MassDOT Files Environmental Report on Phase 1 Service

On May 26, 2017, the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs issued a Certificate on the Notice of Project Change (NPC) for the South Coast Rail Project (SCR). In the NPC, MassDOT proposed a phased approach to SCR commuter rail service by extending an existing rail line. The Certificate outlined the scope of work for developing a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (DSEIR). MassDOT filed the DSEIR with the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act office on January 31, 2018, describing a plan to begin long-awaited commuter rail service late in 2022.

The Baker-Polito Administration is committed to restoring transit service to southeastern MA. Phasing the project will begin service more quickly and allow the region to accrue the benefits promised by the Full Build Project, which is the preferred Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative. The DSEIR filing initiates a public comment period with a public meeting and will result in a Certificate issued by the Secretary outlining next steps.

The Phased Approach

The DSEIR outlines MassDOT's approach to completing the SCR project. MassDOT proposes to advance Phase 1 to deliver service to the South Coast years before revenue service is possible under the Full Build Project. At the same time, MassDOT will proceed with designing, permitting and funding the Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative, which was already reviewed under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

Phase 1 will extend the existing Middleborough/ Lakeville Commuter Rail Line south onto the existing Middleborough Secondary freight line to provide service to Taunton, New Bedford and Fall River. The Middleborough Secondary connects to Cotley Junction in East Taunton. From there, Phase 1 trains will join the New Bedford Main Line and continue to New Bedford, or they will branch off on the Fall River Secondary to Fall River. This area is known as the Southern Triangle, and it is an active freight corridor. MassDOT will improve the track infrastructure, build a new signal system for passenger service, and add stations and overnight layover facilities for the commuter rail equipment.

The Southern Triangle portion of the project, including stations and layover facilities, was included as part of the overall Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative, which was previously studied. The primary new element of Phase 1 is the use of the Middleborough Secondary for commuter rail service to connect to the active Middleborough Main Line. Because Phase 1 service will connect to the Middleborough Main line, which is not equipped to handle electric trains, Phase 1 service will use diesel locomotives.

MassDOT will upgrade a number of culverts and bridges as part of Phase 1 work.

The DSEIR analyzes the Phase 1 elements of South Coast Rail that were not previously examined and any related impacts and mitigation. These areas include:

- Improvements to tracks on the Middleborough Secondary to bring them to commuter rail standards
- A new station at Pilgrim Junction in Middleborough
- A new station in East Taunton south of Cotley Junction
- Modifications to stations previously proposed in Freetown and Fall River (due to land use changes)

The map on page 3 depicts the SCR phasing plan, showing both Phase 1 and the Full Build (the Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative), and the proposed stations.

The DSEIR Recommendations

The DSEIR analyzes the route alternatives, service options, and station locations that MassDOT is proposing for Phase 1. Phase 1 service through Middleborough takes advantage of existing commuter rail service and active freight lines. MassDOT considered three potential Middleborough options to deliver Phase 1 commuter rail service between Boston and Fall River/New Bedford. MassDOT chose the alternative that offers a one-seat ride from the South Coast, has the least environmental impact (and would not require a wetlands variance to construct), offers travel-time savings over driving, meets the goal to provide service as soon as possible, and supports a potential future Cape Cod service connection. The preferred alternative can be constructed without disrupting the existing transportation system, and will provide both short-term and long-term benefits for MBTA operations.

The MBTA will operate three morning peak trains and three evening peak trains to both New Bedford and Fall River, with Taunton and Middleborough seeing up to six morning and six evening peak trains (because all of the service would pass through those communities). There would be a total of 13 trips each way - 26 trains total - for weekday service. During off-peak periods, three trains would operate on a 3-3 ½ hour frequency. To assure seating for current and future passengers, the MBTA will purchase new bi-level coaches and add cars to train sets to increase seating capacity based on projected ridership.

In addition, this option includes:

- All of the Southern Triangle stations previously evaluated in the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report (FEIS/R), with the exception of Battleship Cove, which would be included in the Full Build.
- Relocating the Taunton Depot Station south of Cotley Junction for Phase 1 service, renamed as East Taunton Station; a central Taunton station will be included in the Full Build.
- A new, relocated station in Middleborough, at Pilgrim Junction, which currently serves as an MBTA layover site.
- Building two new layover facilities in New Bedford (Wamsutta Layover) and Fall River (Weaver's Cove).
- Providing a shuttle bus between the existing transit-oriented development at the Middleborough/Lakeville Station and the new Pilgrim Junction station to ensure that riders who currently walk to the station can take a shuttle to the new Pilgrim Station.

