EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL STUDY

Public Meeting #3 – Summary
Thursday, October 22, 2020
Online Zoom Meeting

Advisory Committee (AC) Attendees & Alternates

Representative Mindy Domb, State House of Representatives
Senator Adam Hinds, Massachusetts State Senate
Clete Kus, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC)
Senator Eric Lesser, Massachusetts State Senate
Jim Miner, Office of Congressman Seth Moulton
Ari Morton, Office of Representative Lindsay Sabadosa
Maureen Mullaney, Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)
Representative Smitty Pignatelli, State House of Representatives
Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)
Representative Todd Smola, State House of Representatives

Additional Elected Officials

Senator Anne Gobi, MA State Senate
Representative William Straus, State House of Represenatatives

MassDOT Attendees

Meredith Slesinger, MassDOT Rail and Transit
Ethan Britland, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Patrick Nestor, MassDOT Legislative Affairs
Makaela Niles, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning
Judi Riley, MassDOT Office of Communications
Sarah Bradbury, District 3

Project Team Attendees

Drew Galloway, WSP – Consultant Team Project Manager
Ned Codd, WSP
Sophie Cohen, WSP
Laura McWethy, AECOM
Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates (RVA)
Emily Christin, RVA

Spanish Language Interpreter
Gabriela

Public Attendees (see page 11)

Meeting Purpose
The purpose of this meeting was to present the study's analysis of the final three alternatives and to gather feedback from attendees on the analysis of the final three alternatives and the Draft Report.

Materials
PowerPoint Presentation[1]

PRESENTATION
Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates (RVA), welcomed attendees to the meeting. She reviewed the process for participating in the meeting using the Zoom application and choosing the correct "language channel" or closed captioning. She introduced the members of the project team and read the meeting agenda. Ms. Farrell passed the presentation to Ethan Britland, MassDOT Project Manager.

Review of Study Process and Next Steps
Mr. Britland outlined the study process and the steps completed to date. He noted the study is a conceptual planning study and is near completion. The study's technical analysis/alternatives analysis is complete, and a Draft Report is out for a 30-day public comment period. Next steps include public comment on the study findings and the Draft Report, and the release of the Final Report. He noted the importance of Public Involvement in the planning process, including three public meetings and six Advisory Committee meetings.

Review of Three Final Alternatives Selection
Mr. Britland reviewed the final three alternatives that were chosen for further analysis since the last public meeting:

- Alternative 3: Passenger rail between Pittsfield and Boston with upgrades to existing track
- Alternative 4: Passenger rail between Pittsfield and Boston with new high-speed track in existing alignment between Springfield and Worcester
- Alternative 4/5 Hybrid: Passenger rail between Pittsfield and Boston with new high-speed track between Springfield and Worcester and priority realignments

Mr. Britland noted all three alternatives include rail service between Pittsfield and Boston, with stops in Chester and Palmer via a service that shares the corridor with CSX. As the alternatives go

[1] The presentation and a recording of the meeting are available on the study website, www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study

up in number, the level of infrastructure investment increases to improve speeds and reduce travel times.

Mr. Britland noted Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 Hybrid include segments of separate high-speed track. He explained the legend of the alternative graphics show double tracking (existing is in black, new double track is in yellow). Alternative 4 shows new separate track in red. The Alternative 4/5 Hybrid shows realignments in blue.

He presented a table and map of the priority realignments in the Alternative 4/5 Hybrid that straighten the curves in the corridor and result in travel time savings, including the cost of each realignment per minute saved (some cost more than others). There are varying degrees of cost associated with each segment's reduction in travel time. He noted this will be important to consider in next steps for the project.

Alternatives Evaluation

Mr. Britland presented the overall key findings from the final alternatives analysis since the previous meeting:

- Ridership forecasts range from 922 to 1,554 daily boardings (278,000 to 469,000 annual boardings).
- Conceptual capital costs range from $2.4 billion to $4.6 billion (including contingency funds).
- Interaction between passenger and freight trains is higher in the Pittsfield to Springfield segment (due to sharing the double-track, there are higher levels of freight volumes west of Springfield and lower speeds because of steep grades).
- Differences in improvements, costs, and travel time are all attributable to the Springfield to Worcester segment in all three alternatives.

He reminded attendees of the evaluation criteria used in the analysis of the three final alternatives.

Service Performance

Mr. Britland reviewed the estimated frequency, travel time, and speeds of each alternative, pointing out the differences between the alternatives in the Springfield to Worcester segment. Travel times and speeds along the Pittsfield to Springfield and Worcester to Boston segments remain the same across the alternatives. The alternatives consecutively reduce travel times by 10 minutes, once with the separate track, and again with the realignments for a total decrease of 20 minutes.

He presented the final ridership modeling in 2040 daily boardings. The refined ridership models used for the final alternatives include the "Enhanced" Hartford Line and Downeaster as proxies. To estimate ridership on a new corridor that has limited or no service now, the study team had to use proxy services that are adjusted to make them more similar to the characteristics of an east-west service.

The initial proxy was the Hartford Line, but this was enhanced to include New Haven to better provide a similar large market such as Boston. Based on feedback from the Advisory Comment and the public, the other proxy chosen was the Downeaster, which is anchored by Boston (not New York City).

