Appendix A:

December 16, 2024 Public Meeting Summary

Meeting Summary

Brad Brothers, Town of Palmer's Town Manager, opened the meeting and welcomed attendees, noting Palmer's legacy as the Town of Seven Railroads. He emphasized that this meeting will not result in any final decisions, and instead will serve as an opportunity for the public to provide feedback on the potential site-specific analysis alternatives and potentials for station design.

Andy Koziol, MassDOT Director of West-East Rail, provided an overview of the project and reviewed the meeting process. He described MassDOT's Compass Rail program and referenced multiple studies completed prior to the start of the early 2024 kickoff to the Palmer Station Planning and Design project. He reviewed the agenda of the meeting and handed the presentation over to Natasha Velickovic, VHB, to present the alternatives analysis done to date (the presentation is posted on the project website, www.mass.gov/info-details/palmer-station-planning-design).

Discussion Stations

After the presentation, the room split into discussion tables to discuss station design and the alternatives analysis. The display boards and information materials are posted on the project website, www.mass.gov/info-details/palmer-station-planning-design. There was also a table for members of the public to record written comments, which are transcribed in Attachment 1.

Alternatives Analysis

Attendees were prompted with the following questions:

- Are there site-specific considerations that we should be aware of?
- Are any of the metrics or ratings more important than others?

Attendees provided the following feedback, summarized into themes:

- **Proximity to Downtown:** Desire to locate the station accessible to downtown Palmer with multiple regional connections and routes considered. Specifically, connections to the Quaboag Riverwalk, Palmer Public Library, and other regional recreational options were mentioned.
- **Connectivity:** Attendees identified benefits in both local and regional connections. Attendees noted the benefits of selecting sites close to other local activities, specifically identifying the benefits of a potential connection to the Quaboag Riverwalk. Attendees also identified the importance of regional connectivity, including to UMass, and any other north-south connections.
- **Historic Station Location:** Attendees expressed varying perspectives around the historic station location. Attendees described the potential benefits of the station location due to the proximity to the downtown location, and the potential for a north-south connection.
- **Mitigation of Local Impacts:** Station siting should consider the implications to the neighboring communities associated with a potential increase in cut-through traffic associated with accessing the site, vibrations associated with trains stopping at the station, and lighting (i.e., using dark sky lighting fixtures to minimize additional light population).

Station Design

Attendees were prompted to provide feedback on the following:

- Station character & aesthetics
- Local elements
- Supplemental station elements

Attendees provided the following feedback, summarized into themes:

- **Historical Integration:** Include signage or displays highlighting the town's history, such as photographs, old station memorabilia, and historical narratives. Interpretive panels about local industries, former trolleys, and the area's colonial-era origins. Consider using salvaged bricks or a mural depicting historic scenes. Work with the local historical society or community members who have archives, photos, and stories. Incorporate references to notable local landmarks (e.g., St. Mary's Church, hydroelectric facilities, old industrial sites, historic clock in Depot Village, Palmer Library plaque).

- **Aesthetic and Material Choices:** Use materials sympathetic to the local architectural vernacular: brick, stone, and other elements that reflect local character. Consider small brass or metal inserts in the sidewalks indicating historical significance or guiding visitors to points of interest. Consider using new, reused, or salvaged local materials. Ensure the station is visually appealing and distinct, aligning with community identity.
- **Community Amenities and Wayfinding:** Provide information on local attractions and activities (e.g., kayaking on the river, local restaurants, or cultural events). Highlight connections to regional destinations (e.g., Boston) and how the station can support tourism and commuting. Include directional signage, maps, or brochures at the station telling travelers where to go and what to see in town. Consider a children's area or kid-friendly elements.
- **Accessibility and User Experience:** Emphasize accessibility through the use of high level platforms and elevators (if needed for pedestrian bridge) for all users, including those with strollers or wheelchairs. Emphasize security features including safe, well-lit paths, and surfaces that are easy to navigate. Suggest features that make the station easy to use for first-time visitors: clear schedules, seating areas, shelters, restrooms and possibly a place for bike storage.
- **Economic and Community Development Linkages:** Encourage the station to serve as a gateway to the downtown area and local businesses, in addition to regional connections to UMass. Include signage that indicates how visitors can reach shops, dining, and other services. Reflect community pride—participants mentioned long family histories and strong local ties; incorporating these stories could foster town pride and potentially boost economic activity through increased foot traffic.
- **Involving Local Artists and Designers:** Suggest commissioning a local artist for a mural or public art piece that reflects local heritage and culture. Consider a small exhibit or rotating display of historical artifacts, photographs, or artwork in partnership with local cultural organizations, such as the Quabbin Art Association (QAA)) and Munson Arts Council (MAC).
- **Sustainability and Future Growth:** Recognize the importance of durable materials and flexible design elements that can adapt as the community and transit services evolve. Consider green infrastructure or landscaping that aligns with local ecology to make the station area more inviting.
- **Follow-Up and Contact Points:** Several community members offered historical resources and expressed willingness to share information

