Task Force Meeting Summary
I-90 Allston Multimodal Project

DATE: June 17, 2025
HSH PROJECT NO.: 2021055.08
PANELISTS: Beth Larkin (TY Lin)
Gregory Boles (VHB)
Laura Gilmore (MBTA)
Luisa Paiewonsky (MassDOT)
Meredith Avery (VHB)
Ryan Cullen (VHB)
Susan Harrington (MassDOT)

Overview

On Tuesday, June 17, 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 87 attendees (30 in-person and 57 virtual). The meeting covered the following topics:

- Welcome/ Introductions
- Layover Update
- MBTA, MassDOT Compass Rail, and Amtrak Operations
- Rail Components
- West Station Bus Concourse
- Next Steps

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

- **Beth Larkin (Larkin), TY Lin and Task Force Facilitator,** welcomed everyone to the meeting and began with a brief safety minute. She ran through the agenda with Task Force members and meeting attendees noting that the agenda is focused on the project's rail and transit components. In addition, Larkin pointed out that there are ongoing efforts that may

or may not impact the work presented for Beacon Park Yard (BPY) and those efforts would be discussed during the meeting.

Layover Update

- **Luisa Paiewonsky, MassDOT** Executive Director, Megaprojects Delivery Office, shared that a proposed scope of work for identifying alternate locations within the City of Boston for some or all of the layover tracks currently proposed for BPY was sent to the City of Boston for their review. A meeting is scheduled for the following day, June 18, 2025, to review the proposed scope.
- **Matthew Petersen (Petersen), City of Boston (COB)** shared that their review of the scope is underway and the City of Boston is looking forward to working collaboratively with MassDOT to explore the options.

MBTA, MassDOT Compass Rail, and Amtrak Operations

- **Laura Gilmore, MBTA** spoke about the planned service improvements for rail service.
  - Compass Rail service enhancements and expansion will include six daily roundtrips connecting Boston and Springfield, including Amtrak's Lake Shore Limited service. Currently, there is one roundtrip service operating this connection (the Lake Shore Ltd.). While Compass Rail is a MassDOT initiative, the service is planned to be operated by Amtrak. No Compass Rail stops are planned in the project area—they will run express through BPY.
  - MBTA Framingham/Worcester Line investments include: speed restriction removal, Worcester Union Station platform rebuild, 30 minute service frequencies (targeted for 2026), and ongoing station accessibility improvements.
  - Train movements through the project area: Today 59 trains operate through the corridor. This is expected to increase by 109 trains for a total of 168 trains per day by 2035. There will be increased revenue movements for the MBTA, Amtrak, and Compass Rail. The number of non-revenue movements for maintenance will remain the same. Most trains (160) will be MBTA-operated.
  - Approximately 80 of these trains (Framingham local service) will stop at West Station while approx. 80 trains (Worcester zonal express) will not. Today, the only stations that host 80 or more trains a day are terminal stations or stations with multiple lines like Back Bay and Ruggles. This is three times current service at Boston Landing and almost two times current service at Forest Hills or Hyde Park.

- The MBTA notes that the proposed service to West Station and communities on the Framingham/Worcester Line is robust while balancing the need to offer time-competitive transit to prompt riders to take transit over driving. The plan is subject to change as the MBTA regularly reviews schedules based on demand and operations.
- With Worcester 30-30, both zonal express and local riders will receive more service.