Both proxies used a 20-mile straight line catchment area with a modified (enlarged) Springfield station buffer for student populations, as well as induced demand under the "Enhanced" Hartford Line proxy. Induced demand was not included for the Downeaster because it is a fairly mature service already. He noted the correlation between frequency and speed, and projected ridership for the alternatives. He also presented the data in annual numbers.

Costs

Mr. Britland presented the key findings from the conceptual cost analysis of each alternative:

- Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 Hybrid provide separated track between Springfield and Worcester to comply with CSX guidance. This results in a capital cost increase of approximately $1.5 billion.
- The proposed improvements/cost estimates in the Pittsfield to Springfield and Worcester to Boston segments are the same for all three final alternatives.
- The cost difference between Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 Hybrid primarily relates to track realignments that further reduce travel time by approximately ten minutes.
- At this conceptual stage of planning, the standard contingencies added to cost estimates to account for unknowns (e.g., condition of CSX assets, condition of utilities) constitute 23% of the total capital cost for each alternative.

Mr. Britland reiterated how the cost estimates were refined for the final alternatives, based on federal guidelines, detailed quantity listings, and unit costs from Massachusetts and New England projects. Mr. Britland summarized CSX's policies and the assumptions the study made based on these guidelines for shared tracks (i.e., operations greater than 90 mph require a new separate track with 30 feet of separation from the centerline of the CSX freight track). Alternatives 4 and 4/5 Hybrid would require a separate track given their proposed speeds. He noted the complexities of the guidelines affected the conceptual cost estimates.

Mr. Britland presented the elements included in the capital cost estimates and explained how the estimates were developed. The study team began with the construction costs (with CSX guidance) and a construction contingency of 35% per FRA guidelines. The study team incorporated professional services to be inclusive upfront of all services that would be needed to implement the project. Finally, the study team analyzed how property acquisitions and rolling stock impact the cost and completed the analysis with an additional unallocated 5% contingency for unknowns.

Mr. Britland presented a detailed table of the overall conceptual cost estimates for each alternative (see slide 20). The Alternative 4/5 Hybrid has the highest total capital cost estimate at

$4.6253 billion, and Alternative 3 has the lowest at $2.4139 billion. He reiterated that the difference among the alternatives is largely influenced by changes along the Springfield to Worcester segment, but also vehicles and operating cost.

Environmental and Community Impacts

Mr. Britland presented the key findings from the analysis of environmental and community impacts:

- Compared to Alternative 3, impacts to wetlands and open water are about 10 to 12 times greater for Alternative 4 and the Alternative 4/5 hybrid.
- The Article 97 land impacted by Alternative 4 and the Alternative 4/5 Hybrid is about three to five times greater than Alternative 3.
- Alternatives 4 and 4/5 Hybrid create greater environmental and community impacts because they diverge from the existing rail alignment. While they are primarily within the CSX corridor, they have to separate from the freight tracks, creating more impacts than Alternative 3.

He noted there will be changes to air quality (some positive and some negative) for each alternative. He presented a detailed table of the results of the environmental and community impact analysis on slides 22-23.

Benefit-Cost Analysis

Mr. Britland explained that a Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) is a comparison of Future No Build conditions with Build Scenarios. It is a key component of how the federal government chooses projects to fund. He presented the types of project benefits and costs the U.S. Department of Transportation uses in its methodology.

Mr. Britland presented the results of the BCA in a table (see slide 27). He noted the analysis looked at the project benefits of each alternative using the two proxy services with a range of ridership. There are two BCA ratios for each alternative based on the different ridership scenarios. All three final alternatives have a BCA of less than 1.0, and a ratio of 1.0 or higher makes a project more competitive for federal funding.

Mr. Britland paused the presentation to take an initial round of public comments for clarifying questions on the material that was just presented.

Public Comment for Clarifying Questions

John Garrett asked about the BCA ratio and would like a further explanation of what is included in the benefits component of that calculation. Sophie Cohen, WSP, said the BCA looked at different types of benefits (shown on slide 27), the critical one being travel time savings. She explained travel time savings were valued based on the expected ridership for each alternative as well as time saved per rider. That is multiplied by a federally-provided value of travel time savings per hour. Most of the remaining benefits (safety, vehicle operating cost savings,

emissions, and pavement damage) are based on the decrease in automobile VMT (vehicle miles traveled) that will result from people shifting to rail. These are counterbalanced somewhat by an increase in Rail VMT with the project. All of this is added up based on values provided by US DOT. The benefits are then divided by the costs to get the ratio.

Ms. Farrell read the following question that was typed in the Q+A feature by Randy Frank: "*Does the BCA make any assumptions about the price of service to the end user?*" Ms. Cohen said that is not taken into account. She explained the BCA looked at the cost to operate the service and the benefit that the service provides, but does not account for who is the ultimate payer for the service as that is considered a "transfer" and there is no net cost or benefit.

Ms. Farrell read the following question that was typed in the Q+A feature by Barbara Palmer: "*Please clarify the air quality impact — is this about construction or the operations?"* Mr. Britland said he was referring to operations.

Study Draft Final Report

Mr. Britland noted the study phase is exploratory in its nature, developing a wide range of alternatives, winnowing them down from a couple dozen to six and finally three for final analysis. MassDOT understands that further work is required before initiating a project.

