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# Task Force Meeting Summary

## I-90 Allston Multimodal Project

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DATE:	May 15, 2025	SHS PROJECT NO.:	2021055.08
PANELISTS:	Albert Ng (Harvard University) Beth Larkin (TY Lin) Chris Calnan (Tetra Tech) Don Kindsvatter (Urban Idea Lab) Etty Padmodipoetro (Urban Idea Lab) Jim Keller (Tetra Tech) John Weston (MassDOT) Luisa Paiewonsky (MassDOT) Mark Shamon (VHB) Rich Lennox (WSP) Susan Harrington (MassDOT) Tom Nally (ABC)		

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## Overview

On Thursday, May 15, 2025, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) convened a hybrid (in-person and virtual) meeting of the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project Task Force. There were 182 attendees (94 in-person and 88 virtual). The meeting covered the following topics:

- Welcome/ Introductions
- Layover Update
- Multimodal Local Connections
- Temporary Grand Junction Rail Outage
  - Outage Schedule Reduction Approach
  - Service Contingency Measures
- Next Steps

## Meeting Summary

### Welcome and Introductions

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- The Task Force meeting was facilitated by an external consultant, **Beth Larkin (Larkin), TY Lin**. She welcomed everyone to the meeting and began with a brief safety minute.



- **Kayla Sousa, MassDOT** producer, reviewed basic hybrid meeting logistical information.
- Larkin ran through the meeting agenda with Task Force members and meeting attendees.

## Layover Update

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- **Luisa Paiewonsky (Paiewonsky), MassDOT** Director of Megaprojects, and **Matthew Petersen (Petersen), City of Boston (COB)** shared that the city and MassDOT have been meeting regularly to discuss different layover opportunities. Paiewonsky emphasized that the focus is on the Boston terminal area. Updates will be provided to the Task Force as the work progresses.

## Multimodal Local Connections

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- **Jim Keller (Keller), Tetra Tech** reiterated that the project aims to improve mobility for all travel modes, reconnect the Allston community to the Charles River with expanded access, and address inadequate bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure by creating new and augmented bicycle and pedestrian connections. This was the focus of the Multimodal Local Connections Working Group (WG).
- The Cambridge Street Bridge (CSB), along with the Franklin Street Pedestrian Bridge (FSPB), will be replaced as part of the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project. The South Side Buffer Path (SSBP) runs parallel to the southern property limit and the Boston University (BU) campus. The SSBP connects the FSPB to the Agganis Pedestrian Bridge, which crosses over to the Charles River Reservation.

### FRANKLIN STREET PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE (FSPB)

- **Etty Padmodipoetro (Padmodipoetro), Urban Idea Lab** said that existing pedestrian bridge isn't ADA-compliant and will be replaced with an accessible pedestrian and bicycle bridge.
- Initially, Access Ramp and Spiral Ramp Options were considered for the replacement design. Both would require property taking.
- The CSB's replacement created an opportunity to redesign the FSPB without any property taking. The following two options were considered:
  1. Cambridge Street Bridge Connection (CSBC) Option (Preferred)
    - Located near the current bridge – high visibility to path users.
    - Directly connects Linden Street to Cambridge Street.
    - Since the elevation of the proposed Cambridge Street is lowered, it will not require a ramp along the former Allston Depot property.



- Higher visibility of path users.
  - Shorter path.
  - Doesn't require traversing Harvard Street and Cambridge Street intersection.
  - Opportunity to widen the entry area to Cambridge Street with a plaza.
2. U-Turn Option
- Connects Linden Street directly to the SSBP through a gradual ramp.
  - Located very close to the 35 Braintree Street Residential Project.
  - Since the bridge is behind the building, it would not be visible from the street.

## SOUTHSIDE BUFFER PATH (SSBP)

- **Don Kindsvatter (Kindsvatter), Urban Idea Lab** discussed the two options for the SSBP both of which will run along the southern property limit:
  - At-Grade Option
    - Would pass under Cambridge Street and Malvern Street, rise to pass over Babcock Street, and stay elevated to Agganis Way.
  - Elevated Option (Preferred)
    - Would pass Cambridge Street, rise to the transit plaza level at Malvern Street, and stay elevated to Agganis Way.
    - Path users are more visible.
    - Structure would be constructed on retained fill, which will allow for planting.
    - Better connections to the Malvern Street Transitway, Ashford Street, and the pedestrian and bicycle network at the plaza level.
    - Reduces canyon effect by rising sooner.
    - Better access from the bypass road and West Station Bus Concourse.
  - Both options would work with either design for the FSPB.

