Project Advisory Committee (PAC)
Meeting #7
Meeting Summary

January 20, 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
- Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority – Jim Russell
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission- Todd Fontanella

NHDOT Team: Shelley Winters, Lou Barker

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

Approximately 5 non-PAC members attended

Meeting Handouts:

- Plaistow Commuter Rail Benefits Summary
- Capital Cost Estimate
- FTA Noise Assessment Example Memo
- Revised Draft Alternative Analysis Chapter 9 (Recommended Alternative) – includes updated Evaluation Matrix
- Draft Layover Facility and Station Alternatives Analysis Report

Public Comments:

- Shelley Winters introduced PAC Meeting #7 and opened the floor to public comments.
- James Peck, a Plaistow resident, said that he represents a group of 400 citizens who are against a layover facility. He said he appreciates the response to comments from last meeting. However, he said the study's Facebook page still needs work. He stated that based on CMAQ program goals, the project should measure air quality in one of two ways. One being the cost of the project verses vehicle miles traveled (VMT) removed and another cost of the project verses tons of emissions removed. He pointed out that

since the ridership includes existing commuter rail riders, the emissions would not include a full reduction of VMT or emissions for these 104 existing transit riders (i.e., reduction would be five miles, not 80 miles one-way). He said he would like to see the results of this analysis in the Alternative Analysis Report. He also stated that CMAQ funds could be used for other projects in the state; they are not tied to Plaistow. He suggested it will be helpful to Plaistow, region, state and residents see the cost/benefits.

- Ron O'Blenis advised that there are discussions to extend the contract for the study to allow additional time for PAC and public comments. He noted that as part of the annual town meeting process, the Plaistow Board of Selectmen and public are preparing warrant articles for vote in March 2015. A contract extension would allow adequate opportunity to consider results of any vote as part of the public input for the study.
- Sean Fitzgerald said the Town supports the extension of the study and feels like the study should not be rushed for completion by March. The Town's Board of Selectmen would like a vote to occur within four months after the study is completed. They feel the March vote would not allow citizens to have as much info as possible before voting. After the study is complete, the town would undertake a public outreach campaign to engage the public and make sure under-represented citizens are involved in the process. The Town has received a lot of information in the last several weeks. The Town is busy with preparation for Town Meeting right now and would not want to miss the appropriate review of materials related to this study. He would like to get town boards involved in the project, including the Planning Board and Conservation Commission. He asked if the remaining project budget could support any additional public engagement. The town will send letter to NHDOT to support extension of project to allow proper presentation of study materials to the town and public. He would like the PAC to go on record to support extension of the project.
- Robert Clark said that the cost benefits and ridership are almost done. He would like NHDOT to evaluate no build at this point, rather than just extension of the contract.
- Shelley Winters said she would like to still review the three alternatives with the PAC and get public input on the alternatives to be able to finalize the Alternative Analysis report. The contract extension would really extend the Environmental Assessment (EA) process and allow for proper FTA review. The Alternative Analysis process is almost finalized and is not the reason for the contract/study extension.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked if the Alternative Analysis includes a No Build option. John Weston said if none of the three alternatives is determined to be feasible as part of the Alternatives Analysis process, then a No Build alternative becomes the recommendation. If that occurs then the project work effort will not progress into the formal Environmental Assessment (EA) phase, but would rather conclude with documenting the rationale for the No Build conclusion. If a build alternative is

recommended, than it moves into the EA process, which involves comparing the selected alternative to a No Building option. He stated that the question for today is whether there is an alternative that is even worth proceeding into the EA process.

- Ron O'Blenis said he is concerned with the town vote and how it fits into the public process. A general discussion of the Board of Selectmen and public warrant articles on a town vote followed. The study team expressed the concern that to proceed with the study, public input is needed at two parts during the process: the first is if any of the three alternatives are preferred; then, later, the second decision on if the project is preferred over a no build scenario. The timing of the public vote needs to fit with the study timeline to make sure public input is meaningful to the study decision-making process.
- Robert Clark said that the citizen petition asks if you are in favor of having a layover facility and commuter rail service in the Town of Plaistow.
- Sean Fitzgerald expressed concern that public thinks the layover facility will be like Bradford.
- Robert Clark stated that on March 15, 2015, citizens will vote on the project and a second warrant article put forth by the Board of Selectmen may or may not happen based on the outcome of the citizens' warrant article. He said January 30th is the deliberative session.
- John Weston introduced the Plaistow Commuter Rail Benefits Summary paper. He stated that the project has four primary potential benefits: jobs, property values, public benefits, and economic development/expansion/growth. The benefits are in general not site specific. Jobs related to station development are really linked to supportive development in Plaistow. The potential for associated development is not well defined yet, so two different development scenarios were considered for the benefits assessment. The first example is the development of the Testa and Chart property site as a transit-oriented development (TOD) type with 20-25 retail shops. This potential development scenario has a benefit of adding up to 1,000 jobs. The second development scenario was completed for this study that looked at just the Testa Realty site. This scenario is mostly a medium density residential development type, with limited commercial development. This scenario would add approximately 36 jobs.
- Ron O'Blenis said the station can help induce jobs not directly create them.
- Robert Clark asked if these benefits were for all three alternatives.
- John Weston said that yes, with some variation. He stated that the likelihood of these benefits occurring depends on the desire of the Town of Plaistow for certain types of development.

