Project Advisory Committee (PAC)
Meeting #6
Meeting Summary

January 6, 2015, 1:00 pm, Plaistow Town Hall

PAC Attendees:

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

Town of Atkinson – Robert J. Clark

Rockingham Planning Commission – Cliff Sinnott

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority – Ron Morgan

NHDOT Team: Shelley Winters

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

Approximately 15 non-PAC members attended

Meeting Handouts:

- Previous meeting handouts (Ridership Forecasts memo, Noise and Vibration Impact Assessment memo, Land Use/Economic Benefits Assessment)
- Draft Layover Facility and Station Alternatives Analysis Report

Public Comments:

- Shelley Winters said PAC meeting 6 would begin with public comment and follow with a working session among the PAC members.
- James Peck, a 37-year resident of Plaistow said many Plaistow residents are concerned about the negative impact of the project and all three station and layover locations. He said that he believes the public engagement of the project has been limited to date and understood that it was not funded as part of this project.
- Sean Fitzgerald responded and said the HDR project proposal had the firm **Project for Public Spaces** as a subconsultant to support public participation, but available funding was not sufficient to engage them. He noted that in the agreement relative to the project with NHDOT and the Town of Plaistow, public engagement was the responsibility of the Town.
- James Peck said the project website and Facebook site are not highly publicized and suggested advertising more to increase public involvement. He stated that the website

has not been updated recently with additional study materials. He suggested using the Facebook page more to spread the word. He said the public meetings have been repetitive and that, so far, costs/benefits are not being addressed. He said a Facebook page has been formed with 300 followers called "Citizens Against a Train Layover Yard in Plaistow NH." He showed concern with small ridership, low air quality improvements with limited vehicle reduction/emissions. He believes all three layover locations will cause impact to town residents.

- James Peck asked if Alternative 1 Layover is 90% in Haverhill and 10% in the town of Plaistow. Stefanie McQueen clarified that the layover footprint is located in Haverhill and access to the site is from Plaistow.
- James Peck said that it appears that Alternative 2 has a large impact on wetlands. He asked what would be done to protect wetlands. Ron O'Blenis said the layover is designed to minimize the impact. Our environmental team is working on ways of mitigating wetlands. He asked how much fill would be needed. Ron O'Blenis said he does not know the amount of fill, but the track to connect to the site will require use of fill or a bridge to minimize wetlands impacts.
- James Peck stated that Alternative 2 is 1,500 feet away from Pollard Elementary School and Alternative 3 is 500 feet away. He asked when the next public meeting would be held. Ron O'Blenis said the next meeting would be held at the end of January.
- Peter Griffin, a member of a New Hampshire railroad restoration group and resident of Windham, NH said he has nothing to gain or lose from this project but that New Hampshire as a state does. He urged Plaistow residents to look beyond the immediate downside to see the long-term upside (i.e. economic positives and mobility). He said people need to think about the future, you may have no interest in the train but the next person that wants to buy your house may want it.

Meeting Notes:

- Shelley Winters then closed the meeting to public comments and introduced the start of the PAC working session. The discussion started with a review of the draft Ridership Forecast memo that was introduced at the previous PAC meeting.
- John Weston said the previous comments received on the ridership memo were reviewed and the document is undergoing revisions. He provided more details on how the market areas were defined based on the two data sources utilized for the estimates. Both the cell phone data and the 2008-2009 MBTA survey show that 92%-95% of riders would come from the five towns (Plaistow, Atkinson, Newton, Hampstead, and Kingston).
- Cliff Sinnott commented about the high population and employment growth rate used to estimate 2014 figures. John Weston said new data from the New Hampshire OEP was released and population in the Plaistow area has actually decreased slightly between 2010 and 2014. This makes the ridership projection for 2030 based on a 0.9% annual growth rate not as robust as

previously projected. Ridership projections for 2030 dropped by approximately 30 people, from approximately 280 down to 250.

