

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

**Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting # 2
Monday, December 7, 2009
Northampton Council Chambers, Northampton, MA**

Meeting Summary

Attendees:

PAC Members

Ned Huntley – Northampton Department of Public Works
Bob Reckman – Northampton City Council
Jerry Budgar – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association
Frank J. Werbinski – Ward 3 Resident
Christine Cahillane – Ward 3 Resident
Marie Hess – Five Colleges, Inc.
Nicole Rohan – Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
Dan O'Brien – DCR
Gary Roux – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)
Marcus J. Boyle – Board of Selectman, Hatfield
Glenn Barrington – UMass Transit Services

Members of the Public

Tom Narrigan – Valley Area Transit / PVTA
Angela Plassmann – Ward 3 Councilor-Elect
Sydney Stern – Ward 3 Resident
Bill Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident
Joanne Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident
Marianna McKim – Ward 3 Resident
Mary Serreze – Northampton Media
Mike Hempstead – MassBike PV Board Member

Project Team

Rich Masse – Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Highway
Division, District 2 (MassDOT)
Erik Abell – MassDOT
Gary Bua – TranSystems
Joe Cahill – TranSystems
Maureen Chlebek – McMahan Associates
Gary McNaughton – McMahan Associates
Marcy Miller – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)

Welcome / Introductions

Rich Masse, of MassDOT, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming to the meeting. Rich asked that everyone from the PAC and project team introduce him or herself. Gary Bua, the Project Manager from TranSystems, reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

November 28th Neighborhood Walk Recap

Marcy Miller, of FHI, provided a recap of the November 28th neighborhood walk. The purpose of the walk was for residents to highlight features of the neighborhood that are important or are issues to them. The study team essentially would "look and listen". There were about 13-15 neighborhood residents and seven members of the project team in attendance. Marcy highlighted a few points made at the meeting and noted that a summary items heard at the walk would be posted to the project website in the next few days. A few members who attended the audience then reiterated points made on the walk, including really getting a handle on what the problem is that needs to be fixed. Another suggestion reiterated at the meeting was to provide improvements incrementally and verify that they are successful.

Recap of Existing Traffic Data

Maureen Chlebek, of McMahon Associates, recapped traffic data presented at the November PAC meeting, including intersection volumes and the capacity analysis. She noted that while most arterials have a morning traffic volume peak, a daytime low, and a very distinct PM peak, Route 9 has relatively high traffic volumes all day with only a small peak in the PM. The residents questioned whether the chart, which shows the peak from 3 to 5 PM, was correct. Residents noted that the peak was typically from 4 to 6 PM. The study area peak hour was identified as 4:45-5:45 based upon the intersection counts. Many residents also noted that the traffic volumes did not seem high to them (with the exception of the peak hours) and should not warrant improvements. Maureen noted that under future year traffic conditions, the traffic volumes occurring throughout the day will be comparable to today's peak hour traffic volumes.

Another unique characteristic about the travel on Route 9 is that the predominant direction of travel does not alternate in the morning and afternoon peak periods. In both peak periods, the eastbound traffic volume is predominant.

Maureen next discussed crash data. She noted that at the Route 9 / Damon Road intersection, angle collisions are almost as high as rear-end collisions. This is unusual for a signalized intersection, and may mean the people are taking risks in the intersection because of congestion. Most of the crashes occur here in the peak period. There was a question about what years the crash data included and did the types of collisions change after the intersection of Route 9/I-91 SB on-ramp was signalized in 2008? Maureen noted that the crash data was from 2005, 2006, and 2007. 2008 crash data is not yet available. Gary stated that the study team can complete a before and after comparison of this intersection once the data becomes available.

In addition, Maureen noted that there are a large number of injury crashes. There was a question on whether the crash data includes the driver's age? Maureen noted that this data does not, though the information is available in the crash database. Their concern is that there are a large number of young, inexperienced drivers in this area. To address the severity of the crashes in the study area, McMahon calculated equivalent property damage only (EPDO) crash rates, in which a weighted average is applied to crash rates to account for severity of accidents. Maureen stated that the intersection of Main Street at Pleasant Street has very high EPDO crash numbers.

There was a question as to whether crash rates were calculated for bicycle and pedestrian crashes, because a large number of bicyclists and pedestrians use the Pleasant Street / Main Street intersection. Maureen stated that crash rates were not estimated for bicycle and pedestrian crashes. However, MassDOT has identified the intersection of King Street/Pleasant Street/Main Street as the 39th highest EPDO crash location, the highest bicycle EPDO crash location and the 4th highest pedestrian crash cluster location in the state.

There was a question whether the team applied a bicycle level-of-service. While a bicycle level-of-service has not been applied, pedestrians are accounted for in the signals where there is pedestrian-only phasing.

