Nashua-Manchester 40818 Passenger Rail (Capitol Corridor) Project

Meeting Summary

Event: Nashua Stakeholder Meeting

Date and Time: Wednesday, June 23, 2021, 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Location: Zoom Online Meeting Platform

1. Attendees

City Attendees

Kristen Clark, Traffic Engineer
Joyce Craig, Mayor
Leon LaFreniere, Director of Planning and Community Development
Patrick Long, Ward 3 Alderman
Shannon MacLeod, Policy Director
Jodie Nazaka, Senior Planner
Daniel O'Neil, At-large Alderman
Lauren Smith, Chief of Staff
Kevin Sheppard, Director of Public Works

Other Attendees

Nate Miller, Southern New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission
Ryan Renauld-Smith, Manchester Transit Authority (MTA)

New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT)

Patrick Herlihy
Shelley Winters

Consultant Team

Darren Benoit, AECOM
Rachel Burckhardt, WSP
David Derrig, AECOM
Jay Doyle, AECOM
George Katsoufis, AECOM
Christian Nielsen, AECOM
Laura Parete, FHI Studio

2. Presentation Summary

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) hosted a follow-up stakeholder meeting with the City of Manchester and other organizations on Wednesday, June 23, 2021, at 9:00 AM via the Zoom online meeting platform. Patrick Herlihy of NHDOT welcomed attendees to the meeting and asked them to introduce themselves and state their affiliation. P. Herlihy explained that the purpose of

the stakeholder meeting was to have a follow up discussion about the Manchester Station and layover facility options.

Jay Doyle of AECOM reviewed the meeting agenda. He stated that the project team would provide background on the project, discuss updated station concepts, land impacts, updated Manchester layover facility concepts, the preliminary evaluation, and explain the next steps. J. Doyle mentioned that the updated concepts presented at this meeting reflect input from the City of Manchester and other stakeholders.

J. Doyle reviewed the project objectives which include:

- Provide alternative to congestion on I-93/Route 3 by extending Lowell Commuter Rail Service to Nashua and Manchester
- 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
- Develop a financial plan

J. Doyle presented a map of the updated Manchester Station options, which include the Valley Street, Hybrid, and Granite Street Station options.

The updated Granite Street option was presented by George Katsoufis of AECOM. This option is located at the corners of Granite Street and Canal Street and includes the following features:

- Pick-up and drop-off area
- Bus stop
- Large sidewalk with pedestrian and bike facilities
- Covered 150 ft. station platform cover
- 800 ft. station platform

J. Doyle presented the Hybrid station option. He stated that this option aims to provide a balance of access from Granite Street as well as potential future transit-oriented development (TOD). The length of the platform is behind the Market Basket. The bus pick-up/drop-off area is shifted to the south end of the site. An overpass would be constructed for pedestrians to access the platform from the South Commercial Street side of the tracks. The Hybrid option has the potential to be expanded in the future to provide a more substantial intermodal bus facility. J. Doyle explained the land impacts associated with this option.

J. Doyle presented the Valley Street A option. This option is accessed from Valley Street Ext. and the existing Market Basket's south driveway. G. Katsoufis explained the key features of this option, which include a large bus stop area, automobile loop, and a pedestrian bridge connection that will tie into a future multi-use trail and provide access from the South Commercial Street side of the tracks. J. Doyle explained a summary of the potential land impacts for all the Manchester Station options.

J. Doyle reviewed a preliminary Scoring Matrix and asked if attendees had questions or comments. Questions and comments are noted later in this document. The Scoring Matrix listed effectiveness, environmental, and cost indicators that help to provide guidance on the best option to progress.

J. Doyle presented an update on the Manchester layover facility concept. Operationally, the layover facility is best placed near the outermost station on the rail line to minimize the cost and impacts of running empty trains between their overnight storage in the layover yard and the station. Therefore, Manchester is the best option. The project team identified and screened several potential layover locations and based on siting criteria focused on options that are south of the planned Manchester Station. Rachel Burckhardt of WSP reviewed the operational requirements, which include overnight train storage, mid-day train layovers, and storage for 4-5 train sets. R. Burckhardt explained the Layover Site #2 Pan AM South option. J. Doyle explained the design criteria, compatibility factors, and potential locations. The team compared the Pan Am South and City of Manchester Wastewater Treatment Plant as potential locations. J. Doyle presented a Screening Matrix which evaluated the potential for each layover location option.

