

FREIGHT COMMITTEE
of the
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL

Summary of November 12, 2008 Meeting

This meeting was held in Conference Room 4 at the State Transportation Building.

The meeting was called to order at 1:10 PM.

1. Introduction – Walter Bonin, *Chair and City of Marlborough*

W. Bonin opened the meeting and asked each participant to introduce him- or herself.

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of October 8, 2008, were approved unanimously.

3. Member Announcements

In light of new federal leadership, the Advisory Council should encourage the MPO to again review its stance on illustrative projects. There is a sentiment in Washington that the Obama Administration will support far-reaching, regional transportation projects. (J. Businger, National Corridors Initiative)

Agreed. (Frank DeMasi, Wellesley)

It is a concern that if Massachusetts gets increased funding from Washington, that funding would go to poorly conceived projects currently in the pipeline (Urban Ring, Silver Line Phase 3) even though other projects considered too expensive would not receive consideration. (Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association)

The Freight Committee should consider rail access to deep-water ports in Boston. (A. Pinsley)
Massport does not support the concept, because land is too valuable and the area is already too congested. (F. DeMasi)

There is an insufficient market for the investment. Massport has retained access at other ports, namely Charlestown. (Lynn Vikesland, Massport)

Greg Bialecki, Undersecretary for Business Development – Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, should speak to the Advisory Council. (F. DeMasi)

The State should have completed the Economic Development Plan by now. It would be good to hear an update on it. (W. Bonin)

Has there been a formal comment on the Freight Committee charter? (F. DeMasi)
M. Al-Khatib is preparing comments. They will be ready shortly. (Pam Wolfe, MPO Staff)

4. Discussion of Statewide Freight and Rail Plan – Tom Cahir and Tim Doherty, Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works

T. Cahir explained the recent restructuring of EOTPW. The Office of Transportation Planning now encompasses the following activities: traffic analysis, data resources/road inventory, long-range planning, transit planning, sustainable transportation, public/private development, research and ITS planning, administration, and MPO activities. T. Cahir is the deputy secretary of rail development and enhancements, a group that remains outside the Office of Transportation Planning.

The CSX agreement has been in the works for 2 ½ years. EOTPW has been focused on important assets for the commuter rail system, particularly those east of Worcester. Improving commuter rail to Worcester has been a priority. The Boston Terminal running track and the Grand Junction are important facilities in the negotiations. The definitive agreement with CSX that was signed about one month ago resulted in immediate improvement (by 2 ½ trains a day) in the commuter rail service to Worcester. The first closing in the agreement is scheduled for June 2009.

Through the rail development and enhancements group, EOTPW is examining CSX properties throughout the state and is looking for intermodal sites. Much of the focus is on the Beacon Park Yards site in Allston, a rail freight facility that is scheduled to close in 2012. The State is considering more than 40 replacement sites outside Boston, including an environmentally constrained Westborough site and a rail yard in Worcester.

Also, EOTPW is integrating freight considerations into the South Coast Rail project. Kristina Egan, project manager, works closely with T. Cahir and his staff in order to support freight inclusion in the multimodal project.

Point and Issues Raised During Discussion

Will the Statewide Freight and Rail Plan consider passenger service? (W. Bonin)

The Plan will consider passenger service as it pertains to rail freight access, but it will not consider passenger service exclusively. The MBTA is well suited to examine passenger service separately. (T. Cahir)

The Freight Committee is concerned about highway traffic and highway congestion that involves trucks. We are supporting efforts to take truck traffic off of the highway. Also, relocating rail freight facilities outside Interstate 495 could increase truck freight congestion in the region's suburbs, particularly MetroWest. We are concerned that local impacts will limit rail freight expansion. (W. Bonin)

The State agrees that there is a significant amount of truck freight and we are looking to make rail one part of the solution. This Plan is an opportunity to review local zoning challenges,

potential economic growth and inherent environmental impacts. A public/private partnership with CSX is included in the Plan. (T. Cahir)

Small, distributed rail freight facilities have an intrinsic value in reducing truck freight congestion, thereby reducing maintenance costs for our roads, reducing air pollution, and reducing costs of goods. If the State moves major rail freight operations from Beacon Park Yards, could the State use the facility as a smaller distribution center for the urban core? (M. Wellons)

The Plan has not reached that level of review yet, but adaptive reuse of the Yards and the impact of truck freight will be considerations. (T. Cahir)

Why is Beacon Park Yards moving? (M. Wellons)

Changes in the real estate and freight markets make the facility economically infeasible. (Tim Doherty)

Moving rail freight operations outside Boston will shift congestion location and mode to MetroWest's highways where towns are not well suited to manage it. The State needs to consider the infrastructure needed for this shift. (Arnold Pinsley, MetroWest Growth Management Committee)

