

South Coast Rail: A Reader's Guide to the Final Environmental Impact Statement/Final Environmental Impact Report

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INTRODUCTION

This summary is intended to provide an easy-to-read guide to help readers explore the lengthy and detailed **Final Environmental Impact Statement/Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIS/FEIR)** for the South Coast Rail Project. MassDOT hopes this outline will help you understand the technical information and recommendations in the document. The FEIS/FEIR is an important document. Completion of this report will permit MassDOT and the MBTA to seek permits for the project and begin final design in anticipation of construction.

The FEIS/FEIR is a combined federal and state document produced by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps). MassDOT and the Corps agreed to produce a coordinated document summarizing the environmental review of the project. To this end, MassDOT has adopted the federal document (FEIS) as the state Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR), with some additions.

The FEIS/FEIR summarizes the alternatives for restoring train service to the South Coast and outlines the Corps' conclusion that there is no practicable

alternative to the Stoughton Electric Alternative with less environmental impact. The Preface documents how MassDOT complied with the state environmental review process and confirms MassDOT's choice of the Stoughton route as the preferred alternative.

The document outlines the transportation benefits of the recommended alternative and its potential impacts on noise, visual, wetlands, environmental justice, air quality and other social, historic and environmental resources. Because the document is long – about 2,000 pages plus maps and figures – this guide is intended to help readers find topics of significance to them. Copies of the full report are available online (see the box on page 7 for more information) and by request in DVD format. The summary is also available in print form. Although the Corps does not have a formal process for public review of the document, the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Office of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) is soliciting public comments, and MassDOT plans to hold two Open Houses in the region during the public comment period. You can visit the project website, www.mass.gov/southcoastrail, for the meeting schedule and for information on how to comment on the document.



What is South Coast Rail?

South Coast Rail is a project of MassDOT and the MBTA to restore public transportation service to the South Coast region, which was halted in 1958. The project will improve access to transit for an underserved area of the state, increase transit ridership, improve regional air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and support opportunities for smart growth and economic development. The South Coast Rail Project includes a smart growth *Corridor Plan* to guide the region's economic development while protecting its green spaces, lakes and ponds. The project includes Technical Assistance to help 31 cities and towns in the region implement the *Corridor Plan*.

WHAT IS IN THE FEIS/FEIR?

The FEIS/FEIR is a significant document in the environmental review of South Coast Rail. It builds on the work of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (DEIS/DEIR) published in 2011, which looked at five alternatives for transit to the South Coast (No-Build or Enhanced Bus; three Commuter Rail alternatives; and a Rapid Bus Alternative). Following review of the DEIS/DEIR, the Corps eliminated the Attleboro Alternatives and the Rapid Bus Alternative. The FEIS/FEIR evaluates three sets of alternatives:

- A No-Build/Enhanced Bus Alternative
- The Stoughton Alternative (diesel and electric variations)
- The Whittenton Alternative (diesel and electric variations)

The FEIS/FEIR has chapters defining and comparing the alternatives, describing the environment, and assessing the impact of the various alternatives on physical, social, economic, historic, and natural resources. The document also establishes



PHOTO BY JOHN ROBSON

Governor Deval Patrick, Transportation Secretary Richard Davey and members of the South Coast delegation discuss transportation funding at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

MassDOT's commitments to mitigate for unavoidable impacts. It contains appendices on technical topics of interest and importance to the project. Of particular

Differences between the Draft and Final EIS/EIR

Chapter 3 of the FEIS/FEIR, *Alternatives*, outlines elements of the project that have changed since the draft report. Work on the project over the last two years allowed MassDOT to describe the project's impacts in more detail and explore mitigation measures. These changes include the following:

- Designs of the track, stations and layover facilities were advanced to help address the project's impacts on wetlands and natural resources.
- Wetlands throughout the project were delineated in the field (a process that includes examining each wetland, marking the boundary, and recording the boundary onto survey plans), then the results were reviewed and approved by each of the Conservation Commissions. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) reviewed and approved the wetland delineation in Easton.
- MassDOT refined its operating plan to optimize performance and ridership, and calculated new ridership figures.
- MassDOT selected locations for the overnight layover facilities based on a number of criteria: on the New Bedford Line, the Wamsutta site was selected, and on the Fall River line, Weaver's Cove East was selected.
- The proposed Stoughton Station was shifted to the south, with access from Brock Street, to reduce conflicts with vehicle traffic in Stoughton Center and to meet access requirements. The proposed Downtown Taunton Station for the Whittenton Alternatives was shifted north to a location on Dana Street. More details have been developed for other stations (see Section 3), but no other stations have been relocated.
- Chapter 7 provides a more detailed description of measures that MassDOT will undertake to avoid or minimize impacts to the environment. Where impacts can't be avoided, this chapter describes mitigation measures proposed by MassDOT and summarized in detailed tables.
- The FEIS/FEIR proposes an Evaluation Plan with a monitoring component to assess the success of the project's smart growth implementation plan and to allow for changes or corrections, as needed.
- The FEIS/FEIR includes an Operations Analysis for the alternatives.

interest are the responses to public comments that more than 150 people and institutions submitted on the project's 2011 DEIS/DEIR.

