



Phase 1 New Bedford Public Information Meeting Summary

Date: Tuesday, September 17, 2019

Location: Keith Middle School, Auditorium

PRESENT

Elected Officials and New Bedford City Staff

Debora Coelho, Councilor At-Large
Maria Giesta, Ward 2 City Councilor
Brad Markey, Ward 1 City Councilor
Tabitha Harkin, Director of Planning
Rudy Botros, Office of Planning
Jennifer Carloni, Office of Planning
Kirsten Bryan, Office of Planning
Pauline Macedo, Community Services

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)

Jennifer Tabakin, MBTA Program Manager
Kim Dobosz, MBTA Project Manager

Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)

Jean Fox, MassDOT Project Manager

Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)

Chris Ross

Project Team

Rick Carey, VHB
Ken Caputo, VHB
Luke Mitchell, VHB
Charlie Passanisi, VHB
Emily Christin, Regina Villa Associates (RVA)
Nancy Farrell, RVA
Frank DePaola, AECOM
Scott Kelley, AECOM
Joe Sgroi, City Point Partners

Public Attendees: see pages 9-10

PRESENTATION¹

Nancy Farrell, RVA team member and meeting moderator, introduced Councilor Maria Giesta. Councilor Giesta welcomed the participants and encouraged them to ask questions and talk with her about any concerns.

Ms. Farrell introduced Jennifer Tabakin, MBTA Program Manager for South Coast Rail and Tabitha Harkin, Director of Planning for the City of New Bedford. She welcomed Jean Fox, MassDOT Project Manager, to the stage to begin the presentation.

Ms. Fox indicated that funding for the project is in place, and federal, state and local permitting is anticipated to be in place this week. A Program Manager/Construction Manager (AECOM) has been hired by the MBTA. In addition, coordination has begun with railroads and utilities to prepare for the larger contracts. At the same time, work is continuing to advance a portion of the Northern Corridor design to 30%. The project team meets with City of New Bedford departments on a monthly basis and is also planning Technical Assistance support with the City.

Ms. Fox said construction has begun with early action items, including culvert repair and replacement along the right-of-way (ROW). A contractor has also started with site preparation work for the four railroad bridges.

Ms. Fox reviewed additional ongoing South Coast Rail activities and showed the proposed Phase 1 weekday service schedule:

	DAILY INBOUND	DAILY OUTBOUND	TOTAL	PEAK PERIOD
New Bedford	7	7	14	3 Morning Peak Trains 3 Evening Peak Trains
Fall River & Freetown	6	6	12	3 Morning Peak Trains 3 Evening Peak Trains
Taunton & Middleborough	13	13	26	6 Morning Peak Trains 6 Evening Peak Trains

¹ The presentation is available on the Documents & Meeting Materials page of the project website: www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.

TOTAL	13	13	26	6 Morning Peak Trains 6 Evening Peak Trains
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She noted that two new train sets will be added so the existing Middleborough/Lakeville route will not be overcrowded.

Ms. Fox listed the numerous benefits that South Coast Rail will bring to the region, including a net growth in jobs, tourism, a boost to the economy and reduced truck traffic due to improvements to freight rail infrastructure.

She presented the two station locations in New Bedford, which were selected to serve residential and business districts, foster development, and support the waterfront.