The Draft Final Report was released on October 19. As part of that report, MassDOT recommends these areas advance in further conceptual planning:

- More detailed study of economic and community benefits and impacts.
- Explore opportunities with rail partners
- Better understand governance options for expanded passenger service in the Commonwealth
- Evaluate funding opportunities and obstacles

Mr. Britland reviewed the study process and noted the Draft Report is open for a 30-day comment period. He said there is a comment form on the study website to share comments. A Final Report will be shared by November 30.

PUBLIC COMMENT[2]

Ms. Farrell reviewed the comments and questions that were submitted in writing using the Q+A feature in Zoom[3] and unmuted attendees who pressed the 'Raise Hand' button to speak audibly. Ms. Farrell opened the public comment period by inviting feedback from elected officials.

[2] See Appendix A for a record of questions submitted in the Q+A, along with responses by the Study team.
[3] The typed Q+A comments are transcribed and fixed for typos and grammar. The audible questions/comments are summarized.

Jim Miner, Office of Congressman Seth Moulton, said he was thrilled to see one of things recommended is a more detailed study of economic and community impacts and benefits. He asked what else would be recommended for investigation in this area. Mr. Britland said additional research could include conducting surveys of businesses and residences to understand market conditions, working with business community across the Commonwealth, trying to understand the new normal post-COVID conditions, coordinating with local governments to facilitate land use decisions that promote non-auto transportation, neighborhood workshops regarding community impacts, continue updating ridership and cost estimates, and evaluating impact of future carbon pricing on VMT and rail services.

Ms. Farrell read the following questions that were typed in the Q+A feature:

Paul Ravina: "*Instead of doing the project all at once, would it be possible to start with service from the Brookfields, Charlton, Spencer, Leicester, Auburn? That could build demand that would help the complete project to happen.*" Mr. Britland said MassDOT is not prepared to speak to phasing at this early point in the process but it can be looked at in the future.

Steve Strauss: "*What efforts have been made to reach out to NYS DOT to involve them in the final 37 miles to Albany-Rensselaer?*" Mr. Britland said MassDOT has not reached out to NYSDOT, as this study only investigated service between Pittsfield and Boston, not west of Pittsfield. However, this topic could be explored in future analysis.

Robert Kearns: "*Has MassDOT spoken with CSX? Is there any agreement with CSX?*" Mr. Britland said further conversations are needed.

The following attendees pressed the 'Raise Hand' button to speak audibly:

Bob Daley, resident of Chester, said Chester is the future rail hub of the 21 hill-towns and this is merely "the end of the beginning" and this process has gone well. However, the BCA should have been viewed as a Benefit Commonwealth Analysis where speed of implementation and ridership projections lead to economic rebirth are priority values. He urged MassDOT to pursue an 18-month timeline for Phase 1 to deploy existing DMU service in western Massachusetts and then begin restoring double track. He said the MBTA should include western Massachusetts.

Rich Holzman, resident of Chester, said western Massachusetts needs action now and does not want MassDOT to get buried in studies. Action is needed to connect western Massachusetts with eastern Massachusetts given the impact that COVID-19 has had on real estate in the western markets, and the high population density in eastern Massachusetts.

Larry Blake asked about a parallel project that is studying high speed rail that follows part of this route and is there any possibility of connecting the two projects. Mr. Britland asked if Mr. Blake was referring to NNEIRI or NEC FUTURE and noted that the East-West Passenger Rail Study built upon NNEIRI as it did not achieve the travel times many people wanted.

Ms. Farrell read the following questions that were typed in the Q+A feature:

Christopher Parker: "*Did you consider tilting equipment (i.e., Talgo and other manufacturers)? How much time could tilting equipment save for each alternative and how much with tilting equipment increase the equipment costs and revenue and increased ridership?*" Drew Galloway, WSP, noted tilting would offer five to seven percent improvement in travel times. However, under CSX guidance, tilting equipment in tilt mode cannot be used on shared track (which is an element of all three final alternatives).

Paul Ravina: "*Are you saying there will be no local service between Palmer and Worcester? If so, you just lost a large majority of possible passengers.*" Mr. Britland responded that there are no local stops between Palmer and Worcester, but Palmer is a stop.

Dan Hodge: "*Why are the emissions benefits negative? With more people taking the train rather than driving their car, this seems like a surprising result.*" Ms. Cohen said, relative to automobiles, diesel-based trains emit more pollutants per mile. She explained the offset from the decrease of automobile use was not enough to displace the increase from rail diesel emissions. As technology gets better, there is an opportunity for that differential gap to decrease.

William Strauss noted that Mr. Britland said "Final Report" when he meant "Draft Report". Ms. Farrell noted the Draft Report is open for public comment, not the Final Report.

Andrew Wolan: "*Will the train stop at Fenway Park on game days?*" Mr. Galloway noted that Lansdowne was included with time-of-day stops determined for game day service and built into the schedule.

Claudia Cass: "*Can you explain what a white paper is?*" Mr. Britland explained it is primarily a shorter study, with literature research designed to understand the landscape of a particular issue or topic and guide future discussions around it.

