



EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL STUDY

Advisory Committee Meeting #6 – Summary

Wednesday, September 30, 2020

Online Zoom Meeting

Advisory Committee (AC) Attendees & Alternates

Representative Natalie Blais, State House of Representatives

Jonathan Butler, 1Berkshire

Senator Harriette Chandler, Massachusetts State Senate

Linda Dunlavy, Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG)

Astrid Glynn, Massachusetts Department of Transportation

Daren Gray, Baystate Health

Richard Griffin, MassDevelopment

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

Thomas Matuszko, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC)

Melissa Olesen, Office of U.S. Senator Edward J. Markey

Janet Pierce, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC)

Representative Smitty Pignatelli, State House of Representatives

Kimberly Robinson, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC)

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, State House of Representatives

Mayor Domenic Sarno, City of Springfield

Sandra Sheehan, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA)

Representative Todd Smola, State House of Representatives

Tonia Tassinari, Massachusetts Department of Housing and Economic Development

Jeremy Thompson, 495/MetroWest Partnership

Mayor Linda Tyer, City of Pittsfield

Thomas Creed, Springfield Regional Chamber

Jared Freedman, Office of Senator Jo Comerford

Eric Kashdan, Office of U.S. Senator Edward J. Markey

Jon Niedzielski, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern

Travis Pollack, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

Elizabeth Quigley, Office of Congressman Richard Neal

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

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

Materials

PowerPoint Presentation¹

Public Attendees (see page 10)

PRESENTATION

Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates (RVA), welcomed the Advisory Committee and public attendees to the meeting. She reviewed the process for participating in the meeting using the Zoom application. She introduced the members of the project team and read the meeting agenda (**slide 2**). Ms. Farrell passed the presentation to Ethan Britland, MassDOT Project Manager.

Review of Study Process and Next Steps (slides 3-4)

Mr. Britland outlined the study process and the steps completed to date. He noted the study is near completion with the next steps including the release of the Draft Report, a public meeting, and the release of the Final Report.

Mr. Britland presented questions that will be used to facilitate the discussion of the Advisory Committee participants regarding next steps for MassDOT once the study is complete. He acknowledged the study is conceptual and therefore does not go into detail on several elements that can be part of the next steps. He asked participants to think about these questions throughout the presentation.

Review of Three Final Alternatives Selection (slides 5-10)

Mr. Britland reviewed the final three alternatives that were chosen for further analysis:

¹ The presentation is available on the Documents page of the study website, www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study.

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

Mr. Britland noted all three alternatives share the corridor with CSX, and Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 Hybrid include segments of separate 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).

Alternatives Evaluation (slides 11-28)

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.

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. He presented the final ridership modeling in 2040 daily boardings. As discussed at the previous meeting, the ridership models used the 'enhanced' Hartford Line (extended to New Haven) and Downeaster as proxies. Both proxies used a 20-mile straight line catchment area with a modified Springfield station buffer for student populations, as well as induced demand for the Hartford Line. 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 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. 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 will 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 21). 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.

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 nine to ten 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 four to five times greater than Alternative 3.
- Alternatives 4 and 4/5 create greater environmental and community impacts because they diverge from the existing rail alignment.

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 analysis on slides 23-24, and said these results are important to consider in next steps in regard to permitting challenges.

Benefit-Cost Analysis

Mr. Britland explained that a Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) is a comparison of 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. He noted that factors such as freight service benefits and indirect economic benefits and jobs, are not included in the BCA.

Mr. Britland presented the results of the BCA in a table (see slide 28). 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 allow Advisory Committee members to pose questions on the alternatives evaluation.

Representative Smitty Pignatelli, MA House of Representatives, thanked the study team. He asked them to clarify the point made by the Secretary of Transportation on a previous call regarding the new separate track and new double track on CSX rail. She indicated the passenger track needs to be 30 feet away from the nearest freight track. He asked if that is within the ROW and how problematic it would be to obtain easements, saying this could be a deal-killer for this project.

