

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

**Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting # 1  
Monday, November 16, 2009  
JFK Middle School, Florence, MA**

**Meeting Summary**

**Attendees:**

PAC Members

Ned Hurley – Northampton Department of Public Works  
Bob Reckman – Northampton City Council  
Allan Byam – University of Massachusetts (UMass) Amherst  
Jerry Budgar – Ward 3 Neighborhood Association  
Frank J. Werbinski – Ward 3 Resident  
Christine Cahillane – Ward 3 Resident  
Marie Hess – Five Colleges, Inc.  
Mary Jane Bacon – Senator Rosenberg’s Office  
Nicole Rohan – Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)  
Danny 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

Marvin J. Ward - PVPC  
Tom Narrigan – Valley Area Transit / PVTA  
Gene Tacy – Ward 7 Councilor-Elect  
Angela Plassmann – Ward 3 Councilor-Elect  
W. Sydney Stern – Ward 3 Resident  
Luke Jaeger – Ward 3 Resident  
Bill Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident  
Joanne Mackiewicz – Ward 3 Resident  
Marianna Miken – Ward 3 Resident  
Elaine Jandu – Ward 3 Resident  
Erica Dickenson – Member of the Public  
Phil Brockleby – Member of the Public  
Mary Serreze – Member of the Public

Project Team

Rich Masse – Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), Highway  
Division, District 2 (MassDOT)  
Al Stegemann – MassDOT District 2

Gautam Sen – MassDOT  
Erik Abell – MassDOT  
Gary Bua – TranSystems  
Joe Cahill – TranSystems  
Maureen Chlebek – McMahon Associates  
Gary McNaughton – McMahon Associates  
Paul Schimek – TranSystems  
Bill Grace - TranSystems  
Marcy Miller – Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. (FHI)  
Jill Barrett - FHI

## **Welcome / Introductions**

Rich Masse, of MassDOT, welcomed everyone and thanked them for coming to the meeting. Rich acknowledged the high number of attendees and requested that the members of the public hold their questions to give the PAC members priority to discuss the data presented. He stated that a space of time was reserved at the end of the meeting for comments and questions from the public.

## **Project Background**

Gary Bua, the Project Manager from TranSystems, asked that everyone from the Project Team and on the PAC introduce him or herself. Gary reviewed the agenda for the meeting and information on the background and schedule of the project. Gary discussed the goals and the project / alternatives development process. The goal of this study is to develop improvements that will reduce congestion and improve mobility in the Interchange 19 area. At this point, there was a comment that it appeared that the assumption was that something must be done. Did it make sense to do nothing at all in the Interchange 19 area? Rich explained that one of the alternatives was indeed to look at the act of doing nothing, called a No Build Alternative.

## **Public Involvement**

Marcy Miller, of FHI, next distributed and presented the key points of the Draft Public Involvement Plan for the study. Key components of the Draft Public Involvement Plan include up to 10 PAC meetings, three public meetings, newsletters, and a project website. She guided the group through a draft layout of a website for the project, which will be located at [www.interchange19.org](http://www.interchange19.org). She stated that the website would include project meeting information, project documents, and a place where the public could ask questions or make comments and receive a response from the project team.

Marcy asked the group whether it would be beneficial to conduct a neighborhood walk with residents. This would essentially allow the residents to show the consultant team issues and concerns outside a meeting room, in a more relevant location. The PAC was quite interested in this and Christine Cahillane agreed to raise the topic at the Ward 3 meeting that week. She would then send a proposed date or two for the walk to the project team, via email.

There was a question whether the public could post comments directly to the website and comment on other citizens' comments. Marcy stated that, at this time, the project team was not intending to allow the public to post directly to the website. Marcy stated that the Team would compile the comments and post them on a monthly basis. People could view others' comments this way, but the website would not function as a blog. Finally, Marcy stated that the team would like to launch the website in the next two weeks.

## **Existing Conditions**

The project team next presented its findings for existing conditions. In particular, the team discussed data collections methods and results to date. Paul Schimek, of TranSystems, presented existing transit conditions. Paul noted that this study would incorporate and evaluate transit improvements as part of its alternatives analysis. He summarized the projects listed in the Connecticut River Crossing Study as "Transportation Demand Management Package 2" that relate to the current project study area. He noted that PVTA is the sole local public transit operator in the region, and that it has recently implemented some of the Intelligent Transportation Systems improvements described in "TDM Package 2." He described the three PVTA bus routes that operate through the corridor and mentioned that Peter Pan Bus Company provides long-distance bus service in the corridor on a route that operates from UMass Amherst to Springfield and beyond via downtown Northampton, Route 9, and I-91.

