

MEMORANDUM

TO: Michael Hunter, Undersecretary
FROM: Dennis Coffey
SUBJECT: Fitchburg Commuter Rail Improvement Project – land acquisition in Littleton
DATE: February 22, 2010

As discussed on Friday, here is a brief summary of the Littleton Station land acquisition opportunity.

Background:

The Fitchburg Commuter Rail Improvements Project has been in the planning and engineering stages for many years, and has been now been provided funding from several sources. The Federal Transit Administration and the Commonwealth, with the strong support of the General Court, have provided funds to address the longstanding problems of schedules and reliability on this route, the longest commuter rail route in the MBTA system. Additional funds have recently been provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation under the federal stimulus program. These investments will help the MBTA to better meet the needs of commuters from throughout the Fitchburg line's service region.

The primary goal of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line Improvement Project is to significantly enhance the infrastructure of this rail line in order to provide greatly improved service, safety and reliability for commuters along this 50-mile long corridor extending from Fitchburg to Boston. To define and detail these objectives an alternatives analysis process had been conducted with active participation by communities along the route, extensive public outreach, and development of alternative design approaches. The key program element identified as essential to the successful achievement of the project objectives is to install double track along much of the route. Double tracking allows for the most operational flexibility and safety in providing improved levels of service, decreased transit time and more efficient and safe maintenance of the line.

Due to budget constraints major sections of double tracking were to be excluded from the FTA New Starts project (\$150M – a 50/50 split with the state). However, federal stimulus (ARRA) funds were secured to enable additional double track installation between South Acton to Ayer, an important 8 mile addition to the New Starts project.

This added double tracking will include signal system enhancements, along with improvements to eight grade crossings and alterations to the current Littleton Station.

The ARRA grant award provides approximately \$8M to modify the station to accommodate the double track and install high level platforms. The ARRA funding does not provide adequate funding, though, to increase parking at this important regional station.

The Opportunity:

In the course of early engineering work the MBTA and its design team have met with both the Town of Littleton and the adjacent property owner, Nordblom Company In an effort to maintain

budget the design team sought to minimize any takings of private property adjacent to the station.

Nordblom owns approximately 40 acres adjacent to the current station. Nordblom operates a small, private parking lot that serves commuter rail riders, providing approximately 100 parking spaces. The MBTA parking is very limited at this station. Currently 44 spaces are available.

Earlier this month Nordblom communicated their willingness to sell an 8+ acre portion of their parcel, including the site of the parking facility, for \$1.5M to the MBTA.

The MBTA does not have the financial resources at this time to fund this acquisition. Both the town of Littleton and the MBTA believe this acquisition would significantly improve the utilization of the station, encourage further economic development, and support the town's efforts to enhance the "reverse commute" option to Littleton.

State Senator Eldridge has advocated for this project, and suggested that this project is consistent with the Executive Office's goals of enhancing economic development through transportation system improvements. Littleton Town Manager Keith Bergman has also communicated to Secretary Bialecki about the importance of this project. Below is a quote from his e-mail that summarizes the opportunity.

"Improvements to the Fitchburg commuter rail line are, of course, a vital transportation strategy for meeting the economic development needs of this region. It would especially help the reverse commute needed for the I-495/Rt. 2 IT corridor's employers, including IBM. For dual tracking of the Fitchburg line, though, Littleton's commuter rail station must be rebuilt/relocated. And that rebuilt station cannot have less parking; it must have more. . . If the design of the new Littleton station could incorporate the 8.5-acre Nordblom property for parking, it would be an infinitely better station design.

Littleton staff received a very preliminary briefing from MBTA on the design of the new commuter rail station (now only at the 15% design stage) last week, and the biggest problem identified was parking—there wasn't any—none—in fact, we'd be losing 44 MBTA-owned spaces in the station's rebuild. The adjoining Nordblom property has 100 privately owned spaces, and recently obtained Planning Board approval to build 100 more. That property is now being offered by Littleton Development Trust to the MBTA for \$1,500,000."

Summary:

Project: Acquisition of 8+ acres in Littleton, to provide additional parking to enhance commuter rail services on the Fitchburg Line, in concert with double tracking project.

Costs: Land acquisition \$1.5M

Design and construction \$500,000 (to plan for and incorporate maximum parking and integrate with the new station design and development.)

Attached is a summary update on the status of the project.