

MEMORANDUM

DATE February 24, 2011
TO Transportation Planning and Programming Committee
FROM Anne McGahan and Mike Callahan, MPO Staff
RE Public Outreach Feedback on Draft Needs Assessment

INTRODUCTION

The Boston Region MPO held a series of public meetings in February to gather feedback on the draft transportation needs assessment conducted as a component of the next Long-Range Transportation Plan, Paths to a Sustainable Region. Meetings were held on February 10 in Saugus, February 15 in Needham, and February 16 in Boston. Additionally, Friends of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail invited staff to Concord on February 17 for a meeting and the MPO held a Transportation Equity Forum in Boston on February 23. (The feedback received at the Transportation Equity Forum will be presented in a final version of this memorandum.) Approximately 130 people have attended the Plan-related meetings through February 18.

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

Many diverse viewpoints were expressed at the meetings. Following is a summary of views that were expressed repeatedly. A more complete description of the comments made at the meetings can be found in the summaries that follow this section.

- A needs assessment is a good way to start the planning process.
- Economic development is a need for the Boston region. The transportation needs that support economic development projects should be identified.
- The MPO should prioritize the needs.
- The MPO should study the total cost of the needs so the magnitude of the financial shortfall is understood.
- The cost effectiveness of projects should be measured so the projects that best solve the region's needs are programmed.
- Trails provide non-motorized connections between activity centers and transit stations. They support public health and protect the environment.
- Trucks are a burden on our highways. There is a need to use the freight rail system to support efficient freight distribution.

MEETING SUMMARIES

Saugus Workshop

Meeting participants made the following comments:

- Route 1 is designed to 1930s standards and needs to be upgraded. However, the highway should not be expanded as this will shift congestion to other portions of the highway and have negative consequences for the communities along the highway.
- There is a lack of transit service to Lynn. Extending the Blue Line to Lynn will encourage good land use development.
- The North Shore Alliance for Economic Development listed their five transportation priorities for 2011. These projects are supported by the Alliance for their potential to create a more vibrant economic foundation for the North Shore:
 - Reconstruction and improvements on Route 128, Exit 19 at Brimbal, Sohier, and Dunham: This project would facilitate the development of 250 acres.
 - Route 1 Improvement Project, widening of Route 1 between Route 60 (Copeland Circle) and Route 99, and the Bell Circle upgrade: The proposed gaming facility at Suffolk Downs will make this project even more important.
 - Blue Line extension to Revere and Lynn: The goal for 2011 is to complete the Environmental Impact Report and for the project to be in the Long-Range Transportation Plan.
 - Parking Garage and Train Station Upgrades in Beverly and Salem
 - Route 128 Corridor Study: This study would determine improvements that can eliminate traffic slowdowns on Route 128 at the Lowell Street and Route 114 interchanges.

Needham Workshop

Meeting participants made the following comments:

- There is bad congestion in the Needham Street/Highland Avenue corridor connecting Newton and Needham. This area would benefit from an extension of the Green Line along the existing rail bed that runs along the corridor. It would stimulate economic development in area of the New England Business Center. It is an economically important area for the state because of the potential to create jobs in the area. The bottlenecks there discourage business activity.
- Economic development is not happening along the transit corridors in the West Corridor.
- It's not clearly laid out what transportation investments are needed to support economic growth and the many large economic development projects identified in the needs assessment. A connection needs to be made in the needs assessment between the region's economic needs and the transportation needs that can support them. The existing and proposed developments should be noted. For instance, the Westwood Station project depends on improving the I-93/I-95 interchange in Canton and development along Route 128 in Newton and Needham would be supported by a transit connection.
- The MPO should consider return on investment in its projects. Where can it get the biggest bang for its investments? Extending the Green Line to Needham would have large

economic benefits.

- Rail trails serve a need to connect activity centers and transit stations with non-motorized transportation options. There are many minor, unused branches off of rail lines that could provide more of these connections. They also can improve our health, although they are not simply for recreation. They could support commuting, too.
- MassDOT needs to spend more on the transportation enhancements program.
- The MPO is not funding or planning to fund many shared-use paths. There should be more funding allocated to them.
- The MPO needs to study how the projected 70 percent increase in freight volume will affect the transportation system in each of the corridors.
- The Bay Colony Rail Trail would help connect to activity centers and the Needham Line commuter rail and would give people other transportation options in this congested area.
- Freight rail routes are not mapped in the needs assessment. These should be mapped along with the class and speed restrictions of the lines. People should know where this infrastructure is, even if it's abandoned. These contiguous corridors are valuable.
- The MPO should identify the total cost of the region's maintenance needs. This number would be much larger than the funds available.
- The biggest need in the Boston region to support the President's high speed rail initiative is the proposed North-South Rail Link.