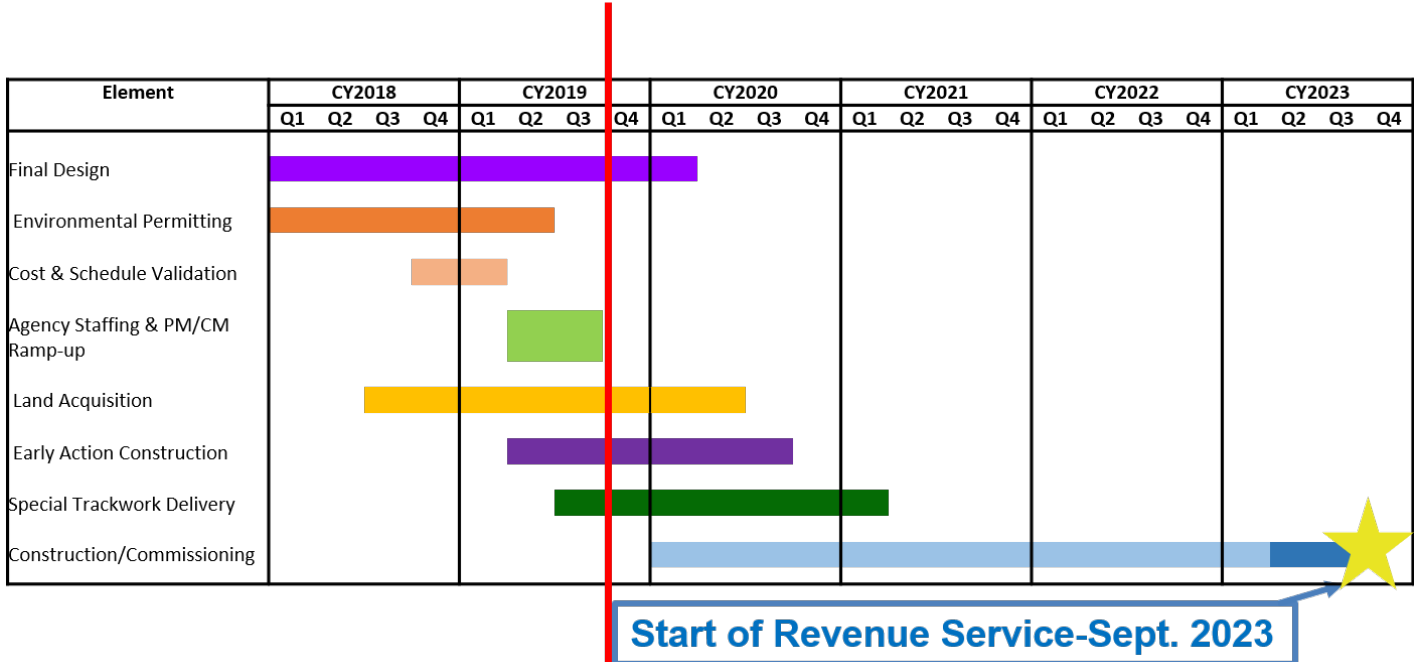
North New Bedford Station was originally planned to be located on King’s Highway; however the project team discovered multiple design challenges that made the location infeasible: significant drainage problems, a 30” sewer main along the ROW that impacts the City’s sewer system, a change in the parking plan (the parking lot was supposed to be shared with Flagship Cinema which is no longer there), as well as other land acquisition issues. She explained that the next best location that would meet the needs of the community was across the tracks on Church Street. The Church Street location includes a pocket park, potential for a future pedestrian walkway over the tracks to a retail area, 354 parking spaces, and pedestrian/bicycle access. She described further details which can be seen on Slide 11.

The roadway around North New Bedford Station will also receive multiple vehicle and pedestrian accommodation improvements, including 2,800 feet of new sidewalk and pedestrian and vehicle traffic signal upgrades. Ms. Fox noted that based on the ridership demand modeling, about 40% of future riders live west of the station and 60% live east of the station.

New Bedford Station, formerly called Whale’s Tooth Station, will be located in downtown New Bedford on Acushnet Avenue. The station will include pedestrian access from Acushnet Avenue as well as a new pedestrian bridge over Route 18 and 352 parking spaces in a shared lot. Ms. Fox reviewed further details which can be seen on slide 15. The new pedestrian bridge will be about 250 feet long from Purchase Street to Acushnet Avenue.

Ms. Fox showed a drawing of the Wamsutta Layover Facility, which will house trains overnight. It is located at the end of the line and the trains will only be parked there overnight (no maintenance will be done at this site).

She summarized the Phase 1 project schedule:



Ms. Fox noted that the goal for start of service is late in 2023 and the project team is working hard to meet that goal. She encouraged everyone to sign up for email updates on the project website as that is the best way to stay informed of all project details and progress. She pointed to the project email address where people can share comments and questions, and noted there are comment sheets on the sign-in table as well.

Ms. Harkin presented the City of New Bedford’s Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Study. She said she and Planning Office staff have been meeting with the South Coast Rail project team monthly and have been working closely with the Mayor’s Office and other City departments. The City is kicking off the 18-month long TOD Study in partnership with SRPEDD to ensure the two stations bring positive change to the City.

She explained that TOD is a “type of community development that includes a mixture of housing, office, retail and/or other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a quarter to a half-mile of high-quality public transportation (walkable zone).” Some goals of TOD are to encourage less vehicle trips and to make the neighborhood more walkable and pedestrian friendly.