(Continued on p. 4)

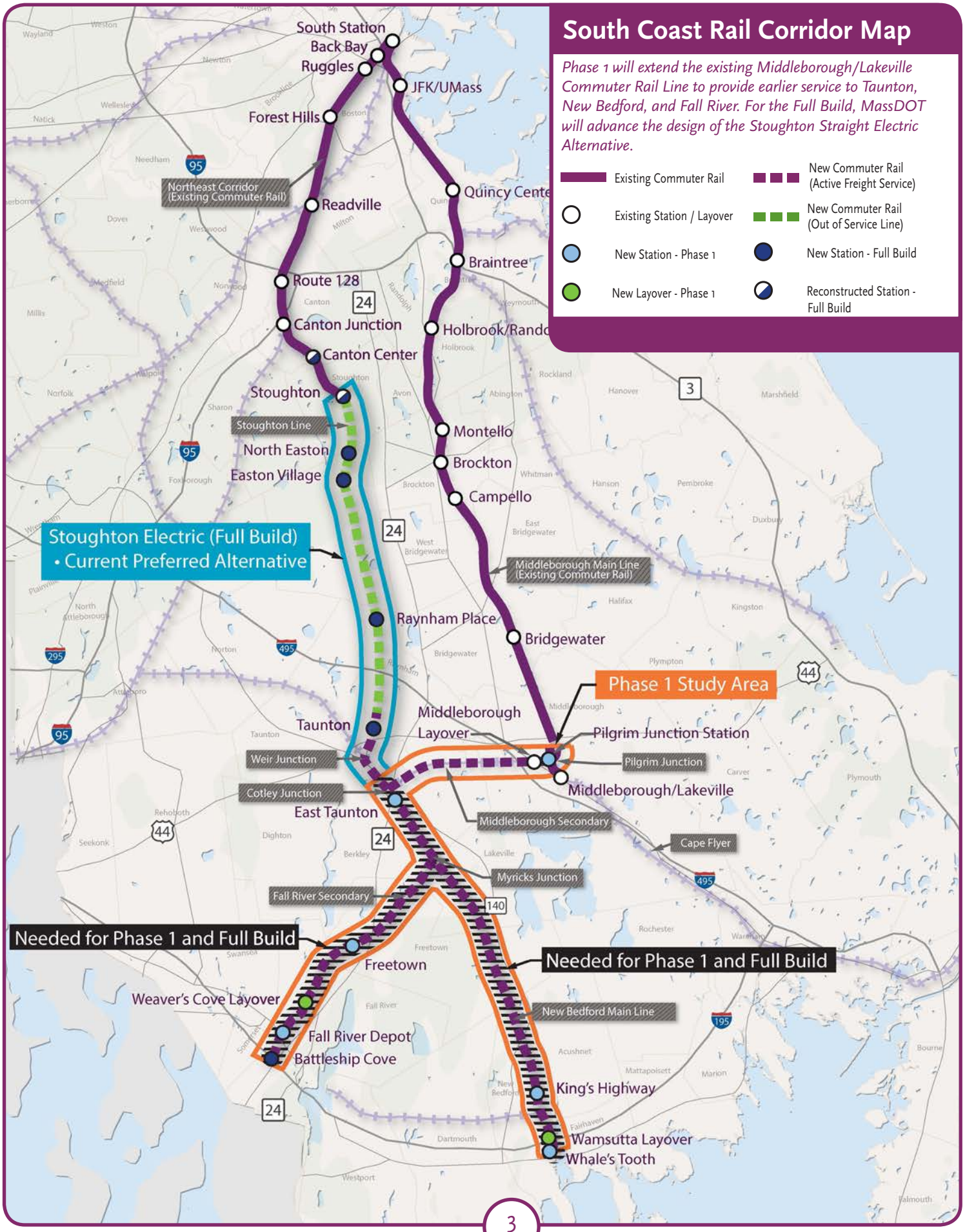
Key Definitions

"**Full Build Project**" is the Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative designated as the preferred alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report (FEIS/FEIR).

"**Phase 1 Project**" refers to the infrastructure, service and stations for the Southern Triangle and the Middleborough Secondary.

MassDOT's State of Good Repair Program (SOGR) is not part of SCR Phase 1. SOGR projects are primarily intended to maintain the existing freight service infrastructure.

In Phase 1, MassDOT will construct 56% of the track miles required for the Full Build.



South Coast Rail Corridor Map

Phase 1 will extend the existing Middleborough/Lakeville Commuter Rail Line to provide earlier service to Taunton, New Bedford, and Fall River. For the Full Build, MassDOT will advance the design of the Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative.

