

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION – OFFICE OF TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

STATE FREIGHT AND RAIL PLAN

CENTRAL REGION MEETING NOTES

LOCATION OF MEETING: Central Massachusetts Regional Planning
Commission, Union Station, 2 Washington Sq. Worcester, MA

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: November 3, 2008 – 1:00 p.m.

MEETING ATTENDANCE:

Public attendees who signed in:

Brian Solomon	Monson	Robert Bentley	Mass Central Railroad
Eric Denoncourt	Town of Shrewsbury	Stephen O'Neil	Worcester Regional Transit Authority
Paula Brouillette	Douglas	John LaPoint	South Grafton
Frank DeMasi	Wellesley	Tom Daley	Town of Newton
Jo Hart	Worcester	Gary Bechtholdt	Whitinsville
Walter Bonin	Marlborough	Rick Sousa	Intransit Container, Inc.
Adam Shuster	Ashland	Richard Rydant	Central Mass Regional Plan. Com.
John Upton	Worcester Polytech	Sujatha Mohanakrishnan	Central Mass Regional Plan. Com.
Jessica Strumkin	495/Metrowest Part.	Shalini Sen	Central Mass Regional Plan. Com.
George Bell	E BSR Railroad	Bill Moisuk	Central Mass Regional Plan Com
Stephen Crane	City of Worcester	Mary Ellen Blunt	Central Mass Regional Plan Com.
Rich Brown	Transpo Industries	Brook Blodget,	Holden
David Crowell	Pembroke	P. Scott Conti	Providence & Worcester Railroad
Dan Bigda	West Brookfield	Kristin Wood	Office of Congressman Olver
Kelly Callahan	Holden	Brad Harris	Montachusett Regional Planning Com.
Mark Purple	Ashland	George Snow	Montachusett Regional Planning Com.
Atty. Leonard Singer	Boston	Henry Lane	Whitinsville
Armand Carpentier	Charlton	Claire O'Neill	Mass Office of Business Development,
Shyla Matthews	Mass Development,	Susan C. Templeton	Office Rep Harold P. Naughton Jr.,
George Casey	Natick	Chuck Anastas	Marlborough

Executive Office of Transportation Staff:

Thomas Cahir, Deputy Secretary
Ned Codd, Office of Transportation Planning, Study Project Manager
Paul Nelson, Office of Transportation Planning
Timothy Doherty, Transportation Programs

Consultant Team:

Ronald O'Blenis, HDR, Project Manager
Daniel Hodge, HDR
Jonathan Lee, HDR
Dennis Coffey, HNTB
Jill Barrett, Fitzgerald & Halliday
Jim Stoetzel, Transit Safety Management

HANDOUTS: Summary of purpose of Massachusetts State Freight and Rail Plan

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: This was one of five regional public stakeholder meetings that were held in October and November 2008 to provide information on the Massachusetts Freight and Rail Plans being developed, and to receive input from stakeholders about needs and priorities.

BACKGROUND: The Massachusetts Executive Office of Transportation has begun a comprehensive evaluation of the Commonwealth's freight and rail transportation system their operations, and effect on economic development and quality of life. The evaluation will conclude with the publication of two separate documents. The first is a State Freight Plan that will be multi-modal (includes air, rail, truck and maritime transport) and intermodal (transportation by more than one mode, e.g. truck and rail) in its scope, analysis, and recommendations. The second is a comprehensive State Rail Plan that will include a detailed analysis of all rail infrastructure and operations, both freight and passenger. The study began in the spring of 2008 and will conclude in the summer of 2009. To date the study team has researched existing conditions, interviewed numerous stakeholders including shippers, receivers, transportation managers and operators of all transportation modes and intermodal facilities, regional planning agencies, economic development officials and freight trade representatives.

Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Ned Codd, Project Manager for EOT, thanked everyone for attending the meeting and reviewed the purpose of the Massachusetts Freight and Rail Plan. Mr. Codd also expressed gratitude to the Central Massachusetts and Montachusett Regional Planning Commissions for their assistance with planning and outreach for the meeting. Mr. Thomas Cahir, Deputy Secretary for EOT spoke about his agency's current involvement in the proposed transaction between EOT and CSX Railroad in Massachusetts. The transaction will result in expanded commuter rail service to Worcester; will improvement vertical clearances on CSX to accommodate unrestricted movement of double stack commuter trains to the Worcester area, and sets out a plan for acquisition by EOT of secondary CSX freight lines in eastern Massachusetts. Mr. Ronald O'Blenis, Project Manager for the HDR Consultant Team, made a presentation that covered the topics of freight movement and trends, truck freight, maritime ports, airports, freight rail and passenger rail. He noted a copy of each regional presentation would be posted on the study website: www.massfreightandrailplan.com. Mr. O'Blenis paused at the end of each topic and asked attendees to comment on issues and ask questions. He encouraged people to let the study team know if the information presented on trends, freight characteristics and movements reflected their views on freight in their region and to provide local information they would like the Consultant Team to consider. Meeting attendees provided input throughout the meeting.