List of Attendees

Project Team Attendees

Andy Koziol, MassDOT
John Weston, MassDOT
Gus Bickford, MassDOT
Dan Racicot, MassDOT
Natasha Velickovic, VHB
Michael Gordon, VHB
Steve Devine, VHB
Vivian Cheng, VHB
David Spears, Michael Baker International
Ryan Shannon, Michael Baker International
Emily Meyer, Regina Villa Associates
Emily Farmer, Regina Villa Associates

Steering Committee Attendees

Brad Brothers, Town of Palmer, Town Manager
Heidi Mannarino, Town of Palmer, Town Planner
Michael Marciniec, Town of Palmer, Planning Board Chairman
John Latour, Town of Palmer, Community Development Director
Matthew Morse, Town of Palmer, Department of Public Works Director
Karl Williams, Town of Palmer, Town Councilor (District 3)
Dave Golden, Town of Palmer, Master Plan Implementation Committee
Ben Hood, Palmer Redevelopment Authority

Public Attendees

Adam R Gaeni
Bernie Fontaine
Michael Glabilly
Donald J Blais JR
Beth Drake
Adam Hageman
Deck Hansen
Dave Cotter
Jason S Pin
Ed DeVarem
David C Bussell
Amanda Bussell
Sandra Sheehan
Ed Miga
Kara Clark
Robin Lamoth
Justin Nichoals
Scarlet Lamoth
Sara Gucciardi
Paralee Smith
Donald Frydryk
William Bernat
Janelle Tarantino
Romie Lacefield
Bob Haveles
John McCloskey
Karen Nadolski
Lizzie Roberts
Christoper Pelletier
Griswold
S. Muntser
Marcelo Gusnão
John Morrison
John Lebida
Vanessa Jskula
Violet Snook
Max Buliov
Alissa Chapin
Carrie Saldo
David Burns
Steven Kosmider
Rebecca Gagne
Jim Gagne
Paul Ireland
Jamie Abraham
Linda Leduc

Kathy Bonvie
John Pajak
Barba Mackintosh
David Mackintosh
Daniel M. Bigda
Louanne Wisnuski
Kathy Young
Amanda Skawura
Valerie Beaudoir
Ned Lefferts
Amber Kampuknian-Hastings
Nicholas Zeo
R. Kaczmaraczyk
Ben Heckscher
Jessica Ferry
Casey Larson
Michael Swiatlowski
Christoper Glabicky
Christine Smith
Theodore Kozal
Hannah ODonnell
Richard Lamothe
Kenneth Johnson Jr.
Dara Battige
Michael Harril
Mark Bursari
Brigham Stevenson
Bruce Allen
Steven Nadobli
Susan J. Peletier
Steve Chianfia
Paul Burns
Michael Strahan
Dave Loos
Theodore Bonmayer
Richard Bonnge
Paul S. Wisselm
Paule Les
David Beaudre
Peter Warren
Matthew Morse
Pat Stouthall
Nancy Tully
Robert Gromosky
Blake Lamothe
Maria Thomson
Steve Nowak
Fran Nowak
Joseph Bonvie
David Pasquini
Christopher Schulke
Barbra Hill
Walter Hill
Anne Miller
John T
Gary Pierce + 1
Scott Anderson
James Przypek
Paul Goodrich
Joseph Bers-
Carleton Bordem
Bob Lamb
Patience Hartley
Patience Hartley
Neil Hahn
Jay Flynn
Noah Sullivan
Ray Remillard
Kia Fish

Attachment 1: Written Comment Received at or Prior to Public Meeting

The following comments were provided to the project team at or in advance of the public meeting.

