



**Meeting
Notes**

Attendees: Attached

Date/Time: May 13, 2009 6:00 -8:30 PM

Project No.: 10640.00

Place: Worcester Public Library

Re: Worcester Regional Mobility Study – Public
Informational Meeting 2

Notes taken by: VHB

AGENDA

- Welcome & Open House
- Public Informational Meeting
 - Meeting Purpose
 - Technical Presentation
 - Major Issues & Themes from PIM #1
 - Existing & Future Conditions Review
 - Preliminary Focus Areas
 - Next Steps
 - Breakout Session for Focus Areas
 - 1 – Multimodal Needs 2 – Problem Intersections
 - 3 – Problem Corridors 4 – New Regional Connections
 - Breakout Session Back-brief
 - Comments

WELCOME & MEETING PURPOSE

J. Wanat (VHB) opened the meeting, provided an overview and status of the study. The 15-month study is being run by the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) and is expected to be completed in late 2009. The first public meeting was held in November, focusing on issues and framework. Another public meeting is planned post-summer, in addition to a public scenario planning workshop this summer. The focus of this meeting is to review existing conditions, future 2030 conditions, discuss possible solutions, and to recap issues for those unable to attend last meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to: ensure open and transparent study process; provide a forum for public discussion and comment on key issues; and present the study progress and milestones.

The study website is a valuable resource and all documents and meeting notes are available online (www.vhb.com/worcesterregionalmobility). There are surveys at the front desk to fill out and an

online comment form on the website. Surveys can be left at the front desk, or mailed to CMRPC. Slides from this meeting, along with notes and a copy of the survey form will be posted to the website.

TECHNICAL PRESENTATION

J. Wanat began the technical presentation with a 30-minute powerpoint slide show, which included a recap of major issues and themes from Public Meeting 1, review of existing and future conditions, a review of preliminary focus areas for improvements, and next steps. Key points included:

- **Study Area.** The study area is approximately 132 square miles that generally forms the urban core of Central Massachusetts, including 12 communities. The area includes over 40 intersections and major interstates such as I-90 to the south and I-190/I-290/I-395 bisecting the study area.
- **Study Goal.** Overarching goal includes the consideration of economic development opportunities and making sure the transportation system safely and efficiently serves existing development and helps stimulate and unlock economic development potential.
- **Existing Conditions.** The Draft Existing Conditions technical report is available on the study website. Socio-economic conditions and environmental resource areas have been mapped and are shown on several of the display boards around the room. Socio-economic considerations included income, population density, environmental justice areas, and auto ownership. Environmental resources included wetlands, habitat, drinking water resources, historic areas, recreation/conservation land, and hazardous waste sites
- **Public Transportation.** Public transportation consists of WRTA bus service, regional bus service, AMTRAK/MBTA Commuter Rail, and air passenger service at Worcester Regional Airport. The WRTA is the second largest regional transit authority in Massachusetts. Almost 60 percent of WRTA patrons do not own a vehicle and rely on transit services for mobility purposes. Over half of the bus trips are work-related. Transit funding issues are caused by the reliance on shrinking state and local sources for operating costs (federal funds are used for capital costs).
- **Pedestrian/Bicycle.** There are four regional pedestrian/bicycle multi-use trails in the study area (the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail; the Worcester Bikeway/Trails System; the Wachusett Reservoir Loop; and the Blackstone River Bikeway). There are not many on-road bicycle lanes.
- **Congested Corridors.** A detailed review of existing congested corridors, problem intersections, and corridors with high crash rates was completed. The trends show key problems on the major east-west roadways in the study area.
- **Future Conditions.** Future 2030 conditions (without improvements) were reviewed for socio-economic trends and transportation facilities. The forecast shows additional congested roads and more problem intersections.
- **Focus Areas.** A review of preliminary focus areas was completed to help frame the discussions during the breakout session. The major categories of focus areas included: (1)

Multimodal Needs; (2) Problem Intersections; (3) Problem Corridors; and (4) New Regional Connections.

- **Next Steps.** Next steps for the study include a Scenario Planning Workshop this summer, followed by a final Public Meeting post-summer.

BREAKOUT SESSION

J. Wanat informed the group that for the next 60 minutes the meeting participants would rotate around to four stations where focused discussions on key issues will occur. At each station, study team members will facilitate the discussion and take notes. At the end of the breakout sessions, the study team members will report back to the overall group on what they heard. John Mullin (UMASS) will facilitate the session.

