

**North Shore Transit Improvements
Steering Committee Meeting**

**Torigian Community Life Center, Peabody
December 4, 2002**

Meeting Notes

Introduction and Meeting Notes

William Tinti, Chairman, opened the meeting at 2:07 PM and asked those present to introduce themselves (see Attendance list). Mr. Tinti then asked if there were any corrections to the October Steering Committee Notes, which had been sent to the Committee prior to the meeting. The Meeting Notes were approved with no changes.

Universe of Projects

A Major Investment Study (MIS) Universe of Projects handout was then distributed to the Committee (see Attachment). Stephen Woelfel, MBTA, explained that based on input from the Steering Committee and the public, these were the options to be examined within the MIS.

Dennis DiZoglio, MBTA, emphasized that these options were strictly within the MIS and would be examined *in addition* to those being studied in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). He said the purpose of the MIS was to help prioritize future capital investment by the MBTA. He added that the MBTA wanted to be sure that the listing of proposed actions and investments was representative of what the North Shore wanted.

Jan Okolowicz, PB/Harris, then discussed the projects described in the handout. He noted that an inclusion of a proposed project or action did not imply an endorsement by the MBTA, but simply means that it will be examined within the context of the MIS. He observed that some items represent operational changes, while other items represent new facilities and related capital investments. After the various elements are evaluated, the "packaging" of the various elements into projects or programs (e.g. station improvements) will be examined.

Mr. Tinti asked members of the Steering Committee to provide feedback on this universe of projects. Dan Lauzon, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), pointed out that if cab signals were used on the North Shore Commuter Rail Lines, there would be a cost reduction because it increased efficiency and required less maintenance. Mr. Okolowicz said it made sense to utilize cab signals for any new construction and noted that they could be added as part of an incremental, phased approach on older lines. He noted that cab signal implementation would entail right-of-way installations and supervisory control facilities. The locomotives and control coaches are already equipped with cab contrail hardware by virtue of its use on the MBTA's "Southside" lines.

Annie Harris, ENHC, said that as part of the water ferry alternatives, she would like to see an examination of a connection to the train as part of the Salem/Boston ferry. She also said she would like to see an analysis of a year-long, not seasonal, service— using a better boat. She acknowledged that the trial service operated from Salem a few years ago proved the need for a more seaworthy vessel during the stormy fall and winter

seasons. She said that it would likely be an expensive vessel, but hopefully something not on the scale of a North Sea ferry. Mr. Tinti asked if the weather conditions on the South Shore ferries were different. Mr. Okolowicz said the Salem – Boston route is fully exposed to the open North Atlantic waters; the South Shore routes from Hingham / Hull / and Quincy are more protected due their location west (landward) of the Hull peninsula. Mr. Tinti asked if there were any linkages between ferries and train service on the South Shore. Mr. Okolowicz said there were some bus connections but that primary connection is automobile. Mr. Lauzon commented that the ferry terminals were similar to commuter rail stations with large amounts of parking and passengers tending to time their arrivals close to the ferry sailing time.

Ms. Harris also asked if the MIS would be looking at expanding bus service to other towns. Mr. Okolowicz said the consultants were not planning to expand bus service beyond the existing MBTA service area. He said that it could be possible to examine increases in service and new routings within the existing service area. CTPS works on such matters continually with the MBTA. It was suggested to bring someone from CTPS to a future Steering Committee meeting to talk about the issue.

George McCabe, Congressman Tierney's Office, suggested that these alternatives be prioritized quickly. Mr. DiZoglio said that the MBTA will take the results and put them into the new needs annual list.

Ted Grant, Lynn, said that based on a meeting the MBTA had in Salem the previous night, he believed that the entire process has been a waste of time because the MBTA representative dismissed the possibility of a Blue Line extension to Lynn. Mr. DiZoglio said that the MBTA representative at the meeting was simply commenting on available MBTA funds for their 5 Year Capital Investment Plan, and it was unfortunate that he said that. Mr. DiZoglio pointed out that the catalyst for Blue Line extension funding would be the federal government, and the funds were simply not available at this time. Mr. Tinti asked if a report of the meeting was in the newspaper. Mr. Grant said it appeared in the *Lynn Item*.

Tom Costin, Lynn Business Partnership, said that this meeting was occurring due to the efforts of the Lynn Business Partnership, Congressman Tierney, and Senators Kennedy and Kerry. He said unless the MBTA makes a statement about the comments made at the meeting in Salem, all the effort would have been for nothing. Mr. DiZoglio said he had met with the Special Assistant to the MBTA General Manager that morning about this issue and said the MBTA will be performing damage control.

Mr. Tinti said that this misperception was not a surprise because many people in the area think the entire process is window-dressing. He said that he had faith in the process because of Mr. DiZoglio's involvement and through him the MBTA organization. He said that he thinks there needs to be an MBTA response to the *Lynn Item* article in order to restore faith in the process. Mr. McCabe added that a response would be needed in order to demonstrate a state commitment to the project in order to get congressional votes. Ms. Harris suggested a briefing by Mr. DiZoglio with the *Lynn Item*.

