

**Fitchburg Line Working Group**  
**Meeting Notes February 4, 2020**

**Attending:** Peter Lowitt, Bruno Fisher, Justin Thompson, Mo Khan, Josselyn DeLeon, Jessica Strunkin, David Martin, John Orrison, Sam Squailia, George Kahale, Senator Dean Tran, Representative Tami Gouveia

**Representative Gouveia discussed her work on Transportation Issues** from Acton east along the Route 2 Fitchburg Line Corridor. She had met with 50 people at a Transportation Town Hall in Acton over the summer and based on the feedback received has focused on the Route 2 Fitchburg Line from Acton east to Alewife. She has been working the legislature and has introduced specific projects into the transportation bonding process. These include further work at Alewife Parking Garage, introducing the concept of funding satellite parking to support commuter rail stations along the Fitchburg line and along 95/128. Her mantra is to move people, not cars.

She continued with describing her work with the progressive caucus to address decarbonization and electrification (more ev charging stations were discussed) and the need for equity, which Senator Tran also touched on, especially geographic equity and the need for more funding for regional transit authorities.

There was discussion of what to do with the MBTAs diesel rolling stock once new electric equipment is in place, such as along the new Lynn Line which is being electrified. Rep. Gouveia has asked that the diesel stock be switched to the Fitchburg Line to support the Rail Vision (MBTA's Rail Master Plan) goals of 20 minute services for commuter rail .

Justin Thompson of Keolis responded that when EMUs are on line they will move more efficient diesels to other lines. Scheduling team at Keolis and the MBTA can address this redistribution at a future meeting.

Mo Khan stressed the need for more funds for RTAs which had their funding frozen for a number of years, first mile last mile issues including no service after the pm rush hour, and Mr. Lowitt spoke to the need for a ½ price reverse commute to make the system operate more efficiently.

There is a need to get ridership data from the T. The last data is from 2018 based on manual counts. There have no counts since then. Keolis has an incentive based contract to grow ridership and the weekend fares pilot which was recently made permanent has been very productive. The Foxboro line is currently piloting off peak fares.

Ms. Strunkin spoke to the need for an Alewife type garage at 495 and Rt 2 (Littleton) to reduce congestion.

Senator Tran noted that Secretary Pollard is discussing a garage at this location as well. Senator Tran is the ranking member of the Transportation Committee. He noted coupling RTAs and satellite parking could be a winning combination. He stressed the need for geographic equity in funding and the need for reliability, fares that don't incentivize driving (a monthly pass and parking is on par with a car payment). He addressed the need for a study for Route 2 corridor improvements (highway and rail). He noted that at the North Central Chamber Breakfast Governor Baker announced just such a study. Bravo Senator!

It was noted that the Concord Rotary has fallen off the TIP list and it is the only major corridor with traffic lights. The Rotary is in the MAPC area and it is the #1 investment priority in the MART/MRPC area yet doesn't get votes in the MAPC region. Senator Tran noted that when the Study is announced and hearing held later this year, we need to mobilize and get people interested in supporting work on the rotary and along the corridor out to those hearings. Reliability of service should be job 1 with fares a near second.

Mr. Thompson of Keolis asked that he be sent a list of businesses, TMAs that use, or want to use a shuttle to meet the commuter rail. He noted that Keolis has a tool (ap) to link with shuttle schedules and commuter rail service.

A column by Add Carr of the Globe noted that if businesses offer free parking, people drive. If they offer parking and transit passes, most people drive. If they just offer transit passes, workers will use that service.

John Orrison spoke about the single track along the Fitchburg Corridor in Waltham and how the HNTB study is recommending moving the station further west 1+ miles to create an intermodal hub. There is also talk of extending the Red Line west from Alewife to the new Waltham station.

There was discussion of the North South Rail link. The New tower over south station should not impact this project. Mr. Orrison noted that the system should be looked at holistically to better model impacts.

Mr. Martin spoke about South Acton Station. The town purchased additional land for parking and now has 500 spaces plus satellite parking. There is discussion of a parking deck over the existing garage. The town offers reserved parking for \$175 a month.

He continued to discuss the use of shared bike rentals (Zagster) at south Acton connecting via the Assabet River Rail Trail to neighboring communities. Mr. Lowitt noted that this might be an appropriate discussion to have with Ayer as well due to the Nashua River Rail Trail terminating at Ayer Station.

Councilor Squailia of Fitchburg noted that the cost to drive and park remains less than parking and taking the train and its perceived as more reliable. This needs to change.

Bruno Fisher noted that Gateway Cities program is beginning conversations around reducing ticket prices to/from Gateway Cities and perhaps using carbon offset monies to cover these costs.

The Devens Shuttle has seen ridership drop from 4700 riders a year to about 3200 in 2019. Costs have been reduced to maintain service and this underscores the need for constant education about the service.

The Littleton Shuttle has seen ridership surge to upwards of 30 riders a day in the new year.

Mr. Lowitt and Ms. Strunkin discussed connecting Clear Path for Veterans New England with a potential satellite parking area at UNIAC. Also the work with CMRPC and MART to increase service to and from Worcester and between Clinton and Devens.

Crosstown Connect mentioned they are looking at a Stow Shuttle from Stow Town Hall area to South Acton. Use of COA van is being explored, but the volunteer nature of Stow's COA drivers is making this difficult, despite the funding Representative Hogan has secured for the project.

Ayer parking garage officially opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January. Over 100 of the 180 spaces are filled and this is expected to rise as word spreads.

Ms. Strunkin noted how impressed she had been with the Ayer Station Park charrette process conducted by the Town. Also that a UMASS Donahue Institute Study is underway to benchmark Devens Economic Impacts. We continue to need housing near jobs and train stations and Vicksburg Square, if rezoned would fit that bill nicely.

Mr. Martin noted that Acton has reduced its pricing for Satellite lots to \$1 to \$2 (including the cost of the shuttle) and this appears to be working. He noted that the Rt2 Pipler/Taylor Road traffic light and intersection are undergoing improvements this year.

John Orrison of HNTB spoke to the need for employer subsidies and taking a holistic approach to assessing the entire transportation system such as including tickets that say how much GHG you saved by taking the commuter rail or T. Mr. Thompson noted that this information is on a Keolis app, but not on a ticket.

Mr. Thompson closed by noting that reliability throughout the system and along our line is improving. Impacts from mechanical issues improved 19% and service within 10-15 minutes of schedule is 95% reliable while service on schedule (+/- 5minutes is 89 % reliable). The approach to overcrowding is to add a dozen or more coaches to handle system surges while the 80 new bi-level cars are on the way. They are also refurbishing single level cars and continue to make track improvements. More capital work is going on in the system than ever before, but there is still more to do.

Thanks for a great meeting folks.