

Meeting Notes
Blackstone River Bikeway Task Force

DATE: Tuesday January 27, 2009
10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

PLACE: Massachusetts Highway Department District 3 Office
First Floor Conference Room
403 Belmont Street
Worcester, MA 01604

ATTENDEES: List Attached

1. Welcome and Introductions

Kimberley Sloan, Massachusetts Highway Department's (MassHighway) Project Manager, opened the meeting and introductions were made. Handouts provided included:

- agenda
- BRBW typical sections (eleven 8.5"x11" sheets)

2. Project Update – Segments 1 and 2

Section 1 – Kimberley Sloan stated that an Inter-Agency Service Agreement is being finalized to transfer design money to DCR. DCR will then put out a Request for Proposals and hopefully will have a design consultant on board by late summer.

Section 2 - The \$100K additional state funding required to incorporate a segment of Section 1 into the Section 2 design contract has not yet been approved. The design of the original alignment of Section 2 is approximately 75% complete and is on hold until the funding agreement is finalized.

3. Project Update – Sections 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7

Progress/meetings to date – Frank Vitale, Parsons Project Manager, described the major activities undertaken by Parsons since the last Task Force meeting. Parsons has:

- Developed an outline of a permitting strategy to obtain Wetlands Variance approval
- Worked to minimize a delay in developing impact analyses caused by problems with the ground surface models
- Flagged and surveyed wetland limits within Sections 3, 4 and 5
- Completed the historic/archaeological resource inventory and provided recommendations for proposed archeological shovel test-pits. Once approved by MassHighway, Parsons historical consultant JMA, will complete the MHC

application to conduct testing and submit to MassHighway for transmittal to MHC. Testing cannot be initiated until the weather conditions permit testing in unfrozen ground.

- Completed a Hazmat inventory and identified areas of concern that warranted further investigation
- Reviewed with MassHighway share-the-road/sidewalk bikeway configurations in Worcester and Millbury.
- Drafted a project Purpose and Need statement; recently received comments from MassHighway - will be distributed to regulatory agencies
- Met with major owner of Riverdale Mills, Mr. Knott, regarding possible alternate alignments through his property in Northbridge.
- Initiated bridge-type studies task that will analyze groups of structures with similar configurations, rather than separately for each of the 20 proposed structures.
- Will identify required bridge boring locations. Many of these locations will likely require filing RDAs or NOIs with the affected Towns.
- Reviewed comments on the alignment alternates that were received since the August Task Force meeting. The comments will be taken into account as the design proceeds.

Dave Patnaude, Parsons Deputy Project Manager, reviewed the entire proposed alignment and described key changes that have been incorporated since the last Task Force meeting. Alignment changes and new alternates considered were identified in Worcester, Millbury and Northbridge

Diana Walden, wetlands scientist with the BSC Group, provided an update on the wetland flagging effort, summarized the major wetland units and identified the areas that will have the greatest anticipated impacts, based on a preliminary evaluation. She also described the wildlife and state protected species that may require review by the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP). Diana also described our approaches to reviewing potential mitigation sites and indicated that it is the team's goals to work with the Towns to identify mitigation sites.

Steve Cronkite, Parsons Senior Planner, reviewed eleven typical cross-sections that have been developed to adapt the BRBW alignment to the diverse field conditions along the proposed route.

4. Other Business/ Questions

Jen Hager, Town of Sutton, noted that all the project activity described in the presentation is not apparent to the public and should be better communicated, possibly on the website. Also, the Purpose and Need statement should be coordinated with the Towns. The consultation with the Towns has been uneven and she hopes it will improve. She is glad to hear of Parsons' recent productive meeting with the Towns of Uxbridge, Millbury and Northbridge and encouraged Parsons to initiate a similar dialogue with Sutton; she acknowledged a meeting with Parsons was scheduled for after the Task Force meeting.

Kimberly Sloan, MassHighway, cautioned that funding for coordination meetings was limited.

Jen Hager stated that Sutton has specific concerns that need to be considered now in early design so the project does not proceed in the wrong direction if obstacles can be avoided. For example, Sutton would like to see a better connection planned between the new Tricentennial Park and the BRBW, as currently a narrow bridge in poor condition is the only link. Sutton anticipates potential property owner objections to the currently proposed route, while the old (EENF) route seemed feasible and was favored by the town Conservation Commission. She asked when the EIR would be published and Kimberly Sloan stated that it depends because it will need to address all the Towns concerns. Jen Hager asked if MassHighway wanted the Towns to help deal with property owners regarding rights-of-way (ROW). Kimberly Sloan indicated that MassHighway would welcome assistance acquiring ROW because no agreement has been reached by MassHighway and DCR regarding acquisition. Jan Reitsma, the National Heritage Corridor Commission, indicated he would again urge the two commissioners to agree on the best way to acquire the necessary right-of-way. He recommended accelerating parts of the project as much as possible to take advantage of anticipated federal stimulus package infrastructure dollars.

Megan DiPrete, Town of Uxbridge, stated that she appreciated the coordination meeting that she had with Parsons last week and she has more confidence that the project is progressing according to schedule.

There was a discussion initiated by Laurie Connors, Millbury, of how to handle properties along the alignment that become available. It is unclear whether it would be best for the towns to acquire the properties or DCR or MassHighway. Arthur Frost recommended that the Towns acquire key properties if they become available. Jan Reitsma suggested that DCR institute a mechanism to acquire the properties.

Frank Vitale, Parsons, noted that Parsons has been discussing ROW issues with several of the major land-owners already, i.e. National Grid, Aquarion Water, P&W RR, Riverdale Mills, and cautioned that it is important not to get bogged down by individual property negotiations at this stage of project planning since the detailed ROW plans have not been developed yet and minor alignment shifts can be performed as design proceeds. He further stated that Parsons goal was to complete the EIR/EA as soon as possible so that the project team can focus on more detailed ROW issues during design. Regarding Jen Hager's suggested website updates, Frank Vitale pointed out that Task Force meeting minutes are posted on the site to allow those interested to become informed as to what has been accomplished and discussed to date.

Jan Reitsma suggested that Parsons continue to have meetings with the Town Planners so that major ROW issues can be identified early, while not getting bogged down in meetings with individual landowners.

In response to a question regarding emergency access, Steve Cronkite, Parsons, indicated that the boardwalk design will typically need to accommodate emergency and maintenance vehicles and this results in a relatively heavy and oftentimes, expensive design. Jen Hager asked Arthur Frost to clarify the MassHighway regarding emergency access. Arthur Frost will clarify the specific requirements with MassHighway's bikeway specialist in Boston, but Mr. Frost anticipated that local emergency response officials will request full, direct access to all parts of the bikeway.

Arthur asked all the Town Planners present to pull all the deeds for the properties along the alignment, to help MassHighway to identify ROW needs.

Jan Reitsma requested that the Heritage Corridor Commission review the draft of the Purpose and Need statement. He also noted that a Canal Restoration Feasibility study is available. He suggested that Parsons should review this study in order to avoid potential conflicts and to take advantage of opportunities relative to this historic resource. He also suggested that Parsons Team's wetland specialists coordinate with the Blackstone River Coalition relative to mitigation opportunities since the coalition will have useful ideas that could be considered.

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In response to several Task Force members, Arthur Frost and Kim Sloan requested that Parsons consider adding each of the town website links to the project's webpage. Frank Vitale responded that he would get back to Kim on timing to accomplish this.

There was a question as to when the Segment 6 punch-list work would be completed. Danny O'Brien stated that the old irrigation system has already been removed, and the remaining work will be completed in the Spring.

5. Next Meeting Date
June 2, 2009