

MassDOT Cape Cod Canal Area Transportation Study

Cape Cod Canal Area Transportation Study

RE: First Public Informational Meeting

Date and Time: January 15, 2015, 7:00 – 9:00 PM

Location: Admirals Hall, Massachusetts Maritime Academy Campus, Buzzards Bay, Bourne

Attendees: [Sign-in sheets with attendees names is attached]

Meeting Notes:

The MassDOT Project Manager, Ethan Britland, welcomed the attendees to the first public meeting of the Cape Cod Canal Transportation Study. Mr. Britland introduced members of the study team, including Ed Hollingshead, and Bill Reed and Michael Paiewonsky of FST, Michael Walsh a project manager with the US Army Corps of Engineers, Ken Buckland of The Cecil Group, and Diane Madden from MassDOT Environmental.

Mr. Britland provided an overview of the study with a slide show (attached) noting the age of the canal bridges, and probable decades of future delays from increasing maintenance requirements as the impetus for the study. The study is in its earliest stages and will lead to an environmental impact analysis.

He noted that the bridges and much of the canalside property are under federal ownership and managed by the Army Corps of Engineers. The study area was shown (see attached slide show).

Michael Walsh of the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) described the Corps' process for deciding whether the Corps continues maintaining or replacing bridges. He noted that the Corps is responsible for providing three bridges over the canal, two highway bridges and one railroad bridge. He informed the public that the Corps has not begun their study, but that the Corps is seeking funding to start their study.

Ed Hollingshead of FST described the project planning process. He said that the planning study will document the problems and a number of potential solutions, which will then be further considered at the State and Federal levels. MassDOT's study will also examine traffic counts, environmental issues, and potential funding sources including Public Private Partnership (P3) that fund projects with tolls.

Mr. Britland then opened the floor to questions from the attendees, beginning with elected officials:

An attendee from Sandwich asked about if ships passing through the canal would contribute to the cost of the bridges.

Michael Walsh of the Corps replied that they do not have a mechanism for ships paying for passage through the canal.

An attendee asked about the process regarding the collaboration of State and Federal studies. He was concerned about a duplication of efforts between the two agencies. He asked for clarification about how information and results will be shared.

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Mr. Britland replied that the Corps will rely on the results of the MassDOT study, which has a focus on transportation, rather than waterway navigation. They are still discussing the best way for that information sharing to occur.

An attendee asked about how tolls will be implemented for local residents who have to go over the bridge several times a day. The attendee asked if local residents would receive a toll waiver or a discount.

Mr. Britland replied that, at this point in time, the tolling construct is undefined. The Public Private Partnership study process is happening concurrently.

The Town Manager of Bourne asked several questions including jurisdictional issues related to replacement of the bridges (including who owns what and who builds what). He asked about the study area, which he believes should be expanded to include the traffic back-up on Route 25 near Glen Charlie Road. He also asked about the study timeline in relation to Bourne's plans for traffic improvements at Belmont Circle for their economic development. He recommended that MassDOT consider interim improvements for Belmont Circle. He also requested information for review in advance of meetings.

Michael Walsh of the Army Corps of Engineers replied that they have gone through their records and found that the Army Corps of Engineers owns the bridges and is obligated to provide two highway bridges over the canal.

Regarding the study area, Mr. Britland replied that the study area can be expanded by one exit on Route 25 to include where the referenced traffic backs up to.

Regarding the timeline for improvements at Belmont Circle, Mr. Britland replied that MassDOT did not want to come up with a project that would have to be modified based upon the study, so they will be making improvements, but scaling them back.

Regarding advanced materials for Working Group meetings, Mr. Britland replied that distributing material in advance of Working Group is difficult because it can be problematic for members to digest the information without the context of a presenter explaining the process that generated the subject data.

Rep. David Viera said that he is not convinced about a third bridge. He shared that he is uncomfortable with multiple planning processes with the State, Federal government, and public private partnership. He urged for more collaboration and for the Federal government to be part of the MassDOT study.

Mr. Britland replied that the message will be delivered to the Boston office.

