

Meeting Summary

Event: Nashua Stakeholder Meeting

Date and Time: Wednesday, June 9, 2021, 3:00 – 4:30 PM

Location: Zoom Online Meeting Platform

1. Attendees

City Attendees

Julie Chizmas, Planner
Amy Deroche, Hunt Memorial Building
Jim Donchess, Mayor
Dan Kelly, Nashua Rail Committee
Patricia Klee, Board of Alderman
Sarah Marchant, Director of Community Development
Stephen Michon, Nashua Rail Committee
Paul Patti, Nashua Rail Committee
Jan Schmidt, Board of Alderman

State Elected Officials

Tom Giancola, Constituent Service and Outreach Coordinator, State Representative Ann Kuster
Carl Seidel, State Representative/Nashua Rail Committee

Other Attendees

Kenneth Brown, Simon Property Group
Kyle Fox, Town of Merrimack
Brian Groth, Town of Hudson
Wendy Hunt, Greater Nashua Chamber of Commerce
Jay Leonard, Welts, White & Fontaine, P.C.
John Madden, Erdman Anthony
Jay Minkarah, Nashua Regional Planning Commission
Amber Logue-Morgan
James Petropulos, Hayner/Swanson
Eric Salerno, Town of Tyngsborough
Paul Shea, Great American Downtown
Dawn Tuomala, Town of Merrimack
Matt Waitkins, Nashua Regional Planning Commission

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

Patrick Herlihy
Shelley Winters

Consultant Team

Jonathan Bruneau, Jacobs
David Derrig, AECOM
Jay Doyle, AECOM
George Katsoufis, AECOM
David Nelson, Jacobs
Laura Parete, FHI Studio

2. Presentation Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) hosted a stakeholder meeting with the City of Nashua and other organizations on Wednesday, June 9, 2021, at 3:00 PM via the Zoom online meeting platform. Patrick Herlihy of NHDOT welcomed attendees to the meeting. Herlihy noted that the project is in the development phase. The purpose of the stakeholder meeting was to provide a project update, discuss Nashua station locations and get stakeholder input on the potential concepts.

Jay Doyle of AECOM reviewed the meeting agenda. He stated that the project team would provide background on the project, discuss the potential Nashua station options, and explain the next steps. J. Doyle mentioned that there would be ample opportunity for the group to ask questions and discuss the options.

J. Doyle reviewed the project objectives which include:

- Provide alternative to congestion on I-93/Route 3;
- Improve bi-directional access to jobs and housing;
- Perform an Environmental Assessment (EA);
- Develop 30% design for the 30-mile extension of the Lowell Line, including four new stations and one layover facility; and
- Develop a financial plan.

J. Doyle presented a map of the corridor, and discussed the station layout alternative that was shown in the 2014 EA. The map reflects the extension of Lowell Service to Nashua, higher ridership and economic benefits, expansion on 40 years of MBTA network extensions, and interstate precedence with Pilgrim Partnership with Rhode Island. J. Doyle explained that the project is aware of the potential Landing at Nashua, LLC development. This is being monitored by the project.

J. Doyle discussed the station location options. The first was the Crown Street Park and Ride. This location was acquired by the City of Nashua and developed as a park and ride facility. He explained that the location is well positioned for a new rail station and multi-modal connections.

The second station option is being evaluated for one of two potential locations: Spit Brook Road or the Pheasant Lane Mall. The South Nashua (Pheasant Lane Mall Station Option) would access the existing mall perimeter. A parking structure adjacent to a platform would be needed for this option unless sufficient surface parking area can be identified. The South Nashua (Spit Brook Road Station Option) is at the north end of a developer's project area (Nashua Landing, LLC). The project is evaluating an area within the site identified by the developer as a "donation parcel" for the potential station and parking lot location. This location would accommodate 454 parking spaces, bicycle parking, pick up and drop off

areas, and an 800 ft. platform. An option like this was included in the 2014 work but was located at the south end of the site near the east end of Spit Brook Road.

