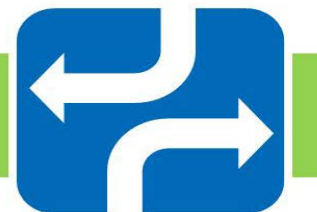


I-90 Interchange Study



I-90 Interchange Study Working Group Meeting No. 3

September 6, 2018 3:00-5:00 PM
District 1 Conference Room, Lenox, MA

Summary

Purpose: The third meeting of the I-90 Interchange Study Working Group focused on updating the project's data collection; seven Interchange concepts and alternatives; evaluation criteria and preliminary screening results; and review of the project schedule.

Present: Cassandra Gascon and Ethan Britland of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) Office of Transportation Planning (OTP); David Derrig, and Dave Patnaude, AECOM; Joanne Haracz, McMahon; and Nancy Farrell, Regina Villa Associates (RVA). The following members of the Working Group attended, with members of the public listed at the end of the notes:

Working Group Members

Betsy Andrus, Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce
William Elovirta, Selectman, Becket
Senator Adam Hinds
Peter Frieri, District 1 Alternate
Francesca Hemming, District 1
Colleen Henry, Lee Chamber of Commerce
Nathaniel Karns, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Clete Kus, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Alternate
Bao Lang, District 2
Rich Masse, District 2
Eric McVey, Town of Blandford
Jeanne LeClair, Economic Development, Hill Towns
Tom Matuczko, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission
Elizabeth Murphy, MassDevelopment
Kate Phelon, Greater Westfield Chamber of Commerce (by phone)
Hardy Patel, MassDOT
Rep. Smitty Pignatelli
Derek Poirier, Town of Otis, Highway Superintendent
Gary Roux, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission
Brad Curry, Town of Blandford, Highway Superintendent
Jim Consolati, Tyringham Board of Selectmen

MassDOT Project Manager Cassandra Gascon opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. She said the team has made progress since the June Working Group meeting. This includes developing and reviewing the interchange concepts that were presented at the Open House; completing the traffic counting program; continuing data collection and analysis; and initiating a Regional Transportation Network Modeling effort. The final traffic count data just arrived the morning of the meeting, and Ms. Gascon said the team hasn't had time to review it yet.

Ms. Gascon raised an issue regarding the impact of the traffic counts and the CTPS modeling on the schedule. She and Ethan Britland noted that a major update of the regional model is now expected in October. The team believes it makes sense to wait for the update before running the model. This recommendation will result in extending the project by about two months, but it makes sense to work from the newest data, as opposed to four-year old figures. The team will continue to complete other aspects of the project, which will not be delayed. Rep. Smitty Pignatelli expressed some disappointment, but understood the goal of working with the most up-to-date model.

Existing Traffic Desire Lines

David Derrig, AECOM, introduced the concept of traffic "desire lines." The lines trace the routes that traffic takes using Exits 2 and 3 from the Mass Turnpike. The lines depict regional traffic volumes using line thickness (not including the Mass Pike, whose volume would override the other routes). The Mass Pike/I-90 sees 30,000 vehicles daily. Mr. Derrig noted that the "desire lines" are useful as they indicate visually where drivers are going as they leave the highway at Exit 2 or 3.

The traffic data includes all four ramps at each exit. At Exit 2 in Lee, about one-third of the traffic entering I-90 is from the Study Area, but less than 10% of the traffic is oriented to the Study Area, which is an anomaly. That may be due to travel time decisions on how to reach Westfield or a destination east of Westfield rather than using local roadways. Mr. Derrig also used the example of a driver choosing different routes to and from work, depending on traffic conditions.

Regarding Exit 3 in Westfield, about one-third of the traffic is oriented to and from the Study Area.