- Sean Fitzgerald asked that looking at the big picture, would a station work with these ridership numbers. John Weston said that a station in Plaistow would be on the lower end of the middle range of all MBTA stations when comparing ridership.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked if a table could be provided that compares ridership at other existing terminal stations in the MBTA system.
- John Weston said one way to determine if a station is successful is how it does economically. For example, while revenue from tickets will not produce a profit for the MBTA, a successful project would provide enough ticket sales to help offset operating costs and allow a reasonable opportunity for MBTA to provide the additional trip to Plaistow. The positive aspect of this project is that the operational cost is only incremental.
- Ron O'Blenis said if the station and layover facility were located on the same site, the MBTA costs would be minimized. He also emphasized that the working assumption, based on previous discussions with MBTA, was that if a terminal station and layover station were built in the Plaistow/Atkinson area that it would accommodate current and future operational needs, and then the MBTA would operate the commuter rail service extension at no cost to the local communities or NHDOT.
- Sean Fitzgerald said local officials and the public are asking how much it will cost. He asked if the operating costs and revenue potential could be provided to show the public that they would not have to incur any of the costs. He also asked if the some comparable costs could be provided, such as the cost to operate at Bradford versus a new station in Plaistow.
- Shelley Winters said we will provide this data as best we can in a format that will help to provide some additional context. It has been understood from the beginning that the MBTA will operate the commuter rail service extension at no cost to the local communities or NHDOT.
- John Weston said that an initial estimate for operating costs based on data from a few years ago is around $400,000. He explained that HDR is working on getting up to date figures that may change since MBTA has a new operator (Keolis) and they may have a different cost structure.
- Robert Clark referenced the range of year one ridership numbers he has seen in the past (approximately 670 in the 2010 TIGER grant application and 167 in the recent ridership forecast memo). He expressed his concern that current projections show that only 1% of the area resident's population would utilize the service.
- Cliff Sinnott said there are two ways to report ridership: passengers or trips. The 2010 TIGER grant may have utilized number of trips (one-ways) which is why it is much higher than recent projections. In the current ridership numbers, we are showing the number of passengers per day, or round trips.
- John Weston agreed that the percent of area residents that access jobs in Boston or Cambridge is low, but that demonstrates why the service is needed. He suggested that not everyone could drive the 10 minutes to access commuter rail service in Haverhill. We have made conservative assumptions on ridership projections using other comparable communities that do have access to commuter rail.

- Robert Clark said ridership should be factored into a No Build option. He asked if the layover were in Haverhill, would the MBTA support operations.
- Ron Morgan said that MBTA's design standards are to co-locate terminal stations and layover facilities. He explained that there is economy in locating the facilities together. In the case of Alternative I, they are separated by 1.1 miles and it would require the movement of trains between the station and layover facility and additional deadhead costs would be incurred.
- Shelley Winters said that how each alternative addresses the MBTA policy would be incorporated into the alternative analysis matrix.
- Ron Morgan said the PAC members attended the site visits to other existing layovers, including Greenbush station and layover in Scituate, MA. Those facilities are designed to MBTA standards that include having terminal station and layover facilities constructed adjacent to each other.
- Ron O'Blenis asked Ron Morgan to look further into the MBTA's willingness to accept Alternative I with the layover and station being located in two different sites.
- Robert Clark asked if the layover is in Massachusetts would New Hampshire or the Town of Plaistow incur a cost to operate. John Weston said further conversation with MBTA is required to determine their position on supporting Alternative I. He also noted that in addition to reducing operating costs, another reason for the MBTA policy of co-locating the layover and station is reliability. Having them as a pair there is less likely to have conflicts with freight and other passenger trains and eliminating potential delays. Ron Morgan confirmed that reducing conflicts with other trains is a driving factor in the MBTA policy.
- Cliff Sinnott commented on the ridership and the percentage of people who would utilize the service. He said that with many transportation investments (i.e., bridge repairs, sidewalks, etc.), it is not possible to create a project that benefits a large percent of the population, but that does not mean they are not valuable projects. He stated that if you look at the per vehicle cost compared to the number of vehicle capacity added for the I-93 improvement project, it would be low.
- Robert Clark said that he believes the primary concern with the project is the layover facility. For people to support the project and be willing to take on a layover facility that would be a permanent fixture in the town, the ridership numbers need to be there to off-set the negative impact of the layover facility.
- Ron O'Blenis said that our ridership estimates are conservative and calculated estimates are near the assumed 275 riders that was discussed by the project team at the beginning of the study effort.
- Robert Clark said the TIGER grant said this area was a nonattainment area, but now it is an attainment area. He requested this be changed in the documents. Ron O'Blenis said that this change will be indicated in the documents.
- John Weston said the cell phone data and the MBTA data correlate almost perfectly regarding the number of people daily traveling to Boston. Currently, 95 people from the five towns are traveling to downtown Boston everyday. After looking at the cell phone data and MBTA survey data, it was discovered that many area residents who use commuter rail have a final destination

other than downtown Boston. Approximately 750 area residents work in Boston or Cambridge in places outside the typical downtown business district.

