



EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL STUDY

Advisory Committee Meeting #4 – Summary Monday, February 24, 2020

Sheraton Springfield Monarch Place Hotel
One Monarch Place, Springfield, MA

Advisory Committee (AC) Attendees & Alternates

Jonathan Butler, 1Berkshire

Patrick Carnevale, Western Massachusetts Office of the Governor

Nancy Creed, Springfield Regional Chamber

Representative Mindy Domb, State House of Representatives

Astrid Glynn, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Daren Gray, Baystate Health

John Hahey, Massachusetts Association of Railroads

Senator Adam Hinds, Massachusetts State Senate

Linda Leduc, Town of Palmer

Senator Eric Lesser, Massachusetts State Senate

Paul Matthews, Worcester Regional Research Bureau

Timothy McGourthy, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED)

Melissa Olesen, Office of Senator Edward J. Markey

Kimberly Robinson, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)

Mayor Domenic J. Sarno, City of Springfield

Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA)

Representative Todd Smola, State House of Representatives

Mayor Linda Tyer, City of Pittsfield

Sujatha Krishnan, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)

Clete Kus, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC)

Ricardo Morales, City of Pittsfield

Maureen Mullaney, Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)

Jon Niedzielski, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern

Travis Pollack, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Elizabeth Quigley, Office of Congressman Richard Neal

Dan Racicot, City of Worcester

MassDOT Attendees

Ethan Britland, Office of Transportation Planning
Dan Fielding, Legislative Affairs
Makaela Niles, Office of Transportation Planning
Judi Riley, MassDOT Communications

Project Team Attendees

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

Materials

PowerPoint Presentation

Public Attendees (see page 10)**PRESENTATION¹**

Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates (RVA), welcomed the Advisory Committee and public attendees to the meeting. She explained she will facilitate the discussion so MassDOT can incorporate the feedback into the alternatives moving forward. Ms. Farrell introduced Ethan Britland, MassDOT Office of Transportation Planning, and asked the Advisory Committee members and project team members to introduce themselves.

Mr. Britland reviewed the meeting objectives and next steps for the Study, which include an Advisory Committee meeting before the final three alternatives are determined. Mr. Britland explained the feedback received at this meeting will guide MassDOT in narrowing the alternatives.

Mr. Britland showed a word cloud of the primary points heard at the previous Advisory Committee meeting. He said based on this feedback, and comments received at the February 12 public meeting, MassDOT will develop additional information in a ridership sensitivity analysis. He listed the types of information which will be developed further, including:

- Incorporating induced demand to ridership numbers
- Increasing the demographic coverage from a 20-mile station buffer to a 40-mile station buffer, and including higher education institutions
- Exploring other model inputs and sensitivities, including the Downeaster

¹ The presentation from the meeting is available on the project website, www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study.

- Additional benchmarking/calibration

He acknowledged that MassDOT heard a lot of comments that the ridership should be analyzed more closely, and this additional information will serve that purpose.

Mr. Britland presented the additional analyses that will be conducted once the alternatives are narrowed down to three, including:

- Transportation-related benefits
 - Vehicle operations
 - Business time and reliability
 - Personal time and reliability
 - Safety
 - Environmental factors
- Benefit-cost ratio
- Socioeconomic impacts
 - Business output
 - Value added (GDP)
 - Job years
 - Labor income
 - Population and household growth
 - Labor force growth

He noted that many comments from the previous Advisory Committee and public meetings included requests for this additional information. These analyses were not left out of the alternatives development; MassDOT always intended to conduct them once the shortlist of alternatives was developed.

Discussion

Maureen Mullaney, Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and Jonathan Butler, 1Berkshire, gave a presentation of comments on the alternatives, which can be viewed here: <http://berkshireplanning.org/events/announcements/comments-on-the-east-west-rail-study-alternatives-analysis>. Ms. Mullaney and Mr. Butler explained these comments were prepared by FRCOG, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG), Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), 1Berkshire, and Senator Adam Hinds after the February 6 Advisory Committee meeting. Ms. Farrell said Astrid Glynn, MassDOT Rail and Transit Administrator, would like to schedule a meeting with the group of Committee members who prepared the presentation. MassDOT and the Committee member will schedule a meeting.

Ms. Farrell asked each of the Committee members to provide feedback on the following questions to begin the discussion:

- What are your service priorities?
- What criteria should we use to narrow down to the final 3?
- What tradeoffs are acceptable? Not acceptable?

- Are there hybrids of the six preliminary alternatives that we should consider?

She provided an anecdote of South Coast Rail, which appeared like it was not going to be completed a couple of years ago. However, Phase 1 is going out to bid at the end of this month with travel times that are just slightly longer than the Full Build. She asked the Committee to think about phasing as a possibility.

