



I-90 Allston Multimodal Project

Task Force Meeting Summary

DATE:	March 12, 2025	SH PROJECT NO.:	2021055.08
PROJECT	Beth Larkin (TY Lin)		
TEAM:	Chris Calnan (Tetra Tech)		
	Gregory Boles (VHB)		
	Jay Maddox (MBTA)		
	Jim Keller (Tetra Tech)		
	John Weston (MassDOT)		
	Josh Bendyk (VHB)		
	Laura Gilmore, (MBTA)		
	Luisa Paiewonsky (MassDOT)		
	Mark Fobert (Tetra Tech)		
	Mark Shamon (VHB)		
	Meredith Avery (VHB)		
	Rich Lenox (WSP)		
	Ryan Cullen (VHB)		
	Susan Harrington (MassDOT)		

Introduction

- On Wednesday, March 12, 2025, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) convened a hybrid (in-person at Boston University 43 Hawes Street, Ladd Room, Brookline, MA and virtual on Zoom) meeting of the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project Task Force. There were 115 virtual registrants and 17 in-person attendees.
- The meeting covered the following topics:
 - Welcome and Introductions
 - General Project Updates
 - Project Schedule
 - Layover
 - Overview
 - Layover Analysis White Paper
 - Layover Concept Update
 - Next Steps and Future Meeting Schedule



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- * A Grand Junction Rail update was originally on the agenda, but due to time constraints the topic was tabled until the next Task Force meeting.

Presentation

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- MassDOT Director of Mega Projects, Luisa Paiewonsky, welcomed virtual and in-person attendees to the meeting and went through the agenda.
- The project team designed a shorter meeting agenda covering fewer topics in order to maximize discussion and engagement between the project team and the Task Force.
 - There will be additional changes to Task Force meetings to address input from Task Force members, including more regular meetings.
- Luisa Paiewonsky introduced Beth Larkin as the new Task Force Facilitator.
 - Beth described her role as Task Force meeting facilitator. She will reinforce the importance of ongoing engagement with the Task Force and will make sure that all points of view are heard and considered during the meetings. As meeting facilitator, she will help to support MassDOT's goal of responding to the interests and priorities of all Task Force members and the public at large.
 - Beth looks forward to meeting the Task Force members and engaging at future Task Force meetings.

GENERAL PROJECT UPDATES

- The project team is reviewing Harvard's Track Proposal for the MBTA Worcester Line tracks.
- The project team is evaluating a plan developed by A Better City (ABC) and Harvard University that presents alternative construction staging strategies that reduce the duration of the needed closure of the Grand Junction branch railroad through the project area.
- MassDOT welcomes communication with the Task Force members and the public outside of Task Force meetings; however, at this time correspondence specific to the design is not something that MassDOT can respond to in writing. MassDOT's environmental team would like formal dialogue on the design to take place after the joint Draft Environmental Impact Report/ Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/DEIS) is filed this summer and the public has had a chance to review it.
- The Cambridge Street Bridge preservation project is advancing. National Grid will carry out gas line repairs, and then a contractor will be assigned for the preservation work.
 - Westbound sidewalk reopening remains a priority, with updates expected in upcoming meetings.



- Cambridge Street Bridge reconstruction remains part of the larger Multimodal project.

PROJECT SCHEDULE & PROCUREMENT

PROJECT SCHEDULE

- The project schedule leading up to the 25% design/Base Technical Concept (BTC) is outlined on slide 10 of the Task Force meeting presentation slides. The schedule outlines the NEPA and MEPA processes.
- Following a review by Federal Highway's Division Office, Office of Project Development and Environmental Review, and Legal, the draft DEIR/DEIS is anticipated to be filed in late summer. A public comment period will accompany its filing.
- The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is scheduled to be prepared in late 2025 and early 2026. The Record of Decision, which results from the NEPA process, will close out NEPA. It will disclose the final decision and summarize the mitigation measures and any required approvals.
- The MEPA process mirrors the NEPA process with draft and final document filings. Due to permitting constraints, the NEPA and MEPA processes may be divided, with a Final Environmental Impact Statement filing for NEPA and a separate Final Environmental Impact Report for MEPA. The State final MEPA document will be filed in advance of the final NEPA filing to support the State permitting process. Federal permits are tied to the Record of Decision, while state permits are tied to the MEPA Secretary's Certificate.
- The project team will prepare a Base Technical Concept (BTC), which is the 25% design, that will go into the bid documents which the design/build entities will bid upon.

