Project Advisory Committee (PAC)
Meeting #5
Meeting Summary

December 16, 2014, 1:00 pm, Atkinson Town Hall

PAC Attendees:

Town of Plaistow – Sean Fitzgerald; (Alternate) Tim Moore

Town of Atkinson – David Harrigan;

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission - Todd Fontanella

Rockingham Planning Commission – Cliff Sinnott

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority – Not in attendance

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority – Jim Russell (via phone)

Pan Am Railways – Not in attendance

City of Haverhill – Not in attendance

NHDOT Team: Shelley Winters & Lou Barker

HDR Engineering Team: Ron O'Blenis, John Weston, Katie Rougeot, Stefanie McQueen

Approximately two non-PAC members attended

Meeting Handouts:

- Draft Recommended Alternative Screening Memo/Alternatives Analysis Summary Table
- Draft Ridership Forecasts for Proposed Plaistow Commuter Rail Extension Technical Memo
- Draft Land Use Impacts/Benefits Memo
- Draft Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment
- Alternative Graphics

Meeting Notes:

- Shelley Winters introduced the PAC members and explained the agenda for the meeting. She said the beginning of the meeting would be open for public comments.
- John Sherman, a selectman from the Town of Plaistow said he received a recommendation memo at the selectman's meeting the previous held. He felt the document did not evaluate each alternative equally. He said he has developed spreadsheet that he sent to NHDOT and HDR team and has not heard feedback. He suggested ranking the evaluation criteria as high, medium, or low priority.

- Ron O'Blenis explained to the PAC that Mr. Sherman was referencing the "Draft Recommended Alternative Screening Memo" that was discussed at the Town of Plaistow Board of Selectmen meeting held on December 8, 2014. The memo was developed based on the ongoing alternative analysis and incorporated public input from the October public meeting, PAC member input from previous meetings, and written comments from the public. Ron explained that the memo was further updated and refined after the Board of Selectmen meeting on December 8th and now incorporates comments from the Plaistow Board of Selectmen. The draft memo includes a summary of the analysis for each alternative, an overview of the screening process, and provides a draft recommendation. The current version of the memo that is provided for this meeting includes an updated matrix to assist in a consistent evaluation of alternatives.
- Ron O'Blenis said he would like to discuss during the meeting to determine if each criteria should be ranked. The current evaluation of the alternatives evaluation is a qualitative assessment.
- John Sherman said that in terms of priorities, the amount of property required for acquisition is a more important consideration than walking distance to the station. He suggests identifying the properties that need to be taken and then rank the properties.
- Sean Fitzgerald said that so far, costs have not been well defined for each alternative and that risk has not been established. He expressed his concern about making a decision before going through the process.
- David Harrigan said a no action alternative needs to be included as part of the process.
- John Sherman said he has concern with Alternative II parking expansion, which requires a bridge to connect to parking. He thinks that Alternative I station makes more sense because it uses an existing park-and-ride lot. He suggests stating in the criteria the benefits, negatives, and an explanation of what mitigation will be required.
- John Sherman said that the Board of Selectmen would like to see the results. They are concerned they may not have this opportunity. They would like to see the study continue, but would like to see the results well before a decision needs to be made.
- Shelley Winters said the study is moving in a linear process. The timeframe has not changed.
- Sean Fitzgerald advised that decision process of Town of Plaistow would need to be considered in determining how public input or approval will be obtained.
- John Weston said the current process is moving towards a recommended alternative. Once the recommended alternative is determined, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process will evaluate the recommended alternative and the no build option. At this point, a true decision will be then be made.

