

CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY MEETING
GRAND JUNCTION COMMUTER RAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

SUMMARY MINUTES

LOCATION: Morse School, 40 Granite Street, Cambridge MA 02139

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: June 16, 2011 – 6:30-8:30pm

ATTENDANCE: 79 (signed in)

PROJECT TEAM: Matthew Ciborowski (MassDOT); Ned Codd (MassDOT); Dominic Tribone (MassDOT); Scott Peterson (CTPS); Jieping Li (CTPS)

PRESENTATION SUMMARY [see meeting presentation]:

The Grand Junction Railroad provides the only rail connection east of Worcester between Boston's north side commuter rail system (serving North Station) and south side commuter rail system (serving South Station). The Grand Junction runs from the Boston – Worcester main line in the vicinity of Beacon Park Yard in Allston over the Charles River and through Cambridge, Somerville, Charlestown, Everett and Chelsea.

MassDOT purchased the Grand Junction from CSX Corporation in 2009, along with other former CSX rail rights-of-way in eastern Massachusetts in the first phase of a two-phase transaction. Associated projects related to the transaction include CSX's consolidation of its railyard operations in Worcester and improvements to vertical clearance along the CSX line from the New York border to Westborough to allow for double-stack freight operations.

When the MassDOT – CSX transaction is completed (anticipated in September 2012) with the purchase of the Boston Main Line from Boston to Worcester, MassDOT will own and control significant new transportation assets that can facilitate improved transportation services. Among other things, the purchase would allow for an increase in MBTA Commuter Rail service to communities along the Framingham/Worcester Line, as passenger trains will no longer be delayed by freight trains.

As a result of the Grand Junction acquisition specifically, a proposal was developed to route some additional MBTA Worcester/Framingham Line trains via the Grand Junction to North Station – thereby allowing for new connections and destinations while also avoiding congestion at South Station. The Grand Junction Commuter Rail Feasibility Study is a preliminary review of the feasibility, benefits, and impacts of providing commuter rail service from the Worcester/Framingham line to North Station via the Grand Junction line, potentially with a stop in Cambridge.

This study will evaluate the expected ridership for MBTA Commuter Rail service along the Grand Junction based on a range of different modeling assumptions. Potential future service plans have been developed in order to test the ridership effects of changes in frequency, travel speed (through Cambridge and Somerville), and the potential construction of a station near Kendall Square in Cambridge for a 2035 planning horizon. Traffic and safety impacts at the six vehicular grade crossings and two pedestrian grade crossings along the branch are also being evaluated. The study will compare these impacts and ridership to a future 'no-build' scenario in which all trains on the Worcester Line terminate at South Station, as they do currently.

Based on the findings of this analysis, MassDOT will assess the suitability of pursuing this service on the Grand Junction, and will identify anticipated environmental review requirements for the project, as well as examine the impact to any proposed alternative uses of the corridor. The study analysis is also reviewing other proposals for the corridor, including a potential section of the Urban Ring busway or a shared-use path.

The objective of this study is to determine if MBTA Commuter Rail service from the Framingham/Worcester line via the Grand Junction to North Station is a viable transportation service that would generate sufficient ridership and increased mobility to offset any negative impacts, and justify project costs. Furthermore, the study will also provide a preliminary assessment of impacts on traffic, pedestrian, and bicycle access at the grade crossings. The study will result in findings that will guide whether and how to pursue the use of the Grand Junction for MBTA Commuter Rail service.

Public outreach for the project began in winter 2010-2011, as MassDOT met with interested stakeholder and neighborhood groups at individual meetings. On June 16, 2011, MassDOT convened a larger meeting to discuss the project. At this meeting, a presentation and question-and-answer session discussed:

- Purpose of the study
- Study status
- Existing conditions of the corridor through Cambridge and Somerville
- Existing conditions of the Worcester/Framingham Line
- Awareness of other corridor concepts
- The future no-build condition (all trains continue to use South Station)
- Future alternatives to be evaluated
- Variables within each alternative to be examined
- Next steps

MassDOT will next hold a public meeting on this study in fall 2011, at which time the ridership and traffic impact results will be presented. MassDOT will also make recommendations for the next steps, should the project move forward.

DISCUSSION

State Representative Marty Walz was introduced, and she introduced fellow State Representative and Cambridge City Councilor Tim Toomey, as well as staff from US Congressman Michael Capuano's office, Massachusetts Senator Sal DiDomenico's office, and Massachusetts Senator Anthony Petrucci's office.

