



FEIS/FEIR Names Stoughton Route as the Preferred Alternative

The US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and MassDOT released the **Final Environmental Impact Statement/ Final Environmental Impact Report** (FEIS/FEIR) on South Coast Rail for public review on September 23, 2013. The FEIS/FEIR is a combined federal and state document produced by the Corps summarizing the environmental review of the project. MassDOT adopted the federal document – the FEIS – as the state Final Environmental Impact Report – FEIR – with some additions. As part of the environmental review process, the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) office will accept public comments on the FEIS/FEIR until October 26, 2013. As part of the public review, MassDOT is sponsoring two public Open Houses to provide information on the FEIR. See the box on page 4 for information on the civic engagement and comment process.

As documented in the FEIS/FEIR, based on extensive analysis of environmental benefits and impacts, MassDOT has identified the Stoughton route as the Commonwealth's preferred alternative for the South Coast Rail project. The Corps has also concluded that the Stoughton Electric Alternative is the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA), clearing the path for the project to advance.

The FEIS/FEIR summarizes the alternatives for restoring train service to the South Coast. It outlines

the Corps' conclusion that there is no practicable alternative to the Stoughton Electric Alternative with less environmental impact. The FEIS/FEIR Preface documents how MassDOT has complied with the requirements of the Certificate issued by the Secretary of Environmental Affairs on the Draft Environmental Impact Report, and confirms MassDOT's choice of the Stoughton route as the preferred alternative.

A Long Trip

Before 1958, southeastern Massachusetts was served by commuter rail to New Bedford and Fall River via the Old Colony Railroad System. Trains left South Station and traveled via Canton Junction along the Stoughton Branch railroad. Once service was discontinued, commuter rail was only available along the Boston-Providence Shore Line and the Old Colony Middleborough Line, with no easy access for commuters from Taunton, Fall River or New Bedford.

Restoring rail service to the South Coast region has been studied extensively for almost 20 years. The Patrick Administration has made completion of the FEIS/FEIR – and advancing the project to final design and permitting – a transportation priority. The cities of Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford are the only cities within 50 miles of Boston that are not served by commuter rail.

After previous efforts were not advanced, MassDOT determined that an alternative had to be developed through a combined state and federal environmental review. The coordinated process began with a joint federal/state scoping process, which resulted in a Certificate from the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs under MEPA and a scope of work for the Draft EIR on April 3, 2009. The combined draft document was filed in March 2011, and a Certificate was issued with the scope for the FEIR on June 29, 2011. The Preface outlines how the FEIR meets the requirements established in the Certificate. As required by MEPA, the Secretary of Environmental Affairs is soliciting public comments on the FEIR.

Reviewing the FEIS/FEIR

The FEIS/FEIR is in two volumes with more than 2,000 pages. The appendices are on an accompanying DVD. There are many color figures, charts and tables in the report. MassDOT is making available stand-alone copies of the Executive Summary, which are available with or without a full document on DVD. MassDOT has also produced a summary of the document and this fact sheet.

The FEIS/FEIR is a substantial document. It contains nine chapters and a Response to Comments on the DEIS/DEIR, along with technical appendices. The DEIS/DEIR looked at five alternatives for transit to the South Coast (No-Build or Enhanced Bus; three Commuter Rail alternatives; and a Rapid Bus Alternative).

The FEIS/FEIR evaluates three sets of alternatives:

- A No-Build/Enhanced Bus Alternative
- The Stoughton Alternative (diesel and electric variations)
- The Whittenton Alternative (diesel and electric variations)

South Coast Rail trains would. . .

- Run with double-decker coaches if needed to increase capacity
- Serve approximately 4,570 new daily riders
- Provide a 77-minute run time between New Bedford and Boston and a 75-minute run time between Fall River and Boston (current estimate for electric alternative)
- Build 10 new train stations, relocate Stoughton Station and use the existing Canton Center Station
- Eliminate almost 256,000 vehicle miles traveled on roads and highways



A turtle uses a critter tunnel to pass beneath the Greenbush Line tracks. South Coast Rail includes similar crossings to encourage wildlife passage.

