I-93 Transit Investment Study

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Summary
Wednesday, March 26, 2008
2:30 PM

Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation, Boston

Attendance

TAC members who signed in:

Ram Maddali	New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)
Matt Caron	Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC)
Steve Williams	Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Rosemary Monahan	U. S. Environmental Protection Agency
Paul Nelson	Massachusetts EOT
Kit Morgan	NHDOT
Peter Butler	FTA – Region 1
Barbara Lucas	MAPC (Boston MPO)
Cliff Sinnott	Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC)
David Preese	Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission

In attendance via teleconference:

Ken Cervenka	FTA Office of Planning and Environment
Alex Eckmann	Federal Transit Administration

Other attendees:

Stanley Wood	Mass Highway (Highway Operations)
David Carney	Bus operations, MBTA
Lisa -	MBTA
Tom Irwin	Conservation Law Foundation

Consultant staff

Ken Kinney	HNTB Corporation
Dennis Coffey	HNTB Corporation
Jill Barrett	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
John Weston	PB Americas, Inc.

Welcome and Introductions:

Paul Nelson welcomed everyone to Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation. TAC members introduced themselves. Ken asked that the committee discuss the New Hampshire Capital Corridor before beginning with the items on the TAC agenda.

Capitol Corridor

Steve Williams, Executive Director of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission conveyed concerns by leaders in Southern New Hampshire that the Capitol Rail Corridor is not included in the I-93 Transit Investment Study. This corridor is defined as passenger rail service from Boston, MA through Nashua, NH to Manchester, NH with eventual service to Concord, NH. Steve passed out a resolution from Senator Peter Hoe Burling, Chair of the New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority, citing the Capital Corridor as the number one priority for rail in the state. The Rail Transit Authority recommended that the rail corridor be put back into the I-93 Transit Investment study as an alternative. Recently New Hampshire DOT received a letter from the Mayor of Manchester expressing concern that the Capital Corridor was not under consideration in the study. David Preese reinforced the message from the Manchester region.

TAC members reviewed the reason why the Capital Corridor was not included as an alternative in the I-93 Transit Investment Study. Dennis Coffey noted that the study team has found, and the TAC concurred, that while some commuters from the I-93 study area may use this route, it would not serve the majority of people living in the I-93 corridor and therefore would not address the purpose and need of the study. The study team and the TAC have consistently noted the independent utility of this route. TAC members noted that there is no conflict between the study and the goal of the state in pursuing the Capital Corridor as a priority project.

Ram Maddali of NHDOT acknowledged the importance of developing the Capital Corridor. He said this rail line is farther along in development than the M & L line and the state is supportive of efforts to move forward. The project is in the Long Range Transportation Plans of both regions and about $31M in funding has been identified for the Capital Corridor. After considering and evaluating the concerns of Manchester officials and the New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority, it was agreed that the Capital Corridor line will not be added to the I-93 TIS as an alternative, as originally discussed at the November 15, 2007 TAC meeting. But the TAC did agree that the strategic implementation plan should affirm the importance of the Capital Corridor to the state as a significant transportation alternative.

Modeling

There was extensive discussion about the January 29, 2008 memo on modeling prepared by PB Americas, Inc. (PB). John Weston of PB explained the need to use a hybrid model

using both the CTPS model (Boston MPO Model maintained by the Central Transportation Planning Staff) and the Massachusetts Statewide Model, which includes most of the Southern New Hampshire study area, as well as Massachusetts. Ken Cervenka of the FTA Office of Planning and Environment had submitted comments on many technical aspects of the analysis and Barbara Lucas of MAPC had additional concerns about the modeling. Barbara noted that the newly amended Regional in the near future transportation plan includes a different demographic set than was used in the current model. It was decided that due to the technical nature of the comments there would be a separate discussion of these issues and John will report back to the TAC with a report on that technical meeting.

John Weston noted that the study team would also conduct two types of sensitivity analysis – one utilizing the Delphi model and another that would deal with TOD development.

There was much discussion about the various types of information used in the model that could affect results. Barbara Lucas asked how the 1991 household survey on mode choice translates into census demand. Was a ½ mile walking radius from a transit used? (Yes) Was there any sensitivity to the cost of parking? (No – there is too much variety and complexity). Barbara noted that the supply of parking might become more of a constraint in Boston as more garages are slated to be torn down. Is the model calibrated in a way that can respond to fluctuations in the price of fuel? (Yes, for sensitivity analysis runs).

David Preese noted the proposed alternatives only go as far as Exit 5. Why not Exit 6? Also, concerning the airport – did we consider impact of the new airport connector road (from Everett Turnpike?)?

Parking Costs

Ken Kinney said he would distribute the parking memo to the TAC after the sensitivity runs are completed.