- Existing Commuter Rail
- New Commuter Rail (Active Freight Service)
- Existing Station / Layover
- New Commuter Rail (Out of Service Line)
- New Station - Phase 1
- New Station - Full Build
- New Layover - Phase 1
- Reconstructed Station - Full Build

AM PEAK/INBOUND (TO SOUTH STATION)	PHASE 1	AVERAGE BY AUTO	TIME SAVINGS
TAUNTON	1:11	1:45	:34
FALL RIVER	1:31	2:00	:29
NEW BEDFORD	1:31	2:05	:34

PM PEAK/OUTBOUND (FROM SOUTH STATION)	PHASE 1	AVERAGE BY AUTO	TIME SAVINGS
TAUNTON	1:12	1:40	:28
FALL RIVER	1:33	1:55	:22
NEW BEDFORD	1:31	2:00	:29

Phase 1 service will offer travel-time savings for passengers who typically travel by car or bus. The above figure shows estimated travel time from Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford for the morning and evening rush hour commutes. Average auto travel time can swing by a full hour depending on conditions, accidents and other factors (it can take 1½ hours from Fall River to Boston on some days, and 2½ on others). Rail service will save riders, on average, about an hour a day.

Phase 1 daily, one-way trips are estimated at 3,220, with 837,200 trips per year. **Before the Full Build is completed, the MBTA will have provided 7 million trips over 8 years with Phase 1 service.** Ridership will grow to 7,920 daily trips with the Full Build for a total of 2,059,200 per year. Taking these riders off the highway will provide significant vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reductions and traffic congestion benefits.

The total program capital cost of Phase 1, with escalation, is anticipated to be approximately $935 million, and will be refined as the design advances. The Full Build capital cost is estimated to be $3.2 billion, inclusive of Phase 1 costs. About 85 percent (or more than $800 million) of the cost of Phase 1 is for the Southern Triangle, which is in both Phase 1 and the Full Build. Because annual escalation cost for construction is 3.5 percent, building the Southern Triangle now will provide savings of $153 million. These savings help offset the cost of improvements to the Middleborough Secondary required for Phase 1 service.

When the Full Build is complete, the Phase 1 investments will have continuing value. The Southern Triangle upgrades will support the Stoughton Straight Electric Alternative, and the upgraded tracks along the Middleborough Secondary will be used to carry freight and can serve as a backup rail alternative.

Navigating the DSEIR

The DSEIR was months in preparation. It focuses on the environmental impacts of upgrading the Middleborough Secondary and constructing new stations. The DSEIR addresses changes in station locations or impacts, the use of diesel locomotives for Phase 1, construction within the Middleborough Secondary and construction and operational impacts. These issues were not addressed in the Final Environmental Impact Report/Statement (FEIR/S).

The DSEIR looks at factors such as ridership, cost and smart growth planning. MassDOT addresses environmental justice, climate change, air quality, wetlands and water quality, rare species, noise and vibration, traffic, and cultural resources. The DSEIR examines secondary growth and cumulative impacts. In addition, the DSEIR lists required land acquisition for stations, driveways and other related uses (that are unique to Phase 1 and were not previously studied). The document includes a chapter on mitigation measures for Phase 1, identifies the responsible parties and includes a schedule for implementation. It also provides a copy of each comment letter submitted on the NPC and responses to the comments.

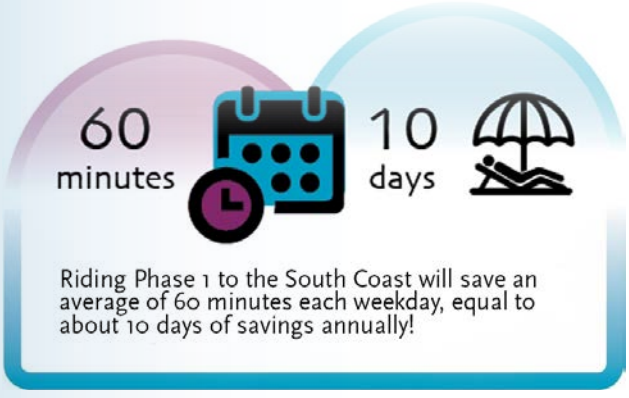
The MBTA will provide riders with 7 million trips over 8 years with Phase 1 service before the Full Build is completed.