J. Doyle reviewed a map comparing the two South Nashua Station options. The map depicted the likely driving access routes to and from the station option. He reviewed a table which compared driving travel times to and from each station option from the north, south, east, and west. Additionally, he described and compared the key features of each site. J. Doyle then proceeded to describe the Crown Street Station. The station would accommodate 209 parking spaces, passenger platforms, and multimodal connections at a curb area adjacent to the platform.

J. Doyle discussed connectivity between each of the potential station options. The stations would connect to existing multi-modal routes. The Crown Street Station would be able to connect to Nashua Transit System's routes 3,7, and possibly 1. While the two South Nashua Station options would connect to Nashua Transit System's routes 6 and 6A

J. Doyle explained the project's next steps. He said that the current phase of the project started in early 2021 and is working on documenting existing and future baseline conditions, advancing the planning of stations and the layover facility, developing operating plans, conducting environmental review, and engineering the necessary infrastructure improvements. The 30% engineering design and the financial plan are expected to be completed in late 2022 – early 2023. The project has completed most of the engineering survey and site inspection related work. Subsurface and geotechnical boring will occur over the next few months. The Manchester Regional Commuter Rail alternative is being progressed by the project. The team has worked to identify station locations in Manchester, Nashua, and for the layover facility. The project is monitoring potential funding initiatives in Washington from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

The decision sought for Nashua is determining the preferred South Nashua Station location. The project team welcomes stakeholder feedback as we work to identify the preferred location. Stakeholder meetings will continue this Summer. A fact sheet is being developed and will be available this Summer. A Public Meeting is anticipated for November 2021.

3. Discussion

Questions

Q – Is the project team evaluating the Bedford airport site for a station?

A – A station location was identified in the 2014 work. It is on the west side of the Merrimack River near the access bridge. The focus there is on determining the platform and parking layout. The project team is also looking at improving access to that station. The project will meet with the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport to update them on the project and get their feedback.

Q – What is the possibility of constructing an exit ramp off the southbound Route 3 to provide more direct access to the Pheasant Lane Mall Option?

A – The interchange modification is not currently part of this project and is out of scope. This is something that would not be funded by the FTA. When this was mentioned in 2014, the Regional Planning Commission was involved with that suggestion. The work is essentially in Massachusetts, which would require interstate coordination.

Q – Can you address the clearance standards for the high-level passenger platforms?

A – The project team is evaluating the need for two tracks at the Crown Street Station location. The project is evaluating different options to make sure that the applicable clearance requirements are being met. Reconfiguring the tracks at the station would significantly increase project costs. Some of the planned Commuter Rail trains are expected to “turn”, i.e., reverse direction, at this location, so the team continues to analyze planned operations to determine platform requirements.

Q – What’s going to be included in the financial plan for operational costs? What will be included in the overall financial plan?

A – The project team will be looking at revenue sources, such as fares, as well as sources from public private partnerships at the station locations. The project will look at the cost to operate MBTA service. The operating plan is not yet finalized. Sales tax and income tax will not be included in this plan. The team will be evaluating best practices and innovative funding and financing strategies from other projects around the country.

Q – How are you determining the number of passengers the stations will service?

A – The project team will use a ridership projection model that is approved by the FTA called the “STOPS model.” It uses data on existing and expected trip making patterns, population, and employment in the corridor. It also considers the travel time and frequency of the planned service. The team will be using a forecasting model that the FTA will recognize when it’s time to seek federal funding for the project.

Q – Is there any way the project can advertise for public input during the sessions you are scheduling?

A – There is a project website with information for the public. Notices will be sent to media outlets about the Public Meeting in Fall 2021. A project fact sheet will be available this summer. Various communications will be available for the public to learn about the project and provide input.

Q – Is there a way to tie this project in with freight rail costs?

