

## **Route 110/113 Rotary Study Informational Meeting Summary**

**Thursday, April 8, 2004**

**6:30 PM – 8:00 PM**

**Searles Building**

**3rd Floor – Great Hall**

**41 Pleasant Street**

**Methuen, MA 01844**

### **MEETING AGENDA**

1. Welcome – Senator Steven A. Baddour
2. Introductions
3. Study Process
  - A) Goals, Evaluation Criteria, Public Participation
  - B) Issues Evaluation
  - C) Alternatives Development
  - D) Alternatives Analysis/Evaluation
  - E) Recommendations
4. Role of the Study Advisory Committee
5. Next Steps
6. Comments and Questions

#### **1. Welcome – Senator Steven A. Baddour**

Senator Baddour opened the meeting by introducing himself to the attendees and welcoming them to the informational meeting. He pointed out the reason everyone is there is because the Route 110/113 Rotary in Methuen is one of the worst intersections in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Senator also noted that the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) recently conducted a study of Interstate 93 through the region. He continued that this new study would look at the rotary in more detail with more input from the public because of the expected impacts. This meeting tonight is intended to start the dialogue with MassHighway, and to get the public involvement process started. An advisory panel is being formed to facilitate involvement from the public, so that the study can propose solutions that have the least amount of impact. Next, the Senator introduced and turned the meeting over to Ken Miller from the Bureau of Transportation Planning and Development (now the Office of Transportation Planning).

**2. Introductions**

On behalf of Secretary of Transportation Daniel Grabauskas and MassHighway Commissioner John Cogliano, Ken Miller thanked everyone for attending. Ken then proceeded to introduce Gaylord Burke - Director of the MVPC, Bob Frey - Manager of Statewide Planning, Connie Raphael - MassHighway District 4, Ethan Britland - Statewide Planning Unit, Mark Guenard - MPO Activities Unit, and Tony Komornick from the MVPC. Ken also thanked Senator Baddour for attending and for his help with getting the study process underway.

Ken stressed the importance of having an advisory panel with local membership. Residents and others with local knowledge of the area can help significantly in defining and addressing the issues. He noted that this study is going to build upon some of the issues covered in the MVPC's I-93 study, which looked at the I-93 corridor and interchanges from Andover to the New Hampshire state line. The I-93 study analyzed seven alternatives for the Route 110/113 Rotary in Methuen. Ken added that several of the alternatives may be feasible, but the study did not recommend a preferred alternative.

Ken stated that the study process would take a fresh look at the rotary by examining a wide variety of issues, and then come to an agreement regarding recommendations for the area. This could include short and long-term improvements such as transit services and/or roadway improvements. Ken stressed to everyone that this is a planning study and any proposed solutions still have to go through the environmental, design and construction processes, which can take many years to complete. Ken turned the meeting over to Bob Frey, Manager of Statewide Planning, to discuss MassHighway's study process.

**3. Study Process**

Bob proceeded to outline the five-step study process that Planning uses to conduct its transportation studies, starting with Task 1 – Goal and Objectives. This task is intended to develop the framework that will be used to conduct the study. The first subtask is to define the study area. Next is to establish the evaluation criteria, which will be used to assess the benefits and impacts of the alternatives being developed. Sample evaluation criteria include traffic flow, safety, congestion, residential impacts and environmental impacts. Another major subtask of Task 1 is the public participation plan. This plan will consist of two major components: advisory committee meetings and public informational meetings. Advisory committees are also known as working groups, study advisory groups, or task forces. Depending on the scope of the study, an advisory committee can be five to ten people, or more than thirty. The purpose of the advisory committee is to maintain public involvement throughout the study process and provide input to many aspects of the study. The second level of the public participation plan involves conducting public informational meetings to give the general public an opportunity to comment on the study. Typically, one is held at the beginning to introduce the study and to solicit input on the existing conditions. A second meeting is convened to present the alternatives, and to solicit comments again. The third meeting typically presents proposed recommendations and solicits comments. This type of two-tiered public participation plan has worked very well in past transportation studies. In addition, press releases and websites have also been used to notify the public and distribute information regarding a study. A schedule of the public participation plan will be formed at the beginning of the study.

Bob proceeded by explaining that the next major task is to develop the existing conditions and issues evaluation. Task 2 involves data gathering and collection used to analyze the base year conditions. In addition, constraint mapping of elements such as environmental factors, wetlands, and land use will be performed. Next, the future conditions will be analyzed, which are based mainly on forecasted traffic volumes and expected development.

The third major task of the study is to develop the alternatives. In addition to a no-build scenario, the study will look at a whole range of options including transit, travel demand management (TDM), and transportation systems management (TSM). These alternatives will be developed based input from the committee and data such as average daily traffic counts and manual turning movement counts, which are used to evaluate the extent of issues and the effectiveness of the alternative. The development process will include both short-range (within five years) and long-range alternatives (typically between five and ten years or longer).

The fourth task of the study is the alternatives analysis, which involves the first screening process. This initial screening is done to eliminate the impractical alternatives from further consideration. The alternatives that remain will proceed to the next round of analysis. In this step, the evaluation criteria are used to assess the benefits and impacts of the transportation alternatives. Various analysis tools are also used such as regional travel demand models and micro-simulation programs. The end result of the alternatives analysis may be one alternative or a combination of alternatives bundled for the desired purpose, as well as a general ranking of the preferred alternatives based on qualitative and quantitative criteria. Numeric scoring for rankings is generally avoided because people place different values on evaluation criteria – i.e., what's most important to one group of people (environment, business growth, etc.) is not necessarily the top priority for another. The desired outcome is to reach an agreement on one or a set of preferred alternatives. However, in some cases a general agreement cannot be reached. Planning tries to achieve general agreement with a study advisory committee and then, as mentioned above, present the proposed alternatives to the general public through open informational meetings. After soliciting input from the general public on the proposed alternatives, the study team goes back and refines the alternatives into short and long-range categories and possible packaging of multiple alternatives. These alternatives could include highway, transit, TDM (i.e. alternative work hours or transit pass subsidies), and TSM (i.e. ramp metering, intelligent transportation systems, or dynamic message boards).

