

CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY MEETING  
GRAND JUNCTION COMMUTER RAIL FEASIBILITY STUDY

PUBLIC MEETING NOTES

LOCATION: Kennedy-Longfellow School, 158 Spring Street, Cambridge MA 02141

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

ATTENDANCE: 100 (signed in)

PROJECT TEAM: Matthew Ciborowski (MassDOT); Ned Codd (MassDOT); Callida Cenizal (MassDOT); Donny Dailey (MassDOT)

---

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 is evaluating 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 compares 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 is assessing the suitability of pursuing this service on the Grand Junction, and is identifying anticipated environmental review requirements for the project, as well as examining 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 public 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 next held a public meeting on December 8, 2011. At that time, MassDOT made a presentation and moderated a question-and-answer session which discussed:

- Study purpose and need
- Study background
- CSX Railroad purchase
- Existing conditions
- Ridership results
- Traffic analysis results

- Capital cost estimate
- Key findings
- Next steps

The key findings of the study discussed at the meeting were as follows:

- Demand for increased Framingham/ Worcester commuter rail service is high, and will increase in coming years;
- Ridership and travel benefits of additional trains are comparable whether those trains travel via the Grand Junction to North Station or via the main line route to South Station;
- South Station expansion can support additional Framingham/Worcester trains if that project can be realized;
- MassDOT is not pursuing the use of the Grand Junction for increased MBTA Commuter Rail service at this point. However, MassDOT is also not eliminating the possibility of re-examining the proposal in the future, should circumstances warrant or conditions change.
- It is worth noting that the expansion of South Station would provide much-needed increased Commuter Rail capacity for the Commonwealth. However, expanding Boston South Station is an enormously complex and expensive project without a specific timeframe. Should the need for increased Commuter Rail capacity become overwhelming in the period prior to the expansion of South Station, MassDOT might reopen the Grand Junction discussion. The use of Grand Junction for Commuter Rail service could meet some of the needs to be provided by an expanded South Station, at much lower cost and with much less time and complexity.

Following this meeting, MassDOT will complete a draft report of the findings, recommendations and next steps. The report will be posted on the study website for review and comment at <http://mass.gov/massdot/grandjunction>.

---

## DISCUSSION

State Representative and Cambridge City Councillor Tim Toomey was introduced, and he introduced fellow Cambridge City Councilor Henrietta Davis. He thanked the audience for their attendance, collaboration and support on this project. He asked the audience to support the proposed shared-path along the alignment in Cambridge.

John Businger (Brookline) asked for clarification on a technical issue with the presentation, and stated that he felt the proposed South Station expansion was insufficient to meet future demand in the Northeast Corridor. He claimed to have information that Amtrak was going to demand further expansion of South Station beyond what is proposed, including underground alternatives. Mr. Ciborowski stated that with no designer under contract yet for the project, it was too premature to speculate about potential designs at South Station, but that MassDOT is working closely with Amtrak on the project.

Cambridge City Councilor Henrietta Davis stated her desire to advance the proposed shared-path along the alignment in Cambridge, as it will help to shift more people from cars to bicycles in the city.

Jeff Rosenblum of the City of Cambridge encouraged the audience to think about how best to take advantage of the CSX purchase by MassDOT. He reminded the audience of the large number of passengers through Cambridge every day via rapid transit on the MBTA's Red Line, and advocated for the Urban Ring project in order to alleviate the transit congestion in Boston's urban core communities. Finally, he stated the City's desire to see the further development of the proposed shared-path along the alignment.

Jeff Quinlan (Cambridge resident) asked if the study analysis included the overlap of potential other uses of the corridor, or if they were mutually exclusive. Mr. Ciborowski stated that as the study only examined commuter rail within the existing footprint of the current railroad tracks. The proposed commuter rail service would not significantly alter the physical and operational configuration of the line. The study is intended as a preliminary feasibility for commuter rail service in the corridor only, and did not specifically evaluate the potential feasibility of other uses. However, other proposals for the corridor would be evaluated in the same general context and constraints, with or without commuter rail service.

