

**I-91 Interchange 19
Northampton, MA**

**Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting # 5
Tuesday, July 20, 2010
Bridge Street School Library, Northampton, MA**

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

PAC Members

Jerry Budgar – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association
Angela Plassmann – City Councilor, Ward 3
Frank J. Werbinski – Ward 3 Resident
Christine Cahillane – Ward 3 Resident
Nicole Rohan – Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
Gary Roux – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)
James Lowenthal – MassBike Pioneer Valley

Members of the Public

Tom Narrigan – Valley Area Transit / PVTA
Sydney Stern – Ward 3 Resident
Bill Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident
Joanne Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident
Marianna McKim – Ward 3 Resident
Lachlan Ziegler – North Street Association

Project Team

Rich Masse – Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Highway
Division, District 2 (MassDOT)
Al Stegemann - MassDOT
Bao Lang – MassDOT
Joe Cahill – TranSystems
Paul Schimek - TranSystems
Maureen Chlebek – McMahon Associates
Marcy Miller – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)

Meeting Presentation

Joe Cahill, of TranSystems, welcomed everyone and reviewed the meeting's agenda. He noted that the primary purpose of today's meeting is to reduce the number of alternatives that are to be further analyzed in the study.

Marcy Miller, of FHI, next provided a summary of the comments received at and after the public meeting. She provided a quick tally of the written and verbal comments received at meeting, as well as comments submitted to the study website and to the study team via email. Approximately 41 percent of the comments supported the No Build alternative, 40 percent supported the Transportation Demand Management (TDM) package, and between one and four percent support each of the following alternatives: 12, 13, 13 A, 13 B, 15, 15, A, 16, and 17. Many comments supported more than one alternative. Marcy stated that these numbers were draft at this time. (Updated statistics are included in the third project newsletter.)

Paul next provided information responding to the request at the public meeting to include a trolley alternative. Paul stated that a trolley replacement for bus routes B43 and M40 on their 20-mile round trip between Northampton and Amherst, would provide only a modest increase in transit capacity at a capital cost ranging from \$260 to \$400 million for track, electrical power and wire, vehicles, and maintenance facilities. Assuming that it would be infeasible to either dedicate a lane on Route 9 to the trolley or to remove bicyclists and pedestrians from the Norwottuck Rail Trail, there would be no change in transit operating speed. Operating costs for trolley (streetcar or light rail) vary widely, but are unlikely to be less than bus and could be much higher. Based on the high capital cost and modest potential for benefits, Paul suggested that this alternative should not be investigated further. There was a question about federal funding for trolley and other transit improvements. James Lowenthal stated that \$100 million has been spent on Route 9 over the last decade. While the cost of the trolley is expensive, it is not orders of magnitude more than what has already been spent, he said. Paul replied that major transit funding is an uncertain and highly political process, and that grant money used for improvements such as Transit Signal Priority and new buses would likely be more effective.

Joe next provided recap of what has been accomplished at the past few PAC meetings. He reviewed the concepts and evaluations and also briefly described the benefits and impacts table. He stated that based on the study team's analysis, the past meetings with the PAC, and the public meeting input, the project team recommendations are to move forward the build concepts 13, 13 A, 13 B for further study.

Paul discussed the TDM package. The project team recommends that the TDM package, with a focus on capital improvements, move forward. An increase in transit operating costs would be difficult to fund, except potentially for the duration of the construction process. Paul suggested that articulated buses, bus stop improvements (fancy shelters, solar powered lighting, and schedule holders), WiFi on buses, ITS, and transit signal priority should be included in the TDM package for additional study.

In addition, the No Build and the TDM package are recommended to move forward in the analysis. The project team recommended that no full build alternatives (new ramps or new direct connections such as flyovers) be advanced for additional study. The PAC supported the study team's recommendations.

Questions and Comments

There was a question on the floodplain impact of Concept 13 B. Joe stated that, while he did not have the exact number off hand, he anticipates that it could be in the order of 10 feet.

