



Fall River Depot Station Area Workshop

January 13, 2010

Water Street Café, Fall River

The workshop began with an open house so participants could review renderings of the proposed station and area. Mayor William Flanagan welcomed the participants and Kristina Egan, South Coast Rail Director, outlined the project and goals for the evening: to gather community ideas for the Fall River Depot Station. She noted that the Army Corps of Engineers is preparing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, which is tentatively due in June.

Greg Guimond, SRPEDD, gave a short history of transit on the South Coast. Mr. Guimond shared images of earlier Fall River stations and modes of transportation. Rail service ended in the fall of 1958 with the construction of the regional highway system. Mr. Guimond discussed the high levels of growth on the South Coast and outlined opportunities for and challenges to preserving the qualities of the region.

Mr. Guimond summarized the *Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan*, released last summer, which resulted in a Corridor Map of 31 South Coast communities, designating priority areas for development and natural protection. Mr. Guimond showed images of development around public transit stations from Denver and Kenosha, Wisconsin. These projects boosted economic development. Mr. Guimond oriented the audience to the proposed location for the Fall River Depot Station at Davol St. and Pearce Street.

David Spillane and Amy Kohn, Goody Clancy, presented smart growth concepts for the station and neighboring blocks. There are thousands of households and jobs in a one mile radius of the station location. Land uses are primarily industrial in the immediate vicinity, with the waterfront to the west and a residential and commercial area to the east. The Fall River Depot Concept Plan from the Corridor Plan provides a starting point from which MassDOT is seeking to gather visions for the site and neighborhood. Mr. Spillane listed guiding principles for the development, including:

- Continue to advance the **City's plans** for the area
- Provide a **station design** (bus and train) and a commuter **parking solution** that strengthens the look and feel of the area
- Provide foot and bike **connections between neighborhoods**, the **station** and the **waterfront**
- Create a **walkable, mixed-use place** around the station
- Create opportunities for private sector investment around the station; ensure that **zoning** is supportive of the station area concept
- Reshape the identity of Davol Street to create a **pedestrian-friendly urban boulevard lined** with attractive buildings – not parking

Ms. Kohn showed the audience two views of a station with potential development on the site. The station will be an intermodal transit facility, including access to bus service, and the parking garage would be wrapped with retail or residential units to hide the garage and provide a friendly street front. Paths could connect the neighborhood to the station and the station to the waterfront, encouraging tourism. New mixed use development is portrayed on surrounding blocks. This concept incorporates the city's goal of turning Route 79 into a boulevard, which would be more pedestrian friendly. The presentation included images of what the station area could look like from a street view.

The PowerPoint presentation from the meeting is posted at www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.

Discussion and Visions

The team asked the audience for suggestions and ideas for the station and neighborhood. What would residents and business owners like to see in the station, on the nearby streets? What should the station look like?

Members of the audience had several suggestions:

- Plan something that says “Fall River!!” Rehabilitate the historic mills- perhaps as the station. We are proud of our historic city and these efforts should reflect that
- Create a gateway that expresses the City. I like the direction and scale (three to four stories) shown for this area.
- Long overdue!! Build it grandly to compliment the waterfront! This should carry Fall River into the 21st century. Sooner the better!
- I'd like the City to embrace walking, biking, and slower traffic on Davol Street.
- As grand as possible!! Traffic should be paid attention to as well.
- On the waterfront near Battleship Cove, we need parking because this area is crucial to the survival of Fall River. No big chains stores! Attract more small businesses. We need to take care of ourselves and people who live and work here. Get rid of the salt sheds (nearby) so we can use the space for parking. Currently there is nowhere to park here on the waterfront. This is desperately needed to support our business community. This is mainly due to the fact that people don't want to walk long distances.
- We need employment in the City and places for people to work here! Include employment in the planning.
- Many people will come to the station from metro-Fall River; we should put in businesses along the street (e.g., restaurants and dry cleaners) so that their money is spent in our city.
- A different view could incorporate the Quaker Fabric building. Consider using it; it is an icon, it is located on the waterfront. This building could be used as a station waiting room with a people mover to get to the platform. It has three floors, perfect for redevelopment, possibly making a track connecting to this building. Reuse of unique structures that are already in existence.
- You should include more public parking spaces! Everyone will come to Fall River from all points east, west and south to use the rail. I think we are looking at 1,000 to 1,300 spaces needed for regular use of the station. Go for maximum amount of parking.
- People like a hometown, New England village atmosphere! Like the Quaker building idea.

Ms. Egan thanked everyone for the suggestions and asked for questions and comments on other aspects of the proposed station.

There were comments and questions about Davol St. and Route 79's conversion to a boulevard.

A speaker owns a business on Davol Street and is concerned with the traffic that exists here daily. How can MassDOT expect to accommodate the current heavy traffic, plus future traffic, with a boulevard?

Fall River has developed a Rte 79/Davol Street transportation study that analyzes this issue.

How does the current "spaghetti of ramps" in the area affect the project?

Greg Guimond, SRPEDD, said that MassDOT's Highway Division is conducting a meeting on Friday, January 15 at 2:00 PM at the Narrows Center for the Arts to discuss this very subject.