Mr. Britland explained the center of new separate track for passenger track must be 30 feet from the center of the nearest track for CSX. Alternative 4 stays substantially within the ROW as much as possible but there are points that diverge. He said the CSX ROW is pretty wide. Drew Galloway, WSP, explained the tracks in Alternative 4 and the Alternative 4/5 Hybrid generally parallel the existing alignment but also able to engineer some higher speeds for the passenger track. The high-speed realignments in Alternative 4/5 allowed a much greater increase in sustained high speeds and commensurate reductions in travel time. Mr. Britland said this will be an important conversation to have with CSX.

Senator Eric Lesser, Massachusetts State Senate, said he appreciates the inclusion of the Downeaster as a proxy but many comparable routes are not included in the ridership methodology, like South Bend to Chicago or Stockton to San Francisco. He said he provided feedback at the previous meeting that the New Haven/Hartford corridor is not a fair comparison. He asked why the Downeaster and the enhanced Hartford Line were the two chosen proxy services and how these were used in the ridership analysis.

Mr. Britland said MassDOT feels the two proxies chosen provide a good range and he understands predicting ridership is not easy. He noted the Hartford Line is a similar geography and was enhanced to include more stops, like New Haven. The Downeaster was included for its

Boston market draw with stops in rural areas. MassDOT believes the Downeaster and 'enhanced' Hartford Line are good proxies for Massachusetts, but future analysis could potentially look at ridership in a different way. Laura McWethy, AECOM, further detailed how proxy services are used in ridership modeling, noting they capture the unmodeled attributes such as trip purpose or what other markets are available. She added that the study team had used modified proxy factors to further fit this study including factoring some numbers up in the Hartford Line since Boston would be a big draw. She noted commuting patterns are difficult to translate from the west coast.

Rep. Pignatelli said he hopes the Advisory Committee will have a serious conversation about the state purchasing the rail line from CSX. Mr. Britland said that is a good conversation for MassDOT to have as the study comes to a close.

Advisory Committee Discussion (slides 30-33)

Ms. Farrell presented questions and topics to the Advisory Committee for their thoughts and feedback on next steps for MassDOT upon completion of the study. The following is a summary of the discussion. Ms. Farrell noted the Advisory Committee can email comments until October 7 as well.

Ms. Farrell asked the following questions first:

- Are there any alternatives that you would prioritize or deprioritize?
- What phasing approaches, if any, should be considered?

Mayor Linda Tyer, City of Pittsfield, said she was surprised to see only a 20-minute difference in travel time between the alternatives and it is discouraging to see the speed and travel time between Pittsfield and Springfield is equivalent to driving. Regarding phasing approaches, she advocates for the first phase to be passenger rail service between Pittsfield and Springfield, as there is no current service in this segment.

Ms. Farrell asked the Advisory Committee for potential items for further analysis that MassDOT should consider.

Kimberly Robinson, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), said it is imperative that economic benefits from a major infrastructure project such as this be analyzed. She believes it would be key to understanding the full picture, as this project is building opportunities.

Senator Adam Hinds, MA State Senate, asked if a pilot service is feasible on the existing track. Regarding purchasing the track, he said the current transportation bond bill includes \$225 million that many members of the Advisory Committee worked to get in, which is worth noting. He is curious what MassDOT would say on creating a new authority or expanding an existing authority.

Mr. Britland said a pilot service is something he would like to hear about from the Advisory Committee about further and noted it would revolve around conversations with CSX. CSX is resistant to passenger service on its line. Mr. Galloway said a pilot service on the Connecticut River Line in the Knowledge Corridor is operating successfully because there is existing capacity on that line, which is quite different from the line between Springfield and Pittsfield. He noted this line is heavily used already and the single track sections being addressed in the alternatives with double tracking would not be installed yet and will make instituting a pilot program potentially more difficult. Ms. Farrell asked Mr. Galloway if CSX ever sells its lines. Mr. Galloway said yes.

Mayor Tyler shared three points. She said the indirect economic benefits are interesting but might be hard to measure without rail there currently and reemphasized the Pittsfield to Springfield corridor should be the first phase. She would like to see more information on how this project impacts housing and employment opportunities, as she sees residents of Pittsfield face challenges when two spouses live in the area and one may have to travel to work. She asked if it is worth looking at the number of car daily roundtrips using E-ZPass data between Pittsfield and eastern Massachusetts communities. She added she is intrigued by Rep. Pignatelli's comment on buying CSX track, so the project can control its priorities for passenger service along the corridor and eliminate conflicts.