Comment Form 1

Major concerns = no restrooms

Unmanned no one to help you. Where will people go to bathrooms after long trip?

Would like to keep a major presence of Palmer as the town of 7 railroads with signage.

Also post online sites and meeting summary… what is website?

Comment Form 2

Please put questions and responses to these questions generated by this meeting online.

Please put this presentation and pictures of all sites including parking spaces etc. online and available to residents and/or interested parties.

Comment Form 3

Not letting town peoples A chance to speak at a town meeting?

Comment Form 4

Town highway department is definitely not an option

Comment Form 5

Looks like your plan is B. But the historic Train station would have bigger bang for the buck.

Comment Form 6

Concerns about the proposed site at the DPW yard - Youth football use the Water St. field for practices we ask that the area not be used or make sure little impact is done to the area. I know there is water that affects the land, so I'm assuming it will not be used. We just ask that the land not disappear, so our kids don't lose the only field we have. Thank you for your time!

Comment Form 7

The rail stop at South Main St. would be beneficial as it's still close to downtown with minimal impacts to anything else as someone who regularly commutes to Boston via car than subway, this would help cut steps out. My biggest concerns are cost of parking and cost of train tickets, but this is down the line from now.

Comment Form 8

Main comment on station proposals is accessibility for disabled + elderly with a steps only proposal.

Comment Form 9

Station design: consider the rivers design as well as the local artist in the region, consider mill history as well as input from local & youths.

Comment Form 10

What is the use of not having the ability of transferring to N/S/E/W if station is a standalone outside of town – no benefits for downtown businesses if station is located outside of downtown. What is website + is it accessible to get into?

Thank you for gathering here today. I would like to discuss the topic of asset management and the valuable resources we have in our community, particularly in Palmer.

To start, we have five schools in Palmer that are currently underutilized despite our significant investment of $7 million in a new police station. This highlights a pressing issue regarding the management of our community's assets. Additionally, we face similar challenges in Monson with underutilized resources.

Effective asset management is crucial, yet it appears that our state and local entities are not adequately addressing this need. Since the involvement of the Department of Transportation (D.O.T.), there has been a noticeable lack of engagement from the steering committee, which is primarily influenced by Mass D.O.T. Unfortunately, neither the planning agencies nor VHB have contacted us for our input regarding the valuable assets we possess, including the historic railroad station that symbolizes our town's heritage.

The Union Passenger Station was once a hub for seven railroads, serving as a vital connector for our community. Despite the significant investments made to enhance this asset, including the establishment of the Steaming Tender restaurant, it seems to be overlooked by our local leadership. The town council, town management, and planning agencies have not prioritized transportation-oriented development (TOD) in their recent studies, resulting in missed opportunities for our community.

We must reassess how we view our assets, particularly the railroad station, which is essential for both rail development and passenger service. The current plans proposed by D.O.T., which include high platform designs, aim to increase ridership on the currently failing Knowledge Corridor. However, this approach will do nothing for Palmer if it continues in this direction.

I have emails from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) indicating that low platforms will work at the current historical site, enabling us to run north, south, east and west from this location. Furthermore, the FRA was notified by D.O.T. to refrain from involvement in this project, which is concerning as we were only seeking guidance. Given that this project is situated at a crucial north-south-east-west location, it is essential for the Federal Railroad Administration to be involved. The current proposals from Mass D.O.T. represent a significant mistake for Palmer, as they do not take advantage of our strategic positioning.

Additionally, it is important to note that about 12 years ago, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission removed the Vermonter service from downtown Palmer to the Knowledge Corridor instead of securing a dedicated train for our community. This decision has not benefited Palmer.

