

Meeting Notes

Date: November 14, 2018
2:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.
Place: Transportation Board Room
10 Park Plaza, 2nd floor

Notes Taken By: Rail Vision Team
Project Name: MBTA Rail Vision
Advisory Committee – Meeting 3

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members

Chairman Joseph Boncore
Senator William Brownsberger
Representative Carolyn Dykema
Representative Daniel Ryan
Mayor Mike Cahill
Jim Aloisi, TriMount Consulting
Eric Bourassa, MAPC
Kathryn Carlson, A Better City
Stephanie Cronin, Middlesex 3
Ben Forman, MassInc
Peter Forman, South Shore Chamber
Helena Fruscio Alstman, EOHED
Michael Lambert, Brockton Area Transit
Ray LeDoux, Brockton Area Transit
Paul Matthews, 495 Partnership
Timothy Murray, Worcester Chamber
Chris Osgood, City of Boston
Joshua Ostroff, T4MA
Susanne Rasmussen, City of Cambridge
Lucas Santos, Representative Moulton's Office

MassDOT/MBTA

Scott Hamwey, MassDOT
Mike Muller, MBTA
Alexandra Markiewicz, MassDOT

Consultant Team

Theresa Carr, VHB
Kristine Wickham, VHB
Mike Gordon, VHB
Nancy Farrell, RVA
Amanda Poggenburg, RVA
Stefan Reul, Steer
Darrell Smith, Steer

Public

Farah Alfahad, The Alliance for Business Leadership
Paige Duncan, Town of Foxborough
Todd Fontanella, CMRPC
Ellie French, BBJ
Sarah Hamilton, MASCO
Ian Hatch, Representative Moulton's Office
Andrew Jennings
David Melly, Representative Dykema's Office
Elijah Plymesser, Smart Growth America
Mark Sternman, Senator Lovely's Office
Anne Marie Vu
Beth Wierling, The Kraft Group
Garrett Wollman

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This document summarizes the discussion at the November 14, 2018 MassDOT/MBTA Rail Vision Advisory Committee meeting. All references to slides relate to the presentation which has been posted to the [project website](#).

WELCOME

S. Hamwey, MassDOT Project Manager, and Mike Muller, MBTA Project Manager, welcomed the members and outlined the meeting agenda consisting of a short presentation on the Tier 1 Evaluation key takeaways and a more in-depth discussion with committee members about the priority areas that should be considered in one or all of the eight Tier 2 alternatives. The public was welcome to make comments or ask questions at the end of the meeting.

PROGRESS SINCE LAST MEETING

Tier 1 Evaluation

The Tier 1 evaluation has been completed and the results highlighted in a presentation shared with the Advisory Committee (AC) members, also posted to the [project website](#).

Presentation to Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB)

The team presented a project update to the FMCB on October 15. The full presentation is available in the Related Files section of the [October 15 meeting on the FMCB website](#). The team presented a brief overview of the Tier 1 evaluation and introduced the service concepts under consideration.

Optional Advisory Committee Meeting

At its last meeting (September 13), AC members asked for more details on the Tier 1 evaluation process and its modeling tools. The team held an optional session on October 23 to present and answer questions about the technical details of the modeling. No decisions were made in the meeting, which was intended to help clarify the tools, data and methodology, and example findings.

TIER 1 EVALUATION KEY TAKEAWAYS

S. Hamwey reviewed the Tier 1 service concepts and the key takeaways from the Tier 1 evaluation (see slide 4). Comments from the Advisory Committee:

- W. Brownsberger asked for a definition of how a pulse system works. S. Hamwey clarified that "pulse" refers to a logical, predictable, bi-directional, "clock-face" schedule, such as trains arriving at 10 minutes past every hour. This would present a more set schedule and, in some cases, a substantial increase in frequency.
- What is meant by high-capacity transit? S. Hamwey explained that this is a scenario where high-quality transit that carries large volumes of passengers but is not commuter rail – could replace the traditional commuter rail service. Examples of high-capacity transit could include the subway system or bus rapid transit.

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- What does the team assume for electrification? S. Hamwey replied that there is flexibility in how the system is electrified but that for the Tier 1 evaluation, especially for the operations costs analyses, the team assumed Electric Multiple Units (EMUs).

