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South Coast Rail Completes a Major Milestone

Early in 2023, South Coast Rail (SCR) reached an important milestone: substantial completion of the Fall River Secondary (FRS). SCR's first major construction contract saw completion of new commuter rail stations in Fall River and Freetown, the Weaver's Cove Layover in Fall River and 12.1 miles of new welded rail along the FRS. This work was completed on time and on budget. Currently, work continues on the larger contract for the Middleborough Secondary/New Bedford Main Line (MS/NBML) and the signal and communication system to bring both lines to full Phase 1 service.

There is plenty more to come as we look ahead. A mild winter helped advance construction and the MBTA and its team are moving full steam ahead. When complete, South Coast Rail will provide a one-seat trip from southeastern Massachusetts to Boston for the first time since the late 1950s in about 90 minutes from Fall River and New Bedford.

Project Progress

Construction on the Fall River Secondary Line was performed by Skanska DW White JV under a [\\$159 million contract awarded in May 2020](#). The contract includes upgrades to over 12 miles of track that were previously used for freight, nine bridges, 11 culverts, and 10 grade crossings. In celebration of completing the contract, the MBTA held a ribbon-cutting at Freetown Station in December 2022 (see the article on page 5). As 2023 began, the contractor was completing punchlist items such as parking lot striping and fencing along the right-of-way.

While the stations look ready for service, there will be finishing activity at the station and layover sites in the coming weeks. In addition, service depends

on installation of signal boxes along the right-of-way along with other signal work. Those elements of the project are incorporated in the MS/NBML contract, the second and larger of the two major construction packages.

On the New Bedford Main Line, over 24 miles of track and right-of-way areas are being reconstructed along with six rail bridges, 18 grade crossings, and 14 interlockings. Four stations and a layover facility are also progressing well as part of the second contract award. The platform is installed at Middleborough station and parking lot paving will begin later this spring. East Taunton station is nearing completion and will include a center-island platform with an elevator and ramp system for accessibility. Two New Bedford stations are under construction: at Church Street, there is significant progress on the underground utilities and installing the platform panels; at New Bedford station, the platform is installed. Other work includes installing drainage, conduits and light poles.

Utilities and foundations for a new crew building and power structures at the Wamsutta Layover Facility are being installed along with utilities and drainage for the yard track area. Wamsutta will also serve as the layover site for the MassCoastal freight railroad.

Signal and communications work for the entire South Coast Rail Phase 1 corridor is being performed under this contract. Signal instrument houses are being installed along the right-of-way. These sheds of various sizes contain the equipment that manages signals, operations, and track switches. Crews are pulling cable, fiber wires and completing the tie-ins that will operate the entire Phase 1 system.



Platforms being installed at East Taunton Station, February 2023

The MBTA has awarded a construction contract to Barletta Heavy Division to build an ADA-compliant pedestrian bridge from the historic center of New Bedford to the station across Route 18 and Acushnet Avenue (see page 4). Foundation work has begun on the bridge.

Off-site traffic mitigation work is visible in a number of SCR communities. These projects are improvements to roadways, sidewalks, coordinated traffic signal systems and station entrances for vehicles and pedestrians. The MBTA committed to the mitigation as part of the SCR program. The work is timed for completion by the startup of commuter rail service.

Looking Ahead

With completion of the two major SCR construction contracts, next steps for South Coast Rail Phase 1 include finishing installation of signal systems and a rigorous testing and commissioning process of all new equipment by contractor crews, the MBTA and Keolis, the system operator. Training for SCR train crews will also be underway. At every step, safety will be a key consideration for our riders and crews. Look for more information about SCR's Safety First program over the next few months.



Platforms being installed at East Taunton Station, February 2023.