- Ron O'Blenis said it would vary based on which alternative is selected. For example, if Alternative III is selected, the potential development area for TOD on the Testa Realty property is reduced to accommodate the layover and station.
- John Weston said that the potential for station-related development is driven by the Town and real estate market (i.e., zoning, market demand).
- Ron O'Blenis said that the Testa Realty property is zoned industrial; it would need to be rezoned for TOD.
- Sean Fitzgerald said he has discussed rezoning the site in the past.
- John Weston said another job driver is construction. Approximately 325 jobs per year during construction are expected to occur related to station and layover construction. It is likely these jobs would not be local to Plaistow, but rather regional due to type of jobs. Another potential benefit is an increase in property values related to station development. A number of studies have shown that on average, commuter rail can increase property values within one-half mile of a station by 10% or more. In some cases, the increase has been up to 23%. Studies also have shown that during times of economic decline such as the recent recession (2007-2009), areas within close proximity to stations have a greater ability to retain property values. One example is the area around the Bradford station that performed 1000% better than non-transit areas of the town. A third potential benefit is economic development. This benefit is based on the ability for employers that locate near transit to attract from a larger job pools. This benefit is hard to quantify at this point however.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked if these benefits are included within the alternative evaluation matrix.
- John Weston responded that no, these benefits are not specific to any alternative, but rather common for all alternatives.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked why these properties in Bradford performed 1000% better than other properties. He asked if this shows the value of multimodal access.
- Robert Clark asked if the large increase was because these properties were undervalued and then they finally went up. He said that it was important point from the findings to note that the influence occurred within the one-half mile.
- John Weston said yes, the one-half mile was the major number in Bradford, declined after that.
- Sean Fitzgerald suggested creating a new table that shows other communities with commuter rail service and how property values have changed over the past 5 years. This could perhaps show how well a station can help insulate property values. He suggested using State of Massachusetts data on equalized assessed evaluation value for this analysis.

- Cliff Sinnott asked if there is a conservative number for the one-half mile area incremental difference. He asked if the property impact of an alternative could be considered, looking at how the loss of property taxes for a site is offset by increased property values within one-half mile of the stations.
- Sean Fitzgerald said that the I-93 project did not use this metric to evaluate cost/benefit/person. He asked if there is some reasonable standard to apply to this study's analysis.
- Ron O'Blenis said not really, because it is really a public policy question. The cost/benefit metric for TIGER grants helps to compare projects on a national level, but is not necessarily good to use to compare local benefits.
- Cliff Sinnott asked if there are measures that can be used to help the public understand the local impacts/benefits.
- John Weston said jobs related to adjacent station area development are the primary benefit tied to these types of projects. To understand the full potential of this adjacent development, we need to understand how the Town would leverage the station and if it would result in additional development.
- Robert Clark said the 2010 TIGER grant assumed a $2.3-$4.9 million benefit, a ridership of 700, and large development around station.
- Cliff Sinnott thought that the cost/benefit in TIGER grant did not include economic development. John Weston said TIGER grant is mostly driven by station development not just on ridership and a reduction of vehicle miles travelled (VMT).
- John Weston introduced the Capital Cost Estimates.
- Robert Clark asked which capital cost will be funded by MBTA.
- Sean Fitzgerald said he believes that the Town cannot afford MBTA commuter rail service if the station and layover are not co-located. He stated that most communities would be unable to support the operational subsidy needed to support operations. He described that at the onset of the discussions about moving commuter rail to Plaistow involved a relocation of a layover to North Haverhill. The Town of Plaistow was then approached about the possibility of extending service to Plaistow and relocating the layover facility near the new station.
- Ron O'Blenis said that it is also our understanding that the Town could not support an operational subsidy.
- John Weston said that what our $400,000 operations and maintenance (O&M) cost estimate is in the right range for the MBTA cost to operate. This estimate is not markedly different from the initial estimate and in reality the additional operating costs would be offset by the additional revenue (ridership) gained