S. Hamwey explained that no service concept looks completely unfeasible or unreasonable. He acknowledged that there are questions about what alternatives to advance. The team needs input from the AC members on a number of topics, such as the level of frequency, whether all lines should be treated the same (a "one size fits all" approach), whether all eight alternatives should be aspirational within current budget constraints or a mix of aspirational and achievable within the current budget, whether the alternatives should assume full system electrification system, whether there are geographic areas for specific improvements or changes, and how many alternatives should encompass major downtown terminal capacity investments such as South Station Expansion or North South Rail Link. The team will combine today's discussion with the results of the Tier 1 analysis and present some suggestions for the eight alternatives to the committee.

COMMITTEE PRIORITIES FOR THE EIGHT ALTERNATIVES

Round Table Discussion on Priorities and Concepts

S. Hamwey explained that an alternative will present different concepts that make up the Commuter Rail system: frequency, number of central terminals, service typology, accessibility, and power source. He also asked the members to present any other issues that need to be taken into consideration.

Group Discussion on the Framework for Developing Eight Alternatives

Nancy Farrell, RVA, reviewed the group discussion questions (see slide 6) and explained the discussion process before opening the floor for committee members' comments. Each member was asked to comment on (1) a priority that should be represented in all of the eight alternatives, and (2) a priority that should be in at least one of the eight alternatives. The following represents the comments heard from the Advisory Committee representatives and recorded on flip chart pads and notes taken by the consultant team during the meeting.

- C. Osgood said non-exhaustive frequency means greater ridership and a mode shift. Electrification of the Commuter Rail would allow faster travel times. He would like the increased frequency to be sustained for more than just peak hours on the Fairmount and Needham lines.
- P. Forman observed that because southeastern MA communities are not sure what South Coast Rail (SCR) is going to do, they have no sense of alternatives for expansion. There are issues of reliability, frequency, and time. He suggested that the alternatives focus on connecting stations and major centers of employment for a reverse commute. For South Shore and southeastern communities, transportation is about getting in and out of Boston and considering how that will change over time. There may well be more travel to these areas from Boston in the next 15 years presuming that SCR provides for economic development and businesses locate in the area.
- R. LeDoux expanded on P. Forman's remarks in terms of frequency. There should be a balance of express and local service to the south coast; travel times shouldn't deter ridership and transfers

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should be eliminated as much as possible. In terms of Gateway City connections, commuter rail nodes in older urban areas drive economic and market opportunities.

- W. Brownsberger stated that he's most concerned about high frequency service in the urban rail areas within Route 128, particularly the Worcester and Fitchburg lines, though he would like to see high frequency pulse service on all lines with a fare structure that would draw high ridership across the board.
- L. Santos (representing Congressman Moulton) said that the Congressman really wants to take a deeper look at imagining 15-minute frequency across all stations and regions to see where the bottlenecks are, what capital investments are needed, and what the tradeoffs are for each. He wants to truly understand what it takes to get to that end goal.
- P. Matthews stated that all alternatives need to plan for the future, not current conditions. Parking is making such an impact on stations. If parking is a constraint, what impact does it have on ridership? The Foxboro Pilot should provide a lot of parking to the Franklin line, but it is important to understand the demand for parking. He would also like the idea of a reverse commute to be considered in all alternatives. Again, the need is to plan for the future. The alternatives should account for people riding to employment from Boston and from other stations to employment along the lines.
- C. Dykema asked how we can optimize improvements on all of these dimensions. There is an operational component and strategic component. Ridership at a basic level, which includes reliability, frequency, travel time, should be an assumption built into the system. Reverse commute should be looked at from a strategic standpoint, looking at job centers and economic centers where reverse commute would be important. Electrification is going to be a component that moves the Commonwealth the furthest in terms of goals for reducing climate impacts, assuming other pieces are in place to drive ridership. The main question is: does the Commonwealth have a viable transportation system or not?
- D. Ryan commented on reverse commute as being more about development than commuting. Gateway Cities are looking to draw people in. People who live in Boston think the City is full, but there are great cities and towns asking for development. If we keep putting too many people in too small an area, it won't work. Ingenuity can make this work (example of Boston being filled in on the ocean). The focus should really be on reverse commute, it's too dense here.
- T. Murray stated that he wants to better understand the possibilities. For example, when looking at the zonal express that begins and ends in Worcester, which is a plus for that area, he also wants to understand the ramifications for communities in between. When the Commuter Rail started, there were six round trips to Worcester, now there are 20. The impact of Commuter Rail service on Worcester's growth is a major factor in developers' decisions to invest. He asked how to drive development to Gateway Cities. Transit has been proven to do that. It's important as the AC considers operational issues now that there are better connections, like West Station. There's a lack of understanding of the ramifications to communities along the lines. He asked to consider that some towns do not need multiple stations and every train does not need to stop at every station.
- J. Boncore stated that most transportation planners will say that frequency is the most important concept. We're seeing worse congestion in the Commonwealth than we've seen in decades. We