The last step in the study process is to finalize the recommendations and publish the Final Report and Executive Summary.

Bob reiterated that the preceding five tasks make up our typical study process, but as in all studies, we modify the scope to fit the context. In this case, the study scope will be modified significantly because the MVPC study of I-93 has done a majority of the work for the rotary but no preferred alternative was chosen. The I-93 study will be considered a starting point for this Route 110/113 Rotary Study.

The question was asked if the I-93 study is available. Bob responded that it's on the MVPC website and in local libraries, however it's still a draft document.

The question was asked how long will it take for this study and Bob replied approximately one year. Ken added that this is the beginning of a process in which we will all work together for general agreement. It's also a process designed so that at the end of the study people are satisfied with how it was conducted and we can move forward with recommendations.

#### **4. Role of Study Advisory Committee**

Next, Ken discussed the role of the Study Advisory Committee (SAC), which MassHighway is working with Senator Baddour to establish. The intent of an SAC is to get everyone involved that may have a stake in the study. However, it should be noted that if one is considering being a member of the SAC, there is a good amount of work involved in the process.

In addition to an SAC, there will also be informational meetings where the general public can stay informed and give input on the study. Ken then went through the proposed membership list to determine how it should be modified.

The question was asked if anyone has been overlooked as an SAC member. Senator Baddour then went through the citizen advisors on the list and pointed out where in the study area each one resides. Frank DaSilva was then added as a citizen advisor. Bob added that on other studies neighborhood groups are sometimes formed, and one representative from the group channel the concerns to the study process. Bob equated the advisory group's participation to a 'sounding board' that we can use to gauge how the public feels about certain aspects of the study.

Ken added that MassHighway is not included in the draft SAC membership list because we cannot advise ourselves. This SAC was formed so that we can hear what everyone has to say about the study.

Ken stated the study could be done in-house, drawing on MassHighway resources, however other options are available.

One recent example of this type of process is the Connecticut River Crossing Transportation Study. A new bridge over the Connecticut River was not recommended as an alternative. Instead, improvements to the local roadways and an interchange on I-91 were recommended as short to medium-range solutions and a long-range solution, respectively.

#### **5. Next Steps**

Ken stated that the next steps would be to finalize the scope, clarify responsibilities, and to plan the first meeting of the SAC.

#### **6. Comments and Questions**

The question was asked if this study would take into consideration the proposed widening of I-93 from the MVPC study. Ken replied that the modeling forecasts used in this study will take into account any expected changes to I-93. He reiterated that this study will build on information from the I-93 Study.

The question was asked if this study will start out with the seven proposals from I-93 Study. Ken answered yes, but we will also look at other alternative, because if there had been a clear-cut solution then they wouldn't have proposed further study of the rotary. Instead, they would have recommended an alternative or set of alternatives.

Ken added that when he was working on the South Weymouth Naval Air Station Study, it took one and a half years to develop the alternatives. They were presented to the public and comments were received. The study team went back and came forward with better set of alternatives.

Bob added that language in the text of the executive summary of the I-93 study shows that no consensus was achieved on the best alternative or set of alternatives.

The question was asked if traffic from Dracut would be taken into consideration. Ken answered in the affirmative.

The question was asked if sound barriers would be erected near houses that have been there for generations. Ken stated that any alternative would attempt to mitigate the impacts to the fullest extent possible.

Senator Baddour added that barriers are being installed all over the state, and that he would promote the construction of sound barriers around the interchange by working with state officials.

Ken stated that some alternatives developed might actually make the footprint of the interchange smaller.

An attendee stated that this study will go in and propose things that will destroy the area and that it shames him to live in the neighborhood. Ken responded that there are no preconceived notions going into this study and that any alternatives already proposed are not ours. They came from the I-93 study, which was a good study. Bob added also, that we're at the beginning of the process for this study and we haven't looked at the I-93 very closely as of yet. Ken added that the I-93 study suggests conducting an EIR as the next step, but we're taking a different approach.

The question was asked about short-range solutions and how long they may take. Ken answered that things like roadway striping, new signs, and other improvements of this type can be implemented in much less than five years.

An attendee asked how the rotary came to be designated as one of the worst accident locations in the state. Ken responded that the Registry of Motor Vehicles data and crash records were analyzed to determine rankings.

An attendee stated that the study should be looking at volumes on Route 113 from the rotary to Dracut. Another attendee added that the ramps into the rotary currently function as two-lanes ramps.

A question was asked about the allowance of the I-93 breakdown lane as a travel lane. Ken responded that it was first allowed a couple of years ago, on condition that it would be temporary until a study was conducted.

The statement was made from an attendee that one option is that we could do nothing.

An additional statement was voiced that the local residents are being held hostage because they can't sell their homes.

The question was asked how often would MassHighway have meetings. Ken responded that the majority of SAC meetings would be product-driven. However, there will also be public informational meetings at significant milestones.

## **7. Conclusion**

Ken closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending, and that we look forward to conducting the study.