## AGGANIS PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

- Padmodipoetro discussed the two options for the Agganis Way Pedestrian Bridge:
  1. West Option (Preferred)
    - Doesn't align with Agganis Way.
    - Allows for an overlook at the end of the bridge.
    - Connects to the park from both the east and the west.
    - Avoids switchback.
    - Short route to Paul Dudley White Path (PDWP).
  2. East Option



- Visually aligns to Agganis Way.
- Switchback to accommodate ramp slope.
- Lands close to the throat area, which is the narrowest part of the PDWP, so bridge can only enter from the west on the Charles side.

## DISCUSSION

- **David Loutzenheiser (Loutzenheiser), Massachusetts Area Planning Commission (MPAC)** said that he generally agrees with the preferred options. He emphasized the importance of a robust tree canopy, which is difficult to achieve with only 4' of buffer area on the sides of the path and suggested providing wider than 4' along the path.
- Petersen said that the City of Boston has the same preferred options. The City's Disabilities Commission had voiced concerns about the U-Turn Option for the Franklin Street Pedestrian Bridge, due to:
  - path length,
  - managing interactions between bicycles, pedestrians, and people using mobility devices, and
  - the interface at the bottom of the U-turn at the southern foot of the bridge.
- **Galen Mook (Mook), MassBike**, thanked the team for looking at robust options. However, he expressed that more coordination work is needed. Specifically,
  - Mook noted the need to coordinate with the City of Boston on the Cambridge Street connection at Harvard Street to make sure it's safe due to the amount of traffic coming onto Harvard Street.
  - Mook commented that DCR previously missed an opportunity to connect the BU bridge to the Charles River and encouraged the project team to work to establish that connection.
  - The project team should consider how Brookline residents will connect to West Station and access the riverfront. Many of them will travel through the Agganis intersection, which is a complex and dangerous crossing that should be made safer.
  - Consideration should be given to renaming some of the project elements, such as changing the South Side Buffer Path to The People's Pike and renaming the Harry Agganis Footbridge to the Bob Sloan Footbridge.
- Note: Kindsvatter was approached by a representative of the Serria Club, Clint Richmond, after the meeting who endorsed Galen's request that the project team and the City coordinate on a safe crossing of Comm Ave at Agganis for cyclists from Brookline.



- **Jessica Robertson (Robertson), Allston Community Representative** agreed with Loutzenheiser for a better balance between the path and the tree canopy proposed for the SSBP and that she supported the connection from Cambridge Street to Linden Street at the end of the Franklin Street Pedestrian Bridge (FSPB) Robertson asked if it is possible for the FSPB to have ramps in both directions on Linden Street.
  - *Response: Keller said that COB has performed planning analysis to put a shared use path along Lincoln St. for pedestrians and bicycles in the future. The project team could look into having an additional ramp connection in the other direction, however it would likely conflict with the proposed I-90 westbound on-ramp and future COB shared use path alignments.*
  - Robertson, although agreeing that the elevated buffer path is the better option, stated her preference for Harvard's proposal to move the tracks north to allow for future terra firma development.
- **Albert Ng (Ng), Harvard University** clarified that the path is 38' in some places and generally 30' throughout. The existing property line is not shifting, the variance in width is due to an irregularity along the property line.
- **Fred Salvucci (Salvucci)**, said that he's happy that people feel like their input has been incorporated, however he believes it's premature to designate preferred alternatives and that the project team should be able to finalize the environmental process without having definitive plans for layover while the City of Boston works with MassDOT to identify alternate layover sites. Salvucci suggested showing no layover at Allston.
- **Seth Gadbois (Gadbois), Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)** asked if layover at Beacon Park Yard is part of the No Build Alternative to support south side operations as part of the South Station Expansion project.
  - *MassDOT responded that they will follow up on Gadbois' questions. (Response provided at the end of the Summary Notes under Questions Received at the Meeting and Subsequent Responses.)*
- Gadbois stated that he thinks the no build without layover is a justified option. In addition, Gadbois noted that in the Massachusetts' Environmental Protection Agency's (MEPA) certification for the NPC, MassDOT was directed to document the need for layover and that MassDOT should be prepared to lay out their analysis about why the build alternative is preferred.
- **Jay Flynn (Flynn), TransitMatters** commented that he doesn't believe the layover assessment needs are justified and that the analysis prepared way overestimates the layover needs.