Michael Walsh of the Corps replied that the State is being proactive in their transportation and traffic study, which the Corps would not replicate because the Corp is obligated to provide the bridges. He said that the Corps needs to answer the question of repair versus replace. He added that the Corp is funding limited.

An attendee from Woods Hole discussed the negative impacts of additional people traveling over potential bridges on the Cape's infrastructure and quality of life. She also asked about moving the

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vehicle ferry from Woods Hole moving to an alternative port that does not require coming onto the Cape for visitors traveling to the islands.

Mr. Britland replied that these issues will be considered, including quality of life impacts. Regarding alternative ports for travel to the islands, it can be considered as part of the study.

An attendee asked if Route 25 be extended over the long bridge to exit 2 of the Mid-Cape Highway, allowing vehicles to cross without crossing over the Sagamore Bridge.

Mr. Britland replied that they will look options for connections across the canal. They have not looked at alternatives concretely yet, but it will be considered.

An attendee asked the Corp about the structural integrity of the bridges and the relation to traffic flow.

Michael Walsh replied that the bridges are structurally sound. He said that his study will look at whether it is better to invest in maintenance or replacement. He said that they have a lot of data on the integrity of the bridges from regular bridge inspections.

An attendee asked about the Public Private Partnership and how costs will be shared.

Mr. Britland replied that he is not an expert on Public Private Partnerships. He replied that one model is design-build-maintain-operate. It is a procurement method to find concessionaires to design, build, maintain and operate the bridge and fund this investment by collecting tolls. There are a lot of Public Private Partnerships (P3) throughout the nation. Mr. Britland noted that P3s are becoming more common because the infrastructure of the nation, much of it built in the 50's and 60's, is reaching the end of its useful life and is in need of repair or replacement. At the same time, however, the highway trust fund is running out of money year after year. The idea is to get the vital infrastructure done with private funding. There is a lot of infrastructure that needs to be replaced. Even if the Commonwealth built the bridge with state funds, they would have to borrow money. He said that there will be other meetings for the P3 process. He also directed people to visit the P3 web page on MassDOT's web site.

An attendee who lived in Bourne on Sandwich Road asked about how residents who live next to the bridges can provide their input. She said local residents are trapped in their houses due to traffic in the summer. The residents of Sagamore Village and Bourne Village want to be involved.

Mr. Britland replied there are a number of ways to be involved and invited the attendee to be a part of the Working Group. He said it is common in other projects for neighborhood groups to be on the Working Group.

An attendee from Sagamore thanked MassDOT for involving the public from the beginning. She asked about whether trains and buses would be included in the study. She indicated that she does support the third bridge as a replacement bridge, not as an additional bridge.

Mr. Britland replied that the study will consider multimodal alternatives, including trains and buses.

An attendee asked about whether a study had ever been conducted on the relative cost and maintenance of a tunnel versus a bridge.

Mr. Britland replied that he is not aware of such a study.

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The same attendee stated that rail is going to take some of the traffic from the road. He stated that any project will have a considerable impact on Bourne. He expressed his support for a limited access frontage road on Scenic Highway to reduce traffic. He expressed his support for a previously-engineered Southside Connector road.

Mr. Britland replied that it is too early in the process to talk about the impacts of these projects. Since Southside Connector was designed quite a long time ago, there are more environmental constraints due to the high impacts of the road design, which make the project not feasible today.

An attendee from Chatham, who used to prepare environmental impact statements, proposed a question about the timeline. He stated that a two-step process may preclude public input. He also asked if the public process would follow MassDOT's guidelines for public process.

Mr. Britland replied that conceptual planning studies commonly precede environmental impact statements. Conceptual planning studies look at a wide range of alternatives with different criteria. Environmental Impact Reports and Statements are required by the state and federal governments. The current planning study is part of MassDOT's typical project development process, which precedes these detailed and mandated environmental impact studies. Regarding public participation, the project has a public participation plan, which is a separate and more recent document than the guidelines (MassDOT Project Development and Design Guide) the speaker referenced. This current plan is being followed for media, outreach, and accessibility.