Parking, station size and appearance were also discussed. There were concerns about the ability to transform Route 79 into a boulevard and about safety for pedestrians and neighbors walking to the station. Business owners and others asked about the effect of Commuter Rail service on freight:

How many stories is MassDOT proposing for the parking garage? What type of zoning recommendations will you be making for this location?

The building is currently proposed for three to four stories, in line with other structures in the neighborhood. The parking lot could be "wrapped" with commercial, residential or office space. The zoning proposals will be up to the Fall River community to decide. SRPEDD will be working with the City to develop zoning language.

Is there an opportunity to make this area more of an urban center? Will a new station in this location hurt the downtown? And how will it relate to the downtown?

An effort is underway in New Bedford at the Whale's Tooth Station to focus mostly on residential and neighborhood-focused retail uses so as not to

detract, but instead support the vitality in the downtown. This is the kind of issue SRPEDD will discuss in detail with Fall River officials, residents and business owners to hear what people want to see happen.

How does this station compare to Quincy/Braintree Station?

The North Quincy Station offers 1206 spaces (18 for disabled operators); and Braintree has 1322 (22). These are large regional Red Line Stations. The concept for this station includes 500 spaces.

How many spaces are in the garage based on the projected need? Will the garage be designed so it can be expanded if necessary? (e.g., lesson from Middleborough Station, where the parking lot filled up much more quickly than expected)

500 spaces are currently included in the concept plan. This is based on the ridership projections in 2030 and it builds in a 20% surplus as a buffer. The garage could be expanded, based on the design, and there could be other parking in the neighborhood.

What about the activities near State Pier that depend on rail, particularly freight. What will happen to those uses? Will freight come through the neighborhood in the middle of the night?

Greg Guimond, SRPEDD, said that freight will continue to Battleship Cove. Kristina Egan added that the Commonwealth has a legal obligation not to interfere with the current freight service. The Commonwealth will be working with Mass Coastal, which is in the process of making a deal with CSX Corporation to buy the rights to run the freight operation. Ms. Egan introduced John Pearson, from Mass Coastal, who said the company plans to work with Fall River businesses and serve the community.

A member of the audience said that he has only seen a rendering; what is the fabric of the area? Where are the options of building types?

Ms. Egan said that this is a concept plan and one of the goals of this meeting is to gather ideas from the Fall River community about the fabric of the building and neighborhood. Decisions on building materials and that level of design detail are really up to the individual developers. What would residents and business owners like to see?

What will the hours of service to this station be?

Kristina Egan said there will be three (3) am peak trains along each branch (Fall River and New Bedford), several during the midday, and three (3) trains along each branch in the evening peak hours and a few later. This would total eighteen (18) trains per day.

MassDOT needs to consider commuter and pedestrian safety! The speaker lives two (2) miles away and it is not a safe walk. Where are the lights? Who will police the station? He wakes up at night to the sounds of gunshots and wouldn't want to walk to the station, but would most likely drive. Why wouldn't he just drive from here to Middleborough for better service?

Ms. Egan said that public safety will be considered in the station design. MassDOT will be working with the city and public safety officials. People will use the station because it is convenient, and, with appropriate public safety elements and more development, will be safe as well.

Will the station and rail service be ADA accessible? Taking the train could be less expensive for the state due to reducing existing costs associated with getting access to health care (now the speaker needs special service to reach the Boston area).

Ms. Egan said the MBTA has committed to making South Coast Rail stations fully accessible, building with everyone in mind.

Other questions centered on how property is made available for a station and what kind of development could be involved.

What are the acquisition plans for the land within and surrounding the station?

Specifics aren't available yet on land acquisition, but MassDOT offered to talk with land owners after the meeting or at a later date. MassDOT has not determined what property will be needed for transportation uses.

A representative of Peter Pan Bus lines said he is very pleased to see a bus component located at the station (Peter Pan has limited facilities in Fall River now). He would like to see the new station on a fast track! It is an opportunity that may be realized

through stimulus funds. His company is a developer as well as a transit company; and has been part of intermodal stations in Holyoke, Springfield and Westfield. Should a bus facility be developed here, it would be great from Peter Pan's perspective to be part of a station that serves multiple modes. How will SRTA connect to this station?

Another participant asked the Peter Pan representative where the company prefers to locate its facilities.

He stated that they always prefer intermodal locations, where a wide variety of transportation options are available.

SRPEDD is working with SRTA on coordinating its service with the new station. More information will be available on this subject after there is a preferred alternative and traffic management plans are being developed.

One speaker expressed support for the project but concern about how to pay for it: He followed the project in the 80s, when Fall River couldn't get rail. Now with so many tax increases and public spending, he would like to see this developed in steps or phases. He suggested starting with bare bones that can grow over time – like they have done in Japan. MassDOT should do something small, spend less now and build on it. He suggested that a spur to the industrial park(s) would help. Fall River needs rail and affordable transportation.

Ms. Egan thanked him for his perspective and thanked all of the nearly 70 participants for their ideas and encouragement. She urged them to stay involved in the process and to share ideas with MassDOT and the city.