



**EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL STUDY  
Advisory Committee Meeting #1 – Summary  
Tuesday, December 18, 2018**

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
60 Congress Street, Springfield, MA

**Advisory Committee (AC) Attendees & Alternates**

Secretary Jay Ash, Massachusetts Department of Housing and Economic Development  
Senator Joseph A. Boncore, State Senate  
Tim Brennan, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission  
Jonathan Butler, 1Berkshire  
Patrick Carnevale, Western Massachusetts Office of the Governor  
Nancy Creed, Springfield Regional Chamber  
Linda Dunlavy, Franklin Regional Council of Governments  
Astrid Glynn, Massachusetts Department of Transportation  
Richard Griffin, MassDevelopment  
John Hahey, Massachusetts Association of Railroads  
Bill Hollister, Amtrak  
Linda Leduc, Town of Palmer  
Senator Eric Lesser, Massachusetts State Senate  
Paul Matthews, 495 Partnership  
Thomas Matuszko, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission  
Representative Thomas M. Petrolati, State House of Representatives  
Mayor Joseph Petty, City of Worcester  
Janet Pierce, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission  
Representative Smitty Pignatelli, State House of Representatives  
Jeff Price, Federal Railroad Administration (by phone)  
Jody Ray, MBTA Commuter Rail  
Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, City of Springfield  
Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority  
Representative Todd Smola, State House of Representatives  
Mayor Brian Sullivan, City of Westfield  
Rick Sullivan, Western Massachusetts EDC  
Mayor Linda Tyer, City of Pittsfield  
Mark Cressotti, City of Westfield  
Zoe Magrid, Office of State Senator Harriette Chandler

Jon Niedzielski, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern  
Travis Pollack, Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
Elizabeth Quigley, Office of Congressman Richard Neal  
Dan Racicot, City of Worcester  
Bethann Steiner, Office of State Senator Adam Hinds  
Corey Testa, Office of State Representative Alice Hanlon Peisch

**MassDOT & MBTA Attendees**

Secretary of Transportation Stephanie Pollack, MassDOT  
Jeff Gonnevill, MBTA Interim General Manager  
Jennifer Slesinger, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning  
Alexandra Markiewicz, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning  
Judy Riley, MassDOT Communications

**Project Team Attendees**

Drew Galloway, WSP – Consultant Team Project Manager  
Ned Codd, WSP  
Regan Checchio, Regina Villa Associates  
Emily Christin, Regina Villa Associates

**Public Attendees**

Patrick Beaudry, *PVPC*  
Charlie Blanchard, *Town of Palmer*  
Alejandro Cameron, *WGBY-TV*  
Tom Casartello  
Bob Daley, *Chester Foundation*  
Adam Frenier, *N. E. Public Radio*  
Stephen Gazillo  
Anthony Gesauldi, Office of Senator Boncore  
Ben Heckscher, *Trains in the Valley*  
Jonathan J. Higgins  
Karen [illegible]  
Kenneth Higgins  
Richard Holzman, *Chester PVPC Commissioner*  
Ben Hood, *Citizens for Palmer Rail Stop*  
Elliot Jerry, *REMI*  
Sujatha Koishram, *CMRPC*  
Clete Kus, *Berkshire Regional Planning Commission*  
James Lee  
Charlotte Lee  
Bill Leung, *REMI*  
Michael Marciniac, *Palmer Planning Board*  
Mike Masciadrelli, *WWLP-22 News*

Jen McCoy, *Palmer Steering Committee*  
 Anne Miller, *Citizens for Palmer Rail Stop*  
 Melissa Olesen, *Office of Senator Markey*  
 David Pierce, *Chester Foundation*  
 Dana Roscoe, *PVPC*  
 Carne Saldo, *WGBY-TV*  
 Emma Shephard, *Citizens for Palmer Rail Stop*  
 Shawn Smith  
 Paul E. St. Sauveur  
 Ryan Tran

**Materials (available on [project website](#))**

- PowerPoint presentation
- Goals Exercise handout
- List of Committee members

**WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS<sup>1</sup>**

Regan Checchio, Regina Villa Associates (RVA), welcomed the Advisory Committee and public attendees to the meeting and introduced Jennifer Slesinger, MassDOT Project Manager. Ms. Slesinger reviewed the meeting agenda and noted that a post-meeting survey will be electronically shared with the Committee for any additional feedback. She introduced project staff and invited the Committee members to introduce themselves.