Michael Harrison: "*Will the Nov. 30 report include the further study that's recommended? If not, if approved, what would be the estimated time it would take to complete?*" Mr. Britland said the Final Report will not include the additional analysis identified in the recommendations and he cannot speak to a timeline on when the future studies will be carried out.

Rick Bryant: "*How do the Benefit Cost Ratios for the East/West rail alternatives compare to the ratios for other regional rail projects (Amtrak service from Pittsfield to Boston, Pioneer Valley Service, Hartford Line, Downeaster)?*" The study team did not have that information at hand.

David Golden: "*Who actually makes the final determination of which option, 3, 4, 4/5 is put forward to the powers that make a decision whether to go forward or not?*" Ms. Farrell noted that first it is important for the public to weigh in on this topic. Mr. Britland said it depends on

next steps, including examination of governance structure for a passenger rail authority, as well as public input. It is possible during the further analysis one alternative will stand out more than others.

The following attendees pressed the 'Raise Hand' button to speak audibly:

Andre Ferreira said he commutes from Ludlow to Boston and the 1 hr 37 min travel time would not convince him to use the train. If travel time is decreased more people would use the service. He said the MBTA takes a portion of the state's budget every year for what they fund, and they are building Green Line Extension and South Cost Rail as well as in debt for the Big Dig. He asked when the state is going to prioritize western Mass more.

Donald Blais, a resident of Palmer, said he is glad to see Palmer in each alternative and would prefer the fastest alternative (Alternative 4/5 Hybrid) but any alternative that includes Palmer would be beneficial for the region. In terms of economic and community impacts, Palmer and other towns with UMass presented a study to the Advisory Committee last year regarding growth opportunities in the region. He said this cannot be delayed any further and thanked the study team and Senators Gobi, Lesser and Adams.

Joshua said he created a Facebook group in high school called "Create Commuter Rail Service from Boston to western Massachusetts" and said this project would boost the state's economy as well as northern Connecticut's economy. He asked if MassDOT reached any agreement about the Route 2 corridor from Fitchburg to North Adams. Mr. Britland recognized there is legislation for a study regarding the Northern Tier Rail from Fitchburg to North Adams.

Ms. Farrell read the following questions that were typed in the Q+A feature:

Robert Kearns: *"Will the final report have a preferred alternative?"* Mr. Britland explained that sometimes a study concludes by recommending a No-Build scenario, other times a Build scenario or specific alternative, and other times further analysis is required to identify the best path forward. MassDOT is not endorsing Alternative 3, 4, or 4/5 Hybrid, but recognizes that the Advisory Committee had a strong preference for the Alternative 4/5 Hybrid. MassDOT is recommending the conceptual planning phase continue and hopefully that could develop into a project.

Tracy Opalinski, Ware Business Community: "*BCA would meet 1.0 federal funding if study were to include a "25" mile ridership including Amherst/Palmer connection and would greatly benefit the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' anchor university by connecting students to Boston access for internships and growing the biotech sector in MA. Is there any possibility of including this data in the next steps and the report?"* Mr. Britland encouraged Ms. Ware submit this comment through the website but he cannot speak to future analyses.

Ms. Farrell noted there are several comments regarding the need for new development and focus on western Massachusetts that are in the Q+A.

Jonathan McHatton: *"Is it possible to examine the MBTA's Providence Line as another proxy to estimate ridership, as Providence is also similar in population to Springfield? If not, why?"* Ms. Farrell asked if someone can speak to the proxies that were chosen. Laura McWethy, AECOM, noted the importance of a proxy that is regionally appropriate which is why the options are limited to this area, as the proxy accounts for unmodeled attributes such as trip purpose and fare. The Providence Line was considered, but it would ultimately operate similar to the Downeaster. Additionally, it has more of a commuter-oriented distance than the proposed service. Ned Codd, WSP, added that the radius used was 20 miles in a straight line from the train station, including any areas that touch those boundaries, which includes most of Amherst and Northampton.

The following attendees pressed the 'Raise Hand' button to speak audibly:

Laurence Shaffer, Central Corridor Passenger Rail Coalition, said the Coalition has been interested in the connection from Brattleboro, VT to New Haven, CT. Amherst has been important, but there are other potential passengers and markets to serve. The key to the central corridor is the connection in Palmer to take the service East and West. There's an opportunity for Central folks and East-West folks to come together to revitalize the line into Boston for people connecting in Palmer. He wants to ensure the Coalition plays an important part in this study.

John Garrett said this study is trying to kill the project. He said TransitMatters noted the cost estimates were very high relative to NNEIRI. He appreciates the study team's work and accepts some of the next steps, especially studying governance, but noted there is zero timetable to this project. He said if this study intended to do what the objective is (make the project happen) then MassDOT could have studied options like the northern tier if CSX was not going to cooperate in a cost-effective manner. The Study employed pre-ordained metrics to reach a pre-determined conclusion and he said there is no accountability.

John Pelletier, a resident of Newton, said ridership significantly increased on the Downeaster and CTRail beyond what was projected. He agrees governance needs to be studied but a schedule should be established and he is concerned by the nebulous next steps.

Barbara said she wants to echo recent comments. She was surprised Mr. Britland only mentioned that there was merely legislation for the Northern Tier. She moved to Western Massachusetts while working in Boston remotely. She is concerned with lack of timetable and talk of the project being buried in studies.

