

## 6. Next Steps

The East – West Passenger Rail Study is a substantial step forward in realizing the potential for enhanced service within the corridor. The following areas have been identified as next steps to continue advancing the conceptual planning phase for East-West Passenger Rail.

During this time of fiscal uncertainty, MassDOT will review what federal transportation planning grants may be available to support some of the work described in this chapter. These next steps are recommended to gather additional information that could inform the development of an East-West passenger rail corridor beyond the analysis contained in this study.

### Further Discussion of CSX Requirements

Simply put, CSX policy regarding accommodation of passenger rail service on its right-of-way adds significant cost and complexity because it favors complete separation of the passenger operations from its own tracks whenever possible. The estimated additional capital cost for complying with CSX's design criteria is approximately \$1.5 billion.

Separate track with 30-foot spacing from the existing freight rail is required for any passenger rail operation where train speeds exceed 90 mph. Where shared-track operations occur, CSX requires new and upgraded infrastructure to meet its latest engineering-related policies concerning weight and clearance requirements as well as design standards. Track restoration elements found in the East-West Study assumed wider track centers (distance between two tracks) than historically found along the route as well as replacement of undergrade bridges to comply with the CSX guidance.

This investment would allow passenger and freight to operate with less risk of operational interference but may not necessarily be needed for the speeds described in the various Alternatives or for safe, well-coordinated operations.

Therefore, MassDOT will:

- Continue discussions with CSX to ascertain the basis for their policies and requirements related to shared operations with passenger service and whether their support for an East-West passenger service is possible with other operating standards and, if not, what other options exist;
- Ask CSX to cooperate in additional analysis such as rail capacity modeling and right-of-way condition;
- Seek to conduct a life-cycle cost analysis, if possible, to determine the full spectrum of costs associated with greater control over the right-of-way; and
- As commenters such as the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the Sierra Club have suggested, a phased approach may be worth considering and discussing with CSX. Phasing has proved useful with other projects in Massachusetts -- most recently the South Coast Rail project. A phased approach could focus on specific improvements that offer benefits such as safety and increased reliability or could address infrastructure in a particular segment. Whether a pilot service would be worthwhile is uncertain given the current operational impediments, but it may be explored as part of a phased approach and could also include working with Amtrak on any plans for service to Albany.

This step is consistent with the suggestions of several Advisory Committee members as well as the written comments of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC).



white paper could consider:

- Legal/regulatory, operational, and financial characteristics of intercity and commuter rail service
- Structure and capacity of public entity to:
  - Evaluate developing information about options
  - Develop funding and financing strategy, including fare policy
  - Provide management and oversight during
    - a. Construction
    - b. Operation
- Powers and authority of passenger rail entity, including:
  - Legal ability to provide or contract for commuter rail and/or intercity service
  - Technical capacity to provide or contract for commuter rail and or intercity service
  - Eligibility to receive and manage federal and other funds
  - Liability limitations and risks
  - Establishing balance between operating independence and public control
- Life-cycle costs of acquiring and supporting public interest in the right-of-way and related assets
- Funding sources and financing methods
  - Development through construction
  - Operations (including any subsidy required for the assumed fare policy)
  - Maintenance and capital renewal
- Scope of functions to be undertaken by an operating railroad, including:
  - Maintenance of the right-of-way, including stations and layover areas
  - Safety and regulatory compliance
  - Securing and maintaining equipment, including locomotives and coaches
  - Development of service plan and terms under which schedule can be altered
  - Providing security
  - Handling ticket sales and fare collection, engaging, and directing personnel
  - Operating trains safely and on schedule
- Dispatching all trains and/or coordinating with dispatch operations of other railroads (Figure 6-1).

*Figure 6-1 – Eastbound CSX Freight Train Departing Pittsfield (Credit: D. Hoover)*

### **Consider a Phased Approach**

As commenters such as MAPC and the Sierra Club have suggested, a phased approach may be worth considering. Phasing has proved useful with other projects in Massachusetts – most recently the South Coast Rail project. A phased approach could focus on specific improvements that offer benefits such as safety and increased reliability or could address infrastructure in a particular segment. While phasing is not likely to be a simple proposition, it could offer an opportunity to respond to one of the most prevalent themes among the commenters, namely an interest in change sooner rather than later.

Whether a pilot service would be worthwhile is uncertain given the current operational impediments, but might also be explored as part of a phased approach.

### **Evaluate Funding Opportunities and Obstacles**

The East – West Passenger Rail project is a large and complex project that would require large capital investments as well as ongoing operations and maintenance funding, likely necessitating a combination of many different funding sources and strategies. MassDOT should work with in coordination with state and federal elected officials and other key stakeholders to evaluate and identify funding obstacles and opportunities.

Therefore, MassDOT should look for ways to support efforts to establish a sound basis for pursuing federal funding and:

- Outline key features of, and a rationale for, changes to the federal benefit-cost analysis method to capture a wider range of outcomes; and
- Based on findings from the governance white paper, catalogue existing funding sources and eligible recipients and possible future funding structures.