John Businger (Brookline) asked if there were any government-mandated speed restrictions on the Grand Junction corridor, and whether there are any agreements with MIT governing the use of the line. Mr. Ciborowski responded that there are no laws limiting speed along the line, but that a limit of 10 miles per hour has been in place due to the condition of the railroad equipment. Rep. Toomey added that MIT is concerned about the proposal.

Dennis Carlone (Cambridge) asked if this proposal will serve as the North-South Rail Link, and reiterated interest in the North-South Rail Link. Mr. Codd replied that by connecting North Station and South Station through downtown, the North-South Rail Link would serve all commuter rail lines, whereas the Grand Junction connection would serve only Worcester-Framingham line trains.

Carol O'Hare inquired as to why noise pollution issues are not being considered as part of the current study, and why there is interest in looking at the impact to pedestrians and bicyclists. Mr. Ciborowski replied that the study is intended to examine feasibility of the corridor for use by evaluating ridership and traffic impacts. Noise, vibration and other environmental impacts would be evaluated in an environmental study if this feasibility study indicates that the proposal merits further review.

Heather van Aelst (Somerville) asked if this project would require an environmental impact study. Mr. Ciborowski replied that decisions on environmental reporting thresholds are made by the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office at the state's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Preliminary review of MEPA statutory review thresholds suggests that this project would require some level of environmental review – either an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) or Environmental Impact Report (EIR). An environmental study of any kind would be accompanied by a more formal and involved public process.

Richard Fanning asked about the petition he submitted to MassDOT concerning train horn noise in East Cambridge. Mr. Ciborowski thanked Mr. Fanning for submitting the petition before the meeting so that there was a chance to investigate the issue. State laws passed in 1998 requiring a 'quiet zone' (area where train horns are not blown at crossings) were superseded by Federal law a few years later requiring trains to blow their horns at rail grade crossings as a public safety measure. MassDOT understands the concerns about noise in the neighborhoods, but at this point Federal law prescribes the parameters under which a train horn must be sounded. Mr. Ciborowski briefly explained the current process for cities and towns to apply for a quiet zone, but emphasized that

quiet zones can be dangerous, and that the safety implications must be weighed against the noise benefits.

Rosalie Anders from the City of Cambridge expressed concerns over the use of word “cognizant” in reference to other potential corridor uses. The City wants assurances that this proposal would not preclude the Urban Ring or multi-use path proposals, and would like to see, as part of the study, how this fits into the long term needs of the transportation system. Ms. Anders also expressed concerns about maintenance costs and the impacts on MBTA bus routes crossing the corridor. Mr. Ciborowski replied that maintenance costs will be considered. Because rail service must be preserved in this corridor whether or not commuter rail service is implemented, there would not be major changes to the physical configuration of the line. As a result, commuter rail service would not significantly change the feasibility of implementing either the shared use path or the Urban Ring. He also indicated MassDOT is open to working with the City and other stakeholders on proposals such as the multi-use path, and that MassDOT is much more accessible and willing to coordinate on these issues than CSX was when they owned the corridor. Mr. Codd added that MassDOT is reviewing this proposal because of the need for enhanced public transit service. Furthermore, this proposal would be a relatively inexpensive enhancement (costing minor corridor upgrades as well as engines and coaches) and may be financially feasible, even within the significant financial constraints that the Commonwealth and MBTA are facing. In contrast, the Urban Ring would cost hundreds of millions, or even billions of dollars as currently proposed, and there is no funding identified for it. As a result, the Urban Ring is not included in the current long-range Regional Transportation Plan for the Boston Region, which lists all major transportation projects expected to be implemented in the next 25 years.

Steven Nutter of Livable Streets Alliance stated that MassDOT must think not only about potential demand but benefits. He sees no benefits for Cambridge, and compared this rail connection to a highway bringing in people to the city. Mr. Ciborowski replied that this type of feedback is appreciated, and echoes previously-heard feedback. One potential benefit, he added, would be reduced cars into Cambridge from daily commuters. Mr. Codd added that a station near Kendall Square would offer benefits to Cambridge in terms of offering more transportation options, new transit connections, reduced auto demand, and increase potential for smart growth, mixed-use development. MassDOT must consider the impacts of the proposal for Cambridge residents, but must also consider transportation needs of all of Massachusetts.

