



South Station Expansion Project

Appendix 1-Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Technical Report

October 2014



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1. Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), and the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) have for decades identified the expansion of rail capacity at Boston South Station as a crucial transportation need, one that has been articulated in multiple local, regional, state, and Northeast Corridor (NEC)-wide planning documents.¹ In cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Amtrak, and the MBTA, MassDOT is now pursuing the expansion of South Station to support existing NEC and commuter rail services and to provide for future Amtrak and MBTA service expansions. The current track capacity, layout, and operations of South Station limit the ability to accommodate projected future expanded services. In addition to expanding South Station terminal facilities, the South Station Expansion (SSX) project will also identify a solution to address existing and future intercity and commuter rail service layover needs. The SSX project includes planning, environmental reviews, and preliminary engineering for the five primary elements of the project:

1. **Expand the South Station terminal facilities**, including the addition of up to seven tracks and four platforms and construction of a new passenger concourse and other amenities.
2. **Acquire and demolish the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) General Mail Facility** located on Dorchester Avenue adjacent to South Station, which will provide an approximately 14-acre site on which to expand South Station. (Note the relocation of the USPS facility will be the subject of a separate environmental review process prepared by others.) Dorchester Avenue will be restored for public and station access.
3. **Create an extension of the Harborwalk along reopened Dorchester Avenue.**
4. **Provide for the possibility of future joint public/private development** adjacent to and over an expanded South Station.
5. **Provide adequate rail vehicle layover space** to address existing and future intercity and commuter rail service needs.

This Public Involvement and Agency Coordination Report has been prepared in support of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the SSX project, in accordance with the Certificate of the Secretary of the Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) on the Environmental Notification Form (ENF) for the SSX project (April 19, 2013), the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) regulations, 301 CMR 11.00 (revised, May 10, 2013), and FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts, 64 Federal Register (FR) 101 (26 May 1999), pp. 28545-28556.

2. Goals of the Public Outreach Program

Public involvement activities for the SSX project have the following goals:

- Provide an interactive, collaborative, and credible public process that welcomes the communities of interest and provides a variety of ways for the public to be involved in, contribute to, and review draft project ideas and plans.

¹ Documents citing the need for an expanded South Station include: *Critical Infrastructure Needs on the Northeast Corridor* (2013), *The Northeast Corridor Infrastructure Master Plan* (2010); *The Amtrak Vision for High-Speed Rail in the Northeast Corridor* (2010), *A Vision for the Northeast Corridor* (2012), the Massachusetts Department of Transportation *Rail Plan* (2010), the Massachusetts Department of Transportation *Freight Plan* (2010), and the two most recent long range transportation plans of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (2007, 2011).

- Solicit ideas and recommendations from the public that would result in a project that is achievable; reflects public aspirations; and enhances multimodal transportation for the city, region, and NEC.
- Provide methods to keep residents; business owners; city, state and regional officials; and users of South Station involved and updated regularly on development of project plans.

MassDOT also keeps in mind the guiding principles of Environmental Justice (EJ) and Title VI:

- To avoid, minimize, and mitigate disproportionately high and adverse effects of alternatives on EJ and Title VI populations;
- To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities; and
- To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

The project's Public Involvement Plan lays out specific strategies for implementing MassDOT's goals. The plan is posted on the project website². Outreach activities are tracked using spreadsheets that catalogue meetings and issues and are utilized for project planning with project meetings. The project complies with MassDOT's policies regarding EJ, Title VI, and accessibility. See Appendix 3 - *Environmental Justice Technical Report* for further information.

The outreach strategies were developed for a wide variety of users of South Station, including abutters to the station who might be impacted by changes in use or by construction; those using the MBTA or Amtrak services; those who live near potential layover facility locations; local businesses; residents and businesses in Fort Point Channel, South Boston, Chinatown and the Leather District. MBTA commuters and users of Amtrak service are the most difficult stakeholders to communicate with as many of them enter and depart the station quickly with little interest in being delayed. Signs in the station, information tables and electronic information are used to provide project information to these constituencies.

Other strategies have been employed to consult with specific groups, including:

- Briefings for numerous neighborhood and business organizations in the Leather District, Chinatown, and South Boston;
- Meetings with facility managers, large employers, real estate, and tourism interests to introduce the project and gather questions and comments;
- Presentations to groups interested in transit and rail issues; and
- Agencies or other entities with an interest in the project or affected by a potential project impact.

