PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PAC)
MEETING #2
MEETING SUMMARY

March 6, 2014, 2:00 pm, Plaistow Town Hall

PAC Attendees:

- New Hampshire DOT - Shelley Winters
- Town of Plaistow – Sean Fitzgerald; (Alternate) Tim Moore
- Town of Atkinson – Robert J. Clark
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission - Todd Fontanella
- Rockingham Planning Commission – Cliff Sinnott
- Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority – Jim Russell
- Pan Am Railways – Not in attendance
- City of Haverhill – Not in attendance
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority – Not in attendance

HDR Engineering Team: Ron O'Blenis, John Weston, Kris Erikson, Katie Rougeot

Approximately 5 non-PAC members attended

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- The floor was open to the public for their comments at the beginning of the meeting. The public were informed this would be the only time during the meeting to provide comments. Follow up comments could be provided to PAC members after the meeting for discussion, as appropriate, at future meetings.

- **Comments:** Larry Gill, former selectmen of Plaistow, NH- Larry believes there is a need for a commuter rail in Plaistow, NH. He supports the efforts of the study and is disappointed that there are people that will not give the project a chance to be evaluated before forming an option on the merits of any plan.

- **Comments:** Richard Blare, resident of Plaistow, NH- Richard agreed with Larry's comments and knows there is negativity about the project. Richard explains how he is legally blind and has no way of traveling to Haverhill or Boston by himself. The commuter rail would give him a means of getting around without being dependent on someone else, reiterating the importance of transit access for the portion of the population that do not, or can not, drive.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

- The DRAFT Project Purpose and Need was sent electronically to the PAC after the last meeting. Comments were received and reviewed.

- The Purpose and Need is a required part of the NEPA process which will frame the study and be used as a tool to screen alternatives. The different alternatives considered will fit the Project's Purpose and Need.

- The Purpose and Need of the project is different from the goals and objectives of the study. The goal of the study is to analyze commuter rail service and implementation options. The purpose of the project is to implement commuter rail service to Plaistow.

- The Draft Project Purpose and Need still needs the input from the general public. Once comments are received, modifications may or may not be made to the draft.

- **Comments**: Suggestions to review Section 4.2 Commuting Cost and Travel Times and Section 4.4 Regional Air Quality Attainment and to remove Section 4.6 MBTA Train Operational Efficiency were expressed.

  ACTION: In response, it was agreed that Section 4.2 and Section 4.4 will be reviewed. Section 4.6 is included as it provides the rationale for participation in the project by the MBTA.

- Information regarding existing train schedules and FRA train horn requirements were distributed for consideration and incorporation into the study.

- A suggestion was made to change Section 4.6, MBTA Train Operational Efficiency, to state layover should be moved north of the existing Haverhill Station. It was stated that the section should remain because there are a number of reasons to move the layover which includes MBTA considerations that must be evaluated as part of the study.

- Configuration of the layover facility and station are important because of they impact non-revenue operations and capacity of the line. If the layover or station is not in ideal locations there will be cost and operational disadvantages.

- It was noted that the local RPCs have received congestion and roadway data from the National Performance Research, which uses cell phones data.

  ACTION: The HDR Team will evaluate how this data could be utilized for the study.

- **ACTION**: The HDR Team will make revisions to the DRAFT Project Purpose and Need based on the comments.

PROJECT SCOPE

- An overview of the scope of the study was provided. The study is currently in Task Two, Environmental Assessment. Upcoming tasks will include Ridership Development and Rail Service Plan Development. Ridership development will include information on future fare increases, (assumed plan is 5% every two years), gas prices projections, and congestion. The HDR team will be working with the MBTA to develop an operating schedule and an operating cost.

- Cliff Sinnott said it is important to use the experience from other MBTA expansion projects and see if it can be used for this project.

- **Comments:** A question arose if there was any way of using data from other regions to assist in ridership analysis. In response, it was noted that travel demand models are different for each metropolitan area. The results from a different region would not translate well to this area.

PARKING

- Concern about the amount of parking needed was discussed along with the possibility of a bus service connector. Bus service may be a beneficial connection to the train station but will not be part of the site option evaluation. The amount of possible available parking does not appear to be site selection discriminator at this point.

LAYOVER FACILITY AND STATION REQUIREMENTS

- The requirements for a layover facility and station were discussed. Six different layover facility and five station concept plans were distributed to the PAC members. The layout for each layover facility included six layover tracks, area for associated improvements (i.e. stormwater detention), an area for parking and crew building and the estimated limit of disturbance. The station concept plans includes the station track and platform along with parking and an estimated limit of disturbance.

- A Study Area Map was distributed to the PAC members which displayed the primary constraints such as residential development, open space/parkland, priority habitats, wetlands and water bodies.

- **ACTION**: It was requested that the two sites that were eliminated from further consideration (144 Main St and Westville Homes Site) be identified on the concept plans.

- **ACTION**: It was noted that there appears to be wetland/stream information that did not display properly on the concept plans – to be revised as required.

- **Comments:** Since the concept plans need to be explained to other people, a description of the attributes of each conceptual plan would be helpful. Developing a way to rank the conditions or a matrix for evaluating was also suggested.

- **ACTION:** The HDR Team will develop and distribute a description of each concept plan. The HDR Team will distribute an electronic version of the concept plans with the modifications discussed.

NEXT STEPS

- The next Project Advisory Committee meeting will be the 1st week in April (April 3rd at Atkinson Town Hall) and the public meeting will be in early May.

- It was agreed that at future meetings that Agendas and documents, as appropriate, will be sent out in advance.