The Study includes two TOD sites:

New Bedford TOD



North Station TOD



- Proximity to Downtown
- Multi-modal connectivity
- Maritime/MUB/Residential
- Access to highway/retail
- Neighborhood connection
- MUB/Large-Scale Retail

Ms. Harkin showed the scope of work and schedule for the Study, which is currently in Phase 1: Existing Conditions Analysis (Fall-Winter 2019). This analysis looks at existing zoning and current conditions of the sites to better understand what design improvements need to be made. Next will be Phase 2A: Future Conditions Analysis (Spring-Summer 2020), in which the Study's consultants will use modeling software and data, including 3-D drone flyovers to analyze land development. Finally, Phase 2B: Development and Implementation Plan (Fall-Winter 2020) will include a detailed plan for zoning changes and design guidelines. The City will host public meetings during each phase of the Study, and will work closely with the communities, residents, and development partners.

Ms. Harkin described further elements of both TOD sites which can be seen on slides 26-27. She explained the City will be sensitive to how these changes will impact the surrounding neighborhoods and promote positive changes, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists. She said the City will do extensive public outreach throughout this process, including the public meetings mentioned earlier as well as an internal stakeholder group. She noted her office is in Room 303 of City Hall and welcomed anyone to stop by.

Ms. Farrell opened the meeting to questions and comments.

Q+A

Steven Darwin, a resident of Fairhaven, asked if there will be express service from New Bedford in addition to trains that make all the local stops. He also asked how many parking spaces are in the Lakeville lot, as he usually has no trouble parking at Lakeville. Ms. Fox said she doesn't know the exact number of spots in Lakeville but she knows Middleborough has 768 spots and the project is considering about 700 spots for both New Bedford stations. She said the MBTA is very cautious when estimating the parking demand and capacity to avoid previous bad experiences with too little parking availability. The MBTA uses the Central Transportation Planning Staff (CTPS) ridership models when determining parking needs at each station. Regarding express trains, Ms. Fox noted there are constraints at South Station which limits when trains can be parked there, but the project team has been directed to look at possible express service or a shoulder train (a train that runs express early in the morning).

Steve Hemingway, a resident of the north end of New Bedford, asked if there are any plans to connect the two stations with a walking/bike path. Ms. Harkin said there is no direct path right now but the City is looking at possibilities for how best to connect the two stations.

Rich Taber, Mattapoisett RPM News, said the parking lot proposed for shared parking for New Bedford Station fills up in the summer because of the ferries. Ms. Fox said the project has met with the Port Authority that oversees the parking lot and they explained there are only three weekend events over the summer in which capacity is an issue so they should not interfere with South Coast Rail, which consists primarily of weekday commuters. She added that parking will be continually monitored for possible adjustments if necessary. Mr. Taber asked if the ridership percentages on slide 12 include surrounding communities or just New Bedford. Rick Carey, VHB, explained these percentages are part of the CTPS ridership model and they include the entire region.

Melissa Costa said King's Highway traffic is heavily congested in the mornings around 7:00/7:30 AM and she is concerned about the North New Bedford Station adding more traffic. She asked what the plans are to accommodate this extra traffic. Ms. Fox said the project team studied the potential change in traffic volumes with the new North New Bedford Station and there is no additional traffic expected with the switch in locations. Lisa Sherman, CDM Smith, summarized the traffic design improvements that are part of the King's Highway Improvements project; construction will begin next Spring. Ms. Sherman said there will be left-turn-only lanes at intersections, upgraded traffic signals, and safety improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists by providing better accommodations.

An attendee who lives on Church Street is not happy with the state of the abandoned Julius Koch building, which is not being maintained. She is concerned people may break into it at night as there is no lighting, and she asked if someone could monitor or maintain the building until construction begins. She is also concerned about traffic impacts from the North New Bedford Station. Ms. Fox thanked her for her comment and said it is helpful for the project team to be aware of all issues. Ms. Fox said the traffic modeling analysis looked good for the new station location and there should not be negative impacts. She encouraged the attendee to call the police if she witnesses any dangerous activity at the abandoned building and assured her the new station will be very well-lit with a lot of activity.

Doreen St. Jermaine said she walked along Church Street and collected the names and comments of her neighbors who do not want the North New Bedford Station to be located on Church Street. She is concerned about what a station will bring to the neighborhood. She is concerned about traffic and the station will encourage people to park on neighborhood streets, and resident-only stickers will prevent caregivers to the elderly from accessing their patients.² She is concerned about the safety of children and the change in housing prices (if the value increases, they won't be able to afford taxes). Ms. Fox said the King's Highway project will alleviate many of the traffic problems the neighborhood is experiencing, especially with adaptive signal control. Ms. Fox said the station will bring a lot of activity which reduces opportunities for malicious behavior. She summarized Operation Lifesaver, which is a national rail safety program that the MBTA brings to schools to teach children about train safety, and the children will bring the message home.