Summary of Public Comment and Questions

Freight Movement and Trends

[Please note questions or comments made by members of the public are in italics]

How do Massachusetts freight movements compare with Connecticut or New Hampshire? (But be careful not to use just route miles because the high volume of passenger rail for Metro North may skew the results).

We do not have data focused on comparisons to those two states but we are specifically looking at regional connections in the freight and rail systems beyond the Massachusetts border and thus are incorporating freight flows to, from and through Massachusetts and the connecting infrastructure in nearby states.

How much freight movement through Massachusetts is destined for other New England States? Are we the gateway to northern New England?

The study will include a detailed commodity flow analysis including freight movement through Massachusetts bound for northern New England.

Is there a trend that more companies are leaving the state? Our concern is business decline.

The consultant is examining how the policies in place are driving the decisions by companies to locate. We will also recommend policies or strategies that would help retain/attract business.

What are the trends of freight-related businesses locating in Massachusetts?

The trend is downward. There is more freight flows inbound as we are a consumer state – in fact Massachusetts is number three in the US in per capita income, an indication of our purchasing power. While we can't totally reverse the trends of freight-dependent businesses, we are looking for opportunities to mitigate it. Trends are being examined, such as the potential long term cost of fuel and the preservation of land for industrial uses. The planning effort will identify opportunities to address issues and keep more jobs in Massachusetts.

Look at companies that are growing. As they become larger they leave the state.

Moving distribution centers west puts more pressure on truckers. And companies are being targeted and wooed with a variety of incentives. Reebok will be moving its entire distribution system to Spartanburg, North Carolina.

Is the obsolescence of our freight rail infrastructure leading to companies leaving? We have an antiquated system.

This study is specifically examining the role of freight and rail in terms of the state's economic competitiveness, and strategies to increase competitiveness.

What are the complete freight flows from origin to destination?

Our sources of freight flow data cover freight flows across all modes for 2007 down to the county level, with information on origin-destination patterns. As mentioned above, the study is producing a detailed commodity flow analysis.

How do you calculate secondary traffic?

Many freight trips involve more than one mode and often a stay at a warehouse before final shipment. That second move (i.e., from warehouse to retailer) is considered secondary traffic, and it also includes much of the larger parcel shipments from companies like UPS and FedEx. The plan will provide more detail on commodity-specific freight shipping patterns to better understand the nature of secondary traffic, which is probably more local/regional compared to long-haul commodity moves.

How is the location of a distribution center figured out?

Decisions about location are made based on land costs, ease of permitting, size of markets, travel time and access to markets, fuel consumption and other factors.

Do you have any data on the difference between primary rail, secondary truck or primary truck to secondary truck?
We do not have the answers today but are looking to understand it better (see above).

In Massachusetts, from an economic standpoint, we need to understand our assets (such as an educated workforce) to be attractive to businesses, and be realistic about our best economic opportunities (which may not always involve heavy freight use).

How much freight from northern New England and Canada is forced to use trucks because of the poor condition of the railroads?

What is the study's source of data of outbound freight?

Our primary data source on freight flows is Global Insight's TRANSEARCH data, and that is being supplemented by data from the Rail Waybill, the Federal Highway Administration Freight Analysis Framework (FAF) and input from freight shippers and carriers.

Historically, Boston & Maine and Pan Am railroads moved lumber but the rail infrastructure is in bad shape, how much loss in rail transport to trucks is caused by the poor condition of infrastructure? How much of that is now by rail and how much by truck?

Truck Freight

I am from the I-495 area and the increasing amount of trucks on the road is diminishing our road capacity.

Because of the relatively high cost for rail service from the New York/New Jersey area to Worcester, the volume of truckloads (which has become more price competitive) is going up and the volume of rail loads is down from 350 to 100 per week.

The plan should address the trucking industry trend towards double trailers.

Ports– Maritime and Air

Where is the short sea shipping planned?

New Bedford is looking to set up opportunities there because they have rail connections. Fall River is trying to set up roll on roll off capabilities at its port.

The problem with short sea shipping is that New York and New Jersey do not have capacity at their ports. People are not going to put goods on a boat and then have to put them on a truck. Bridgeport and Albany tried roll on and roll off and it failed. Don't create something that has to be subsidized.

