

**Beyond Lechmere Northwest Corridor Planning Project
Advisory Group Meeting**

**June 24, 2004
Visiting Nurses Association, Community Room
Somerville, MA**

Minutes

Introductions and Review of Minutes

Joe Cosgrove opened the meeting at 12:15 PM and invited those present to introduce themselves (see Attendance).

Mr. Cosgrove asked if there were any comments or edits to the minutes from the previous Advisory Committee meeting (6/3/04), which had been distributed previous to the meeting. Ellin Reisner, Somerville representative, said that the minutes referenced wording in the Project Scope that the project team was unable to identify. She offered to find the reference for the project team after the meeting. [The reference was located on Page 11 of the Project Scope in Phase Two-Conceptual Engineering & Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report, under Task 5-NEPA Draft Environmental Impact Statement/MEPA Draft Environmental Impact Report. The reference listed in italics was “This scope assumes that the level of environmental impacts associated with the MBTA’s preferred alternative are determined to be not significant, and that the FTA will require preparation of an Environmental Assessment (EA) published jointly with the DEIR. If the Preferred Alternative is likely to result in significant impacts (i.e., if it includes new light rail or bus rapid transit on new dedicated ROW alignment) it would require an Environmental Impact Statement rather than an EA.”] There were no other edits to the minutes.

Review and Approval of Advisory Committee Groundrules

Mr. Cosgrove then asked if anyone had any suggestions to the Committee Groundrules handout, which had been distributed at the previous meeting.

Joe Lynch, Somerville representative, proposed two alterations. First, he suggested that those who plan to make lengthy comments during the 10-minute public comment period put their remarks in writing and oral comments be limited to 2-3 minutes in order to allow everyone to speak. He also proposed a sign-up sheet for public comments. Further, Mr. Lynch suggested that in an absence of a consensus on a topic, the Chair recognize written submissions and include them in the final report. Lee Auspitz, Somerville representative, suggested that the language read, “Written submissions are invited. The final report record will include written submissions.”

Jim McGinnis, Somerville representative, said that responding to current meeting comments in writing would be impossible. Mr. Lynch added, in response to questions from Committee members, that the 2-3 minute period could be altered at the Chair’s

discretion. He formally moved for these additions to the Groundrules. Mr. Auspitz seconded the motion. The motion was carried, with one vote (Mr. McGinnis) in opposition.

Follow-up Items from 6/3 Meeting

Mr. Cosgrove said that he hoped to get all project material on the MBTA website (www.mbta.com) within a week or so. He noted that most information materials will be distributed to Committee members using e-mail, and that if anyone requires a different method of communication, they should let him know. He said that interested parties will receive meeting notices of Advisory Committee meetings.

Mr. Lynch suggested that notices for upcoming Advisory Committee meetings be posted on community cable bulletin boards.

Mr. McGinnis requested that information materials (minutes, etc.) be distributed to the Committee electronically, instead of in paper form, to allow for wider distribution. Mr. Cosgrove agreed. [Note: Documents will be mailed to those who have not provided the project staff with an email address.]

Overview of Existing Conditions

Mike McArdle, VHB, provided an overview of the Existing Conditions in the study area (the PowerPoint presentations from meetings will be available shortly on the MBTA's web site). He said the Existing Conditions report will be distributed to the Committee during the first week in July for review. [NOTE: The report will be distributed before the end of July.] The report will highlight the need for transit and mobility improvements in the area. It will provide descriptions of: the study area, traffic/roadways, congestion management, transit services, environmental justice and coordination with other projects. Mr. McArdle provided preliminary data on these areas, asking the Committee to provide feedback.

During the discussion of demographics, Catherine Preston, Cambridge representative, confirmed that the study was using 2000 data for residents and 1990 employer data.

Mr. Auspitz asked if population density data will be used. Mr. McArdle said it will.

During the discussion of congested areas, Barbara Rubel, Medford representative, asked if other areas could be included. Attendees offered Boston Ave., College Ave., Winthrop St., West Medford Square, Wellington, Rt. 16, Magoun Square, Main St. in Medford, and South Street in Medford as suggestions.