J. Doyle explained the project's next steps. He said that the current phase of the project development started in early 2021 and has been documenting existing conditions and exploring siting options for stations and the layover facility. In calendar year 2021 the team will prepare a NEPA Environmental Assessment for the preferred alternative and begin the financial planning process, which will continue into 2022 along with development of 30% design plans and an expected application for federal funding. The project has completed most of the survey and right of way related work. The team has worked to identify station locations in Manchester, Bedford, Nashua and South Nashua, and for the layover facility in Manchester. The project team will need to decide on the Manchester Station and layover facility options to progress soon. The project team encourages the City of Manchester to send comments to NHDOT regarding their thoughts on the options. The presentation will be made available to the public on the NHDOT project website following the meeting.

The project team will update the station and layover facility options with feedback from the City of Manchester. A recommendation will be provided to the City of Manchester and the Board of Alderman to review and provide comments to the project team.

3. Discussion

Questions

Q – Do the completed dots on the Scoring Matrix represent the most feasible choice?
A – Yes, the completed (full) dots are the preferred, the half-filled dots are in the middle, and the empty dots are the least preferred.

Q – Can you address how the project team feels that Granite Street best meets multi-modal connectivity and parking?
A – The multi-modal connectivity is referring to the existing transit network. The Granite Street Option would link to many but not all existing bus routes.

Q – When the project team mentions station location, are you referring to a building or a platform?
A – The project team is referring to the station platform.

Q – Do you know how many buses per hour connect at the Granite Street location?
A – The Granite Street option includes a bus curb and the number of buses it could serve per hour would be based on the service frequency of the bus routes. The Valley Street and Hybrid station options have

potential to handle greater numbers of buses assuming that vacant parcels south of Market Basket can be utilized.

Q – Is it possible to keep Depot Street open with gates?
A – The Depot Street at-grade crossing could remain open with the Valley Street and Hybrid options, but would need to be closed with the Granite Street option.

Q – Is the Hybrid option station access roadway on Market Basket land?
A – Yes, this is Market Basket land. This is a signalized intersection with Elm Street.

Q – Does vehicular traffic only have access to the Hybrid option station via Elm Street?
A – Vehicles have access via Elm Street and on Canal Street. The project team may recommend improvements to the Canal Street area to increase visibility from Granite Street and to facilitate operations.

Q – Is 1,000 ft. the minimum length for the layover facility?
A – 1,000 ft. layover tracks for overnight storage are desired to accommodate the longest anticipated trains. The project team is in the preliminary stage of planning the layout of a five (5) track layover yard. The project may not need the full 1,000 ft. length because the majority of existing MBTA trains are 5-6 cars long plus a locomotive, which could be accommodated in a space less than 1,000 ft. Ongoing coordination with MBTA regarding the operating plan will inform the actual length needed.

Q – Do you know what time of the morning the trains would start in the layover yard?
A – The first train would start at approximately 5:00 AM each weekday morning.

Q – Is there any need for trains to be running in early morning hours for maintenance purposes?
A – No, the trains will be plugged into trackside electric while stored overnight in the layover yard, which enables the engines to be shut down.

Q – Why didn't the Pine Grove Cemetery rank higher for the layover option?
A – The Pine Grove Cemetery option was reviewed at a high level and considered less desirable than the other two options (Pan Am South and Wastewater Plant) due to environmental concerns. The area is heavily forested, therefore extensive tree clearing would be needed to create room for the layover yard. The location is also in close proximity to single family residential, existing parkland, and includes areas of steep slope that would require more earthwork compared to the other options.

Q – What type of vertical clearance is necessary over the layover facility? Is it the same as NHDOT guidelines?
A –NHDOT guidelines are a good starting point, and the project team is coordinating with MBTA and Pan Am Railways on any project specific clearance requirements.

