

Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force

Minutes of October 17, 2007 at the Fall River Heritage State Park at 4:00 PM

Present:

John Bullard, Vision 2020	Robert Carney, Dartmouth
Dr. Susan Peterson, SRPEDD	Mark Rousseau, Easton
Robert Overholtzer, OCPC	William Roth, Jr., Fairhaven
Peter Kortright, Fall River Chamber	James Hartnett, Fall River
Kyla Bennett, PEER	Linda Grubb, Lakeville
Jennifer Menard, South Coast Devt Partnership	Chris McGowan, Mansfield
Carolyn LaMarre, TRWA	Ruth Geoffroy, Middleborough
Jill McLean, New Bedford	Heather Graf, Norton
Robb Johnson, TNC	Richard McCarthy, Raynham
Priscilla Chapman, Mass Audobon	Tom Fitzgerald, Somerset
Susan Jennings, UMD	Lou Gitto, Stoughton
David Tibbetts, South Coast on Track	Kevin Shea, Taunton
Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Project Mgr.	Bruce Sauvageau, Wareham
Rachel Bain, EOT	Steven Ouellette, Westport
Garth Patterson, Cong. Barney Frank	Lisa Nelson, Cong. Jim McGovern
Mary Wasylyk, Sen. Marc Pacheco	Eric Robbie, Rep. Patricia Haddad
Pedro Amaral, Rep. Michael Rodrigues	Kate Barrett, RVA
Robert Horton, DCR	Liz Gimson, Commtty Pres Coalition
David Farmer, Jacobs, Edwards & Kelcey	A. Batiste, Fall River
Renee Tavares, DCR	Brian Boyd, NBST
Ken Green, OSP Freetown	Mark Monsius, Self
Bruce Kaplan	Jennifer Villegas, RWU
Margaret Ishihara, Wareham Citizen	Nancy Farrell, RVA
Jennifer Holske, TTOR	Bill Kenney
Anthony Cucchi, TTOR	Prof. Edgar Adams, RWU
Jennifer Lev, Wheaton College	Steven Seminelli, RWU
Caitlin Mayo, RWU	Jamie Steburne, RWU
Sara Bruno, RWU	Antonio Mighucino, RWU
Meghan Mill, RWU	Alan Anacheka-Nasemann, COE
Pat Ciaramella, OCPC	Mike McArdle, VHB
Karen Winger, OCPC	Bill Napolitano, SRPEDD
Stephen Smith, SRPEDD	Roland Hebert, SRPEDD
Greg Guimond, SRPEDD	Nancy Durfee, SRPEDD

1. Call to Order

Chairman Bullard called the meeting to order at 4:09 PM. Peter Kortright of the Fall River Chamber of Commerce welcomed everyone to Fall River.

2. Minutes of Meeting, September 11, 2007

The minutes were accepted with the addition of Steven Ouellette to the attendance.

3. Priority Development and Priority Protection Areas

Nancy Durfee made a presentation on a proposed criteria checklist that was distributed for discussion. Ms. Durfee began by displaying a 2004 land use map showing areas already developed and a 2030 unmanaged growth scenario land use map, which shows a great loss in open space. She described the process used in Dighton last year to identify priority protection areas (PPAs) and priority development areas (PDAs). This process will be used for 18 communities in the rail corridor, including Middleborough and Attleboro. Peter Kortright asked what is the next step after assigning values to each criteria. Greg Guimond said that the criteria would be used to develop an overlay mapping process as part of a long-range plan that could be used in a regional Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) process. Ms. Durfee asked for specific feedback on the absence or avoidance of sensitive natural environmental features. Mr. Bullard asked if this effort makes sense as a strategy. Kyla Bennett said it is a useful tool. Ruth Geoffroy expressed concern about the Community Value column. She does not think that value should be identified until after everything is mapped. Lou Gitto asked if Open Space Plans did not already identify areas to be protected. Ms. Durfee said some communities do not have such plans and some are outdated. Where they exist, they are a resource in this process. Mr. Bullard asked everyone to look through the criteria, and to test them on specific places to see if anything has been left out. The November 14th meeting agenda will start with feedback on the criteria and suggestions for improvements.

Public Meeting – An Open Discussion of Alternatives

Mr. Bullard introduced Kristina Egan of the Executive Office of Transportation, Project Manager for the South Coast Rail project. Ms. Egan thanked everyone for their time attending this first of several civic engagement meetings. She said the basic project purpose is still being defined, but it is about getting people between the South Coast and Boston. Regional TDR is a key implementation tool and SRPEDD's work, under a two-year contract, will be an important part of that. Concurrent with SRPEDD's work, there is a consultant team working on a corridor plan that is complementary to SRPEDD's work. That plan will take 18 months. The EIR process will take 2 ½ years. Ms. Egan introduced Mike McArdle of VHB to give an overview of the EIR process.

Mr. McArdle explained the Phase I analysis of alternatives is part of the Army Corps of Engineers (COE) method that combines permitting with the environmental review process. This phase will go on until March. Mr. McArdle asked attendees to identify other alternatives in addition to the three rail alternatives considered in the past. The Interagency Committee, led by the COE, will narrow the list down to 4-5 alternatives, which will go through the NEPA EIS process combined with MEPA. This process will be completed in 2010.

