

Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

Minutes of May 14, 2008 at Buttonwood Park Zoo in New Bedford at 4:00 PM

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020	Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD	Mark Rousseau, Easton
Peter Kortright, Fall River Chamber	Jim Hartnett, Fall River
Richard Shafer, Taunton IDC	Linda Pacheco, Freetown
Bruce Oliveira, for Rep. Stephen Canessa	Linda Grubb, Lakeville
David Tibbetts, South Coast on Track	Ruth Geoffroy, Middleborough
Jennifer Menard, SouthCoast Devt. Part.	Jill Maclean, New Bedford
Carolyn Lamarre, TRWA	Heather Graf, Norton
Kyla Bennett, New England PEER	Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Lisa Pacheco, Freetown BOS	Kevin Shea, Taunton
Erika Ueberbacher, Rayhnam Cons. Agt.	Stephen Ouellette, Westport
Kelly Whitmore, TTOR	Rachel Bain, EOT
Susan Jennings, UMD	Dr. Edgar Adams, RWU
Kristina Egan, EOT	William Kenney, Esq.
Mike McArdle, VHB	Karen Winger, OCPC
Alan Anacheka-Nasemann, U.S. Army COE	Stephen Smith, SRPEDD
George Spatcher, Esq., Attleboro Chamber	Roland Hebert, for SRTA
Paul Moser	Greg Guimond, SRPEDD
Mark Mansius	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, April 9, 2008

The minutes were accepted with the addition of Carolyn LaMarre to the list of those present.

3. Updates from Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Manager

Alternatives that are advancing to phase 2

Kristina Egan described the five alternatives for further study that were presented at the project's anniversary celebration on April 30. They are:

- 1) the Attleboro route via the Attleboro bypass, with electric and diesel options;
- 2) the Stoughton route, with electric and diesel options;
- 3) the Middleborough route, with two options—one with three peak trains (Middleborough simple) and one with six peak trains, the latter of which requires significant infrastructure options in Braintree;
- 4) a hybrid solution with half of the trains through Middleborough and half through Attleboro; and,

5) Bus rapid transit along the highway ROW. A rail or monorail option along the highway ROW is not viable for reasons documented in the report. This option takes a lane from Route 24 in the off peak direction to provide a zipper lane. At Route 128, an additional lane would be needed that would tie into I93's zipper lane. The corridor report is available on CD and is posted on southcoastrail.com. Comments on the report are welcome.

Ms. Egan reported on the next steps in the project. Fieldwork is occurring now, inventorying vernal pools in some of the rights of way. Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has requested a Blandings turtle study in the Hockomock, which will start shortly. Computer simulations of the alternatives will be done to evaluate the performance of the alternatives. Summer tours of each of the five alternatives will take place this summer and Task Force members are invited. The Environmental Notification Form will come out in the Fall when the project will officially enter the MEPA/NEPA process. The draft EIR in April 2009 will identify the preferred alternative. The final EIR in April 2010 will have an environmental analysis on the preferred alternative.

Ms. Egan responded to questions about the five alternatives and the process. In response to a question from Kyla Bennett, Ms. Egan explained that the Corps of Engineers advised the interagency group, but cannot approve any alternative until EOT is done with the MEPA/NEPA process. Ms. Bennett asked if the EIS would also be done in April 2009. Alan Anacheka-Nasemann said that no decision has been made regarding the scheduling of the NEPA process, but it will be done according to NEPA regulations. Ms. Bennett offered the name of an expert on Blanding turtles.

John Bullard asked if the bus option is found to be not practicable, can any work be done on the rail lines common to all alternatives. Ms. Egan said that it is unlikely the bus alternative will be dropped before April 2009. Priscilla Chapman asked if EOT would seek wetlands permits without doing an EIR. Ms. Egan did not know as they are in the very preliminary stages of analysis. Heather Graf asked about the status of the interagency minutes. Ms. Egan said they are all online with this report, as part of the overall report. She will make sure they go in the section for minutes as well. Peter Kortright asked if the bus alternative includes expansion of Route 24 south of I495 from two to three lanes and no expansion north of I495. Mike McArdle said it is too early to tell. They need to take a closer look at traffic conditions, ridership demand and the number of buses needed. They will also look at the Route 140/24 interchange, which is a major constraint. Carolyn LaMarre asked for details on the computer simulation. Mr. McArdle explained they are using Railsim software by Systra. It builds a simulation of the rail infrastructure required for the level of service needed for commuter rail including track, signal system, stations, and different speeds along the line. It predicts level of service, constraint points, and interference. It looks at all trains going into South Station.

