

Meeting Notes

Date: June 28, 2018
10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.

Notes Taken By: M. Buckmaster

Place: MassDOT Conference Room 4150 /
10 Park Plaza

Project Name: MBTA Rail Vision
Advisory Committee – Meeting 1

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members

Chairman Joseph Boncore

Sen William Brownsberger

Rep Carolyn Dykema

Rep Daniel Ryan

Mayor Michael Cahill, City of Beverly

Jim Aloisi, TriMount Consulting

Stephanie Cronin, Middlesex 3

Rick Dimino, A Better City

Ben Forman, MassInc

Peter Forman, South Shore Chamber

Helena Fruscio Alstman, EOHED

Paul Matthews, 495 Partnership

Jesse Mermell, Alliance for Business Leadership

Chris Osgood, City of Boston

Josh Ostroff, T4MA

Travis Pollack, MAPC

Timothy Murray, Worcester Chamber

Susanne Rasmussen, City of Cambridge

MassDOT/MBTA

Scott Hamwey, MassDOT

Mike Muller, MBTA

Jody Ray, MBTA

Elliot Sperling, MassDOT

Consultant Team

Theresa Carr, VHB

Mark Buckmaster, SDG

Nancy Farrell, RVA

This document summarizes the discussion at the June 28, 2018 Rail Vision Advisory Committee meeting. All references to slides relate to the presentation (included as item 3 within the meeting briefing book).

WELCOME AND GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Secretary Pollack welcomed and thanked the Advisory Committee members for participating in the Rail Vision effort. She highlighted the role of the committee and the project as a whole in helping MBTA/MassDOT make smarter investment decisions given often conflicting desires for rail service. Such proposals are legitimate but very difficult to implement operationally. The Rail Vision will build a dynamic model to find the most promising service alternatives for the MBTA's rail system. The result of this process may have to be phased in or be part of a transition, but it's significant work. Focus40 recommendations will be released in a few weeks as well. She noted that there is a great deal of enthusiasm for the project and she will check in periodically.

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N Farrell presented an overview of the Advisory Committee's (AC's) role: to provide informed advice, guidance and diverse perspectives. She reviewed the committee's responsibilities to participate in the meetings, represent their stakeholders' opinions and serve as a conduit for broader public involvement.

S Hamway, Project Manager, addressed the project goals and objectives. The MBTA needs to leverage its extensive commuter rail network to best meet the transportation and economic growth needs of the region. He listed the assumptions that will drive the project:

- **Cost Considerations:** Vision will not be financially constrained, but must be implementable
- **Motive Power and Rolling Stock:** Vision will evaluate new technologies, fleets, full electrification
- **Tradeoffs:** vision will explore alternatives with tradeoffs
- **Geographic Scope:** Vision will focus primarily on the existing system
- **Fare and Parking Policies:** Vision will be coordinated with Fare Policy and Parking efforts, but will not lead those discussions
- **Management and Oversight:** Vision will assume current management and oversight structure

S Hamway said the project has clearance to look at the tensions that can arise between tradeoffs – such as express stops versus infill and similar conflicts.

- J Aloisi / J Mermell: Highlighted lack of diversity of the committee members. Noted importance of ensuring representation for the committee to be effective.
 - S Hamway highlighted efforts made to date to ensure diversity, and acknowledged need to consider adding additional people to the committee. He welcomed suggestions from the members. Invitations are outstanding but more diversity is welcome.
- P Matthews: Confirm that reverse commutes is included within the scope of the project.
 - S Hamway: Confirmed
- J Boncore: Noted some investment decisions don't need to commit MassDOT for next 60 years – for example, could consider leasing instead of purchasing rolling stock
 - S Hamway: Confirmed that leasing / other bridging options would be considered
 - J Ray: Noted, however, that leasing may close off some funding options for rolling stock as FTA will not fund leased vehicles
- J Ostroff: Would parking capacity investments be considered as part of this study or separately?
 - S Hamway: Capacity and pricing for parking will be considered separately, although Rail Vision will need to be consistent with wider policy development.
- R Dimino: Noted potential need to consider fare/pricing strategy, especially in relation to issues of equity. Also noted need to understand state of current assets, potentially through an asset review.
 - S Hamway: Noted the team will be delving into asset constraints on a line-by-line basis. Also noted that others within MBTA/MassDOT (Evan Rowe, Laurel Paget-Seekins) could potentially come to a future meeting to discuss issues of fare policy.
- S Cronin: What is a transfer hub, will the study consider first/last mile issues?
 - S Hamway: Noted focus will be on assets within the control of MBTA/MassDOT – the study will therefore touch on first/last mile issues, but not in detail.