DISCUSSION

- Task Force members conveyed that West Station should be considered a regional station, a connection point, more like Ruggles Station and not Boston Landing.
  - *Project Team Response: Gilmore noted that nothing precludes providing more service than planned in the future while finding balance in improving the current 90-minute ride from Worcester. Gillmore added that the MBTA is looking to increase service at all stations along the Framingham/Worcester Line.*
- **Fred Yalouris (Yalouris), Community Representative** said that there are lots of stations between South Station and Worcester, none of which have the type of bypassing being discussed. West Station is supposed to be regional. If only half of the trains stop here, then some people will have to wait twice as long than if there were no express trains.
- Yalouris added that the project team should conduct an analysis to predict the expected number of riders with each train stopping at West Station compared to the expected number of riders with bypass trains.
  - *Project Team Response: The ridership analysis will include project boardings and alightings at West Station and other stations.*
- Yalouris also requested that the environmental documents include analysis on the future Grand Junction Rail connection to Kendall Square. Several task force members agreed that a connection to Kendall is critical and should be included in the environmental analysis.
  - *Project Team Response: Paiewonsky responded that a Grand Junction-Kendall Square connection is not part of this project, however the current project is designed not to preclude that connection in the future.*
- **Emily Norton (Norton)**, **Charles River Watershed Association** formerly represented Newtonville on the Newton City Council. She said that Newton has been at the forefront of housing development within the Greater Boston area. However, the frequency of rail service hasn't improved, and the stations continue to have single-sided boarding and lack accessibility. She asked if the current plan includes upgrading the Newton Commuter Rail stations.
  - *Project Team Response: **Jay Maddox (Maddox), MBTA** responded that this presentation focused on stops related to the project. We are happy to connect afterward and connect with railroad ops for a formal response.*

- Petersen said that West Station is a connection point – it will be the western gateway to housing and job clusters. Allston is one of the neighborhoods experiencing the highest levels of development in Boston. We must balance serving the local area and maintaining time-competitive service for points west or for regional travelers. COB is looking forward to the process of discussing a layover plan and options for the schedule and rail facility in a way that does not preclude future service.
  - *Project Team Response: The quality of service that will be provided at West Station will be the same as that at other stations and will be time competitive.*
- **Beth O'Neill Maloney (Maloney), Kendall Square Association** noted that today, commuting to Newton takes approximately 1 hour via train vs 45 minutes driving. Commuting to Worcester via rail takes approximately 90 minutes. She asked how many trains will stop vs bypass stations like Natick, Wellesley, and Newton?
  - *Project Team Response: The proposed service plan intends for all Framingham local trains to stop at Natick, Wellesley, and Newton stations as well as at Boston Landing and West Station. Compared to existing conditions, service will increase at every stop on the line per the MBTA's 30-30 Plan. A Kendall Square connection via the Grand Junction is not within the scope or funding of this project. MassDOT has committed that the I-90 Allston Multimodal Project shall not preclude a future connection.*
- **Albert Ng (Ng), Harvard University** commented that it will be nice to see more frequent service on this line.
- Ng expressed concern regarding what was described as a disconnect between 8-10 M SF of proposed development and the rail design service currently being planned, and that the number of switches currently being proposed limits service through West Station.
- Ng asked why is the station on siding tracks rather than on the mainline? Why hasn't a scenario with the station at the south of the site on the mainline been considered?
  - *Project Team Response: MassDOT's understanding was that West Station's location was shifted north to accommodate development and Grand Junction connectivity. The MBTA would prefer the station location be closer to the current mainline to support operations. The MBTA wants to maintain the two existing Worcester Main Line (WML) tracks, with West Station on siding tracks for system resilience.*
- **Harry Mattison (Mattison), Community Representative** asked what's the maximum level of service that West Station and Grand Junction would be able to carry with the proposed configuration if there were no constraints from available trains or signals?
  - *Project Team Response: This can be looked into. Post meeting follow up comment: The maximum level of service would be fully dependent on what line improvements are made and what equipment is operated. Line improvements could be both within and*

external to the project area. Line improvements could include additional tracks, implementation of high-level platforms, and super-elevation adjustments to support higher speeds, to name a few.