A – This corridor is currently operated by Pan Am Railways. The major rail carrier CSX is in the process of attempting to acquire Pan Am Railways, which is pending with the federal Surface Transportation Board. It is anticipated that the acquisition would result in an upgrade of the rail line infrastructure from its current condition. CSX has committed to upgrade the tracks, which would allow increased speeds (25mph for freight). However, significant additional upgrades to the track and infrastructure will still be necessary to support Commuter Rail service, which will need to operate at much higher speeds.

Q – Are the finances expected to be shared across New Hampshire and Massachusetts for this project?

A – There’s a tremendous amount of cooperation between the states. The project has been in conversations with MBTA and MassDOT. The MBTA Lowell Commuter Rail Line does not currently have a layover facility. The layover facility planned to be part of the project will benefit the MBTA and help to

reduce operating costs. There is also coordination regarding the operating plan. It would not adversely affect the existing services from Lowell to Boston. The draft operating plan is being reviewed by the MBTA.

It's expected that benefits to Massachusetts will be included in the Environmental Assessment (EA). As far as specific commitments from Massachusetts for participating, those conversations are just starting.

Q – Is there consideration putting a South Nashua Station on the border of Massachusetts and New Hampshire? Is there consideration of putting a station in Tyngsborough, MA?

A – Locating the South Nashua station in New Hampshire would simplify permitting, environmental matters, and be more efficient for implementation.

Q – Is there other criteria being evaluated besides access times for the South Nashua Station options?

A – Yes - the project will be considering a range of environmental categories, a variety of potential benefits, potential ridership, and costs.

Q – Will all the stations have open platforms?

A – Yes, most of the station platform length will be open, with some portion (approximately 150') have a partial canopy with lighting and amenities.

Q – Are restrooms available at all these platforms?

A – No, I don't believe there will be restrooms as part of the project.

Q – What's going to be included in your cost analysis for a platform?

A – Generally, it includes the foundation, platform construction, canopies and amenities, stairs to the platforms, and electrical and communication devices.

Comments

- The City of Nashua thanked Mr. Doyle and Mr. Herlihy for the work that has been done on this project. They stated the project team is looking at these alternatives in a thorough way. The City of Nashua regards this as an important project. In terms of the location in South Nashua, the access time seems to point to the Spit Brook Road Option, but it is recognized there are additional evaluation criteria to be considered. Regarding the Pheasant Lane Mall Option, it is not yet apparent what the Mall owner's position is regarding the project. The City of Nashua would like the best option for passengers, operations, and the local economy.
- The Project Team stated that the Spit Brook Road Option does seem to have better access, but we agree that there are more criteria than access. There is more input to be gathered and more analysis. The project team welcomes input from the City of Nashua and other stakeholders.
- Consider travel time, land use, and access to support facilities, such as restrooms, restaurants, etc.
- It was suggested that the project team consider the South Nashua Station (Pheasant Lane Mall Option) as the preferred location if NHDOT and MassDOT evaluate the possibility of a

southbound exit off US Route 3 in New Hampshire, which could connect to exit 90 off Route 3 northbound. This would bring people directly to the Pheasant Lane Mall Option.

- The project team did not mention Pan Am Railways or Amtrak station high-level platform clearance standards in the diagrams. Amtrak is considering an extension on this line. There is concern that Pan Am Railway standards would have an unacceptable gap for handicap and non-handicap passenger access. The gap would require a bridge plate. This could potentially be eliminated by a station track.
- A stakeholder said that they believe the best way to have people access the station is via four-lane highways. They expressed concerns over the Crown Street Station for this reason. They believe there are too many two-lane streets, and that traffic congestion will be an issue.
- Consider revisiting the southbound exit idea mentioned earlier in the meeting as it may help traffic congestion and access time to the South Nashua Station (Pheasant Lane Mall Option). This option seems to be a two-fold benefit.
- A stakeholder suggested the team consider locating the South Nashua Station in Tyngsborough, MA.