

## Meeting Summary

**Event:** City of Manchester Stakeholder Meeting

**Date and Time:** Tuesday, May 25, 2021, 2:00 – 3:40 PM

**Location:** Zoom Online Meeting Platform

### 1. Attendees

#### City Attendees

Daniel O’Neil, Alderman

Pat Long, Alderman and State Representative

Shannon MacLeod, Policy Director, Mayor’s Office

Kevin Sheppard, Public Works Director

Kristen Clarke, City Traffic Engineer

Leon LaFreniere, Planning and Community Development Director

Bob Gagne, Chairman, Board

Jodie Nazaka, Senior Planner, Planning and Community Development Office

Tim Clougherty

Phone Caller (unidentified)

#### Other Attendees

Mike Whitten, Executive Director, Manchester Transit

Bill Cantwell, Manchester Transit Finance

Nate Miller, Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission

#### New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

Patrick Herlihy

Shelley Winters

#### Consultant Team

Jay Doyle, AECOM

George Katsoufis, AECOM

Rachel Burckardt, WSP

Joel Anders, WSP

Marcy Miller, FHI Studio

### 2. Presentation Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) planned and hosted a stakeholder meeting with City of Manchester elected officials / staff and other agency staff on Tuesday, May 25, 2021, at 2 PM via the Zoom online meeting platform. Patrick Herlihy, of NHDOT, welcomed everyone to the call,

noting that this is the team's third stakeholder meeting. The first two meetings were with Federal Transit Administration and Massachusetts Department of Transportation/MBTA. P. Herlihy noted that the purpose of the stakeholder meeting is to discuss the Manchester station location and layover facility and obtain the City's input on the potential concepts under consideration.

Jay Doyle, of AECOM, reviewed the meeting agenda, noting that first 20-25 minutes will be spent on the station options and the remainder of the meeting would be designated to discuss the layover facility options. There will be ample opportunity for the group to ask questions and discuss the options. He noted that there would be one layover facility to be located at or near the end of the planned service, in Manchester. The project team is also committed to developing a financial plan for the proposed infrastructure improvements and planned operations.

J. Doyle reviewed the high-level objectives of the project, which include:

- Provide alternative to congestion on I-93/Route 3;
- Improve bi-directional access to jobs and housing;
- Perform an Environmental Assessment (EA);
- Develop 30% design for the 30-mile extension of the Lowell Line, including four new stations and one layover facility; and
- Develop a financial plan.

J. Doyle presented a map of the corridor, and discussed the Manchester station alternative on the south side of Granite Street that was identified in the 2014 EA. The Granite Street site is the approximate historical location of Manchester's former rail station. He stated that, as part of the current phase of work started in 2021 the team has looked at the Manchester Station options with respect to both the Granite Street location and a potential site to the south of it at Valley Street. He also provided a brief overview of the 2020 Manchester Transit Oriented Development (TOD) plan, and how its goals may inform the two station options being considered for Downtown Manchester. Manchester will be the end of the line for the planned rail service.

J. Doyle presented and described two station location options: Granite Street and Valley Street. He reviewed the Granite Street Station option first, noting that it is consistent with the concept that was developed in the 2014 EA. He reviewed access concerns related to this concept and stated that the Depot Street at-grade crossing would be closed and the existing bank building and parking would be retained. The platform would be up to 800 feet long. A pedestrian overpass could be provided, as needed.

Regarding the Valley Street station, there are two sub options at this location, Valley Street Option A and Valley Street Option B. The platform would be up to 800 feet long. There is an opportunity to create parking and the team is looking for feedback on whether that is desirable.

For Valley Street Option B, the existing signalized intersection with Elm Street at the Market Basket grocery store would be utilized. The platform would be up to 800 feet long. There is an opportunity to create parking and the team is looking for feedback on whether that is desirable. A pedestrian overpass to provide access to/from South Commercial Street to the west of the station would be provided. J. Doyle closed by presenting the summary pros and cons of the two station location options.

After the first series of questions, J. Doyle discussed possible locations for the Manchester layover facility options. Manchester would be the end of the line for the planned service. He discussed the operational requirements for storing trains overnight. MBTA Commuter Rail operates in a push-pull configuration with the locomotives pushing the train inbound toward Boston and pulling the train outbound away from Boston. Thus, when stored at the layover facility, locomotives would be at the north end of the train. He discussed site needs and fueling considerations as well as compatibility factors for a proposed facility.