Rob Kusner, a professor of Mathematics at UMass Amherst, said he attended the last meeting before COVID-19. He said the Amherst campus was established because it was a junction of two rail lines and asked why the university does not have a seat at this study's table.

Brett Provost said he is confused about diesel emissions not offsetting emissions from automobiles given recent commitments to reducing carbon emissions at state level and asked why Alternative 6 (which included electrified rail) is not in the final three. Mr. Britland noted this was discussed at the June 10 meeting of the Advisory Committee when the alternatives narrowed to three, and MassDOT and the Advisory Committee acknowledged that Alternative 6 would have achieved the highest speeds, but the permitting and high capital costs were a concern so it was not considered further.

Ms. Farrell thanked attendees for their time and feedback and reiterated that the public comment period for the Draft Report is open through November 19. She concluded the meeting.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

Andreas Aeppli
Sarah Ahern
Andrea [no last name]
Andrea [no last name]
Bob Armstrong
Meredyth Babcock
Brendan Bailey, *RAPV*
Barbara [no last name]
Zach Bauer
David Beers
Keith Benoit
Bill [no last name]
Donald Blais
Larry Blake
Bob [no last name]
Dan Brand
David Brandon
Colin Bratton
Ben Breger
Ralph Brill
Rick Bryant
Mark C
Thomas Casartello
Claudia Cass
Chestre
Buzz Constable
Duncan Cook
Thomas Coulouras
Andrea Crupi
Sheila Cuddy
Bob Daley
Kevin Dandrade
Tammy Daniels
Chris Dempsey, *T4MA*
Kurt Doherty
Cindy Drucker
Paul E. St. Sauveur
Jim Eisenberg
Dane Elliott-Lewis
Steven Ellis
Michelle Ells
Emil [no last name]
Juan F Latorre III
Robert Fagone
Andre Ferreira
Lucy Ferriss
Marilyn Fil
Lucia Foley
Randy Frank
Fred [no last name]
Anita Fritz, The Recorder
Arthur Frost
John Garrett
David Golden
Tom Gruszkos
Alex Guardiola
Michael Harrison
Ken Harstine
Patience Hartley
Ben Heckscher

Dan Hodge
Anne Hogeland
Ben Hood
Douglas Hook
Dan Howard
Sam Hudzik
Marvin J. Ward
Paige Jacobs
Andrew Jennings
Jerry [no last name]
John [no last name]
Douglas Johnson
Joshua [no last name]
Judy [no last name]
David Kates
Kathleen [no last name]
Robert Kearns
Kate Kruckemeyer
Joe Kurland
Rob Kusner
John Kyper
Martin L
Scarlet Lamothe
Henry Leuchtman
Zane Lumelsky
Rich M
Anna M. Barry
Bill Malloy
Marcia [no last name]
Sarah Markham
Rick Marquis
Maximilian [no last name]
Abigail McAndrew
David McCluskey
Jeffrey McCollough
John McElduff
Nicholas McGee
Jonathan McHatton
Stephanie McNair
Joe Mech
Garrison Melford
Jennifer Metsch
Anne Miller, *Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop*
Marybeth Mitts
Michael Moore
Christopher Moskal, *Springfield Redevelopment Authority*
Jim Murphy
Marty Nathan
Foster Nichols
TrainRidersNortheast
Tracy Opalinski, *Town of Ware*
Barbara Palmer
Christopher Parker
Lawrence Parnass, *Berkshire Eagle*
John Pelletier
Irene Pereira
Marcus Phelps
David Phillips
Gary Prophet
Brett Provost
Mark Quam
Cara Radzins, *CRCOG*
Paul Ravina
Clint Richmond, Sierra Club
Corry Rooks
Dana Roscoe, *PVPC*
T Roy
Sami [no last name]
Nahrin Sangkagalo, *CMRPC*
Regan Schiappa, *WWLP*
Bob Seay
Bill Serovy
Laurence Shaffer
Mark Shapp
Sharon [no last name]
Emy Shepherd
Peter Spotts, *Country Journal*
Liz Storms
Arthur Strang
Steve Strauss
Ann Sullivan
Stephanie Swanson
Laura Sylvester
Kevin Tierney
Tim [no last name]

Maksim Tonyushkin
Jessica Traynor
Molly Trowbridge
Benjamin Turon
Paul Tuthill, *WAMC*
Carol Waag
Marc Warner
Wayne [no last name]
Jennifer West
Lori Wheeler
Andrew Wolan
Serena Wong
John Wright
Owen Yamauchi
John Zienowicz, *Ware COA*
[7 phone listeners]

Appendix A

This table includes the comments and questions submitted in the Q+A feature that were not answered during the meeting due to time constraints. The comments are fixed for typos and grammar.

Attendee Name	Question/Comment	Response from Study Team
John Garrett	Has public comment passed? I have thoughts about the recommendations.	The 30-day public comment period for the East-West Passenger Rail Study ends on November 19, 2020.
Steve Strauss	What level of land acquisitions are required in the higher speed options?	Environmental and community impacts are included in the Public Meeting #3 Presentation (slide 23).
Steve Strauss	Would you discuss your thinking about not removing additional at-grade crossings. Does this decision negatively affect travel time?	The travel speeds, and ultimately the travel time, for each alternative are primarily related to the grades, the rail alignment, and interaction with other passenger and freight services.
Colin Bratton	Do these estimates take into account a potential permanent Springfield-Greenfield commuter service?	The Valley Flyer is a pilot service and not included in the ridership methodology.