Robert LaTremouille (Cambridge resident) asked to clarify if the ridership changes seen in the analysis can be attributed to specific trade-offs between routes. Mr. Ciborowski responded that based on the travel demand model analysis, the ridership increases to destinations along the Grand Junction routing (i.e. Kendall Square and North Station) were accompanied by lesser ridership decreases to destinations along the main line route to South Station.

Larry Clinton of State Senator Petrucelli's Office stated that the current train whistles disturb elderly citizens, and asked how emergency response vehicles would be impacted by the grade crossings. Mr. Ciborowski restated that safety is the top priority of MassDOT, and that the increase in the number of trains would likely not have an appreciable impact on emergency response times in the corridor. Examinations of other similar crossing areas have shown that issues can be mitigated through technology. Mr. Ciborowski also stated that whistles were required by law to be blown at all railroad grade crossings unless a whistle ban or quiet zone is in place. Any whistle ban or quiet zone proposal would have to be initiated by the community and City.

Wig Zamore (Somerville resident) stated that he does not feel that diesel trains are a good fit within urban city limits, and that temporary rapid transit closures that require bus substitutions should be subject to environmental review. Mr. Zamore further asked if the environmental model accounted for "black carbon" and if Widett Circle was being considered as a location for a maintenance facility to eliminate the need for dead-heading commuter rails over the Grand Junction to the MBTA's Commuter Rail Maintenance Facility in Somerville. Mr. Ciborowski clarified that that South Station Expansion project

will have a needs analysis for new commuter rail layover facilities, as well as an alternatives analysis to look at potential new sites for facilities, but that at this time the analysis any one location (such as Widett Circle) is premature. *[Note: “black carbon” is not currently a regulated emission and is not included in the preliminary analysis that was conducted as a part of this study]*

Richard Fanning (Cambridge resident) asked if MassDOT would support a whistle ban or quiet zone in Cambridge. He further asked for details on the Greenbush project, its grade crossings, and whether it had met ridership projections. He also asked where a station in Kendall Square would be located. Mr. Ciborowski responded that the request/application for a whistle ban or quiet zone would have to come from Cambridge, and that MassDOT’s support would depend upon the specifics of the proposal. Mr. Ciborowski stated that he did not know the answer to the Greenbush questions at this time. In terms of the station location, it was assumed that there was a commuter rail station generally in the vicinity of Kendall Square for access to residential and employment uses, as well as the Red Line at Kendall Square. However, a detailed siting analysis was not undertaken.

Mark Pappas (Cambridge resident) asked if the environmental analysis took into account the increased idling of cars at crossings in Cambridge along the Grand Junction. He further stated that he felt the commuter rail system was very unreliable, especially in bad weather. Mr. Ciborowski said he understands the tradeoffs as they relate to air quality in the corridor and region-wide, and that the analysis does take idling into account. With the increased idling, regional air-quality was still improved by the project.

Marilyn Wellons (Cambridge resident) asked about the potential speed changes before and after safety improvements in the corridor. Mr. Ciborowski responded that speeds would remain mostly the same – around 10-15 mph in the corridor. He was not aware of any plans to change the speed, only to increase the safety of the corridor. Ms. Wellons then asked about the status of the Urban Ring project. Mr. Codd responded that the Urban Ring project is not currently in the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization’s (MPO) Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) or Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). The Boston MPO has determined it cannot pay for Urban Ring Phase 2 (bus rapid transit) over the next 25 years, and therefore MassDOT has suspended any further planning and environmental review. Phase 3 of the project (expected to be a variety of rail options) is even more expensive than Phase 3, Mr. Codd added.

Sarah Hamilton of the Medical Academic and Scientific Community Organization (MASCO) asked how the proposed safety improvements along the corridor would be paid for. Mr. Codd replied that the \$13 million in proposed work comes from the maintenance provisions of the MBTA’s existing contract with the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Rail (MBCR), the operators who run the commuter rail system. MBCR is required to complete a certain amount of railroad maintenance work per year, and that MassDOT expects these improvements to be addressed at some time through the existing contract or a future commuter rail contract. He characterized the improvements as being completed “as needed” and “as possible” over coming years, depending upon system priorities.