Mr. Derrig summarized conclusions from the map data:

- Exit 3 in Westfield: Approximately 1/3 of all interchanging traffic (both on-and off-ramps in both EB and WB directions) is oriented to and from the Study Area.
- Exit 2 in Lee: Approximately 1/3 of interchanging traffic entering I-90 (EB and WB on-ramps) originates from the Study Area, but less than 10% of traffic leaving I-90 (EB and WB off-ramps) is oriented to the Study Area.
- These are early indications of the universe of trips that may divert to a new Interchange.
- Particularly at Exit 3, diversion of these traffic volumes could noticeably improve operations and reduce congestion at the ramp intersections with Route 10/202.
- The difference in distribution and usage at Exit 2 could signal a travel time decision point whereby traveling west from within the study area to reach a destination east of Westfield (or in Westfield itself) is quicker than traveling east on local study area roadways.

Safety is another important element of the analysis. Mr. Derrig summarized the data regarding high crash clusters within the Study Area for the last three years (see slide 12 for a summary). These locations

will receive additional scrutiny as the team looks at future operations and potential diversion of traffic to a new interchange.

In addition, the team looked at transit service in the Study Area. There is fixed route transit service in Westfield and Lee, but no fixed route or paratransit service elsewhere in the Study Area. There is intercity bus service between Albany and Springfield via Lee and Lenox. A new interchange might present an opportunity for additional transit service.

Mr. Derrig reached out to two local quarries to determine the impact of truck traffic in the Study Area. Tonlino and Sons dispatches about 120 trucks a day; 70% travel north on Algeria Road to Route 20 and beyond, and 30% travel south on Algeria, then east on Route 23. There are few locations where the trucks can turn around; the trucks do not use the I-90 crossover. Williams Stone sends about 40 trucks a week to Westfield to pick up product, and another 100 trucks leave the site (about 20 per day) to deliver finished product. Mr. Derrig displayed a slide showing the routes used by truck traffic in the Study Area. He noted that trucks are important in the consideration of the concepts since they are most noticeable and can affect roadway conditions.

Existing Conditions

Ms. Gascon summarized the results of the Existing Conditions analysis. She listed data under the topics of Issues, Constraints and Opportunities:

Issues – that MassDOT is considering

- Relatively long distance between Exits 2 and 3 of 30 miles
- Safety at intersections serving Exits 2 and 3
- Congestion, specifically at Exit 3
- Lack of access to/from I-90 for study area communities
- Seasonal variances in traffic, which will be reported at the next meeting

Constraints – that need to be considered in developing concepts

- Topography and terrain
- Areas of sensitive environmental resources
- Distance between current exits
- Limited connecting roadways near I-90
- Varying road/bridge conditions on roadways near I-90
- Community impact concerns

Opportunities – community impacts and concerns

- Travel time savings for residents and businesses
- Reduced congestion at intersections serving Exits 2 and 3
- Improved access to/from jobs/schools/businesses for study area communities
- Enhance multimodal connections throughout study area

Interchange Concept Designs

Mr. Derrig said that the team met with Highway Design staff in July to discuss the set of Interchange concept designs that were previously developed. The participants reviewed the concepts and suggested redesigns for some of them.

Dave Patnaude, AECOM, presented both the original seven Interchange concepts and the revised concepts suggested during the meeting with Highway Design staff. Each concept outlines existing conditions and impacts; and where possible, revisions are intended to reduce the impacts to wetlands, right of way, residences, slopes and Article 97 lands.

The concepts include the following locations:

- Alternative 1 – Loose Tooth Road/Route 20, Becket
- Alternative 2 – Werden Road, Becket
- Alternative 3 – Johnson Road, Becket
- Alternative 4 – Algeria Road, Otis
- Alternative 5 – Blandford Maintenance Facility, Blandford
- Alternative 6 – Blandford Service Center, Blandford
- Alternative 7 – Route 23, Russell

Alternative 1 – Loose Tooth Road/Route 20, Becket

Mr. Patnaude reviewed the existing conditions, including 5.2 miles to Exit 2 and 24.5 miles to Exit 3; surface water and wetlands (10,900 sq ft) constraints; ROW impacts; significant areas of 20% slope; and 25 residences within one-quarter mile. See slides 18-20.

The revised layout suggests a revised cloverleaf and reduces wetland impacts and ROW impacts.