The Corps concludes that there is no practicable alternative to the Stoughton Electric Alternative that would have less environmental impact. MassDOT, in its Preface to the document, states that the Stoughton route is the best option for balancing transportation and environmental benefits with environmental impacts. The Secretary's Certificate on the DEIR stated that MassDOT had made the case for the Stoughton route to be the preferred alternative in the FEIR, and that, because the electric option is preferable from an air quality perspective, the Stoughton Electric should be the focus of the FEIR. MassDOT has not, however, identified a preferred mode for the Stoughton Alternatives. Although the electric mode provides more transportation benefit and has substantial transportation, air quality, and climate benefits, it would have greater visual impacts and impacts to historic resources, and it would be substantially more expensive to construct. The Stoughton Electric Alternative presents the worst-case analysis with respect to historic and visual resources.



PHOTO BY JOHN ROBSON

Public involvement is a key aspect of the project.

LOOKING AT THE FEIS/FEIR

What follows is a brief summary of the nine chapters of the FEIS/FEIR. The FEIS/FEIR was prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as the lead federal agency with responsibility under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). MassDOT has reviewed the document and adopted it as MassDOT's FEIR under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA).

Preface – MassDOT prepared the Preface to the FEIR to address its responsibilities under the Massachusetts

Helpful Acronyms and Definitions

FEIS – Final Environmental Impact Statement (federally-required document)

FEIR – Final Environmental Impact Report (state-required document)

FEIS/FEIR – A combined report that addresses both the federal and state environmental review requirements for a project.

Corps – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (lead federal agency reviewing South Coast Rail project)

ENF – Environmental Notification Form (state-required document that precedes the DEIR)

Layover Facility – A storage site for the trains. South Coast Rail will have two overnight layovers, one near the end of the New Bedford line and one at the end of the Fall River line.

LEDPA – Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (the alternative selected by the Corps)

MEPA Office – Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office (state agency, part of EOEEA, reviewing South Coast Rail project)

No-Build Alternative – The future scenario if the proposed project is not built

Right-of-way – A strip of land used for transportation or a transportation facility; much of the South Coast Rail right-of-way is currently owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Secretary's Certificate – A statement issued by the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs outlining the topics required to be addressed in an environmental document, or documenting compliance with the requirements of MEPA.

Section 61 – A section of Massachusetts General Law Chapter 30 that requires state agencies that take action on a project to make an official determination of potential impacts from a proposed project and whether the impacts have been avoided, minimized, and/or mitigated appropriately.



PHOTO BY JOHN ROBSON

Certificate on the DEIS/DEIR. Table P-1 summarizes the requirements by topic and where they are addressed in the FEIS/FEIR.

Chapter 1, Executive Summary – The Executive Summary outlines the key elements of the FEIS/FEIR and the major findings of the study. It includes tables summarizing direct and indirect project impacts. For most readers, this is the most important section of the FEIS/FEIR. It gives a context for decisions on the project to date, summarizes the alternatives at a high level, and lists next steps in the decision making process. Subsequent chapters provide more detailed discussion of each of the topics summarized in Chapter 1.

Smart growth protects natural resources while providing for development in appropriate places.

Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), as some of them differ from the responsibilities of the Corps under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This Preface includes background information on the project’s history; outlines the Commonwealth’s goals for the project; reviews the community involvement process for South Coast Rail; and describes MassDOT’s preferred alternative, the Stoughton route. The Preface summarizes the elements of a Smart Growth Evaluation Plan, which will evaluate and monitor smart growth development in the region. The Plan is summarized in Section 5.5 of the FEIS/FEIR and included in *Volume IV: Supporting Technical Information Appendices*. This section also documents how the FEIS/FEIR responds to requirements set forth in the Secretary’s June 29, 2011

Chapter 2, Purpose and Need – This brief chapter defines the project’s purpose and need, describes the transportation problems on the South Coast that the project is designed to address, and lists MassDOT’s public policy goals and programs.