We have provided a plan today for everyone to take with them, which outlines this feasible solution. With the support of the G&W Railroad, implementing low-level platforms could be accomplished efficiently.

Moreover, we should advocate for the restoration of our historic landmarks, including the Union Passenger Station, rather than allowing them to deteriorate. It is crucial that we engage with the historical commission to prioritize these efforts.

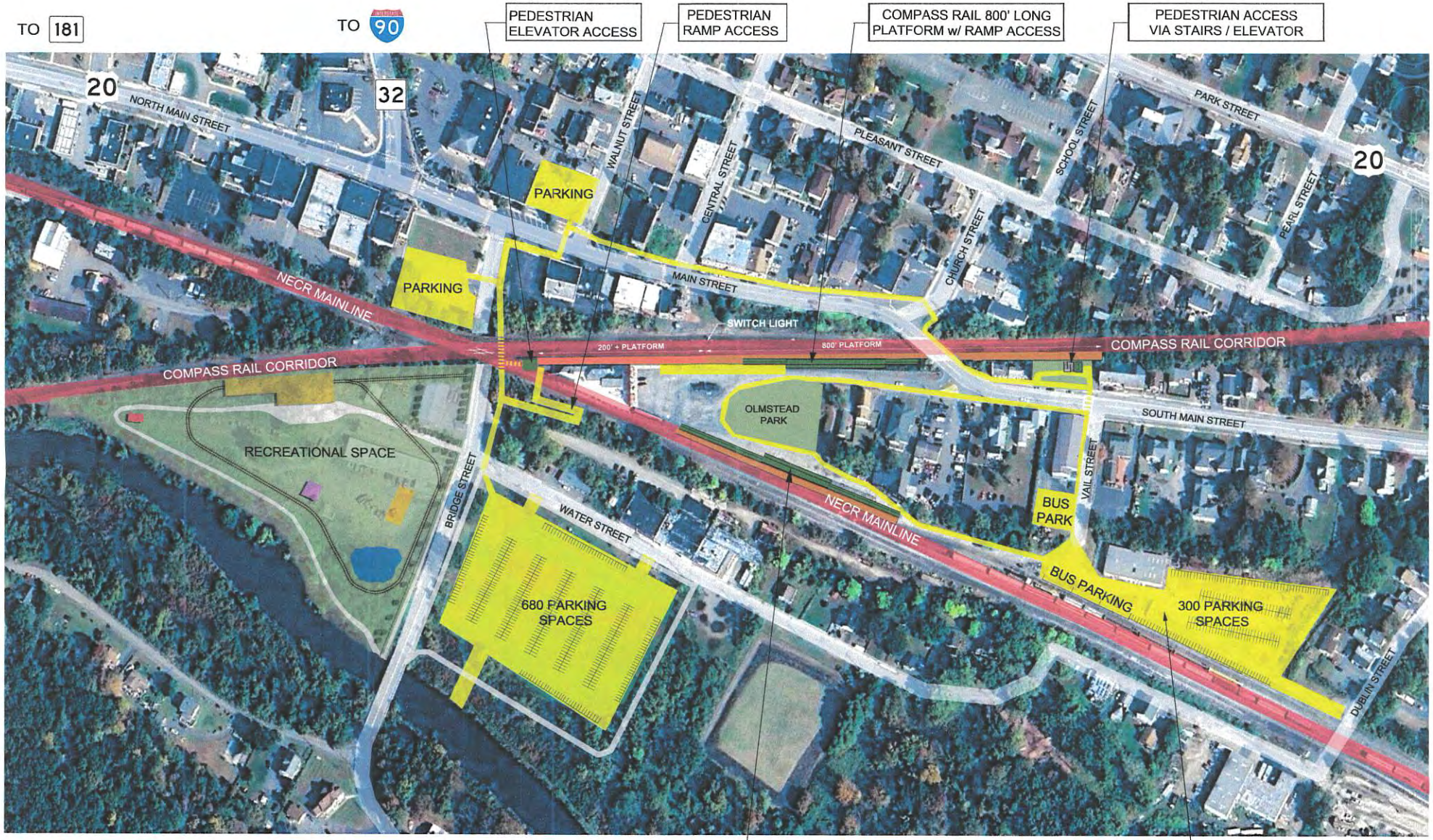
As residents of Palmer, it is imperative that we take ownership of our assets and advocate for their proper management. The current projects proposed by Mass D.O.T. do not align with our community's needs and could hinder our downtown revitalization efforts. The Central Corridor Line Rail Coalition 501-C and Architectural Insights have developed a smart growth plan for Palmer, and it is time to leverage our resources effectively to benefit our community.

