

Littleton MBTA Commuter Rail Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: February 9, 2011

Members (Present marked with "X"): Keith Carroll Bill Cole Dave Derrig Lori Grant
 Ruth Liebowitz Don Mclver Russ Mullen Steve Sussman

Other Attendees: Keith Bergman, Littleton Town Administrator
Mohammed Khan, MART
George Kahale, MRPC

Discussion:

Dave Derrig opened the meeting at 7:08 PM and welcomed Mohammed Khan of Montachusett Area Regional Transit (MART) and George Kahale of the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) before turning to Keith Bergman for an introduction of the evening's issues. Mr. Bergman noted that there will be a temporary service disruption during the Littleton Station reconstruction scheduled to begin this summer (2011), particularly in regard to the temporary elimination of all public parking at the existing station, and that Mr. Khan and Mr. Kahale were at the meeting to discuss how both MART and MRPC can assist the Town in developing a remote parking / shuttle program to serve users of the Littleton commuter rail stop during the construction period.

Mr. Khan noted that during construction, there will be access to commuter rail service, but not to public parking at the station. Mr. Kahale noted that all MBTA parking will be lost for at least nine months. Mr. Bergman noted that the 100 private spaces currently owned and operated by Nordblom Co. will be used for construction staging, and that Nordblom is in the process of constructing a second 100-space parking lot presumably for use as a private, monthly parking pass operation similar to their current operation.

Mr. Khan noted that the total Littleton Station project activity is scheduled to be completed by 2013, but that the track elements must be completed by the end of 2011 to satisfy funding requirements. He noted that the Town should prepare for at least nine months of temporary parking. The initial plan is to use the existing Council on Aging (COA) van provided by MART, and that a second van can be made available by MART if demand warrants. He also noted that from an administrative perspective, the current COA arrangement may be the best model for the Town. MART and MRPC will work with the Town to develop a schedule, which is likely to provide five to six hours of service per day.

Don Mclver asked if this proposal assumed that the COA van would still be on call for the primary COA function. Ruth Liebowitz added that appointments requesting use of the COA van are scheduled up to one day in advance.

Mr. Khan indicated that the service hours would likely complement the COA operations which usually begin after 8 AM. He noted that the COA van is under the control of the Board of Selectmen (BOS). Mr. Khan speculated that the Town could likely recover 60-70% of the cost of providing the temporary

shuttle service if there is a 50-person demand for service. If there is a conflict with COA responsibilities, MART can provide an additional van.

Keith Bergman noted that the Littleton COA van travels to appointments as far away as Boston. George Kahale offered that the COA could coordinate with MART, noting that 3 MART vans travel from Fitchburg to Boston medical facilities every day.

Mohammed Khan reiterated that the van (or vans) is provided by MART at no cost to the Town (other than the Town assessment as a member of MART). Operational costs borne by the Town for shuttle service would include the salary of the driver and fuel costs, and that much of the cost could be offset by a modest (i.e., \$3-\$4) shuttle fee that would be comparable to a typical MBTA parking fee.

Ruth L. acknowledged that the current COA van provides a great service. Mohammed K. responded that "MART is yours," referencing the Town's membership in the transit authority. Russ Mullen commented that the MBTA often hires buses when there is interruption of service on the commuter rail line. Mohammed indicated that bus service is in lieu of train service, not for ancillary service such as a remote parking shuttle.

Ruth L. noted that the schedule provides very thin midday commuter rail offerings, to which George K. responded that MART/MRPC will conduct a survey to determine use and need. Steve Sussman commented that the group can work with and learn from the existing COA operation. Ruth L. noted that there are a fair number of young people who utilize the commuter rail but are not eligible to use the COA service. Mohammed K. responded that there are ways to accommodate that in this special instance. He noted that there will be a designated schedule for remote parking shuttles, and that MART can designate a period for no age-restriction. He also noted that there needs to be a return trip guarantee to the remote parking locations, that a nine-month schedule should be worked out, and that everything must go through the BOS.

Steve S. asked where the satellite parking would be located. He suggested such places as the old police station, and the parking lot behind the Shattuck Street municipal building. Russ M. suggested that there may be space at the water department property on Whitcomb Avenue. Ruth L. suggested that there are spaces near the Common (Stevens Street). George Kahale commented that spaces at churches would be ideal from a shared-use / day-of-week perspective. Don M. suggested consideration of the parking lots on commercial buildings up toward Taylor Street. Keith Bergman noted that he would be speaking to the various department heads to discuss use of parking at municipal property locations. A general discussion of parking locations and issues continued. Mohammed Khan noted that determining the location of the satellite locations was Littleton's responsibility. Once done, MART/ MRPC can assist with schedule, routing, demand, fee structure, etc.

Russ M. asked about construction impacts near the station, i.e., would Foster Street be closed, would U-turns be required. Ruth L. commented that it was her understanding that a station drop-off area would be maintained during construction. George K. indicated that Foster Street would not be closed, and that the old station area would be maintained until the new work is complete.

Ruth L. asked if the Town would prefer to use Town property for the satellite lots. Keith B. responded affirmatively. Keith also suggested that we should look ahead a few years and consider what a permanent shuttle loop serving local employers (IBM, Curtis Wright) might look like. George K. suggested that the first task was to map out the free (municipal) locations, since leasing property would add to costs. George and Mohammed indicated that the cost to the Town might be in the \$10,000-\$25,000 range, and that the calculation was simply the operations cost minus revenues from users. Don M. asked if any economic development / intermodal grants were available. Russ M. asked to distinguish benefits to Littleton vs. benefits to out-of-towners. Mohammed K. indicated that there could be a dual system. Keith B. suggested that it is important to consider future economic benefits of serving reverse commuters. A general discussion of funding sources and opportunities ensued.

Ruth L. asked questions concerning traffic flow and access locations between the existing and proposed Nordblom parking areas. George K. noted that the current ridership is approximately 250 people per day (one-way boardings). Steve S. noted that the current parking is listed as 47 spaces, while George K. noted that the MBTA count is 11 spaces. Mohammed K. indicated that MRPC would conduct a survey of existing riders, inform them about construction issues, determine demand, and distinguish between Littleton and out-of-town users. Ruth L. noted that the difference between express vs. regular train users should be identified.

Action items were defined as follows:

- identify Town-owned properties
- target 50 spaces
- MRPC survey will follow
- establish route, schedule, then test and revise

George K. will provide historic survey information from Littleton station. Russ M. asked about critical path and dates. Mohammed K. indicated that locations should be discussed and determined by late February / early March. The ridership survey would be done in March, and a plan should be developed by April in order to discuss with the Board of Selectmen and the MBTA.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled for February 23rd at 7:00 PM.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.