I-93 Transit Investment Study

Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
Tuesday, November 7, 2006
10:00 AM

Nashua Regional Planning Commission

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Attendance

People who signed in:

Steve Williams	Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC)
Lynn Ahlgren	Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation (EOT)
Paul Hajec	Northern Middlesex Council of Governments
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
Anthony Komornick	Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Rosemary Monahan	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Consultant Staff:

Ken Kinney	HNTB Corporation
Marcy Miller	Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc.
Dennis Coffey	HNTB Corporation
Ron O'Blenis	Parsons Brinckerhoff (PB)
Essek Petrie	HNTB

Welcome and Introduction of Consultant

Ken Kinney welcomed everyone and asked that each individual introduce him or herself. He reviewed the agenda for the meeting. He distributed a draft schedule to the TAC for their review and comment. The schedule will be on the agenda at the January meeting when more time would be allotted to discussion. In the meantime TAC members should provide comments via e-mail to the project team. He stated that the draft schedule would also be reviewed, and possibly revised, by the management committee before the January TAC meeting.

Initial Study Tasks

Ken asked the project team members to provide brief overviews of progress on initial study tasks.

Marcy Miller, of FHI, provided a review of the public involvement efforts that have occurred since September. FHI has completed two press releases, one for the project launch and one for the website launch. Both releases are with the state Departments of Transportation. FHI has also completed a draft fact sheet. This has been reviewed by the Management Team. Some edits still need to be made related to formatting. However, the fact sheet should be available to be distributed at the December 2 CTAP Conference. Marcy stated that FHI had a conference call with staff at NHDOT to discuss some unresolved comments on the Draft Public Participation Plan. The Plan will be revised to reflect these changes. Lastly, Marcy reviewed the website format and asked for comments on this format. Ram Maddali, of NHDOT, suggested that FHI review the welcome to see that the language was consistent with changes made to the fact sheet and other documents. There was a question about whether it is necessary to have Ram's contact email as well as the comment form. After some discussion, most agreed that this was helpful if someone wanted to send an attachment or wanted to e-mail the project manager specifically. It was noted that the illustration on the opening page was not applicable – a new illustration will be used.

Ron O'Blenis, of PB, provided an update of the model development efforts. The Team is expanding the Nashua model, which was developed for the Boston to Nashua Commuter Rail Study. They expect to wrap up this effort in January after which the model will be used to evaluate various alternatives. There were no comments or questions on this effort.

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Essek Petrie, of HNTB, stated that they are in the process of analyzing MBTA commuter rail line boardings on the Haverhill and Lowell lines. They will soon look at these trends and relate them to I-93 travel and the land use in the corridor. He provided information on land use and land use policies in the communities along potential transit corridors. He presented population and employment estimates for the present and future (2030). There were some questions as to what the sources were. Essek stated that the estimates were a compilation of CPTS, MVPC, NMCOG, and NHDOT estimates. There were some concerns among TAC members because of differing views of expected relationships between jobs and households future projections. It was suggested that the study team also consider CTPT estimates.

Essek discussed the zoning and land use policies for each of the communities on the two rail corridors (the western corridor – the current Lowell line, and the M&L branch). Ram asked if this level of detailed analysis was going to be done for every community in the study area. Essek replied that it will be done only for those communities located directly on a transit line. The analyses for other communities in the study area would be less detailed. It was mentioned that the population densities for Salem, Derry, Atkinson, and Windham seemed much too high. Ram questioned whether it would be beneficial if Essek provided a table that included the source data to the TAC members. The consensus was that this would be helpful and Essek said that he would provide this information.

Ram questioned if there are population and employment criteria for New Starts funding. Ken Kinney answered that no there are no fixed requirements. He stated that at some point in this project study, there would be a session or agenda topic on New Starts funding.

Essek continued through each of the communities along the transit corridors. Communities discussed included Lowell, Chelmsford, Tyngsboro, Nashua, Merrimack, Bedford, Manchester, Hooksett, Bow, Concord, Lawrence, Methuen, Salem, Windham, Derry, and Londonderry. He discussed the percentage and type of housing in each community, as well as the physical and institutional potential for transit oriented development. There was a question if any of these communities have changed their zoning as a result of this study

Rosemary Monahan questioned the analyses in Bow and Concord and whether it was useful to consider stations in these communities also. After considerable discussion, it was agreed upon that the intent of the project was to look at these towns as market areas for the Manchester station (the end of the line). Increasing the study area to include stations in these towns would require an expansion in the model further north of Concord, which is not part of this study.

Stakeholders Meetings

Ken Kinney provided a summary of the on-going stakeholder meetings. He specifically spoke of meetings the team had with Derry and the Manchester - Boston Regional Airport. Some of the points that were raised in the Derry meeting included:

- Derry is becoming a suburb of greater Boston. Thirty-five percent of Derry residents commute to Massachusetts, many to the 495/128 corridor.
- There is an identified need to provide more information to elected planning board members about TOD concepts.
- There is support for rail, except probably from some adjacent property owners.

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Points raised in the Manchester – Boston Regional Airport meeting included:

- The airport and Southwest Airlines support rail service to the airport.
- Twenty percent of the airport's passengers are from Massachusetts.
- There are serious challenges to development of an airport station.
- Off-site airport station has potential (but travelers want transit service to get then "to" their destination, not near it.)

TAC Member Comments

- Rosemary Monahan noted the recently published Harvard study (Taubmann Center – graduate student report) of commuter rail and land use impacts. (This study will be included on the project web site.)
- Steve Williams noted that characteristics of commuter rail services vary with distance – the currently planned Nashua service extension is about 10 miles from the existing terminus. Manchester is an additional 19 miles, and Concord would add another 20 miles. The typical "acceptable" commuter rail time is 1 hour.
- RE use of the M&L branch – Bill O'Donnell noted that the new Lawrence inter-modal center would require backtracking – however, it was agreed that any service on the M&L could skip Lawrence.

Next Steps and Meeting Dates

Ken Kinney and Ram Madalli noted that the next meeting will be held in mid-January at a location in Massachusetts. The exact meeting date in not known yet. Web site and e-mail notices will be sent to all.

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