Luke Mitchell, VHB, said the project is beginning to look at the station area for potential opportunities for landscaping and mixed-use design improvements, including a potential connection from Carlisle Street to Woodlawn Park. He confirmed the station will not have a negative impact on traffic. Ms. Fox encouraged Ms. St. Jermaine to attend the City's upcoming public meetings on TOD that Ms. Harkin and her team will be hosting.

Peter Chasse, a resident of Church Street, is disappointed that MassDOT/MBTA did not talk earlier to Church Street residents who believed that the station would be located at King's Highway. He said both areas are a traffic nightmare and the City is already talking about putting a school and marijuana dispensary on Church St. He doesn't understand how a \$1 billion project cannot afford to fix the drainage problems at King's Highway and he said local City officials have not talked with residents about this change. Ms. Fox said the change in station location was not "dropped" on residents as the South Coast Rail team has been meeting with all City departments including presenting at multiple Conservation Commission hearings. She said MassDOT's goal is to build a station that meets the needs of the neighborhood and is enmeshed with the City. She added the drainage issues at the King's Highway location were significant and would have required an enormous outlay of effort that would have delayed the station being open for Phase 1.

Greg asked how the project is being funded and if residents' taxes will increase because of it. Ms. Fox said the project is entirely funded in the Commonwealth's [2020–2024 Capital Investment Plan](#) and there will be no change in tax rates to fund it.

Jim, a resident of the north end of New Bedford, thanked the project team members for their efforts. He thinks South Coast Rail is a great project because commuting out of New Bedford is a nightmare.

Ken Resendes said the Global Charter school is moving into the plumber supply store and bus pick-up/drop-off should be considered. He said the Whale's Tooth parking lot is jammed in the summer and snow is dumped there in the winter by snowplows. Ms. Fox said the Global Charter school is not moving into the plumber supply building and there hasn't been a new location identified yet. MassDOT/MBTA

² The pedestrian bridge would be a separate, private sector project; it is not being built by the MBTA. The City could provide residents with additional parking stickers, as needed.

will continue to monitor the shared parking lot and work with the Port Authority and Seastreak on any adjustments that might be needed. She is not familiar with the City's snow removal plans.

Steve Cassidy said he will see the North New Bedford Station out his kitchen window and he is concerned with noise and dust from brakes. He said no one knocked on his door about previous meetings. Ms. Fox said there were extensive noise and vibration analyses as well as air quality analyses to mitigate any impacts. She said there are freight trains that currently run on the line, and South Coast Rail trains will be moving quickly so there will be no lingering effects. She understands a change can be difficult and takes some adjustments.

Bard Markey, Ward 1 City Councilor, said he's heard concerns from his constituents and asked about noise and vibration impacts and if the buffer of trees will remain or be taken away. Ms. Fox said these are all reasonable concerns and have been extensively studied, so any properties with significant noise or vibration impacts will be offered mitigation. She said a vegetative barrier does not provide noise mitigation but visually it can help. She said no vegetation on private property will be removed, but some trees may need to be cleared on the ROW, which is MBTA property, for safety (tree limbs falling on tracks can cause derailments, etc.). The extent of the MBTA's property is approximately 25 feet from center on either side of the track.

Maria Giesta, Ward 2 City Councilor, said she also thought the station was going to be located at King's Highway and since she learned about the change in location she would like to keep lines of communication between her, the residents, and MassDOT/MBTA open throughout the process. She is concerned about traffic and asked that the project team monitor any traffic impacts carefully, as well as parking on neighborhood streets or residents' driveways. She added there are no sidewalks on many of these streets. She said South Coast Rail is a great project and will bring real positive changes to the economy, but she understands there can be negative impacts as well. She provided her phone number for her constituents to call her anytime and asked Ms. Fox about a possible neighborhood meeting. Ms. Fox thanked Ms. Giesta and said the team can certainly present to the neighborhood. Ms. Fox assured her that the project team has been working closely with the City and will continue to keep communication ongoing.

