

DRAFT

**Whittier Bridge /I-95 Improvement Project
Whittier Working Group Meeting
SUMMARY NOTES**

LOCATION OF MEETING: Salisbury Town Hall
Auditorium
5 Beach Road, Salisbury, MA

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: January 11, 2011, 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

HANDOUTS:

- Agenda, October 5 and 19, 2010 Meeting Summary Notes, Whittier Trail Interpretive Graphic Panels

Welcome and Introductions

Joe Pavao, MassDOT, welcomed the group. He asked participants to introduce themselves (see attached attendance list).

Mr. Pavao asked for comments on the October 19, 2010 meeting notes. On page 4, under Noise Mitigation, the first two sentences were revised to read – “WWG members understand that there are no neighborhoods along the project corridor that meet MassDOT’s noise mitigation policy according to the Cost-Effectiveness Index (CEI). The group continues to discuss potential noise mitigation measures such as non-engineered solutions, where feasible.”

Discussion and Presentation

Shared-Use Path and Noise Wall

Mr. Pavao reported on the November 17, 2010 meeting in the Laurel Road area where MassDOT, members of the WWG and consultants met with some residents to discuss concerns, such as noise and safety. At that time, MassDOT staff assured residents that the existing wall will not be permanently removed. It will be temporarily removed for construction, but will be replaced once construction is complete. While MassDOT’s CEI policy does not support the community’s expectations, the agency will ensure that sound is no worse when construction is complete than it is today. The wall will be placed closer to the noise source. This will provide better noise reduction (an increase of about 3 dBA). 3dBA is at the low end of the range of noise perception (3 – 5 dBA is

the noise perception range), so noise levels should be slightly better than today. The height of the wall could be increased and a berm constructed to support it. The wall placement will optimize the level of protection to the extent feasible. Mr. Pavao noted that abutters have been using walls along Route 128 for comparison. The Route 128 corridor has dense residential neighborhoods that meet MassDOT's CEI. Neighborhoods in the I-95 project corridor are much less densely populated.

MassDOT staff explained to the neighborhood that the right-of-way (ROW) fence will be left intact and repaired. Historically, when communities reuse abandoned railroad ROWs, the neighbors initially have security concerns. In this neighborhood, the sound wall and ROW fence will act as a barrier, so it is not really an issue.

Mr. Pavao reported that the neighbors seem to have interests that are in conflict with the intent to provide parking for access to the shared-use path. Neighbors feel that including parking at trailheads will draw more people to use the path, so they oppose providing a parking area. They also do not want to allow path users to park in the neighborhood. Mr. Pavao said the neighbors' concern about safety is a result of a past incident where someone riding a bike broke into a home. MassDOT agreed to construct the path at the communities' request. The neighbors don't want parking and the communities do, so the agency needs direction from the communities on how to proceed on the issue. The communities must make it clear that they are the decision-makers on the issue, not MassDOT. MassDOT anticipates 25% design in fall 2011, so a decision about the trail heads needs to be reached soon. Mr. Vining said he would speak with Mayor Holaday about the parking issue. The City might implement restrictions. The group discussed parking further. It will be provided at the Route 113 park-and-ride bus terminal, on Merrill Street and at other locations. Mr. Klima noted that residents of Mudnock Road do not want parking either. If parking is restricted in some neighborhoods, alternatives must be provided.

Mike Bertoulin, PB, reminded the group that MassDOT plans to place interpretive panels and other elements at the trail heads. They are intended for use as a gathering spot, so parking should be provided. Decisions about the graphic panels must be reached soon, which means that decisions about parking must also be reached soon. He pointed out that while the park-and-ride will be a trail head, parking will have to be limited there because most spaces are used by commuters. If spaces are designated for trail users, how will the restriction be enforced? He added that path use may not be as high on weekdays when commuters are using the lot. John Fallon, MassDOT asked if the parking issue needs to be resolved before the environmental documents are filed. Mr. Bertoulin said that the Ferry Road trail head is already included in the environmental documents, but it could be taken out if the community requests it. He

cautioned that once something is taken out of an environmental document, it is more difficult to include it later. Mr. Port said it is unlikely that the City will request that Ferry Road be removed.

Mr. Klima said that the Eastern Marsh trail parking lot overflows, because the trail attracts many users. He said he suspects that use of this trail will also be high in all communities. Parking, including handicapped spaces, should be provided at each connection. Parking at the park-and-ride will not be as attractive as at other locations. He added that the stub of the Ghost Trail is another option, as is the area of Rabbit Road to the town line. Mr. Bertoulin said MassDOT needs to know how many spaces the communities want to include at each trail head. Mr. Pavao added that MassDOT will maximize parking at the trail heads at Merrill Street, Pine Hill and the park-and-ride and will keep them within the ROW. Mr. Bertoulin reminded the group of their earlier discussion about the Ghost Trail connection. MassDOT has already extended the connection at Route 110; anything beyond that would be out of the project scope and contrary to previous agreements. The communities were going to work with the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) to design and construct the connection, separate from this project.