Robert Feigin, Medford representative, suggested removing Powder House Square from the list. He said he was concerned about the general inequity of the Existing Conditions presentation due to the absence of Medford in much of the analysis. For

example, he wanted to see the percent of residents who work in Medford included in the demographic information.

Ms. Reisner asked where the data on the traffic counts came from. Mr. McArdle said it came from the Mass Highway database. He added that all the data will be footnoted in the report. Ms. Reisner asked if the report was going to take into consideration new developments in the area. Mr. McArdle said that all data will be as up-to-date as possible, including environmental documentation and Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) modeling.

Bill White, Somerville representative, said he was concerned that the data being used was 14 years old. Mr. McArdle noted that when the 2000 Census data becomes available, it will be used.

Todd Blake, Somerville representative, said an important issue to consider was queue management, and it should be included in the analysis.

Jan Okolowicz, PB, then presented an overview of Transit Services in the area, including subway ridership/capacity, subway schedules, daily boardings at stations, and commuter rail ridership/capacity, commuter rail stations, bus routes, bus route ridership and frequencies, and utilization of “The Ride.” [See the PowerPoint for details.]

During the discussion of commuter rail, Mr. Lynch asked if the analysis will include where commuter rail boardings take place. Mr. Okolowicz said that station-by-station boarding counts will be provided.

Mr. Blake asked if double-decker commuter rail trains have any height restrictions that might impact service. Mr. Okolowicz noted that the MBTA is currently operating double-decker cars on the “South Side” of Boston because of the urgent need to address passenger capacity issues on those routes. He said that double-decker cars could also fit on the North Side routes. Mr. Blake asked if overhead bridge clearances need to take this into account. Mr. Okolowicz said that when they were originally delivered, double-decker cars were operated on the North Side routes. Any planning for new facilities as part of this project will take double-decker car clearance requirements into account.

Mr. White asked if there was analysis available of how different towns subsidized the MBTA system, noting that the Lowell Line only serves 10,000 commuters and Davis Square alone serves 10,000 riders. Mr. Cosgrove said that different modes serve different purposes. Mr. White said that the inner areas are subsidizing Rapid Transit. Mr. Cosgrove said this issue has arisen in the past, but no study has been done on it. Scott Darling, Conservation Law Foundation, said the study could be done, but the MBTA has not done it.

Mr. Okolowicz said that commuter rail focuses on longer distances—getting commuters into Boston. He said that this commuter rail ridership is sensitive to travel

time and adding intermediate stops will affect end-to-end travel time, sending ripple effects through the whole system.

Ms. Reisner suggested that the study also include commuter rail outboard boarding figures, particularly as concerns ridership to Brandeis. Mr. Okolowicz said they will be included.

During the discussion of bus services, Mr. Okolowicz noted that Somerville is a bus-served community. He explained how the No Build Alternative (the baseline alternative) will include elements intended to make the existing bus system operate better.

Mr. Auspitz asked if population density figures will be used in the analysis. Mr. McArdle said they will be included in the final report. Mr. Auspitz asked about the inclusion of public health statistics, such as cancer rates. Mr. McArdle said if the data is available, it will be taken into consideration. He added that the analysis will include Air Quality measurements. Mr. Okolowicz added that the Air Quality analysis will have to use emission rates for the advanced technology buses when analyzing bus service in the study horizon year.

Douglas Carr, Medford representative, asked that bus capacity also be included. He noted that the capacity for the #96 bus was over 100%.

Mr. Blake asked that personal trip travel time (which includes wait plus travel time) be measured. Mr. Okolowicz said CTPS will model this and will include the appropriate calculations of waiting times based on headways and standard transfer penalties.

An attendee suggested adding the #85 Spring Hill-Kendall/MIT bus route to the Existing Conditions tabulations.