Ken Kronenburg (Cambridge resident) asked if this proposal was a “done deal.” He also asked the team to address the potential for a worsening of emissions in Cambridge, even with an improvement regionally. Mr. Ciborowski said that the introduction of trains was in no way a “done deal” and that MassDOT had come out today to share the analysis and findings of the preliminary analysis. Therefore, the analysis completed was only for the simpler, regional air quality, and that a detailed analysis in Cambridge would need to be completed if the project was to be pursued further. Based on the study analysis and findings, MassDOT has stated that it intends to focus on expanding South Station as a means of accommodating additional Framingham/Worcester commuter rail, rather than pursuing commuter rail service over the Grand Junction at this time.

A Cambridge resident stated he felt residents would be unfairly impacted by this proposal, and asked for clarification on the route of the potential commuter rail trains. Mr. Ciborowski clarified that trains would diverge from the Framingham/Worcester main line near Storrow Drive, then pass beneath the BU Bridge to cross Cambridge via the Grand Junction to North Station. Mr. Ciborowski added that the Grand Junction will continue to carry freight and non-revenue (i.e. empty) passenger trains under all scenarios.

Donna McAvenia (Cambridge resident) asked about the possible future damage to adjacent homes by service on the Grand Junction, whether there would be compensation, what noise would occur and how to make the railroad more considerate. Mr. Ciborowski and Mr. Codd reminded her that this preliminary feasibility study does not entail a detailed analysis of all project impacts, but that any future pursuit of the proposal would require more thorough environmental review.

A Cambridge resident asked if there are other examples of the density grade crossings seen along the Grand Junction in Cambridge. Mr. Ciborowski replied that the MBTA system does have some similar areas, and multiple other cities have areas with dense neighborhood grade crossings.

Jacob Hyman (Cambridge resident) reiterated the study finding of the highest demand being to South Station (over North Station or Kendall). He also asked if the safety improvements being proposed along the corridor would qualify the line for quiet zone protection. Mr. Ciborowski stated that he is not familiar with the details or specifics of the quiet zone standards or potential safety improvement designs.

Janice St. Clair (Cambridge resident) asked what circumstance would lead the state to reexamine the proposal for commuter rail service on the Grand Junction, and whether residents would be involved. Mr. Ciborowski replied that state environmental review processes require a certain level of public participation and review, which would occur in such a case. Mr. Codd added that obstacles or delays on the proposed expansion of South Station could impact the Grand Junction decision, and that the South Station project is a complex, costly project that needs support from citizens and elected officials. He urged the audience to support the South Station project, and ask their legislators to do the same.

Chris Cassa claimed that four of the six grade crossings already had proper protection for quiet zone regulations, and asked if MassDOT was comfortable with that level of protection. Mr. Ciborowski replied that he was unsure of the safety level on the existing crossings [*Note: None of the 6 grade crossings in Cambridge presently have the four-quadrant gates referenced by Mr. Cassa in his comment.*], but that MassDOT would discuss any proposals brought to them. Mr. Cassa followed up to ask how best to advance the proposed shared-path along the alignment in Cambridge. Mr. Codd replied that the best way to make progress would be to have the City of Cambridge take the initiative and pursue further planning and design of the project, and to engage with MassDOT and the MBTA on their proposals.

Taylor Walker (Cambridge resident) stated that she understood the challenges of placing the path on the rail corridor and providing both, but asked about changes in the required offset safety distances that would come with increased speeds. She also reminded the audience that a station would also impact the path. Mr. Ciborowski and Mr. Codd agreed that a station could impact the proposed path, but that an increase in speed limit does not necessarily mean changes to any required safety offsets.

Sara Korn (Cambridge resident) stated she supports the proposed shared-path along the alignment in Cambridge, and asked how to get additional pedestrian crossings across the railroad between Binney Street and Cambridge Street. Mr. Ciborowski said that an MBTA permit was needed for such an action, but that there are many requirements for approval. He also stated that MassDOT can provide assistance in directing such a request. [*Note: Transit Realty Associates handles all license requests for the MBTA, and they can be contacted via their website: <http://www.transitrealty.com/>*]

Anne Taylor asked where the results of the study and other materials would be available. Mr. Ciborowski replied that the entire study would be available on the project website at: <http://mass.gov/massdot/grandjunction>.