- Sean Fitzgerald said he had asked if the extension of service to Plaistow could be tried before a new layover facility is built. He said that he was told no because of the concern for inefficiencies. He said that he had asked MassDOT if they would already have extended service to Plaistow if the state line was further north, and he said that he was told yes service would likely already extend to Plaistow.
- Robert Clark said that he asked at the last PAC meeting if the MBTA feels that putting the new layover in Massachusetts is feasible.
- Ron Morgan said that he is still waiting for a decision. Robert Clark asked if MBTA is waiting for a recommendation to make their final decision.
- Ron O'Blenis said he is not sure if it is relevant, because part of the Alternative I layover is in Plaistow.
- John Weston said that the alternative costs were all close with the exception of the layover costs. He said that the Alternative II costs were higher due to bridge and retaining walls required to avoid wetland and floodplain areas. John Weston said that the additional costs for Alterative III are tied to the demolition and acquisition of the Testa Realty property. He said that Alternative I's costs illustrate the efficiencies of using an existing park-and-ride lot and lower real estate costs.
- Cliff Sinnott asked what the mainline track costs included.
- John Weston said that the mainline track costs include the cost for signal systems and interlocking that will need to be installed on mainline to prevent impacts to freight and other passenger services (e.g., Amtrak's Downeaster) due and eliminate the need to lower speed on this segment of the track. He stated that Pan Am would not let impacts to freight service occur.
- Jim Russell asked if Pan Am has been involved in the study. Ron O'Blenis said that we have been in contact with them.
- Sean Fitzgerald said that the contingency costs seem high. John Weston said that a 30% contingency is based on FTA guidance.
- Sean Fitzgerald said he would like the capital cost summary table to include funding sources to help local public officials understand the costs.
- Ron O'Blenis said MBTA will help contribute to the match for federal funding. He explained that the federal funding source is still unclear at this point. John Weston said sources for federal funding changes frequently. He has discussed the project with FTA and it does not meet criteria for New Starts or Small Starts. He stated that this project is not a good candidate due to ridership/number of riders, transit supportive land, and financial planning of project sponsor. Mr. Weston explained that state funding sources are probably unlikely. TIGER grant type funding is the most likely option at this point, but it could change.

- Sean Fitzgerald said during the TIGER grant application process, MBTA agreed to pay for the layover with agreement that the state/town would help cover station costs and acquisition of one train set, possibly through the use of CMAQ credits. John Weston said that MBTA no longer needs additional train sets. He stated that he had not heard that MBTA obligated to pay specifically for just the layover. We have heard local match would be paid by MBTA.
- Sean Fitzgerald mentioned the capital bond bill. He suggested putting potential funding sources in the capital cost estimate table.
- Shelley Winters asked if what Sean Fitzgerald actually wanted for local officials was a breakdown of anticipated Federal funding % and MBTA funding % to determine if MBTA's contributions satisfy the entire matching fund requirement. Shelley indicated that most likely funding sources would provide 80% federal funding for capital and a 20% match would be required. In addition, quick math based on the capital costs estimates indicate that the value of layover facility would fluctuate for each alternative from 13% of the total project cost to 20% and instead we are trying to ascertain the total project cost for all infrastructure improvements and then later determine federal and other (MBTA) matching funds.
- Ron O'Blenis said the town of Plaistow is not anticipated to pay match or operating costs. Also only limited discussions can be held with MBTA until a decision is made on a layover in the Plaistow area.
- John Weston then introduced the FTA Noise Assessment Example Memo. He introduced additional graphics were prepared to show the area that would experience noises higher than the existing ambient noise, including all areas that would experience severe, moderate, or minimal impacts. The graphics were projected to the group. The graphics showed the difference for each alternative how the addition of noise wall(s) would impact the areas experience higher level of noises. In some cases, the addition of a noise wall reduces the noise level in some areas below the existing ambient noise levels. He explained this is for outdoor noise, not what can be heard inside residences or other buildings.
- Sean Fitzgerald stated that this appears to show that noise walls would mitigate more than just project related noise in some cases. He asked if electrical substation costs are included in the capital cost estimates. Ron O'Blenis responded that yes, the relocation costs are included.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked if a comparison of the number of buildings would be impacted with or without these additional sound walls could be prepared. He also asked if we could compare the number of properties impacted in the three alternative sites to the Bradford layover site.