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- R Dimino: Noted that another MBTA asset is land, and the analysis should consider real estate opportunities and more widely how to leverage assets.
- S Hamway outlined the guiding questions the team developed and has presented in stakeholder briefings. The questions at a high level on tradeoffs between potential goals; for example, should the goal be to reduce highway congestion, auto emissions and VMT by focusing on long-distance trips? Or to provide service in the inner core that operates more like urban transit? Reverse commuting is another question, as well as whether future service should support economic development in Gateway Cities by focusing on their needs.
- R Dimino: Consider referencing equity directly in one of the objectives (potentially as a 6th objective).
 - S Hamway: Noted that equity is considered within specific metrics, but happy to consider explicitly including this in the objectives themselves.
- J Aloisi: Noted importance of understanding what we mean by equity. Also suggested referring to "intercity rail" rather than "commuter rail."
 - S Hamway: Noted that "commuter" has been removed from the project title, but any other terms beyond just "rail" considered to have potential for unwanted connotations.

SYSTEMS REVIEW

T Carr, Consultant Deputy Project Manager, summarized the team's work to look at 16 peer systems: nine international rail systems and seven in North America. The goal was to look at their systems, understand what they have done and what lessons can be learned from them. The team is producing a summary report; the presentation shows the locations and summarizes key statistics in comparison to the MBTA's rail system.

T Carr cautioned that in some cases it is difficult to compare the metrics across systems and some data were more difficult to gather for international systems. She summarized the data at a high level: 10 of the peer systems operate fully electrically, 4 are combined/mixed systems and only 2 are diesel only. She noted there is a direct connection between a system's size and its observation to operate efficiently. About half of the systems contract their operations. The MBTA ranked 7 out of 9 domestic systems on farebox recovery. Newer systems have a higher rate of station accessibility. (More of the data can be seen in the slide presentation.)

- D Ryan: Asked about the rationale for comparing to New York, which is much larger than Boston. Also asked logic of comparing to cities which don't experience heavy snowfall.
 - S Hamway / T Carr: Noted that the MBTA is often judged against external peers, and so it's beneficial to consider a wide range of systems as the project doesn't want to be accused of ignoring ideas from other systems. There may be certain elements of systems that are of interest (for example, how they have justified investments) without the system as a whole needing to be entirely comparable.
- P Forman: Asked if there are common metrics/standards for rail systems across the US, and how the MBTA ranked.

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- T Carr: The National Transit Database (NTD) is a common source of metrics across the US, and these data were used in the development of the peer systems review.
 - S Hamwey: Noted that the full peer system review report will be shared with the group at a later date (after MBTA/MassDOT review).
- R Dimino / T Pollack: Both noted the importance of considering systems within systems, in relation to emerging economic centers beyond central Boston.
 - T Carr: Highlighted SEPTA as a useful comparator here given its polycentric nature.
- J Ostroff: Asked if other systems had inflection points for investment
 - T Carr: Highlighted Toronto as a good example of this, which the AC members will see when they review the report.
- S Rasmussen: Asked which systems also ran alongside freight or with a mixed fleet
 - T Carr: Fleet composition was considered for each system but the team hasn't drilled down into operational implications at this stage, although that could potentially be done for one or two examples at a later date.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

S Hamwey presented a series of slides on how ideas will be considered and screened to provide service alternatives. The presentation provides a graphic that explains the steps in this process. The team is currently at the first step, which is development of ideas. These ideas will be screened against three questions:

- Is the concept within the MBTA's control to build and maintain?
- Does the concept avoid rendering freight and Amtrak operations logistically impossible?
- Is the focus of the concept on providing system-level, rather than site-specific improvements?

There is likely to be a long list of concepts that must also provide value in at least one area:

- Potential to maintain or improve trip reliability
- Potential to maintain or decrease trip travel times
- Potential to maintain or decrease passenger wait times
- Potential to maintain or improve service to disadvantaged communities
- Supports stated and adopted land use goals
- Allows for usage of existing maintenance facilities

For each concept, the team will define a master timetable per line that will be evaluated in ATTune, a high-level rail operations planning tool, to see whether there are any fatal flaws that cannot be resolved or overcome without major infrastructure investment. This work will be done on a line-by-line basis.

Once this process has been undertaken for each line, the timetables will be combined for all lines to evaluate the system as a whole. This process will identify (on a high-level basis) fatal flaws that would end the investigation of the concept, but this time at a system-wide level. The team will generate a summary of the different impacts of the tests, identifying the key trade-offs within each concept with reference to the goals and objectives for the MBTA rail system.

Based on this analysis and the trade-offs described above, the team will develop up to eight service alternatives to proceed into the next stage of the evaluation. These service alternatives will include

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elements that could be used to adapt service to future changes in economic and socio-demographic trends, as well as policy changes within the MBTA service area.