Paul Ravina	Would it be possible to add a station in either Auburn or Oxford? It is very difficult to drive into Worcester in the morning, and having a station in auburn with a very large parking lot could be used to get to Worcester or Boston. There would be a large number of passengers that would use that.	Service to additional markets may be potentially considered or explored in a future effort.
Kathleen	For ridership... How have you -or have you- included climate concerns leading to less reliance on fossil fuels transportation? And what about innovations in train design or function that would be expected in 20 years?	Ridership projections were based on historical observations from similar, existing proxy services. Therefore, the forecasts do not account for any future travel behavior changes that may occur due to long-term changes in the cost and/or availability of fuel (for both autos and trains), as well as the cost of the associated transportation-related emissions. However, locomotive technology (both diesel and electric) would be expected to improve in coming decades, which could offer opportunities for more climate-friendly train operations.
Garrison Melford	So this is planned to be operated by Amtrak?	An operator has not been specified at this conceptual level of planning.
Christopher Parker	Why did you unquestionably accept "CSX guidance" on track separation when it violates standard industry practice? Did you look at alternatives such as purchasing the route or taking it via eminent domain so Massachusetts doesn't have to listen to CSX?	The Boston-Albany rail line is owned by CSX from Worcester to New York. Exploring opportunities with rail partners, including CSX, is included as a recommendation in the study's draft final report. Regardless of ownership, freight service would still continue to share tracks with passenger service.

Dan Howard	Aside from guidance, has CSX "bought in" to actually running this service along their tracks?	Exploring opportunities with rail partners, including CSX, is included as a recommendation in the study's draft final report.
Douglas Hook	It seems federal money is needed. If the current mark for federal funding is 1.0 will the feds support the project?	Evaluating funding opportunities and obstacles is included as a recommendation in the study's draft final report.
Steve Strauss	Does anyone know how this project compares to the Raleigh to Charlotte, NC project which has a 3 hour 15 minute or so travel time?	Speaking strictly in terms of end-to-end average operating speed over a long-distance corridor, the projects are quite similar. Within the Final Alternatives, the fastest travel times along the 151-mile rail segment between Pittsfield and Boston would range from 2:45 to 3:05 (compared to a scheduled travel time of 3:50), with average speeds falling between 47.8 and 53.5 mph. According to Amtrak timetables, its takes approximately 3:10-3:11 for Amtrak's Piedmont, NCDOT's state-supported service, to traverse the 173 miles of track separating Charlotte and Raleigh, thereby realizing an average speed of 54.6 mph.
Marc Warner	1. The comparable route methodology chart on page 64 of the draft report shows income, bus vs rail mode, and need for a transfer among the factors used in the ridership forecast. What formula or parameters did the consultants use to account for these variables? What was their basis for these formulas or parameters? 2. Given that the cost-benefit ratio for all of the options seem to be below the level to warrant federal funds, what is to be gained (other than by the	1. Primary inputs to the ridership model include anticipated changes in each market's socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., population, employment, and income forecasts for 2020 and 2040 supplied by each of Massachusetts' Regional Planning Agencies), which determines the amount of total travel demand between the markets, and anticipated travel times between each of the markets in 2040 via personal automobile (based on the statewide travel demand model) or passenger rail (based on the service plans developed for each alternative), with the relative difference between the two modes used to estimate the split of automobile versus transit trips for passengers traveling between a given pair of markets. 2. Further analysis could provide better understanding of the full range of benefits and impacts associated with the service alternatives.

	consultants) from a further analysis of non-passenger transportation benefits? 3. Even if Congressman Neal did come through with an earmark for substantial capital funding, would the state continue to support East West passenger rail if it were obliged to cover the costs of the needed operating subsidies?	3. Evaluating funding opportunities and obstacles is included as a recommendation in the study's draft final report.
Claudia Cass	When will a decision as to which alternative will be made?	The recommendations included in the study's draft final report aim to continue advancing the project's remaining conceptual planning phase for East-West Passenger Rail.
Randy Frank	Follow up: it seems logical that the end user price would have a significant impact on ridership, so how is that taken into account?	Although not a direct modeling input, fare structure is implicit in the two proxy services used for ridership modeling.
Douglas Hook	Where do you get the data on traffic accidents and other numbers on slide 27?	The benefits shown in that slide were calculated based on applying standard factors from federal guidance published by the USDOT on Benefit-Cost Analysis to each alternative's expected change in vehicle miles traveled, which is taken from the ridership forecasts.
John Kyper	Given that MassDOT is considering electrifying various lines in the MBTA commuter rail system and the growth of the Worcester line may merit its electrification, have you considered	The timetables developed for this study do not preclude the use of dual mode multiple unit operations. However, the air quality analysis assumed fully diesel-based operations. CSX policy is also an important consideration.

