Ms. Egan. Some members objected to the letter appearing to be sent from the Task Force when there had been no

discussion of it. Kyla Bennett objected to the process and content of the letter. Linda Grubb said that not all Task Force members agree with the letter. Mr. Bullard said he understands the criticism about the process and will act better on that. Ms. Egan was present and heard the qualifications from Task Force members and she will make sure that the Interagency Group understands them also.

### 3. Civic Engagement Presentation by the South Coast Rail Team

Ms. Egan gave a presentation on the analysis of alternatives so far. All comments from the public will be brought to the Interagency Group to consider as they make a final cut of alternatives to go on to final review. She noted that no final decision on the route and mode will be made until 2010. She explained the ten alternatives being considered along four corridors and some of the pros and cons of each.

Ms. Egan noted that this group has representation from different locations and interests, allowing for a true regional exchange. There are several factors to balance. She asked for questions, opinions and comments on the process itself. She also offered the opportunity for members to make the case to put an alternative back on the table.

Mr. Bullard asked that the Interagency Group measure not only what works today, but look at the next twenty or forty years. Ms. Egan said it was important to continue to hear that from this group. The planning horizon is 20 years; yet, any new infrastructure will be there for 100 years.

Alan Anacheka-Nasemann said the Army Corps will look at all environmental issues, specifically as they apply under Section 404, the Clean Water Act. They are looking at GIS data now. It takes “boots on the ground” before deciding on impacts of each alternative. They will be looking at wetlands impacts outside of ACECs, with a caveat that there will be closer looks at critical areas and unique features of an area.

Priscilla Chapman asked about the timeframe to submit written comments on the alternatives chosen and eliminated. Ms. Egan asked that comments be received by two weeks from today, and that emails include “Comments” in the subject line.

A discussion about the evaluation matrices followed. Ms. Chapman asked if monorail would involve wetlands alternatives. Ms. Egan said it did not get that far in the evaluation process. Alan said that dealing with twenty interchanges is not trivial regarding wetlands and water resources. Robb Johnson said it would be helpful to know the number of grade crossings on all of the routes. Ms. Egan clarified that trip times are all measured from New Bedford to South Station. Mike McArdle said that rail trip times were based on mileage and geometry along the ROW.

She said that the Interagency Group will get down to four to six alternatives some time in April and an ENF will be prepared. Lou Gitto asked if there is a long-term horizon for solving the bottlenecks in the rail system. Ms. Egan said the bottleneck argument is persuasive, but it is so far in the future that it cannot be integrated into planning at this point. 2030 is the planning horizon now.

Mr. Bullard asked for comments on the proposed alternatives and evaluation criteria. Lou Gitto said the use of the highway corridor is a short-term solution while working on

breaking the Braintree bottleneck. The bottleneck must be eliminated to serve the Old Colony lines and Wareham/Buzzards Bay. Gas is just going to increase and that line will be overstressed within the next ten years. The State would not have spent as much on Greenbush if it did not have a plan to fix it. Ruth Geoffroy concurred that to not have the bottleneck solution as part of the planning horizon now is extremely short-sighted.

George Spatcher said the Attleboro alternative give no service to Taunton, Norton and no new service to Attleboro. It gives zero benefit to the communities through which it passes. Todd Castro, Assistant to Mayor Crowley, went on record in support of the Stoughton route. Brendan Morse said if the Middleborough route eliminates Wareham service, we'll be kicking ourselves in 10-20 years. Roland Hebert, representing SRTA, asked when will we know for certain which alternative provides a "reasonable amount" of service to Fall River/New Bedford. Without that service level, the project is a waste of money. Mary Wasyzlk, representing Senator Pacheco, supported the Stoughton route. Robb Johnson suggested that the trip times be refined before further refinement of the alternatives. He agreed with Mr. Gitto's point about the bottleneck. He said the pending Three Mile River ACEC should receive the same consideration as the other ACEC.

Priscilla Chapman asked for access to more of the Interagency Group's written information. She asked that when evaluating wetland and environmental impacts that more than just the number of acres be considered. Kyla Bennett agreed that it is difficult to comment without seeing all the data the Interagency Group has been using. She also made the point that ten acres of phragmite swamp is not as critical as five acres of cedar swamp. She said that restricting the view to new stream crossings is inappropriate and added that limiting well impacts to only Zone 1 is too restrictive.

Peter Kortright said that short-term solutions should be looked at, but not with the impact of slowing down progress to a better solution. He also asked that the reviewers think long-term. He doesn't know why the rest of the world is building electric systems. Just because our system is all diesel now, does not mean that is the best solution.

Charlie Kilmer mentioned multiple grade crossings, a lack of parking and water supply issues in Easton. He asked which station sites have fallen off the table due to development and how does that change the alternatives.

Ms. Egan noted that all environmental criteria in all areas are based on available GIS data. Mike McArdle clarified that with the hybrid alternative (that sends three trains via Middleborough and three trains via Attleboro), there would be no need to fix the Braintree bottleneck or to add a third track in Canton because the trains can fit within the existing capacity of current infrastructure.

#### 4. Future Meeting Discussion

At the next meeting, on April 9, 2008 at the Silver City Galleria, the Task Force will develop a list of negative impacts and ways to minimize them.

#### 5 Adjourn

Chairman Bullard adjourned the meeting at 6:00PM.