Sue Peterson asked if the bus option would be non-stop into Boston, or would it include interconnectivity in the region. Ms. Egan said they are thinking about trip times. They will look at different options, including express trips. CTPS is doing ridership analysis; they will figure out if there are places it makes sense to stop. There is an option to have express and stops. Jill MacLean asked if the Greenbush project analysis included a bus lane as an option. Ms. Egan said it did.

Lou Gitto asked if copies of the report would be sent to the libraries. Ms. Egan said she could do that for the 31 communities. He also asked if the computer simulation is going to include Greenbush and the Old Colony Lines and the growth that is to occur in that area as well. Mr. McArdle said it would. Peter Kortright asked if they already have the software and does it enable forecasting changes in land use and growth pattern assumptions. Mr. McArdle said the MBTA and major railroads have used it. Ridership from CTPS must build in land use and growth assumptions. Bob Carney disagreed with the expense of reproducing copies of the printed report for a handful of people. Ms. Egan acknowledged that it is costly. Kyla Bennett asked when ridership figures would be available. Mr. McArdle said in the fall. Ms. Egan said they have to figure where stations go; it is an iterative process.

Corridor Plan Update

Ms. Egan also gave an update on the corridor plan. Two phases have been completed in a smart growth plan to try to identify economic development and environmental protection opportunities. Goody Clancy has completed a baseline analysis on the economy of the southcoast. SRPEDD is in the research phase of identifying priority protection areas (PPAs) and priority development areas (PDAs). They have completed a dozen communities and will meet with all 31. Ms. Egan presented a few of the findings from the economic baseline study and a literature review of rail impacts. In order to achieve TOD, a strong market is needed as well as proactive local leadership and a cooperative relationship with the transit agency and the local officials. Additional anti-sprawl measures are needed. More TOD is happening in the State since the smart growth program began, in cities similar in character to Fall River and New Bedford. Rail is a piece of an overall economic development strategy, not a silver bullet. The literature is light on commuter rail specific TOD; it's mostly about light rail with closer stops.

Goody Clancy divided the corridor into three areas: northern (linked to the Boston economy, has mixed use districts in downtowns, near transit); 495 (this area had the biggest rate of growth in population and housing and it is also the most vulnerable to unplanned growth); and Southern. Overall, housing is becoming less affordable. Job growth has lagged behind the State and Massachusetts has lagged behind the U.S. The region lost about half of its manufacturing jobs between 1976 and 2000. Competitive advantages include lower costs of production and housing. Barriers include transportation connections (access to labor force), labor skill levels, and quality of broadband service. Goody Clancy will hold an issues and opportunities workshop at a future meeting. They are also continuing municipal meetings on an individual basis, asking communities about their future for economic development, housing, environmental preservation and creating maps of issues that should be made known.

Dave Tibbetts asked if there have been municipal discussions about zoning. Ms. Egan said once there is more clarity about station sites, the goal is to have land use changes underway before any track is laid. Dr. Edgar Adams said that before I495 existed, there was not growth in that area. Transportation is a kickstart for growth. TOD may happen once the infrastructure is built. Mr. Tibbetts referred specifically to Haverhill growth that occurred around a new commuter rail station. Ms. Egan said the point is, you can't put

TOD anywhere. It needs a strong market. Dr. Adams said transit takes the local housing market and makes it a regional housing market.

