

**FREIGHT COMMITTEE**  
of the  
**REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**Summary of the April 14, 2010 Meeting**

The meeting was held in Conference Room 4 of the State Transportation Building.

**1. Introductions and Chair's Report – *Walter Bonin, Co-Chair***

W. Bonin called the meeting to order at 12:50 PM. Members, guests, visitors, and staff introduced themselves (see the attached attendance list). There was no chair's report.

**2. Announcements**

There were no announcements.

**3. Approval of the draft March 10, 2010 Meeting Minutes – *Walter Bonin, Co-Chair***

The minutes were unanimously approved.

**4. Discussion of Members' Views on the Statewide Freight and Rail Plan – *Walter Bonin, Co-Chair***

W. Bonin said the study group did a good job and provided information on which future freight planning can build. W. Bonin said he would like the Freight Committee to submit comments on the draft study to the full Advisory Council for their consideration.

W. Bonin went over several slides from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) presentation. The study shows that truck traffic in Eastern Massachusetts is expected to grow tremendously during the next 25 years. The draft study comes up with several scenarios to address the increased freight traffic, and conducts a benefit-cost analysis of each. W. Bonin said this is the first time he has seen a state study come before the Advisory Council that includes a benefit-cost analysis.

The first scenario analyzed highway improvements and expansions in major truck corridors. The ratio of benefits to costs was 1 to 1 for this scenario. Several railroad investments were also analyzed. For instance, the draft study includes a Northern Tier Investment Scenario that would make investments in the Patriot rail corridor and on connections to Springfield and Worcester. The benefits-to-costs ratio was 3.7 for this scenario, which is favorable to the truck scenario. W. Bonin said he would prefer to see a scenario similar to this, but that would expand rail lines to bypass 128 and I-495 that would go southwest through Ayer, Worcester, and down through Connecticut to the New York area. W. Bonin also suggested a separate study be conducted that would look at a rail alternative to increasing the capacity of I-495 and Route 128.

**Member Comments and Questions are Summarized Below:**

### **On the Draft Study's Recommendations:**

- It is important to consider the scale of the investments when comparing the benefit-cost analyses. Many of the rail scenarios are cheaper than the truck investments.
- While freight rail investments could capture most of the increase in freight growth predicted by the study, a big truck problem remains.
- The study assumes containers will come into Worcester and be distributed by truck. It should consider how short line railroads could do the distribution in Eastern Massachusetts.
- The benefit-to-cost ratio of double stacking between Worcester and Boston should be examined.
- The land use issue is overlooked. Most cities are not interested in preserving industrial property.

### **On Factors Outside of the State that Affect Freight Distribution**

- A problem with the study is that it stops at the border of Massachusetts. An effective study would look at New York and New England as one region.
- Everything moving between Massachusetts and the New York port area has to come up or down the Hudson River and cross near Albany. This increases travel time for freight and increases the relative attractiveness of trucking.
- The State of New York and New Jersey are developing a port inland distribution network. They are considering freight tunnels to get freight across the Hudson.
- One freight option that deserves consideration would be to bring containers from the New York City area into New Bedford and Fall River by sea.
- Building a rail connection on the new Tappan Zee Bridge could alleviate the issue.
- The railroads are not interested in rail on the Tappan Zee Bridge because they want to maximize the business on their existing right of ways.
- The Hudson River issue is a regional issue. National railroads do not see the benefit in investing in the problem because the return on investment is greater in other states or regions.
- A governor's council needs to address freight rail issues. They transcend state boundaries.