Alan Anacheka-Nasemann, Senior Project Manager in the Regulatory Program, explained that the COE cannot issue a permit unless it determines that the alternative chosen is the least environmentally damaging and practicable alternative (LEPDA). He explained that the review starts with the proposal that has the least environmentally damaging consequences, and it must also be possible to do and meet the project purpose. He explained that the Highway Methodology was developed in the late 1980s by the New England COE District, based on Ian McHarg's work (Design with Nature). Ms. Egan said there is a full presentation on how the Highway Methodology works on the website, www.southcoastrail.com. A Civic Engagement calendar is also posted there. She said there are public meetings in November and December that ask for alternatives and criteria to evaluate them. She further explained that the Interagency Group consists of 12 agencies, meeting every month, which will formally consider public input generated by public meetings. In January, the Interagency Group (IAG) will be coming back to the public with a list of alternatives for further input. In March, the IAG will be looking for feedback on the analysis of alternatives against the criteria. Some meetings will be combined with the Commuter Rail Task Force meetings, like this one tonight. It is the IAG that makes the final call on the alternatives chosen. The COE has the final say on the basic project purpose. Minutes from all civic engagement meetings will be posted at southcoastrail.com and submitted in written form to the IAG.

Robb Johnson asked about the criteria being used. Ms. Egan said that most criteria relate to is it buildable, affordable, and the environmental impacts. Mr. Anacheka-Nasemann said that the review is required to comply with all related laws. There will also be a public input process at the stage of the permit application.

Mr. Bullard noted that the next three Task Force meetings are November 14, December 12 and January 16. The January meeting will also be a Civic Engagement meeting, but all Task Force meetings are open to the public. Ms. Egan noted that she will be at all Task Force meetings. Carolyn LaMarre suggested that if meetings are being taped, they could be shared with local cable TV and reach more people. Ms. Bennett asked that meetings be spread around the towns on the three rail line alternatives. Ms. Egan said she tried to do that, based on available locations. She is trying to get the southern communities involved. If there is a need for additional meetings, that can happen. Mr. Bullard noted that civic engagement is a two-way street. The posted schedule shows a sincere effort from state and federal agencies to get opinions from the public. Ms. Egan distributed a handout that defines the different transportation modes as a reference guide. An additional handout showed historic rail corridors.

The following transportation alternatives were listed:

1. Middleborough rail line
2. Stoughton rail line
3. Attleboro rail line
4. Enhanced Bus
5. No Build
6. Monorail in the middle or alongside Route 24 and Route 140 to connect to Boston, Braintree or the Route 128 rail station

7. Same as #6, except light rail, BRT or different technology
8. adjacent bike and walking trails (enhancement)
9. Heavy rail along Route 24 corridor
10. Connect rail to seaports
11. Myricks Junction to Middleborough (shortcut)
12. Taunton to Mansfield (vs. Attleboro)
13. Light Rail from New Bedford and Fall River connects to commuter rail in Taunton
14. HOV lane for enhanced bus
15. Dedicated bus lane
16. Pave over rail ROW to make a bus lane
17. Extend Old Colony line from Middleborough to Wareham
18. Providence to Wareham line

Ruth Geoffroy stated that there should be discussion about the basic project purpose being more than getting residents from Fall River and New Bedford to Boston. Global warming and employment opportunities within the region, including a potential casino in Middleborough, warrant discussion of the secondary objectives in addition to the primary objective of a route to Boston. Karen Winger noted that on other rail lines, reverse commute is not an option and that makes a difference in operational costs. Mr. McArdle said that the reverse commute potential is a great evaluation criteria. Mr. Kortright said that the casinos are not the only things that generate demand. Industrial Parks like Myles Standish in Taunton are real employment centers today. Ms. Egan said the idea of where development is—now or in the future—is being considered by the consultants in the corridor plan. Certainly, there is a need to understand where development potential exists. Robb Johnson said that although it is more challenging for the project purpose, the project should consider what the region needs and wants for jobs and residential choices, and not just be based on an old hub and spoke design. Ms. Egan said there is much research being done on the mobility needs in the area and some things cannot be predicted. Mobility patterns of the future can also be shaped by this project.

Lou Gitto said it is important to consider the option of changing the configuration of the system in the future with a decent schedule that people can use. Commuter rail is just at peak commuter times, but there are all kinds of needs. He suggested that the region build a system so the next component can be added on and not be “fixed” so that the next need requires a whole new solution. He also said it should have the ability to serve people all day long. Mr. Bullard suggested that sounded like highways or buses on highways. Mr. Hebert asked if he was proposing widening the highways as an alternative. Mr. Gitto said no, but flexibility in the system is important.

Ms. Egan had her contact information available for people to take and send other ideas to her. Comments can also be submitted on the southcoastrail.com website. Priscilla Chapman commended EOT for the scheduled meetings. She asked if the IAG meetings are public. Ms. Egan said they are not intended to be public. All minutes will be posted on the website.