

Meeting Summary:

Commuter Rail Communities Coalition Kick Off Event

June 12, 2018

MAPC Offices, 60 Temple Place, Boston MA 02111

Purpose of Event

The purpose of this event was to form a new coalition of mayors and town managers of communities with commuter rail stations.

This event was sponsored by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and the 495/MetroWest Partnership, with support from Transportation for Massachusetts.

Purpose of the Commuter Rail Communities Coalition

The Commuter Rail Communities Coalition was proposed to help address near term-issues around budgets, service, and operations, and to help cities and towns in our region address important long term planning and investment issues that will determine what kind of rail system we have with the MBTA.

Often, the users of the commuter rail system cannot speak “with one voice,” because communities are focused on individual lines or stations, all of which are scattered throughout a very large region. This Coalition is necessary to help communities that depend on the commuter rail to develop a unified vision and voice, and to advocate together for more resources and improved operations.

Currently, MassDOT is undertaking a Rail Vision study to help shape the next commuter rail operating contract. This Coalition will be a conduit for providing input for that study in the near-term, as well as a means for continued coordinated advocacy for the rail system in the long-term.

Discussion Summary

Marc Draisen, MAPC Executive Director, Chris Dempsey, Director of Transportation for Massachusetts, and Paul Matthews, Executive Director for the 495/MetroWest Partnership each welcomed the group. Paul then moderated a discussion on commuter rail issues.

1. What are the major issues that you face in your community with existing commuter rail service?
 - Not enough parking at stations, and need better first/last mile connections.
 - Capacity, such as the need for a second track for additional service.
 - Idling of trains in downtowns and neighborhoods.
 - Lack of service, especially in the mid-day and evening.
 - Costs of the service can be high and burdensome, especially when people need three different payment/ticket mechanisms for parking, commuter rail fares and rapid transit/bus fares.
 - Crumbling 19th century infrastructure.

- Unreliable and infrequent service, and lack of good connections, including lack of north-south station connections in Boston (North-South Rail Link).
 - Need better service in higher density corridors, such as along the Fairmont line.
 - Better connections with services provided by regional transit authorities (RTAs), and transportation management associations (TMAs).
 - Gillette stadium will provide 500 parking spaces for the pilot service from Foxboro which should help with parking shortages in Sharon and Marshfield; however, better connections to nearby employment is also needed.
2. What kind of commuter rail service and system do you want today and for the future?
- Electrified with frequent “urban rail” service. Need a better use of our existing rights-of-way and infrastructure.
 - More frequent service, connecting all of the communities on various lines.
 - Service with better first and last mile connections.
 - Several studies have been recently completed that propose better service on our commuter rail lines [a webpage with links to these reports can be found [here](#)].
 - There should be a study of best practices on what other states are doing or have done to improve their regional rail.
3. Since commuter rail communities face similar and related issues despite geographic, demographic and sociographic differences, how can a coalition help advance our goals?
- We need the coalition and partnerships to amplify our voices.
 - The commuter rail coalition should follow the example set by the water transportation communities, who worked together to form an advisory committee and now have a study underway on a business plan.
 - The Fitchburg Line formed a coalition and the advocacy has led to \$272M invested in the line. The coalition helped find a way to prioritize the investments. This is a good model for the coalition.
 - A coalition can help save time; the geographies may be different, the issues are the same.
4. Who should be in the coalition? What allies do we need at the table?
- Look at who is not at the table – need to reach out to transit oriented development (TOD) developers, but also the users/riders of the system. We need those who can help advocate for more investments in our transportation infrastructure.
 - Reach out to the business community, perhaps via the Chambers of Commerce, MACCE (MA Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives), or via the Massachusetts Competitive Partnership. The Massachusetts Business Alliance’s work to reform education could be a model.
 - Working with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is needed, since they help fund rail and transit.
 - Working with leaders of the business community is needed to advocate for additional funding.
 - First and Last mile connections is also a workforce problem, so we need to work with groups that help with workers. Work also with labor.
 - Coordinate with employers – not just the business community; include non-profits, education, and hospitals. For example, Washington University in St. Louis led the coalition that successfully advocated for the new rail system in St. Louis.
 - Rail and transit is not only an economic development issue, it can support affordable housing and is a workforce issue as well.

- Expand the geography beyond I-495 – join forces with those statewide who want better rail access.
5. How should this group work together with MassDOT, the MBTA, and the MBTA Advisory Board?
- The coalition should work with the MBTA Advisory Board. The MBTA serves two-thirds of the Commonwealth and the coalition is needed.
 - Work also with the RTAs.
 - The coalition should meet at least quarterly.
 - Transportation is one the top three issues in our communities, so do not be afraid to ask for our time to work together on this.
 - The coalition should also talk about what works, and give support to improvements and better policies adopted by the MBTA, such as the recent \$10 weekend pass.

MBTA Rail Vision

- Scott Hamwey (MassDOT), Michael Muller (MBTA) and Theresa Carr (VHB) gave a presentation on the Rail Vision process underway. The presentation included interactive polling of meeting participants on their thoughts on priorities and what should be the guiding principles of rail service in the region.
- A copy of the presentation and the poll results can be found on the webpage [here](#).

Next Steps/Next Meeting

- The next meeting will be in the fall.
- Future meeting items for discussion may include setting the agenda for and determining the governing of the coalition.
- A press release will occur soon about the coalition in support of the \$10 weekend pass.

Updated October 11, 2018

Please email Travis Pollack (tpollack@mapc.org) for changes or corrections to this document.