	using dual mode electric/diesel multiple unit trains on this route?	
Clint Richmond	Do the benefits consider reduced GHG emissions from shifts from vehicles to train	Emissions reductions are included in the U.S. DOT's benefit-cost analysis methodology.
Larry Blake	Are there are studies that would connect Pittsfield and Albany?	The Berkshire Flyer Study, completed in 2018, evaluated using a New York rail route to establish a seasonal passenger rail service between New York City and the Berkshires, including options via Albany.
Clint Richmond	Benefits don't seem to mention economic development impacts (such as consumer spending along the route). Is that true? We have seen TOD benefits along the Hartford line for example.	The U.S. DOT's benefit-cost analysis methodology does not include economic impacts of the project, including increases in jobs, GDP, etc.
Dan Hodge	To what extent does this analysis account for the fact that people taking the train will benefit from not sitting in traffic on the Mass Turnpike? in other words, people will gain significant benefit from not driving (and being able to work, sleep, read, etc.) Related, to what extent does this analysis take into account the horrendous traffic during extended rush hours on the Mass Pike	Travel time savings is included as part of the U.S. DOT's benefit-cost analysis methodology.

	and the fact that by 2040 it will be even worse?	
Clint Richmond	Could there be freight benefits from doubletracking and straightening some segments?	While infrastructure improvements may benefit freight service, these benefits are not included as part of the U.S. DOT's benefit-cost analysis methodology.
Robert Kearns	What is the preferred alternative in the draft report?	The recommendations included in the study's draft final report aim to continue advancing the project's remaining conceptual planning phase for East-West Passenger Rail.
Thomas Casartello	I am assuming the Cost benefit ratios assume the entire Boston - Pittsfield corridor - is it possible the BCA ratio could change in a phased approach for the two route segments (could there be a higher BCA ratio for one segment than the other) in the two segments Worcester to Springfield and Springfield to Pittsfield if they were split into phases?	Changes to the project's characteristics, conceptual costs, and benefits may impact the benefit-cost analysis
Scarlet Lamothe	Do you have a begin date when to start this project? Before this study expires? as many of these do.	The recommendations included in the study's draft final report aim to continue advancing the project's remaining conceptual planning phase for East-West Passenger Rail.

Anne Miller, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop	At the June meeting, Secretary Pollack said that she wanted this study to wrap up, so that it could move to the project phase. How will that transition happen, or are you now saying that it will remain in the study phase?	Since June, through the alternatives analysis process and based on feedback from the Advisory Committee and members of the public, areas for additional study have been identified for further conceptual planning that are needed prior to the initiation of a project phase. The recommendations included in the study's draft final report aim to continue advancing the project's remaining conceptual planning phase for East-West Passenger Rail.
Dan Hodge	Given the low ridership at Palmer and Chester, why don't the alternatives include options to skip those stops for some of the trips thus reducing travel times and costs (more express trains)? Related, the ridership does not seem to support 8-10 trains per day to Pittsfield so why not have some trains link directly with north-south rail service to Hartford/New Haven (and have 4-6 trains per day to Pittsfield)?	Based on feedback from the Advisory Committee and members of the public, inclusion of intermediate stops, in particular Chester and Palmer, was one of the identified priorities for East-West service. Service frequencies are approximate and subject to change due to layovers and operational needs. Express service options could be examined as part of any future project development.
Scarlet Lamothe	I would like to express as that the ridership is off by the hundreds which would make a huge difference in the B.C.A. The benefit is across the commonwealth which is everyone	Thank you for your comment.
Marybeth Mitts, Board of Selectmen, Town of Lenox	I would like to see economic development benefits of this bringing people from Boston/Albany to Lenox to enjoy the outdoors/tourism (Miraval, Canyon Ranch, Kripalu) and understanding that millennials are more likely to be non-auto owners and this development feeds into that generational shift in transportation uses.	Thank you for your comment.

Merdyth Babcock	I am thrilled that Chester MA. has been included as one of the stops along this exciting project. Is there any discussion of the state purchasing the track and renting it to CSX, which would allow the state to have more control? We in western MA. have tried to work with CSX to repair, enhance and highlight rail history without success. If the state was to own the track might some recreational possibilities be included in the future study. I believe that saving 10 min is not worth the environmental impacts. Perhaps creating workspace on trains would make that 10 min. a benefit instead of a drawback.	Exploring opportunities with rail partners, including CSX, is included as a recommendation in the study's draft final report.
Marcus Phelps	Was there a reason why using second hand or older equipment wasn't considered?	New assets are typically assumed as part of a study's conceptual cost estimation.
Thomas Coulouras (he/him)	How will the rail impact carbon emission from our state?	Air quality impacts such as changes in emissions are detailed in the Public Meeting #3 presentation on slide 22.
Marybeth Mitts	LESS STUDY, MORE ACTION - BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME: THIS WILL BRING NEW JOBS AND CREATE NEW INDUSTRY.	Thank you for your comment.

