

LONG FORM (for historical record) Entertainment Report for September 12, 2015

September 12, 2015. South Coast Rail Project Update. Jean C. Fox, MassDOT Project Manager for South Coast Rail, presented MassDOT's plans for extending MBTA Commuter Rail to communities in southeastern Massachusetts that currently have no service. This presentation began with a note of restoration of previous service, showing a map of the original Old Colony Railroad, which provided a network of South Coast rail service at much higher density than found in any United States intercity service today, including a long branch to Cape Cod. Jean showed us several New Bedford and Fall River station photos, including several stations that no longer exist.

After this, we saw a map of the proposed restored service, including the \$20 million MassDOT purchase of right of way from CSX, from Taunton to New Bedford and Fall River, and Jean introduced us to the extensive project planning and negotiations. Track work is in progress to upgrade the rails on these lines for current freight and future Commuter Rail service, and so far ten bridges have been repaired for this purpose. The South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan has allocated \$1.6 million to 31 communities, with the 7th round of funding issued for Fiscal Year 2016 under Governor Deval Patrick. Before leaving office, Governor Patrick also issued Executive Order 525, for the state of Massachusetts to align investment in infrastructure and land preservation with the Corridor Plan. The Army Corp. of Engineers selected electric propulsion as the preferred mode. Interagency coordination required for the South Coast Rail Expansion project has included the Federal Environmental Protection Agency, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program, the Federal Highway Administration, the Federal Transit Administration, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Early action construction started in November 2014, including four bridges and five grade crossings. This work was also needed for road traffic, including clearance for trucks (some of the antiquated bridges being too low to allow many trucks to pass under). Fall River and New Bedford are the only eastern Gateway Cities within 50 miles of Boston without Commuter Rail service. Jean used the economic example of Lowell to show us the economic improvements for these cities projected to occur after starting Commuter Rail service, by way of enabling jobs and other development. The first twelve months of the South Coast Rail Expansion project was program management, data collection, environmental analysis, preliminary design, and land acquisition. While informing us about these issues, she showed us photos of the service area and early construction work, and even scenic and historic areas and wildlife taken into consideration for preservation. The track design is currently at 15%, and station design and other plans are at a similar stage or further along. The second year plans in development are to continue design work and the permitting process with environmental agencies and mitigation strategies, including wildlife crossings. Electrification needs to be extended from Stoughton on down to the points south. Service to Battleship Cove may be seasonal in accordance with fluctuations in tourism, but the rest of the service would be year round. Expect 30% or more of design work within second year. Finally, she informed us that South Station expansion is back on schedule, although relocation of the US Postal Service facility there remains the biggest stumbling block.

After the end of the show proper, we had a Q&A session, which elicited the following assorted facts and projections:

Projected total system cost: \$2.3 billion.

CSX freight operation is expected to continue over the expanded Commuter Rail service area.

All but 2 historic stations will be made fully high level.

Diesel multiple unit trains are a possible alternative to electric locomotive-hauled trains; the MBTA itself has been the largest obstacle to electrification (see below).

Due to environmental mitigation, most of the service area will be single track.

The historic Stoughton Station has been recently sold to the town, and is currently not available for use for the renewed Commuter Rail service.

The largest station is Fall River Depot.

Some of the existing track is only good for 10 mph travel, so more track work is needed.

Quincy is already having problems with Commuter Rail train traffic from Greenbush, so the South Coast Rail expansion should not be run through Quincy; doing so would cause the different Commuter Rail lines to interfere with each others' service.

The best case estimate for the date of completion is approximately 10 years (in approximately 2025).

The MBTA has been very resistant to electrification, partly due to infrastructure/equipment investment requirement and training requirement, as well as the current practice of utilizing equipment across multiple routes.

South Coast Rail projected daily ridership figures: 4380.

Governor Baker has been supportive of the South Coast Rail expansion project.

Two biotechnology companies in the proposed service area have trouble getting workers due to lack of public transportation. For example, commuting to the Massachusetts Transportation Building in Boston from Fall River or New Bedford by car or bus (Peter Pan) currently takes 2 hours (as personally measured by Jean Fox herself), and the bus service is expensive and has similarly poor on-time performance.

Issues raised against expansion by residents include homes built right next to the tracks and added public safety costs incurred by stations (see below), environmental concerns (especially preservation of the Hockomock Swamp), and dislike of the appearance of catenary.

Public safety problems are not necessarily an illusion resulting from overblown fear of criminals from the city -- local criminals can be attracted to the prospect of burglarizing and vandalizing cars parked in stations that have insufficient security (such as Lakeville in 1995, before transit-oriented development in the area resulted in increased security). Part of the planning process of the South Coast Rail Expansion project is to learn from past mistakes such as this so as to prevent such security problems from developing in the first place.

SHORT FORM (for Annual Report) Entertainment Report for September 12, 2015

September 12, 2015. South Coast Rail Project Update. Jean C. Fox, MassDOT Project Manager for South Coast Rail, presented MassDOT's plans for extending MBTA Commuter Rail to communities in southeastern Massachusetts that currently have no service. Ms. Fox presented an overview of the region, proposed stations, a summary of project benefits, and a brief update on the design and permitting. After the presentation, we had a question and answer session.

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