

# Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

**Minutes of December 12, 2007 at the Fall River Heritage State Park at 4:00 PM**

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020	Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD	Linda Grubb, Lakeville
Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Project Mgr.	Chris McGowan, Mansfield
Lisa Lowney, Cong. Barney Frank	Ruth Geoffroy, Middleborough
Rep. Steven D'Amico	Heather Graf, Norton
Rep. David Sullivan	Lou Gitto, Stoughton
Bruce Oliveira, Rep. Stephen Canessa	Kevin Shea, Taunton
Colleen Murray Hackett, Sen. Joan Menard	Steven Ouellette, Westport
Mary Wasyluk, Sen. Marc Pacheco	Byron Holmes, Fall River
George Spatcher, Attleboro Chamber	Kyra Bennett, New England PEER
Peter Kortright, Fall River Chamber	Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audobon
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC	Susan Jennings, UMD
Carolyn LaMarre, TRWA	Karen Winger, OCPC
Robb Johnson, TNC	Stephen Smith, SRPEDD
Larissa Brown, Goody Clancy	Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD
David Farmer, Jacobs, Edwards & Kelcey	Greg Guimond, SRPEDD
Will Richmond, Fall River Herald News	Dr. Edgar Adams
Roger Williams Students	

1. Call to Order

Rep. David Sullivan welcomed everyone to Fall River.

2. Minutes of Meeting, November 14, 2007

It was voted to accept the minutes of November 14, 2007.

3. Report on Tour of Middleborough Route

Kristina Egan reported that 40 people took the third and last tour of the three previously studied alternatives. Rita Garbitt of Lakeville and Ruth Geoffroy of Middleborough talked about impacts. The bottleneck from Braintree north to Boston and what it would take to double track there was discussed. Takings issues and infrastructure challenges were discussed. In spring or summer of 2008, there will be another series of tours of the alternatives that are advancing to the in-depth environmental review. There has been a request to do a tour of the southern portion of the historic rail rights from Taunton south. This will be done at the next stage. Kevin Shea asked about the scope and price of adding capacity to eliminate the bottleneck. Ms. Egan said there are no updated numbers

since the 2000 DEIR, but the pre-alternatives analysis which will come out in March will have some numbers to look at. Linda Grubb expressed Lakeville's concern about closing the Lakeville station if the Middleborough alternative is chosen. She also asked that this alternative be looked at as a new line in an EIR rather than an extension. George Spatcher thought it was revealing that the rail corridor at the bottleneck still exists, but it is used differently than it once was. Where there were once four rail lines up to 1959, there are now two Red Line tracks. Extending the Red Line south or converting part of the Red Line to commuter rail is a possibility. Ruth Geoffroy noted that Greenbush is already experiencing delay in that corridor. Rail service to Cape Cod, Wareham and Buzzards Bay would also depend on that same line; therefore, solving the Braintree congestion problem solves a problem not only for New Bedford/Fall River, but for these other areas too.

#### 4. Corridor Study Update

Ms. Egan announced that Goody Clancy has received the contract today to design a Regional Smart Growth Corridor Plan. Larissa Brown of that firm described the team members and the work to be done. John Bullard asked how Goody Clancy's work would mesh with SRPEDD's working with communities to identify priority protection and development areas. Ms. Egan said that weekly coordination meetings would be held with the consultants. While SRPEDD does detailed mapping, Goody Clancy will simultaneously be doing economic development analysis. Ms. Brown said that it is necessary to know where to preserve in order to plan at this scale. Ms. Egan stated that Goody Clancy is one of the only firms that understand that smart growth is not just about development. Ms. Brown said that there would be a database and values base created for each community with all available information from the municipality and from SRPEDD including what is valued most and the opportunities to change. Susan Peterson said that private land trusts should also be consulted. Kyla Bennett asked for a list of the communities included in the Corridor Plan. Ms. Egan said she would post it on [www.southcoastrail.com](http://www.southcoastrail.com). Ms. Bennett asked if the contract for the Corridor Study allows the work to be done if the chosen alternative is not rail. Ms. Egan stated that the ultimate vision is for a smart growth land use plan for southeastern Massachusetts, so yes. Rail would reinforce the plan.

#### 5. Interagency Coordination Group on Permitting Issues – Status Report

Ms. Egan said that the environmental review began in September and is now in the pre-MEPA and NEPA review process. There will be three rounds of civic engagement meetings between now and April. The first round, which identified new alternatives and evaluation criteria is complete. Meetings were held in Berkley, Stoughton and Dartmouth. In January, round two will ask for feedback on a narrowed list of alternatives and proposed criteria. Meetings will be in Easton, Norton and Fall River. Round three meetings will be held in March to get thoughts on the draft findings. There are six main alternatives with different technologies for each. The six alternatives include the Stoughton, Attleboro and Middleborough rail corridors, No Build, Enhanced Bus and use of the highway system. Different technologies include bus rapid transit, light rail, commuter rail and monorail. At next week's Interagency Coordination Group meeting, Ms. Egan is proposing a three step process to evaluate the alternatives with the following

criteria for consideration. The first step asks: Is the alternative capable of meeting the project purpose? Does it enhance regional mobility? Does it provide a quality of service comparable with the automobile? Is it compatible with smart growth strategies? Step two asks: Is it practicable to construct or operate? Does it improve, or not adversely affect the existing transportation system? Is it reliable? Is it operationally compatible with the transportation infrastructure? Does it have benefits with reasonable capital and operating costs? Can it be built without significant impacts to the transportation system? Does it provide sufficient ridership to justify the investment? Step three asks: What is the relative magnitude of impacts on the aquatic and natural environment? (wetlands filled, number of new bridges or culverts that would disrupt habitats, number of acres of mapped priority habitat for species, number of acres of protected open space impacted)? These criteria were received through civic engagement meetings, memos received and comments at the South Coast Rail website. Other criteria proposed may be included. The final evaluation criteria will be submitted in draft form for the January civic engagement meetings. All minutes from the Interagency meetings will be on the website.

Lou Gitto asked how quality of service is compared with the automobile. Ms. Egan said it is based on time and reliability. Mr. Gitto said it should also meet people's needs and that people need something different than a few trains a day. Ms. Egan said that overall growth patterns affect travel and commuting is only about 30% of travel. Mr. Bullard added that the alternative should last a long time; therefore, criteria could include the cost of adaptation to climate change. Ms. Egan asked for any other suggestions before the end of the week in order to bring them to the Interagency Group.

#### 6. Roger Williams University Student Presentation

Four groups of students presented development alternatives for the Davol Street Station site in Fall River. Ideas included connections to the waterfront and Battleship Cove; pedestrian access; focusing businesses, housing and civic spaces around the station; and restoring the historic street grid. Peter Kortright said that the freeway, topography and distance from the downtown make it challenging to get people between the station site and the downtown. Extending the downtown to the waterfront or creating a new urban center connected with the train station are possibilities. Greg Guimond observed that SRTA is currently without a station and it is important to tie either rail station into an intermodal center with the local bus service. Mr. Kortright said that Mayor-elect Correia likes the idea of a bus route connecting the downtown and the waterfront.

#### 7. Future meetings

The next meeting is January 16 at the Fall River ATMC in conjunction with a civic engagement meeting. Mr. Bullard asked members to consider the issue of changing the Task Force name to match the South Coast Rail project name. Comments can be forwarded to Steve Smith or Mr. Bullard.

#### 8. Adjournment

Mr. Bullard adjourned the meeting at 6:00 PM.