MPO Open House Sessions

Meeting participants made the following comments:

- More bicycle and pedestrian counts on the roadway network are needed.
- Data on crashes between bicyclists and pedestrians are needed. The Registry of Motor Vehicles only collects data when an automobile is involved in the accident.
- There is a severe funding shortfall. The needs should be presented in a way that makes the priorities clear to the public. Additional funding is a huge need.
- Freight is often ignored in regional transportation planning. The relocation of the freight rail terminal in Allston needs to be addressed in the needs assessment. Efficient freight distribution contributes to economic development.
- The MPO should use its big picture view of the region to consider how distribution of goods can be done more efficiently. This would give the municipalities an understanding of the value of industrial land. The distribution sites, and possible future distribution sites, should be mapped. MassEcon is a group that can help identify sites.
- The needs assessment is the right way to start the process. It's not perfect, but is a very good step forward.
- Transit mode share should be examined in the same way that walk and bike mode share were studied. The role of transit is undervalued when mode share is studied at the regional level, rather than studying the mode share of transit in areas where it's available.
- The MPO should study the total cost of the needs and compare it to the funds available. This could be a Unified Planning Work Program study.
- The MPO should study the cost effectiveness of projects. For instance, it could study the carbon dioxide emissions reduced per dollar spent on the project.

- The MPO should highlight projects that would be in the Plan if more funds were available.
- Commuter rail service is needed in parts of the Central Area. Service is spotty at Ruggles and Yawkey Stations.
- The Longwood Medical Area is dependent on cross-town buses. There is a need for better cross-town service.
- The Green Line needs capacity improvements.
- The Longwood Medical Area has 10,000 more employees in the base year than are identified in the demographics.

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Meeting

Staff gave an overview of the Long-Range Transportation Plan development process and took questions and recorded comments. Approximately 70 people attended the meeting, which was broadcast on local cable television.

Meeting attendees made the following comments:

- The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is the only rail trail project included in the current Long-Range Transportation Plan that does not have an earmark associated with it. There should be more trails in the Plan.
- The trail will have negative effects on White Pond and other sensitive areas. The trail is more of a want than a need.
- Freight transportation is an important issue and the closing of the Allston rail terminal is a concern. However, the former rail corridor that would be home to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail was not an economically successful enterprise. Truck traffic is a problem in the nation, but there is not enough heavy industry to significantly divert freight from trucks to railroads. Meanwhile, bicycle and pedestrian transportation modes are becoming more important.
- Towns along the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail have shown their support for the project by spending Community Preservation Act funds to advance its design.
- The Bay Colony Rail Trail should be included in the Plan's Universe of Projects. The trail has broad support in Newton, Dover, and Medfield. However, Needham would prefer an extension of the Green Line along the corridor.
- Trails are needed because they allow residents to travel within and between towns without an automobile. Trails should be treated more equitably. There is more visibility of the importance of trails at the federal and state level.
- It was requested that the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail be included in the 2015 element of the Transportation Improvement Program.

MEETING ATTENDANCE

Saugus

Jane Ahern-DeFillippi of Melrose

Bill Luster, Executive Director of the North Shore Alliance for Economic Development

Jamie Marsh, community development director of the City of Lynn

Fred Moore, Association for Public Transportation

James Tozza, President of Bike to the Sea
John Walkey, Massachusetts field director for Transportation for America
Sheri Warrington, Senator McGee's office.

Needham

Devra Bailin, Needham Economic Development Director
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley representative to the Regional Transportation Advisory Council
Howard Erlichman
State Representative Denise Garlick
Michael Greis, Green Needham
Joel Lebow of Needham
Susan McGravey, Green Needham
Steve Olanoff, Westwood representative to the Regional Transportation Advisory Council
Arnold Pinsley of Natick
Betty Soderhold of Needham
Arnie Soolman of Needham
Tad Stanley, Needham Bikes and the Bay Colony Rail Trail
Heather Urwiller, Randolph Planning Department
Jerry Wasserman, Needham Selectman
Dick Williamson of Sudbury

Boston

Wayne Amico, VHB
Louise Baxter, MBTA Riders' Union
Joe Cosgrove, MBTA
Tom Broadrick, Duxbury Planning Department
Pat Brown of Sudbury
Debbie Burke, City of Malden
Paul Carter
Allan Chiocca, Rockland Town Administrator
Michelle Ciccolo, Town of Hudson
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley representative to the Regional Transportation Advisory Council
John Diaz, GPI
Trish Domigan, VHB
Jim Fitzgerald, World Tech Engineering
Marzie Galazka, City of Everett
Stephan Gavin, MBTA Riders' Union
Meaghan Hamill, Senator Thomas McGee's office
Sarah Hamilton, MASCO
George Howie, GPI
Kristina Johnson, Quincy Planning Department
Tom Kadzis, Boston Transportation Department
Erin Kinahan, MassDOT District 6
Larry Koff of Brookline

John Lucas of Rockland
Alan Moore, Friends of the Community Path
Eric Moskowitz, Boston Globe reporter
Rich Parr, A Better City
Stephanie Pollack, Dukakis Center, Northeastern University
Rich Reine, Town of Concord
Bill Renault, Town of Concord
Richard Schoenfield, Boston Society of Civil Engineers
Elizabeth Schoetz, Senator Katherine Clark's office
Bill Smith, Town of Brookline
Ed Tarallo, Woburn Planning Department
Joe Viola of Brookline
David Watson, MassBike
Lynn Weissman, Friends of the Community Path
Tom Yardley, MASCO
George Zambouras, Town of Reading

MPC/mpc

Encl.