Paul Pawlowski said the location for the station is a great idea and the TOD elements around the station will really make it work. He encouraged the project team and City staff to look at all possible options for improving the use of the area and managing traffic in the neighborhood. He encouraged them to think about the fact that the bridges to the Cape may be under construction in the future and how that will impact parking capacity at Whale's Tooth especially when it is constrained in the summer. He asked why the names of the stations were changed. Ms. Fox said Mr. Pawlowski has a lot of helpful input that would be useful to Ms. Harkin's team and he should speak with her about the TOD program. She explained the MBTA has a station naming committee that is intending to simplify station names and keep them locational. For example, someone commuting from South Station in Boston may not know what or where "Whale's Tooth" is, so it was changed to "New Bedford." There is also a character limit. Finally, operational issues (such as pre-existing switch names) are also a factor.

Richard said he would like to hear more about why the station location was moved to Church Street. He is concerned that the area near Church Street is residential and if the station parking lot is full, people

will want to park for free on the nearby streets, whereas the other location is more commercial with less opportunity for cars to do so. He asked if the industrial park would have been a better location for the station. Mr. Carey said the project team identified a number of significant drainage and infrastructure problems at the King's Highway site that begin at Tarkiln Hill Road, where there is a 30" sewer main that serves the entire City. Through research and data collection, the team realized that the drainage system in place is not just for the railroad, but also for the highway. There were also issues with the landowner and the land for parking. Through further investigation, the costs and effort to try to develop a solution for the sewer and other issues kept expanding, which is why the next best location was right across the tracks on Church Street. Ms. Fox said the parking issue the attendee mentioned earlier is a real problem that affects all stations throughout the system and is something that will be monitored closely.

Mark Gioiosa asked who will be responsible for maintaining the North New Bedford Station facility, and if it will be manned at all times. Ms. Fox said the MBTA will own the station and it is the MBTA's responsibility to maintain it. There will be Bigbelly solar-powered trash bins with built-in compactors and plenty of lighting. The City will maintain the Pocket Park and there will be an inviting and attractive frontage design on Church Street. The station will not be staffed but will be inspected regularly.

A resident of the north end neighborhood said she often cannot get out of her street because traffic is so bad and she has to cut through the Stop and Shop parking lot. She believes the traffic will be worse. Ms. Sherman reiterated the positive design changes that are included in the King's Highway redesign project, including better timed traffic signals for improved traffic flow, new sidewalks and crosswalks, new turning lanes, and increased safety for all users. The intention of the King's Highway project is to alleviate the exact issues the attendee described.

Ms. Farrell thanked everyone for attending and encouraged people to sign up for email updates and to check out the new interactive corridor map on the website, www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.

Public Attendees:

Derek Adamiec
Helena Almeida
Mike Amenabar
David Arruda
Bill Barr
Gerald Barton
Mary Ellen Boyle
M. Brulpoet
Lilia Cabral-Bernard, SRPEDD
Barbara Cassidy
Stephison Cassidy Jr
Melissa Costa
Steven D.
Paula De Cruz
Maria De Moura
Margaret Dinarello
Virginia Eckert
Harold Eckert

Elias Esteves
Richard Fenstermaker
Bob Fraga
Kathleen Gioiosa
Mark Gioiosa
Lionel Goncalves
Will Gonzalez
Wendy Graca
Corron Grasela
Robert Gregory
Tom Guerino
Robert G.
Donna Hemingway
Steve Hemingway
Terry Hillery
Helena Loela
Keith MacDonald
Chris Maynard

Sandra Medeiros
David Medeiros
Colleen Medeiros, Cape Cod Commission
Duncan Merrey
Gabriela Moniz
Jim Niland
Roland Normawal
Jeffrey Oakes
Tony Oliveira
Antone Oliveira
Daniel Pare
Pat Pare
William Parker
Paul Pawlowski
Victor Pereira
Antoinette Piniteiro
Jeff Pontiff
Joe Quigley
Stan Remillard
Ken Resendes
Jeff Rocha
Deborah Roher
Kim Ryan
Tom Ryan
Patricia Ryle
David S.
Denise Santos
Sandra Santos
Bob Schilling
Jeanne Secour
Lisa Sherman, CDM Smith
Manuel Silva
Antonio Silveira
Gregory Sirois
Tyler Smith
Dorene St Germain
Daniel Steliga
Ted Steliga
Erin Steliga
Arty Sylvia
Edward Sylvia
Tanisha Sylvia
Heather Sylvia
Rich Taber
Linda Torres
Steve Voluckas
Joseph Walada
Tracy Wallace

Cynthia Wallquist
Nick Wildman