Maureen followed up on questions about railroad and emergency preemptions. The at-grade railroad crossing at Damon Road is closed one time per day for two minutes. The intersection at King St and Damon Road typically has 12 fire/ambulance emergency signal preemptions per day, and the intersection at Route 9 and Damon Road typically has 10 fire/ambulance emergency signal preemptions per day.

Origin-Destination Data

Maureen next discussed the origin-destination data and the license plate survey. She reviewed the data collection methods. She emphasized that the study was particularly interested in examining the movements between the I-91 Interchanges 19 and 20. She asked the PAC to consider other areas for future planned license plate survey work.

The group spent time discussing Figures 5 and 6 of the handouts. There was discussion about how the graphics should be read and interpreted. There was a question whether three hours is enough time to collect accurate, sufficient data for the study. Maureen answered that the team was confident that the result were an accurate representation of weekday trip origins and destinations. There was a question if the data was collected when UMass was in session. The team answered that they confirmed with UMass that school was in session when the data was collected in May. The team collected this data as soon as they possibly could as the project started only a week earlier. In addition, there was a question as to whether the license plate survey used a time stamp. Maureen replied that there was a 5-minute time stamp put into place for the survey.

On Figure 5, there was a comment that the 19% includes people traveling to Hadley, not necessarily UMass. On Figure 6, there was the observation that the numbers from

the bridge seemed low, and thus, a full interchange at Exit 19 may not be warranted. Maureen noted that in addition to traffic shifts between Exits 19 & 20, a full interchange will likely result in traffic shifts between Route 5 and Route 9 as well as motorists seek the fastest travel route.

There was a comment that the team should get bicycle and pedestrian counts on the Rail Trail at Damon Road. PVPC has provided bicycle and pedestrian trail count, data to the project team. It was agreed that the project team would present this data to the PAC in the near future.

It was suggested that an additional origin-destination survey be conducted. Maureen noted that various methods of O-D survey were considered for this project. A postcard survey typically has a low return rate. Surveys can be conducted at a fixed point, such as a traffic signal, where surveyors approach motorists during the red phase of the signal. The team feels that the best, most cost effective way to get the data we are seeking is the license plate survey. The CT River Crossing Study, however, did complete a driver survey and the results will be reviewed for this study.

There was a question as to whether the UMass/Northampton pair was the top O-D pair from the CT River Crossing Study? Rich Masse, of MassDOT, said that he wasn't sure but would find out.

Future Year No Build Traffic Volumes and Intersection Analysis

Maureen next discussed Figures 7 and 8, which included future 2034 AM and PM Peak traffic volumes and LOS. Maureen noted that the team used a traffic volume increase of 1% per year, which is consistent with the traffic projections in the CT River Crossing Study. There was a request to provide information on the travel model used for the estimates. Maureen answered that the team researched prior studies in the area. The growth rates applied in those studies were based upon traffic models developed by PVPC and the Franklin Regional Council of Governments.

There were questions about whether traffic has declined in the past few years and ridership has increased. Nicole Rohan, of PVTA, stated that ridership increased last year but then leveled off in July. Before the economic downturn, however, the ridership was declining. There was a comment that big changes are anticipated as a result of resource depletion and global warming. These changes would include more funding and focus on transit planning. Nicole noted that while capital funds for transit planning may have risen, operating funds have actually declined in recent years.

There was a question about how bad the traffic really is, when compared to larger cities. Maureen answered that the traffic certainly was not as bad as Boston, but in the future, the traffic volumes in the study area would resemble today's peak volumes throughout the day. Then people are likely to seek other routes and may use neighborhood streets as opposed to the arterial roadways.

There was a comment that UMass should be more of a solution, because they are such a large part of the problem. It was noted that changes to the campus car regulations would require a major effort that only can be done by the school itself.

There was a comment to recognize induced traffic. "If we build it, they will come." Rich stated that it is difficult to forego improvements today for concerns about possible induced traffic in the future at currently underperforming intersections. Rich also stated that the team would collect traffic data from the past few years and look at the effect of the economy on traffic in this area.

Again, there was a call for a phased approach to improvements, to lessen the impact on residents and avoid induced demand.

Finally, there was a question about how far along the Damon Road Reconstruction Plan improvements are. Rich Masse stated that they are at the 25% design completion phase and are posted to our project website under project documents.

Next PAC Meeting / Other Items

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, February 22, 2010. The project team would check for meeting space at Bridge Street School first for availability and notify the PAC via email about the location.

Marcy told the PAC that there was a request to distribute all PAC members emails so that there can be a dialogue. She wanted permission to do this. Everyone agreed that this was not a problem, as long as the emailing did not get excessive.

In addition, Marcy stated that the project team could start a Twitter account for the project. The benefit of doing this is that anyone can sign up to receive the "tweets", that it was not just limited to the PAC. The negative aspect of doing this is the PAC would have to sign up, and not everyone would, so there would still be email updates. The PAC agreed that they prefer to ONLY receive emails. The PAC agreed that they prefer to ONLY receive emails and that Twitter will not be used for this project.