Fall River Secondary Facts and Figures

Building a railroad includes more than preparing the right-of-way and laying tracks. The Fall River Secondary contractor, Skanska DW White JV, has completed these major elements of a new Fall River Line:

Project Element	Status
Stations: Fall River Depot & Freetown	Completed and awaiting final signal and communications
Culverts	Complete
9 Bridges	Complete
10 Grade Crossings	Complete (although not yet activated)
Walls: Sheeting, Soldier Piles and precast modular block wall	Complete or installed
New Track	12.10 miles installed
Sidings	Complete

South Coast Rail Announces Safety First Program

We are excited to return passenger rail service to South Coast communities for the first time in 60 years! With passenger trains soon to be operating on the Right-of-Way (ROW), it's important to remind everyone that safety is MBTA's top priority throughout the system. While South Coast Rail (SCR) is eagerly awaited, staying safe around tracks and trains is essential. We don't want you, your family, friends, or pets to end up in a dangerous situation. Keeping the ROW clear for the trains will make your trip by rail safe and reliable, too.

Because the region has not seen passenger trains in decades, people have become comfortable using the ROW for recreation, such as dog walking, ATV and dirt bike riding, running, and taking shortcuts across the tracks. Sheds, swimming pools, and encampments have been built on and near the tracks, which have also become a dumping ground for trash and debris. Since 1959, the tracks in this area only saw freight trains a few times a day at relatively low speeds, only recently increasing to 25 mph in certain areas. In the coming months, MBTA test trains will begin operating more frequently at speeds up to 80 mph.

In preparation for testing and the return of passenger service, SCR is kicking off the Safety First education program. The program is aimed at promoting safety throughout the railroad corridor and consists of materials, meetings and briefings. Presentations, brochures, videos, and conversations will emphasize Safety First for every age, occupation, and resident. For more information or to request a presentation, send us an email at SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us with "Safety First" in the subject line. We'll be reaching out to schools, libraries, organizations, and neighborhoods. In the meantime, watch our [safety videos](#) and our [Safety Basics vignette](#), and please think Safety First.



Front fold of Operation Lifesaver's brochures



Still from the elementary school-age safety video produced by South Coast Rail

The first rule of Safety First is always to stay clear of the ROW. It is very dangerous and illegal to trespass onto the railroad ROW: it is never safe to be near or around railroad tracks. Only cross tracks in designated locations and obey all warning signs and signals. We'll be sharing these and other safety basics as we near testing and service. Our goal is to bring an understanding of safety rules to every Southeastern Massachusetts city and town.

Stay tuned for more information on SCR safety and thank you for remembering to put Safety First.

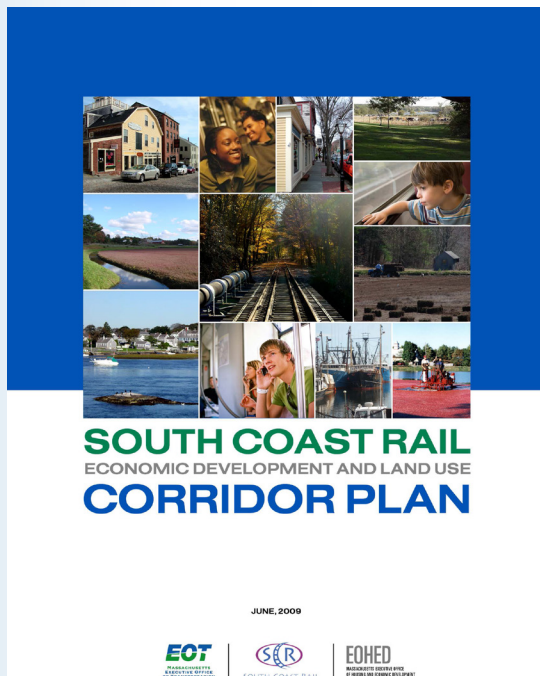
MBTA Partners with SRPEDD and South Coast Communities on Land Use Planning

South Coast Rail is not just a transportation project. As conceived roughly a decade ago, the project has taken a smart growth approach, working with cities and towns to identify their community priorities for Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and Priority Protection Areas (PPAs). The 2009 South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan set out goals for the original effort to guide development and protect the region's natural beauty:

The (Corridor Plan) is a blueprint for clustering jobs and homes around stations, maximizing the economic benefits of rail investment, minimizing sprawl development, and preserving the farms, fields, and forests of the South Coast.