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need to think about this as a way to move people and we need to provide more frequency throughout the day. We need data on population growth around the state to see where the population is growing and where housing is growing or needs to grow. If we can start to understand where housing needs are being met, then those communities should get better transit service. Also, electrification, having a more efficient, competitive system, would be a good move. S. Hamwey noted that the team has the final approved population projections and will be moving forward with those. E. Bourassa stated that MAPC provides demographic projections for the Boston region and works with partner organizations in other regions to project for the entire state. They will be incorporated into the regional and statewide modeling that will be done for additional scenarios. He also said that Massachusetts is growing, and it's growing more than expected, but it's a modest growth. One thing people don't understand is that, while MA is growing, it is also experiencing smaller households. With fewer people per household, there is less housing available.

- J. Ostroff stated that he is a daily commuter on Worcester line. He observed that the further out the team projects, the less accurate the projections will be and among many unknowns. The Commonwealth needs a system that's inherently flexible and reverse commute should be anticipated. He would like to see the Commuter Rail act more like rapid transit in the inner city. We don't know how or when there will be capacity improvements at South Station, so the system should be designed around a greater use of hubs to transfer to other job centers. Flexibility would allow a focus on job centers, greater frequency, and efficient use of fleet and crews. What are our most valuable assets? The people. After that, the land. Corridors and tracks are priceless. The existing structure is a valuable asset to build from. There are corridors all over the region with the capacity to serve more than they currently do. Another question is: how do we get people to job centers, keeping an eye on potential changes in those centers? We shouldn't think of the Commuter Rail as ending, we should be incorporating a system where, for one fare, you can get off a fixed route service and get on a shuttle to a certain area where you work. We need to think of the Commuter Rail as part of a bigger system. We should phase things in. EMUs could coexist with push/pull trains.
- S. Rasmussen agreed with the concept of flexibility. She agreed that a focus on the first and last mile is important. If riders can't get to the station, they end up driving instead. All alternatives must strive for a high transit mode share, otherwise we won't be able to grow. Accessible stations are an obvious concern as well. All long-term solutions should consider full or partial electrification. On the Fitchburg main line, there seems to be a lot of alternatives that assume a switch at Alewife. It's important to understand if that's meaningful because of the distance of the walk to transfer to the Red Line. "Unnecessary" stations need to be looked at throughout the system. Sullivan Square seems to be underfeatured or skipped, she proposed that it should be looked into more. Grand Junction should be considered for longer distance trains, not just urban rail. Also, it seemed that there is an assumption that Grand Junction is a spur line and doesn't go through North Station, which may need more analysis. Frequency is also essential to most of the goals.
- J. Aloisi agreed with the urban rail/Grand Junction issue. The challenge is that we're trying to figure out how to optimize a legacy system. We need to think more as if we were dealing with a

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blank slate: how would we be thinking about it? What is the best way to address the system for today? We aren't expanding roadways anymore, there's a crisis in traffic congestion, and people are being displaced because they can't afford to live in the city. Our system needs to respond to these emerging realities and provide better access to jobs and Gateway Cities. These are the principles that should guide our decisions. We want to link regions to provide access to areas where people want to live and access to jobs they need. We need to have an approach that, over time, breaks down barriers created by our legacy system, and Grand Junction does that. Supporting Gateway Cities and job areas are critical. That means we need all day, frequent, reverse commute type service that will help induce demand. Eight alternatives may be too many. It's better to reduce that number and focus on a shorter menu of alternatives that crystalize feedback from the Advisory Committee. Electrification is a good way to reduce maintenance over time and increase frequency. There is a clear cost reduction over time and clear frequency and reliability benefits.