- Mattison followed this up with a request to provide the minimum headway on the Framingham/Worcester Line based on the proposed rail layout at BPY, i.e. based on the capacity of the infrastructure.
  - *Project Team Response: Gilmore responded that there isn't an answer to this today, but one can be provided after completion of the WML rail analysis.*
- **Jessica Robertson (Robertson), Community Representative** noted that the community would greatly prefer that West Station be located closer to the WML tracks and questioned why that isn't a proposal being evaluated.
  - *Project Team Response: Paiewonsky noted that the rail operations model will be discussed at a future meeting.*

Rail Components

DEIS APPROACH OVERVIEW

- **Meredith Avery (Avery), VHB** said that the DEIS is an analysis of the environmental aspects of the alternatives. It's not a final design. The DEIS also aims to solicit public feedback to refine the concepts. Avery added that the rail components presented in this meeting reflect those in the DEIS documents.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

- **Gregory Boles (Boles), VHB** shared that the design goals were to include West Station and layover space while having enough room for the Allston Community Path. As a result, the station was pushed to the northern end of the parcel. Boles reviewed the existing conditions and build alternative. The build alternative aims to maintain current speeds, add station tracks, and not preclude future service. The Grand Junction track and WML have a connection point known as CP3. Maintenance movements from South Station head west on the WML and switch at CP3.

LAYOUT

- Boles reviewed the proposed layout along the alignment from west to east in three sections: western project limits (West of Cambridge Street), central project limits (West Station/BPY), and eastern project limits (east of BPY).
- **Western Project Limits:** Begin at Boston Landing and ties into existing tracks. Tracks then push north towards I-90 along curves designed for speeds up to 79 mph. This allows

space for the Allston Community Path while maintaining the current speed in the project area. Profile will be lowered to approximately elevation 18' in conjunction with the latest Cambridge Street Bridge design and is the elevation that exists throughout much of the central project area. Northernly bay is currently planned to be used for highway construction staging, preventing the movement of tracks to that area until after the highway staging is complete.

- **Central Project Limits:** West Station is aligned to the north which is consistent with the "flip" design and will allow space for the Allston Community Path while supporting a mainline track adjustment on tangent tracks. WML tracks split from the West Station tracks to maintain direction and speed for zone express and intercity rail service. A continuous connection is maintained from Boston Landing for runaround track to Grand Junction for freight access.
- **Eastern Project Limits:** West Station tracks rejoin WML forming an important crossover area. WML tracks begin diving down to go underneath Commonwealth Avenue bridge. Grand Junction tracks start rising at a maximum grade of 1.5% to travel over I-90, Soldier's Field Road (SFR), and connect to the existing Charles River Bridge at the river. Wall to be installed between the rising and lowering sets of tracks in this area. WML tracks will be shifted into BU's property. A retaining wall along Buick Street would be rebuilt to support track alignment improvements. There will be some construction impacts to Buick Street, but access will be maintained for the Agganis Arena.

DISCUSSION

- Petersen indicated that the City is focused on a forward-looking process and looks forward to working with MassDOT on addressing the rail issues.
- Fred Salvucci commented that interests of western and eastern communities along the Framingham/Worcester Line could be unified by upgrading the line's signal system. He added that the community hates to see train storage at BPY and that there are better options at Widett Circle. He said that infrastructure capacity is negatively impacted by rail crossovers, that there shouldn't be a design that locks out options for more station stops at West Station, and that train storage is precluding two housing parcels.
- Salvucci then spoke of his time working on the Orange Line upgrades in the 1970s and 1980s and said that gentrification in Jamaica Plain was an unforeseen repercussion. The blue-collar communities that the upgrades intended to benefit were pushed out of the neighborhood. West Station will be located near cost-effective housing units. The project team should consider such impacts so that this is not repeated in Allston. This is an environmental justice issue.

