

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Regional Transportation Advisory Council Committees

***Freight* – Walter Bonin & Dom D’Eramo**

The Freight Committee, co-chaired by Walter Bonin of Marlborough and Dom D’Eramo of Millis, met on Wednesday, December 14 at 1:00 PM in Conference Room 4 in the State Transportation Building. Also in attendance were John Businger of National Corridors Initiative, Steve Cotrone of Intransit Container, Frank DeMasi of Wellesley, Bob Gentile of Framingham, Mike Kelly of ICF, Ed Lowney of Malden, Bob McGaw of Belmont, Steve Olanoff of Westwood, Arnold Pinsley of Natick, Barry Steinberg of the Association for Public Transportation, Lynn Vikesland of Massport, and Marilyn Wellons of the Riverside Neighborhood Associations. MPO staff members Mike Callahan and Walter Bennett were also present.

W. Bonin called the meeting to order at 1:10 PM and the meeting began with introductions.

Announcements

M. Wellons announced that a meeting was recently held by MassDOT in Cambridge to discuss the proposal to run commuter rail trains on the Grand Junction tracks. This would allow commuter rail service between Worcester and North Station via Cambridge. However, the MassDOT study found that the proposal was not justified. W. Bonin said that Marlborough would benefit from improved connections to Cambridge. F. DeMasi said that many people may switch to commuter rail if a direct connection were created from Worcester to North Station.

D. D’Eramo announced that Congress will allow 97,000 pound trucks to travel on interstate highways in Maine and Vermont. Some in Congress are pushing to allow this nationally in the next surface transportation bill.

Discussion on Goals and Objectives for 2012

The Co-Chairs asked the Committee to focus on creating a vision for the future freight transportation system. The vision will express what the ideal system will look like when complete. D. D’Eramo said that freight improvements are focused on the areas west of the Boston Region MPO and asked what should be done to improve the freight transportation system in this region. The Freight Committee needs to flag the main issues. W. Bonin said that creating a vision will help the Committee develop a strategy for the speakers they bring in. The Committee must keep in mind that it must advise the MPO and it’s important that they are listening.

Below is a summary of the Committee’s working vision for freight distribution:

- Short line railroads will distribute freight and support economic development in Eastern Massachusetts.
- The Boston Region MPO is more aware of the importance of freight and the need for a strong freight distribution network.
- State policy should support the development of freight villages and industrial sites.

Attendees made the following comments regarding the Committee’s vision:

- Efficiency is very important. The project that will allow trains with double stack containers to reach Worcester will improve efficiency and help take trucks from New York and New Jersey off the highways. Allowing 88,000 pound trucks on highways would also be beneficial. (S. Cotrone)
- Short line railroads should play an important role in distributing freight in Eastern Massachusetts. Otherwise, the movement of CSX's yard from Boston to Worcester will harm infrastructure in between the two cities. (A. Pinsley)
- The Commonwealth owns a lot of rail right of way in Eastern Massachusetts. These can be a solution to the region's freight distribution needs. (D. D'Eramo)
- The MPO needs to be more aware of freight and how improved freight rail service can support economic development and manufacturing jobs.
- There is a cost involved in doing nothing. (A. Pinsley)
- Planners need to compare truck vehicle miles traveled for a scenario in which Beacon Park Yards remains open and a scenario in which it moves to Worcester. (M. Wellons)
- Freight went to trucks from box cars because the travel time is greater for box cars and intermodal terminals are too expensive for low volumes of freight. Short line railroads offer many advantages, but not for transporting containers. (S. Cotrone)
- The state should be more serious about manufacturing. Boston and Cambridge develop a lot of great students, but they are not trained to run casinos. The state needs jobs that will keep bright people here. (W. Bonin)
- Short line operators are very good at marketing their services. Land use is a constraint on rail. Freight villages and centralized distribution facilities would support rail. Public policy at the state level should support this. The state should also consider purchasing freight rights when they purchase right of way. MassDOT should study if it's viable to short line state-owned rails in Eastern Massachusetts. The state needs to maximize the use of its rail assets. (F. DeMasi)
- The Freight Committee should brainstorm with short line railroads and find out what is holding them back. (S. Cotrone)

W. Bonin also asked Committee members to think of goals for 2012. The following goals were expressed by the Committee:

- Take stock of what the MPO has studied and will study
- Learn about the state's economic development policies
- Educate the MPO
- Develop freight project proposals for consideration of the MPO

Several members recommended speakers for future meetings. Among the recommendations were:

- To invite a speaker from a short line railroad to talk about opportunities in Eastern Mass.
- A speaker from the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to discuss manufacturing and distribution issues and transportation investments that will support economic development.
- To invite Jean Fox, the new manager of the South Coast Rail project, to talk about freight planning along the proposed corridor.