The Committee members provided the following feedback:

Committee Member	Comments
Jon Niedzielski, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern	Congressman McGovern is encouraged – not scared by – the estimated costs. He would like to see cost transparency. Equity is important, as the western part of the state has paid its fair share for projects in the east. This project will benefit the entire state.
Daren Gray, Baystate Health	This project would improve public health and provide patients with better access to healthcare, sustainability, air quality, and the job market. Baystate Health offered to share a community health needs assessment with MassDOT. It is too early to make a decision on a preferred alternative without more data.
Linda Leduc, Town of Palmer	Glad to see the extended demographic areas. An intermediate stop in Palmer is a priority. A goal of Palmer is to reduce transportation emissions. She also supports rural communities between Springfield and Pittsfield being served. A hybrid of Alternatives 4 and 5 could be considered, with a stop in Palmer and without bus service. Bus service to Pittsfield is unacceptable.
Mayor Domenic Sarno, City of Springfield	MassDOT should think “big and bold.” A partnership with the federal government is important, and this is a statewide project. In addition to housing and job creation, he wants MassDOT to think about what is feasible and sustainable, and to consider how the trip time will affect riders and what the timeframe for construction will be. He opposes bus service.
Timothy McGourthy, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development	A statewide transportation connection would meet the goals of <i>Partnerships for Growth</i> , the Commonwealth’s economic development plan. Better statewide connections can improve the state’s economy, and local economies can be developed around transit projects. He supports a cross-state connection.
State Representative Mindy Domb	She is awaiting the additional information that will be developed and is glad to see the larger demographic area. A priority is the climate emergency and transportation crisis the state is facing. The service should be all rail and incentives should be built in for riders. High-speed rail is a priority, also opportunities for economic development and tourism. Cannot speak to which stations should be included until the ridership numbers are finalized, but noted her constituents will travel farther than MassDOT may think to catch a

	train. Urged MassDOT to expedite the review of the RPAs' comments. Open to a hybrid as long as there are no buses.
John Hahesy, Massachusetts Association of Railroads	Priority is to avoid impacts to freight train traffic, as that would result in more trucks on highways. <i>Ricardo Morales, City of Pittsfield, asked Mr. Hahesy if he prefers the high-speed alternative on a separate corridor; Mr. Hahesy said that is what is preferred.</i>
Ricardo Morales, City of Pittsfield	In favor of creating equitable access across the Commonwealth, which would be achieved by high-speed rail. Priority to reduce carbon footprint. Opposes buses.
Mayor Linda Tyer, City of Pittsfield	MassDOT should be bold and transformative; providing access to universities is important – glad to see that will be included in the ridership. People will drive a distance to reach the train – emphasize 45 minutes instead of 40-mile radius. High-speed rail will address workforce/housing challenges/climate change. Opposes alternatives with buses. Supports a high-speed, frequent roundtrip rail connection from Pittsfield to Boston with a connection to Berkshire flyer. Open to a hybrid without buses or long travel times. Alternative 6 will be the most transformational. Open to phasing if high-speed starts in Berkshires to Springfield.
State Senator Adam Hinds	Economic benefits for the entire state. Consider how travel times will impact ridership. Intercity connections will benefit each city. Opposes buses. Alternative 6 is the most “future-proof.” Not afraid of the price tags given how the project will benefit the entire state and the new revenue from servicing bonds being discussed in the state legislature. A hybrid could start with high-speed in Pittsfield while Springfield portion is upgraded – or Alternative 5 with enhancements but no bus.
Jonathan Butler, 1Berkshire	Alternatives 4, 5, and 6 are worth moving forward without buses. The high cost of Alternative 6 validates the need for further understanding of ridership demand (western MA's population is declining).
Clete Kus, BRPC	Opposes buses. Criteria should be better job and housing access, economic development, regional equity, and environmental justice. Alternative 6 is most viable; start in western MA and move towards Springfield while improvements are made in South Station.
State Representative Todd Smola	Read the Western MA Rail Coalition handout. ² An alternative without an intermediate stop is a dealbreaker. Loves Alternative 6 and is not scared of the price, but he is concerned about the timeframe of implementation (not viable if it will take 20 years). Wants to see something implemented sooner rather than later;

² A complete summary of comments received (including comment sheets, emails, and letters) will be shared in the Final Report.