During a discussion of “The Ride,” Mr. Okolowicz noted that ridership for Somerville, Medford, and Cambridge is below 2 percent for each municipality as a component of systemwide use. Ms. Bennett said rates may be low because the Ride is not close to public transit. Ms. Reisner added that another organization also provides paratransit in the area.

Mr. White said that the number of automobiles causes respiratory illness. He said a change in the bus system will not help this problem. Mr. Okolowicz explained that federal guidelines for the project require looking at the alternative of improving the existing bus system in developing a baseline alternative for the Environmental Impact Statement.

Kristine Wickham, VHB, presented an overview of Environmental Justice (EJ) issues. She said that local, state, and federal criteria for EJ populations will need to be taken into consideration. She said that the intent is to use the most comprehensive

measure. Ms. Wickham added that one of the goals of the study is to evaluate alternatives in terms of environmental justice benefits and burdens.

Mr. Cosgrove said that noting existing transportation burdens for these populations in the Purpose and Need Statement will also be a critical component. Mr. McArdle added that showing existing equities and inequities will be part of the analysis.

Mr. McGinness said that there needed to be active outreach to EJ populations during this project.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Cosgrove if the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Consent order allows events outside of control, such as 9/11, to delay this project and not meet the 2011 deadline. Mr. Cosgrove said there is discussion at the Secretariat level to resolve this issue of consent order commitments and financing. Mr. Lynch asked if an extension request has been filed. Mr. Cosgrove said it has not, but said that he expects the transportation and environmental agencies will be outlining a public process in the months ahead to address the fiscal realities and status of the legal commitments.

Wig Zamore, STEP, asked if DEP has been notified that the project is not on track. Mr. Cosgrove said schedules, priorities, funding will all be on the table as the agencies work to resolve the SIP/consent order issues.

During the discussion of coordination between projects, Mr. Feigin suggested including copies of Medford's Master Plan. Ms. Rubel noted that Tufts has just begun its Master Plan. Jim Gallagher of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council suggested including the Rt. 28 study as well.

Presentation and Discussion of Purpose and Need Statement

Mr. McArdle then distributed a draft version of the Purpose and Need Statement. He asked Committee members to review the document and provide feedback on it before the next meeting. Once evaluation criteria are established, the Committee can brainstorm potential alternatives.

Mr. McArdle said that it was critical to examine which alternative best fits the Purpose and Need, then look at specific impacts in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). He added that the Purpose and Need was critical in the process and in making the case for funding and implementing a project.

Mr. Auspitz asked if historical background should be included in the Purpose and Need. He noted that Somerville and Medford were built on a streetcar system, creating a specific pattern of settlement. Mr. McArdle said that was important information. Mr. Auspitz also noted the peculiarity of the governance issues—four separate political jurisdictions needing to coordinate and reach agreement.

Mr. Cosgrove invited the Committee to e-mail comments to him before the next meeting in early August. [The meeting will be on Thursday, August 12, noon to 2 PM, at the VNA Community Room on Lowell St. in Somerville.] He said that a new draft, incorporating comments, will be circulated before the next meeting. Ms. Preston asked that the new draft be distributed electronically. Mr. Cosgrove agreed.

Ms. Reisner asked the inclusion of bus improvements. Mr. McArdle said that a baseline alternative - Transportation Systems Management (TSM) - will have to be included. This will show the level of planned improvement such as the Urban Ring and other major highway changes. He noted that this alternative will show the bus network in the study horizon year. Mr. Cosgrove said that if the current bus problems are overcrowding or unreliable service, the study should show how moving bus riders onto other models could increase capacity and/or improve reliability. Ms. Reisner pointed out that the bus service is great, but it is inefficient due to the volume of traffic. Mr. McArdle said issues of maneuverability will be addressed as well.

A Committee member stated that the environmental justice issue should include issues of transportation equity. The alternative should serve people who need service, not just provide for getting automobiles off the road. Mr. Cosgrove said the evaluation criteria will capture this issue.

Mr. White asked for historic data on bus ridership. For example, when the Red Line extended to Davis Square, did bus ridership decrease? Mr. Auspitz noted that the planning figure for Davis Square boardings was 2,000-3,000, but the present-day reality is 10,000.