  - *Project Team Response: Paiewonsky responded that MassDOT is grateful to Harvard for proposing housing and that transportation and housing are two policy issues that can work together instead of being pitted against each other.*
- Salvucci added that the rail layout should be developed without train storage and that West Station should be located on the WML. Salvucci and **Galen Mook (Mook), MassBike** referenced a recent MBTA public meeting in Fall River where residents expressed how they were blindsided by the consequences of new train infrastructure and the effects it has on quality of life.
- **Seth Gadbois (Gadbois), Conservation Law Foundation** noted that where mainline tracks are part of the base case, they are not tied to the purpose and need in the same way as the layover, and asked how much time would be saved on a trip from Worcester to Boston by bypassing West Station on the WML tracks, and if the Task Force will see an alternate without station tracks?
  - *Project Team Response: The MBTA can follow up with the trip time savings and Boles responded that between the Draft and Final environmental document filings there may be changes to the rail layout. Boles added that the station tracks are not tied to the project's purpose and need.* ***Susan Harrington (Harrington), MassDOT*** *PM also noted that there's an ongoing rail study that is evaluating options for WML tracks and that the outcome of the study would be presented at a future Task Force meeting. Also noted that the analysis results are based on parameters other than time savings, such as on time performance.*
- Mook reiterated the need for alternative rail layouts to be presented. He asked what the purpose of the WML is if not for time savings, and that he thought there would be a benefit with less switches in the rail yard?
  - *Project Team Response: Boles responded that the design goal was to maintain the current WML travel times for the majority of WML riders who board from points west of I-95. The separation of mainline and station tracks also adds resiliency to the system, offering the ability of trains to bypass.*
- Mook asked the project team how they'll measure vibrations and noise and how this will be presented in the environmental filings?
  - *Project Team Response: The sound differential is the difference between noise levels today and those of future proposed conditions. An analysis of sound differentials and vibration levels will be included in the environmental filings. The team will also investigate the potential for the low-frequency noise issue being experienced at the new South Coast Rail facility.*

- Mook asked whether there would be funding for layover tracks and if money can be saved by eliminating layover and WML tracks?
  - *Project Team Response: Paiewonsky responded that MassDOT is routinely updating the project and considering scenarios with and without grant funding. She added that this transportation project will open up a great piece of land and that MassDOT is here to make transportation better and create opportunities for future development.*
- **Councilor Liz Breadon (Breadon)** commented that development along the adjoining Ashford Street corridor and corner should be considered in the design as well.
- Councilor Breadon then asked if the project team is considering electric trains and factoring them into layover space and maintenance needs? Future analysis should support a move towards electrification.
  - *Project Team Response: Gilmore responded that the MBTA is moving towards an electrified Commuter Rail system. The first pilot electrification project is on the Fairmount line, estimated to start in 2028. Modeling is underway to anticipate future infrastructure and funding needs across the system, however there are significant energy and capital needs to achieve an electrified system.*
- **Clint Richmond (Richmond), Sierra Club** reiterated support for electrification. He also stated that the design should include enough platforms for future service expansion and reduced dwell times, and that WML should be more integrated with the station.
- Robertson noted that there was a 50-mph limit on one end and a 60 mph limit on the other end. She added that if layover could be eliminated, then West Station could be moved closer to WML like the MBTA would like. She emphasized that time savings analysis is important.
- Petersen noted his support for resiliency and the opportunity to explore alternative layouts between the Draft and Final environmental filings.

West Station Bus Concourse

SERVICE AND DESIGN ASSUMPTIONS

- **Ryan Cullen (Cullen), VHB** discussed the operation and design assumptions for the proposed West Station Bus Concourse, noting that:
  - The bus concourse is designed to be built above the West Station rail infrastructure.
  - Three potential shuttle routes with 40' transit buses connecting Ruggles Station, Lechmere, and Harvard Square to West Station.
    - Requires six berths that allow for independent operation without needing a queue.

    - Route frequencies: every 5 minutes during peak hours, every 15 minutes during midday, and every 20 minutes during evening hours.
  - Bus Route 64 would stop along Seattle Street.