Alternative 2 – Werden Road, Becket

Existing conditions at this site include 7.7 miles to Exit 2 and 22 miles to Exit 3; wetlands and surface water in two quadrants; and limited ROW on the south side and steep slopes on the north side.

The revised layout suggests a partial cloverleaf; however, there are 22 residences within one-quarter mile, Camp Lenox within 600 feet; and septic systems and wells nearby. See slides 21 and 22.

Alternative 3, Johnson Road, Becket

This alternative is 9.2 miles to Exit 2 and 20.5 miles to Exit 3. There are wetlands in two quadrants, steep slopes and a Wildlife Management area on the site (which would trigger Article 97 requirements). There are four residences within a half mile.

The revised layout is based on a partial clover design which avoids wetlands, but results in a significant increase in Article 97 lands and more ROW impacts. See slides 24-26.

Alternative 4, Algeria Road, Otis

This location is 11.8 miles to Exit 2 and 17.9 miles to Exit 3. There are wetlands in three quadrants and Otis State Forest is adjacent to the location (Article 97 impacts), as well as ROW impacts.

The revised layout reduces Article 97 land, while increasing wetland impacts and ROW impacts. It is based on a loop ramp to the northeast. See slides 27 and 28.

Alternative 5, Blandford Maintenance Facility, Blandford

This concept is 15.7 miles to Exit 2 and 14 miles to Exit 3. It provides a potential connection to Chester Road and Old Chester Road and hosts maintenance facility operations. It is adjacent to the Blandford All Electronic Tolling Gantry (AET). It affects a potential Vernal Pool, the ROW and a Surface Water Supply Zone C protection area. There are 26 residences within one-quarter mile and the EB ramps would permit vehicles to bypass the AET Gantry.

The revised layout decreases the water supply and ROW impacts; notes 18 residences within one-quarter mile; eliminates the gantry bypass; may have a constrained ramp location. See slides 29-31.

Alternative 6, Blandford Service Center, Blandford

This location is 18.4 miles to Exit 2 and 11.3 miles to Exit 3. It has some wetland areas and would require shared use of the Service Center roadway infrastructure. There are underground storage tanks at the Service Plazas and there is also additional MassDOT property next to the WB Service Center. There are 17 residences within one-quarter mile, some ROW impact and it is near the Blandford Golf & Tennis Club (which a meeting participant noted is for sale).

The revised layout includes a new ramp location to improve a merge; has 15 residences within one-quarter mile and reduces impacts on the Zone C Protection Area but increases ROW impacts. See slides 32-34.

Alternative 7, Route 23, Russell

This location is 23.4 miles to Exit 2 and 6.3 miles to Exit 3. There is surface water on the site, which is a floodway. There are steep slopes and a steep grade on existing roadways. There are wetland impacts, ROW impacts and 34 residences within a one-quarter mile.

The team was not able to improve the original layout. See slides 35 and 36.

Mr. Derrig listed the evaluation criteria established for reviewing the concepts:

- Design and Operations
- Environmental Impacts
- Socioeconomic Effects
- Implementation

Cost is not included in the evaluation at this point, except at a very high level. The evaluation matrix that the team presented used a set of \$ signs to indicate a range of from less to more expensive. The cost of property takings is not evaluated until final design.

Ms. Gascon said that MassDOT would like to reduce the number of concepts to be modelled to three from the seven presented to the group. Mr. Britland reminded the Working Group members of the process underway: assessing the existing conditions, looking for roadways that crossed I-90, looking at the details of each site, reducing the list to three sites, and running the model on three alternatives. Waiting for the updated model will slightly delay the process by about two months. However, the team managed to perform the existing conditions analysis and alternatives development simultaneously.

The discussion turned to the Evaluation Matrix, which is slide 39 and was also provided to the Working Group members as a handout. There was a movement toward eliminating the concept sites that were close to either Exit 2 or Exit 3, with a preference for sites more toward the middle of the two. Colleen Henry suggested that the two Blandford options make sense by that logic and do not have significant wetlands impacts. Eric McVeigh, Blandford, asked when there was a consensus about moving toward the middle. Ms. Gascon said that this was discussed at the last Working Group meeting. Mr. Derrig also said that the team heard that suggestion fairly strongly at the Open House. Mr. McVeigh expressed concern about truck traffic and the impact on local roadways, in particular Chester Road in Blandford and Blandford Road in Chester. The roads are very steep and there are a lot of curves. He suggested that 53-foot tractor trailers from out of state are part of the problem.