3. Outreach Activities

3.1. Meetings and Events

3.1.1. Public Information Meetings/Open Houses

MassDOT initiated public outreach with two Public Information Meetings/Open Houses, one each on November 19 and November 20, 2012. These events were widely advertised using direct mail to abutters and neighbors; flyers; website and email announcements; and outreach to community groups, pedestrian, bicycle, and transportation organizations. Signs in South Station welcomed the traveling public to attend. One event was held in the late afternoon/early evening and one during the work day. The participants

² Massachusetts Department of Transportation. *Public Involvement Plan*. September 26, 2012. www.massdot.state.ma.us/Portals/25/Docs/PublicInvolvementPlan_092612.pdf.

could view a PowerPoint presentation; meet the project manager, planners, and engineers; and ask questions directly of the principles for engineering, layover facilities, operations, etc. MassDOT developed a project fact sheet and invited participants to sign up for an electronic database to receive future project updates and meeting notices.

The 94 participants (over both days) were provided the opportunity to fill out a comment sheet on the project or to add a comment to a wish board. The comments included the need for pedestrian improvements; support for the North-South Rail Link (although not part of this project's scope of work); questions and suggestions related to service and access to the station; support for re-opening Dorchester Avenue; support for improvements to bicycling in the neighborhood; requests for improvements to the headhouse and platform waiting areas; need for improved curbside pick-up and drop-off; and safety improvements. MassDOT tracked the comments for consideration in the design (project comments are collected in a spreadsheet).

The open houses were more successful in attracting business, real estate, transportation and commercial interests than residents of the Leather District, Fort Point Channel, or Chinatown. This experience prompted the team to renew efforts to brief neighborhood, local business, and civic organizations by going to them directly, rather than depending on their attendance at larger meetings. The open houses did produce many suggestions, which are being considered in the planning.

In addition to the more formal public information meetings and open houses, MassDOT has also organized information sessions at the station itself or in nearby Dewey Square. These sessions are publicized to the project database, and team members are available to distribute project materials and answer questions about the proposed project. As with other events, questions and comments are logged, and participants are encouraged to sign up for the project mailing list.

3.2. ENF Scoping Session

After filing the ENF, MassDOT assisted the MEPA office with the organization and staffing of a Scoping Session held at South Station on April 1, 2013. MassDOT employed paid advertisements, press advisories, flyers, emails, social media, and signs in South Station to advertise the meeting and invite participation.

Approximately 55 participants attended the Scoping Session. There was an introduction to the project using a PowerPoint presentation, with information about the goals of the project, details of the ENF filing, proposed layover facility sites under consideration, and an explanation of the environmental review process. There was open discussion and comments were made by members of the audience. Participants from the Leather District expressed concerns about quality of life issues, and a Chinatown resident reinforced requests the team has heard for better wayfinding information and connections to the nearby community. There was support for the North-South Rail Link (not part of the SSX project). There was support for re-opening Dorchester Avenue and making better connections to the harbor, as well as conducting an appropriate Municipal Harbor Planning Process.

MassDOT distributed surveys to the participants to gather information on the attendees, how they heard about the meeting, and what meeting times would work best for them in the future. Of the responders, a majority stated that they had heard about the ENF Scoping Session through a MassDOT email.

3.2.1. Neighborhood, Abutter and Institutional Briefings, Meetings and Presentations

The South Station area is home to numerous large and small businesses, residences, community organizations, and cultural institutions. It serves more than 128,000 people each week day. As of August 2014, MassDOT and the project team have conducted 46 briefings and discussions with these stakeholders. The Project Manager and team members outline the project, welcome comments and questions, and log issues and concerns that arise in the discussions.

As mentioned earlier, MassDOT has found that engagement with these stakeholders is much more successful through briefings for specific organizations, as opposed to large community meetings. Depending on the organization, these meetings are held at times and locations convenient to the populations – weekdays, weekends, evenings, etc. After a brief presentation, MassDOT answers questions about the project. Comments, suggestions, and concerns are summarized and recorded afterwards for consideration in the project log. Attendees are also encouraged to sign up for the project mailing list. The topics typically reflect the organization hosting the briefing; for example, in the Leather District and Chinatown, there are concerns about quality of life issues, traffic control, pedestrian safety, and wayfinding. Transit groups focus on engineering and operations; the history of the site; and future rail layouts.