Following the public review of the DEIS/DEIR, the Corps eliminated the Attleboro Alternatives and re-evaluated the Rapid Bus Alternative, examining ways to improve ridership and eliminate bottlenecks. Many modifications were developed and evaluated. (They are described in Appendix 3.1-E, Modified Rapid Bus Technical Memorandum.) Despite these efforts, the Rapid Bus Alternative continued to show lower ridership, much higher cost and greater environmental impacts than the commuter rail alternatives. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) concurred that the Rapid Bus Alternative would degrade service on the interstate highway system and thus was not viable. The Corps, therefore, did not evaluate the Rapid Bus Alternative in the FEIS/FEIR.

The Whittenton Alternatives differ slightly from the Stoughton Alternatives in using the Whittenton Branch and a short segment of the Attleboro Secondary through Taunton, rather than the straight route from Raynham to Taunton. The Whittenton route would be slightly longer and include more grade crossings. Although the Stoughton Alternatives have slightly greater impacts on aquatic resources, the Corps determined that the Whittenton Alternative has other environmental consequences, more noise impacts on environmental justice communities, and would affect public safety in downtown Taunton due to the number of grade crossings required.

The Preferred Alternative

The map on page 3 shows the route of the Stoughton Alternative and existing and proposed stations. The FEIS/FEIR details the transportation benefits of the Alternative and its potential impacts on noise, visual, wetlands, environmental justice, air quality and other social, historic and environmental resources.

How does the final document differ from the 2011 DEIS/DEIR? The Preface and Guide to the FEIS/FEIR detail the differences, but in brief, the FEIS/FEIR includes:

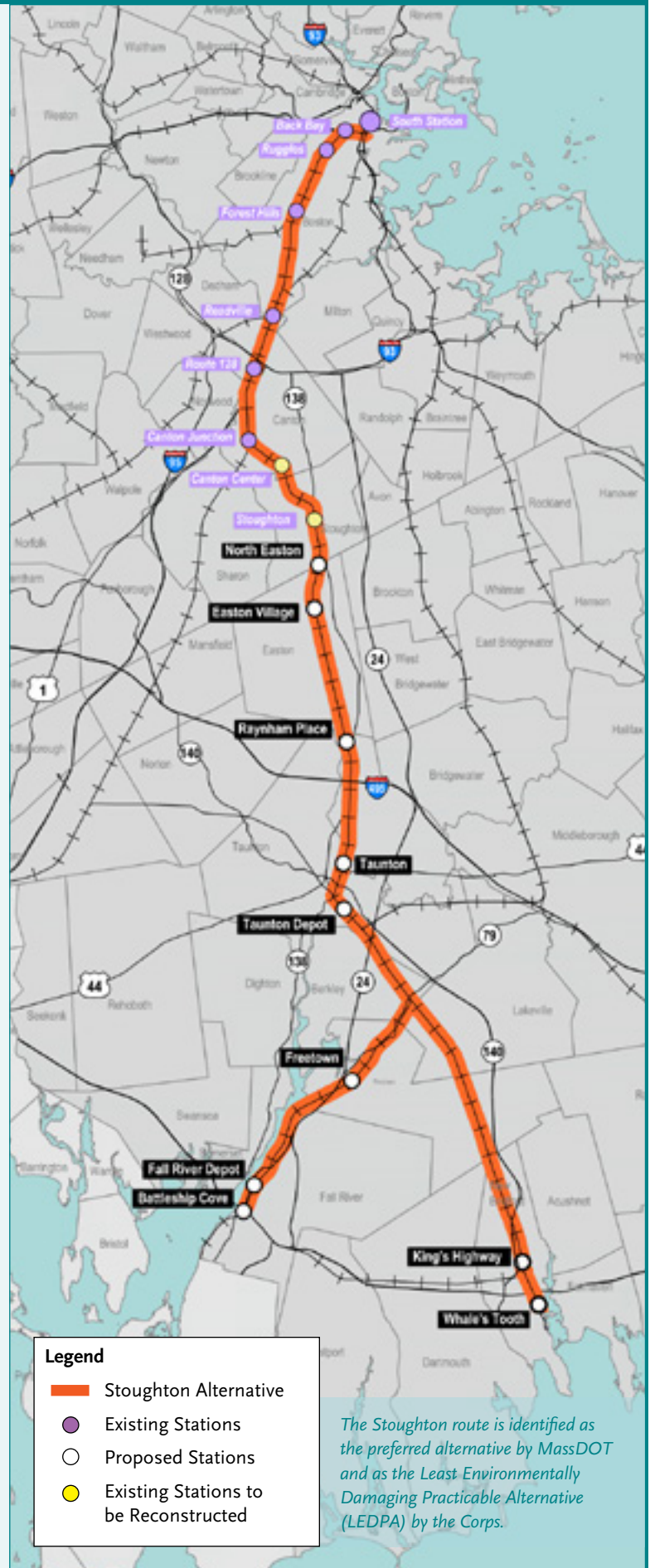
- Advances on designs of the tracks, stations and layover facilities to help address impacts on wetlands and natural resources
- More accurate estimates of wetland impacts based on wetland delineations approved by the Conservation Commissions and Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)
- A refined operating plan and schedule and updated ridership figures
- Overnight layover facility locations and details for the Fall River and New Bedford lines
- Changes in the proposed Stoughton Station location to relieve traffic congestion
- A detailed description of measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate environmental impacts (see Chapter 7)
- An Evaluation Plan with a monitoring component to assess smart growth implementation