As each Committee member introduced themselves, they provided a response to the following question which was shared with the Committee before the meeting: *What is the one most important outcome you would hope to achieve from an East-West passenger rail service?*

The Committee members provided the following responses:

Committee Member	Response
Tim Brennan, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission	A connection to the state capital completed and in operation within ten years or less for passenger and freight rail.
Rick Sullivan, Western Massachusetts EDC	Agrees with Mr. Brennan and would like to see a funding plan developed in the near-term.
Linda Dunlavy, Franklin Regional Council of Governments	Improved mobility and more options for east-west travel.
Janet Pierce, Central Massachusetts Regional	Agrees with Ms. Dunlavy, Mr. Sullivan, and Mr. Brennan, and would like to see reliable and affordable east-west service.

<sup>1</sup> The presentation from the meeting is available on the project website, [www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study](http://www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study).

Planning Commission	
Mark Cressotti, City of Westfield	Improved connectivity between the state capital and western Massachusetts.
Mayor Brian Sullivan, City of Westfield	Agrees with all of the above comments and is looking forward to a fruitful series of meetings with a positive outcome for the region.
State Representative Thomas M. Petrolati	A clear understanding of the cost analysis and ensuring western Massachusetts has an equal voice.
State Representative Todd Smola	A productive report that will not sit on a shelf for 50 years and a concrete way to implement recommendations.
John Haesy, Massachusetts Association of Railroads	Ensuring freight rail needs are heard throughout the process.
Richard Griffin, MassDevelopment	Efficient rail service that supports economic development in rural towns of western Massachusetts.
State Senator Eric Lesser	Sense of the potential statewide economic development prospects possible with linking Boston to western Massachusetts, an area that has seen less investment.
Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority	Simplest possible intermodal connections.
Jonathan Butler, 1Berkshire	More connection from the Pioneer Valley and Berkshires to Boston.
Astrid Glynn, MassDOT	Clear and credible facts to help determine the best possible use of the corridor.
State Senator Joseph A. Boncore, Chair of Transportation Committee	Boston needs this as much as western Massachusetts. Would like to see economic development; how this could be the answer to Boston's housing crisis; clear and true cost estimates that are not inflated; and discussions on funding soon.
Corey Testa, Office of State Representative Alice Hanlon Peisch	Deferred to other members of the legislature and noted Rep. Peisch will attend future meetings.
Thomas Matuszko, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission	Realistic program for reliable passenger rail service between Pittsfield and Boston within ten years.
Jody Ray, MBTA Commuter Rail	Ability to connect with other rail lines in Massachusetts.
Bethann Steiner, Office of State Senator Adam Hinds	Feasible way to connect Boston to the Berkshires; Sen. Hinds looks forward to attending future meetings.
State Representative Smitty Pignatelli	Economic rail corridor between Boston, the Berkshires, and Albany.
Linda Leduc, Town of Palmer	Agrees with comments above; ensure Palmer stays on the map as a logical intermediate stop between Worcester and Springfield.