Jon-Eric White, Newburyport, asked if FHWA would view the path more favorably if parking were provided at Ferry Road. Mr. Pavao reiterated that the decision to provide a few spaces or none is up to the communities. MassDOT's policy is that parking is not necessary in providing alternative transportation, because it is viewed as being more recreation related. Mr. Port asked about using Spring Lane for parking instead of across from the neighborhood. Mr. Pavao said that MassDOT is widening the Ferry Road Bridge but not striping bike lanes. Since there is no direct connection to the path, the agency does not want to encourage use of the connection in that location, even though a connection using stairs will be provided. The 5-foot shoulders can be dedicated for bike lane use as part of a future project. He said that the communities need to do more work on determining needs for the Spring Lane and Pine Hill areas. Mr. Klima estimated that parking for up to 15 to 20 cars would be necessary. Mr. Pavao asked if the communities had collected data for existing trail use. The data had been collected and forwarded to MVPC.

Mr. Fallon asked if the communities can do anything to assuage neighbors' concerns. Geordie Vining, Newburyport, said it is unlikely that the communities will make a decision that is not viewed negatively by some stakeholder group. Mr. Fallon said that it will be important then to document the number of times the communities and MassDOT have reached out to them.

Bridge Type

Mr. Bertoulin reported that the local FHWA office has some concerns with redundancy with the network tied arch bridge type. The office has referred the matter to the national office in Washington, DC. MassDOT expects FHWA determination this week. The bridge type has been used elsewhere, so the agency doesn't anticipate that FHWA will reject the type. The local office won't review the EA without a ruling on type from DC. Once DC rules on type, MassDOT anticipates the local office will complete review of the EA in approximately four weeks. Mr. Beroulin also reported that the value engineering review of PB's engineering and assumptions should also be completed by the end of the week.

Environmental Documents

Mr. Bertoulin said that the National Marine Fisheries Service is reviewing MassDOT's plan for working in water and a response is anticipated this week or next. Once received, MassDOT will submit the EA/draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) to FHWA for review, which should take about a month. MassDOT will revise the document and then file the EA/DEIR with MEPA in March while simultaneously releasing the document for public review under NEPA. A 30-day public review and comment period will begin once the EA/DEIR is noticed by MEPA in the Environmental Monitor. Once the EA/DEIR is noticed, copies will be sent to a distribution list. The WWG will receive copies. The group will receive its copies on or about the day when the EA/DEIR is filed with MEPA, so members will have an additional week for review beyond what the public will have. Mr. Pavao noted that MassDOT's policy is to not release environmental documents until the Monitor notice; however, in this case the agency will provide the WWG with the documents a little earlier. A public hearing will be scheduled about two weeks after the DEIR is noticed. MassDOT's target filing date for the DEIR is March 15. Once the comment period closes, the project team will review and address comments received. The final EIR will be filed with another 30-day public review and comment period.

The group again discussed the shared-use path and different approaches to barriers. Mr. Port asked if clear, solid panels on top of the jersey barriers would be possible. They would be more aesthetically pleasing and safer and might provide some noise protection. Mr. Bertoulin said the barriers are not tall enough to provide any sound protection. The proposed design of the barriers is based on experience with other projects and input from bikers who prefer an open path that isn't tunnel-like because it makes them feel less isolated and safer. MassDOT is requiring a fence on the top of the jersey barrier to protect bikers and pedestrians from debris. Plexi-glass can be abraded and become cloudy. The open mesh being proposed is a compromise solution. Mr.

Vining said he has heard of a material called peri-glass that has been used elsewhere and is more aesthetically pleasing and are safer. He did not have details on the material. Mr. Pavao said MassDOT will entertain suggestions for changes to address aesthetic issues, but it is unlikely the agency will make changes for noise issues, because the sound study has shown that there is no benefit. Maintenance will also be a factor in decision-making. MassDOT won't spend extra money on something that does not have a benefit or will increase maintenance costs for the agency. Mr. Klima suggested that bikers and pedestrians would benefit from noise reduction. Mr. Vining suggested that aesthetic improvements would increase path use, and people will feel safer if path use is high. Mr. Pavao said MassDOT must move forward with design. He suggested the WWG members make these and other comments during the environmental review process. This is the first path MassDOT has constructed on an interstate. Safety, visibility, cost and maintenance are priority considerations for the agency. He added that FHWA will weigh in with comments on the proposals as well. Mr. Fallon noted that justifying the barrier for path users would not be acceptable with the federal agencies. Noise impacts are considered for residents only. He added that using noise reduction for path users as a justification might anger residents who are not going to get noise barriers. Mr. Bertoulin pointed out that the inside, highway side fence will be jersey barrier topped with mesh. The fence on the outside at the path overlooks will be a concrete barrier topped with ornamental railings to get to the 54-inch height necessary to protect bikers. Mr. Pavao offered that MassDOT could use black chain link and ornamental railing to improve the aesthetics.

