



Task Force Meeting Summary

I-90 Allston Multimodal Project

DATE: July 22, 2025

HSH PROJECT NO.: 2021055.08

PANELISTS: Beth Larkin (TY Lin)
Luisa Paiewonsky (MassDOT)
Susan Harrington (MassDOT)
Rob Cahoon (VHB)

Overview

On Tuesday, July 22, 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 120 attendees (28 in-person and 92 virtual). The meeting covered the following topics:

- Welcome/ Introductions
- Project Update
- Lincoln Street Noise Barriers
- 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, highlighting that the meeting would largely be focused on the path forward for the project.

Project Update

- **Luisa Paiewonsky, MassDOT Executive Director, Megaprojects Delivery Office**, shared the following:
 - The Trump administration has rescinded \$327 million of the \$335 million granted to the project by the Neighborhood Access and Equity Fund Grant Program.



- MassDOT is planning to engage independent review consultants to perform a two-step review process. The first step will be to perform an in-depth project cost analysis that reflects the effects of the grant rescission and additional cost drivers such as recent tariffs and inflation; the second step will be to perform an independent engineering analysis to examine how to deliver the most transportation benefits with available resources. The outcome of these efforts will help the MassDOT/MBTA project team determine the path forward.
- MassDOT is considering potential early action items. Some items that were constrained by the grant can potentially now be considered, including the Franklin Street bicycle/pedestrian bridge, Cambridge St. Bridge replacement and Lincoln Street noise barriers.
- The cost analysis will work within the constraints of current funding availability but may consider future potential funding sources.
- The project team will wrap up work on the Interchange Modification Report (IMR) as it is near completion.
- The DEIS/SDEIR's submittals will be paused. The project team had planned to submit the draft documents this fall.
- MassDOT's next steps are to develop the scope of services for the independent review consultants and to procure and engage those consultants.
- Consultants currently working on the project—VHB, Tetra Tech, WSP and HSH—will continue working on the project and will not be involved in the independent consultants' work.

DISCUSSION

- **Jessica Robertson (Robertson), Community Representative** expressed her disappointment that the project had lost its grant funding and urged everyone to stay focused and keep the finish line in sight. Robertson noted that while it was good for the independent consultants to serve as a fresh set of eyes, they should not revert to prior phasing where the highway was to be constructed in 2025 and West Station in 2040, that the project should not be “penny wise and pound foolish” and the focus should be in the right place for project savings. Robertson referenced the Green Line Extension (GLX) Project and how certain elements of the project were scaled back, like the bike path. As a result, she believes that the bike path is too narrow, has no lighting, and is generally poorly designed. She noted that GLX ended up being under budget and the cities of Somerville and Cambridge were refunded a portion of their community contributions and the project should have used the entire budget to design a better bike path. She hopes that similar mistakes are not repeated in this project's designs.



- **Fred Salvucci (Salvucci), Community Representative** noted that per the Governor's press release, they may try to get the \$327 million grant funds back and therefore, it is essential to complete environmental filings as scheduled so there are no delays if funding is restored. He also suggested eliminating layover from the project. Salvucci then stated that early action items require an understanding of construction phasing and that the current design team would be best to identify early action projects, not an independent consultant. Salvucci added that the earlier construction can start on early actions, the more insulated they'll be from inflation.
- **Amy Ingles (Ingles), Town of Brookline** asked what pieces of the project will be moving forward now. Paiewonsky responded that this hasn't been decided yet.
- **Galen Mook (Mook), MassBike** emphasized that the project should continue to move forward, the project should not be paused, and the project should be first in line for funding if there is a change in Congress. He also asked about other funding sources and whether there are any contingencies associated with them. Mook noted that even though the Reconnecting Communities grant has been rescinded, reconnecting communities should still be a tenet of the design. He also underscored thanks for the project team and the feeling that everyone is together on moving the project forward. Paiewonsky responded that the project will not be halted, but certain elements may be paused. For example, the project doesn't have the funds to construct what's laid out in the DEIS.
- **Ken Miller (Miller), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** clarified that the Cambridge Street Bridge replacement could be pulled out as an early action project without jeopardizing any future grant since it has independent utility. He said the reason it couldn't be pulled out under the prior grant was that the bridge was amended into the grant funding for the full project. At that time the bridge could not be pulled out for early phase construction independent of the full project for which the grant was awarded.
- **Emily Norton (Norton), Charles River Waterfront Association (CRWA)** commented that one option for cost-savings would be to build six lanes instead of the eight lanes on I-90.
- **Albert Ng (Ng), Harvard** agreed that the project should be advanced as expeditiously as possible and the scope of the independent analysis should determine what the available project funding is, \$2 billion - \$237 million or something less than that. Paiewonsky responded that they first need to know how much the project currently costs and that the project team aims to maximize progress on transportation and other aspects of the project dependent on available resources. This doesn't necessarily mean the only solution is cutting out elements of the project, but could include solutions like phasing construction, using different materials, analyzing efficiencies, etc. and that information would be shared as it's developed.