Bus on Shoulders

John Weston reviewed two buses on shoulders programs (Minneapolis and Ottawa) that were evaluated. The Minneapolis program has a 10 mph differential between speeds on general-purpose travel lanes and the shoulder up to a maximum of 35 mph. The Ottawa program provides a 12' lane and allows a maximum speed of 100 kilometers (62.5 mph). If the Minneapolis program were applied on the I-93 corridor it would result in only a 1-2 minute travel time savings whereas the total time saved for a commuter in New Hampshire using the Ottawa program would be 20-25 minutes. John Weston examined the potential to expand the shoulder and its related costs to various segments of the corridor as follows:

1. New Hampshire: Widen 10' shoulder by 2' - $25 million
2. State line to Route 125 (No. Andover) – 10' shoulder currently in use during peak periods. Another 2' needs to be added.

3. Route 125 to West Street in Redding – requires 5'widening of shoulder on average - $7-10 million
4. West Street to I-95 interchange: proposed project underway there could incorporate shoulder widening
5. Stoneham to Mystic River – Needs a lot of work because there are built in drainage features and the pavement base is not thick enough. Shoulder and structure must be completely rebuilt - $25 million
6. South of Mystic River to exit 31 -
7. At exit 31 there is an HOV lane southbound so there would be no benefit to having bus on shoulders and northbound the highway is on an elevated structure that would be too expensive to widen.

John Weston reported all bridges have a 64' span between abutments so there would be no need to widen any structures. Costs for this program would also need to include bus maintenance facilities, the purchase of buses and bus shelters. John said the buses would start in a town center, proceed to the nearest Park & Ride and then run express.

Stan Wood of Mass Highway said he thought there would be significant cost to widening I-93 in the northern part of the corridor, if the highway had to be widened towards the median because of drainage. Also, further south along the interstate there would be considerable costs to moving guardrails and signs, accommodating an acceleration/deceleration lane and building pull out areas for breakdowns. TAC members also asked about operational issues for vehicles moving from the shoulder to the HOV lane.
TAC members also noted that along with the NH bus operations, there are other busses that might use the system – MBTA, Massport (Logan Express), MVRTA.

The study team will review these issues with MassHighway. Ken Kinney noted that there are many policy issues to be addressed related to this alternative.

Massachusetts Legislative Briefing

Dennis Coffey and Ken Kinney reported on the briefing at the State House on the I-93 Transit Investment Study organized by State Senator Steven Baddour. Four state legislators for the I-93 corridor area, approximately 10 legislative staff members and 20 commuters and Under Secretary of Transportation Wendy Stern attended the briefing. The commuters were supportive of transit in general, particularly the bus on shoulders program, and cited the need for more parking at transit stations.

M&L Line

Ken Kinney reported on the physical evaluation of the M&L Line between Lawrence MA and Manchester NH. The NHDOT owns most of the Right of Way (ROW). Presently there are two bike paths on the M&L ROW, a number of existing agreements to use the ROW that can be terminated for transit use and other physical encroachments by property

owners that have not been permitted. Ken reported that it appears to be physically feasible to build single lane track with passing sidings at selected locations.

Ken reported that the study team has explored how to reconnect the M&L line from Exit 5 to downtown Manchester via the Manchester Airport. The consultant team developed a route from exit 5, tunneling under the runway and driveway between the airport terminal and parking garage, creating an underground station within the airport, and connecting back to the M&L and on into downtown Manchester. Establishing a connection from exit 5 to downtown Manchester would be very expensive ($230 million), especially as compared to the cost of rail improvements from North Station to Exit 5 ($200 million). Also the airport manager believes from a regulatory point of view, given security concerns at airports, approval of a tunnel would be extremely difficult to obtain.

TAC members noted that there are a number of at-grade crossings of the M&L – and these would present safety challenges. Ken Kinney noted that the estimates include federally approved grade crossing traffic warning systems.

Next Steps

Ken Kinney reported that the project team is in the process of completing the following:

1. Environmental Review – not a formal "EA", but rather an identification of important issues that would be explored in the next phase.
2. Ridership forecasts – the one remaining data gap – these will be used to conduct the final alternatives analysis and sensitivity analysis. The Study Team will provide a written response to the remaining model questions following the technical conference call.
3. Bus on Shoulder memo. Will review and revise information related to this alternative, and explore with MHD operational issues.
4. Parking costs memo. Will examine the cost assumptions used in the model – this will be an appendix to the model memo.

In late April the Team will meet for two workshops to review both the ridership forecasts and the framework for the Strategic Implementation plan (tentatively April 28, 29).

The next TAC meeting is targeted for the week of May 19th (either Wednesday or Thursday (Subsequently this meeting is being proposed the week of June 9th).