Rep. Pignatelli asked what kind of trucks are being referenced. If they are serving local businesses, are for moving and delivery or similar uses, those trucks can't be eliminated. It seems unlikely that other types of trucks would get off at Exit 3 to reach Pittsfield, for example. There are options, such as truck exemptions on local roads, that make trucks a law enforcement issue. Mr. Britland added that zoning is also a powerful tool.

Senator Adam Hinds suggested that concepts 4, 5 and 6 should advance (Algerie Road in Otis and the two Blandford sites) based on their locations and reduced impacts. Becket Selectman Bill Elovirta said his community would not support an Interchange in Becket and the Selectmen have already opposed the idea. Some of the trucks take Route 8 to North Adams and they envision more impacts should there be an Interchange in the town.

Rep. Pignatelli asked if the traffic study will show the types of vehicles traveling through the Study Area; Mr. Britland said it will show vehicle class.

Mr. Britland was asked if MassDOT would proceed with a site that was opposed by a community. He said the goal of the modeling will be to provide additional information and to balance impacts and discuss these issues with a host community or communities. Once the Working Group decides what to model, the alternatives will be taken to a public meeting for a wider review and discussion.

Mr. Elovirta suggested that there should be a full public hearing in each town. There was a discussion about drilling down a bit further into the impacts to ensure they are understood. Mr. Britland said the information is at a high level at this point and the question to be answered is which alternatives may have a fatal flaw that knocks them out as possible sites. The goal of today's meeting is to reduce the list, if possible.

Kate Phelon, Westfield Chamber of Commerce, participating by phone, said she was comfortable shortening the list to the two Blandford concepts and Algerie Road.

Mr. Britland was asked if the analysis will look at the capacity of the local roads to manage additional, potentially heavy traffic. He replied that he can't give a distance for the extent of considering improvements, but the model will provide a quality assessment on impact, predicting volume near the Interchange on local roads. Then the engineers can develop a local roadway management plan.

Speaking for the Town of Becket, Mr. Elovirta said there is value in making I-90 more accessible to the Hill towns. His hope is that the choice can help to eliminate truck traffic on local roadways. He suggested leaving the Russell option on the table.

Addressing Otis, a speaker listed challenges there, including a small community (1600) residents; second home owners; truck traffic on Route 23; steep and winding roads. Having an exit in Otis won't achieve anything different for the community.

Mr. Derrig added that the modeling will add more fine detail to this kind of conversation as the project moves forward.

Francesca Hemming, District 1, noted the public safety issues and traffic data: one-third of the traffic returns to the middle of the Study Area. Reaching all of the Hill towns for emergencies – ambulance and fire in particular – can be a challenge when time is important.

There was a question about whether the Working Group should choose a fourth option since the Blandford Maintenance Area and Service Center are close together and may show similar results. Mr. Derrig and Mr. Britland both suggested that these locations may be similar but have different local impacts. While they might seem to be the same for modeling, despite their close geography they may have unique impacts.

Rep. Pignatelli asked when the information will be ready to share with the public. Mr. Britland said the team wants to present the results of modeling three locations at the next public meeting. There will be another Working Group meeting discussing the modeling results before the next public meeting. This will most likely occur in December.

Mr. Britland summarized that the team will go forward modeling the two Blandford locations and Algeria Road. Rep. Pignatelli noted that the project is already delayed beyond the legislative designation, and he hopes there can be a hard deadline of February 2019. Ms. Gascon thanked everyone in attendance and the meeting ended.

ATTENDANCE

Amber Danahey, City of Westfield
Eileen Fitzgerald, Chester resident
Matt Gamelli, City of Westfield
Drew Renfro, representing Senator Humason
Neil Toomey, Becket Resident