Chapter 3, Alternatives – Chapter 3 describes the process MassDOT used to develop and evaluate transportation alternatives for the project. It begins with a brief history of 20 years of project studies, including 65 potential alternatives on five corridors presented in the Phase I report (see Appendix 3.1-A). The screening of alternatives through the Environmental Notification Form and DEIS/DEIR is included. This section then describes the alternatives evaluated in the FEIS/

Purpose and Need

The Corps determined that South Coast Rail’s overall project purpose is “to more fully meet the existing and future demand for public transportation between Fall River/New Bedford and Boston, MA, and to enhance regional mobility.” MassDOT includes supporting smart growth planning and development in its goals.



The proposed Whale’s Tooth Station in New Bedford would be a potential site for smart growth development.

FEIR in detail: No-Build (Enhanced Bus) Alternative; the Stoughton Alternatives; and the Whittenton Alternatives. It includes details and tables on bridges and culverts; signals; electrification; rolling stock; stations; layover facilities; property acquisition; cost; ridership; beneficial and adverse impacts; and the preferred alternative. This is the longest chapter in the FEIS/FEIR (nearly 150 pages) and details key steps and evaluations conducted on a wide range of topics related to choosing the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA).

Chapter 4, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences – Chapter 4 provides an overview of the existing physical, natural, and human resources in the South Coast region and describes the methods used to analyze the effects of the project on these resources. The FEIS/FEIR evaluates the direct and indirect effects of the project on 18 different environmental resources, ranging from air quality to vibration, and compares the effects of the No-Build, Stoughton, and Whittenton Alternatives (both the electric and diesel options). This chapter also describes the potential short-term construction-period impacts of the project, which would primarily affect air quality, noise, traffic, wetlands and water quality.

Chapter 5, Indirect Effects and Cumulative Impacts – This chapter analyzes the indirect and cumulative effects of the alternatives. The South Coast region is one of the fastest growing areas of the state. South Coast Rail is anticipated to result in economic benefits and growth in jobs and households. While these changes can be beneficial, they will have both direct and indirect effects (impacts caused by the induced growth in jobs and households). Land use and other resources are likely to be affected. To preserve the quality of the region – which has cities and towns, farms and villages, lakes and rivers – MassDOT has incorporated smart growth planning into the project to provide a way for communities to organize growth and direct it away from areas with sensitive ecological value. The cumulative impact analysis evaluates changes in the study area as a result of past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions combined with the South Coast Rail project. Chapter 5 also proposes an Evaluation Plan with a monitoring component to assess the success of the Smart Growth Implementation Plan and to allow for changes or corrections, as needed.

Chapter 6, Commitment of Resources – Chapter 6 responds to specific requirements of NEPA and describes the commitment of funds, energy,



South Coast Rail includes a new station in Fall River at the Gates of the City to be known as Battleship Cove Station.

materials, and labor for the project. It also discloses the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity; in other words, the tradeoffs between the potential adverse impacts of the proposed project and the potential long-term benefits of the proposed project. This section defines “short-term” as being construction related and “long-term” as being the operational phase of the proposed project.

Chapter 7, Proposed Mitigation and MassDOT Proposed Section 61 Findings – This section provides information required under NEPA and MEPA. For MEPA, the section describes MassDOT’s commitment to mitigate for impacts on the environmental and social resources in the Secretary’s Certificate on the Environmental Notification Form (ENF). Tables list the mitigation commitments. The Section 61 Finding is the statement required by MGL Chapter 30 Section 61 for any state agency taking an action on a project that is the subject of an EIR. The Section 61 Finding describes the environmental impacts of a project and confirms that all feasible measures have been taken to avoid or minimize damage to the environment. The draft Section 61 Finding in the Final EIR is MassDOT’s Section 61 Finding, which is required for MassDOT to implement the project. Other state agencies, such as the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM), and Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP), will also issue Section 61 Findings concurrent with their approvals of the project. This section outlines the state and federal permits and mitigation commitments and provides draft Section 61 language for MassDOT and other state agencies.



Chapter 8, Regulatory Compliance – In addition to complying with MEPA and NEPA, South Coast Rail will need a number of state and federal permits. This section lists the required permits and approvals and gives a brief summary of the requirements and how MassDOT will address those requirements.

Chapter 9, Public Involvement and Agency Coordination – The Corps and MassDOT have conducted a number of public involvement and agency coordination activities during development of the FEIS/FEIR. This section outlines these efforts, in particular the activities around major project milestones. MassDOT also convened an Interagency Coordinating Group (ICG) composed of state and federal agencies with an interest or regulatory role in the environmental process. The meetings, dates and topics are listed in Table 9-1.