- Ng asked how MassDOT anticipated using the Task Force going forward. Paiewonsky responded that the Task Force would continue in its advisory capacity and regular meeting schedule.
- **Matthew Petersen (Petersen), City of Boston** said that the City of Boston is strategically invested in the project and that the City is working through layover with MassDOT and thinks that everyone will end up being happy. He also noted that rail alignment, construction phasing and construction disruptions are all integrated problems and that it would be good to have a common understanding of what and how things are being analyzed. The highway is a core part of the project, and other transformative elements that benefit the community are core parts of the project too. Paiewonsky responded that the project team is committed to keeping connectivity as one of the main objectives.
- **Tom Nally (Nally), A Better City (ABC)** emphasized four points, 1) the need to review potential funding sources and identify strategies for fulling funding the project and not strategies for shrinking the scope of the project, 2) minimize any delays in the environmental approval process, 3) focus on benefits for all modes of the multimodal project and not sacrificing the benefits of one mode over another, and 4) that Task Force and stakeholders should provide early input and be able to comment on the work of the independent engineering analysis as was done for the work of the Independent Review Team led by Jack Wright in 2018.
- Nally said that the design should continue to focus on the benefits for all modes of transportation. We shouldn't sacrifice benefits from one mode to distribute to another. Paiewonsky reiterated that the project will remain a multimodal project. She also pointed out the input from ABC and Harvard and the great ideas put forward regarding the Grand Junction Rail outage as an example of Task Force input.
- **Anthony D'Isidoro (D'Isidoro), Allston Civic Association** said that it's important that the public is more informed about the status of the project and stressed the need to beef up communications with the outside world. D'Isidoro suggested developing a communication vehicle that could be used by Task Force members to share with the broader community and hear directly from MassDOT. Paiewonsky responded that the project team is open to suggestions for communications with the public such as a newsletter or social media.
- D'Isidoro asked if the Cambridge Street Bridge preservation work will move forward. Paiewonsky responded that the preservation work is proceeding as planned.
- **Seth Gadbois (Gadbois), Conservation Law Foundation (CLF)** commented about potential "big ticket" savings, such as layover, Worcester Main Line Tracks, and I-90 travel lanes. Gadbois asked how the project team will be defining transportation benefits, connectivity, and multimodality. Gadbois also asked what the next steps are after the



independent engineering analysis is completed and what impacts there may be to the project purpose and need. Paiewonsky responded that layover has potential to be moved, provided that suitable locations are found in the City of Boston, but that it is too early to determine the outcome of the analysis.

- Gadbois asked why the IMR isn't being paused if the environmental process is paused. Paiewonsky responded that the IMR effort is close to being completed and there will then be a product for the work done. Miller added that the purpose of the IMR is to determine whether alternatives presented are acceptable from a safety and operational point of view and that the IMR is not a recommendation of a particular alternative.
- Ingles asked about the number of lanes for the Cambridge Street Bridge replacement and if the project team will address the cross-section if this is an early action project. Petersen responded that the proposed cross-section on the bridge is generally okay and that the Cambridge Street cross-section east of the bridge was more of a concern. Also, the preservation work that's underway doesn't necessarily change anything about the lane allocation on the bridge today, it's more about reestablishing the northern sidewalk.
- **Beth Maloney (Maloney), Kendall Square Association** underscored the points made by Tom Nally and agreed with his recommendation that the project should stay on the original schedule.
- **Chris Osgood (Osgood), City of Boston** added that the project team should continue the cadence of the project and keep refining designs as part of that cadence and understand cost implications of alternatives. He stated that the Task Force should be engaged in the definition of project success and that there should be a full picture of project success and not just transportation benefits. Osgood also requested an updated project schedule. Osgood emphasized that the Allston Multimodal Project is still an amazing project with an amazing project team.
- Robertson stated that project elements that were included in the project budget submitted as part of the grant should be prioritized. Robertson added that it would be great to accelerate construction of the Cambridge Street bridge replacement but recognizes the importance of staging.
- **Peter Dunn (Dunn), Chief Development Officer for the City of Worcester and CEO of the Worcester Redevelopment Authority, representing their local MBTA Task Force**, stressed the importance of receiving input from Worcester in the project. Dunn highlighted some facts about 2024 ridership on the Worcester/ Framingham line: the line had four million riders, more than 50% of weekday riders from Worcester use the line to commute to work, and the line has the second most ridership of commuter rail lines in MA. Dunn expressed the critical importance of providing separate Worcester Main Line tracks as part



of the project, noting that there are over 2,000 units of mixed-income housing under construction within walking distance to Union Station and that those investments around Union Station in Worcester were influenced by the promise of commuter rail and improved connectivity to Worcester. Dunn relayed that Worcester has a vision of an express train to Boston being under an hour, but it currently takes over an hour. Dunn acknowledged COB's proposed financial contribution to the project and noted that Worcester's agreement to relocate CSX from BPY to Worcester made the Allston Multimodal Project possible and that that agreement was based on the expectation and promise of improved commuter rail access to and from Boston.