John Kyper of the Sierra Club stated that in order to increase speed to 30 mph, there will need to be major infrastructure investments along the corridor. He asked about the possibility of grade separation at roadway crossings, and about the number of stations proposed in Cambridge. Mr. Ciborowski reiterated that while the speed limit on the railroad today is 10 mph, investments by the MBTA in the track have extended the useful life of the track equipment, and that only relatively modest further investments would be required to upgrade the track for 30 mph travel. He added that none of the proposals today envision any major infrastructure investment. Any passenger services along the corridor would require upgrades to the crossings, and while the study does not look at

grade separation, it does look at the required upgrades to those crossings. Mr. Ciborowski added that only one station in Cambridge is being evaluated, and that it would be in the area of Kendall Square, but that no specific location had been determined.

A participant asked how the state plans to get emergency service vehicles across the tracks, as he claims to currently see “80 to 90” cars backed up along Cambridge Street when the train is crossing. Mr. Ciborowski replied that MassDOT will evaluate general traffic impacts of train crossings in this study, would specifically examine emergency response issues in the environmental process.

Patrick Moyes (Cambridge) asked if the proposed South Station expansion is happening. He stated that this proposal is bad for Framingham and bad for Cambridge – except for developers. He also stated that the proposal would ‘kill’ the Urban Ring. Mr. Ciborowski responded that the proposal would move only some trains to North Station, not all, and that the Commonwealth is actively pursuing South Station expansion and fully expects that it will be implemented.

Craig Waters (Cambridge) stated that while separated grade crossings may be financially restrictive, during the rush hour, traffic stopped on Massachusetts Avenue between Sydney and the Charles River, and frequent train crossings will only increase this congestion. Mr. Ciborowski states that these issues are exactly what the study will examine.

A participant asked if the Grand Junction purchase was acquired as part of the Green Line Extension project. Mr. Codd said that the rail purchase is unrelated to the Green Line Extension, and that this proposal is for service on the Worcester-Framingham commuter rail line.

Wig Zamore (Somerville) stated that he does not find this proposal a very good idea. He is disappointed not to have seen a broader visioning. He added that financial issues are not a good reason to stop pursuing the Urban Ring, and that Kendall Square has developed well, but at the cost of increased traffic. He asked that the study examine a ‘clean, modern light rail’ system that would connect I-93 with I-90 to alleviate the traffic issues. Mr. Ciborowski responded that while Mr. Zamore’s proposal is interesting, it is not being considered as part of this study. MassDOT must think about the short and long term futures, and this study uses existing facilities to accomplish a transportation goal. He added that it is important for everyone to consider how to fund our transportation needs in a time of significant financial constraints.

A participant stated he had heard contradictory things about South Station expansion. He asked about the capacity of North Station, and the status and financial breakdown of the Green Line Extension. He also stated that the Green Line Extension should be the top priority of the Commonwealth. Mr. Codd replied that MassDOT is actively pursuing South Station expansion and fully expects to implement it, that North Station has capacity for additional service, and that the Green Line Extension is a top priority of the Commonwealth.

Prasad Ramakrish (Cambridge) asked whether money was an object in examining other mode for the corridor, such as light rail or the multi-use path. He also stated that grade crossings will be the biggest concern. Mr. Ciborowski responded that money is not the major concern for modeling various alternatives, the feasibility within the corridor is the major factor in not examining these options.

A participant urged MassDOT to think of the corridor not just as a rail corridor, but as a bike and pedestrian one as well. He emphasized that the city thinks of the connection that way, and that there is a need to look at the true impacts of service in the corridor. Mr. Ciborowski responded that MassDOT does consider the corridor a transportation corridor, and not just a rail corridor. The proposal being explored does not preclude other transportation uses. He added that this is the start of a conversation, not the end of one, and that the goal of this study is to evaluate whether or not commuter rail is a good fit for the corridor and worth further exploration.

Michael Hegarty (Cambridge) stated that running passenger rail along the Grand Junction is a bad idea, and that it is not compatible with the other potential uses of the corridor. He asked if using light rail would make more sense. Mr. Ciborowski stated that all proposals come with tradeoffs; it would be challenging to implement light rail because of the need to maintain heavy rail access to satisfy existing movements of freight trains and empty Amtrak and MBTA passenger trains. It would also leave little or no room for other uses in the corridor.

A participant stated that having spent a lot of time developing Kendall Square as a model for the future, bringing in commuter rail train is not a good idea, and not going to bring in enough people to justify the expense.

Laura Kershner, Co-Chair of the Ward 5 Democratic Committee stated that she felt this public process ignored Cambridgeport. She asked if the process will be transparent, how much it would cost to insulate homes in Cambridgeport to noise and vibration, and whether a decision has already been made. Mr. Ciborowski apologized for the committee not being directly notified, stated that MassDOT will again confer with the City of Cambridge in order to identify all relevant neighborhood groups to contact, and ensured that they would be informed of future meetings. He also stated that a decision has not been made, that this feasibility study is being conducted in order to evaluate basic benefits and impacts to determine whether to pursue the proposal any further, and that noise and vibration impacts and mitigation would be identified in subsequent stages of review (if pursued).