The process included regional planning agencies such as SRPEDD (Southeast Regional Planning and Development Agency) and several state agencies. And the planning involved more than 100 meetings and working sessions, collaboration, GIS and policy analysis, and a significant level of community engagement. The result was development of a Community Priority Areas of Regional Significance Plan.

The original work is ready for updating. Refreshing these plans is beginning for southeast MA. The MBTA is partnering with SRPEDD and all of its communities whether touched by South Coast Rail or not to gather insights and exchange information through a series of working sessions in each community. This time the project team will be able to review what has happened over a decade and discuss area priorities and land uses in communities and the region at large.



The passage of time also offers new tools: online maps and educational videos, visualizations and experience with implementation strategies. SRPEDD is in the process of reaching out to communities, setting up working sessions, and developing a website. We'll be sure to share information as there are opportunities for your engagement, ideas and suggestions.



Rendering of the New Bedford Pedestrian Bridge, aerial view looking towards the parking lot and Station.

Pedestrian Bridge Approved

The New Bedford South Coast Rail station is under construction on Acushnet Avenue, adjacent to Route 18 and the railroad right-of-way. An existing pedestrian bridge crosses the roadway and connects to the historic center of the city, but it's aging. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and the City of New Bedford (City) recently approved a Memorandum of Understanding for a new \$21 million accessible pedestrian bridge that will serve as a gateway to the city.

The existing bridge lacks key accessibility and safety features. Due to the speeds at which vehicles travel on Route 18, crossing the roadway at surface level would pose a significant danger to pedestrians.

The new bridge will bring pedestrians across Route 18 and Acushnet Avenue, connecting to the station parking lot and platform access on the east side and to New Bedford's historic Downtown area on the west side. The bridge will provide a walkway over John F. Kennedy Boulevard between Purchase Street and the station to ensure a safe walking route. To create an accessible path to and from the station, the pedestrian bridge design features walkways and stairs on the west side, and elevators and stairs on the east side, with the bridge measuring 238' feet long by 10'6" wide.

After more than a year of discussions between the City and the MBTA, the MBTA agreed to design and build the bridge to the City's standards. The City of New Bedford

will be the project owner, with design, construction, and primary financing handled by the MBTA. The City will not be required to pay for the bridge construction costs. Once construction is completed, the bridge will be owned and maintained by the City. A competitive construction contract was awarded to Barletta Engineering/Heavy Construction. Work has already begun and will ramp up this spring.

“New Bedford deserves public amenities and spaces that are both functional and beautiful. For a highly visible structure like this pedestrian bridge, excellence in design is a must. We have achieved that goal with this design, and I am grateful for the collaborative efforts between our team and the MBTA’s. The result will be a new city landmark of which we can all be proud,” said Mayor Jon Mitchell.

The New Bedford station will comply with the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Standards, including 800-foot high-level platforms for “all doors” boarding. Other amenities will include benches, canopies, and parking.



Event guests cutting the ceremonial ribbon to open Freetown Station.

December Ribbon Cutting at Freetown Station

On the crisp winter morning of December 5, 2022, Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, Transportation Secretary and CEO Jamey Tessler, General Manager Steve Poftak, elected officials and supporters celebrated the substantial completion of the first Phase 1 construction contract for the Fall River Secondary Line of South Coast Rail (SCR) with a ribbon-cutting at the newly completed Freetown Station.

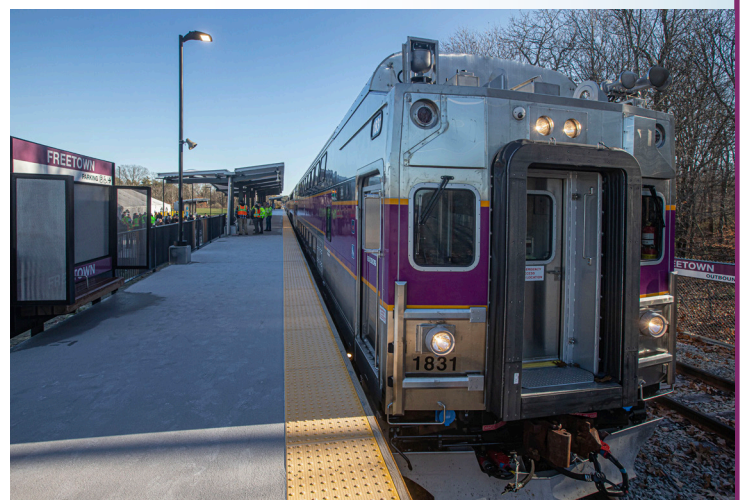
To arrive at the event, state, MassDOT, and MBTA officials boarded four of the MBTA’s brand-new, bi-level Commuter Rail coaches at Campanelli Yard and proceeded to Freetown Station, pulled by a MassDOT/MBTA locomotive. Sixteen coaches