PROCUREMENT SCHEDULE

- The procurement schedule leading up to procurement is outlined on slide 11 of the Task Force meeting presentation slides and assumes utilizing a design-build project delivery method. The schedule lines up with the NEPA process.
- Phase 1: Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to be issued after receipt of the Record of Decision: MassDOT will shortlist design/build teams based on qualifications. MassDOT by regulation can shortlist between two and five teams. Typically, three teams are shortlisted. RFQ will line up with obligation of funds.
- Phase 2: Request for Proposals (RFP): Design/build teams will prepare technical and price proposals.
- Due to project complexity, procurement has been extended, with Notice to Proceed (NTP) now anticipated in January 2028.



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- A benefit of design/build procurement is that after the design/build contract is awarded and notice to proceed provided, the team can start early action items, earthwork and other approved project elements, while completing the full design.

Discussion

- Task Force members voiced concerns surrounding overlap with other major infrastructure projects, such as the Cape Cod Bridges. The project team is aware of the Cape Cod Bridge's timeline as well as MBTA's Draw One.
- **Jessica Robertson (Roberston), Allston Community Representative** asked if the project design phase still needs to be completed after the Notice to Proceed (NTP), and sought clarification on the full project timeline.
- Robertson expressed appreciation for increased transparency in scheduling and suggested more proactive sharing of project materials.
- Robertson asked if the Interchange Modification Report (IMR) draft could be shared with the Task Force before it was filed. MassDOT explained that the IMR is a government-to-government report; MassDOT will discuss the draft with the City of Boston, and the Task Force will be briefed at a future meeting.

LAYOVER

LAYOVER OVERVIEW

- John Weston from MassDOT Rail and Transit lead the conversation on the layover facility. He restated points from the recent Rail and Transit Working Group meeting that layover facilities are essential for train storage, light maintenance, inspections, cleaning, and safety briefings.

LAYOVER FACILITY ANALYSIS

- The Layover Analysis White Paper, distributed on March 7, in advance of the Task Force meeting, outlines an anticipated deficit in southside layover space over the next 25 years.
- The MBTA's ongoing shift to all-day, bi-directional MBTA service reduces midday storage needs but increases overnight layover demand.

LAYOVER CONCEPT UPDATE

- The project team showed a Two Track Layover draft concept which illustrated how the rail and station elements would be shifted to the north from the baseline design concept. The South Side Buffer Path remains along the south of Beacon Park Yard and maintains a 30-foot minimum width. The concept removes two layover tracks previously shown, and shifts



the southernmost Worcester Commuter Rail Main Line further north to create more undeveloped space between the shared use path and the railroad infrastructure.

- The Two Track Layover Draft Concept presented includes a two-track layover yard. Additional layover spaces in the city would need to be identified to accommodate two removed layover tracks elsewhere within Boston in line with the rail operators' rights at Beacon Park Yard.
- The layover need is determined by assumptions of expanded passenger rail service across the MBTA's south side – including on the Framingham/Worcester Line – and MassDOT/Amtrak Compass Rail Service. Delivering increased service will require more trains, prompting concern about whether or not enough layover space will be available when needed in the future.
- The bus concourse would be on decking above the rail yard. The layout of the concourse would be dependent upon where the platforms are below.
- The assumption is that not every passenger train on the Worcester Main Line would serve West Station. Currently zonal express service to/from Worcester skips almost every stop before Framingham. In the future, zonal express service will not serve West Station. Compass Rail trains would also not stop at West Station.

Discussion

- **Matthew Peterson (City of Boston)** asked how layover analysis findings would be incorporated into environmental filings and what adjustments might be necessary. He encouraged continued stakeholder engagement and requested early distribution of materials for review before meetings. He also asked if it was possible to make changes to rail layouts to conserve space (ie. Curved Tracks, Shifting North).
- **Elizabeth Leary (Boston University)** inquired about when the trains would utilize the layover facility and potential impacts on surrounding areas.
- **David Lautenheiser (MAPC)** asked if Amtrak and MBTA could collaborate on shared layover facilities. John Weston responded that facilities could be shared in some cases, but there are constraints surrounding different unions and maintenance requirements.
- **Fred Salvucci** questioned whether layover in Allston was truly necessary and suggested further review of alternative sites. He recommended expanding layover site options beyond current MassDOT assumptions and emphasized the need for a transportation bond issue to secure funding for these and other projects in the coming years.
- **Albert Ng (Harvard University)** expressed concern about the speculative nature of rail planning and suggested that a focus be placed on what could be provided to the community in lieu of a layover facility (particularly affordable housing).