- Cliff Sinnott asked if the ridership projections presented are on the low end.
- John Weston said the 1% increase in the number of area residents from these five towns that that would access jobs in Boston or Cambridge is a conservative value If you look at the map that shows the percent of town residents that work in Boston or Cambridge, in areas similar to Plaistow they have Boston employment rates 5 to 10 percent higher. . Commuter rail service has been available in these communities for some time. He said with Commuter Rail service he does see Plaistow growing to this over time, but does not know how long it will take.
- Sean Fitzgerald said he would like to see a comparison of ridership at other recently opened stations, such as Greenbush station in Scituate. He asked what the ridership estimates were before the station opened and how has ridership increased since service began.
- Shelley Winters concluded the ridership discussions and said the next thing on the agenda will be the Noise and Vibration Assessment report.
- Robert Clark said he does not see calculations of noise caused by the train horns. He said the number of horns a day should be part of the study.
- Ron O'Blenis said that train horns are not blown when trains exit and enter the layover facility; they are only tested on the start up. The majority of new train horns will occur when the train passes the at-grade crossing at Rosemont Ave in Haverhill, MA. The number of horns a day in Plaistow will be approximately 5-6 when the trains start up at the layover facility.
- Robert Clark asked how far away from the Rosemont Ave crossing does the horn start blowing. Ron O'Blenis said approximately 900 feet before crossing.
- Ron Morgan confirmed that the horn gets blows at crossings as well as at start up. He explained that the start up horn is not as intense as the crossings, and is usually very short.
- Sean Fitzgerald said Plaistow would not be receiving a layover like the one in Bradford. The new facility will be designed to current standards similar to the one at Scituate. He suggested relating the noise decimals to relatable everyday noises (i.e. lawn mower).
- Ron O'Blenis said the analysis looks at the existing ambient noise and adds in the anticipated noise from the project. Each alternative is located relatively far away from any of the receptors (i.e., residences, schools, etc.). The locations of the layovers are substantive mitigation by itself. Two noise walls are recommended for two clusters of residences in Haverhill. For the other receptor locations, mitigation is recommended through the introduction of improved building insulation, window treatments, or air conditioners.
- Sean Fitzgerald said we should support the best mitigation process. He would like to see how the introduction of additional sound walls at the layovers would compare to other mitigation measures.
- John Weston said noise does not build on itself. Each added noise does not necessary make a bigger nuisance. In many cases, the level of noise will blend in with current ambient noise.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked to have the noise model include a sound wall at each layover site to determine how significant a sound wall would be. He mentioned the sound wall at the Scituate layover and from 500 feet away you could not hear the trains.

- Ron O'Blenis said federal standards allow for noise mitigation per dollar spent at receptor. At Scituate, the residents were located very close to the layover facility. Here the closest receptor is typically 1,000 feet away.
- John Weston said noise impacts are identified as being moderate or severe. Each type of noise and noise impact has different types of actions to mitigate the impacts. Most of the noise impacts are in Massachusetts. There is another category below moderate that could be mitigated, but this is not typical. This type of mitigation is over and beyond any state or federal mitigation.
- Cliff Sinnott said it would be helpful to see what federal funds will pay for and how much actual sound is added. He asked if the analysis took into account both day and nighttime conditions (Ldn) and if most of the trains occur during the nighttime timeframe.
- John Weston said most the day and night conditions were accounted for and that most of the train's movements into/out of the layover are included in the night time frame.
- Cliff Sinnott stated the graph on vibration on Page 12 of the Noise and Vibration Assessment was easy to understand, but he was having trouble understanding a similar graph on Page 8 related to noise. He said it could be helpful if a similar graph was developed for noise as for vibration.
- Ron O'Blenis said that the graphs on pages 8 and 12 are used for calculation purposes and do not show results for this project.
- John Weston said that for added vibration you start with zero and have only one variable. He said he will talk with the noise and vibration experts and see if we can develop a graph for noise based on existing noise level.
- Robert Clark suggested providing a graph that shows overall existing, added noise, and noise levels with mitigation, including sound walls.
- Shelley Winters said the comments about displaying the data in a graphical form would be considered. Revisions will be made to the conclusion section of the document to have a better understanding of the document without having to read it in detail.
- Ron O'Blenis distributed a draft summary table that shows the number of noise impacts for each alternative and explained that this is a first step to summarizing the complete noise impacts from the report.
- Shelley Winters thanked the PAC members for their comments and said the revisions to the Noise and Vibration Assessment will be made and another draft will be produced. She asked if there were any further comments on the Land Use and Economic Benefits document presented at the previous PAC meeting.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked if the Land Use and Economic Benefits document could include an executive summary, a summary table, or bullet points. Shelley Winters said his comments will be taken into consideration.
- John Weston said the Town of Plaistow's Master Plan includes a goal related to pursuing a train station, but that it does not go into great detail. John Weston asked if the town could provide their feedback on the details of the Master Plan as it relates to station related development. Sean Fitzgerald responded that transportation is part of the Master Plan.