- K. Carlson stated that the alternatives should absolutely be aspirational. Start with the best, most ideal, unconstrained system, such as a system that is fully electrified with 15-minute headways and equal fares across board, then work backwards from that vision. Increased frequency is a must. We need to stop referring to reverse commuting and consider it more as bi-directional commuting. The system also needs to be flexible. A priority is labor mobility for the entire region. Electrification is also key. In regard to fares, the aspiration is how low a fare can we get that induces the multi-modal shift we want and if we have to subsidize from somewhere else, how do we do that? There should be more frequent inner core service.
- E. Bourassa said that driving ridership should be a goal in all scenarios. Looking at the results of the first Tier 1 modeling, the pulse option adds service for a lower cost. He would like to see a Grand Junction to North Station connection. He also asked how systemwide electrification, or strategic electrification, perform compared to a lower cost alternative?
- H. Alstman observed a direct correlation between connectivity and ridership. Thinking about the bottom threshold, if one of these has literally no impact on equity or frequency, would that be okay? She encouraged the team to look at Environmental Justice communities and Gateway Cities separately, as they are different. The branding is confusing, and communication of the different lines is difficult. We need an exercise to really talk about where you can go on these lines and consider each line individually.
- B. Forman stated that Gateway Cities need to reach their potential as the urban centers they should be. When considering prioritization, what can be achieved in our lifetimes? The business community and public want to see improvements tomorrow and understanding where that's possible is important. South Coast Rail, Old Colony lines are underwhelming, and we really need to pull them apart and see what can be done.
- M. Cahill said that in Beverly, there are 22 gate crossings with gate down times of 3-5 min at a time, which is pretty crippling to the community. Reliability is critical and can be addressed in the near term, but electrification is important to reliability in the long-term. Ultimately, full electrification is a necessity in the bigger picture and we can look to what peer systems are doing. Diesel engines don't line up with greenhouse gas concerns and climate change goals. With

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reverse commute, we need to recognize that we're moving people along and within the lines. Frequency, reliability, connectivity, electrification, it's all together.

- S. Cronin stated that these concepts are all foundations for a seamless system. We need a system that's affordable for the lowest income and desirable for highest income. It should be a system that works for first time users, so they don't feel stupid. She would welcome bi-directional full day service. Funding plays a huge role in where we're looking and what we're doing. The MBTA and MassDOT don't need to do it alone, they should look to developers, markets, and use RTAs as a resource. Flexibility and interconnections are important. We should be using creative solutions.

S. Hamwey encouraged committee members to share any further comments for consideration prior to the next meeting. He also asked some clarifying questions:

What do alternatives need to look like to constitute a reverse commute?

- P. Matthews explained that the data he saw was heat mapping around the Worcester line to identify job centers. The life sciences corridor stretches to outlying communities. Looking at the materials prepared for today's meeting, it doesn't look like a bi-directional system.
- J. Boncore asked for clarification about the difference between reverse commute and frequent all day bi-directional service.
- P. Forman said that we should ask what the government is trying to get out of the rail system. There are really three goals: providing mobility for people is critical, equity issues and connectivity, and frequency. It's really about traffic congestion. People who have the option of getting on highways will and it's not in their or the government's interest for them to do so. When you get out in the outer ring, it's not about a commute, congestion, or moving residents already there into the city, it's about economic development, creating future demand by moving a housing solution or employment solution out of the inner city and into the suburbs, and moving people from the city out into the suburbs. There might be different priority patterns for different lines. It's about promoting those extended lines to increase housing and business and helping transport businesses from the overcrowded areas in the city out into suburbs.

Regarding all-day frequency, should it be a goal to deliver the same level of service to all lines or should the project focus more on demand?