Responses to Comments on the DEIS/DEIR – This appendix provides detailed responses to all of the comments submitted on the DEIS/DEIR, including a detailed response to each of the requirements of the Secretary’s Certificate.

WHAT’S NEXT?

The MEPA process will end once the Secretary issues the Final Certificate, which will include any additional requirements for mitigation or avoidance of impacts. The NEPA process will conclude with the issuance of a Record of Decision by the Corps. Once these environmental review processes are completed, MassDOT can invest in developing the final design plans for the project and can obtain all of the required permits. Although MassDOT has begun

the permitting processes, none of the state or federal agencies can issue permits until the MEPA process is completed and they receive final design plans for the project, which is currently at the conceptual or preliminary design stage. MassDOT will seek Coastal Zone Management Consistency Determination approval and apply for the required permits:

- Corps of Engineers Section 404 Permit
- MA Wetlands Protection Act Permit (DEP)
- Water Quality Certificate (DEP)
- MA DEP Waterways Licenses for Bridges
- MA NHESP Conservation and Management Permit
- NPDES Construction Permit (EPA)
- US Coast Guard Bridge Permits

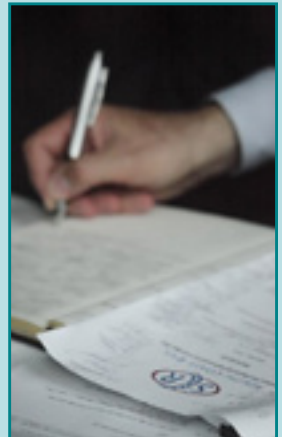
Where Can I Find the FEIS/FEIR?

Copies of the FEIS/FEIR are available for review in a number of formats and locations:

- On the Army Corps of Engineers website: www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/ProjectsTopics/SouthCoastRail.aspx and the South Coast Rail website: www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.
- At libraries in communities from the South Coast to Boston (see a full list on page 8).
- On DVD by request to Kerri Chace, kchace@reginavilla.com or 617-357-5772 x 16.
- In print, but in limited quantities due to the cost of reproduction, by request to Kerri Chace (see the bullet above).

How Can I Provide Comments?

MassDOT will be hosting two Open Houses on the FEIS/FEIR. MassDOT will distribute email and website notices on the dates and locations. Subject matter experts will be at the Open Houses to answer questions on the FEIS/FEIR, as will representatives of the Corps. Comments will be accepted in writing at the Open Houses or can be submitted to the Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs. EOEEA will accept written comments between September 25 and October 25, 2013.



Please send your comments to:

- Secretary Rick Sullivan, EOEEA
attn.: MEPA Office (Purvi Patel)
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston MA 02114
email: purvi.patel@state.ma.us
fax: 617-626-1181 or via hand delivery

For background information on the project, please visit www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.

Copies of the FEIS/FEIR are available at libraries in communities from the South Coast to Boston:

ACUSHNET

Russell Memorial Library
88 Main Street

ASSONET

Guilford H. Hathaway Library
6 North Main Street

ATTLEBORO

Attleboro Public Library
74 North Main Street

BERKLEY

Berkley Public Library
3 North Main Street

BOSTON

State Transportation Library
10 Park Plaza, 2nd Floor

Boston Public Library
700 Boylston Street

BRAINTREE

Thayer Public Library
798 Washington Street

CANTON

Canton Public Library
786 Washington Street

DEDHAM

Dedham Public Library
43 Church Street

EASTON

Ames Free Library
53 Main Street

FALL RIVER

Fall River Public Library
104 North Main Street

FOXBOROUGH

Boyden Library
10 Bird Street

FREETOWN

James White Memorial Library
5 Washburn Road

LAKEVILLE

Lakeville Public Library
4 Precinct Street

MANSFIELD

Mansfield Public Library
255 Hope Street

MILTON

Milton Public Library
467 Canton Avenue

NEW BEDFORD

New Bedford Public Library
613 Pleasant Street

NORTON

Norton Public Library
68 East Main Street

QUINCY

Thomas Crane Public Library
40 Washington Street

RANDOLPH

Turner Free Library
2 North Main Street

RAYNHAM

Raynham Public Library
760 South Main Street

SHARON

Sharon Public Library
11 North Main Street

STOUGHTON

Stoughton Library
84 Park Street

TAUNTON

Taunton Public Library
12 Pleasant Street

WEST BRIDGEWATER

West Bridgewater Public Library
80 Howard Street



SOUTH COAST RAIL