

FREIGHT COMMITTEE
of the
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the November 18, 2009 Meeting

The meeting was held in the MPO Conference Room of the State Transportation Building.

1. Introductions and Chair's Report – *Walter Bonin, Co-Chair*

W. Bonin called the meeting to order at 1:10 PM. Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list).

2. Announcements

The Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition is launching a website this week. The address is www.emfrc.org.

3. Approval of the draft October 14, 2009 Meeting Minutes – *Walter Bonin, Co-Chair*

The minutes were unanimously approved.

4. Briefing on Opportunities & Challenges Facing Short Line Operators – *Daniel J. Wahle, Vice President of Marketing & Partner, Mass Coastal Railroad*

The Mass Coastal Railroad has a licensing and operating agreement with the state to operate on state-owned railroad lines. The railroad has been in business for approximately two years. They operate between Middleboro and Cape Cod, doing mostly local business. About half of their business comes from two solid waste transfer stations. They also transfer some freight to CSX.

The remainder of D. Wahle's presentation was about the railroads opportunities, challenges, and marketing efforts.

Opportunities

- There is a lot of consumption in Eastern Massachusetts, but Class 1 railroads (such as CSX and Norfolk Southern) are not very familiar with the region and do not aggressively market their services to businesses in the region.
- Class 1 railroads want to move their operations further west, which may present an opportunity for short line railroads to serve this market and compete for business, which would mean lower prices and better service for customers. The Class 1 railroads are good at long haul services, but high costs make them less effective at carrying freight over the first and last mile.

Challenges

- Massachusetts does not have a large manufacturing sector. It's largely a consumption state with freight coming in, but little going out. The freight distributed in Eastern Massachusetts is largely finished goods.

- The Commonwealth does not recognize the value of its freight rail system. People at MassDOT, the Governor, and the Lt. Governor recognize the importance, but it is not translating well into policy.
- Freight rail cars are restricted to a weight of 263,000 pounds in Eastern Massachusetts. This creates a problem because the national standard is 286,000 pounds. Therefore, rail cars coming into Massachusetts cannot be loaded to capacity.
- Passenger and freight rail conflicts are a problem in Eastern Massachusetts. The two can coexist safely, but liability is an obstacle.

Marketing

- Economic and environmental competitiveness need to be marketed and sold.
- D. Wahle shared some figures that support the economic and environmental benefits of freight rail. The source of these figures is either the freight rail advocacy group GO-21 or the Association of American Railroads:
 - A freight train can move close to four times as much cargo as a truck per gallon of fuel.
 - According to the U.S. Department of Energy, rail use offers the greatest potential for reducing the energy and environmental impacts from freight transportation.
 - The EPA estimates that for every ton-mile, a typical truck emits roughly three times more nitrogen oxides and particulates than a locomotive.
 - Every ton of freight moved by rail instead of highway reduces greenhouse gas emissions by two thirds.
 - One rail car can carry the same amount of freight as two to five trucks.
- Mass Coastal removes 12,000 truck trips per year from Cape Cod's roads and bridges.

Members had the following comments:

- Norfolk Southern and CSX are looking to centralize their operations outside the inner core. Short line railroads can help preserve local freight distribution that will be lost when the Class I railroads terminate in Worcester and Ayer.
- Short line railroads can help alleviate truck congestion inside I-495. Trucks occupy road space that could be used by commuters. Freeing up space for commuters is important to the economy.
- Land use is an important issue for freight rail. There is pressure to redevelop industrial sites in the inner core. Zoning can help preserve industrial and warehousing land uses.
- Massachusetts is planning to expand commuter rail service to New Bedford and Fall River. These cities could also benefit from improved freight rail connections.
- The MBTA naturally focuses on passenger transportation and building infrastructure to passenger rail specifications. However, freight operators also use the tracks and it is important for them that the rail can accommodate 286,000-pound rail cars.

5. Comments on Freight Planning – Jamey Tesler, MassDOT

Massachusetts values freight rail. Secretary Mullan, the Lieutenant Governor, and J. Teslar have spent a lot of time talking and negotiating with the Class I railroads. The state is working on a statewide freight and rail plan, which will be a foundation that underlies all future work.

Unifying the transportation agencies under MassDOT allows planners to take a holistic view of the entire network, and conduct unified planning. The MassDOT Transit Division handles freight rail. This will open up opportunities for discussion about both freight and transit.

The Commonwealth understands freight rail because they are in the business in some areas. J. Teslar spent three years negotiating with CSX. A problem is the view that if one sides wins, the other loses. Freight and passenger rail need to learn how to support each other. Safety and liability highlight this issue. It is a core issue, but should not be a zero sum issue. Safety may be improved by technology such as positive train control. Insurance is another major burden for rail operators. Some solutions, such as insurance pools, may help.

The state also needs to consider freight because it has statutory responsibilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Infrastructure is going to play an important role in helping the state achieve its goals.

J. Teslar asked the Freight Committee to stay active and involved. The modes are on equal footing and each should make its case.

Members had the following comments:

- The opportunity to work with MassDOT is very encouraging.
- More revenue is needed to support the transportation system.
- Rail connections to the port are important, but lacking.

6. Briefing on House Bill 3355 to Create a State Infrastructure Bank – Frank DeMasi, Freight Committee Co-Chair

F. DeMasi attended a hearing in September on House Bill 3355, which would create a state infrastructure bank (SIB). The SIB could finance private expansions of freight rail infrastructure. The fund could be capitalized by flexing federal highway funds into the SIB.

F. DeMasi handed out materials explaining the SIB and asked members of the Freight Committee to support the bill by contacting Representative Wagner’s office.

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 2:50 PM

Attendance

Agencies

Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council
Jamey Tesler, MassDOT
Ed Anthes-Washburn, Seaport Advisory
Council
Lynn Vikesland, Massport

Cities and Towns

Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Advocacy/Citizens Groups

Dick Flynn – Eastern Mass. Freight Rail
Coalition
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside
Neighborhood Association

Guests and Visitors

Kevin Dooley, Tighe Warehouse
Bob Gentile, Framingham
Doug Low, Rail America
Ed Lowney, Malden
Marilyn MacNab
Arnold Pinsley, Natick
Mike Rennie, Pioneer Valley Railroad
Abby Swaine, EPA – New England
Dan Wahle, Mass Coastal Railroad

MPO Staff

Mike Callahan