RIDERSHIP	PHASE 1	FULL BUILD
DAILY	3,220 trips	7,920 trips
ANNUAL	837,200 trips	2,059,200 trips

Design Steps

MassDOT's consultant team, led by VHB and HNTB, has already surveyed the Phase 1 right-of-way, taken geotechnical borings to identify soil composition, and identified wetland boundaries, and has completed the preliminary track design to ensure the Middleborough Secondary will meet passenger rail standards. Work on the Middleborough Secondary will require upgrading the track from Pilgrim Junction to Cotley Junction, installing new signal and communications systems and positive train control (PTC),* and upgrading five grade crossings.

Over the last two years, MassDOT and the MBTA have been advancing design of the Southern Triangle. The design of the track infrastructure, stations and layover facilities for the Southern Triangle is currently at the 30% design stage. The team is continuing to refine the design to reduce impacts to wetlands and other sensitive resources and has started the process of obtaining wetland permits. The MBTA has begun discussions with property owners where property purchases are required.



Community and Agency Involvement

MassDOT has briefed elected officials and planners on the Phase 1 plan. The team is working with local Conservation Commissions in southeastern Massachusetts to file Notices of Intent under the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act for Phase 1. The Conservation Commission reviews involve public hearings. MassDOT has also re-engaged the Interagency Coordinating Group (ICG), which includes state and federal regulators with a role in permitting the project. MassDOT will be working with representatives from every community as design and construction advance to share specific information, gather comments and answer questions.

Next Steps

MassDOT will host a public meeting during the public comment period on the DSEIR. Watch for an email announcement and check the project website for additional information.

After the comment period closes on **March 23**, the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs will issue a Certificate on the DSEIR's compliance with environmental regulations and laying out requirements for mitigation. MassDOT will then prepare a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report and Section 61 Findings.** After the MEPA process is completed, the project will proceed to final design, permitting, and ultimately construction. Meanwhile, MassDOT will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on updating the federal environmental process for Phase 1.

MassDOT and the MBTA will share project information on the website and through emails. There will be many opportunities for public input going forward. To learn more about the project, and to sign up for email updates, see the Contact Us box on page 6.

**PTC is a federally-mandated safety control system that automatically reduces train speeds when needed and helps to avoid collisions.*

***Massachusetts state law requires a permitting agency to make a finding (referred to as a Section 61 finding) describing an environmental impact, if any, and whether feasible measures are proposed to avoid or minimize impacts.*

How to Comment on the DSEIR

You can find the DSEIR in a number of places, including:

- On the project website: www.mass.gov/southcoastrail
- At the public libraries in most South Coast communities (see the project website for a full list).
- Electronically by request to Jean Fox by email (jean.fox@state.ma.us) or phone (857-368-8853).

To comment on the document:

- Send a letter, postcard or email to MEPA by **March 23**, the last day comments are accepted:

  Secretary Matthew A. Beaton, EOEEA
  Attn.: MEPA Office (Purvi Patel) EEA# 14346
  100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
  Boston, MA 02114
  or fax: 617-626-1181
  email: purvi.patel@state.ma.us
  or via hand delivery

  MassDOT would like to receive a copy of your letter, which you can email or mail to Jean Fox (jean.fox@state.ma.us) or MassDOT, Ten Park Plaza, Room 4150, Boston, MA 02116.

- Participate in the public meeting (visit the project website at www.mass.gov/southcoastrail for details).

Contact Us

For more information, contact us at:

SouthCoastRail@dot.state.ma.us

(857) 368-8853

To learn more about the project and sign up for email updates, visit the website at: **www.mass.gov/southcoastrail**

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Meet the Team: Rick Carey, Program Manager

Rick Carey is the South Coast Rail team member with the longest history on the project and most institutional knowledge. He has been involved in the project for over two decades, since he started working as a consultant at VHB, a planning and engineering consulting firm. You may recognize Rick as he delivers presentations at many public meetings and community events.

Rick also knows the region, as he previously lived in Rehoboth. He experienced first-hand the challenges of commuting to Boston from the South Coast. Rick enjoys working alongside people who are dedicated to the same mission – to successfully restore commuter rail service to the region.

With a background in civil/mechanical engineering and business, Rick is managing the South Coast Rail program for VHB including the strategic development of the design, permitting and construction, the project schedule, and cash flow. He is responsible for coordinating a large team of professionals in a variety of disciplines. He coordinates the project with MBTA and MassDOT, engineers, environmental experts, and outreach consultants.

Rick understands that major capital programs like SCR take time. “The devil’s in the details,” Rick said, “and when the project is over 50 miles long, there are a lot of details.”

At the end of the day, Rick’s job is to provide the MBTA and MassDOT with leadership and technical guidance to get SCR built. Rick has seen the project gain momentum over the years and is pleased the Baker-Polito Administration is prioritizing the project. He looks forward to riding South Coast Rail in the not-too-distant future.