

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL



Regional Transportation Advisory Council

September 13, 2017 Meeting

3:00 PM, State Transportation Building, Conference Room 4,
Boston, MA

Meeting Summary

Introductions

T. Bennett, Chair (Cambridge) called the meeting to order at 3:00 PM. Members and guests attending the meeting introduced themselves. (For attendance list, see page 6.)

Chair's Report - Tegin Teich Bennett

T. Bennett extended a thank you to Massport for sponsoring the field trip to the Conley Seaport Terminal in South Boston in July. She reported that the MPO met twice over the summer, and announced that at the October 25 MAPC Fall Council meeting municipalities will elect representatives for MPO seats.

T. Bennett reported that a pilot program for providing Foxborough Commuter Rail service beginning in April 2019 has been approved by the MBTA's Fiscal and Management Control Board.

Minutes - June 14, 2017

A motion to approve the minutes of the June 14 meeting was made and seconded. The minutes were approved.

Update on North-South Rail Link Study - Scott Hamwey, Manager of Long-Range Planning, MassDOT

S. Hamwey explained that the North-South Rail Link (NSRL) feasibility reassessment is recently underway. The \$2M study will take a fresh look at the NSRL concept. MassDOT will review the technical feasibility of this project in relation to any new alternatives, noting that advances have been made in tunneling construction that may change the scope of the work compared to the last project study (some 15 years ago). There have also been

changes in the regulatory environment, which must be considered. The study will ascertain the costs and benefits of the project at a high level so that decisions to weigh this project relative to other projects can be made. In other words, the study aims to be an objective analysis to determine if the project should continue through the planning process. A complete analysis will help to determine the validity of pursuing the project and demonstrate to stakeholders that a decision was reached objectively.

S. Hamwey explained that there are several service issues and challenges the Rail Link project might help to improve. Terminal capacity, for example, is the main reason the South Station Expansion Project has been pursued for the last several years. There is a sense that south side capacity of the commuter rail system is constrained leaving little room for service expansion during peak commute periods. The Rail Link may be a way to increase capacity beyond the improvements of the South Station Expansion Project.

Secondly, the Rail Link offers more flexibility in maintaining the rolling stock and equipment. Most of the current and potential service facilities are on the north side but most of the service demand is on the south side. Another consideration is that north side commuters are not delivered to the heart of the central business district while the south side commuters arrive closer to the central business district. The Back Bay and Longwood Medical Area are both more directly serviced by south side commuter rail service, which with a Rail Link connection, would improve access for north side commuters.

Suburb to suburb trip making and inter-regional travel to and from Portland, Maine, would be facilitated by the Rail Link. While these two considerations are of lower importance with regards to their effect on the whole system, any improvement in service to the north side commuters will relieve pressures on the downtown transit system.

In reviewing this project, there are some high operational benefits and potentially some high cost elements that need to be better understood. For example, design issues around grades, portal locations, tunnel widths and the desired number of stations will be looked at through the experience of national and international tunneling projects, such as London's Crossrail Project and the recently completed Second Avenue subway project in New York. Furthermore, the recent expansion project in Philadelphia may provide answers to questions about targeting market growth areas. Updating the design criteria used in the 1990's will be undertaken as well as developing service plans and service alignments.

A public information meeting on this project is planned for October 17 at the Fort Point Room in the Atlantic Wharf Building at 290 Congress Street (second floor). Other public meetings are planned for January and March of 2018.

Discussion

T. Bennett asked about the scope of the alternatives that are being reviewed in the study such as number of stations and track alignments. S. Hamwey explained that there are several alternatives being modeled. The number of stations and their alignment will identify the alternatives. One alternative is a one-track versus two-track alignment. Determination and modelling of service levels will be linked to the service level being aspired to in the South Station Expansion Project. This will result in an increase in peak and hourly service in all lines. More aspirational service levels will be modeled to determine the most number of trains that could be run based on vehicle ridership.

The alternatives will be compared to a “no-build” scenario that assumes no terminal capacity expansion in the future as well as a scenario that envisions South Station Expansion. The North-South Rail Link addresses more issues than the South Station Expansion Project, nevertheless, certain measured changes can be made on issues like peak capacity which are covered by both of these planning projects.

T. Bennett asked about the current use of the Grand Junction line to move equipment for maintenance. S. Hamwey explained that the upcoming Rail Vision planning process will more likely focus on that location with more detail. With the North-South Rail Link in place, He noted there would be less demand for the Grand Junction to cross trains over from the south side for service and maintenance. S. Hamwey stated that this study will try to narrow the high-level cost of the NSRL project.

J. Businger supported the resumption of the EIS/EIR process and encouraged MassDOT to secure more funding for the planning study. He stated that a “no-build” alternative is not a good solution to the problem.

W. Bonin expressed a concern about the truncation of service at South Station as it will constrain future growth of the entire system. He also asked if the South Station Expansion project will last and whether connecting North Station and South Station will make them both more viable in the long-term. S. Hamwey explained the goals of the two projects are to increase capacity. The nature of the costs of the two projects may limit what can be attained. The current Capital Investment Plan has no money dedicated to implementing the South Station Expansion Project or the Rail Link. He stated that recent trends show greater population growth in the inner core which may adversely impact models projecting ridership growth. These considerations will all be covered in the NSRL study.

S. Hamwey explained that there is a vast network of infrastructure in the commuter rail system which needs to be used at its highest and best use. It functions to move people to and from the suburbs but it does little to address off-peak, weekends and reverse-commutes. The upcoming Rail Vision study of the commuter rail system will address strategies to increase the use of these assets.

