Kendall Square Mobility Task Force Meeting

LOCATION OF MEETING: One Broadway, 5th Floor, Cambridge, MA - Havana Conference Room

DATE/TIME OF MEETING: October 25, 2016 from 5:00 PM – 7:30 PM

TASK FORCE ATTENDEES:
Joe Barr, City of Cambridge
Kelley Brown, MIT
Peter Crawley, East Cambridge Planning Team
Brian Dacey, Kendall Square Association (Co-Chair)
Tom Evans, Cambridge Redevelopment Authority
Melissa Dullea, MBTA
Jim Gascoigne, Charles River TMA
Scott Hamwey, MassDOT
Patrick Magee, East Cambridge Business Association
Michael O'Hearn, Boston Properties
Michael Owu, MIT Investment Management Company
Susanne Rasmussen, City of Cambridge (Co-Chair)

MASSDOT, MBTA, CITY OF CAMBRIDGE AND PROJECT TEAM ATTENDEES:
Tegin Bennett, City of Cambridge
Adam Shulman, City of Cambridge
Brian Kane, MBTA
Duncan Allen, IBI Group
Laura Riegel, IBI Group
Cathy Offenberg, IBI Group

PUBLIC:
John Attanucci, MIT
Jan Devereux, Cambridge City Council
K Britts
Arcady Goldmints-Orler, TransitMatters
John Hawkinson
Michael Lalli, TransitMatters
Sarah Wetmore, VHB

PURPOSE/SUBJECT: Task Force Meeting #8, Grand Junction Feasibility Workshop

SUMMARY:

Introductions and Administrative Items

Susanne Rasmussen, City of Cambridge, and Brian Dacey, CIC, opened the meeting and provided context for the coming workshop. The purpose of the workshop was for Task Force members to develop a common understanding of the origins and destinations that transit on the Grand Junction could best serve, the desired frequency and likely cross section(s) required for that frequency, and the feasibility of various technology options on the corridor. The intent was that the Task Force would provide input leading to short-term as well as long-term recommendations.

The consultants, Laura Riegel and Duncan Allen of IBI Group, presented three separate sections of information with guided discussion and input after each section.

- First, they presented on the background of the Grand Junction and possible transit uses ("representative treatments") in terms of the types of connections and functions that could be served.
- Second, they presented on frequency and technology.
- Third, they spoke about the physical right-of-way needs and how to provide for future transit options.

The presentation is available online on the Kendall Square Mobility Task Force website (http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Transportation/kendallsquaremobilitytaskforce). The following notes represent a summary of key discussion points that took place during those segments of the workshop.

Notes and Discussion

The questions and conversation were extensive. The bullets below summarize main points made:

Background and Representative Treatments

- 84% of trips to Kendall are directly by Red Line and local buses and 16% are by commuter rail or other rapid transit lines
- The Urban Ring study estimated boardings at Kendall (assuming full build-out of zoning at the time) as 3,250
- It will be necessary to keep one railroad track in place to enable heavy rail train sets between the north and south rail corridors and the Boston Engine Terminal
- Are there opportunities for connections to Newton stations through West Station if there is more frequent service to Riverside – would Worcester line commuters be allies to relieve pressure on the service?
- Is new local (with frequent stops) transit service needed or are local trips served well enough by the bike path and EZ Ride?
- Should a further connection to Everett be considered?

Frequency and Technology

- Think frequency before technology – in most cases, any technology can be used but frequency determines the cross sections needed

- Frequent connections to Sullivan and Longwood requires a grade separated crossing of the Commuter Rail and Green Line Extension – one of many aspects of the high cost of providing high frequency service
- The railroad bridge underneath the BU Bridge is in terrible shape - it was built as two tracks
- What limitations are being set now in the West Station design?
- The six street crossings are another constraint on frequency and speed. One signal is about equal to 40% of the delay resulting from a station (deceleration and dwell time)
- North American crash energy management approach differs from transit (subject to FTA) and overseas rail, and so when transit vehicles with passengers share tracks with non-transit vehicles, they must be FRA-compliant, which tends to mean they are larger, bulkier, and noisier
- The FRA requires time separation or other safety measures if non-compliant vehicles used
- Mixing FRA compliant trains and signalized crossings is not ideal
- How much can Transit Signal Priority (TSP) help?
- Existing movements on the existing track are mostly MBTA and Amtrak 'equipment moves'
- Questions were asked regarding the effects of the span of service (e.g. peak only, all day) and need for time separation (if other equipment moves on the tracks could occur at other times)
- One upgraded track with passing sidings could provide a likely headway of 25/30 minutes
- Double track ~ intermediate frequency
- What would the impact of the proposed equipment upgrades and resulting capacity improvements to the Red and Orange be on the need for transit service in the GJ corridor?
- It was proposed that the goal should be to maximize frequency and serving regional trips while keeping costs low.
- A reasonable frequency should be achieved for such a significant investment.
- If the connections would be served by a 2-seat ride, timed transfers or higher frequencies would be desirable.
- What about providing high frequency service just between West Station & Kendall? (less crossings)
- Grand Junction service could impact traffic on cross streets, which would also affect buses.

Physical ROW Needs

- Stations require an additional 16' – 28'
- Outside of Cambridge (e.g. in Somerville), the ROW constraints are worse
- Land is expensive - how does it compare to vertical solution (e.g. building tracks over or under land to take up less land) costs?
- There was caution expressed about counting on DMUs, since the MBTA is not planning on them anytime soon
- West of Mass Ave there are two tracks already

Takeaways

The following summarize the key takeaways from the discussion:

- The existing rail track must stay in place
- For Grand Junction service, the Task Force is interested in longer, frequent connections to Riverside & Everett (beyond Sullivan), as well as to North Station and West Station - local trips are better served by the path and existing services.
- To be competitive and provide good regional connections, intermediate frequency at least is needed
- There is still a need to confirm that there is demand for this frequency
- A full path connection from West Station to North Station would be excellent
- A single track shuttle (direct, short, infrequent, with limited stops) might only make sense short-term
- The Task Force members did not want to discount DMU & Wireless electric in future

Next Steps

S. Rasmussen summarized possible next steps related to the feasibility of Grand Junction transit and the design and construction of the multi-use path:

1) Complete physical survey of the ROW (being undertaken by the City)
2) Look at possible station locations and spacing
3) Study grade crossings
4) Further study demand and supply comparisons between different possible end points compared to other existing services (e.g. Orange Line to Red Line from Sullivan)

S. Rasmussen also summarized upcoming meetings (Note: the proposed meeting dates have since been changed and therefore exact dates are not included here):

1) Task Force Meeting #9: Draft recommendations (now January)
2) Public Meeting #2 (now February)
3) Final Task Force Meeting #10 (now March)

S. Rasmussen also discussed possible tasks for the coming year, including further discussing Red Line improvements and meeting with ride-hailing or Transportation Network Companies (e.g. Uber, Lyft, Bridj).

Public Comment

The public was invited to share their questions and comments, which are summarized below:

- What are travel times now, what is the market/demand for Grand Junction transit?
- What are impacts to existing services? Will no one use EZ Ride?
- How is car share and potential driverless services considered by the Task Force? Those are considerations for people who will not want to wait; we need to consider impact of these disruptor services.