J. Doyle stated that the team has taken a broad look at where these layover facilities can be located. The most desirable locations are closest to the terminal station in Manchester. A number of potential sites were identified and screened against key criteria such as adjacent land uses and proximity to the Manchester terminal station. The two most viable sites are the southeast end of the former Pan Am Manchester rail yard and the land adjacent to the east side of the City of Manchester Wastewater Treatment Plant. He provided details about the two most promising layover site options and presented a summary screening matrix.

J. Doyle concluded with a summary list of key next steps for the study.

### 3. Discussion

#### Questions

Q – For the Valley Street options, will Valley Street Station be at grade?

A – Yes. The parking would be surface parking, and there would be a high-level platform.

Q- Is it possible to come in off Elm Street and build a deck and have station down below?

A – Yes, this is possible. There is an 8–10-foot difference between the proposed platform and Elm Street. This is possible if the team excludes a Valley Street extension. The team has tried to be sympathetic to sidewalks and pedestrian access.

Q – Which concept is easier or less intrusive to build?

A – Not including the potential parking from Valley Street, they are similar. The Granite Street option does not have a parking option. All other costs, platform, and access are similar.

Q - Do you expect a difference in pedestrian vs vehicular access to the station amongst the options?

A – It is anticipated that this will be more of a pedestrian accessed station because its downtown location, rather than a Park and Ride location.

Q – Is there a way to construct the Granite Street option without stopping traffic on Granite Street?

A- It is possible, and the project team will investigate the technical details, with respect to railroad gate crossing closures. The team is committed to having only a brief gate down time. The City of Manchester is working with NHDOT to install adaptive signalization on Granite Street, and there are concerns that any improvements can negatively impact the upcoming adaptive signalization improvement.

Q - Can you consider a multimodal transit center?

A – The project team will consider this. It is likely more feasible at the Valley Street site, as there are constraints at the Granite Street site.

Q - What other TOD is contemplated in the area? All buses begin and end at Elm Street and Veterans' Park.

A – Potentially, mixed use and residential. The Valley B option is conducive to pedestrian and bicycle travel.

Q – Why did the study team not evaluate the Pine Grove Cemetery site higher for the layover site?

A – There are potentially significant environmental constraints on this site, including nearby residences and parks/open space. The site would require extensive clearing of trees.

Q – Can you consider looking at the cemetery site again?

A – We will give the site another look, but as noted above there are likely environmental constraints given its proximity to Smith's Ferry Heritage Park and the Brown and Mitchell Park, and there are residents that live close to this site as well.

Q – There was a question about vertical clearance that would be desire for the commuter rail.

A – 18 feet is a good rule of thumb. Future electrification may require up to 21 feet.

Q - Is anyone engaging the private property owners?

A – That outreach and next steps will come in the next stages of the project. The project team plans to engage the public in the coming months. In addition, Manchester Public Works is participating on the call and can be contacted with further questions (P. Herlihy [patrick.herlihy@dot.nh.gov](mailto:patrick.herlihy@dot.nh.gov) and Marcy Miller from the consultant team at [mmiller@fhistudio.com](mailto:mmiller@fhistudio.com)).

Q– Were other layover station locations considered?

A – The 2014 EA found that the more northerly stations were less desirable. The five-track width storage requirement is a challenge.

Q – Can there be a passenger terminus to accommodate transit and bus riders?

A – The team has thought about how this could be done, but there are challenges, especially around Canal Street.

Q – Can the team explore idea of acquiring the Firestone property eventually for a multimodal center?

A- This can be factored in, especially if an earmark is an option for funding.

Q - Has the Amtrak expansion to Concord been considered?

A – These are separate funding sources. The project team will plan to get more information from Amtrak as both studies continue.

### Comments

- There is support for the Granite Street station location because it is closer to downtown and has potential for multimodal connections (2).
- The team should consider looking at Pan Am site for layover facility.
- There is support for creating an intermodal facility. It is important to get the station as far north as possible, but still close to Downtown.
- The City will weigh in on the general location of both the station and layover facility before design continues.
- In response to input received, the team will explore the feasibility of a third option, which combines features of the other two (i.e., a “hybrid option”) with the platform located behind Market Basket and the north end accessible from near Granite Street and the South End accessible from near Valley Street.
- The team will host another meeting with the City by end of June/early July 2021. J. Doyle asked the City to confirm who can officially comment on the concepts.