David Phillips	Would the alternative you are recommending be faster than driving? It doesn't seem that you took the concept of a faster route between Auburn and Palmer via Mass Pike alignment seriously enough.	The travel time comparison between rail and driving can depend on the time of day and the corridor segment.
Lucia Foley	Please explain why Westfield, where Westfield State University is located, is not included among the stops. Thank you.	Westfield was not included in the original scope or in early stages of the study. The number of stops also has an impact on the travel speeds and travel times.
Ben Hood	To develop a shovel-ready project ASAP for near-term Federal infrastructure investment, why not start with the NNEIRI study's Build Alternative improvements in the Boston-Springfield Segment, which enabled train speeds up to 79 mph? No need to inflate capital costs related to CSX freight clearances. Note that the NNEIRI Tier 1 EA and FRA FONSI cover this segment. To benefit the entire Commonwealth, extend this NNEIRI-level intercity service to Pittsfield/Albany.	Thank you for your comment.
Marybeth Mitts	WESTERN MA HAS BEEN LEFT OUT OF THE STATE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PICTURE. WESTERN MA HAS IMPORTANT INDUSTRY: DEFENSE, ADVANCEDMANUFACTURING, PHARMA, NEW INDUSTRY AT THE BERKSHIRE INNOVATION CENTER. WE ARE DESPARATE FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT.	Thank you for your comment.

John Pelletier	Has the team looked at NNEPRA in Maine to use as an example of a new authority to manage rail service, perhaps that could be a focus of the white paper...	Understanding governance options for expanded passenger rail service is included in the study's draft final recommendations.
Andreas Aeppli	For the emissions calculations, did you take into account changing road and rail technology over the period of analysis?	Changes in air quality emissions were based on applying the emissions profiles of currently available, modern diesel-based trainsets and internal combustion, gasoline-fired automobiles to the change in vehicle miles traveled under each mode. In addition, ridership projections were based on observed behaviors aboard existing US passenger rail systems and, therefore, do not simulate the impact of any potential environmentally-oriented economic or policy mechanisms that might be implemented in the future to help combat climate change.
[redacted email address]	Is there any way to convince having Alternative 6 be recommended? My concern is the 3 chosen options aren't really going to do much since the best option only saves someone in Pittsburgh 30 minutes of travel time. I would understand if the only concern for alternative 6 is money, however, it is quite a speedy travel and can boost mobility and economic growth for most of the state. I look at the Shinkansen, the Japanese bullet train, and it costed $33 billion in 2020 money to build a 320 mile corridor compared to what would be about 130 mile of new track between Pittsfield and Boston for $22 billion, which seems too high for that stretch of tracks. How come we can spend $22 for a 1.5 mile tunnel in Boston but not $22 billion for high	While some Advisory Committee members felt that Alternative 6 reduces impacts to freight service and could be transformative for the Commonwealth, the majority felt that it should not move forward due to its longer term nature for implementation and the expected high cost relative to the other alternatives.

	speed train between Boston and Pittsfield?	
Douglas Hook	I'd like to ask again where the data for the BCA results came from specifically? And how that was calculated	The BCA results are primarily driven by two factors: ridership and costs. Ridership determines the extent to which travel along the corridor is displaced from automobile-based journeys to train trips. In turn, the change in vehicle miles traveled via automobile versus train serves as the key input to the benefits calculations (e.g., more rail trips means fewer miles of pavement that is assumed to be damaged at a specific rate, fewer automobile-related fatalities or serious injuries based on an average rate of collisions per mile, etc.). Aside from the Residual Value benefit, which refers to an asset's "useful life" or how much of the asset remains at the end of the BCA's analytical period, all benefits are calculated by multiplying a given alternative's change in VMT by a standard conversion factor retrieved from USDOT's federal guidance for conducting BCAs for transportation projects. These benefits are evaluated in comparison both the large initial infrastructure-related capital costs and the smaller, recurring operations and maintenance costs.
Claudia Cass	Berkshire County is constantly left out of transportation options in this state. It is unacceptable that in 2021 we cannot even get to Boston and back without an overnight stay unless we drive there and back.	Thank you for your comment.
Robert Kearns	Looking at ridership are you assuming fixed fares like the MBTA Commuter Rail, Connecticut CT Rail and the Downeaster or fluctuating fares like Amtrak Northeast Corridor, Valley Flyer and Vermonter?	Although not a direct modeling input, fare structure is implicit in the two proxy services used for ridership modeling.

Claudia Cass	Build the rail and the riders will come.	Thank you for your comment.
Merdyth Babcock	When the Keystone Arches were built over the Westfield River the designer, George Washington Whistler, fought for the Keystone Arch Bridge design because he knew they were building a track for trains they could not envision. I hope we all trust and give voice to future trains that we cannot imagine but will aid in our attempts to mitigate for a changing climate. Thank you for all the work you are doing.	Thank you for your comment.
Clint Richmond	Are the emissions impact a function of ridership? In others words, if the train was fuller would the impacts improve?	As part of the benefit-cost analysis, emissions reductions takes into account reduced auto emissions from mode shift as well as increased train emissions.
Clint Richmond	What level of ridership would be needed to get to a BCA of 1 or within the FRA acceptable range?	Changes to the project's characteristics (including ridership), conceptual costs, and benefits may impact the benefit-cost analysis.

Paul Ravina	Traffic on I-290 going into Worcester during rush hour is jammed every morning and every night for hours. If there were a train stop in Auburn or a nearby town you would be able to add a lot more passengers to your calculations, grateful refugees from I-290 traffic.	Thank you for your comment.