Mr. Bertoulin reported that Mr. Klima sent a drawing of a helical ramp as a possible connection in Amesbury. He noted that while in concept it might work, the path is at MassDOT's ROW limit and is next to a historic structure. It would require Section 4(f) and Section 106 historic reviews, which could cause a project delay of six months or more. MassDOT cannot get involved in this issue, which is outside the project scope. He reminded the group that MVPC had agreed to work with the communities to advance the connection idea. MassDOT will allow the connection. Some members said that MassDOT had committed to helping with the east-west and Main Street Visitor Center connections. Mr. Pavao said he was not aware of a letter, but stated that the Administrator has made it clear to the community chief executive officers that MassDOT's work will not preclude the communities' future efforts to implement the connections. Mr. Bertoulin reminded the group that they have another opportunity to comment on the issue during the EA/EIR review process.

Request for Determination of Applicability (RDA) for Route 110

Mr. Bertoulin reported that the RDA for the Route 110 connection to Rabbit Road was submitted by District 4 and approved on January 5, 2011.

Interpretive Plaque Concepts for Whittier Trail

Kelly Carr, William Warner Architects (WWA), displayed a locus slide showing the proposed interpretive areas for the north and south termini of the path and the areas at the north and south ends of the bridge and mid-span. She displayed several slides with updated conceptual sketches of interpretive materials. The slides depicted signs and other elements at proposed locations along the path.

Some pieces that WWA is proposing to reuse are massive and need space. They would be located at trail heads where picnic areas are located at the northern and southern terminus. The trail heads would have more general information and a trail overview. The bridge abutment and mid-span overlooks would use the themes of the story of John Greenleaf Whittier, the river ecology and the history of the crossing. They would be presented so that they look like pieces of sculpture. She displayed several options for the first approach of repurposing existing materials, such as using the carved granite seal abutments and the painted seal in structural steel as a gateway to the path with train information and bike racks. The builder's plaque and brass state seal could be placed in granite facing and located at seating areas where materials are grouped based on the three themes. The rounded top abutments could be used as benches. A second approach would be more rustic, such as using a nautical theme and information boards in wooden structures. A third approach would use new materials and steel and have an industrial look. Mr. Port suggested the themes be worked into even small elements such as mile markers. Mr. Klima said he likes the gateway concept. He would prefer the history theme be presented in one location. Artifacts could be displayed along the length of the path. Mr. White said he prefers not to have too much old steel displayed next to a new bridge. He suggested using repurposed materials in smaller sizes. Mr. Vining said he thinks the rustic look approach is the least appropriate. He asked if new steel is used could it be weathering steel that would avoid the need to repaint. Mr. Bertoulin said weathering steel is a relatively new material. Mr. Pavao said MassDOT would likely clean and repaint the elements, since it is more of a capital program task. It would probably be done when the bridge is repainted. The group agreed their first choice is the repurposed approach. Mr. Bertoulin said the communities should present a unified comment document at the next meeting. It will take the project team about one month after receiving the comments to develop the next level of design.

Fred Lucey, Office of Representative Costello, questioned the appropriateness of having picnic areas that need large amounts of space and parking. Ms. Carr noted that the picnic areas are not destination spots, but rather amenities for path users. Mr. Bertoulin added that if space is limited, a trade off between amenities and parking may be

necessary. The next step is to begin work on actual layouts and designs to determine space needs.

Mr. Pavao reminded the group that the shared-use path still needs an official name.

There were no further questions or discussion, so the meeting adjourned. The next meeting is scheduled for February 15, 2011 from 2 PM to 4 PM in the same location.

The following topics were carried for discussion in February:

1. Shared-use path and interpretive panels
2. Noise
3. Environmental Assessment
4. Other updates

**Whittier Bridge /I-95 Improvement Project
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January 11, 2011
ATTENDANCE**

Name:

Affiliation:

Working Group Members/MassDOT Staff

Eric Botterman	Millenium Engineering – MassDOT Owner’s Representative
Stephanie Boundy	MassDOT
Jim Cerbone	MassDOT
Joe Fahey	City of Amesbury
John Fallon	MassDOT
Neil Harrington	Town Manager, Salisbury
Thatcher Kezer	Mayor, City of Amesbury
Jerry Klima	Selectman, Town of Salisbury
Fred Lucey	Representative Costello’s Office
Joe Pavao	MassDOT
Andrew Port	Newburyport Planning Department
Geordie Vining	Newburyport Planning Department
Jon-Eric White	Newburyport Water Department
Jennifer Yim	City of Amesbury

Consultants

Kate Barrett	Regina Villa Associates
Mike Bertoulin	Parsons Brinckerhoff
Kelly Carr	William Warner Architects
Joe Freeman	TetraTech Rizzo