will support South Coast Rail as part of the \$278.5 million contract awarded in December 2019 for 80 Hyundai-Rotem bi-level coaches. The coaches feature upgrades and improvements like LED lighting and the integration of Positive Train Control. They will replace single-level coaches, address an immediate need for additional vehicles, and provide a more efficient way to add capacity.

Freetown Station is located at 153 South Main Street, in Assonet. The event showcased the station’s features: a fully accessible 800-foot long platform with canopies; a bike shelter; parking that includes Electric Vehicle charging areas; a transition plaza for bus connections and drop-off/pick up of riders; benches; signage; lighting; and security cameras.

Opening the event, state and local officials lined up in front of the new station to cut the ribbon and commemorate the progress milestone. Beneath a tent nearby, the Apponequet Regional High School Chorus performed the National Anthem. Speeches were given by Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, Transportation Secretary and CEO Jamey Tessler, General Manager Steve Poftak, State Senator Michael J. Rodrigues, Representative William Straus, Representative Carole Fiola, and Representative Paul Schmid. Speakers shared memories of the work done to advance SCR and their excitement about the approaching beginning of service.

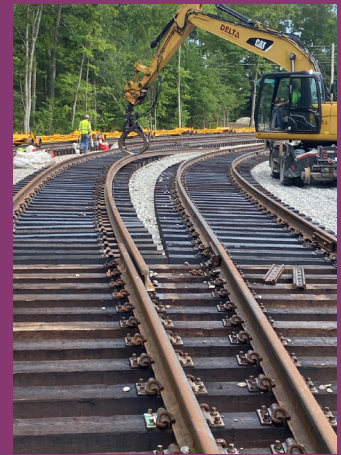
This celebration presented an opportunity to recognize the many years of leadership and support for the program, advocacy and teamwork that are bringing Commuter Rail service back to southeastern MA for the first time in more than 60 years. We’re grateful for everyone who collaborated to host the ribbon-cutting and for everyone who was able to join us. It was a great day to relive the history of the project, and the SCR team looks forward to the future positive impact the project will have on the region.



Commuter Rail train coach pulled into Freetown Station during the ribbon cutting

What to Know about Construction:

- Typical hours of construction are Monday-Friday, 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM or until dark; crews may arrive at construction sites prior to this time
- The exception is for track outages: these are 24-hour day work periods usually over 4-5 days; communities will be notified in advance of these events
- Construction pest and rodent management are required and ongoing
- Dust control and management are required and monitored
- Safety is embedded in all of the work on South Coast Rail



Construction Questions

To report a construction-related issue on the South Coast Rail project, call the hotline at 617-222-4099. It will be answered Monday-Friday, between 7:00 AM and 3:30 PM (except holidays). All voicemails left outside of these hours will be received on the following 7:00 AM to 3:30 PM weekday shift. We will respond to all complaints. A separate line is established for off-site improvements in SCR communities, such as for road improvements, crosswalks and sidewalk construction: 423-375-4086.

There is also a phone number for inquiries directly to the Noise Program: scrnoise@mbta.com; 617-449-7387

The SCR team is available to talk with or meet with residents, businesses and elected officials during construction to discuss issues and update stakeholders. Write us at SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us.





FRP Platforms at Church Street Station in New Bedford, February 2023.

Contact Us

For more information, contact us at:

 SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us

 617-222-4099

 To learn more about the project and sign up for email updates, visit the website at: www.mass.gov/southcoastrail

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