Travis Pollack, Metropolitan Area Planning Council	Clear implementation plan to improve connectivity across Massachusetts; apologized Marc Draisen could not attend.
Bill Hollister, Amtrak	Supportive of whatever group wants; safe and reliable service that leads to economic development.
Mayor Linda Tyer, City of Pittsfield	Connect Pittsfield to the rest of the Commonwealth.
Elizabeth Quigley, Office of Congressman Richard Neal	Connect Boston to the rest of Massachusetts with reliable and faster trains; federal expenditure in north-south routes in New England's Knowledge Corridor.
Jon Niedzielski, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern	Integrated system with north-south connections in addition to east-west connections.
Dan Racicot, City of Worcester	Rail service was critical to closing the "mental gap" that Worcester is out of reach for commuting; this project could do a similar thing for Springfield and Pittsfield to enhance connectivity and the perception of connectivity with rest of the state.
Zoe Magid, Office of State Senator Harriette Chandler	Improve reliability of trains moving east from Worcester, and improve connection to the west of Worcester; Sen. Chandler is sorry she could not attend the meeting.
Patrick Carnevale, Western MA Office of the Governor	Improvements are not just for western Massachusetts, but for the Commonwealth as a whole; looks forward to working with the group.

### STUDY & ADVISORY COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

Ms. Slesinger presented an overview of the study, noting its purpose is to conduct an evaluation of the benefits, costs, and impacts of a range of alternatives for rail service between Boston and Pittsfield within a 12-18-month timeline. The three primary tasks are to assess the context, identify and analyze up to six alternatives, and develop a framework for next steps.

Ms. Slesinger introduced MassDOT Secretary Stephanie Pollack, Secretary Pollack said she was happy to attend the meeting and was mainly there to listen. She said MassDOT knows how important this study is and it will provide an opportunity to understand the implications and benefits in a greater depth.

Ms. Slesinger summarized the groups that are represented by the Advisory Committee and the responsibilities of the Committee. She shared the following proposed schedule of Committee meetings:

- Meeting 1 – December 18: study context; goals and objectives
- Meeting 2 – Spring 2019: alternatives screening criteria; six possible preliminary alternatives
- Meeting 3 – Summer 2019: preliminary findings; proposed three final alternatives
- Meeting 4 – Fall 2019: alternatives analysis outcomes; next steps

## STUDY CONTEXT

Ms. Slesinger presented the following graphics and information:

- Map of rail ownership along the study corridor
- List of related planning and infrastructure projects, including the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI); she asked the Committee to share any other relevant studies for the project team to review
- Projected 2020 population densities
- Home locations and counts of people who work in Boston
- Annual average daily vehicle traffic volumes adjacent to the study corridor
- Existing travel conditions of automobile traffic on I-90, MBTA Worcester/Framingham Line, Amtrak Lake Shore Limited Line, and Greyhound/Peter Pan buses
- A preview of existing physical and engineering conditions and constraints along the corridor
- Comparable state-supported rail markets, including the Amtrak Downeaster service

Mayor Tyer asked if the market analysis would include regional demand as well as municipal demand, as the Berkshires have unique characteristics, such as tourism, which should be considered. Ms. Slesinger said the data can be aggregated at different levels, including regionally.

Secretary Pollack welcomed Jay Ash, Secretary of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Economic Development, Jeff Gonneville, MBTA General Manager, and Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno to the meeting.

Secretary Pollack described the physical and environmental constraints shown on Slide 17 in detail, noting in order to provide a 90-minute trip from Boston to Springfield there would need to be physical changes to straighten out the alignment, as well as contending with private grade crossings and curves along the corridor. Mr. Ray confirmed commuter rail trains rarely travel up to 80 mph. Secretary Pollack noted there are tradeoffs that will have to be considered. For example, lower cost alternatives would result in longer travel times.

Ms. Slesinger presented the next steps for the project team's analysis of the corridor, which include a more in-depth analysis of prior studies, multimodal passenger and freight markets, and the physical, regulatory, and ownership opportunities and constraints.

Mr. Cressotti asked if the study is only looking at the existing rail corridor for the alternatives. Ms. Slesinger said the study will start with the existing rail right-of-way (ROW) for the alternatives development, but if the Committee feels strongly about the issue, the study could consider other alternatives.

Senator Lesser asked if an analysis will be done on how development and traffic trends will change as the rail brings more opportunities for housing and jobs. Ms. Slesinger said the benefits

analysis will provide a general sense of ridership demand and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction, but changes in land use are more complex to predict so the study team will analyze previous studies and provide a qualitative understanding of benefits of rail.