Andrew Ingliss (Cambridge resident) asked when the state would receive funding to pursue South Station Expansion design. Mr. Codd replied that the state had already received a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration to begin design and environmental work.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40pm.

#### MEETING ATTENDEES

Carol	Adler	
C	Arruda	
Torgun	Austin	
Joseph	Barr	Parsons Brinkerhoff
Joe	Beggan	
Willis	Bibbins	
David	Blaisdell	Representative Walz' Office

Adam	Bockelie	
Barbara	Broussard	ECPT
Kelley	Brown	MIT
Rachel	Burkhardt	Parsons Brinkerhoff
John	Businger	National Corridors Initiative
Mary Anne	Carlson	
Jennie	Carrello	
Chris	Cassa	
John	Christ	
Larry	Clinton	Sen. Petruccelli's Office
Mark	Curby	
Ann	Curly	
David	Dahlbacha	MVTF STEP
Wally	DeGuglielmo	Sen. DiDomenico's Office
Frank	DeMasi	RTAC
Salvatore	DiDomenico	
Nancy	DiLando	
James	Dohm	
Jay	Doyle	AECOM
Caroline	Ducas	Parsons Brinkerhoff
Richard	Fanning	
John	Fibor	
Robin	Finnegan	Cambridge Pedestrian Comm.
Gregory	Finnegan	Cambridge Pedestrian Comm.
Kristen	Franks	Congressman Capuano's Office
Debby	Galef	Cambridge Pedestrian Comm.
Vicki	Goldberg	
Lara	Gordon	
Natalya	Gromyko	
Linda	Haas	
Mike	Hall	TetraTech
Sarah	Hamilton	MASCO
Mary Alice	Harrington	
Michael	Hegarty	
Heather	Hoffman	ECPT; Assoc. of Camb. Neighborhoods
Gregory	Hughes	
Jacob	Hyman	
Jesus	Iglesias	
Andrew	Ingliss	
Paul	Keplin	
Laura	Kershner	
Sara	Korn	
Kenneth	Kronenburg	
Robert	LaTremouille	Friends of the White Geese
Vicki	Lewis	
Jay	Lordan	
Patrich	Magee	ECBA
Charlie	Marquardt	ECPT
Robert	Martel	Brickbottom
Rhonda	Massie	

Donna	McAvenia	
Maryann	McMahon	MCNA
John	McQueen	RTAC
Ann	Mechling	
Mark	Melo	
Frank	Moore	Friends of the Community Path
Hayes	Morrison	City of Somerville
Thomas	Nally	A Better City
Svet	Neov	
Carol	O'Hare	
Mark	Pappas	
Sean	Peirce	USDOT / Volpe Center
Joan	Pickett	MCNA
Jeff	Quinlan	Liveable Streets Alliance
Rose	Radin	
Tad	Read	Boston Redevelopment Authority
Ellin	Reisner	STEP
Jose Luis	Rojas	
Jeff	Rosenblum	City of Cambridge
Elena	Saporta	
Rebecca	Schrumm	Friends of the Community Path
Tim	Snyder	Representative Toomey's Office
Janice	St. Clair	
Tom	Stohlman	
Lois	Sullivan	
Will	Sutton	Representative Toomey's Office
Saul	Tannenbaum	
Richard	Taylor	
Anne	Taylor	
Dylan	Tierney	
Tim	Toomey	State Rep / City Councillor
Carolyn	Truant	
Heather	Van Aelst	Brickbottom
Adam	Villa	
Scott	Wachtler	Cambridge Chronicle
Taylor	Walker	Cambridge Bicycle Comm.
Dan	Walsh	
Jay	Wasserman	ECPT
Craig	Watkins	Assoc. of Camb. Neighborhoods
Marilyn	Wellons	
Tom	Yardley	MASCO
Larry	Young	
Wig	Zamore	MVTF STEP