	wants to see the timeline of various elements of the alternatives. Supports extending the timeframe of this study if necessary to develop all the information. A hybrid should consider the timeframe of implementation. People will sacrifice a little extra time commuting on the train versus a shorter distance in their car.
State Senator Eric Lesser	Shares skepticism of earlier reporting on ridership numbers; glad to see the additional information to be developed. This project should change the trends of the state, not follow them; acknowledge what will happen to the state without it given the housing crisis, congestion, and aging population in the west. Climate change is a priority – this project is necessary to meet the 2050 Net Zero bill. MassDOT should engage more stakeholders from Boston.
Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority	Priorities are equity across the state, providing everyone with mobility, and convenience – define what convenience means to people. Universities are 45 minutes from Palmer – consider how to integrate these populations. Buses can provide these connections to the train stations. A phased approach would allow the state to see how successful the first phase is and to reassess how the rest of it moves forward.
Elizabeth Quigley, Office of Congressman Richard Neal	Congressman Neal is aware a federal partnership is necessary for this project and it is a top priority for him. More information is needed on ridership, economic development, and environmental concerns to narrow the alternatives to three. Equity is important. He looks forward to the study laying out a clear path forward to building the east-west rail.
Melissa Olesen, Office of Senator Edward J. Markey	Senator Markey’s priorities are equity (enhancing opportunities for everybody statewide) and environmental benefits.
Patrick Carnevale, Western MA Office of the Governor	Priorities are to think about what is realistic and what the timeframe of the project would be. The alternatives cannot be narrowed down until the additional information is developed.
Dan Racicot, City of Worcester	Not in a position to endorse any alternatives. Worcester has seen what improved passenger ridership has done at a local level. The “Heart to Hub” trains have been very successful in changing people’s minds about their transportation options.
Paul Matthews, Worcester Regional Research Bureau	The Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data is critical. The Worcester-Framingham line is critical to the success of this project, including the Worcester/Framingham Line Third Track Study and improvements to Union Station. MassDOT/MBTA are conducting the Rail Vision simultaneously – there is a lot of complexity involved. A realistic conversation about phasing is necessary. He would support an extension to the study timeline if

	needed. Consider employment commuting nodes like MetroWest/495 to the east.
Sujatha Krishnan, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission	Connecting Worcester to Springfield is a priority, as identified in CMRPC’s long-range transportation plan. Criteria should include performance metrics of equity: timeframe, how long the ride takes to Boston, and ridership. CMRPC can assist with metrics if needed. Phasing should be considered given the high cost of the project. Logan Express is one of the state’s most successful buses, and it is an example of what can be achieved when a bus serves a need. Buses should be considered in phasing. A hybrid of Alternative 5 with a train should be considered.
Kimberly Robinson, PVPC	PVPC is a cosigner of the presentation shared earlier. Looks forward to discussing bigger questions once the numbers are revisited. Economic opportunities apply to each alternative.
Nancy Creed, Springfield Regional Chamber	Equity – make sure the connection goes all the way to the west. Conjunction with freight operations is important. An economic impact analysis is needed for finalizing the alternatives. Interested in Alternatives 4, 5, and 6, and possibly a hybrid of 4 and 5. When the word “subsidize” is used, it often means subsidized by the business community.
Travis Pollack, Metropolitan Area Planning Council	MAPC supports this project, and it is important to have a long-term vision of what we want with a phased approach to get there. Consider what elements can be done sooner than others. Criteria should be what helps passengers and freight and economic development; have distinct pieces “shovel ready” for when funding arrives. Convenience for business travelers is important – allowing for productivity on a train even if not high-speed at first.

Ms. Farrell thanked the Committee members for their comments, and gave a brief summary of what was said:

- Many would like to see more information on ridership, travel time, and economic development
- Bus service can be successful when used properly (as feeders to the stations), but should not be considered for east-west service
- Equity and climate change should be priorities
- Legislators are not afraid of the costs
- Many people mentioned phasing as a possibility
- Come up with a realistic service

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Farrell then invited members of the public to provide comments.

Anne Miller, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, said rail service does not need to be either high-speed electric or slow diesel, and diesel trains are much greener than they once were. A 70 mph rail service in Florida is currently being upgraded to 120 mph (believed to represent a new extension from West Palm Beach to Orlando). The assumption that people will not use the train unless the travel time is less than or equal to driving is false.

Mike Eagan, a resident of Palmer, asked if the team has considered a 40-mile radius around Worcester when analyzing ridership. Laura McWethy, AECOM, confirmed it will be included in the analysis.

Mark said high-speed trains along I-90 will not be done soon, and MassDOT should have confirmed what CSX is willing to do regarding a shared corridor before the study began. South Station is maxed out at peak travel times, and there is a new development building an underground garage which will prohibit North South Rail Link. Ms. Farrell said that there is work underway to redesign tower one, which manages all traffic in and out of the station, and is the first step in needed improvements to South Station.

Matt, a resident of Sturbridge, said China is using Maglev trains and this study is a great opportunity to do something big, and it should connect to Albany and have raised rail on bridges.