There was a question about what additional detail will be provided for the alternatives that are advanced. Joe stated that these alternatives will receive more advanced design and impacts analysis. In addition, the team will look at additional traffic questions and impacts (e.g. can portions of the roundabout be one-lane instead of two?).

There were concerns and question about the roundabouts. There was a comment that many drivers here treat yield signs as stop signs, throwing the concept of roundabout out the window. Joe noted that there will be a learning curve for the roundabouts if they are constructed. There was a question whether there is a roundabout or rotary at the Sagamore Bridge. Maureen answered that Sagamore was a rotary. Joe explained that rotaries are larger and operate at higher speeds compared to modern roundabouts. Entering a roundabout is more like a crossing traffic move. There was a question on whether the roundabouts will negatively affect ambulances coming over the bridge towards the hospitals and whether there are studies on this. Maureen said that she would check on this but is not sure if studies exist for two-lane roundabouts. Emergency vehicles coming from the Hadley side would generally make a right turn on to Damon Road, using one quarter of the roundabout.

There was a question on whether induced traffic effects were included in this analysis. Maureen Chlebek stated that induced trips resulting from mode shifts were not likely because transit ridership is low. She stated that the team has looked at shifts in traffic routes and is not anticipating induced traffic to any of the concepts being carried forward, since these concepts do not add new connections. There was a concern that cars stopped in traffic pollute a lot less than free flowing cars. There was a suggestion to replace the build alternative air quality green circles with red squares.

Nicole Rohan stated that PVRTA initially has funding to so some ITS projects, including an FTA grant awarded in early July. The agency is still hoping for other improvements at bus stops and the ability to access more real-time transit information on the internet. The currently available funding, however, does not cover the entire PVRTA service area, although some of the initial deployment will be in the Northampton garage. There will be more information about this in next two months as the project moves forward.

There was a question on how time savings would happen with Transit Signal Priority. Paul answered that when bus is within the line of sight of a signal, the Opticom signal would try to let the bus pass through quickly by holding the green light longer or switching it from red to green sooner. Cars traveling in the route of the bus would

benefit as well. Signal priority works best in areas where there is not extreme congestion.

There was a question regarding the viability of the No Build Alternative if additional development occurs in Hadley. Specifically, if a new development is proposed, will this process be reopened? Rich Masse, of MassDOT, said that all improvement and studies move forward on a case by case basis. Federally funded improvements must go through National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, which must consider No Build as an alternative. Any large developments need to go through an environmental and traffic impact review process. The developer is responsible for making any improvements necessary to address impacts from the development. Joe pointed out that the build alternatives have been developed based on a growth in traffic. If the No Build is selected, it increases the likelihood that a proposed development will show more traffic impacts and therefore need to mitigate as necessary. The build options have more capacity built into them so this reduces that likelihood.

There was a question whether operating expenses will be further fleshed out in the TDM package, including potential sources of funds? In addition, are there opportunities to look at additional Park & Rides in Hadley and Amherst? Paul said that the team can keep this option on the table, however, Sheldon Field Park & Ride currently is operating at well below capacity. Also, the major Park and Ride market is for travel to UMass, where parking is expensive, not for travel to Northampton.

There was a question about how this project fits into the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The plan has a list of all projects included on four year Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). This project is not in a TIP or CIP. Currently, it is only in the Pioneer Valley Long Range Plan (20+ years).

There was a request to get more precise land taking evaluations for concepts that are recommended to move forward. Joe provided hard-copy draft property impact evaluations to the PAC. He stressed that these are very rough numbers based on conceptual designs and will be further refined and modified as the design progresses.

Next Steps

Joe went over the next steps of the study process. The team will further develop the alternatives that remain in the analysis. Later, a preferred alternative will be identified, a public meeting will be held, and the team will begin design (if required).

The team will create a newsletter for distribution in the coming weeks. This newsletter will inform the public of the alternatives that will move forward in the analysis.

The PAC tentatively agreed to hold the next meeting on Tuesday, October 5th.