

**PIONEER VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION (PVPC)**  
**Minutes of the Virtual Zoom Meeting Held on Thursday, December 9, 2021**  
**Springfield, Massachusetts 01104**

**Commission Members Present Were:**

Nita Abbott	Alternate Commissioner	Granby
Doug Albertson	Alternate Commissioner	Belchertown
Isaac Bauer	Commissioner	Worthington
Joanna Brown	Commissioner	South Hadley
Lillian Camus	Commissioner	Granby
Joshua Carpenter	Alternate Commissioner	Ludlow
William Dwyer	Commissioner	Hadley
Judith Eiseman	Commissioner	Pelham
Christopher Flory	Commissioner	Williamsburg
Jon Goddard	Alternate Commissioner	Southwick
Walter Gunn	Commissioner	Longmeadow
Holly Hendricks	Alternate Commissioner	Williamsburg
Richard Holzman	Commissioner	Chester
Michael Hutchins	Commissioner	Blandford
Edmund Jaworski	Alternate Commissioner	Hatfield
Jack Jemsek	Commissioner	Amherst
George Kingston	Commissioner	East Longmeadow
Kate Kruckemeyer	Alternate Commissioner	Holyoke
Cynthia Labrie	Commissioner	Chicopee
Linda LeDuc	Alternate Commissioner	Palmer
Michael Marciniec	Commissioner	Palmer
Jay Moore	Commissioner	Wilbraham
Mark Paleologopoulos	Commissioner	Agawam
Marcus Phelps	Commissioner	Southwick
Jonathan Torcia	Alternate Commissioner	East Longmeadow
David Whitehill	Alternate Commissioner	Northampton

**Guest Speakers**

Chris Brewer, Vice President, Economics and Planning, AECOM  
Stephen Gazillo, *Vice President, Transportation Planning, AECOM*  
Dan Hodge, *Executive President, Cambridge Econometrics*  
Eric Lesser, *Massachusetts State Senator*  
Meredith Slesinger, *Rail and Transit Administrator, Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT)*  
Lyle Wray, Executive Director Emeritus, Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG)

**Guests Present**

Bob Daley, Finance Committee, Town of Chester  
Jon Gould, Liaison, Office of Adam Hinds, Senator representing Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin, Hampden Counties  
Michael Harrison, Pioneer Valley Radio  
Ben Heckscher, Trains in the Valley  
Ben Hood, Co-Founder, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop  
Andrew Jennings, Transportation Consultant  
Clete Kus, Transportation Program Manager, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC)  
Zane Lumelsky, Independent Rail Consultant, Knowledge Corridor Services  
Tom Matusko, Executive Director, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC)  
Joel McAuliffe, Deputy Chief of Staff for State Senator Eric Lesser  
Ann Miller, Co-Founder, Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop

Christian MilNeil, Editor, StreetsblogMASS  
Andy Myers, Finance Committee, Town of Chester  
Christopher Parker, Town of Wendell Planning Board  
Lindsay Sabadosa, State Representative, 1<sup>st</sup> Hampshire District  
Rebecca Townsend, Longmeadow Town Moderator  
John Weston, Director of Surface Transportation, Harris, Miller, Miller & Hanson (HMMH)

**PVPC Staff Present:**

Rana Al-Jammal, Senior Planner Specialist  
Patrick Beaudry, Manager of Public Affairs  
Patty Gambarini, Principal Environmental Planner/Section Manager  
Indrani Kowlessar, Director of Human Resources  
Catherine Ratté, Principal Environmental Planner/Section Manager  
Kimberly H. Robinson, MUP, Executive Director  
Dana Roscoe, Principal Planner/Transportation Manager  
Gary Roux, Principal Planner/Traffic Manager

**Communities Not Represented at the December 9, 2021 Commission Meeting**

Brimfield	Huntington	Springfield
Chesterfield	Middlefield	Tolland
Cummington	Monson	Wales
Easthampton	Montgomery	Ware
Goshen	Plainfield	West Springfield
Granville	Russell	Westfield
Hampden	Southampton	Westhampton
Holland		

1. Chairman's Call to Order, Welcome and Minutes of the Commission Meeting Held October 14, 2021

The December 9th virtual meeting of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Planning Commission Chair Walter Gunn who welcomed the PVPC Commissioners, Alternate Commissioners, PVPC Staff, and distinguished guests. Following introductions, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to address the October 14, 2021 PVPC Meeting minutes.