The Corps concluded that there is no practicable alternative to the Stoughton Electric Alternative that would have less environmental impact. However, MassDOT has not identified a preferred mode for the Stoughton route. While the electric mode provides more transportation advantages (a slightly faster trip and higher ridership) and also benefits air quality, it would have greater visual impacts, affects more historic resources and would be substantially more expensive to build, operate and maintain. The Stoughton Electric Alternative represents the worst-case analysis with respect to historic and visual resources (compared to the diesel option), and MassDOT will weigh public comment and these other factors as it advances the project.

Next Steps

The MEPA review process will end once the Secretary issues the Final Certificate, which will include any additional requirements for mitigation or avoidance of impacts. The NEPA process will conclude with the issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) by the Corps.

Once the state environmental review process is completed, MassDOT can invest in developing the final design plans for the project and can obtain all of the required permits. The MBTA will assume a primary role in final design. Although MassDOT has begun the permitting processes, none of the state or federal



Legend

- Stoughton Alternative
- Existing Stations
- Proposed Stations
- Existing Stations to be Reconstructed

The Stoughton route is identified as the preferred alternative by MassDOT and as the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) by the Corps.

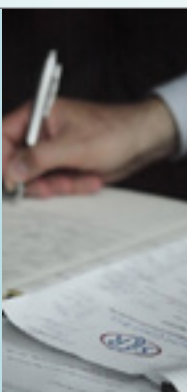
agencies can issue permits until the MEPA process is completed and they receive final design plans for the project, which is currently only at the conceptual or preliminary design stage. MassDOT will seek Coastal Zone Management Consistency Determination approval and apply for the required permits:

- Corps of Engineers Section 404 Permit
- MA Wetlands Protection Act Permit (DEP)
- Water Quality Certificate (DEP)
- MA DEP Waterways Licenses for Bridges
- MA NHSEP Conservation and Management Permit
- NPDES Construction Permit (EPA)
- US Coast Guard Bridge Permits

Information on these steps will be shared with the public in future email updates, on the project website and in community briefings.

How can I comment?

MassDOT will be hosting two Open Houses, and will accept written comments at these events. Comments can also be submitted in writing to the Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Comments should also be copied to the Corps. Comments will be accepted between September 25 and October 26, 2013.



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Coming Next...

- Five-Year Update of South Coast Rail Community Priority Areas
- Completed Technical Assistance Projects

Where Can I Find the FEIS/FEIR?

Copies of the FEIS/FEIR are available for review in a number of formats and locations:

- On the Army Corps of Engineers website, www.nae.usace.army.mil/Missions/ProjectsTopics/SouthCoastRail.aspx, and the South Coast Rail website, www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.
- At the public libraries in these communities:

Achushnet	Freetown
Assonet	Lakeville
Attleboro	Mandfield
Berkley	Milton
Boston, State Transportation Library and Boston Public Library	New Bedford
Braintree	Norton
Canton	Quincy
Dedham	Randolph
Easton	Raynham
Fall River	Sharon
Foxborough	Stoughton
	Taunton
	West Bridgewater

- On DVD by request to Kerri Chace, kchace@reginavilla.com or 617-357-5772 x 16.
- In print, but in limited quantities due to the cost of reproduction, by request to Kerri Chace (see the bullet above).

Contact Information

If you would like more information about the project or to be added to the project distribution list for email notifications of meetings and other updates, please contact Jean Fox, Manager of South Coast Rail, by email to Jean.Fox@state.ma.us or phone at (857) 368-8853. Project information and updates, including information on what's new with the project and upcoming meetings, are posted on the project website at www.mass.gov/southcoastrail.

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