Mr. McGinniss said he had a problem with the way the Urban Ring counted ridership. He said that it gave special preference to bus instead of a better mode of service. He said this approach discounts the quality of service. Mr. McArdle said that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has changed its evaluation criteria to include measures that are designed to capture benefits to existing transit users.

Transportation Planning Process

Mr. Cosgrove then distributed a handout describing the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and the Transportation Planning Process (attached). He said that a longer version of the handout in brochure form is being prepared by the MPO and should be available in the next month.

Mr. Cosgrove said that this study is a corridor approach that feeds into the larger systems process of the Boston MPO Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The long-range plan vision is implemented through programming of federal transportation dollars for highway and transit projects in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). He also noted that the study needs to fit into the MBTA's 25-year transit plan, the Program for Mass Transit (PMT), as well as the MBTA's Capital Investment Program (CIP). He noted that Green Line to West Medford is in the long-range plan stage, although the

project planning has not been done and consequently assumptions made in the RTP and PMT may not turn out to be part of the defined project.

Ms. Reisner asked how the project was rated in the PMT. Mr. Cosgrove said it was rated as a medium-priority, with no funding sources identified.

Mr. Cosgrove said if the project is advanced in planning to engineering and design, the MPO would approve a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). Funding opportunities, such as New Starts a major source for expansion projects, would have to be identified.

Mr. Auspitz asked that since the New Starts funding is nationally competitive, if it made sense for the Purpose and Need to cite the high amount of transit use in the area. Mr. Cosgrove said that New Starts criteria may be a good place to start in developing evaluation criteria for this alternatives analysis. He noted that New Starts has broadened criteria to include user benefits beyond new riders. He also pointed out that federal funding may not be an option given other priorities and creative financing measures may need to be identified. At this alternatives analysis stage, however, we want to define the “best” project in terms of how it addresses the transportation problems we identify.

Ms. Preston suggested that the evaluation criteria for the different transportation planning processes be reviewed for the Committee. Mr. Darling offered to put together a memo describing how New Starts works.

Mr. Darling asked if this project was earmarked in the Transportation Bond Bill. Mr. Cosgrove said it is in the current version, but noted that inclusion in the bond bill does not guarantee access to actual funds. Mr. Darling noted that communities might need to contribute toward the financing.

Mr. Auspitz said that at some point, the Committee will need talking points about why this project is a good idea. Mr. Cosgrove said facts about the various project options will be generated by this study.

Mr. Okolowicz noted that coordination between regional transportation projects demonstrates commitment on a federal level to the planning process.

Mr. White said that after reading the Committee Groundrules, he fears the fact that the MBTA retains final authority over the outcome. Mr. Cosgrove said the Committee’s advisory role is an important one and he reiterated that at this planning stage we are simply narrowing alternatives to viable options for detailed impact and cost/benefit analysis, not deciding on a LPA. He said he expects that there could be three alternatives and a baseline low-cost capital improvement to come out of this process. If there is a Committee consensus on three alternatives, those three will advance. He noted that ultimately, policymakers will make the investment decisions and hopefully this planning process can provide the data and analysis to inform those decisions.

Mr. Blake asked Mr. Cosgrove to define consensus. Mr. Cosgrove said that he preferred to let the process play out. Mr. Feigin said he wanted consensus to be defined at this time and suggested it include a majority of members of each community. Melissa Bennett, Medford representative, said she was concerned that each community did not have equal representation on the Committee. Mr. Cosgrove said that Somerville was the primary affected community. Mr. Feigin disagreed and said Medford was a co-primary community. He said until told otherwise, the assumption is that West Medford is the northern boundary of the study area. Mr. Auspitz said that the project is operating under a mitigation rubric, and Somerville is the target. A Somerville representative said that Somerville and Medford had many mutual goals, and much of this will settle itself.