EOTPW is sensitive to this issue and, although the Plan has not addressed it yet, the State will address this issue when the Plan is complete. (T. Cahir)

In Massachusetts local concerns often trump regional interests. How will the Plan achieve its regional objectives in the face of local impacts? (W. Bonin)

This is the first statewide rail plan in Massachusetts in 20 years, and cities and towns are excited about its recommendations. Regionalization is more popular today than in the recent past; cities and towns are looking to aggregate resources to save money without reducing services. Local governments appreciate the common benefit of regionalizing resources, and we are hopeful that the broad, long-range recommendations will be embraced at the local level. (T. Cahir)

In the wake of recent transportation bonds and discussions of a new federal focus on infrastructure maintenance, will the State and its federal partners pursue infrastructure investments for freight service? These investments could enhance domestic production and support economic recovery. (Mike Renneke, Pioneer Valley Railroad)

Until a new administration takes control in Washington, it is only speculative to predict federal priorities. As indicated by the Statewide Freight and Rail Plan, the State is committed to improving freight rail service. Once the Plan is complete, the State will have a better idea of what is necessary for those improvements. (T. Doherty)

The federal government favors public-private partnerships to finance transportation projects. The MPO and the State should consider the finance method. (F. DeMasi)

Someone has to take a stand to support freight to the intermodal center, Beacon Yards. Why is distribution by rail to Massport's facilities off the table? (F. DeMasi)

It is not off the table. (T. Doherty)

The State should consider distributed rail freight sites closer to Boston, like Readville Rail Yards and Beacon Park Yards. Westwood Station is an active industrial site in a great location for transloading, but developers are converting it for residential and retail uses. These sites in the urban core around industrial uses could serve a purpose in a distributed rail freight network. (F. DeMasi)

Massachusetts does not necessarily need a centralized rail freight system, and there may be a place for distributed facilities. As the Plan moves on, the pros and cons of a distributed or centralized network will become clearer. (T. Cahir)

Will the Plan consider a statewide rail diversion program or several trans-loading facilities? (F. DeMasi)

Massport is a major agency in freight transport through eastern Massachusetts. Is Massport involved in the Plan? We don't agree that rail to Massport is infeasible. We will continue to follow this. The biggest problem is the pressure for other land uses. (F. DeMasi)

Yes, Massport is an important stakeholder in ongoing Plan discussions. (T. Cahir)

Massport sees no market for freight to the port. Massport has taken steps to preserve rail access, such as in Charlestown for Track 61. (L. Vikesland)

5. Discussion of best practices for communicating results to Advisory Council

Would it be appropriate for the Freight Committee to comment on the Statewide Freight and Rail Plan? (F. DeMasi)

That is up to Malek Al-Khatib, Advisory Council chair, but any comment letter would need to come from the full Advisory Council. (P. Wolfe)

Should the Freight Committee give an update as an item on the Advisory Council agenda? (M. Wellons)

Yes. "Committee Reports" is an item on the Advisory Council agenda. John Hersey, MPO Staff, contacts committee chairs for brief summaries of recent committee work and circulates those summaries to Advisory Council members before the meeting. Members are encouraged to review the summaries before the meeting and ask questions of the committees' chairs at the meeting. (P. Wolfe)

The Committee should have an agenda item for its presentation to the Advisory Council. (W. Bonin)

6. Update on statewide freight advocacy group

The Boston Society of Civil Engineers is working with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Agency on the Infrastructure Bank bill. One topic is about possible flexing of funding to transit and freight. (W. Bonin)

If the members of this committee pursued a separate, non-MPO advocacy group, how would that group receive administrative support, like staff to secure meeting rooms and record minutes? (J. Businger)

To that end, where would a statewide advocacy group meet? (W. Bonin)

Maybe a statewide partner like the Massachusetts Railroad Association could provide support for this like-minded effort. We should maintain contact with members of the committee and the larger list of other participants. (F. DeMasi)

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 2:45 AM.

Attachments:

1. None

Attendance List for November 12, 2008

Agencies

Tom Cahir, Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works
Tim Doherty, Executive Office of Transportation and Public Works
Lynn Vikesland, Massachusetts Port Authority

Cities and Towns

Walter Bonin, Marlborough
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

Citizens Groups

John Businger, Northeast Corridors Initiative
Brian Kane, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority Advisory Board
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside Neighborhood Association
Arnold Pinsley, MetroWest Growth Management Committee

Guests and Visitors

Kevin Dooley, Tighe Warehousing
Ed Lowney
Marilyn MacNab
Mike Rennie, Pioneer Valley Railroad

MPO Staff

John Hersey
Pam Wolfe