### GOALS EXERCISE & DISCUSSION

Alexandra Markiewicz, Deputy Project Manager, presented six potential goals for the alternatives as well as key considerations that for each alternative:

1. Improve attractiveness of Western MA as an affordable place to live
2. Enhance competitiveness for attracting new jobs and employers
3. Improve mobility for transit-dependent populations
4. Support economic development for Western MA businesses
5. Reduce the number of automobile trips along the corridor
6. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air quality impacts from transportation

Key considerations for all alternatives will include freight impacts, environmental and community impacts, and cost.

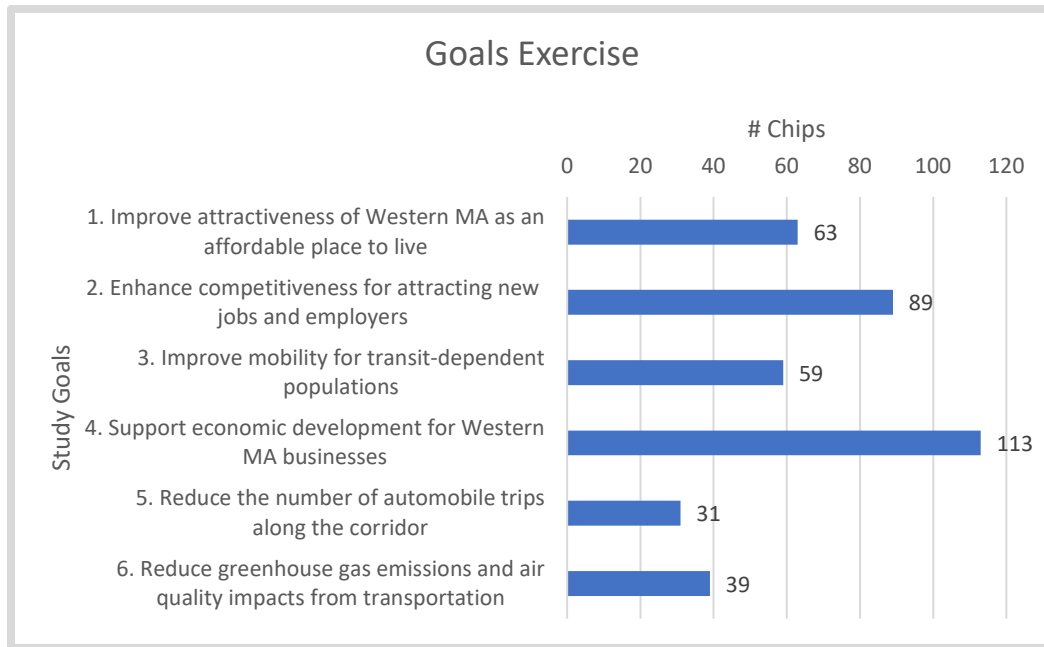
Ms. Markiewicz asked the Committee if there is anything missing from the potential goals or key considerations:

- Secretary Ash said Goal 2 should include existing jobs and employers as well.
- Paul Matthews, 495 Partnership, said Goal 4 should include economic development along the entire corridor, not just western Massachusetts.
- Mr. Ray said constructability and timeline for implementation should be included in the Key Considerations.

Ms. Markiewicz asked the Committee members to participate in a Goals Exercise, and to assume Goal #2 includes Secretary Ash's suggestion and Goal 4 includes Mr. Matthews' suggestion.<sup>2</sup> Each member was provided with 12 poker chips to place in six jars, with each jar representing one of the six goals. Members were able to allocate the chips how they wished, according to which goals are most important to them. Members could place more than one chip in the jars that represent objectives that are important to them or they could distribute the chips evenly across all jars. The results of the exercise are as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Ms. Markiewicz noted the order of the goals in the Goals Exercise handout differs slightly from the order in the PowerPoint



*Total count is 394. Some participants did not use all their chips in the exercise.*

Ms. Markiewicz thanked the Committee for participating in the Goals Exercise, and she noted that the results are helpful for the study team learn initial priorities from the Committee.