The representative added that the Committee should be discussing the best alternative to meet needs, not just what is fundable. Mr. Cosgrove said they should focus on the best project that addresses real transportation problems, but the planning group should also be cognizant of the regional transportation planning context and fiscal realities.

Ms. Rubel asked that the MBTA define the project in the context of Eastern Massachusetts New Starts competition.

Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held on **Thursday, August 12** at noon. Ms. Rubel offered to try to find meeting space at Tufts University. Ms. Preston offered the Cambridge City Hall Annex as backup, but noted there was no parking there. (We learned after the meeting that space is unavailable at Tufts for August 12th, so the next meeting will be held at the VNA Community Room on Thursday, August 12 at noon.)

Open Forum

Steven Oakland, Somerville resident, encouraged the MBTA to offer project documents on its website. He said that a Green Line connection between Tufts main campus and medical school would be highly utilized.

Mr. Zamore noted that the House had authorized \$259.9 in the Transportation Bond Bill, and it had not yet passed the Senate. He said that he wanted to know more about the 75% of non-commuters on the system. He said that including a revenue cost analysis was a good idea. He also wanted to see an on-time analysis included. He advocated using a bigger screen at the next meeting. He asked for two weeks notice for each meeting, and that information materials be sent out a week in advance.

Mr. Zamore added that the study needs to address EJ issues. He said that EJ communities have a 35% greater mortality rate. He added the project needs to consider public health impacts based on population density figures (a per square mile analysis). He also encouraged the MBTA to conduct more EJ outreach. Mr. McArdle said that the project was in the very early phases, and the more detailed analysis (EIS) will come later. He added that this baseline data will be included in the Existing Conditions report.

Mr. McGinnis said that EJ outreach needs to be done at an early stage according to state regulations. Mr. Cosgrove noted that after Labor Day, the MBTA plans to hold Community Meetings. He encouraged Committee members to offer suggestions to broaden outreach for these meetings and noted this will be an agenda item for the August 12th meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:20 PM.

Action Items:

- Revise Groundrules to include suggestions from Advisory Committee and distribute prior to the next meeting
- Put project information on MBTA website
- Distribute all information materials (minutes, etc.) to the Committee electronically (unless the participant does not supply a web email address)
- Send Existing Conditions report to Committee in July
- Distribute longer MPO handout, when available
- Incorporate Committee comments into new Purpose and Need and distribute electronically before August meeting

**Beyond Lechmere Northwest Corridor Planning Project
Advisory Group Meeting**

June 24, 2004

**Visiting Nurses Association, Community Room
Somerville, MA**

Attendance

Lee Ausptiz*	
Jeff Bennett*	Charles River TMA
Melissa Bennett*	
Todd Blake*	City of Somerville
Greg Boune	Somerville resident
Pat Camtillon	City of Medford
Doug Carr*	
Brendan Chisholm	Office of Rep. Ciampa
Scott Darling*	Conservation Law Foundation
Bob Feigin*	
Bettina Fest	Office of Rep. Jehlen
Geraldine Freda*	City of Medford
Jim Gallagher	MAPC
Cara Glenn	City of Somerville
Seth Goldstein*	
Joe Kelley	Office of Rep. Toomey
Adam Knight	Office of Sen. Shannon
Ken Krause*	City of Medford
Jeff Levine*	
Joe Lynch*	
Jim McGinnis*	STEP
Charles E. O'Brien	Somerville DPW
Tuck O'Brien	City of Somerville
Steven Oakland	Somerville resident
Brock Parker	Somerville Journal
Larry Parnell*	Cambridge Pedestrian Committee
Catherine Preston*	City of Cambridge
Ellin Reisner*	
Barbara Rubel*	Tufts University
Nelson Salazar*	
Bill White*	Somerville Board of Aldermen
Rick Willette*	Somerville DPW
Wig Zamore	STEP
Joe Cosgrove	MBTA Planning Dept.

Regan Checchio
John Gonzalez
Mickey Krockmalmic
Mike McArdle
Kristine Wickham
Jan Okolowicz
John Weston

Regina Villa Associates
DHK Architects
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VHB
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