- **Bill Deignan** commented that he saw that the final presentation for the Multimodal Local Connections WG seemed to mention a connection across the Charles between Cambridge and Boston and asked whether a recommendation came from this.
  - *Response: Chris Calnan, Tetra Tech said the project team explored a connection from the BU bridge down to the Paul Dudley White Path and weren't able to develop any viable options due to accessibility, ROW, environmental and historic impacts.*

## Temporary Grand Junction Rail (GJR) Outage

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### OUTAGE SCHEDULE REDUCTION APPROACH

- **John Weston, MassDOT** reviewed challenges with the GJR closure:
  - MBTA's "North Side" and "South Side" Commuter Rail infrastructure is connected by GJR.
  - An at-grade alternative would sever the GJR connection during construction. This would require MBTA and Amtrak to take a 100+ mile detour route, which is one of many factors that would make a GJR closure challenging.
- The project team is looking into ways that could shorten the outage period when GJR isn't available for service. **Rich Lennox (Lennox), WSP** talked about the alternative staging strategies proposed by A Better City (ABC) and Harvard University. These are currently being reviewed by the project team.
- The criteria used to evaluate these strategies include:
  - Maintaining all transportation modes throughout the closure.
  - Temporary and permanent geometric challenges within a constrained throat area for all transportation facilities.
  - Rapid reconstruction of the GJR Bridge over Soldiers Field Road (SFR).
  - Construction of retained fill approaches and new GJR Bridge over I-90.
  - Schedule and cost implications.
- **Tom Nally (Nally), ABC** said that the solution must be done collaboratively and is something that everyone is comfortable with. It should be cost-effective and work for the schedule. ABC does not believe that the GJR will need to be closed for six or seven years. Nally said he thinks they can find a way to do the closure in several stages, a few weeks at a time, and that it's also possible to have alternate maintenance operations for short periods of time. Nally added that he thinks that the team can collaboratively come up with a creative solution, and commended MassDOT for their accelerated construction techniques that have been used on other projects.



- Ng agreed with Nally that the closure could be measured in weeks or months and not years. ABC, the City and Harvard all agree that this is a critical issue and appreciate MassDOT's flexibility to work through new ideas.

## SERVICE CONTINGENCY MEASURES

- **Mark Shamon, VHB** spoke on the current effort to develop a contingency plan for different closure possibilities. The study will analyze:
  - Rail operations across the system.
  - Equipment inspection and maintenance cycles.
  - Maintenance facility capabilities.
  - Equipment layover/marshaling (construction period).
  - Operation agreements.
  - Environmental and cost considerations.

## DISCUSSION

- **Ken Miller, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** commented that he thinks MassDOT is on the right track to look at both options, shortening the closure period and to mitigate on the south side. He emphasized that through these efforts he believes there will be a reasonable solution.
- Petersen said that COB is open to being involved with planning the closure as they want it to be successful. He emphasized the importance of understanding the trade-offs of impacts with different roadway closures. In particular, the project team should evaluate the trade-offs between the GJR closure and the impacts of closing lanes on SFR during the construction of the Little Grand Junction Bridge. For example, would temporarily closing SFR significantly accelerate construction, and if so by how much? Although SFR is an important corridor and a closure would cause temporary inconvenience, SFR should be evaluated for alternatives. Also, there may not be a good alternative solution for the train facilities during a long-term closure.
- Loutzenheiser asked if the project team has looked at pulling in a parallel bridge to the GJR bridge over the Charles River to accommodate a shared use path.
  - *Response: Shamon responded that there could be potential for a parallel shared use bridge, however it is not part of the project.*
- Loutzenheiser then asked if a replacement of the GJR bridge will be required at some point to meet service needs north of the Charles River.
  - *Response: Shamon replied that there's no reason to rebuild the GJR Bridge for the purposes it serves today but acknowledged that the bridge may have to be replaced at some point in the future due to aging.*



- Paiewonsky said that she appreciated ABC, Harvard, and everyone else sharing their ideas to help solve issues.
- Gadbois asked that the environmental analyses consider the impacts from different potential scenarios, such as increased emissions from increased auto trips. The project team should coordinate with the climate office.