- John Weston introduced the draft "Ridership Forecasts for Proposed Plaistow Commuter Rail Extension Technical Memo" that was distributed for discussion during the meeting. He said ridership is a driver of many of the remaining tasks. Delay in the ridership was caused by MA CTPS inability to undertake the ridership work. HDR has undertaken this work and has expedited the ridership forecast development. The ridership forecasts presented at the meeting are draft results. The ridership write ups need to be reviewed for final edits, but the forecast results are considered the projected ridership numbers.
- The forecasts were developed in two different ways. The first method used cell phone data from a third-party source to help analyze where people are going. For this study, HDR considered the number of people in Haverhill, Plaistow, and the surrounding areas (approximately 5 miles around Plaistow) that travel into downtown Boston. The data shows that approximately 95% of people traveling from Haverhill to downtown Boston use commuter rail. In general, terminal stations have a high percentage of people that use commuter rail to travel to Boston. The second method used MBTA survey data and U.S. Census employment data.
- Cliff Sinnott suggested drawing a 5-mile circle on map used to show the market areas for Plaistow and Haverhill. (Other PAC members concurred with this recommendation)
- John Weston said that using the two methods of forecasting, based on existing commuter rail ridership, the number of estimated riders at a new Plaistow station in Year 1 would be between 90-100 riders. The cell phone data showed only the number of people going to downtown Boston, but there are also a large number of people that take commuter rail to destinations other than downtown. The cell phone data did not capture this information, but the MBTA data and Census estimates did account for this larger destination area.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked if the cell based Boston destination area could be expanded.
- John Weston advised there would be a significant time delay to do this. He noted that the numbers of the two approaches are similar, thus it is not expected that adding the expanded cell data would not be expected to increase the numbers significantly. It also means that the forecast numbers can be described as conservative. John Weston said that the future projections for ridership take into consideration natural growth, growth in employment in Boston or Cambridge, and an increase in the number of riders based on improved access to commuter rail service.
- Cliff Sinnott concurred that over time the train will attract people to Boston. He asked how long it takes for people to change travel patterns. John Weston believes it happens quickly. He said the MBTA survey/Census employment estimates and projections include not just commuter trips but the total number of trips per week. He also said that

economist interviewed people to have a better understand of the type of development possible for this area. According to the analysis, there is a market for additional residential units and Transit Oriented Development (TOD) potential in Plaistow.

- Cliff Sinnott also believes that the population is not growing as quickly as is stated in the memo. He believes that 0.0365% annual growth rate is too high. John Weston said the growth rate used was from Plaistow's Master Plan to represent actual growth from 2010 to 2014.
- Dave Harrigan suggested adding additional citations to the ridership forecast document and making access to source data and studies easier.
- Sean Fitzgerald said ridership is an important factor and this needs to be clear to the selectmen and the public.
- Jim Russell said commuters are a part of the market but ridership for special events could also play a huge role for this service as it has for the Downeaster.
- John Weston then reviewed the near-term potential traffic impacts that would result from the projected ridership. In the AM peak hour, an additional 100 trips are expected, and an additional 46 trips are expected in the PM peak hour period. Currently, the daily traffic counts on Main Street are 6,700. Route 125 has 19,000 daily trips. Based on the anticipated ridership and additional trips, the traffic impacts on these two roadways are anticipated to be minimal. He mentioned that the traffic impacts are still underway and more details will be available at a future meeting.
- Cliff Sinnott questioned the travel times between Plaistow and Haverhill station presented in the draft "Land Use Impacts/Benefits Memo." He inquired if this was the travel time during peak hours.
- John Weston said that the travel times may be low for peak time and that HDR will evaluate them further.
- Cliff Sinnott stated there were statements in the Land Use document that do not have a reference and asked that references be provided.
- Ron O'Blenis said our initial assumption for ridership was 275 and our 2030 projection, based on the cell phone data and MBTA survey/census estimates, is very close at 279.
- Ron O'Blenis said that it is important to understand what the town wants regarding the future development of the town. The project team does not want to make assumptions as to what the Town's needs are. To that point, John Weston said commuter rail stations do not necessarily drive development, but allow for a focal point. Cliff Sinnott said the station would *promote* development.
- Ron O'Blenis said an issue with Alternative III is the potential for hazardous materials and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) does not support clean up activities as part of their projects.

- Tim Moore said existing traffic on Main Street is the problem with Alternative III.
- Ron O'Blenis said Alternative II keeps traffic off Main Street and it is not located near the school. However, the downside is it that it takes residential properties.
- Regarding Alternative I, Ron O'Blenis said that the MBTA are not saying "no" to have the layover and station separated, but they will need to make sure it is economically feasible.
- John Weston then introduced the draft "Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment." He said the three alternatives do not have any significant differences in terms of any significant noise impacts. Alternative III creates some impacts to more residents due to the location of the locomotives at the layover facility and station. There are two types of impacts: severe, which must be mitigated, and moderate, which may be mitigated.
- Shelley Winters said there will be another PAC meeting on January 6, 2015 and a public meeting tentatively schedule for mid to late January contingent upon the availability of Plaistow Town Hall.