

**I-93 Transit Investment Study
Public Meeting – October 1, 2008, 6 p.m.
Manchester City Hall
Manchester, NH**

Kit Morgan of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation welcomed members of the public and introduced Ken Kinney, of HNTB, the consultant hired to conduct the study. Ken Kinney said the study team looked at 15 alternatives; tonight's meeting will focus on the final two. The screening of alternatives was focused on purpose and need, which included the objectives of removing cars from I-93 and fostering more compact development around transit.

Two final proposals were the Manchester and Lawrence (M&L) commuter line and express bus service with the bus traveling on the shoulder of I-93 – bus on shoulder (BOS). The northern terminus of M&L would be Exit 5 on I-93 south of Manchester. The line would not go to downtown Manchester. This possibility was studied but because some of the right-of-way was lost when Manchester Airport was developed, the cost of tunneling under the airport property would be as much as the cost of establishing service from Exit 5 to Boston.

The purpose of BOS is to get faster trips. It has been done successfully in other cities. Buses would run all day with frequencies of 15 or 30 minutes during peak periods.

When comparing capital costs of the M&L rail and the BOS service, rail would cost \$197 million versus \$88 million. Operating costs of BOS would be 50% less than rail and revenue is expected to be about the same. Each would generate about the same number (approximately 10,000) of riders per average weekday. Environmental impacts are about the same. But the rail would have significantly better community impact because it spurs more compact development in the vicinity of train stations.

In general, the M&L has higher benefits (especially regarding land use) but also higher costs. However, this corridor also has the greater challenges to implementation. The consultant does not believe that, under current evaluation criteria, this corridor would be likely to receive federal funds. In addition, there are significant challenges to community acceptance because some of the corridor is used as bike path. There are many grade crossings and there could be opposition to increased noise.

However, because the state of New Hampshire owns the right-of-way, the study team anticipates that at some future time (possibly after the study's 2030 horizon year) land use and other conditions may change and the M&L line may become more viable. The study recommends the state should maintain control of the line for future use.

The study recommends the New Hampshire Main Line (Boston-Nashua-Manchester) should be developed as a priority rail line.

The study team recommends that the two states take steps now to begin the implementation of a Manchester-Boston BOS. This would include agreements between the two states, establish an implementation task force, develop a facility and operation plan and perform an environmental assessment.

Question: What land use assumptions were used when looking at potential stations?

Response: 2006 Metropolitan Planning Organization projections. In addition we did some sensitivity analysis for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) with high residential that increased ridership by 15%.

A second sensitivity analysis performed used different employment and different population figures that increased ridership 10% but there were big swings in ridership. Some locations had less, while others more than doubled. The biggest shift showed a drop in employment in New Hampshire so there were fewer work trips but Boston became a more important employment center, with more people taking transit.

Finally, we performed a third sensitivity analysis on the impact of increased gas prices. We calculated the impact of gasoline at \$5.60/gallon and did not increase train fare. New Hampshire ridership increased by 20%, with the percentage of increase falling off as stations got closer to Boston.

Question: How will BOS impact I-93 that already is planned to go to 4-lanes in each direction? How much wider will it need to be to drive on shoulders?

Response: I-93 will be built with a 10-foot shoulder but with a sub-base, grading and embankment of the shoulder to accommodate an additional 2 feet. In MA the shoulders are generally 10 feet and there is enough room under bridges for BOS. However, a lot of drainage work is needed to support BOS.

Question: Where do I go if I have a breakdown? Will there be space beyond the shoulder?

Response: Massachusetts currently uses shoulders in some areas of I-93 during peak hours for general purpose traffic. It has pull-out lanes every half mile and we assume this would be built in for BOS. Shoulders also are used as travel lanes only during peak hours and therefore would be available for emergency use most of the time.

Question: If I lived in Manchester and wanted to travel to Salem, would BOS be available?

Response: No. Buses will travel non-stop to Boston. We studied ridership and learned there are only three locations riders typically disembark – Lawrence, Anderson and Boston.

Question: Is any BOS proposed from Concord?

Response: No. Ridership volumes are too low.

Question: How much of the M&L is active in New Hampshire?

Response: None. There is no track on the line right now. That's actually beneficial because it will be less expensive to reconstruct new track. The right-of-way for the New Hampshire segment is controlled by the state. There are some allowed and not allowed incursions on the right-of-way. In Massachusetts the line was controlled by a freight operation but is currently owned by MBTA.

Question: Do any other regions allow car or vanpools to use BOS?

Response: BOS is a relatively new program. Allowing this type of use would be a policy decision. This study did not model use by vehicles other buses. There will be 90-100 buses during peak.

Question: Wasn't an objective of the study to reduce cars on I-93? What would be the impact of improved transit?

Response: Less than 5%.

Comment: We need transportation alternatives other than the highway. The expanded I-93 will fail in the future.

Comment: We don't have a transportation system in NH. We have a system of roads and no choice. The Downeaster is an example of the benefits of transit. It's brought renewal to communities like Haverhill, Old Orchard Beach.

Comment: I have trouble with the study recommendations saying the land use changes to allow greater residential density is needed for the M&L to be feasible. Without a commitment to develop the M&L, land use change won't happen.

Question: Why don't we develop a small segment of the M&L – Lawrence to Salem?

Response: From a strategic point of view, building support for one segment at a time is what other communities have done. It's what got the Nashua-Manchester line moving forward.

Comment: But the responsibility for advocating for rail should be done by the state government, not left to communities.

Question: Are stations being located in places with potential to develop community centers? Derry seems to be the only place that has an existing center.

Response: We had that in mind but during analysis proposed stations would be subject to change.

Comment: This study has done a great job in making the connection between land use and transportation. However, I see a disconnect between the findings and recommendations. I am troubled by the federal landscape as it may be changing. Why put off rail for 20 years? Rail will never move forward.

Response: Projects are now judged on three main criteria – land use, cost/benefit and financing. These criteria could change, making it more likely that service could be implemented in less than 20 years.

Question: I don't understand why the incremental approach isn't practical for the rail alternative.

Response: The study's context is I-93; there is not enough benefit from the rail alternative to pursue it at this time. One needs to look beyond this particular study.

Question: Has there been any consideration to feasibility of rail in light of chloride pollution?

Response: No. This will be looked at in the Environmental Assessment.

Question: When is the earliest BOS may be seen?

Response: 5 years. BOS would be built in consecutive segments – beginning with the section closest to Boston where the congestion is most severe and there would be the biggest travel time savings. Next segment would be to the 93/95 interchange in Woburn and progressively move north into New Hampshire.