- John Weston said while many houses in Bradford are 135 feet from the layover tracks, the homes are located higher than the tracks, which complicates the ability to reduce noise impacts from sound walls. Sean Fitzgerald asked if the issues with Bradford layover and how the new layover would differ would be presented at the next public meeting.
- John Weston introduced the revised draft of Chapter 9 of the Alternative Analysis report. This chapter outlines the alternative screening process and includes the alternative evaluation matrix that has been discussed at previous meetings.
- Shelley Winters pointed out that the highlighted cells in the evaluation matrix are the items that were updated since the previous meeting.
- Robert Clark commented that air quality has not been addressed yet, and said he would like to see the impacts. He said that air quality should be a top consideration for the Town of Plaistow. He asked if results from cold start engines would be included in the analysis. Ron O'Blenis said that these tests would not be completed as part of the study.
- Ron O'Blenis said that the air quality analysis for this study is still underway.
- Cliff Sinnott said that while air quality is important, especially on a regional level and for potential funding sources, he believes that air quality impacts would be similar for all three alternatives. The results of this analysis would really impact the No Build decision.
- John Weston stated that this is also an issue for MBTA and that they are actively procuring new locomotives that meet higher EPA Tier 4 standards. By 2020, they hope to significantly reduce the number of existing locomotives that meeting lower Tier 2 standards.
- Shelley Winters asked the group to provide their opinion of each alternative's key benefits or issues based on the evaluation matrix that was provided. She asked if after the review of alternatives if there was a consensus agreement on which, if any, of the three sites was being recommended by the Project Advisory Committee. The results from the group discussion on the benefits and issues of each alternative are provided below.

Alternative I

Key Benefits/Advantages	Key Issues/Constraints
- Limited impact on wetlands - Lowest overall costs - Reuse of existing park-and-ride facility - Compatible with immediate area	• Operational issues tied to 1.1 mile separation of facilities (mentioned most frequently) • Access to Route 125 is not the most convenient of the alternatives • Concern with future land use compatibility

	• Town can't support operational subsidies that seem likely for this alternative • Most impacts to Atkinson residents • Most residential properties within one-half mile of two sites

Alternative II

Key Benefits/Advantages	Key Issues/Constraints
- Co-location – reduces impact to freight/Amtrak - Operationally ideal for MBTA - Mitigation of wetland impacts seems possible (bridge and other context sensitive solutions) – scale of wetland impact seems limited - Best access to Route 125/ best opportunity to capture regional traffic/makes most sense from a regional transportation perspective/best opportunity to attract riders - Existing lighted intersection and access to Route 125 - Future development potential of adjacent sites is higher (Testa site is not used for station/layover and would therefore be fully available for development) - Fewest residential properties within one-half mile of site & least noise impacts - Smallest land impact of all sites - No Town property used	• Seems to have the most environmental impacts/concern to public (mentioned most frequently)

Alternative III

Key Benefits/Advantages	Key Issues/Constraints
- Operationally good for MBTA	• Concern with traffic impacts on Main Street (mentioned most frequently) • Less regional access opportunities • Reduces opportunities for TOD development on Testa site • Impact on schools and adjacent neighborhoods • Includes reuse of Town land • Currently zoned industrial

- John Weston reviewed what he heard:

  - Alternative I: operations issues are the primary concern, MBTA's concerns over complications are apparent; most residential impact.
  - Alternative II and III are close in terms of issues and benefits.
  - However, Alternative II seems to be preferred due to benefits of regional access and lower local roadway impacts, less impacts on Plaistow Village, existing signalized and designed intersection with Route 125 at Joanne Drive, smallest site impact, fewest noise impacts, primary concern is wetland impact on site
- Cliff Sinnott agreed that this is what he heard and interpreted it to mean PAC consensus was reached for Alternative II. John Weston said that moving forward with Alternative II leaves options open for Testa Realty and town-owned site.
- Cliff Sinnott asked that since the Alternative II site is adjacent to the Testa Realty site, could this site connect to the Alternative II station. John Weston responded yes, but the trick is how to create a hospitable pedestrian environment between the tow sites.
- Sean Fitzgerald asked what additional information or analysis would be done on the Alternative II site as the recommended alternative. John Weston replied that the Environmental Assessment with include regulatory and permitting reviews. The NEPA process will be followed to complete a more thorough investigation of wetland impacts, the air quality process, FTA review, SHPO review of archeological and historic impacts, additional cost information, and an implementation and financing plan.
- Sean Fitzgerald stated that a lot of information has been received in the past 60 days.
- John Weston said that a frequently asked question list will be prepared and will be available at the public meeting that helps summarize the work done to date and answer important questions.
- Shelley Winters stated that the next public meeting is Wednesday, January 28th at 7pm in Plaistow Town Hall. She said that the next PAC meeting is dependent on whether the contract is extended.
- Cliff Sinnott stated that he would submit a letter in support of a contract extension to NHDOT. He mentioned that the next TAC meeting will be held on Thursday January 22nd and he will be presenting the status of this project.
- Shelley Winters concluded the meeting.