The following feedback was provided during the breakout stations:

STATION 1 - Multimodal

- Flagg Street, Pleasant Street, and Salisbury Street are three corridors that need sidewalks (specifically the segment of Flag Street between Pleasant Street and Salisbury Street)
- Intermodal education (at an early age) is important so that each mode respects the other
- Enforcement for all modes (enforcement of jaywalkers, bicyclists traveling in the wrong direction, illegal right-turns on red, etc.)
- Transit connections to employment centers are needed
- Bus service to the Greendale Mall should be restored
- Create multimodal access to the Worcester Regional Airport (including a rail link)
- Provide direct bus access to destinations rather than radial access into the CBD, then out (move away from a hub service)
- Provide better multimodal connections to UMASS Memorial and Union Station
- Implement truck exclusion routes and/or dedicated truck routes
- Retain the weekend WRTA bus service
- Pursue Safe Routes to School programs (Belmont Street School, Elm Park)
- Improved wayfinding programs are needed (kiosks, signage, etc.)
- More study/research is needed on needs of disabled (e.g. volunteers to ride buses to assist)
- Expand evening service for commuter rail
- Improve bike path connections, encourage biking/walking for discretionary trips, and improve connections between modes (safety, bike racks)
- Use a “Complete Streets” approach when designing or upgrading roads

STATION 2 - Problem Intersections

- Webster Square:
 - Retime traffic signals at Cambridge Street/Main Street
 - Improve emergency vehicle mobility through the square
 - Add pedestrian crossings at Park Ave/Mill Street (current crossing is difficult)
 - Add midblock crossing on Park Ave north of Mill Street
 - Cambridge Street at Webster Street – consider closing Webster Street between Mill Street and Cambridge Street or one-way flow (away from Cambridge Street)
 - The former Harvey Knife Building is vacant and should be part of the redevelopment
 - Consider realigning Cambridge Street so it intersects with Mill Street/Webster Street
 - Consider realigning Mill Street so it intersects Park Ave at less of a skew
 - An east-west connector road would divert traffic away from Webster Square
 - Consider a Cambridge Street to Webster Street connection south of the square
 - Consider a roundabout
 - Stay away from roundabouts at Webster Square, they are not pedestrian friendly
 - Eliminate Mill Street and extend Cambridge Street to intersect Park Avenue at a T intersection and Main Street at a four-way intersection
 - Coordinate long-term transportation vision with zoning and land planning at Webster Square
- West Boylston Street:
 - Crosswalks and sidewalks need maintenance on many sections of the corridor in Worcester
- Tatnuck Square:
 - Reduce the number of intersections on Pleasant Street with one-way streets and access management
 - Tighten the intersection at Mower Street
- Lincoln Square:
 - Depress Belmont Street under Main Street to connect to Highland Street
 - Make the intersection at the police HQ more traversable for pedestrians
 - The “burnout” tunnel beneath Highland Street is a barrier for pedestrians and bicyclists
- Kelley Square:
 - Install traffic signals
 - Install a double roundabout with pedestrian treatment
 - Consider depressing Harding Street under Kelley Square (issues with the canal location need to be identified)

- The movement from Vernon Street northbound to Madison Street needs to be more direct, this currently requires a left-turn at Green Street and the right-of-way is confusing
- Consider a bypass road connecting Madison Street to Harding Street
- Make Harding Street and Water Street two-way (on-street parking would be lost)
- Combine Harding Street with Water Street north of the square
- Combine Harding Street with Green Street
- Close underutilized roads and access points to simplify the intersection
- I-290/I-90/I-395:
 - I-395 to Route 12/Southbridge Street is a dangerous hairpin merge
 - A more direct connection from I-395 to I-90 is needed, the toll booth is currently the funnel point
 - I-395 to I-90 does not appear to be a popular connection given the constraints and the costs required to provide this direct connection (what's there could work much better with minor improvements and not a major new and expensive connection)

STATION 3 - Problem Corridors

- The I-290 corridor breaks down if there is an accident; consider diamond/carpool/HOV lanes (admittedly this would be difficult given the number of ramps)
- Better understand origin-destination patterns to see if any ramps can be closed
- Investigate another way to get north-south instead of I-290, look at desire lines
- There is local and regional congestion on I-290; sign the regional traffic to stay to the left-most lanes
- The Route 56/West Street corridor is a problem (people going to Spencer, the intersection just west of Route 56)
- Solutions for problem corridors need to be visionary, with alternate corridors developed and thought in the context of economic development (similar to Route 146/Shoppes at Blackstone Valley)
- The "North Corridor Project" by MHD provides localized improvements at 18 to 20 intersections; other solutions could involve demand reduction (get people out of cars; gas tax)
- I-290 corridor through the downtown is an economic drain (recurring lost time due to congestion); in addition to demand reduction, consider adding a lane of capacity in each direction
- Transit on Park Ave is not recommended due to congestion; solutions could include an I-90/Route 56 connection, light rail, signage/wayfinding
- Traffic problems occur at I-290 Exit 19/20 at Burncoat Street
- There are limitations to the east-west improvements on Highland Street, Chandler Street, Pleasant Street due to the constraints (environmental impacts and right-of-way); seek to improve transit for east-west travel