Mr. Britland said MassDOT could pull data from the Massachusetts turnpike, however since the study has completed the analysis phase, Mayor Tyler's comments make sense as next steps. He noted the turnpike data may not directly correlate with rail ridership but it could be helpful to know. Mr. Galloway noted that the segment of Pittsfield to Springfield is very mountainous with steep grades, so regardless of ownership this segment of the rail corridor will remain slower due to its geography and the difficulty in making line changes with National Wild and Scenic Rivers System designation for sections of the Westfield River that parallels the corridor.

Representative Todd Smola, MA House of Representatives, thanked the study team for the presentation and is glad the Advisory Committee is still moving forward despite the pandemic. He asked if there is any consideration about how the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will impact public transportation ridership in the short and long-term. He is concerned about future ridership and asked if there is a way to consider the effects of the pandemic.

Mr. Britland said MassDOT is exploring what the pandemic has done to ridership, however, it is not being incorporated into the study at this point. However, these conversations are ongoing and should be highlighted in the Final Report as next steps are considered. Ms. Farrell noted the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB) meetings have been taking a sober look at ridership.

Ms. Farrell asked the Advisory Committee for potential operational items to consider, such as safety issues associated with grade crossings and discussions with CSX. Mr. Britland noted that

considering how communities without a station stop feel about additional service and safety is important. The Advisory Committee did not provide any further comments on this question.

Ms. Farrell asked the Advisory Committee for governance and funding items to consider.

Travis Pollack, Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), said there are other states that have successfully introduced passenger rail working with Amtrak and suggested the study team take a look at those examples. He added a pilot service should be considered as a next step, at least for one or two round trips.

Rep. Pignatelli said he has some initial concerns about a pilot that does not operate at sufficient speed or is affordable, and is concerned with Amtrak being the operating entity of the rail from an affordability standpoint. Amtrak is historically more expensive and that should factor be considered moving forward.

Thomas Matuszko, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), asked what MassDOT's opinion is on how these next steps should be accomplished and what happens after November 30.

Mr. Britland said it is difficult to answer that question while MassDOT is still in "listening mode", and the purpose of this meeting is for MassDOT to hear all feedback provided by the Advisory Committee and formulate that into recommendations in a Draft Report before hosting a public meeting and listening to the public. After that, MassDOT intends to have conversations about next steps and moving the project forward.

Next Steps (slides 35-36)

Mr. Britland summarized the next steps for the study:

- Solicit Advisory Committee feedback on final analysis
 - Accepting written recommendations through October 7, 2020
 - Written recommendations can be sent to Makaela Niles, MassDOT Project Manager, at Makaela.Niles@dot.state.ma.us
- Draft Report – October 16, 2020
 - Will include findings and Advisory Committee recommendations
 - Released for 30-Day public comment period
- Public Meeting – October 22, 2020
 - Present analysis of three final alternatives
 - Solicit feedback on analysis and draft report
- Final Report by November 30, 2020

Mr. Britland said he looks forward to hearing from the Advisory Committee on next steps.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Farrell reviewed the comments and questions that were submitted in writing using the Q+A feature in Zoom.²

John Kyper: *“Why is there no station stop planned for Westfield?”* Mr. Britland said Westfield was not included in the original scope and early stages of the study. He noted there is a balance to strike between desirable travel speeds and number of stops.

Clint Richmond, Sierra Club: *“How does 30’ compare with other railroad companies, for example in Virginia.”* Mr. Galloway said he believes Virginia’s agreement with CSX does not precisely require the same 30 foot distance but the agreement essentially splits the entire corridor for over 100 miles, with the Commonwealth getting one side and CSX getting the other side and the net result will be very close to the 30 foot distance criteria.

Mr. Richmond: *“Some of the Boston to Worcester segment is being triple tracked. How will that impact the analysis?”* Mr. Britland said Alternative 4 and Alternative 4/5 Hybrid relied on that triple track being in place to allow the west-east train to pass an MBTA train at the same time. From the study team’s perspective it was critical to be in place.

Mr. Richmond: *“The Article 97 land is only 11.6 acres in the worst scenario. How does this compare to Hartford Line or South Coast?”* Ms. Farrell said there is no Article 97 land in Phase 1 of South Coast Rail but she is not sure about the Full Build. Mr. Galloway said Hartford did have impacts but does not have a specific number. He said they were fairly modest and resulted in shifting track by a couple of feet.