Cara Radzins, CRCOG, said CRCOG was a cosigner of the presentation of the RPAs comments presented earlier. There are a significant number of people in the Hartford area who are interested in this service, and she is glad to see the 40-mile radius around the stations.

Jon Fryer, a resident of Dover, said this project is as important to the Boston MetroWest region as it is to the whole state. He asked MassDOT and the Advisory Committee to review his proposed Alternative 7, which would, according to Mr. Fryer's calculations, cost half the price of Alternative 6. He said to visit www.alternative7.net.

Dominick, a small business owner in the Berkshire hills, said this study should be about equity. He said it is difficult for him to participate in legislative issues in Boston because of traffic.

Ben Hood, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, read the following email:

Good morning,

I am the grad student from UMass who spoke briefly at the last public hearing about my family's struggle to finish my degree. I am finishing getting my Master's in Architecture and work for the University as part of a work study program. I had hoped to attend the meeting today and offer the following thoughts as a young building professional, but I am ill.

There is a lot of good stuff in option 5. I believe we should look at an option where we do Option 5 between Springfield and Boston, option 4 between Pittsfield and Springfield, and add back the Chester/Palmer stops. We should also look at Option 4 from Pittsfield to Springfield, and Option 6 from Springfield to Boston, with stops in Palmer in Chester. I guesstimate these would cost \$7 and \$14 billion respectively. The advisory committee generally needs to offer us a real option that is in this price range, 5 options for less than \$5 billion, and 1 for \$25? Seems we missed something along the way.

At the same time, the advisory committee needs to offer at least one proposal next time that can be accomplished WITHOUT federal funding.

The committee should not present any options at the next meeting which leave out any of the communities expressing strong desire at this point. Their doing this at the last meeting was extremely unhelpful and led to emotion instead of substantive conversation.

The committee should release DETAILED summaries of each final option several hours BEFORE the hearing. I wanted to see this information before hand and spend an hour looking. I suspect the majority of people at the meeting were presented with that information for the first time in the room. What happened at the public hearing is not best practice for presenting people with information and the planners who are working with the state know that from their own educations. The three page statement we were given should have been the start of a much longer package we could review before the meeting.

The committee should commit to releasing detailed reports beforehand at the meeting today. Every week I get detailed meeting agendas before critical meetings on major state construction projects. This is no different.

*Best of luck today,
David Fite*

Dave Pierce, Chester, shared that Mystic Valley Railway Society once ran tourist trains on weekends using Amtrak and MBTA equipment from Boston to Albany and the trains were full. He said service could begin quickly.

Richard Holzman, Chester, said this meeting was the most productive one yet. He said there is a role for buses to serve train stations. He said MassDOT should go with something realistic in the short-term, and higher speeds could be available 25 years from now.

Bob Daley, Chester, said a phased approach could begin with low hanging fruit. It makes more sense for a high-speed train between Springfield and Boston, rather than between Pittsfield and Boston. Chester station is only 50 feet away from rail infrastructure.

Karen Christensen said this has been a productive meeting, and encouraged people to visit www.westernmassrail.org and to review the handout provided to attendees.

Ms. Farrell said members of the Advisory Committee can share additional comments by March 2 with Mr. Britland to be considered in the analysis moving forward. She thanked everyone for coming and adjourned the meeting.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE (from sign-in sheets)

James Bachand

Patrick Beaudry, *PVPC*

Alden Bourne, *NEPR*

Karen Christensen, *Train Campaign*

Brian Connors, *City of Springfield*

Dennis Cote, *Valet Park of America*

Bob Daley, *Chester Rail Station*

Mike Eagan

Cynthia Espinosa, *City of Holyoke*

Jonathan Fryer

Ben Heckscher, *Trains in the Valley*

Brendon Holland, *Focus Springfield*

Richard Holzman, *Chester Planning Board/Chester Station*

Ben Hood, *Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop*

Ryan Johnston

Matt Kibbe

Ted Kozak

Ben Lamb, *1Berkshire*

Pete Landon

Mike Masciadrelli, *WWLP*

Joel McAuliffe, *Office of Sen. Lesser*

Anne Miller, *Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop*

Sean Oliver

Adelaide Patterson

John Perez

David Pierce, *Chester Station*

Brian Pigeon, *City of Worcester*

Kevin Pink, *1Berkshire*

Cara Radzins, *CRCOG*

Kim Rivera

Dana Roscoe, *PVPC*

Austin Sanders

John Schubert

Mark Shapp

Tim Sheehan

Emmaladd Shepherd, *Citizens for Palmer Rail Stop*

Bonnie Smith

Shawn Smith, *Citizens for Palmer Rail*

Paul Tuthill, *WAMC Radio*

Dominick Villane

Gene Willey