Nancy Durfee gave an update on Priority Protection Areas (PPAs) and Priority Development Areas (PDAs). She distributed a handout of the schedule for meeting with each community and the stage of the process. GIS maps for all 27 SRPEDD communities are done. SRPEDD is reviewing open space and master plans and other materials before visiting the communities. PPAs and PDAs are outlined at an information sharing session, using maps and local knowledge. A third category exists for sites that could be protection and development, or are going to be protected or developed. At a community review session, local representatives review the GIS map. Somerset and Carver have been completed since January. Ms. Bennett said she thought Easton and Stoughton were going to be done. Mr. Bullard agreed they need to be done. Ms. Durfee said SRPEDD would be happy to help with the process. Mr. Bullard asked if all of the maps, when put together, would be put through a regional screen, at which point multiple communities talk together. Ms. Durfee said they would. Ms. Bennett asked who is involved in the community reviews. Ms. Durfee said the public is invited at the same time as the meeting with the committee. It varies by town who is present. It provides a tool for the communities to move forward. A copy of the report and map will go to the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Lamarre asked if the maps are available online. Ms. Durfee said they could be made available.

Greg Guimond did an initial review of station locations for bus, rail and layover, identifying 89 locations. This work involved using 2005 air photos, MassGIS, local assessors data, site visits and discussions with local officials. More recent air photos are coming. The analysis included 33 categories of information including operations, environment, infrastructure, land use and zoning, and economic development. The map of locations is being refined. It will go to the consultants in the next six months. Operational requirements for the State will weed out locations. There is more flexibility with stations than the route. The potential for TOD is a factor. Mr. Guimond said that in meeting with local officials, development that is already permitted is a factor. His task was to do an initial review of all possibilities. Goody Clancy, VHB, EOT, SRPEDD staff and local officials will refine the list of locations. Ms. Bennett asked if 40Rs are a factor. Ms. Egan said that population density is a factor. If a town adopts a 40R, it does not increase the chance of a station or train going there. 40Rs can go in lots of places.

Erica Ueberbacher said there is a lot of incentive for town officials to bring forward all information they have to Greg and Nancy. In the town's discussions with them, they identified all conditions before identifying locations. Mr. Guimond said SRPEDD is trying to dovetail these discussions with PPA and PDA. Lisa Pacheco of Freetown added that the town worked very well with SRPEDD and Goody Clancy. They put everything that was said to paper. Public members also attended.

Mr. Gitto asked who is locking in any of these station locations. All are on the open market and at risk of being developed. Also, it is important to have specific station locations to do the ridership analysis. Ms. Egan said that specific locations are required for modeling. Sites may change, and then modification is needed. Project planning must move forward with the best guess at this point. Mr. Bullard said that municipalities have

a responsibility too in making their own decisions about locations and actions they take. Dick Shafer said that the Taunton Depot plaza was built around a future station, getting ready for TOD. He is concerned with a change in plans. If the Middleborough route is chosen, then those sites are out of the equation. Mr. Shafer noted that there is still no public transportation connectivity to educational institutions in the region. In addition to Boston, he expressed a desire for intra-regional connections.

4. Completion of Facilitated Discussion

Mr. Bullard continued with the discussion to identify a list of negative impacts and how to eliminate, minimize or mitigate them. The list of positive and negative impacts will remain open. The intent is not to argue for or against a route. He recommended that when the list is finished, the discussion remains open. Heather Graf summarized a memo to the Task Force about whether or not to continue with this process until the Task Force is expanded to include communities outside of the region who would be impacted by the alternatives. Mr. Bullard said the June 11 meeting may be a good time to further discuss the roles of this group and its membership. It was agreed to continue to go through the list of negative impacts, recognizing that it is not closed. Mr. Bullard asked members to email Steve Smith with any additions to the lists of negative or positive impacts.

As part of the discussion of impacts, members of the Task Force again raised the issue of flexibility for the project and the ability to extend it in the future in order to connect communities. Ruth Geoffroy expressed concern that a Wareham extension is not part of the alternatives analysis model. Ms. Egan stated that Wareham is not a planned project. Ms. Geoffroy argued that it has been studied and there is feasibility to extend over the canal. If it is not considered now, the State could lose that potential option for the future. Mr. Gitto indicated that if the rail is to be used for freight as well as commuters, there would be a need for greater mitigation. For example, freight trains would stop automobile traffic longer.

5. Other Business

There was none.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting is June 11, 2008 at a place to be determined.

6. Adjourn

Mr. Bullard adjourned the meeting at 6:20 PM.