I urge you all to consider the potential for passenger service in Palmer and recognize the importance of our historic location. We must work together to ensure our community's assets are not neglected and that we are proactive in achieving sustainable development.

Next month, we will provide additional information and will hold a town forum on Monday, January 27th from 6 PM to 8 PM at the Steaming Tender. Together, we can advocate for the necessary changes and improvements that will benefit our community.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to working with all of you to support the future of Palmer.

Sincerely,
Blake Lamothe



DEPOT VILLAGE - PALMER, MASSACHUSETTS

PROPOSED PLATFORM ACCESS POINTS
FROM PUBLIC PARKING AREAS

Architectural Initiatives
Architects Planners Interiors
3 CONVERSE STREET, SUITE #201
PALMER, MASSACHUSETTS, 01069
PH: (413) 283-2553

Central Corridor Passenger Rail Coalition
1294 South Main Street
Palmer, Massachusetts 01069
Herkimer66@gmail.com
413.658.7089

December 9, 2024

Andrew Koziol, Director of West-East Rail
Massachusetts Department of Transportation
10 Park Plaza, Suite 4160
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Re: December 16, 2024 - MassDOT Palmer Rail Stop

Dear Mr. Koziol,

The Central Corridor Passenger Rail Coalition (CCPRC) expresses its gratitude to you and the rest of the team with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation for your patience and guidance as the search for the ideal location of a Palmer Passenger Rail Stop proceeds. The CCPRC represents a consortium of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Vermont communities dedicated to returning passenger rail service from Brattleboro, Vermont to New London, Connecticut. With its east west connection, Palmer, Massachusetts sits in an ideal location to transport people from north south to east west, in particular those passengers seeking transportation to Boston. Success will be measured by the many new passengers generated by north south service arriving and departing Palmer, many of which will travel to Boston.

The CCPRC continues to strongly support the siting of a new passenger rail stop at the Historic Location, the home of the restored Palmer Railroad Station. Constructed in 1884, this magnificent building, designed by Henry Hobson Richardson, is the crown jewel of history and culture in Palmer. In a location perfectly suited for railroad service both north south and east west, placement of a new passenger rail platform will create an environment for comfort, safety and ease of use for our new passengers. The historic site conveniently provides easy transfer from the north south to the east west rail line. That north south passenger rail service to Palmer will allow for the students, faculty and staff of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to easily travel by train from Amherst to Boston.

The CCPRC congratulates MassDOT for its stated goal of providing connectivity and economic development opportunities through the siting of the passenger rail platforms. The central location of the Historic Location and its access to population centers are within walking distanced to the proposed rail platform. Further, there are significant opportunities to create new housing, affordable and market, jobs and needed tax base. Developers have indicated a willingness to invest in a hotel and entertainment themed destination venues near to the proposed passenger rail. Sufficient property has been identified and made available to ensure that the property acquisition process goes smoothly. Further, the process to attain environmental permits to proceed to construction will be easier on property that has been dedicated to railroad use since the nineteenth century.

Over the years, the CCPRC has developed many friends in the passenger railroad family. Those friends include the Federal Railroad Administration, Trainriders Northeast and the Genesee and Wyoming Railroad. The CCPRC looks to bring those strong relationships to bear to help solve the challenges that we might encounter as we proceed forward through design and construction. The CCPRC is fully committed to making the Palmer Passenger Rail Stop a success. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Laurence Shaffer
President