



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of the November 9, 2011 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference 4 of the State Transportation Building, 10 Park Plaza, in Boston, MA.

1. Introductions – *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

Steve Olanoff, Chair (Westwood) called the meeting to order at 3:05 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves after which S. Olanoff introduced Karl Quackenbush, the newly appointed Director of Central Transportation Planning Staff. (For attendance list, see page 7)

2. Chair's Report – *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

S. Olanoff announced the results of the Boston Region MPO elections. Arlington and Lexington won a 4 and 3 year term respectively. Medway won the SWAP seat. Everett and Newton won at-large, uncontested seats; and the other new members winning uncontested seats were Norwood, Three Rivers Interlocal Council (TRIC), Beverly, North Shore Task Force (NSTF), and Woburn, North Suburban Planning Council (NSPC).

Thursday, November 3, 2011 was the first meeting of the new Boston Region MPO. MassDOT Secretary Davey was present with many of the chief elected officials of the communities. An orientation was given by the MPO staff and several work scopes were advanced.

3. Approval of the Meeting Minutes of October 12, 2011 – *Steve Olanoff, Chair*

A motion to adopt the meeting minutes of October 12, 2011 was made and seconded. The minutes of October 12, 2011 were unanimously approved.

4. Maximizing Rail's Potential in Eastern Massachusetts for Passengers and Freight –

Jody Ray, Deputy Administrator, MassDOT

J. Ray expressed appreciation to the Advisory Council for inviting him to address them. He briefly reviewed his experience in rail transportation citing his first career employment with the Boston & Maine Railroad (BMRR) in 1974. He moved to Amtrak for a couple of years followed by his move to the MBTA where he had been until earlier this year. He recently started his position in MassDOT as the Senior Director of Rail. Although his career has centered on the engineering side, he is now engaged in the operations side of freight planning and administration. J. Ray then addressed the following topics:

- Relations between the MBTA and the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Railroad Company (MBCR): The MBCR began its operations in 2003 with two subsequent contract extensions which will carry their contract through June, 2013. Currently, MassDOT is looking at bidding contracts that would commence July, 2013. The relationship between MBTA and the MBCR is strictly contractual. The new contract will likely be highly

competitive; the new contract will consider transitional inputs from the bidding contractors in order to make any potential service transition seamless.

- Relations between passenger and freight operators: The MBTA has negotiated passenger rights over freight lines along various branches (Pan Am, CSX). There are several lines where trackage rights were secured for commuter rail purposes over existing freight rail lines. If the lines become deteriorated due to neglect by the owner, the MBTA can step in and acquire those lines without further approval by the owner.
- Rail system's greatest maintenance needs: The greatest systemwide maintenance needs in the foreseeable future will be bridges, especially moveable draw bridges like the Beverly Draw Bridge and the Gloucester Draw Bridge. Both bridges are candidates for replacement. Another problem bridge is the Saugus River Draw Bridge which is currently operating as a single track bridge with speed and lane restrictions. Draw Bridge One, near North Station, is in design for complete replacement.

The rail system is in need of several major bridge replacements. The Merrimack River Bridge is consistently on the top of the list of needed replacements because of its impact on freight and Amtrak service. Currently, there is a 15 mph speed limit on the bridge. The replacement is in design and funding options are being sought to replace the bridge.

Although non-maintenance in nature, another big systemwide need is the federally mandated Positive Train Control System. This will be a cost to the MBTA of nearly \$350 million and is supposed to be in place by 2015 in order to bring the MBTA into full compliance. Currently there is no funding for this project.

There are bridges where MassDOT supported two '286 Improvement' Projects. (286 Improvements refer to operating capacity standards which currently call for a 286,000 pound-per-railcar load capacity) One of these projects is scheduled for rails on the Providence/Worcester Railroad; another is with the New England Central Railroad. Both are TIGER grants to increase load capacity of bridges. Some bridge work will be expected after the scheduled MassDOT acquisition of the CSX line to Worcester.

- Preparing for winter weather: Last year there was no time to recover between storms. Equipment failure often results when snow-packed equipment cannot be properly inspected between service runs. This year new snow-fighting equipment has been purchased including snow-blowers, rail heaters/melters and snow-plows. Snow-fighting equipment and commuter rail passenger cars do not operate at the same time, so the primary concern with fighting snow is preparing for the next day of service.

In response to winter snow events, a reduced-service schedule has been devised. This will be applied to bus routes as well. Fully deployed trains will be used but the schedule will be spread-out over longer intervals which will reduce the number of trains in service for that snow-event. This scheduling will free up some trains so that responding to train failure will not disrupt the systemwide load as severely. All equipment is in service

during snow events to deal with increased demand. MassDOT will strategically place some snow-fighting assets at locations which are known to have a history of snow drifting and icing.