In addition, MassDOT developed on-line surveys in multiple languages inviting stakeholders to comment on topics such as South Station amenities; pedestrian and bicycle access; and other key issues. The team summarizes the results and MassDOT considers the input while developing approaches to access, amenities, and general issues that the participants comment on. The first survey (September – December 2013) asked participants about amenities for the South Station of the future. It was available online (and in print by request) in English, Spanish and Chinese. 730 people accessed the questionnaire, responding to specific questions and offering 52 pages of open-ended suggestions on improved amenities, safety, wayfinding and much more.

The second survey, on bicycle and pedestrian issues, went live in May 2014. It remains open and will be summarized in the future. Preliminary analysis of the feedback (693 responses at the time of the analysis) identified key intersections and improvements that could be made for bicycling conditions in the area. This information was also shared with the City of Boston for planning purposes.

3.2.2. Engaging Environmental Justice and Title VI Populations

The SSX project will benefit EJ communities by improving access to public transit, jobs, and other community services. MassDOT conducted a study assessing the impacts of the project on accessibility for EJ/disabled populations and non-disadvantaged populations. This assessment determined that accessibility to needed services (hospitals and colleges) and jobs (basic, retail, and services), mobility and congestion, or environmental impacts would not be impaired as a result of the project. The assessment also determined that none of the EJ populations, including low-income, minority, linguistic isolation, or disabled populations, would experience a greater burden than any non-EJ population resulting from any of the SSX project Build Alternatives. (See Appendix 3 - *Environmental Justice Technical Report* for more information).

MassDOT has emphasized efforts to reach EJ and Title VI populations. This outreach has included activities such as:

- Working with the City of Boston’s Office of Neighborhood Services to determine how and where best to distribute meeting information and project notices in multiple languages, including at South Station and the adjacent bus station, local bus stops, and to potential abutters (providing materials and flyers in Spanish and Chinese, and other languages or assistive services on request), especially near potential layover facility sites;
- Providing information to city, community, and neighborhood groups on the project, on meetings, and on how to participate;
- Providing interpreters, materials, and flyers in multiple languages, either on request, or as a regular service, depending on the populations engaging in project activities;
- Translating informational fact sheets into Chinese or other appropriate languages, as a policy and on request, and making these materials available on the website and in print;
- Providing accommodations such as taped meetings for the visually impaired and audio equipment at meetings and workshops for the hearing impaired, upon request; and
- Meeting with community groups to present information on the project and collect input and comments; and tracking the issues for team review and consideration.

Analyses undertaken as part of the project will identify and assess potential adverse effects; determine whether adverse effects can be avoided, minimized, or mitigated; and assess benefits versus burdens on the environment and community.

3.2.3. Outreach to Layover Site Stakeholders

Layover facilities for the SSX project are under consideration as part of the environmental review process. MassDOT has conducted an alternatives analysis to review and screen potential sites. MassDOT has worked with City of Boston officials and other elected officials to consult with them on the potential alternative sites. The site information is included in project presentations and materials.

MassDOT proposes to expand layover capacity to the west of South Station to provide a more-balanced mix of layover sites. MassDOT intends to utilize Beacon Park Yard as a preferred location to the west and continues to evaluate the Widett Circle and Readville – Yard 2 Alternatives to provide a layover facility south of South Station. MassDOT is simultaneously performing environmental review of the I-90 Allston Interchange project, which is located in an area that includes the Beacon Park Yard rail site and I-90 (the Massachusetts Turnpike). The Interchange project is examining how to best realign the transportation assets in this area while also addressing significant structural needs; highway operational changes (the introduction of All-Electronic Tolling); the construction of a commuter rail station; and the introduction of significant off-road multimodal connections throughout the area. MassDOT has determined that it is appropriate to consider these potential transportation changes under a single environmental review process. Therefore, MassDOT plans to continue environmental review of the Beacon Park Yard site as a layover facility as part of the I-90 Allston Interchange project’s environmental review. An ENF for that project is anticipated to be filed with the Secretary of EEA in late 2014 concurrent with this DEIR. In conjunction with planning for potential use of Beacon Park Yard, MassDOT has organized a Task Force that is meeting frequently to address the project. The Task Force members represent a wide range of constituencies.³ Feedback from this process will be integrated into this project.

MassDOT has also met with the MBTA and elected officials regarding the potential use of a site at Readville, which is adjacent to current dedicated rail uses.

