



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Transit
Administration**

REGION I
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New Hampshire,
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October 1, 2010

Mr. Mohammed H. Khan
Administrator
Montachusett Regional Transit Authority
R1427 Water Street
Fitchburg, MA 01420

Mr. Richard Davey
General Manager & Rail and Transit Administrator
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

**Re: Fitchburg Commuter Rail Extension Project
Wachusett Station and Westminster Layover Facility
Environmental Assessment - Finding of No Significant Impact**

Dear Messrs. Khan and Davey:

Based upon our review of the environmental documentation, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Extension Project (attached). The purpose of this commuter rail extension is to provide a transit option for motorists traveling to Boston along Route 2. The project will extend commuter rail service 4.5 miles west from the existing terminus in downtown Fitchburg to a new terminus in West Fitchburg, MA (Wachusett). The project includes the following components:

- o 4.5 miles of track and signal upgrade
- o Up to 285 space station parking facility
- o High level boarding platform
- o Up to 6 track layover facility

Please be advised that in accordance with 23 CFR 771.121, please transmit a notice of availability of this FONSI to all affected Federal, state and local governmental entities. In addition, under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the FTA has determined "No Historic Properties Effectuated".

The FTA looks forward to continuing to work with the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority on this important transit improvement.

Sincerely,

Mary Beth Mello
Regional Administrator

Attachment

**FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION
REGION I**

Finding of No Significant Impact

Project: Fitchburg Commuter Rail Extension Project/Wachusett Station and Westminister Layover Facility

Applicant: Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART) and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)

Project Location: West Fitchburg, MA/ Westminister, MA

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Extension project is to provide a transit option for motorists traveling to Boston via Route 2. By extending commuter rail service 4.5 miles from downtown Fitchburg to a new rail station in West Fitchburg at the intersection of Routes 2 and 31, the ease of access is expected to attract commuters from the North Central Region of Massachusetts.

The need for the project stems from the several inter-related transportation deficiencies; 1) lack of transit options west of Fitchburg; existing demand for transit service and additional parking along the existing Fitchburg Commuter Rail line; 3) the MBTA's current reliance on a poorly located, undersized, and outdated layover facility; and 4) the need for improved access to jobs in both the Boston area and Montachusett region.

The project will extend commuter rail service 4.5 miles west from the existing terminus in downtown Fitchburg to a new terminus in West Fitchburg, MA (Wachusett). The proposed commuter rail station will be located largely within the limits of Pan Am Southern's existing right of way in the City of Fitchburg immediately adjacent to the existing main line and will consist of a full-length high level platform equipped with passenger shelters benched lighting and bicycle storage facilities. The station will be fully accessible per the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Parking for up to 286 cars on adjacent industrially-zoned parcels with access to the parking lot via Authority Drive, which is located less than one-half mile of Route 2. To reduce cut through traffic on Fifth Massachusetts Turnpike, establishment of a cul-de-sac is proposed to be located prior to the parking lot with breakaway bollards for emergency vehicle access. A new layover facility will be located at the Westminister Business Park, approximately 1.5 miles west of Wachusett Station. The layover facility will allow for the overnight night storage of up to six trains.

Alternatives Considered

The environmental assessment (EA) evaluates three alternatives to improve mobility along the corridor; 1) No Build Alternative, 2) Bus Service and 3) Commuter Rail. The commuter rail alternative as described above was selected as the preferred alternative. The EA also evaluated alternative sites for the station and layover facility.

Agency Coordination and Public Opportunity to Comment

The MART involved a number of agencies, local officials and the public in the planning and conceptual design of the Fitchburg Commuter Rail Extension project. The EA was made available for a 30 day comment period. A public meeting was held on July 13, 2010. Meeting minutes and response to comments are included within the EA. During the comment period the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) requested additional information to support FTA's proposed Section 106 determination of "No Historic Properties Effectuated." Specifically, MHC, in its role as the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), requested additional information on the sensitivity of historical and archaeological resources within the station and layover facility sites. The supplemental information had been prepared and transmitted to MHC. On September 23, 2010, MHC concurred on FTA's determination of effect.