At the conclusion of the Goals Exercise, Secretary Pollack announced that on December 18, Massachusetts joined a coalition of nine other states that will work together on a commitment to reduce transportation carbon emissions.

**IDENTIFYING & ANALYZING ALTERNATIVES**

Ms. Slesinger presented the process that will be used for developing the staff recommendations for six alternatives, including the scope of alternatives (infrastructure investment vs. service level), the 2016 NNEIRI’s three final alternatives, and the alternatives analysis process. She noted that the staff-recommended six alternatives will be narrowed to three alternatives for a more in-depth analysis based on Committee and public input.

**NEXT STEPS**

Ms. Slesinger described the proposed schedule for upcoming public meetings and Advisory Committee meetings:

- Public Meeting 1 (February/March 2019): study background; market and condition analysis; input on alternatives
- Advisory Committee Meeting 2 (Spring 2019): input on six alternatives
- Advisory Committee Meeting 3 (Summer 2019): findings from six alternatives; input on final three alternatives



- Public Meeting 2 (Summer 2019): findings from six alternatives; input on final three alternatives
- Advisory Committee 4 (Fall 2019): findings from final alternatives; next steps
- Public Meeting 3 (Late 2019/Early 2020): release draft report

Ms. Slesinger noted that the schedule is flexible and the team is open to feedback from the Committee. She introduced the project team, including representatives from WSP and Regina Villa Associates. She said that Keville will complete the cost analysis.

Mr. Cressotti said the study team needs to think outside the box, as he believes people will not want to take a train from Springfield to Boston if they can make the trip in their vehicle, and 90 minutes is not fast enough. The existing corridor serves freight, so the study should be open to considering a separate corridor for passenger rail service.

Senator Lesser asked if the study team can include a 60-minute travel time alternative from Springfield to Boston. Ms. Slesinger said the team will present a wide range of options at the next meeting and it could include a 60-minute alternative.

Mr. Niedzielski said the language regarding high-speed options should be consistent as alternatives are being developed. Ms. Slesinger said the study team is committed to analyzing a 90-minute alternative as a high-speed option.

Rick Sullivan asked for more detail about the NNEIRI alternatives and how this study will be different. Ms. Slesinger said the NNEIRI looked at a total of 18 alternatives, including options up to 125 mph, but many were dismissed due to ROW constraints. This study will pursue alternatives that require going outside of the existing ROW.

Mayor Tyler asked if there could be a 90-minute alternative between Boston and Pittsfield included. Ms. Slesinger said the team is committed to developing a fair alternative for Pittsfield, but has not yet established what makes sense for that portion of the corridor.

Mayor Sarno said it can be a two- or three-hour ordeal to get to Boston from Springfield today, and asked the team to develop a 60- or 75-minute alternative to make it attractive to potential riders. Ms. Slesinger said the team needs to consider how to fairly spread out the six alternatives, but a slower rail travel time would still be competitive if vehicle congestion worsens.

Secretary Pollack said there are a lot of people who would prefer taking the train over driving a vehicle - even if the travel time is the same or longer - because they can be productive on the train. She noted South Coast Rail's projected travel time between New Bedford and Fall River and Boston is 90 minutes, and the models project the ridership to be robust. She suggested that the Committee should not be deterred by a longer travel time alternative. She said the statewide congestion study shows high variability for arriving on-time by vehicle, and a train has the

advantage of a smaller variability (higher chance of being on time); reliability and consistency can be more important to some people than the travel time.

Mayor Sarno agreed a consistent 90-minute rail travel time is attractive compared to the inconsistent vehicle travel times and he looks forward to the work this study will do. He said he wants the result to be realistic and financially sound.