- W Brownsberger: Asked for clarification regarding guiding questions versus objectives
 - S Hamway: The guiding questions introduce the concept of trade-offs and serve as a basis for developing service concepts, while the objectives will be used to actually assess the impacts of different service concepts. He noted that it's likely that at least one service alternative will be taken forward which seeks to align with each of the guiding questions.
- C Osgood: Objective 1 – He recommends adding existing/unmet needs as well. He also recommends adding a 6th objective on equity. He noted that the 8 scenarios should not envisage identical service across all lines, but rather be a blend of different services.
 - S Hamway: He agreed that the 8 scenarios will not be identical on all lines – each concept will be considered on a line-by-line basis
- S Hamway: Discussed the different possible definitions of equity – there is income equity, racial equity, geographic equity, and potentially others to be addressed and balanced in the study.
 - J Aloisi: Recommend also including people displaced as a result of cost-of-living increases or changes in the housing markets
- J Aloisi: Objective 5 – he recommends adding maximizing use of assets in a cost-efficient way (including land for layover, which may be needed less if trip frequencies are increased). He also noted that what is “in the control of MBTA” is not always clear. For example, first/last mile could be applicable if MBTA decided to run a shuttle service. He suggested it would be helpful for a primer to be developed on items that might not be in MBTAs control (for example, arrangements with freight / Amtrak)
 - S Hamway: Primers on key items could be circulated at future meetings.
- B Forman asked whether South Coast Rail is assumed in the Rail Vision effort
 - S Hamway: Yes
- C Dykema: Objective 2 – she highlighted learning from the Amazon process, and what companies may be looking for from transportation
- P Forman: Asked where the 8 service alternatives will come from
 - S Hamway: The team will look at each of the guiding questions and service / investment options and develop concepts under different levels of cost / operational constraint. Options will be assessed first using ATTune (a high-level operations tool) to understand what is operationally feasible, then against each of the objectives to determine how services could best be delivered under different cost / operational constraints.
- S Rasmussen: Objective 4 – she noted that resiliency typically means preparedness, whereas here sustainability may be a better word
- R Dimino: Objective 5 – He suggested that for return on investment, the MBTA shouldn't just consider the commuter rail, but should consider wider intermodal services

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- J Ostroff: Objective 1 – This process needs to emphasize holistic thinking – maximizing transit ridership, not just that of the commuter rail. Objective 1 / 3 – should universal accessibility be an objective to include?
- J Ray: He noted that the group needs to be clear on precise metrics to use – for example, is total ridership the most useful metric, or is it passenger miles? Are all trips considered the same value whether it is a short trip (e.g., West Medford to North Station) or a long trip (Worcester to South Station)? It's not just the number of people, it's how far you are taking them.
 - J Aloisi: Agreed that specific definitions are important to understand
- P Matthews: Should first/last mile issues be considered as part of the objectives? Objective 5 – efficiency can be defined in many ways – also need to consider difference in short versus long-term efficiency savings when assessing concepts
 - S Hamway: Pointed to information on tools to be used to assess concepts provided in the briefing book
- B Forman: Noted that if ridership models are calibrated to what we see in the US currently, this could be constrained relative to what the potential is
 - S Hamway: The team has developed tools that seek to overcome this potential constraint

OUTREACH AND CLOSING

N Farrell outlined the vision for stakeholder engagement in brief. The Advisory Committee is one of three efforts underway, along with meeting with a group convened by T4MA (Commuter Rail Communities Coalition), and legislative input. A more robust public process will start up in early fall to introduce the project. In the meantime, the team has reviewed recent data collected by the MBTA's Office of Performance Management and Innovation (OPMI), and a summary memo has been provided in the AC's briefing book. The team is developing a quick tradeoffs survey for riders and non-riders, with the goals of learning what customers want and finding out what appeals to non-riders.

- T Pollack: Noted that we should seek to leverage knowledge from other studies with public outreach elements.
- R Dimino: Noted that other studies have been undertaken (for example, by Transit Matters and A Better City) and that it may be beneficial for the committee to be briefed on them.
 - W Brownsberger: This kind of information may be beneficial to provide for some members on a voluntary basis.
 - S Hamway: Scott and OTP can serve as a conduit for organizing less formal meetings on such matters if they are helpful.
- M Cahill: He would like to confirm how comprehensive the list of service and investment elements is, and noted that in many cases these can work together.
 - S Hamway: He agreed that these are not intended to be standalone items and that this would be made clearer. He also noted that for the 8 service alternatives, it is likely that some will be low cost/complexity, at least one will assume the presence of the North-South Rail Link, and that each of the guiding questions would be covered by these.
- P Matthews: He clarified that the Mayors group was organized through T4MA as well as MAPC. He also noted that the website is considered a good resource for people to access.

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- S Hamwey: Most of the materials in the briefing book will be made available via the website within a week or so.
- M Cahill: although it was mentioned previously that the commuter rail tends to serve a more affluent population, there remain some people who use it who will be less affluent and therefore more price sensitive.
- C Osgood: He noted the importance of understanding the time horizon for benefits, and that the evaluation must consider when benefits would be realized.
 - S Hamwey: Interim phasing is likely to be necessary for several investments (for example, electrification), especially given the timing of the next commuter rail operating contract.

S Hamwey noted that by the time of the next meeting, mid to late September, the team plans to complete and calibrate the models; identify service concepts; and begin to screen and evaluate the service concepts.

He welcomed comments and ideas from the AC members (Scott.Hamwey@state.ma.us) over the summer.