- W. Brownsberger said that is it simpler to just have a pulse system. He then asked if it adds enough value to skip stations that aren't used as much.
- M. Muller stated that all modeling will focus on the most ideal service on the lines and then will look at investments required to get to that ideal before working backwards from there. He asked if we should be narrowing alternatives down to something more manageable. K. Carlson explained that when she thinks of the vision, she imagines the ideal, and then there's analysis and a price is assessed. L. Santos explained that if we want to electrify, we have to look at other infrastructure issues that would need improvements as well. He stated that he wants to understand how to maximize the output.

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How much do we want to consider parking constraints in the model? Do we want to relieve those constraints in all models or some?

- M. Cahill stated that if we lift parking constraints, what we put forward has to solve the issue.
- E. Bourassa asked if the team can present alternatives with parking constrained and with it lifted, to take into consideration that not all towns will allow more parking.
- C. Dykema explained that where she is the parking fills up by 7:30 AM and that's one of the primary constraints. We could look at ideas like a park and ride with a shuttle from a nearby community to the station to maximize ridership. Communities hosting the parking would get benefits.
- P. Matthews provided the example of Acton being heavily constrained by parking. There could be shuttles to bring people from off-site parking or a nearby community.
- S. Cronin explained that when she has to think about parking at the station possibly filling up, she won't use the commuter rail, but will drive.

Electrification

- S. Hamwey stated that there is general consensus that electrification is a desirable end state for the system.
- J. Boncore agreed that it would be good to do some modeling. To electrify the Providence and Fairmont lines fully would not be that heavy a lift. Consider the turnpike shutting down during construction: we might want to have frequent, all day service to Worcester without electrification to test what's going on with the different lines to collect data. S. Hamwey explained that the team has simulation software and can build it out with full electrification or with hybrid electrification to use resources.
- B. Forman stated that the most important performance metric is connectivity, but there's still a lot they need to understand in detail.

Any ideas on North-South Rail or South Station Expansion to be included in the scenarios?

- J. Boncore asked what inexpensive operational changes can be made today?
- W. Brownsberger stated that he's never been excited about North-South Rail, but there would be a lot of problems if riders have to stop at North Station or South Station. The connectivity piece is important.

S. Hamwey asked if the team should explore dropping low performing stations in the scenarios. There were several agreements that the team should look into it. Next meeting the team will come back with scenarios.

PUBLIC COMMENT

N. Farrell invited public comment.

- Garrett Wollman: If we really want to have this vision of fast, frequent, reliable, all day, bi-directional service, we need to start from the beginning with full electrification and fast light units, because there's not an existing infrastructure to do that type of service model with diesel engines.

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- Andrew Jennings said he's concerned that all alternatives will focus on 1950s technology. He thinks the city needs to look at tram trains, where the draw is to extend out into the suburbs on suburban rail tracks. He also suggested looking at dual mode tracks that have an effect on the electrification questions. In Hamburg, there's a line that reverses trains in less than a minute and splits, with one half of the train going to the airport and the other half to the suburbs. If we used this model in Boston, it could boost service.
- Paige Duncan explained that Foxborough is getting a service pilot next May. She said that having a bi-directional commute that works is what we should be aspiring to, but her community currently does not need 15-minute all-day service. Foxborough has large growth areas and is an area of future growth for the Commonwealth. Sometimes in projections, that doesn't show up. Foxborough just changed its zoning and is actively changing to allow for growth. She emphasized that we should be talking about the outer edges and promoting the needs for future growth, keeping the focus on the Commuter Rail.
- Clint Richmond said he has heard a lot about population projections and urges the team not to focus on those projections, emphasizing that transit leads to growth. We've not invested to keep up with population growth of the last few decades. We've lost connectivity. The regional rail should not focus just on Boston. We still have changing demographics, so even if the population doesn't grow, we will have changes in travel modes. A lot of Gateway Cities are not being served. There's talk about all day service, but we don't even have everyday service. He also encouraged the team to work with our neighbors.

NEXT STEPS

S. Hamwey encouraged the committee members to submit any further comments as soon as possible. By Wednesday next week, a summary will be available to everyone and he will get word out soon when next meeting will be. December 13 is the tentative date, but this date, as well as time and location, will be confirmed with the Advisory Committee within the coming week.