

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC)
MEETING #3
MEETING SUMMARY

April 3, 2014, 2:00 pm, Atkinson Town Hall

PAC Attendees:

- Town of Plaistow – Sean Fitzgerald;
(Alternate) Tim Moore
- Town of Atkinson – David Harrigan;
(Alternate) Robert J. Clark
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
- Todd Fontanella
- Rockingham Planning Commission –
Cliff Sinnott
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation
Authority – Ron Morgan
- Northern New England Passenger Rail
Authority – Jim Russell
- Pan Am Railways – Not in attendance
- City of Haverhill – Not in attendance

NHDOT Team: Shelley Winters

HDR Engineering Team: Ron O’Blenis, John Weston, Kris Erikson, Katie Rougeot, Jamie Paine

Approximately 2 non-PAC members attended

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- The floor was open to the public for their comments at the beginning of the meeting. Follow up comments could be provided to the PAC members after the meeting for discussion as appropriate at future meetings.
- **Comments:** Larry Gill, former selectmen of Plaistow, NH- Larry stated that he has been an active supporter of the project since its early development. He expressed his concern that those in opposition to the project are not giving the project a chance before the study information is even developed.

PREVIOUS ACTION ITEMS

- The agenda for the meeting along with meeting minutes from PAC meeting #2 were sent electronically on March 25, 2014. Comments were received and reviewed. At the start of the meeting copies for these two documents were distributed. Any further comments were asked to be expressed.

- Shelley Winters said for next set of meeting minutes a deadline will be established for comments to be submitted. When a final document is produced, it will be posted on the NHDOT website.
- **Comments:** Sean Fitzgerald asked to edit grammatical mistake of the spelling of Larry Gill's name. Also, he asked if the comments in the meeting minutes could include who made certain request for info.
- Cliff Sinnott asked to include his comment to the Project and Scope section. Last meeting he said it is important to use the experience from other MBTA expansion projects and see if it can be used for this project.

INITIAL SCREENING OF SITE OPTIONS

- On March 25th an electric document of the Site Option Attributes and Plaistow Site Option #7 were distributed to the PAC members.
- The Site Option Attributes document was developed based on Sean Fitzgerald's request at the last meeting to provide a summary of the main points of each option to better understand the pluses and minuses of each. This document was produced to assist in the review of each site option.
- Plaistow Site Option #7 was developed based on review and refinement to previously developed Site Options. The site option was a variation that is different enough from the others that it was thought it should be considered as another option.
- John Weston said that through using the site option attributes and our discussion today we want to screen the seven different options into two or three. The two or three options will then be further analyzed. The goal of the meeting today is to have a working discussion to determine which sites can be screened out and which ones have potential to further analysis.
- Ron O'Blenis introduced Jamie Paine from Normandeau Associates. Jamie will be working with the HDR team on environmental issues. Through development of site options it will be critical to minimize environmental impacts. Additional investigation will be done on the revised list of potential sites. The data developed to date is based on record/GIS information and although sites may appear to work on paper, there may be issues on the ground that have not yet been documented. Jaime will lead the more detailed investigation of environmental site conditions.
- Cliff Sinnott noted that in the community attribute section of the Site Option Attributes document that a differentiation should be made to compatibility of adjacent development to a station as opposed to a layover facility. He said community compatibility for a layover isn't the same compatibility as with a station.

- **Comments:** Robert Clark identified an error in the Site Option Attributes document. In Table 1.4.1 Layover Community Attributes and Service Operation Ability, Layover 6 location should be changed from Home Depot to Haverhill.
- David Harrigan asked why the no build alternative was not included in the options. John Weston responded that the no build alternative will be considered as part of the NEPA document when comparing different build alternatives, but at this stage only possible build site options are being assessed.
- Sean Fitzgerald expressed his concern that not everyone has been to a layover facility and does not understand what mitigation needs to be done. He suggested that some information be provided regarding what types of mitigation may be possible and how effective they are.
- Sean Fitzgerald stated that he had not been able to have a detailed discussion with his board about the site options and was not prepared to endorse or eliminate any options at this time. This sentiment was echoed by the representatives from Atkinson.
- **ACTION:** Changes will be made to correct the errors in the Site Option Attributes document. The no build alternative will be included as an alternative after the site screening process.

TRACK CONFIGURATION

- Robert Clark asked if the square footage of the facility could change by using bi-level cars. It was explained that the size of the facility is consistent with MBTA design standards that establish all new facilities should accommodate a 9-car train.
- Ron Morgan explained the required length of the platform or layover facility will not change based on the projected ridership of the Haverhill line or train configuration. The 9 car train length is a requirement to accommodate projected growth on the system and because the rest of the system uses that configuration. In the future the MBTA will be only purchasing bi level cars but each train set will still consist of 9 coaches.
- Crossovers are not included in the plans now, but the future design will include them. Ron O’Blenis said the length of track will not reduce in size but the configuration of the layover may change depending on the environmental issues.

NOISE IMPACTS

- In response to questions about noise impacts and site topography, Ron O’Blenis explained that the HDR team will model the noise impacts based on the conditions and attributes at each site. The team will be using FTA (Federal Transit Administration) methodology which is a well known model utilized around the county to assess impacts from train noise.

