



## **Input to Long-Range Transportation Plan for the Boston MPO Recommended Projects**

The Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition (EMFRC) has identified the following list of candidate projects for the MPO's consideration as it completes the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) "Paths to a Sustainable Region."

### **1. Metro-Boston Ground Freight Traffic Study:**

- a. Identify truck *vehicle miles traveled* (VMT), routes, origins, and destinations, within the Boston MPO and each MPO sub-region.
- b. Analyze the impact of proposed increased truck size weight limits from 80,000 pounds to 97,000 pounds on anticipated truck trips. Estimate the VMTs' and greater weight limits' impact on maintenance costs to highways and bridges, on costs to the environment and public health, and their ultimate impact on taxes or user fees to pay for the higher costs.
- c. Identify the current underutilized capacity of the Metro-Boston rail network particularly that within the urban core to assess its potential for and barriers to, long-term truck-to-rail freight diversions.
- d. Identify existing rail infrastructure, including inactive rail rights-of-way (ROW), to preserve critical rail capacity.

### **2. Metro-Boston Maritime Freight Study:**

- a. Determine the traffic patterns of maritime freight in and out of the Boston MPO, and current and potential market growth.
- b. Identify barriers preventing or discouraging increased use of rail from the ports and the feasibility of on-dock-rail to ease highway constraints.
- c. Assess the impact of a Seaport District build-out on port access and future maritime growth.

### **3. Preservation Assessment - Strategic Rail Assets**

Existing rail assets, industrial property and port access must be preserved simply to maintain the capability for future rail service in the Boston MPO area, even though current shipping patterns and economic conditions may not support current use. Strategic Properties in jeopardy of disappearing forever as a future freight rail resource includes: include Track 61- South Boston; Mystic Wharf Branch – Charlestown Central Mass Line (Dormant I-495 to Rte 128); Readville Yards; rationalized Beacon Park Yard; Old Colony Line - Fitchburg to Framingham – Mansfield - Taunton. It is recommended

that a study be conducted to determine the status and strategic value of the preceding lines and properties with recommendations for their preservation.

4. **Rail Infrastructure Improvement Projects:**

- a. **Freight/Passenger Improvements** - The NorthEast Corridor (NEC) is a key rail asset with primary use as an intercity Amtrak and MBTA commuter corridor. The NEC between Boston and the state line is owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Current passenger operating practices reduce freight weight capacities from the national standard of 286,000 pounds to 263,000 pounds limiting the use of newer, higher capacity rail cars. To allow for the unimpeded flow of freight and the development of increased passenger service, we recommend:
- Rail grade separation over/under the NEC between Mansfield and Attleboro enabling unimpeded freight flows from the SouthCoast region to connections with Class I carriers via Framingham.
  - A third track on NEC between Readville and Attleboro to accommodate increased commuter and regional rail and to add clearance and weight capacity for rail freight connecting to or traversing the NEC.
  - A rehabilitated Merrimack River Bridge in Haverhill, to eliminate freight and passenger conflicts and to provide for 286K pounds and unrestricted speed.
  - Rail-highway grade separations within the Town of Framingham. Currently Framingham is the central hub for “carload” freight rail in Massachusetts. While it does not generate truck traffic, the train operations disrupt passenger rail and highway traffic as well as pedestrian flows. A grade separations and freight yard improvements are recommended to enhance the quality of life while retaining the fluidity of the critical freight rail artery.
- b. **Urban Core Freight Facilities** - Conduct an engineering assessment to enable access (currently via Track 61) into the Boston Marine Industrial Park and North Jetty and appropriate staging areas. Also evaluate the establishment, near Boston ports, a new expanded intermodal transfer and freight village/logistics park near Boston ports and the Route 128/I-95 Corridor, with efficient highway access.
- c. **Urban Ring Shared Usage** – Engineering assessment for shared use of the Grand Junction Secondary Track, now owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to support freight, passenger rail to North Station and light rail between Allston and Cambridge.

### **Why is Freight Rail Important to the Boston MPO's Region?**

Preserving, modernizing, and expanding the remaining rail freight and distribution facilities within the Boston MPO area, and designating land for new facilities, are critical to alleviating the road congestion that cripples economic growth. Removing barriers to public and private investment will be pivotal to maintaining a competitive freight rail presence, regardless of whether the infrastructure is publicly or privately owned. Similarly, highway and rail capacity must be planned in unison, with more attention to reducing the length of the “last mile” truck delivery and the number of such trips.

Recent industrial land acquisitions will present long-term impacts on the movement of goods and people within the Boston MPO area. Gentrification of industrial and distribution enterprises in the Allston/Beacon Park Rail Yard area will remove the last remaining urban freight rail terminal from metro Boston's distribution chain.

As a result, freight distribution activities will shift significantly in Eastern Massachusetts, particularly in the Boston - Metro-West - Worcester Corridor and along the Route 128/I-95 and I-495 corridors. Further, the Commonwealth's Freight Plan anticipates a regressive long-term, continuing diversion of freight from rail to truck as overall freight volume continues to increase. Each freight car removed from the rails adds three to five round-trip trucks to the Boston MPO's road network. Together these shifts portend increased costs in congestion, travel times, road maintenance, and public health.

### **Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition's Vision Statement.**

We anticipate a future when:

- 1. Planned development of transportation infrastructure, particularly of underutilized rail and industrial properties, stimulates economic development and job growth.*
- 2. Programs and policies in the LRTP provide the mobility, access and infrastructure needed to diversify the Commonwealth's economy so as to increase higher wage industrial jobs and to attract new businesses. These policies and programs preserve current infrastructure and access while protecting existing rail-served industrial companies and their employees.*
- 3. State-wide zoning reforms encourage corridor development, with passenger and freight transportation as integral components. Local, regional, and state-wide planners work in concert to integrate economic development with transportation.*
- 4. The transportation infrastructure, including rail assets and maritime and aviation facilities, benefits both freight and passenger service.*
- 5. Massachusetts exploits its underutilized rail and maritime infrastructure to alleviate long-term congestion and to ease the Commonwealth's dependency on trucks and highways.*
- 6. It adopts formal Public/Private Partnerships to encourage private investment by new businesses, class 1 and short line railroads, maritime operators and motor carriers.*
- 7. The Commonwealth reexamines its transportation reform activities, particularly as they affect the adequacy and level of freight transportation policies and planning, in order to manage the costs of both rail and truck freight more effectively.*
- 8. The Commonwealth demonstrates active leadership and vision in the development and execution of freight programs through establishment of an office specifically devoted to this issue.*