M. Gowing asked if the study will address the heavy demand on the Green Line resulting from riders exiting commuter rail at North Station and filtering onto transit. Commuters who would bypass the Green Line and go directly to their destination using the commuter rail would lighten the load on the already burdened Green Line. S. Hamwey explained that this will be addressed in the study and added that the service headways for the Orange Line are of a more immediate concern for the north side passengers.

M. Gowing asked if the project was part of a serial development with South Station Expansion or if these two projects were competing with each other. S. Hamwey explained that the purpose of the study is to determine what has changed in the “build” environment that would make it harder to complete. He also stated that there are elements of the two projects that could co-exist. South Station Expansion is a high-cost project and it is not funded in the CIP, which may leave a reluctance by MassDOT officials to take on two high-cost, unfunded projects at the same time. The NSRL study might help to set a priority to either of the projects.

A. Fragoso asked about the choke-points on the north side. S. Hamwey explained that the expansion of commuter rail tracks and platforms at North Station will add capacity to North Station. In modeling this project, the South Station Expansion Project is called the “surface alternative” and it includes the North Station improvements.

F. DeMasi asked about the benefit of converting the layover yards to other uses for economic development as a way to help pay for the project. He also mentioned extending the northeast corridor electrification which would provide a new look into future equipment purchases. S. Hamwey explained that economic development is one of the guiding principles in advancing a project but in this case, the economic development benefit is a secondary benefit. A project of this scale would not be undertaken primarily for the potential economic development that might result. Regarding electrification extension, S. Hamwey noted that electrification would be extended into the corridors, especially into the environmental justice communities. Electrification could happen with or without the tunnel, so this would be considered a secondary benefit of the project.

W. Bonin asked about protection of the land above the tunnel project and whether this would be considered in this study. S. Hamwey indicated that geotechnical information and building foundation information is being gathered.

Election Committee, Mike Gowing, Chair

In accordance with the bylaws of the Advisory Council, the election of officers will take place each year at the October meeting. The Election Committee met to consider candidates for Advisory Council Chair and Vice Chair after having announced the election process to the full membership prior to this meeting.

The Election Committee nominated Tegin Teich Bennett to the office of Chair for the

November 2017 – October 2018 term. No further nominations from the floor were made and the Council voted to accept this nomination for Chair.

The Election Committee nominated AnaCristina Fragoso to the office of Vice Chair for the November 2017 – October 2018 term. No further nominations from the floor were made and the Council voted to accept this nomination Vice Chair.

At the end of this meeting, the nomination process will be closed and the final slate of candidates will be presented for a vote at the October meeting.

The Council voted unanimously to nominate Tegin Teich Bennett to the office of Chair. The Council voted unanimously to nominate AnaCristina Fragoso to the office of Vice Chair. The nominating process was called to a close.

Old Business, New Business, and Member Announcements

F. DeMasi suggested the Advisory Council comment on the upcoming MassDOT Rail Plan when it is released. He noted that some improvements mentioned in the 2010 Rail Plan have not been completed and should be pursued. S. Olanoff noted that the Advisory Council had an ad hoc Freight Committee in the past and asked if it should reconvene to consider MassDOT's Rail Plans. T. Bennett took the request under advisement.

T. Bennett noted several proposed meeting topics that may be helpful in informing the group include: Green Line Extension progress update; a review of the impact of the removal of toll booths on the Masspike; an update on the progress being made on the new fare collection system at the MBTA; scenario development in the Long Range Transportation Plan; Vision Zero, Complete Streets and a transportation safety panel.

Members suggested that topics might include: A review of land-use policies by MAPC; developing and implementing autonomous vehicle (AV) policy; presentation of AV study by CTPS.

S. Olanoff announced the MAPC Council Meeting on October 25, 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM at the Quincy Marriott. An AV demonstration is planned. The MPO election will also be held.

S. Zadakis announced that Crosstown Connect has added Sudbury and Concord to this TMA. He is working on last-mile issues with both towns.

F. DeMasi commended Ed Carr of the MetroWest RTA for improvements to the Framingham Railroad Station and the new parking lot. There is a bike path connecting several local offices.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting adjourned at 4:20 PM.

Attendance

Municipalities - Voting

Acton
Cambridge
Marlborough
Millis

Citizen Advocacy Groups

American Council of Engineering Companies
Association for Public Transportation
Boston Society of Architects
Boston Society of Civil Engineers
CrosstownConnect
MASCO
MBTA Ridership Oversight Committee (ROC)
MoveMassachusetts
National Corridors Initiative
Riverside Neighborhood Association
WalkBoston

Agencies Non-Voting

MassDOT - Aeronautics Division
Three Rivers Interlocal Council
US EPA

Guests

Patrick Tierney
Gabriella Spitzer
Toni Pignatelli
Frank DeMasi
Ed Lowney
Dee Whilleby

Staff

David Fargen
Matt Archer

Attendee

Mike Gowing
Tegin Bennett
Walter Bonin
Ed Chisholm

Tom Daley
Barry M Steinberg
Schuyler Larrabee
AnaCristina Fragoso
Scott Zadakis
Paul Nelson
Leonard T Diggins
Jon Seward
John Businger
Marilyn Wellons
John McQueen

Steven Rawding
Steve Olanoff
Timothy Timmermann

Michael Baker Engineering
Michael Baker Engineering
Michael Baker Engineering
NSRC Working Group
Malden Resident
Boston Resident

Sandy Johnston