Mr. Costin said it must be made clear that everything on the MIS list is in addition to the Blue Line EIS alternative. He stated that he does not want to see the Blue Line extension alternative replaced with an alternative from the MIS list.

Debra Hurlburt, Beverly, said that she also would like to see the water service issue explored in more detail and would like to have someone from CTPS come to a meeting for a briefing about the bus service. Mr. Okolowicz suggested that a CTPS representative could come in January or February.

Mr. Tinti noted that the ridership survey indicated concern with general conditions at existing stations. Mr. Okolowicz said that examining specific upgrades, such as high-level platforms, would be part of the analysis. He also noted that many of the stations were rebuilt or upgraded during the MBTA's Commuter Rail Improvement Program (CRIP) during the 1970's and early 1980's. Some items, like signage, paving, lighting, etc. may be nearing the end of their lifecycle and would eventually need replacing. Mr. Okolowicz said that this issue of "re-capitalization" for the MBTA infrastructure is a never-ending system-wide issue that is not unique to the North Shore.

Salem-Danvers Overview

Mr. Okolowicz then gave a more detailed presentation on one of the MIS items—implementation of commuter rail service from Salem to Danvers via Peabody (see attachment for a copy of this presentation). Termed the "Danvers Branch," the line is 4 ½ miles long. The northern three miles of it (Peabody to Danvers) have been out of service since a fire occurred at the Waters River bridge in 1985. Mr. Okolowicz noted that the southernmost 1 ½ miles between Salem and Peabody are in marginal operating condition, being used for freight service by Guilford.

Mr. Tinti asked about the number of grade crossings. Mr. Okolowicz said there are 10 highway grade crossings on the route. He said the line was grade separated from Peabody to Danversport. Mr. Okolowicz reviewed the route of the Danvers Branch on a circa - 1980 rail map also depicting the additional connecting lines at Peabody Square (South Reading Branch) and Danvers Junction (Wakefield – Topsfield line). Mr. Tinti requested a more detailed "non-antiquarian" map with roadway features, showing the Salem-Danvers line.

Mr. Okolowicz also said the project team envisioned two potential commuter rail station sites—a neighborhood / downtown walk-up station in Peabody and a large parking facility adjacent to Route 128 in Danvers. He said that a "rule-of-thumb" is to space commuter rail stations at four to five mile intervals. A Peabody Square stop would fall within the 4 1/2 mile interval between Danvers and Salem; however, given the need to proceed slowly through the center of Peabody Square, it would seem advantageous to stop the trains at that location. Jean Delios, Peabody, asked for more detail about the potential Peabody station. Mr. Okolowicz said that the line would go through Peabody Square with little additional parking and should include a bus connection. Ms. Delios said that she envisioned a station similar to the Wakefield Commuter Rail station, which included moderate parking. Mr. Okolowicz noted that the project team is sensitive to possible traffic impacts on Peabody Square that might be caused by a substantial Commuter Rail parking presence. He added that additional parking should help to increase ridership and the project team would be pleased to discuss the issue with her further.

Public Involvement Summary

Mr. Woelfel asked if anyone from the Steering Committee had comments to the public involvement summary that had been distributed at the previous meeting. There were no comments. Mr. Woelfel also said that a three-page handout summarizing the DEIS Scoping Process was now available.

Mr. Tinti noted that the MBTA holds other meetings and perhaps some more communication and coordination is needed between those meetings and this project. Mr. DiZoglio noted that the MBTA is a large organization that is departmentalized, but an effort would be made to brief others.

Mr. Woelfel noted that the North Shore Task Force had contacted him, saying that the October Steering Committee meeting held in Gloucester was not well-publicized. They have requested another public meeting in Gloucester. Mr. Woelfel noted that a public meeting had already occurred in Gloucester in September 2001, but stated the Task Force's request that the Steering Committee consider changing one of the scheduled meeting locations. He added that Danvers and Salem have been targeted for the upcoming meetings.

Regina Villa, Regina Villa Associates, added that Gloucester City Councilor Christine Rasmussen was particularly concerned about not being notified of the October Steering Committee meeting. The West Gloucester Commuter Rail station is located in her district, and Ms. Rasmussen has several concerns about the station.

Ms. Villa noted that while over 600 individuals are notified of public meetings, only Committee members and some other interested parties are notified of Steering Committee meetings. Mr. Tinti suggested that all elected officials in the study area be notified of upcoming Committee meetings. Regan Checchio, Regina Villa Associates, agreed to do this. Ms. Delios suggested doing e-mail notification. Ms. Checchio said that if anyone wished to be notified by e-mail, they should contact her.