Mr. Richmond: *“The Sierra Club would like to see a stop in Westfield considered in these studies.”* Ms. Farrell thanked him for his comment and encouraged him to submit this in writing as well.

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

Rep. Pignatelli said this is a generational investment and advocates that it begins in the west. He does not believe the state is committed to a legitimate west-east rail. He said the project will need the leadership of Congressman Neal, Mayor Sarno and Mayor Tyer, saying the Advisory Committee members heard it loud and clear the project will not move forward without federal funding. He suggests to Congressman Neal and Mayor Sarno and Mayor Tyer that at minimum, the project should begin in Springfield moving west and east at the same pace.

Ben Hood, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, said he is very pleased to see a stop in Palmer included in all three final alternatives. He is concerned about the low BCA ratio for the alternatives and his group looked at the NNEIRI study in 2016 which was around 0.6 based on higher level of benefit for environmental benefits and ridership. He believes the ridership would increase by looking at the NNEIRI connection into Connecticut and the BCA ratio would be higher. He encouraged

² The comments are transcribed and fixed for typos and grammar.

attendees to visit www.palmertrain.org to review the analysis. Sophie Cohen, WSP, said she can certainly look at the materials and reiterated the benefits are tied to ridership and without higher ridership there will not be a higher ratio. Ned Codd, WSP, noted NNEIRI was a useful tool for this study and there is overlap in the Boston to Springfield segment. However, NNEIRI had a much larger geographic focus with long-distance high-speed rail from Montreal to New York. The benefits captured higher ridership in NNEIRI due to being largely passenger oriented, as opposed to the east-west corridor, which is slower and freight-oriented.

Mr. Farrell reminded the Advisory Committee to send additional comments to Makaela Niles by October 7. She reiterated the next steps on slide 36. Ms. Farrell and Mr. Britland thanked the Advisory Committee and the public attendees for their commitment throughout the study and their feedback.

PUBLIC ATTENDANCE

Lauren Allen	Jonathan McHatton
Rob Aloise, <i>CRCOG</i>	Jennifer Metsch
David Andrew	Anne Miller, <i>Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop</i>
Matt B	Ricardo Morales, <i>City of Pittsfield</i>
Anna M. Barry	Ari Morton, <i>Office of Rep. Sabadosa</i>
Pat Beaudry, <i>PVPC</i>	Maureen Mullaney, <i>FRCOG</i>
David Beers	Larry Parnass, <i>Berkshire Eagle</i>
Ilias Benmokrane	Joe Piemonte, <i>MBTA</i>
Thomas Casartello	Kevin Pink, <i>1Berkshire</i>
Joshua D Coran	Dan Racicot, <i>City of Worcester</i>
Thomas Coulouras	Clint Richmond, <i>Sierra Club</i>
Andrea Crupi	Dana Roscoe, <i>PVPC</i>
Bob Daley, <i>Chester Station</i>	Deanna Ruffer, <i>City of Pittsfield</i>
Peter DeMallie	Adriana Santiago
Tighe Dudek	Bob Seay, <i>WGBH</i>
Dalton G Dwyer	Sarah Szczebak, <i>Town of Palmer</i>
Adam Frenier	Shaun [no last name]
Linda Hager	Tim Sheehan, <i>City of Springfield</i>
Laura Hanson	Emy Shepherd, <i>Citizens for Palmer Rail Stop</i>
Ben Heckscher	Jessica Sizer, <i>Town of Palmer</i>
Ben Hood, <i>Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop</i>	Chad St. John
Douglas Hook	Stephanie Swanson, <i>Office of Sen. Lesser</i>
Matthew Jones	Michael Testerman
Sujatha Krishnan, <i>CMRPC</i>	Elizabeth Torres
Clete Kus, <i>BRPC</i>	Molly Trowbridge
John Kyper	Paul Tuthill, <i>WAMC</i>
Ben Lamb, <i>1Berkshire</i>	R. Wilson
Chris Lisinski, <i>State House News</i>	Serena Wong
Joel McAuliffe, <i>Office of Sen. Lesser</i>	[4 phone listeners]