- Shared freight and passenger operations and assets: The MBTA has made ongoing concerted efforts to share assets. Switch maintenance and track signals are expensive to keep online. If a section is not being used, it is best to take these assets out of service.

Schedules are coordinated between freight and passenger service. Passenger trains are given priority during commuter rush hours. During the middle of the day there is a joint-usage schedule while night service is set for freight service.

Work on the Fitchburg Line double-track project is underway. A second track will facilitate more freight to Boston and the North Point development in Somerville and Cambridge. Another double track project will include rail lines that are currently in use by the Amtrak "Downeaster Service" from Portland, Maine. This rail segment improvement will cost \$20.8 million to improve the tracks from Ballardville to Wilmington Junction and will be funded by Amtrak. There will still be a gap that is Ballardville Station, requiring the addition of a station track. In addition, Wildcat Branch will improve to 60 mph speeds once bridge and rail projects are complete. Collectively, these improvements will increase passenger rail speeds which will help to increase freight rail capacity through reduced bypass wait time.

Regarding the Franklin Line at the Walpole connection, the line was rebuilt to allow for safer and more efficient use of time in facilitating the 16-car passenger trains to special events at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro. Time to re-inspect the Boston cars in snowbound conditions was excessive. Improvements at this location will enhance freight movement in and out of the Mansfield area.

Responses to Questions:

In response to members' questions, J. Ray made the following additional comments:

- During regular snow storms, train operation is not affected. Ridership goes down in mega-event (2 ft. plus) so fewer trains are in service because fewer passengers are travelling. During snow events, train riders are often on non-work-related journeys which reduces the need to offer a service that is rush-hour driven and allows for spreading the service more evenly throughout the day. Typically, trains have fewer passengers on snow-event days.
- Public notices of service operations need to be coordinated so that expectations, in terms of passenger waiting time and service level, can be achieved. When a snow emergency is declared by the Governor with the disclaimer "if you have to travel, use public transportation", it is accompanied with advice to check out an authoritative website for service schedule information.
- In order to minimize damage to the infrastructure during snow-fighting events, highly-qualified employees with a good understanding of the rail system are used. There are a myriad of issues and problems that result from heavy snow removal.

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- Track improvements were made immediately after the acquisition of Grand Junction. Improvements including replacing rail and adding ties throughout the curve areas between the Fitchburg mainline and the Beacon Park Yard. Future improvements on the work program for this section include welded rail and improved grade crossings for safety purposes.
- There are 75 new commuter rail coaches being acquired by the MBTA. Also 20 locomotives are on order and scheduled to be delivered in 2013.
- Review of the Beacon Park Yard Study has been extensive. One finding of the study is that 57% of all the freight containers arriving at Beacon Park Yard were re-distributed to the I-495 area. The study estimates that there will be a significant reduction in truck traffic as a result of the relocation to Worcester. CSX wanted a freight terminal facility in Westborough, but there was no available space. However, there will be a large flexi-flow operation at the old Westborough Yard which will reduce truck freight traffic. (J. Ray will look into the availability of the HNTB, consulting firm study of Beacon Park Yard.)
- There is no American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding for either double-tracking or for bridge replacement projects in the region. To qualify for ARRA funding, projects needed to be “shovel-ready”.
- Rail owners maintain their property in order to use it. MassDOT would not have to upgrade any private holdings. The rail properties would be inspected and qualified prior to the introduction of any passenger service on any rails.
- There is currently no passenger rail service associated with the Grand Junction project, so there is no need to place a speed limit there. Should a passenger service commence, an engineering process would be undertaken to determine appropriate speed and operating characteristics.
- There will be a Northeast Corridor position added to the Rail Group at MassDOT.
- For Eastern MA lines, there is nothing left on which MassDOT does not have trackage rights. Engineering studies would have to be undertaken in order to find out if there is a potential for passenger service. MassDOT has acquired rights to all the rail lines so that service is not stalled due to lack of passage rights.
- MBTA has a problem with midday storage. Currently they are looking for a midday storage yard. Expansion of South Station may allow for securing a storage facility if one can be obtained. A mid-sized service yard would also improve maintenance turnaround for medium level maintenance and repairs.
- The Fairmont line is technically available for port traffic. When interacting with commuter rail, freight companies will have limited liability protection which lowers their operating costs. This is an incentive for freight companies to cooperate with the MBTA relative to commuter rail track rights. It is beneficial for both freight and passenger interests to be working together.
- There are staff members at MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning who can cover the topic of freight and rail planning. There are 5 people specifically involved in rail planning at MassDOT. (Mr. Ray is the contact person at MassDOT for any rail related issue.)

Comments:

- It is important that FHWA ask MassDOT what they are doing for freight planning. A champion for freight is lacking at MassDOT. (Dom D'Eramo, Millis)
- The Advisory Council's Freight Committee encourages participation by FHWA in the Committee's meetings. (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)

5. Update on Livability Program – Sean Pfalzer, MPO Staff

Sean Pfalzer of the Boston Region MPO presented the Advisory Council with a brief overview of the Livability Program and a summary of what has been accomplished over the past year.