MOVED BY DOUG ALBERTSON, SECONDED BY RICHARD HOLZMAN, TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE COMMISSION MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2021. THE MINUTES WERE APPROVED WITH FIVE ABSTENTIONS.

Executive Director Kimberly H. Robinson recognized and thanked Executive Director Emeritus Lyle Wray of the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) for partnering with the PVPC over the years. Ms. Robinson announced the presentation of a Certificate to Mr. Wray in recognition of the collaboration between the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the Capitol Region Council of Governments and Mr. Wray's assistance in the completion of many collaborative projects including the New England Knowledge Corridor, the HUD Sustainable Communities Grant and his East-West Rail efforts. Ms. Robinson added best wishes for Mr. Wray's retirement and underscored that he will be missed.

## 2. Presentations and Status update on East-West Rail

Ms. Robinson thanked all of the guest speakers and announced that after their presentations, there would be a roundtable discussion facilitated by Principal Planner Dana Roscoe. Mr. Roscoe invited AECOM Vice President, Steve Gazillo, to speak about the Economic Impact Analysis Review.

### Economic Impact Analysis Review

Mr. Gazillo stated that he and Chris Brewer, AECOM Vice President of Economics and Planning, will present an economic analysis of the potential economic benefits of proposed rail improvements in the region, namely the completion of the Hartford Line between Hartford and Springfield and the East-West Rail improvements between Springfield and Worcester which will re-establish the Inland Route from Boston to New York via Springfield and Hartford.

Mr. Gazillo asked that everyone keep the following questions in mind during his and Mr. Brewer's presentation: what have been the impacts of long-term disinvestment in rail for our region; can rail investment help us reverse the regional trend of flat growth in jobs and population; will rail investment lead to positive economic development; and how does rail investment relate to new infrastructure investment and the Jobs Act.

Mr. Brewer remarked that Metro Hartford-Springfield, comprised of Hampshire, Hampden and Hartford Counties, is not growing economically as well as the Northeast Corridor. He explained that Metro Hartford-Springfield hasn't had the same level of transit infrastructure that the Northeast Corridor has had and that has affected its ability to sustain industries that rely on transit ridership services. Mr. Brewer reported that Metro Hartford-Springfield lost most of its regional rail access in the 1970s and work from home trends have been increasing for more than ten years in metro areas with limited transit infrastructure. He indicated that cities that have robust transit infrastructure have fewer workers working from home so transit infrastructure has become a key economic differentiator along with new residential construction and poverty rate. But, Mr. Brewer asked, how can capacity for transit oriented development, rail infrastructure, and higher density residential development be enhanced. Mr. Brewer indicated that increased transit oriented development in Metro Hartford-Springfield would attract new construction jobs and households resulting in an incremental growth in jobs.

Mr. Wray commented that there is no other investment in our region that will have the ten to one investment return that East-West Rail has. He underscored that this is transportation for economic growth.

### Project Funding Possibilities

Massachusetts State Senator Eric Lesser stated that in order to qualify for funding, East-West Rail, which is a major federal infrastructure project, has to meet a certain cost-benefit benchmark in order to be considered by the Federal Rail Administration (FRA). However, the current Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) ridership projections don't meet that threshold because they don't reflect the actual demand. Senator Lesser explained that the PVPC in collaboration with CROG did its own analysis which included potential Metro Hartford ridership, whereas MassDOT did not include Connecticut ridership. He reported that when that ridership is included, the ridership estimate increases by 54% from 469,000 people using the East-West Rail link to 720,000 people. Senator Lesser underscored that MassDOT needs to update its ridership estimates.

Senator Lesser remarked that Amtrak plans to use the \$66 billion in funding it received from the recently passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to advance rail projects along the Northeast Corridor. Although East-West Rail is in Amtrak's plans, Senator Lesser emphasized that unified Massachusetts, Connecticut, and federal coordination, both locally and regionally, is needed for the promotion of East-West Rail. He indicated that the Future of Work Commission has shown that Massachusetts business leaders believe that this is the time when East-West Rail can become a reality because of the prevalence of remote and hybrid workers. Senator Lesser

remarked that if there's an East-West Rail, workers can work part time in their own homes in western Massachusetts and work part of their work week in Boston or in New York City. He concluded his presentation by emphasizing the importance of the Worcester, Springfield, Hartford and New Haven members of Congress working collectively in partnership to make East-West Rail a reality.