Open Comments

Jim Treadwell, Salem Neighborhood Coalition, said the MBTA CIP meeting in Salem the previous night was extremely crowded. He noted that none of the alternatives that are part of this study were included in the CIP. He also noted that the proposed South Salem station had been eliminated from the CIP budget. Mr. DiZoglio said that the station was eliminated from the budget because of division within the community on the issue. Mr. Tinti asked if the CIP was a prospective program. Mr. DiZoglio said it was a 5-year program that is updated annually. The 2003 – 2008 version is now undergoing review and comment.

Mr. Treadwell asked if the proposed improvements to the Salem commuter rail station included having an enclosed station. Mr. DiZoglio said that the MBTA has not been successful with buildings at commuter rail stations because they do not attract tenants and vendors. Mr. Tinti asked which stations have enclosed, continuously staffed waiting areas with ticket counters? Mr. Okolowicz said such stations include Rt. 128, Back Bay, North Station and South Station, which also function as Amtrak main line stations. He said that it was difficult for vendors to make sufficient money at a typical commuter rail station to warrant the investment in full time staffing. Most of the passenger volume occurs between 6:00 am and 8:00 am. In situations where the MBTA has inherited old railroad station buildings, the MBTA seeks tenants for a nominal rental

fee. The tenants then sell tickets, newspapers, coffee, etc. but the relatively low volume of passengers after the morning rush often results in the station building being closed after the morning commute period. Mr. Lauzon said that the "masses" usually arrive within 5 minutes of the train leaving for train service. Mr. Tinti said he would like to see this information as part of the analysis.

Mr. Treadwell then said he would like to add an intermodal facility and parking to the Gloucester improvements, West Gloucester needed to be added to the station list, and the Salem turnaround facility should be incorporated in the MIS. He asked if there would be a feasibility study for the Danvers Branch? Mr. Okolowicz said it would be provided within the context of the MIS, to be finished in the upcoming spring. Mr. Woelfel noted that, if the Danvers Branch becomes a viable project, a whole separate public process and environmental process would need to be started for just that project.

Carolyn Britt, Rockport, said she wanted to make sure improvements to the Rockport station stay on the agenda. She asked what sort of work Rockport needs to do to become a high priority item. Mr. DiZoglio said that currently the improvements are not a priority for the MBTA when compared against improvements at other stations. He said that hurdle could be resolved by bringing money to the project as the Town of Gloucester did through its congressional efforts. Ms. Britt asked if the project needed a good design to move ahead. Mr. DiZoglio noted that Beverly and Salem have both obtained funds for design.

Mr. Tinti said the problem with the North Shore municipalities is that they have historically competed against each other instead of bringing the full force of the region to solve its problems. He said this process was trying to address this by reaching consensus. Mr. Costin pointed out that Lynn has been waiting in line for 55 years.

Jack Suslak, Lynn resident, asked if there was any demand to bring the new commuter rail service from Danvers through Wakefield Junction. Mr. Okolowicz said it was approximately nine miles from Danvers to the main line at Wakefield Junction and that the trains could not achieve very high speeds over that nine-mile segment. By comparison, the distance between Danvers and the main line at Salem is only 4 1/2 miles, affording closer (and hence faster) access to the main line from Danvers hence the preference for the Danvers –Peabody – Salem routing.

Mary Rodrick asked about funding for the Beverly garage. Mr. DiZoglio said that funding was part of the Enterprise fund, which is gap funding so projects can go forward. Ms. Rodrick also asked about funding for the increased frequency commuter rail service. Mr. Okolowicz noted that while increased frequency may not require additional capital funding, it would definitely increase operating costs. He said that operating money can be as difficult to obtain as capital money. He said the consultants are still awaiting the results of CTPS's ridership forecasts for the additional commuter rail service.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 PM.

Action Items

- Consultants to produce a more detailed map of the Salem-Danvers branch
- Consultants to notify all local officials of upcoming Steering Committee meetings
- Steering Committee to consider substituting Gloucester for either Danvers or Salem for upcoming MIS public meeting

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Attendance

Robert Bradford	North Shore Chamber of Commerce
Ethan Britland	MassHighway
Carolyn Britt	Rockport
Regan Checchio	Regina Villa Associates
Tom Costin	Lynn Business Partnership
Jean Delios	Peabody
Dennis DiZoglio	MBTA
Anna Frantz	Peabody
Ted Grant	Lynn
Annie Harris	ENHC
Debra Hurlburt	Beverly
Dan Lauzon	Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers
Paul Leighton	Salem News
Susan Lynch	PB/Harris
George McCabe	Congressman Tierney's Office
Jan Okolowicz	PB/Harris
Jim Smith	DMJM/Harris
Mark Sternman	Senator Kerry's Office
Jack Suslak	Lynn resident
William Tinti	Salem
Jim Treadwell	Salem Neighborhood Coalition
Stephen Woelfel	MBTA
Regina Villa	Regina Villa Associates