- Ron O'Blenis asked if there have been any other proposals for the Testa Realty property (Alternative III site).
- Sean Fitzgerald said the Testa Realty property has been looked at a few times and that it has been considered for a TOD project, but additional traffic on Main Street due to development on this site is a primary concern. Main Street traffic calming is a top priority for the Town of Plaistow, and additional impacts may not work with ongoing efforts to reduce traffic in the village center.
- Ron O'Blenis asked if this supports Alterative II because access is off Main Street. Sean Fitzgerald responded that he would like to make sure the study is complete before supporting any alternative. Sean also mentioned the jobs numbers included in the report, 645,000 jobs in New Hampshire, and 445,000 jobs in downtown Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville. He emphasized the importance of land use to increase jobs, access to jobs, and providing more opportunity.
- John Weston said people are using commuter rail to reach further then just downtown so the access to jobs number may in fact be higher than the 445,000 figure provided in the draft. He said the report will include additional job growth estimates in Plaistow based on capital costs for the project.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked to highlight employment opportunities and include the Town's unemployment numbers in the Land Use and Economics Benefits document. He asked the study team to explain how the project will help residents.
- Cliff Sinnott said it was helpful in the report to compare a new station in Plaistow to other terminal stations. He asked if the proposed trip time between Plaistow and North Station includes proposed track and bridge improvements along the corridor. John Weston said the bridge improvements are included, but he will check about the track improvements.
- Shelley Winters introduced the next topic, Chapter 9 of the Draft Alternatives Analysis Report. She indicated that the chapter an evaluation matrix that was revised based on previous comments at the Plaistow Board of Selectmen and PAC meetings to include a response to each evaluation criteria for all three alternatives.
- Sean Fitzgerald said he would like to see details on cost, in particular the added cost to the town due to loss of property or tax revenue for acquisition of properties for each alternatives. In addition, he would like to see potential revenue to the Town from parking or other sources.
- Ron O'Blenis said the study will recommend the location of the layover and station, but continued feedback is needed make this decision.
- Robert Clark said that the MBTA position needs to be determined to see if Alternative I can be eliminated at this point. Sean Fitzgerald asked how much it costs to operate the train for the deadhead trips required in Alternative I. Ron O'Blenis said the questions about the MBTA's position will be looked into.
- Robert Clark requested if the maps in Appendix E could include the location of the layover and station tracks could be include on the existing land use maps. Stefanie McQueen said that the tracks can be included and the maps can be updated.

- Cliff Sinnott asked if this would be the last PAC meeting before the next public meeting. He said he feels that another meeting is needed to review the evaluation matrix and to produce a result. Sean Fitzgerald agrees and would like to have the Plaistow Board of Selectmen involved.
- Robert Clark said he would also like to have the Atkinson Board of Selectmen involved. Shelley Winters said that Plaistow selectmen reached out in order to get involved, and Atkinson is welcome to do them same.
- Ron O'Blenis said our job is to take your comments into consideration and come to a conclusion.
- Cliff Sinnott said the alternative analysis process is to locate where a layover and station could be built, not if any project should be built.
- John Weston confirmed that the true decision on the project would be made during the EA (Environmental Assessment) process. However, if none of the alternative sites were recommended during the alternatives analysis process, an EA process would not be advanced.
- Shelley Winters closed the meeting by saying that another PAC meeting will be scheduled for the week of January 19 and a public meeting will be the week of January 26.