- Salvucci reinforced the history of CSX moving out of BPY to Worcester to make the Allston Multimodal Project possible.
- Salvucci stated concern about the term “available resources” and that MassDOT should relook at other sources of funding, including the Fair Share funds. Salvucci also stated that the inflationary impacts of the Trump administration “are a big deal.” The project's at-grade option has insulated it from inflated steel costs; however, the Cape Cod Bridges are more susceptible to cost inflation due to the amount of steel on that project.
- D'Isidoro asked if the project team could share a brief presentation about the status of station, commuter rail, and bus service optimization along the Framingham-Worcester line. and whether any ongoing or proposed projects will get cut by the Trump administration. Larkin suggested that this information could be compiled and posted to the project website.
- Gadbois stressed that there were important elements from the grant which made it competitive. He also asked if MassDOT would accept comments on what should be included in the scope of the independent analysis. Paiewonsky said MassDOT would consider comments on what scope should be included in the independent engineering analysis. She also clarified that the independent consultant(s) will be given direction and information from the project team, but the analysis itself will be independent.

Lincoln Street Noise Barrier

- **Rob Cahoon (Cahoon), VHB** presented on the Lincoln Street Noise Barriers, which is a potential early action item. The noise barriers are proposed in two segments along the south side of Lincoln Street. The goals include: achieving 10 dBA noise reduction (for at least one first row receptor); maintaining the minimum offset behind the I-90 guardrail; minimizing impacts to existing utilities; and preserving space for a future shared-use path along the south side of Lincoln Street planned by the City of Boston. Currently, there is a subsurface utility investigation that will likely result in some utilities being relocated.



DISCUSSION

- D’Isodoro said that years ago when scoping Lincoln Street, businesses raised concerns about their signs no longer being visible from the Mass Pike after the noise wall is installed. Is there a certain height the noise wall can be that doesn’t block the signs? How do projects usually deal with noise walls in commercial districts? Cahoon responded that the height of the noise barrier was designed to provide the maximum benefit for the identified noise receptors. The height of the noise barriers may vary and be stepped at the ends.
- Robertson appreciates that this is moving forward as it’s much needed. Robertson asked why the 5-foot utility buffer couldn’t be used for the pathway. Cahoon responded that the dimensions are representative of the City of Boston’s planning within their right-of-way, and there are a number of utility poles along the utility buffer that would obstruct a shared use path. Petersen added that COB is coordinating with Eversource to ensure that the path follows the Eversource utility subwork.
- D’Isodoro asked if the Eversource projects will be complementing the planned shared use path or if the design for the shared use path may have to be readjusted after the utility work is complete. Cahoon responded that there will be ongoing coordination as the project develops.
- Robertson stated that a 10’ wide path is not sufficient for two-way biking. Petersen responded that COB was happy with the right-of-way provided by MassDOT and will discuss the allocation of available right-of-way with the public in the future.
- Osgood asked what the definition was of a “receptor.” **Chris Bajdek, VHB Noise Analyst** responded receptors are residential dwelling units. A benefited receptor receives at least a 5-decibel noise reduction which is considered a noticeable change in noise level.
- Mook noted that an added benefit of the project would be its traffic calming effect on Lincoln St. drivers. Mook agreed that the width of the path is probably inadequate for it to be shared use.
- Mook asked if the sound barrier could be moved closer to the Mass Pike and that wherever it’s possible to get an additional inch or two for the path to take it as this will be a highly trafficked corridor for commuting. Cahoon responded that Lincoln St limited the cross-section and that the alignment of the noise barriers are mostly at the minimum offset from I-90 now. Petersen agreed with Mook that this will be an important corridor.



Next Steps

- Proposed upcoming meeting dates and location were provided and discussed:
 - Dates: August 19, September 18, October 16, November 13, and December 11
 - Location: Meetings will return to being held at the Fiorentino Community Center in September
- Larkin asked the Task Force for their thoughts on holding the August meeting. Some Task Force members supported replacing the August meeting with a general written update and resuming Task Force meetings in September. Others wanted a meeting in August. Subsequent to the Task Force meeting, the decision was made to provide an update in August and resume the meetings in September.
- Ng asked if the project team could share an updated project schedule before the next meeting. Paiewonsky responded that they will share the schedule when it's available.
- At the next Task Force meeting MassDOT will provide the status of their planned actions to advance the path forward.