

Littleton MBTA Commuter Rail Advisory Committee

Meeting Date: Wednesday, November 17, 2010

Chairman Lori Grant called the meeting to order at 7 PM in Room 307, Littleton Town Offices.

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

Other Attendees: Keith Bergman, Littleton Town Administrator
April Anderson, EOHED
Michael Baskin, Lozano Baskin
Phillip Brake, HNTB
Paul Hadley, MBTA
George Kahale, MRPC
John Mahony, Jacobs

Discussion:

Keith Bergman provided a brief introduction and thanked the MBTA project team for returning to speak with the committee. He noted that it was nice to see that the latest plan included public parking. Mr. Bergman noted that in future meetings, Mohammed Khan of MART will attend to discuss shuttle service under both construction and post-construction conditions, and that Jody Ray, MBTA director of railroad operations, will attend to discuss potential service upgrades and other operational issues.

Paul Hadley of the MBTA provided an update of progress on plans for the Littleton Station. He noted that ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funding for double tracking had provided the means for plans for Littleton Station to be implemented, and referred to CPF 43 and the Wachusett Station projects as other activities occurring on the Fitchburg line. Mr. Hadley noted that this work was setting up the infrastructure to add trains and increase service in Littleton. Phil Brake noted that the proposed center platform design was critical in allowing the "turn back" to occur in Littleton rather than Acton, providing the physical means for service extension. Keith Bergman indicated that the preliminary indication from MBTA operations staff is that the South Acton schedule can be immediately extended to Littleton once the improvements are in place.

Phil Brake gave a presentation of the station engineering plans. The plans indicate that the existing private parking lot owned and operated by Nordblom will be incorporated into the station plans (by purchase) as public, first-come first-serve parking. He noted that wetland permitting issues would be presented to the Conservation Commission during November.

Keith Carroll asked if the entire Nordblom site would be purchased. Paul Hadley noted that the ultimate plan is to purchase the remaining Nordblom 8-acre parcel, but for now the existing improved area is the only portion of the property to be purchased. Keith Bergman noted that Nordblom is still indicating their desire to build what is permitted for the site, which is an additional 100-space parking facility. Don

Maclver offered comments regarding the importance of planning for the whole intermodal system, and that he had conducted discussions with Representative Eldridge about this. Mr. Hadley indicated that the project has an extremely tight schedule and that the plan was required to reflect only those funds that had been committed to date. Bill Cole asked if any of the funding that had been transferred to fund the proposed parking garages in Ayer could return to the Littleton project, but was told by George Kahale that the Ayer selectmen had voted to build the \$4 million parking garage that was the subject of their latest proposal to the State.

Keith Bergman introduced April Anderson of EOHED. She discussed the funding mechanisms through which the State will fund the purchase of the existing Nordblom parking lot as part of economic development efforts. Paul Hadley noted that his understanding was that funding is in place to purchase the first 100 spaces. Ms. Anderson indicated that EOHED has had conversations with Nordblom regarding their future plans and access connections. Bill Cole commented on connections from the remaining Nordblom development and gave examples (i.e., the Donelan's parking lot) of details that would improve flow and safety.

Phil Brake provided a detailed description of the station platform elements and operational details, including site constraints, sidewalk and geometry details, elimination of parking at Grimes Lane, and that a total of 90 spaces (83 regular, 7 handicap) with appropriate bus, shuttle and dropoff circulation will be provided on the Nordblom parking site. He noted that construction in certain areas was underway, that wetland replication areas have been identified on the NE side of the tracks (a 1.25 acre strip taking from Nordblom), and that culvert replacement under the platform would be required. Substantial construction is expected to commence in spring 2011, with significant completion by December, 2011.

Keith Carroll asked why the parking lot entrance had such a hard turn, why there was no channelization island between entering and exiting lanes, and noted that Foster Street residents had requested that no left turns be allowed out of the parking facility. John Mahony responded that separate left and right turn exit lanes had been provided, and that additional channelization had been ruled out. Phil Brake noted ease of maintenance without an island, and John Mahony indicated that there was a widened radius to facilitate easy entrance to the parking lot. Mr. Brake also noted the safety features of having the parking lot on the same side of Foster Street as the platform, unlike the existing condition.

Don Maclver asked if the MBTA would be presenting the project to the Planning Board as a courtesy. Steve Sussman noted that Police Chief Kelly had commented on the subject of no left turns, and Keith Bergman noted that Chief Kelly could assign an officer to direct exiting traffic if turning traffic became an issue. Paul Hadley indicated that the no left turn issue was up to the Town, but did not need to be addressed immediately. Mr. Maclver reiterated his question regarding a meeting with the Planning Board. Dave Derrig asked why, given the schedule deadlines facing the project, was a meeting necessary if there was no Planning Board action to be taken. Keith Bergman indicated that an informal discussion at a future meeting would be useful. Mr. Maclver indicated that he would try to schedule time on a December Planning Board agenda for this discussion. Mr. Maclver then initiated a general discussion of shuttle bus routing and circulation.

Michael Baskin presented renderings and computer-generated images of the station platform design. He explained the various design details, clearance issues and code requirements. Don MacIver asked if low-sodium de-icing materials would be used on the platform and the parking area. Keith Carroll initiated a discussion about a landscape design plan, and Mr. MacIver requested a copy of the planting and species schedule.

Steve Sussman asked when the Nordblom spaces would be available to the general public. Phil Brake indicated that they would be available at the beginning of construction, and that the Grimes lane parking area would be used for staging. He indicated that there would always be at least 90 spaces available within ¼ mile of the station during construction, and there would be night and weekend construction. A general discussion of the noise bylaw then occurred.

John Mahony walked through a description of the six construction stages, and left the staging plans with Keith Bergman for future reference. He noted that the key to phasing was maintenance of an access road off of Foster Street in the future track bed, and that traffic on Foster Street would always be maintained. Mr. Mahony noted that the goal was to avoid “fouling the track” – no interruption of rail service. He did indicate that there would be one planned instance of weekend track closure to replace a stone culvert under the existing track. Bill Cole asked if construction vehicles would be routed via Taylor Street, and Mr. Mahony indicated that there were plans to suggest a truck route that included Taylor Street.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.