Based on the public comments, including the supplemental Section 206 information, the MBTA and MART determined that no substantive changes were warranted.

Determinations and Findings

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Finding

FTA served as the lead agency under NEPA for the project. The MART and the MBTA prepared an EA in compliance with NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq, and with FTA's regulations, 23 CFR Part 771. The EA analyzes and describes the project's potential significant impacts.

After reviewing the EA, its supporting documents and public comments, the FTA finds under 23 CFR 771.121 that the proposed project will have no significant impacts on the environment. The record provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Section 106 Compliance

In accordance with Section 106 of the Historic preservation Act of 1966 as amended (36 CFR 800); FTA has issued a determination of "No Historic Properties Effectuated". On September 23, 2010, MHC, in its role as SHPO, concurred on FTA's determination.

Section 4(f) Findings

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.135, the FTA has determined that Section 4(f) requirements do not apply since no land from a significant publicly owned public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge, or any significant historic site will be used as a result of this project. FTA has made this determination since the current contemplated project has no anticipated 4(f) use.

Approved: _____

Mary Beth Mello

Date: 10/1/10

Mary Beth Mello
Regional Administrator
FTA, Region I

Concur: _____

Wendy A. Lee

Date: 10/1/10

Wendy A. Lee
Regional Counsel



Deval L. Patrick, Governor
Timothy P. Murray, Lt. Governor
Jeffrey B. Mullan, MassDOT Secretary & CEO
Richard A. Davey, General Manager
and Rail & Transit Administrator



September 27, 2010

Mary Beth Mello
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration
55 Broadway, Suite 920
Cambridge, MA 02142

Dear Regional Administrator Mello:

As you are aware, on June 22, 2010, the Montachusett Area Regional Transit Authority (MART), in cooperation with the MBTA, released for public review the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Wachusett Extension project. The project involves the extension of commuter rail service from the current terminus in Fitchburg to a new terminus in Westminster, MA. A new layover facility adjacent to the end of the line is also part of the project. The MART held a robust public review of the document. Copies of the EA were distributed to the regulatory agencies as well as other municipal agencies and other interested parties. Copies were made available at local libraries in Fitchburg, Westminster and Gardner and a copy of the EA was posted on MART's website.

A public meeting was held on July 13, 2010, at MART's Headquarters in Fitchburg. MART placed an advertisement in the local paper notifying the public of the document's availability and of the public meeting. The meeting included the presentation and an opportunity for questions and answers, as well as comments from the public. A copy of the meeting minutes, including the presentation slides and the sign in sheet have been added to the EA as an Appendix. MART accepted comments on the EA for 30 days; 9 comment letters were received. MART and the MBTA prepared a Response to Comments Memorandum. Copies of the Response to Comments memorandum as well as the comment letters are included in the Appendix to the EA.

During the comment period, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, in its role as State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), requested additional information to support the FTA's proposed determination of effect. In summary, the SHPO requested that the Wachusett Station and layover facility sites be subjected to a sensitivity assessment for historical and archeological resources by a qualified cultural resource professional. A copy of MHC's letter is included in the EA. This information was submitted to the FTA on September 16, 2010; on September 17, 2010, the FTA provided this information to SHPO and also reiterated its proposed Section 106 Determination of Effect ("No historic Properties Effectuated"). On September 23, 2010, SHPO concurred with this Determination of Effect. The supplemental information, the FTA's Draft Finding of Effect and SHPO's concurrence documents have all been included in the EA as attachments in the Appendices.

Based upon the public review, including the supplemental Section 106 information, the MBTA and MART do not believe any substantive changes are needed in the EA. In summary, the EA documents that the project will not result in impacts to the human and natural environment. Given that this project does not have the potential to affect the quality of the human and natural

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environment, the MBTA is requesting that the Federal Transit Administration issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Wachusett Extension.

We appreciate your assistance on this project. If you have any questions on the document, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Andrew D. Brennan
Director of Environmental Affairs

Enclosure