Q – Is the project team engaging private property owners?
A – It is intended that the team will engage private property owners, but the first step is to discuss the potential options with the City of Manchester.

Q – When is the project team deciding which Manchester Station and layover facility options they will progress?

A – The team will be completing its analysis soon. The team would like to schedule a follow up meeting with the City of Manchester again once the updated options have been evaluated.

Q – Are you expecting a decision from the Board of Alderman on the preferred options?
A – The team is expecting a decision from the City of Manchester on its preferred option.

Q – Were any other station locations evaluated further north beyond Granite Street and Valley Street?
A – Yes, as part of the Alternatives Analysis completed in 2014, there was an exploration of station sites to the north, but they were deemed to be less desirable due to operational considerations and ROW constraints.

Q – Has a layover facility been evaluated north?
A – This was evaluated during the 2014 studies for alternatives that would have served Concord, but those alternatives were dropped. There is insufficient ROW available north of Granite Street for a layover facility until well north of downtown, and access to/from it would involve trains crossing multiple at-grade crossings in downtown.

Q – Could a larger multi-modal center be built at Granite Street and Valley Street?
A –The Granite Street station site has limited space for a larger multi-modal center based on existing land uses. The Valley Street station site has more vacant underutilized land on which a multi-modal center could be sited. The Hybrid station option has the south end of the station platform in vicinity of Valley Street and so it has similar potential for larger multi-modal center but with a longer walk to the rail platform compared to the Valley Street option.

Q – Has Amtrak's plans for a potential new route to serve Nashua, Manchester, and Concord been considered in these plans?
A – NHDOT is meeting with Amtrak to learn more about their plans. The Project can't look at Amtrak options because of the federal funding being considered for this project.

Q –Does the project team need an actual vote from the City of Manchester?
A – The City of Manchester would like to provide a preferred option for the Board of Alderman to review and vote on.

Comments

- The Hybrid Option may accommodate parking in the new SNHU garage.
- The City of Manchester does not agree with the Granite Street option being preferred for multi-modal connectivity.
- The project team needs to think about the station option in the long term. The option should make sure that a platform is in a place that could include a multi-modal station. The City of Manchester does not feel that Granite Street would accommodate this in the future.
- The MTA stated that the Granite Street Option does not provide enough space to accommodate buses traveling in and out of the station.
- The City of Manchester said that the closing of Depot Street with the Granite Street Option needs to be addressed. There would be significant public comment from local businesses and

others in the area that use this street. It does not seem feasible, from the City's perspective, to close this street.

- The City said that there are significant traffic issues at Valley Street and Granite Street. The Hybrid Option addresses some of these concerns.
- Market Basket monitors their parking lot and tows unauthorized vehicles.
- Patrick Long, Alderman from the City stated that he is leaning towards the Hybrid Option. The Hybrid Option provides potential for a parking garage.
- The City of Manchester can share the alignment for their overpass project planned adjacent to the potential Layover Site #2 Pan Am South Option. The overpass is anticipated to be built diagonally across the tracks. The project plans to accommodate tracks under the overpass.
- The Commuter Rail locomotive will always be on the north end of the train. Depending on how many coaches are needed will determine the length of the layover storage area.
- The Pan Am South location for the layover facility seems like it could work. There are condominiums in that area that will be vocal about the potential for a layover facility. It's worth looking into the Pine Grove Cemetery option as well.
- The last mile connection will make or break this project. It would be helpful to place the station as far north as possible near downtown, so that existing developed areas can access and utilize the station. The Granite Street option has many pros in regards the to the last mile connection, as does the Hybrid option.
- The City of Manchester would like to consider having a multi-modal center to accommodate future transportation options and to have such a facility in close proximity to the rail station.
- Amtrak is phasing out older equipment and starting to acquire and replace outdated equipment. Amtrak service frequency is typically much lower than a commuter rail operation.
- The project team will work through the Hybrid option and provide updates.
- The City of Manchester may designate a special meeting to discuss the preferred options.