LAYOUT

- Cullen presented the Parallel Busway Bus Concourse concept. The decked busway is above the rail infrastructure and the concourse operates in an east-west direction with two parallel barrels off Cambridge Street Bypass Road. The concourse is accessed via Cambridge Street Bypass Road or West Station Way and egresses to Cambridge Street Bypass Road. Other aspects of the bus concourse include:
  - Up to seven active berths with three possible layover berths if needed. Space for diversion activities or bus staging if layover berths not needed.
  - Pick-up and drop-off area that accommodated 15 cars from the WB direction, located at the south side of the station along Cambridge Street Bypass Road.
  - Floating bus stops and bus lanes on Seattle Street for Route 64 stops.
  - Array of pedestrian access routes and points of connectivity to the surrounding network, including Allston Community Path. Pedestrian barrier recommended along layover lane to deter pedestrians coming from the pick-up and drop-off area.
- The design aims to consolidate the number of crosswalks for safety.
- The concourse is surrounded by two-way bike facilities on three sides with potential for a one-way on the north side of Cambridge Street Bypass Road. A Bluebikes station and secure bike parking area are proposed with the concourse.
- Cullen described vehicular movement as follows:
  - Buses approaching from Seattle Street would use designated bus lanes before turning onto Cambridge Street Bypass Road, utilizing the parallel barrels of the concourse, and continuing back onto the Seattle Street bus lanes.
  - The Malvern Transitway would be open to transit and emergency vehicles only. Buses would follow the same path as those coming from Seattle Street but instead would continue back onto Malvern Transitway.
  - The bus lanes and movements conflict with vehicular movements in the lane configurations. They would likely operate under separate transit phases that allow for transit signal priority.

DISCUSSION

- Petersen stated that COB believes that the lateral position of West Station at the bus concourse and Seattle Street intersection needs further analysis and signal operations will be

important. He added that the City is looking forward to working with the MBTA and others to develop a service plan.

- Breadon asked whether buses will be able to come off the turnpike and drop passengers at West Station?
  - *Project Team Response: Cullen responded that the project team has not specifically developed a scenario for accommodating buses exiting the turnpike, adding that an earlier review found that it would be relatively easy to accommodate eastbound buses but may be difficult to accommodate outbound buses.*
- **Bill Deignan (Deignan), City of Cambridge** stressed that it's critical to make sure the intersection at Cambridge Street and Seattle Street functions well and safely.
- Deignan asked if the bus platform will be a covered structure that protects from the elements?
  - *Project Team Response: Cullen responded that they are not depicting any covered elements, but that it could be a consideration.*
- Robertson asked why the bus concourse is modelled as a terminal station instead of a through station?
  - *Project Team Response: Cullen responded that West Station could operate as a through station. Temporary lay-up berthing capabilities were requested because locations such as Harvard Square cannot accommodate more buses in waiting.*
- Robertson questioned if the pedestrian barrier could be reassessed to have crosswalks installed based on desire lines.
  - *Project Team Response: Cullen responded that this can be considered.*
- Ng noted that with the amount of development predicted, there should be ample bus service throughout the area and that the design should consider the mixing of public and private bus service to support the amount of future development. He added that it's possible that Harvard will shift some of its terminus routes to West Station.
- Mook commented that what was presented seems preliminary and that work needs to be done to develop a more robust design. He offered the following comments:
  - Regarding the bike crossing where buses will be entering and exiting the berth area —could this be pulled back to a safer location? We should be thinking about all the ways we can minimize conflict.
  - It seems like the design doesn't include dedicated bus corridors like those at Ruggles.
  - Although the design presented has pedestrian, bicycle, and bus accommodations, what would the most robust design look like? How could the bus be more integrated into transit service? I would like the project team to share this design and include it in the environmental filings.

- Petersen noted that after the tragedy at Forest Hills, COB has been working with MBTA to think of robust design solutions. Hopefully these can be incorporated into West Station.
- An attendee spoke about their regular commute via Route 64. The bus often gets stuck in traffic and service is infrequent. Why are we dedicated so much of this traffic to just adding more buses? There should be more focus on expanding light and Commuter rail service.
  - *Project Team Response: It's important to point out that the bus and shuttle service being modeled throughout the network does not have committed operators and the goal is to design an intermodal station with robust service connections, to and throughout the network.—there is still work to be done.*

Next Steps

- Proposed upcoming meeting dates:
  - July 22, August 19, September 18
- Potential topics at upcoming task force meetings:
  - Railwork at BPY update
  - Status of alternate layover sites
  - IMR briefing
  - CTPS follow-up
  - Grand Junction Rail temporary outage/mitigation
  - Lincoln Street noise wall
  - Future BPY land use
- Potential topics for later meetings:
  - Landscaping and plantings
  - Stormwater and utilities
  - Rail alignment