Secretary Pollack said the study will not lay out one path forward, but several paths. She noted that Congressman Neal and Congressman McGovern are great advocates for infrastructure in the region, and she hopes a national debate on infrastructure and investment will occur soon. She said the Committee will be a great help to the team in developing the right set of alternatives, but it will be important to understand the benefits and tradeoffs of each alternative first and then consider the cost and practicality. She said with multiple options on how to move forward, MassDOT will be ready should new funding become available.

Mayor Tyler said it will be important for the study to consider who will be riding the train ten years from now, not just today.

Ms. Leduc asked what radius outside of the corridor is being considered for potential riders. She said if there is an infill station in Palmer it may slow the travel time down, but there is a large population of students nearby at UMass Amherst and other communities that should be considered. Ms. Slesinger said the map in the presentation showed a ten-mile radius but there is no hard boundary around potential stations, and the ridership analysis will evaluate travel time and other factors to understand the radius of demand.

Mr. Matthews said he is a member of the MBTA Commuter Rail Vision Advisory Committee, and they have been discussing electrification of rail. He asked how this may affect the study's analysis. Ms. Slesinger said electrification is something the team will look at and will utilize the data and outcomes from the Rail Vision study as well. Ms. Matthews said it will be very important to take advantage of the Rail Vision effort. He added that it currently takes him one hour each way to commute to Boston from Worcester on the train, and he is aware there are physical challenges involved including at-grade crossings. He applauded the Baker administration for their commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and said electrification should be considered if the study timeline puts rail ten years into the future.

Ms. Pierce said the overall population of the state should be considered when developing the alternatives, and there is an interest to travel west.

Ms. Magrid said the routes from Pittsfield to Worcester and Springfield to Worcester should also be considered, as not all housing opportunities are exclusively to the west of Worcester and not all job opportunities are to the east. She said the team should look at how many workers in Worcester live to the west of Worcester.

Mayor Sarno asked if Palmer is being considered as a stop. Ms. Slesinger said Pittsfield, Springfield, Palmer, and Worcester are being considered, but the team is unsure which alternatives Palmer would be included in. Secretary Pollack said if the Committee wants the study to consider additional stops, the earlier the Committee requests that the better.

Mr. Hollister said the study should consider connecting to other states as well, including New York and Connecticut, and there may be potential for federal funding for intercity service. He said more and more young people are not obtaining drivers licenses. He said rail has great potential for boosting economic development, and provided Hudson, NY, as an example. Ms. Slesinger said coordination with neighboring states will be important and the analysis will consider zero-car households.

Mr. Brennan said there may be significant environmental and community impacts if an alternative outside the corridor is considered.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Ms. Slesinger asked if the members of the public to provide comments.

Elliot Jerry said he grew up in Shutesbury, MA and asked how the study will address a fair distribution of economic benefits and which alternative will best serve which communities. He asked if an economic impact analysis will be done. Ms. Slesinger said the study will evaluate costs and benefits relative to rail ridership and trip diversion, but that study scope does not entail a detailed economic impact analysis.

Karen Christianson asked if climate change resilience will be incorporated into the study. Ms. Slesinger said future vulnerabilities due to climate change will be a factor that is considered in the study.

David Pierce, Chester Foundation, said Chester has an old railroad station with well-established parking, and advocated for connecting the rail to Chester. He said the town is waiting for better transportation access since they are not connected to I-90 either. However, there is a potential revenue stream of riders and tourists in Chester.

Richard Holsman, a resident of Chester, said Chester should be considered for a potential rail stop, and Chester would be to Pittsfield what Palmer is to Springfield. He said Chester has Senator Lesser's and Congressman Neal's support and their railroad station is ready for activity.

Anne Miller, Citizens for Palmer Rail Stop, said there is a huge amount of support in Palmer for a station as many residents do not own cars or have access to transit. She agreed with Secretary Pollack that people prefer to ride in trains over cars even if the travel time is longer.

Charlotte Lee, a citizen of Palmer, also advocated for a train stop in Palmer.

Ms. Slesinger thanked everyone for coming and told the Committee they will be receiving the post-meeting survey soon. She adjourned the meeting.