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- **Seth Gadbois (Conservation Law Foundation)** requested further analysis of space usage at South Station, South Side Maintenance Facility, and other MassDOT-owned parcels. He echoed Ng's concern surrounding housing production and asked that emphasis be placed on relocating layover activities to other existing facilities. John Weston responded that South Station is used for some Amtrak vehicle storage and may continue to be used. Springfield properties are geared toward use on other regional rail services and are not ideal for use related to East/West service. The Middleboro yard is being replaced by New Bedford and Fall River yards as part of South Coast Rail Phase 1. Follow up is required as to why the Middleboro yard isn't being retained if there is a projected south side layover shortfall.
- **Stacy Thompson (Livable Streets Alliance)** asked if MassDOT could look into areas other than Allston for providing additional layover needs. Potential areas specifically discussed during this meeting included: Springfield, Middleboro, South Station, I-90/Rt. 128 Interchange, Widett Circle, Tow lot adjacent to Widett Circle, south side land identified by the City of Boston, and Amtrak's Front Yard. Many of these areas were discussed as described above.
- **Benjamin Tocchi (Office of Representative Michael Moran)** added that House Majority Leader Moran is delighted about the inclusion of early action items and believes it is a demonstration of MassDOT's commitment to alleviating community concerns.
- **Representative Tommy Vitolo** highlighted that his focus is ensuring Brookline, Brighton, Allston, and BU residents have continued access to the Charles River.
- **Jessica Robertson** requested re-labeling the Worcester Main Line tracks in future diagrams "Express Tracks" or something similar. She said that calling those tracks anything else would send a negative message about the future of service at West Station.
- **Seth Gadbois** urged the project team to revise the project's purpose and need to remove layover. He suggested that including layover is not consistent with "all planning to minimize harm" in compliance with Section 4F.
- **Chris Osgood (City of Boston)** suggested that a new analysis be done to compare what the project could look like with and without layover and realignment of the Main Line express tracks.
- **Anthony D'Isidoro (Allston Civic Association)** expressed gratitude for the continued study, repeating the importance of analyzing impacts on the Allston neighborhood. He further suggested that any studies should take into account that Allston residents will need to be convinced of the final plans in the future.

NEXT STEPS

- Grand Junction updates and discussion are being tabled for a future Task Force Meeting.



- Monthly meetings are being planned, with tentative dates of April 16th, May 15th, and June 12th, falling in a regular pattern on the second or third week of each month.
- The project team recognizes a desire for future meetings to ideally take place in Allston, and locations are being researched. Future meetings will be held with in-person and online components available.
- Topic suggestions for upcoming meetings include Grand Junction update, shoreline, park land, and street network.

FOLLOW UP ITEMS (TO BE DISCUSSED AT FUTURE TASK FORCE MEETINGS)

- Interchange Modification Report (IMR) Briefing
- Track Layout and Layover Analysis

Questions received via Zoom Chat

- **Nathan Mandell:** Has any consideration been given to expanding layover in Worcester or introducing layover in or around Framingham? Both locations already have freight yards and open land in close proximity to their stations where layover could likely be built. This would also help better balance layover capacity on the Framingham/Worcester line, instead of having 75% of overnight layover in Boston.
- **Mandell:** Looking at the white paper, it is not clear how the needed layover numbers are derived from the proposed Commuter Rail and Amtrak service. It would be very beneficial to explicitly state the projected schedules as Regional Rail gets implemented, including where stops are skipped, where short turns are made, the approximate travel times, and the approximate turn-around times. It would also be beneficial to see how improved acceleration/deceleration on BEMUs affects these schedules, as well as potentially reduced dwell times with full-high stations. From this information, it could then be shown what fleet sizes are required to run these services, and then the layover needed to support the fleet. Could we please have this additional information provided to better understand the stated layover need?
 - **Mark Fobert:** Nathan - As noted in the presentation, the analysis looked at facilities that the owned by MBTA or Amtrak. The facilities in Framingham are owned and used by CSX and the Worcester facility is constrained. I understand the MBTA is always looking for opportunities for layover space and do not see either as currently feasible.- John Weston MassDOT RTD.
- **James Malloy:** With all of these conversations about layover facilities, south station expansion, and north side Charles River bridge replacement, would it behoove us to revisit



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the North-South Rail Link (originally planned to be included in the Big Dig) to increase capacity, avoid redundant facilities, and free up more funds?

- **Bill Deignan:** When we talk about street network, Cambridge has long been told that regional traffic analysis was going to be redone and discussed. We would like to see how the project affects traffic into Cambridge, along with associated future build out of the area.