- Overview: Main components of the program are the MPO's livability workshops as well as online resources for municipalities and others interested in improving livability. These resources include a livability indicator database and links to informational resources. The MPO is also planning a regional forum on livability. The main objective is to raise awareness and facilitate discussion, and identify strategies to promote livability.
- Workshops: Two workshops were conducted this year. The first workshop was conducted in Jamaica Plain and discussed the Washington St. Corridor from Williams St., near English High School, to Burnett St. which is located just east of the Casey Overpass. Discussion did not include the Casey Overpass, where The Arborway (MA Route 203) intersects Washington St. near the Forest Hills Transit Station. The main improvements discussed were how to improve the bicycle and pedestrian access to the area.

The second workshop was in Medway along the MA Route 109 corridor. This is part of a larger project which is at the 25% design stage, much of which extends beyond the scope of the workshop session. The discussion centered on potential enhancements to the existing design. A key issue at this location is the handling of shopping center vehicle traffic in areas where it comes in conflict with pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Much of the data used at the workshops came from the Needs Assessment conducted for the Long-Range Transportation Plan.

- Online Database: S. Pfalzer reviewed the livability online database examining data themes. These include accidents, vehicle miles traveled, sidewalk coverage, auto ownership and others. Summary data are listed on the data sheet for selected communities. There are cross-community comparisons of similar towns as well as regional results. Possible uses of the databases are to examine existing conditions and travel patterns and identify local challenges for improvement aimed at enhancing travel options in the community.

With geographic analysis at the Traffic Analysis Zone level, planners can study local impacts of livability related issues. In-town commuting can be studied to find areas that might be best targeted for local improvements. The database has incorporated 2010 Census data.

Livability should be considered in more than just a transportation related sense. For example, there are health, business and economic, and land use issues related to livability. Future work will incorporate these aspects into informational resources.

In the coming year more workshops are being scheduled by staff. The Advisory Council could act as a forum for related livability topics.

Responses to Questions:

In response to members' questions, S. Pfalzer made the following additional comments:

- Field work at the study site, MA Route 109 in Medway, identified truck related traffic conflicts. Curb-cuts were employed sparingly and it was noted that nothing in the design would negatively impact truck/freight movement.
- With regard to the livability workshop conducted in Jamaica Plain, the focus of the study area that was discussed was outside of the Casey Overpass intersection. It was noted that in all of the livability studies, accessibility issues were considered.

6. Committee Reports –

Membership: Monica Tibbits reported that the committee is putting together information on recruiting new members and a report will be forthcoming to the Advisory Council membership on this.

S. Olanoff raised the concern about the need for a resolution of the question of which entities vote on the Advisory Council. Due to the fact that many of the MAPC Subregions are now voting members of the MPO, there should be a discussion of whether these entities (that currently vote on the Advisory Council) and other MPO members should be voting members of the Advisory Council. No resolution on this matter was reached and discussion will be continued to the next Membership meeting.

7. Member Announcements – There were none.

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

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ATTACHMENT 1: Attendance List for November 9, 2011

Cities and Towns:

Mike Goring, Acton
Laura Wiener, Arlington
Robert McGraw, Belmont
Tom Kadzis, Boston
Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Dom D'Eramo, Millis
John Gillon, Quincy and ITE
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Agencies:

Tod Read, Boston Redevelopment Authority
Kristina Johnson, City of Quincy
Jody Ray, MassDOT
Calli Cenizal, MassDOT
Steven Rawding, MassDOT Aeronautics
Catherine Pasnelle, MassRIDES
Bruce Kane, MBTA
Richard Canale, Minuteman Advisory Group on Inter-local Coordination (MAGIC)
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council
Chan Rogers, Southwest Advisory Planning Committee (SWAP)

Citizen Groups:

Mary Ann Murray, Access Advisory Committee to the MBTA (AACT)
Tom Daly, American Council of Engineering Companies
Schuyler Larrabee, Boston Society of Architects
Malek Al-Khatib, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Jenna Bernabe, Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition
Chris Anzuoni, Massachusetts Bus Association
David Earnst, MassBike
Tom Yardley, Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization
Tom O'Rourke, Neponset Valley Chamber of Commerce
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
Monica Tibbits, Route 128 Business Council
John McQueen, WalkBoston

Guests and Visitors:

Kevin Dooley, The Logistics Group
Arnold Pinsky, Natick
Abby Swathe, US EPA NE
Amanda Richard, for Senator McGee

MPO Staff:

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| Karl Quackenbush, Director | Sean Pfalzer |
| Pam Wolfe | David Fargen |
| Mike Callahan | Walter Bennett |