An attendee from Bourne asked if MassDOT will do a detailed study of the pedestrian and bicycle connections and if the sidewalks over the bridges are safe.

Mr. Britland replied that the study will look at pedestrian and bicycle issues and try and improve identified issues. He said that it is not just canal crossing study. He said that complete streets are important and all MassDOT planning studies are multimodal in nature. He indicated that the leading issue of the study is to create multimodal mobility in the Cape Cod Canal area, followed by establishing an additional or replacement crossing.

Michael Walsh added that the sidewalks on the bridges do not meet Federal standards and that they feel uncomfortable to be on because of their narrow width and proximity to moving traffic. However, the sidewalks are inspected regularly and there are no structural safety issues. He said that the definition of highway bridges may or may not include pedestrian and bicycle facilities, although the fact that the bridges do have sidewalks is important. He said that they will take the opportunity of a new bridge to try to include improved accommodations for pedestrians and bicyclists. The service roads on either side of the canal are technically not bike paths, but they do serve as great bike paths, so if there is a way to improve connectivity, he is in favor of it.

An attendee from Bournedale Village asked about a highway ramp shown in conceptual plans through his neighborhood, and whether the ramp would eliminate homes.

Mr. Britland replied that the plans are preliminary and additional analysis steps will be taken looking closely at impacts to residential areas and environmental resources. The previously shown criteria for evaluating alternatives do include right-of-way impacts on communities.

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An attendee from Bourne asked about how the study ties into an evacuation event and what would happen if both bridges were out of operation and if ferry service would be available.

Mr. Britland replied that there is an existing emergency response plan. It illustrates that in the event of an emergency how people and vehicles could get off of the Cape. It is a guiding document and the bridges are an important part. It does not need to be recreated.

Michael Walsh replied that they do not expect a situation where both bridges are out of commission.

An attendee asked about how the pulse of the people of Cape Cod will be taken regarding the different alternatives, including a third bridge. She is concerned about how seriously the comments will be taken, how they will be recorded, and how they will be accessible.

Mr. Britland replied that the comments will be recorded by video, written in minutes, and available online and in the public record. He stated that the comments are seriously considered and that all meetings are open to the public. The Working Group meetings tend to be elected officials and regional and neighborhood representatives that get into greater detail. This meeting is an example of general public informational meetings. The general public meetings are less conducive to getting into the details, but they are good opportunities for soliciting public input and sharing the results of detailed study efforts.

The same attendee stated that she is pleased that people can become part of the Working Group. She asked if written commentary for the record is solicited. She also stated there could be a Cape-wide referendum on the issue of a third bridge, given the anxiety that the third bridge is being fast tracked.

Mr. Britland replied that comments are accepted in written form. He also replied that there are focus group meetings, which are meant for meeting with neighborhood associations or other groups. If a particular group of people would like to hear more or be a part of the study, they will be reached out to. Regarding a possible referendum, he stated that it is a citizen's right to initiate such a referendum.

An attendee asked about the functionality of approach roads to the bridges, which he sees as obsolete, especially the rotaries.

Mr. Britland replied that the study process includes short- and medium-term improvements. MassDOT will be looking at roadway, intersection, ramp, and multimodal issues in the area. The study is not just cross-canal connectivity. It is also meant to deal with these issues.

The same attendee followed up about MacArthur Boulevard, which has been on a repaving schedule for three years, but has not been completed.

Mr. Britland replied that the resurfacing is being advertised this year.

An attendee from the Sandwich Planning Board recommended that the east boundary of the Study Area be pivoted to include the Sandwich Marina. He asked that the marina be expanded to allow for larger boats and ferries to Boston. He believes that two destinations straddling the Study Area, Heritage Museums and Gardens and the Marina, could have access off of the highway. He requested that the multimodal approach be applied in the marina district for bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

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Mr. Britland replied that those comments have already been received. The Study Area was generated by a GIS function and can be changed. He indicated that the lines will be modified to include the important areas.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:00PM