³ See the website for details at <http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/highway/HighlightedProjects/AllstonI90InterchangeImprovementProject.aspx>

4. Communication Tools

4.1. Project Website and Electronic Communication

MassDOT maintains a website for the SSX project:

<http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/southstationexpansion>

The project website includes frequent updates and meeting notices, project documents, links to media and other services; and ways to contact MassDOT. Materials prepared for the project meet MassDOT's accessibility standards.

MassDOT uses a number of methods for communicating with the public about project meetings, issues, and publications. At the outset of the project, MassDOT developed an electronic database to provide frequent communication with stakeholders. Website visitors, meeting attendees, those who comment on the project or attend a meeting, are included in the database. Specifically, the project database includes:

- Abutters to the South Station property and to layover facility sites under consideration, and current users of facilities and services at or near the project site(s);
- Public officials;
- Neighbors, stakeholders, and those who attend meetings or request to be added to the database;
- People who comment on project materials or documents; and
- Agency representatives.

MassDOT mailed an invitation to identifiable site abutters to join the email database to facilitate frequent communication. A QR code (below) was established for the project to facilitate communication, linking directly to the project website via the use of smartphone technology. The team established additional means for commuters and visitors to South Station to sign up for project information, participate in open houses or questionnaires, using high visibility materials, signage, or a booth in the station itself on several occasions.



MassDOT uses the project database to notify stakeholders of public meetings, updates of the website, the availability of new fact sheets and inviting participation in surveys.

MassDOT produces print signs and flyers and employs the very visible electronic billboards in South Station and information booths as a means for commuters and visitors to South Station to sign up for project information, participate in open houses or questionnaires, and learn about the project.

4.2. Supporting Materials

MassDOT has produced a series of four project fact sheets. The fact sheets provide information on project alternatives being evaluated, decisions or recommendations, and continuing ways to participate in the project. The fact sheets are in easy-to-read formats and are posted on the project website for easy review and printing. They are distributed at project meetings and presentations and are produced in accessible formats. In addition, there is a project brochure in English, Chinese, and Spanish; and a Project Snapshot flyer available. The Project Snapshot explains the need for and goals of the project, in prose and infographics, and explains how to join the project database for further information.

In addition to project documents such as technical memoranda and reports, presentations are posted on the project website (under Documents) and made available in print format, large print, or other languages on request. Project questionnaires or surveys have been used to gather opinions from South Station users, commuters and visitors.

4.3. Social Marketing

MassDOT uses a variety of social media to provide information on SSX. MassDOT has produced 25 blogs on the project. Some of these blog posts have been publicized by other local media, including *Boston Magazine* and the *Boston Globe*. The use of social media helps incorporate new voices into the project, from young system users to those with low English proficiency to EJ populations. MassDOT public affairs staff members regularly post project updates through a variety of social media, including the MassDOT blog, Twitter feed, and Flickr account.

5. Outreach and Coordination Tools and Issues

In addition to the techniques outlined in Section 4, MassDOT is assessing potential project impacts that may affect particular groups or populations. MassDOT also coordinates with ongoing or planned projects near the expansion project.

5.1. Technical Coordination

MassDOT meets regularly with the various departments within the agency (including the MBTA), Amtrak and the NEC to coordinate the technical planning, operations and design elements of the project.

5.2. Media

Project meetings and events are publicized through media advisories and the use of other social media by MassDOT, which has established protocols. Because South Station serves both local and NEC intercity passengers, the media list is regional in nature and includes professional industry publications. Diverse (including non-English language) media are incorporated in the list.

5.3. Coordination with Ongoing Projects

MassDOT regularly coordinates its project planning with: the MBTA and commuter rail operator; Amtrak; the City of Boston (BRA and BTD); the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization and Metropolitan Area Planning Council; Massport; Federal Railroad Administration, the NEC Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission, existing and potential developers, and with state and federal environmental regulatory agencies.

6. Responsiveness

Stakeholders have raised a variety of concerns and shared their transportation challenges via public events, surveys and briefings, along with comments on the ENF. MassDOT has centralized and responded to these issues in a timely and consistent manner to ensure they are considered and potentially incorporated into project planning.

6.1. Meeting Summaries and Issues Tracking

MassDOT maintains a template for meeting summaries for all meetings involving this project. MassDOT disseminates meeting summaries, tracks action items, and logs issues and comments. Meeting summaries for public meetings are posted to the project website.