#### Ridership Analysis Presentation

Dan Hodge, Cambridge Econometrics Executive Vice President, reported that the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NNEIRI), a study that was completed in June 2016, examined the Boston to Montreal via Springfield corridor and the Inland Route of Boston to Springfield to New Haven. Mr. Hodge explained that the study focused on Boston-Springfield infrastructure improvements and it proposed eight trains a day between Boston and Springfield including direct service to Hartford, New Haven and New York City. The infrastructure cost for improving the railroad tracks was approximately \$300 million and travel time was estimated at 2 ½ hours for Boston to Springfield.

Mr. Hodge reported that MassDOT's East-West Passenger Rail (EWPR) Study, completed in January 2021, focused on the Boston to Springfield to Pittsfield route and proposed 8-10 trains a day, slightly faster travel time between Boston and Springfield, and capital costs in the \$2.4 to \$4.6 billion range. Mr. Hodge explained that the estimated ridership numbers in the EWPR study are now greater than NNEIRI's estimated ridership numbers. He believes there's reason to think that there will be more growth in East-West passenger rail ridership. Mr. Hodge underscored that more people living and working near rail stations will increase passenger rail ridership.

Mr. Hodge then advocated for more passenger rail ridership to Boston, New York City, and Connecticut. He added that there is the potential for a strong market for passenger rail service from the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Amherst. Mr. Hodge remarked that that the EWPR Study indicated that there is also greater ridership potential for trips to Connecticut and New York City. He stated that if five out of ten trains going to Springfield continue on as direct service trains to Connecticut, ridership will increase by 54%.

Mr. Hodge concluded his presentation saying that updated economic assessment and ridership opportunities need to be added to rail study documents. He didn't recommend redoing the EWPR but instead he advocates adding some amendments and updates to the Study and creating a western Massachusetts inner city passenger rail authority.

#### MassDOT Governance Paper Review

MassDOT Rail and Transit Administrator Meredith Slesinger reported that MassDOT created the *Massachusetts Intercity Passenger Rail Governance White Paper* to provide background information on the issues that influence the framework of passenger rail operations in western Massachusetts. Ms. Slesinger explained that the purpose of this white paper is to provide key recommendations on passenger rail operations and governance options in order to inform the Massachusetts Legislature on next steps. She stated two key recommendations: (1) Amtrak should be the operator for proposed East-West Rail in western Massachusetts; and (2) a western Massachusetts intercity rail authority should be established to develop, manage and implement East-West Rail service. Ms. Slesinger added that this intercity rail authority should have the authority to enter into agreements, contract for inner city service, be eligible to receive federal and other funding, manage risk, and purchase insurance.

Ms. Slesinger remarked that there are differences in how commuter rail and intercity rail are funded. She reported that the East-West Rail alternatives are defined under federal regulation as Intercity Passenger Rail, and as such, East-West Rail can be operated by Amtrak. Ms. Slesinger explained that Amtrak is the only railroad that has the right to operate over any line in the national railroad network, and it has the ability to use any railroads' facilities. She indicated that the cost for Amtrak to use rail lines is based on the incremental costs and not the full cost of capital and maintenance. Also, Amtrak has been given preference in train dispatching in order to minimize

delays to Amtrak trains when they're operating on tracks that have both freight and passenger services. At this point, Ms. Slesinger remarked that she would conclude her presentation and give the Commissioners an opportunity to ask questions.

#### Next Steps Roundtable Discussion

Mr. Wray questioned the value added of having any kind of rail authority. Ms. Slesinger responded that having an independent intercity rail authority from a legal and regulatory perspective will help in the ability to match passenger rail services with local needs. She explained that the most successful passenger rail services around the country are those where independent authorities have been instituted.