The Seaport Advisory Council is aware of these failures but wants to consider the option. It failed because intermodal facilities were not available. In some parts of the country, roll on/roll off is viable but our rail system won't support the high speeds needed to make it work. And short sea (or coastal) shipping could include longer-distance market such as Virginia.

Is there any freight coming from other Massachusetts airports? The report will be less credible if not included.

Yes. The data you have seen today are of international air freight movement, not domestic. Domestic air cargo data trends will be included in the report.

Rail - Freight

What can be done to increase rail volumes along the I-95 corridor to help make shipping and highway travel more efficient?

We recognize that this is a major corridor and ways to make it more efficient will be explored, in particular based on work by the I-95 Corridor Coalition.

Will trucking companies support a shift to rail and vice versa?

The presentation has not touched on land use planning. The Blackstone Valley is a perfect place for distribution centers. The Providence-Worcester Rail is an excellent resource. However, not long ago BJs built a large warehouse on Route 146, one mile away from the Providence-Worcester rail line. Now we have lots of trucks on our small roads without any linkage or use of rail. There does not seem to be a sense of urgency for communities to consider land use decisions that have huge cumulative impacts (i.e., increased truck volumes on local roads). Freight oriented development should maximize multi-modal connections, not just trucks.

There is a need to help communities consider rail as part of land use development decisions.

Are rail carriers having conversations and working with government and town planners to identify opportunities for rail?

Yes.

How does the Port of Providence factor into the freight system?

Providence-Worcester railroad is working with communities. The biggest challenge is to get communities to agree to support rail freight. We have capacity that is not utilized in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. There has been a lot of improvement in the Port of Worcester in the last few years. We are now able to move 80% of the coal bound for the power plant in Holyoke by rail rather than by truck. Providence-Worcester rail has taken initiative to pay to modify bridges to accommodate double stack rail.

The policy part of the rail plan is essential. We need to have consensus on how we place distribution centers and consider the resources we have to move goods around. Local decisions can have a big regional impact. It will be important to develop policy that decision makers will support, and ideally improve coordination between economic development organizations, communities, and the transportation industry (private and public).

The study can help facilitate understanding at the local level of the challenges, opportunities and benefits of freight-related decisions and policy. The study will identify regional distribution facilities but not to the level of detail of listing rail sidings or individual parcels.

I would guess in the case of the BJ distribution facilities, most of the costs of improving roads were shouldered by the municipality or the state. Other states provide funds to improve private rail infrastructure, but Massachusetts does not.

We need to address the fact that most roadway improvement costs are borne by the Commonwealth and most rail improvement costs are borne by private industry. Rail needs more public support.

There seems to be a lot of emphasis on accommodating bridges for double stack rail cars, what exactly needs to be done? Can you tell me how many bridges?

There are 32 bridges between New York and Worcester on the CSX line, with 17 set to be improved by CSX and 15 by EOT. Further information on other vertical clearance issues across all rail lines will be discussed in the report.

Be aware of the competitive side of moving freight. The American Trucking Association is a strong lobbying organization. Just as rail operators want to move to heavier cars and double stacking, truckers want to increase the use of double trailers to try to stay cost competitive with rail.

The state has ownership of short lines that could be great infrastructure for branch lines.

Rail - Passenger

There does not seem to be any discussion about passenger rail between Worcester and Springfield and there should be.

With all the other initiatives in the state, this is not a near-term priority. While there are limitations based on current rail infrastructure between Worcester and Springfield, the state and other public officials are planning to consider and evaluate this connection more closely in the future.

What about electrifying rail between Boston and Springfield?

This is not likely to happen. The New Haven-Hartford-Springfield line will remain non-electrified.

Can you discuss current MBTA planning for expansion?

The MBTA has been extending commuter lines and frequency of service in Massachusetts. Expansion must be done in a coordinated way, on a step by step basis, considering capacity, maintenance, stations and freight needs. There are real capacity issues such as additional tracks at South Station, especially if and when the South Coast Rail project is implemented.

We need to bring up issues that have been on the table 3-4 years such as having a direct connection between Worcester and Providence so they make it into the plan. What is the problem with getting passenger rail from Worcester to Providence? It's a better route to New York City than traveling to Boston to get the train to New York. Worcester, in its central location and as the second largest city in Massachusetts, may be seen as a rail hub.

Look at passenger rail in the Blackstone Valley, connections between Worcester and New London, Worcester to Ayer.

People want to see a "vision" to assure the public the state is aware of the need to move people around and it should reflect the long term needs of Massachusetts. In this context, it's important to look at historical rail routes to help visualize what the system could be.

This study is looking at policy, not just concerns of the present, and is planning to include a "vision" as part of the plan.