## General Discussion

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- Gadbois asked about the status of the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant given recent events at the federal level.
  - *Response: Paiewonsky explained that the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee proposed rescinding the funding source that the project draws the \$335 million grant from. This is still in the proposal stage, and MassDOT is monitoring the situation closely and assisting the Commonwealth's delegation as much as they can. As of right now, the team hasn't been notified that the grant status is changing.*

## Next Steps

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- Larkin discussed plans for upcoming TF meetings over the summer.
  - Next meeting:
    - The next TF meeting will be Tuesday, June 17 at the MassDOT Transportation Building.
    - Proposed topics will likely be rail focused.
  - Summer meetings:
    - Robertson asked if TF meetings over the summer could be held on Tuesdays or Wednesdays instead of Thursday.
      - *Response: Larkin said that this would be accommodated, but they may have to be held at other locations such as the MassDOT Transportation Building or a BU building due to conflicts at the Fiorentino Community Center.*
  - Task Force members indicated that holding meetings at alternate locations is fine so long as there is advance notice. Regarding meeting at BU, the stated preference was to meet somewhere along Comm Ave. which is more easily accessible from Allston and Brighton. Future meeting topics:
    - Robertson asked if the TF could see more details about the CTPS modelling. She was told that the new model is more flexible and it is supposedly easier





to make adjustments. She would like to see how the outputs change in response to different inputs.

- Gadbois seconded the CTPS topic. He said that the goal isn't to keep changing the inputs to skew the results, but he feels as if the CTPS modelling to date isn't complete.

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS RECEIVED AT THE MEETING AND SUBSEQUENT RESPONSES

- **Seth Gadbois (Gadbois), Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)** asked if layover at Beacon Park Yard is part of the No Build Alternative to support south side operations as part of the South Station Expansion project.
  - *Response: Layover is part of the No Build Alternative and implies no agency action with respect to the existing layover tracks. The MBTA has existing rights to build, operate and maintain layover tracks. These rights were granted in 2003 and predate the South Station Expansion project. The No Build Alternative would not extinguish easement rights.*
- **Zachary Yaro:** For the updated Franklin bridge, I want to voice my support for the options with the switchback or loop on each side of the Pike, minimizing the time we would spend physically over the Pike. Unless the bridge were made very wide, with plants or something to insulate us from the noise below, the version with the long loop west over the Pike and then back east to street level would be very unpleasant to walk over.
  - *Response: Thank you for your comment.*
- **Sam Finston:** What transit is currently being planned for the Malvern Street transit way?
  - *Response: Thank you for your comment. The Malvern Street Transit way is being designed to host Bus, Pedestrian and Bike connection to West Station. Planned transit include routing for the Ruggles/ LMA shuttle and a potential routing for the MBTA 64 bus.*
- **Tyler Swanson:** Does 4 tracks mean 4 total tracks or 4 layover tracks in addition to the Worcester line tracks?
  - *Response: In the Build Alternative, 4 layover tracks would be in addition to two Worcester Mainline tracks and station siding tracks proposed to serve the Worcester Mainline and a future Grand Junction.*
- **Adam Goodlitt:** Just a comment about the layover, wouldn't it make sense to build the layover now while we have the opportunity so if we want to increase the number of trains on the Worcester line when the east/west/compass rail project opens



- *Response: Thank you for your comment. Layover at Beacon Park Yard is being evaluated through the DEIR Environmental Filing process and will be open to Public comment.*
- Bill Deignan: I hope we can coordinate on some additional work on a multi-use path connection across the river and connecting the river path system.
  - *Response: Thank you for your comments.*
- Bill Deignan: The path connection is extremely important here and the limited connectivity that the BU Bridge has is insufficient.
  - *Response: Thank you for your comments. Per request, MassDOT has explored options and based on the constraints, primarily environmental impacts, ROW, and accessibility, a reasonable alternative hasn't been placed under consideration. Please feel free to submit suggested connection points to the project team. The main constraint from a historical perspective would be the need to avoid any impact to the BU Sailing Pavillion which is immediately east of the BU Bridge. Impacts to the BU Bridge itself would also be a concern as would any new structure in the Charles River. The bridge, the sailing pavilion and the Charles River are all contributing elements of the National Register-listed Charles River Basin Historic District.*
  - *To further clarify: The Allston Multimodal Project's project limits are the south side of the Charles River; the project does not include any work to the MBTA-owned Grand Junction Bridge. However, the project design will not preclude any potential future work that may be planned as a separate future project. Similarly, the "throat" area and West Station platform designs will not preclude passenger rail service across the Grand Junction Bridge, although we are not aware that this service is planned.*
- Sam Finston: The grand junction railway bridge provides a rare opportunity to improve our passenger rail network within the city. Seeing as we're building a large new train station, is there any rail service being planned across it? I'm not sure what the goal is of a new station that is just an additional stop on the Worcester line and via routes. The issues mentioned about the bridge's importance to Amtrak and the MBTA makes it sound even more important to at least double-track.
  - *Response: Project limits are at the south side of the Charles River. The project's West Station platform and track alignments through the throat area are being designed within the project limits as not to preclude a future passenger rail service across the Grand Junction.*