Catherine Hornby (Cambridge) reiterated her support for a shared use path in the corridor, while maintaining only the existing use. She questioned what the benefit was to Metro-West communities. Mr. Ciborowski clarified that the proposal being discussed would divert some trains to North Station, and some trains would continue going to South Station.

Leland Cheung, Cambridge City Councillor, pushed for MassDOT to talk with the community, and asked if the project was a *fait accompli*? Mr. Ciborowski replied that MassDOT is completing this study to determine the feasibility of the project – construction or operation is not a *fait accompli*.

Steve Kaiser (Cambridge) asked if there was any consideration to using a rail connection from Worcester to Ayer to allow trains to access North Station. He also asked if the study is looking at the proposed Somerville Community Path connections to the Grand Junction, and whether longer trains to South Station were being considered. Mr. Codd replied that that the study is not examining any specific designs or path alternatives, as it is not an engineering study.

Susan Harrison stated that MassDOT had previously made comments about the connection between building a station and performing an environmental study. Mr. Codd replied that he did not remember making such comments previously, but that this study will evaluate the opportunity for a station and make further recommendations.

Charlie Marquardt (Cambridge) stated that MassDOT should do more than minimum MEPA review, and should commit to completing one at this time. Mr. Ciborowski replied that MassDOT would complete what is required by MEPA, and that MEPA review requirements are very strong and comprehensive.

State Representative and Cambridge City Councillor Tim Toomey stated to the audience that Cambridge City Hall has not gotten the message that many are opposed to this proposal, and that the community needs to continue to put pressure on the City Council.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm.

MEETING ATTENDEES

- Jonathan Adams
- Carol Adler
- Yogi Anand
- Indu Anand
- Rosalie Anders, City of Cambridge
- Joseph Barr PB
- Jeff Bennett, Charles River TMA
- David Bracken, HYM
- Barbara Broussard, ECPT
- Kelley Brown, MIT
- John Burckhardt
- John Businger, National Corridors Initiative
- Dennis Carlone
- Leland Cheung, Cambridge City Council
- Colleen Clark, Ward 5 Dem Comm
- Lawrence Clinton, Sen. Petruccelli's Office

- Dennis Coffey
- Elizabeth Coleman
- Jack Corrisaw
- Jean Cronin
- Ann Curby, LPHA
- Gloria Cyr
- Wally DeGuglielmo, Sen. DiDomenico's Office
- Nancy DiLando
- Jay Doyle, AECOM
- Dick Fanning, Wellington-Harrington
- Sally Funk
- Debby Galef
- Jeremy Garczynski
- Lara Gordon, Coldwell Banker
- Joe Grassi
- Mike Hall, Tetra Tech
- Susan Harrison
- Michael Hegarty, ECPT/Lechmere
- Andy Hinterman, Friends of the Community Path
- Heather Hoffman
- Catherine Hornby, Cambridge Bike Committee
- Everest Huang
- Mark Jaquith, ECPT/can
- Silvia Keber
- Tony Keber
- Michael Kenney, Cambridge Historical Society
- Laura Kershner, Ward 5 Dem Committee
- John Kyper, Sierra Club
- Robert LaTremouille, Friends of the White Geese
- John Maguire
- Rajiv Manglani
- CharlieMarquardt, ECPT
- Walter McDonald
- William McQuinney
- Shams Mirza
- Frank Moore, Friends of the Community Path
- Thomas Nally, A Better City
- Frank Nelson
- Matt Nelson
- Steven Nutter, Livable Streets
- Carol O'Hare
- Gerolf Piki
- Prasad Ramakrishna, Friends of the Community Path
- Ellin Reisner, STEP

- Justin Rice, Boston Globe Your Town
- James Robinson, Cambridge Chronicle
- Matt Schrumpf
- Jim Shaer, BU
- Aravind Srivivesan
- Barry Steinberg, Assoc for Public Transportation
- Tom Stohlman
- Will Sutton, Rep. Toomey's Office
- Carole Tally
- Marilyn Tarmy
- Tim Toomey, State Representative / City Councillor
- Heather Van Aelst, Brickbottom
- Taylor Walker, Cambridge Bike Committee
- Marty Walz, State Representative
- Jay Wasserman
- Craig Waters
- Wig Zamore, STEP MUTP
- Barry Zevin