I-93 Transit Investment Study

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Summary
Thursday, June 21, 2007
1:00 PM

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

<u>Attendance</u>

TAC members who signed in:

Lynn Ahlgren	Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation
Bill O'Donnell	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) – New Hampshire
Kit Morgan	New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)
Ram Maddali	NHDOT
Matt Caron	Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC)
Tim White	SNHPC
Steve Williams	Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Dennis DiZoglio	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
Anthony Komornick	MVPC
Betsy Goodrich	MVPC
Andrew Motter	Federal Transit Administration (FTA) – Region 1
Matthew Moran	FTA
Cliff Sinnott	Rockingham Planning Commission

Consultant staff:

Ken Kinney	HNTB Corporation
Marcy Miller	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Dennis Coffey	HNTB Corporation
David Nelson	Edwards & Kelsey (E& K)
Yawa Duse-Anthony	E& K
Joe Castiglione	Parsons Brinckerhoff

Welcome and Introductions

Dennis DiZoglio welcomed everyone to Haverhill and MVPC. Ken Kinney provided an additional welcome and reviewed the agenda for the meeting. The three items to be discussed include the recommended eight tier one alternatives, suburban transit connectivity, and alternative analysis next steps. These eight will be analyzed and reduced to four tier 2 alternatives.

Eight Tier One Alternatives

Initial Alternatives

David Nelson presented 15 alternatives on three potential corridor alignments to the TAC at the February 2007 meeting. He reviewed the three alignments, the Eastern corridor, Western corridor, and Highway corridor, as well as the two modes of transit improvements, rail and bus rapid transit service. David described the baseline as improvements that will be completed in concert with the I-93 highway expansion project. These baseline improvements include enhanced bus service from Exit 4 in Derry, and the planned bus services from Exit 5 in Londonderry and Exit 2 in Salem, and the purchase of 14 commuter coaches by NHDOT.

David noted that the original 15 alternatives have been narrowed to eight alternatives based on the preliminary evaluation criteria. First, the three alternatives on the Western corridor have been eliminated. These alternatives do not serve the I-93 travel market and thus the benefit to I-93 congestion would be minimal. While improvements in the western corridor could provide benefits to communities on that corridor, and certainly has independent utility, they simply would not address the purpose and need of this study. There was a concern that this corridor (and any potential improvements) could eventually compete with I-93 improvements. Ken Kinney suggested that policy makers can take the cost-effectiveness information from this study and compare it with other corridor improvement information. There was also an issue with the point in the presentation that there is a "small Manchester to Massachusetts market." It was agreed that this statement was stated poorly and would not be used as part of the reasoning for eliminating these alternatives.

David noted that the rail alternatives have been shortened from Manchester CBD because of the high capital cost to restore ROW across the airport. The cost of a tunnel under the runway would be significant. However, airport shuttle service will be examined as part of the alternatives assessment. There were concerns about this modification among TAC members. The airport, a few stated, was an important destination. There was also a concern that this modification presumes that any future service will be rail. Ken stated that all alternatives can support rail service, though even without this modification, the rail would not reach directly below the terminal. There would have to be a shuttle. There was a suggestion to look at alternative rail right-of-way. David stated that we did explore the power line right-of-way but this was deemed infeasible because route passes through the Mall of New Hampshire parking lot. David stated that service to the airport would largely serve non-residential travel rather than residential travel. People who would use this service most are non residents flying into Manchester who plan to visit Boston or elsewhere in the region.

It was noted by several members that the Concord / Bow region is interested in connecting into this system in Manchester. We should be sure to not take any actions which will foreclose these northern travel markets connecting in. Ken stated that we can provide costs of what it would take for these northern markets to connect in.

David noted that the Andover and Lawrence transfer options have also been eliminated because Lawrence is constrained from an operational feasibility perspective and Andover has weaker service characteristics and connectivity compared with the Anderson Regional Transportation

Center. David stated that trains will still stop in elsewhere Lawrence because there are significant populations that need to be served and Lawrence is becoming more of a travel destination.

David summarized the eight tier one alternatives that remain. There are four rail alternatives that remain, two on the Eastern corridor (one providing service to Boston and one providing service to Anderson) and two on the Highway corridor (one providing service to Boston and one providing service to Anderson). There was a question about potential station locations. There were concerns that if there was a problem somewhere (e.g. Derry) could the service stop there? David stated that the strategic study can include a cost differential of truncating the line at various locations.

In addition, there are four bus alternatives, two shoulder alternatives (one providing service to Boston and one providing service to Anderson) and two dedicated lane alternatives(one providing service to Boston and one providing service to Anderson). On the Boston service rail alternatives there was a question of why the Haverhill Branch could not be use instead of the Wildcat Branch. The Haverhill Branch has only a single track and many stops and thus would have longer travel times end to end. There were questions about the median vs. shoulder lane travel in the highway alignment, including questions about where stations would be placed in the median alignment. David stated that this is an issue that would have to be addressed.

The Team discussed bus bypass shoulders. Under this concept transit vehicles could use highway shoulders to bypass congestion thereby increasing reliability and providing travel time savings for transit service. Yawa Duse-Anthony said there are several areas in North America that utilize this approach. The project team is preparing materials documenting this research including best practices such as driver education and proper signage. David presented Smart Traveler data illustrating potential time savings using bus bypass shoulders. David also described High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes and their advantages (they come with a revenue stream).

Suburban Transit Connectivity

The team and TAC members reviewed a range of options, including employer based shuttles, low cost, or no cost shuttles (through TMAs) and airport shuttle services. David noted that all alternatives can be modeled with and without a high quality transit connection at Andover and/or Anderson.

General Discussion

Key areas of concern of TAC members included**:**

Need for a logical northern terminus (i.e, airport or downtown Manchester)
Need more definition of the “transit reservation” in the I-93 highway corridor – can it be used for busway/shoulder lanes and /or HOT lanes? Where is it?
What happens in Massachusetts? What is schedule for I-93 improvements in Mass.?
Shuttles and TMAs – many experiments have failed – need to better understand why.

Need facts on distribution of employment centers and other demographics.

Next Steps

Ken described the next steps for the project team. They are to:

- Develop operating plans for Tier 1 alternatives
- Identify station locations
- Finalize evaluation measures for Tier 2 evaluation
- Employ evaluation measures
- Present findings to Stakeholders
- Prepare full evaluation of Tier 2 alternatives (ridership, costs, etc.)

Ken stated that at the next meeting, the TAC would discuss various operating plans and three station area concept plans. These plans will likely be in Salem, Derry, and one on the highway alignment. The next meeting was tentatively set for the afternoon of August 16, 2007. The location will be determined.