



**Meeting  
Notes**

Attendees: Attached

Date/Time: March 18, 2009 2 PM - 4 PM

Project No.: 10640.00

Place: CMRPC  
Union Station, Worcester

Re: Worcester Regional Mobility Study –  
Advisory Group Meeting 2

Notes taken by: VHB

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AGENDA

- Welcome and Study Update
- Existing Conditions Overview
- Envisioned Enhancements
- Advisory Group and Public Comments
- Next Steps

INTRODUCTIONS

D. Cooke (VHB) opened the meeting and reviewed the agenda. This is the second Advisory Group meeting for the study which will update the group on study findings for existing conditions and allow for group and public discussion on potential enhancements. The meeting is open to the public and any comments from members of the public will be heard at the end of the meeting.

WELCOME AND STUDY UPDATE

D. Cooke provided an update of the study progress, including the feedback from the first Public Informational Meeting and the completion of existing conditions. A draft study report on framework and existing conditions was emailed to the group and is available on the study webpage <http://www.vhb.com/worcesterregionalmobility>.

EXISTING CONDITIONS OVERVIEW

J. Wanat (VHB) reviewed the findings for existing conditions for environmental, socio-economic conditions, and transportation conditions. Display boards illustrating the findings have been posted around the room. Major findings from the environmental, socio-economic, and transportation sections are summarized in a series of GIS-based graphics, including:

- Environmental:

- The key environmental resources and sensitive areas that were reviewed and mapped (see Figures 2 through 6) included:
  - Wetlands and floodplains
  - Water supply protection areas
  - Rare species and vernal pools
  - Historic and archaeological resources
  - Protected recreation/conservation land
  - Hazardous material and solid waste facility sites
  - Environmental justice populations
- Socio-economic (see Figures 7 through 11):
  - In 2000, the study area communities had a combined total population of 311,430 persons. The estimated current (2007) population is 321,500 persons.
  - There are nearly 100,000 households in the study area.
  - For the study area as a whole, approximately 57 percent of the households own the home they occupy.
  - Median household incomes for each geographic unit in the study area range from a low of \$8,800 to a high of over \$128,000.
  - The number of low and moderate income persons for each community in the study area have been mapped for purposes of environmental justice. All of the study area neighborhoods with large percentages of low- and moderate-income people are located in Worcester.
  - The study area's minority populations have been mapped for purposes of environmental justice assessments. Minority populations are disproportionately concentrated in several sections of Worcester, generally in the center and northeast, in many of the same areas that house most of the study area's low-income population.
- Transportation (see Figures 14 to 21):
  - For transit, community concerns regarding the public transportation system that were voiced during public meetings include: need renewed attention to Commuter Rail / Light Rail; improve Bus-Commuter Rail Links; need to strengthen transit connections to major activity nodes; need to enhance Bus Services (fleets, technology, routing, service, funding); and improve consideration of disabled communities' needs. Transit trips comprise less than 1 percent of the total trips in the study area.
  - Pedestrians and bicycle transportation issues that have been raised through the public process include: lack of bicycle lanes on key roadways; pedestrian signals that require an upgrade or retiming; better sidewalk and crosswalk maintenance; improved accessibility for the disabled; improved walkability to major activity nodes; and enhanced regional connections.
  - Road network evaluation included safety, bridge ratings, congested corridors, and peak hour traffic operations (I-290 and key intersections). The most congested corridors included I-290, Route 9, Chandler Street, Route 122 (Grafton Street), Southbridge Street, and Route 70 (Lincoln Street).
  - All of the major squares in the city of Worcester are at or over capacity. Figure 21 in the study report highlights the intersections that are at or over capacity during peak

hour conditions. Critical crash corridors, determined by reviewing the 3 year history of crashes, included Route 9 (Worcester), Route 122 (Worcester), Main Street (Worcester), Route 9 (Shrewsbury), Route 70 (Worcester), and Route 12/Route 20 (Auburn).

- o On I-290, none of the deceleration or acceleration lanes meet current design standards. There are lane drops along I-290 that cause traffic disruptions.
- o Public comments on roadway issues included: key east/west connections are lacking; problem areas are I-290, Route 9, Kelley Square, Webster Square, Tatnuck Square, and Lincoln Square; the prevalence of neighborhood cut-through traffic; airport access needs to be more reliable; signal maintenance and enhancements are needed; key connections do not exist (e.g. I-395 to I-90).

## ENVISIONED ENHANCEMENTS

D. Cooke reviewed the screening criteria and the enhancements that have been discussed, in concept, to date throughout the study (these have not been studied in detail). Envisioned enhancements include:

- Transit System Enhancements (such as a Transit Signal Priority system where traffic lights would respond to approaching buses)
- Commuter Rail Enhancements/Extensions (such as a potential extension west)
- Assessment of On-road Bike Lanes
- Assessment of Public Streets Lacking Sidewalks
- Extension of Blackstone River Bikeway
- I-290 Traffic Flow/Safety Improvements
- Webster Square Redevelopment
- I-290/I-90/I-395 Interchange Improvements
- Intersection Signal Optimization/Pedestrian Improvements
- East/West Mobility Improvements (potential new connections and upgrades to existing roads):
  - South Option - New I-90 Interchange west of I-290/I-395 interchange, on New Alignment
  - South Option - New Alignment via Frontage Road to I-90/I-290/I-395 Interchange
  - South Option - New I-90 Interchange at Route 56 (or connection to Route 20), follows Route 56 to Pleasant Street
  - South Option - New I-90 Interchange at Route 56, follows Stafford Street
  - South Option - Oxford Street Connection at I-90/I-290/I-395, follows utility corridor
  - North Option - I-190 Connector at Ararat Street
  - East/West Option - Worcester "North Corridor" Enhancements to Existing Roads (Highland Street/Pleasant Street)
  - East/West Option - Worcester "Central Corridor" Enhancements to Existing Roads (Chandler Street/Pleasant Street)
  - East/West Option - Worcester "South Corridor" Enhancements to Existing Roads (Hope Avenue/Webster Street/Main Street)
  - East/West Option - Route 9 Corridor Management Plan
  - East/West Option - PIM 1 (Citizen's Proposal) (many environmental and neighborhood issues)
  - Heard Street Upgrade (many environmental and neighborhood issues)

- East/West Option - GWAIP Alternatives (many environmental and neighborhood issues)
- Improvements to I-90/I-290/I-395 Interchange

## ADVISORY GROUP AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following comments were voiced:

- Park Avenue traffic lights need synchronization; however the corridor is heavily developed so that access management is probably the most realistic remedy in addition to signal synchronization.
- Route 20/12 crashes are due to vehicles crossing the road between developments/attractions on opposite sides of the street. MHD and the town are initiating a design for this corridor including dividing the street with a median.
- Route 9 corridor (Shrewsbury), the crash statistics don't reflect the recent improvements along this corridor including a median. This has been noted in the existing conditions report.
- The key east-west roads through Worcester are low capacity roads that need attention.
- I-290 congestion is one of the biggest problems in the area; need to identify alternate corridors
- Site plan and special permit review process/zoning needs to be revised to help preserve and enhance roadway capacity (development occurs up to the street right of way).
- Access management is needed (e.g. avoid gas stations with multiple driveways to occur at congested intersections).
- An I-190 connector in Holden may help with the I-290 traffic problems.
- Need to propose enhancements that are demonstrated to work, simple and low-cost improvements such as restriping that do not have a major effect is not a productive use of funds.
- The WRTA is pursuing a Charlie Card payment system, along with transit signal priority technology.
- There are only a few very large employers in the study area, which makes transit service challenging. The area's industrial base has evaporated and the employment centers have dispersed. This pattern poses challenges for transit services.
- The lane drops on I-290 westbound could probably be resolved with restriping in the near term including signage to notify drivers that the lanes are reduced. This study will include short and long term solutions, including restriping and the potential benefits/impacts of widening I-290 by one lane in each direction.
- I-395 does not connect directly to I-90, this is a problem. The I-395 to I-290 connection is seamless.
- Frontage roads along I-90 to connect to a new interchange will face opposition and have high environmental impacts.
- An interchange at Route 56 would get support from the town of Auburn, this will address cut-through traffic and serve development on the Auburn/Oxford line for travel into Boston.

- From an economic development standpoint, traffic is desirable and developers tend to locate where there is traffic. Economic development considerations must be part of this study.
- Airport access should be a limited access facility that is reliable and that will take traffic away from other congested roadways. The airport is a key economic development driver in this region.
- The pedestrian, transit, and bicycle recommendations are necessary to help rebalance the mode share and encourage non-auto use. The high reliance on auto use is reflective of the need to improve other non-auto modes so that they are more attractive.
- Roadway capacity enhancements must be complimented with demand reduction strategies.
- Improving mobility is about economic development.
- The pedestrian and bicycle recommendations must be supported by a coordinated land use component.
- The City of Worcester has an interest in options that take traffic away from the congested east-west streets and I-290. The options that provide an alternative to I-290 such as the north I-190 connection and the south connections at I-90 effectively create a bypass of I-290 and better serve the origin-destination patterns. These connections would hopefully address cut-through traffic into neighborhoods.
- The DEP has sent notices to UMass Hospital and Hanover Insurance regarding RideShare non-compliance.
- Webster Square is one of the biggest bottlenecks in the City of Worcester. A revitalization plan for this area with access management is needed.
- Need to identify the number of lanes and cross section of roads envisioned for enhancement, such as Route 56. The first step is to forecast the travel demands.
- There is strong support for a designated airport access road off I-90. The study team may consider developing a tag line for the overarching study goal that mentions the economic development component of the study.
- Need to integrate planning and zoning into the study recommendations.
- Recommend that the Public Meeting include a discussion of the enhancements and any preliminary findings from the model so that the meeting is not only about existing conditions.
- The Hope Avenue interchange may want to be pulled out as a separate enhancement.

## NEXT STEPS

D. Cooke reviewed the next steps for the study including travel demand modeling to test alternatives, developing the future 2030 condition, and planning for the second public informational meeting. The second public meeting will include a review of existing conditions and a preview of enhancements. The original date of April 8<sup>th</sup> will be postponed until the modeling is completed for some of the envisioned alternatives so that this can be a part of the dialogue during the meeting, in addition to existing conditions.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 PM.

**Worcester Regional Mobility Study**  
**Advisory Group Meeting 2**  
**March 18, 2009**  
**2:00 PM to 4:00 PM CMRPC**

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