There was a question whether the team would look at incentives to get users out of their single-occupant vehicles and into transit. Paul mentioned that all people affiliated with the 5 Colleges receive free transit ridership as part of their ID card. He mentioned that similar programs have been expanded to other types of employers elsewhere. There was a question about what is known about reasons for using public transit and Park & Ride lots. Nicole Rohan, of PVTA, answered that her organization has recently completed transit rider surveys. She stated that surveyed riders would like more frequent service. She also said that the Park & Ride lots are not owned or operated by PVTA.

Paul next presented information on the existing bicycle and pedestrian network. He mentioned that sidewalks are lacking or in poor condition in a few parts of the study area, in particular along Damon Road. He noted that bicyclists use both the roadway network and also (along with pedestrians) can use trails. The Norwottuck Rail Trail was extended across Damon Road and under I-91; there is a current project to resurface and improve it. The Northampton Bike Path was very recently extended west to and across King Street. The remaining gap between the two trails may be filled as part of a proposed project to relocate Amtrak passenger rail "Vermont" service from the east back to the west side of the Connecticut River.

Gary Roux of PVPC stated that his agency has conducted more recent bicycle and pedestrian counts on the trails and could likely conduct more counts as part of the current study. There was a comment that bicyclists need to use the Coolidge Bridge and that high-speed merges to and from expressways can be dangerous for bicyclists.

Paul said that the design of on and off-ramps would consider bicyclists. It was confirmed that the study area does not include the Coolidge Bridge.

Bill Grace of TranSystems next reviewed the environmental data that has been collected thus far and would continue to be reviewed in this study. He explained that there were components of the natural environment that would be analyzed, as well as social, economic, and cultural issues and concerns. He pointed out several key areas that are particularly critical for this project including potential impacts to residences or businesses as well as the Elwell Recreation Area. There was a comment from a PAC member noting the importance of considering the potential impact on agricultural lands in the Pioneer Valley.

Maureen Chlebek, of McMahon, next presented the traffic data collected to date as part of this study, including roadway and signal plans, traffic volume data, accident data, travel time and delay studies, and an origin-destination survey. She explained the protocol for collecting traffic data and its life span. She presented data on traffic volumes, traffic safety, traffic operations, and the preliminary origin-destination analysis.

Maureen described the tools and methods used to collect the data. The team used automated traffic recorders on the highway and collected turning moving counts at intersections. Travel time and delay studies were conducted by actually driving routes in the study area and recording causes, locations, and durations of encountered delay. The origin-destination study consisted of a license-plate (LP) survey. Members of the PAC expressed serious concerns that the previous traffic counts and origin-destination (O-D) data conducted as part of the last study were not accurate. Maureen discussed how the LP survey was conducted. Counters posted at designated intersections recorded license plate data by turning movement. The LPs were then matched using a computer program, and the origin and destination information compiled. This origin-destination survey completed for this project is based on actual data, not assumptions. Ultimately, the PAC was interested in learning more information on the origin-destination analysis, asking for an entire meeting to be devoted to the topic. Specifically, the project team was asked to present information on specific directional movement percentages.

Maureen described the method being used to project future year 2034 traffic volumes in the study area. A growth rate of one-percent per year will be applied to the background traffic and anticipated traffic from known developments will be added to the street network.

### **Public Comments / Questions**

There was a comment that there really is not a lot of congestion during the non-peak hours. It seems that the impact to the neighborhood would be huge for peak-hour traffic improvements. There were comments opposing this comment, particularly that turning left out of Day Rd is much too difficult.

There was a concern that the LOS on Route 9 has worsened even though Table 6-1 of the CT River Crossing Study stated that it would improve if a traffic signal was placed at

the intersection of Route 9/I-91 SB on-ramp. It was noted that the congestion on the Coolidge Bridge has lessened since the bridge construction. Another recommendation was to prohibit first- and second-year UMass students from having cars on campus.

There was discussion at the pedestrian push signal on Damon Road. It backs up traffic through the intersection. There was a request to post the Damon Rd Reconstruction Plan on the project website. In addition, the effects of the at-grade train crossings and fire/ambulance were noted to increase congestion.

There was general support voiced for mass transit initiatives, particularly at the local colleges.

### **Next PAC Meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, December 7, 2009. The project team would check the community room at JFK Middle School for availability and notify the PAC via email about the location.