### **General**

- It is important to consider railroad travel times. The average rail cycle time is 29 miles per hour. This is a challenge to increasing rail's share of freight distribution.
- Widening I-495 would be very costly. Comparing this to a rail freight alternative should be analyzed.
- South Coast Rail is predicted to cost \$2.6 billion. This project is good, but addressing congestion on Route 128 and I-495 is more important.
- Building rail terminals in Worcester and Ayer will increase traffic on I-495 and Route 128. A follow-up plan to address this issue is important.
- Public policy, such as a carbon tax, could encourage freight rail.
- Freight railroads worry about liability and capacity, which makes it difficult to have passenger and freight service on the same lines. Corridors are constrained in their ability to expand their right of way.
- The federal DOT is supportive of diverting freight from trucks to rail. The state could reap the financial benefits of an increased federal DOT interest in the issue.
- Freight carriers need to attend meetings and explain the benefits of their services.

Richard Flynn, of the Eastern Massachusetts Freight Rail Coalition, suggested that the Freight Committee make a statement to the full Advisory Council that it is concerned about increase truck traffic in the Route 128 and I-495 belt. A comparison of adding rail capacity to highway capacity should be conducted. The plan as it stands still leaves the state with a truck problem. The study is in a draft form and the Freight Committee should weigh in now. W. Bonin added that the study should consider freight moving into Boston from Worcester, Ayer, and elsewhere.

Frank DeMasi, Co-Chair and representative of Wellesley, asked members of the Committee to send their comments to him.

**5. Planning for the Advisory Council's Freight Panel (tentatively scheduled for May 26 at 3:00 PM) – Frank DeMasi, Co-Chair**

Discussion of this agenda item was postponed to a later meeting.

**6. Ideas for Freight Studies for the Next Unified Planning Work Program – Walter Bonin and Frank DeMasi, Co-Chairs**

Steve Olanoff, representative of Westwood, said the MPO's Unified Planning Work Program Subcommittee is meeting this week. It is time for the Freight Committee and Advisory Council to discuss their priorities for federal fiscal year (FFY) 2011. The Freight Committee should also consider how \$40,000 programmed in the current UPWP for an MPO Freight Study should be spent.

F. DeMasi would like the MPO to conduct a truck to rail diversion study. R. Flynn suggested a study that would analyze the effects of shifting freight from short line railroads to trucks. S. Olanoff would like any study to produce specific projects or programs that can be implemented. R. Flynn suggested a study of what it would take to move the rail share to 25 percent and what would the benefits be. He also suggested that the UPWP proposal consider maintaining freight rail connections to the urban core. W. Bonin said the problems in the Boston region must be studied first.

It was suggested that an MPO study examine the weight restrictions on rails in Eastern Massachusetts. Upgrading state-owned tracks in Eastern Massachusetts to the national 286,000-pound standard is important. The MBTA does not want cars weighing more than 263,000 pounds on its tracks. This policy harms freight railroads.

Marilyn Wellons, representing the Riverside Neighborhood Association, recommended a public education program to inform people about the benefits and consequences of freight rail and truck traffic. W. Bonin suggested the regional planning agencies should be responsible for the education campaign. Louis Elisa, of the Seaport Advisory Council, said his group would be interested in helping in the education process.

**7. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 PM

## **Attendance**

### **Agencies**

Lynn Vikesland, Massport  
Alison Felix, MAPC  
Louis Elisa, Seaport Advisory Council

### **Cities and Towns**

Walter Bonin, Marlborough  
Dom D'Eramo, Millis  
Frank DeMasi, Wellesley  
Steve Olanoff, Westwood

### **Advocacy/Citizens Groups**

Richard Flynn – Eastern Mass. Freight  
Rail Coalition  
Jenna Venturini – Eastern Mass. Freight  
Rail Coalition  
Marilyn Wellons, Riverside  
Neighborhood Association  
John McQueen, WalkBoston

### **Guests and Visitors**

Clare Conley, APM Solutions  
Bob Gentile, Framingham  
Jo Hart, Worcester  
Ed Lowney, Malden  
Ken Patrick, Mashpee  
Arnold Pinsley, Natick  
Doug Low, Rail America  
Marilyn McNab, Boston

### **MPO Staff**

Mike Callahan  
Sean Pfalzer