- Suggest signage be used to route drivers to Main Street vs. Park Ave/Route 9 (it's a more direct path)
- Consider I-190 as a bypass for I-495
- The lane drops, closely spaced ramps, and speed reductions on I-290 are the biggest problem; consider an "exit only" off-ramp at Lincoln Street; consider striping and signage to improve traffic flow
- A "beltway" around I-290 is not necessarily the solution (may devastate the CBD)
- Remove the Route 122/Vernon Street interchange on I-290 to improve Kelley Square
- There is a problem with the "legibility" of the roadway system; people are not taking the "best" way
- Eliminate the on-ramp onto Lincoln Street from I-290

STATION 4 - New Regional Connections

- Look at a new I-90 interchange at Route 56
- New regional connections must include improved Airport access (Hope Ave, Goddard Memorial Drive, I-190)
- A clear understanding of origin-destination patterns is needed
- The biggest potential for economic development is along the Route 56 corridor and the land to the west of the Airport; existing east-west roads are already developed
- A north connection that would take traffic off I-190/I-290 would help reduce the backups on I-290 and Lincoln Square in the evening
- Adding a lane on I-290 or removing closely spaced ramps is a good solution in theory to improve traffic flow, however these will be very difficult to implement (physically and politically)
- Note improvements to Route 12 between I-395 and Route 56
- Improve regional access to and from Holden/northwest Worcester

COMMENTS

The following comments were voiced at the meeting, written on the surveys at the meeting, or provided online:

- Always consider pedestrians in design (e.g. Complete Streets, Share the Road)
- Planning should avoid solutions that are not multimodal or binding
- Concurrent phase pedestrian signals (vs. exclusive phase) should be the standard in the study area (better for pedestrians)
- Traffic flow on I-290 needs improvement and attention (this corridor is an economic drain)

- Regional signage improvements are needed for wayfinding
- Bus service and paratransit is critical, even more so in the future as the population is aging and will rely on transit even more; funding for transit operations needs to be restructured
- Light rail should be considered for the area to help relieve the reliance on automobiles and an overburdened road system
- Consider a “zero” fare bus service or restructure the fare system to make it more attractive
- Overlay the City’s Economic Development plan to make sure transportation and land use visions are synchronized
- Improving Airport access will also help resolve many of the east-west mobility problems
- Safe Routes to Schools programs should be considered
- Have buses stop at all supermarkets; run weekend service more; don’t allow drivers to talk on cell phones while driving
- More locations where bus passes can be purchased and options for reduced pricing for monthly passes
- More bicycle safety laws and more bicycle lanes in and around the City of Worcester
- At the intersection of Main Street and Cambridge Street in Webster Square – review the traffic light timing; ambulances and other emergency vehicles need a better emergency system to travel around this intersection
- We need more open and interactive meetings similar to this meeting so the public can have a say in future planning efforts
- A public campaign should be initiated to deal with informing and enforcing jaywalking rules, as well as the bicycle riding rules as they pertain to the direction they must follow (same applies for automobiles)
- Make the Hope Avenue interchange at I-290 a full interchange
- With regard to I-290 signage, replace the three arrows on I-290 at the Brosnihan Square exit (that indicate the left 3 lanes are for I-290) to say LEFT 3 LANES FOR THRU TRAFFIC / RIGHT LANE TO 146; drivers swerve over to the Route 146 exit at the last minute because there are not always 5 lanes
- Convert the traffic flow on I-290 EB from just past the Lincoln Street entrance to the I-190/Burncoat Street exit so that it narrows to the left 2 lanes for through I-290 traffic, and the right 2 lanes are for I-190, possibly dividing the highway

- Add the comment survey from the meeting to the website as a downloadable form so that people can complete and return via email or mail
- Make copies of the meeting PowerPoint presentation to streamline the technical material and lengthen the breakout interactive session.
- Environmental groups have not been vocal at these meetings up to this point
- Investigate the existence of a rail siding anywhere in the Airport Industrial Park area
- Investigate where the Blackstone River passes under the Harding Street/Kelly Square intersection
- Once, and if, an airport access road route is selected, there should be an active group organized and if needed, a referendum should be put on the ballot; the decision should not be political - it must be practical

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM. Slides and notes from the meeting will be posted to the project website along with the survey form, as requested by one attendee.

**Worcester Regional Mobility Study
Public Informational Meeting #2
May 13, 2009
6:00 PM to 8:30 PM
Worcester Public Library**

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