- John Weston said the model will analyze noise in two different time periods. One test will be evaluate loud sounds, by using info. from an hour long count of ambient noise. The other will measure noise over a 24-hr period, which takes into account the different noise levels in both daytime and nighttime.
- **Comments:** Sean Fitzgerald asked if an example of the information that is evaluated through the modeling process could be provided to him.
- **ACTION:** HDR Team will provide a summary of the factors of the noise modeling analysis.
- David Harrigan said he knows someone that witnessed the train engines at Bradford idling for one hour before leaving the facility in the morning. David said the noise is one issue for the residents.
- Sean Fitzgerald suggested visiting a modern facility to have a better understanding of the operational aspect of a layover.
- Robert Clark said the time of year will produce a different noise sample, how is that accounted for?
- Jim Russell said depending on the season adjustments are made to the model.

LAYOVER OPERATIONS

- Jim Russell asked the MBTA if they would consider operations to Plaistow if there was no layover included in the project. Also, can we assume some trains may not begin their runs in Plaistow? In response Ron Morgan explained there may be exceptions but the MBTA would prefer to have an end of the line layover. He said the assumption can not be made that all trains will not stop at Plaistow, that answer can not be made until the schedule is developed.
- Bradford currently has four trains layover at night and the fifth train layovers in Boston. The MBTA position is to correct problems and reduce compromised facilities.
- Jim Russell explained that Amtrak equipment cycles on from time to time to stay warm. Any temperature below 42 degrees the engine must continue to run and can no be turned off. It was discussed that MBTA equipment is typically plugged in and it is not understood that it cycles on as Jim explained the Amtrak equipment does. This will be investigated further by the MBTA and the HDR Team.

SITE OPTION REVIEW

- **Layover 1:** Ron O’Blenis said this site is operationally ideal however it does have environmental problems including the stream crossing. Taking the property does not improve accommodations of the layover.
- Plaistow is generally not supportive of this option, the residents in this area already experiencing noise from the existing wood chip operation.

- Ron O’Blenis says from an economics point of view, using the site would likely result in the taking of two businesses. The area already has unemployment issues and this site option would impact that.
- Sean Fitzgerald suggested demoting a site rather than screening them out, categorizing as less promising or more promising.
- Layover 1 is not designed to avoid the Town of Newton; movement of the switch location would not improve the layover to avoid environmental impacts.
- **Station A:** Sean Fitzgerald believes if Layover 1 is not promising, Station A can not be promising. The Station A is located in heavily populated residential areas; local officials would be concerned of the traffic.
- Ron Morgan asked if the parking facility size is accurate in the drawings. In response John Weston explained the parking shown is about half the size, the estimated amount is 350-400 spaces. This number is an estimate until the ridership data is produced.
- **Layover 2:** As recommended at last meeting, 144 Main St property was identified on the site plan. This layover has some wetland impacts and operational issues but avoids the stream on the property.
- **Layover 3:** Jamie Paine explained that using wetlands for access is more acceptable cause for wetland impacts. He suggested impacts may be reduced by moving the layover tracks away from the wetlands and having a longer lead track to them.
- **Station D:** Ron O’Blenis said this station uses the existing park and ride for parking. However, this parking lot will have a flooding issue and the existing business on the property will need to be taken. The platform is located on the roadway which would necessitate relocating the roadway onto property owned by the adjacent apartment buildings. The benefit of this location is there are minimum environmental impacts. The station location is not ideal but possible.
- Cliff Sinnott suggested the property off of Joanne Drive as a possible layover site. Robert Clark added that using that site for the layover, would not result in the blockage of Main St. which would occur with Layover 2.
- **Layovers 4, 5, and 7:** Ron O’Blenis explained all three layovers are a variation of each other. Layover 7 has the potential to move to the south due to the wide span bridge and be modified to look like Layover 5. This layout of these layovers options will ultimately be dictated by the topography of the land and the environmental impacts.
- David Harrigan voiced his concern that these three options were close to the Westville Homes site which was eliminated from the study. In response to this comment, Larry Gill asked if the Westville Homes is still out of the study. HDR team said the site was physically too small to fit a layover facility. Shelly Winters said NHDOT has agreed and signed a MOU that the Westville Homes site will not be included as an alternative in the study.

- **Layover 6:** This layover has potential but there are operational issues. Ron O’Blenis emphasized the more efficient we can make the layover for the MBTA the less costly the project will be as a whole.
- Ron Morgan asked if the layover could be potentially double ended. Ron O’Blenis responded that it will be explored as the designs are refined and understands that a double ended facility leads to greater operational efficiency and feasibility.
- The HDR Team will plan to meet with the Pam Am Railways and MBTA to discuss operational issues.
- **ACTION:** The HDR Team will take into consideration the suggestions for potential changes to the sites options. The Team will meet with Pam Am Rail and MBTA to have a better understanding of operations.

STATUS OF STUDY SCOPE ITEMS

- John Weston explained the status of the ridership analysis. The HDR Team will be using a FTA “STOPS” model that employs cell phone and MBTA data. The MassDOT will be funding the ridership model.
- David Harrigan urged HDR and NHDOT to do a Destination Survey of the drivers on Route 125 and Route 121 during morning rush hour in order to learn how many drivers are going to destinations served by the Haverhill Line and therefore are potential train riders who might remove them from commuter traffic. Current users of the stations in Haverhill could also be asked if a Plaistow station would be more convenient.

NEXT STEPS

- The next step will be hosting a public meeting. The meeting is tentatively scheduled to be the week of May 14, 2014. Location is to be announced.
- The public meeting will address the Purpose and Need along with all the potential options. The purpose of the meeting is to allow for public feedback in order to screen out options.
- At the closing of the meeting, the Alternatives Evaluation Criteria document was distributed. These criteria provide the framework for evaluating the alternatives, once they have been screened down to 2-3 sites. The PAC members were asked to review the document and provide feedback regarding additional information that would be needed in order to be able to compare the alternatives.