Mr. Roscoe announced that George Kingston, Commission member representing the Town of East Longmeadow, has asked what opportunities might exist for the City of Springfield and western Massachusetts if East-West passenger rail is expanded. Dan Hodge replied that there are great opportunities and benefits of East-West Rail. Mr. Roscoe then addressed Ms. Slesinger saying that she had noted in the *Massachusetts Intercity Passenger Rail Governance White Paper* that expanded passenger rail service would be operated by Amtrak. Mr. Roscoe asked if passenger rail operated by Amtrak would be viable or could CSX provide service. Ms. Slesinger responded that because Amtrak has access rights, an operating agreement would need to be made between Amtrak and CSX. She added that MassDOT is negotiating with CSX as part of the potential Pan Am sale and CSX recently signed a support letter for MassDOT's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant application.

Mr. Roscoe remarked that one of the shortfalls noted in the East-West Rail Study was an inability to secure federal funding without a better return on investment and ridership numbers too low to have a competitive return on investment. Ms. Slesinger commented that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has established a planning process which adheres to the Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) for service development and infrastructure improvements. Ms. Slesinger indicated that FRA will be writing a new program for the \$12 billion that's in the bipartisan infrastructure law and steps have been taken to secure the CRISI grant for work to be done in the City of Springfield. She added that it's too soon to know the details of the new program that's being developed by the FRA. Mr. Roscoe asked if there is potential for having passenger rail from Vermont to Montreal. Ms. Slesinger replied that at this time, passenger rail service to Montreal is not being considered.

Mr. Roscoe asked what next steps the PVPC could take to advance the East-West Rail. Mr. Hodge replied that the PVPC, in collaboration with MassDOT, CRCOG and other partners, should determine the development of a western Massachusetts intercity rail authority. Ms. Slesinger noted that it would be helpful if the PVPC would encourage population density around railroad stations and along the passenger rail corridors that have been discussed and ensure that there are land use policies that encourage passenger rail ridership. Mr. Roscoe indicated that Marcus Phelps, Commission member representing the Town of Southwick, asked about the viability of the inland rail passenger route because of the inland route's potential for coastal flooding. Mr. Roscoe remarked that the short answer is that an inland route would be viable.

Mr. Gunn thanked Mr. Roscoe for being the round table moderator, and he thanked the guest speakers: Senator Eric Lesser, Steve Gazillo, Lyle Wray, Chris Brewer, Dan Hodge, and Meredith Slesinger for their presentations.

### 3. Schedule of the Commission and Executive Committee Meeting Dates for 2022

Mr. Gunn noted that 2022 schedule for the Commission meeting dates has been distributed to Commission members and Alternates. He remarked that it hasn't been decided yet whether the next Commission meeting scheduled for February 10<sup>th</sup> will be an in-person meeting or a Zoom meeting.

4. Community Reports/Updates From PVPC Commission Members

Mr. Gunn asked if there were any community reports. Mr. Phelps reported that the PVPC is partnering with the Town of Southwick to update the Town's Master Plan. Mr. Phelps underscored that it has been fifty years since Southwick's Master Plan was last updated. Richard Holzman, Commission member representing the Town of Chester, thanked Ms. Robinson and Mr. Gunn for a great meeting.

Jack Jemsek, Commission member representing the Town of Amherst, commented that a great deal of overwhelming technical information was presented in today's meeting. Mr. Gunn suggested that Mr. Jemsek meet with PVPC Executive Director Kim Robinson or with Principal Planner Dana Roscoe to obtain a better understanding of the East-West Rail studies. There being no other community reports, Mr. Gunn moved on to the next agenda item.

5. Executive Director's Highlights

Ms. Robinson announced that the PVPC is continually checking on available federal funding including Build Back Better Act funding and connecting with Pioneer Valley communities regarding funding opportunities.

6. Other Business

There being no further business to conduct, Mr. Gunn called for a motion to adjourn this Thursday, December 9, 2021, Commission meeting.

MOVED BY CYNTHIA LABRIE, SECONDED BY JOANNA BROWN, TO ADJOURN THIS THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9TH COMMISSION MEETING. THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS TO CONDUCT, THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED WITHOUT OBJECTION AT 7:05 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Albertson, Secretary/Clerk  
Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

List of Documents Distributed for this December 9th Meeting:

- Agenda for the Thursday, December 9, 2021 Commission Meeting
- Minutes of the October 14, 2021 Commission Meeting minutes
- Schedule of the 2022 Commission Meeting Dates
- Schedule of the 2022 Executive Meeting Dates