

## Site Option Development

At the public meeting held on May 22, 2014, the conceptual site options for a layover and station facility in or adjacent to the Town of Plaistow, NH were presented. Nine (9) potential layover facility site options were identified in four (4) general areas along the Plaistow Commuter Rail Extension Study Corridor. Seven (7) different potential station site options were identified. Each layover facility or station site option was evaluated based on a series of attributes that were identified to help evaluate the suitability of a site for further consideration. These attributes were categorized and summarized as they relate to the surrounding community, environmental conditions, and service operations.

Prior to the May 22, 2014 public meeting, conceptual plans were reviewed with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) at a meeting held on March 6, 2014. At the time of that meeting, eight (8) layover facility and five (5) station site options had been developed and were reviewed. The details of each preliminary site option were reviewed including the location, features, and the community, environmental, and operational attributes. PAC members were asked to seek input from interested constituents to facilitate any potential modification to the concept plans prior to the May 22, 2014 public meeting.

Following review of the eight (8) layover facility and six (6) station site options by the Town of Plaistow, the Board of Selectmen issued a May 20, 2014 letter that summarized their preferences regarding preferred sites and requested development of an additional option for a combination of a station and layover. This option, identified as Layover 9 and Station G, included the use of the 144 Main Street property owned by the Town of Plaistow. This property had been excluded from initial consideration due to the stipulation of a memorandum of understanding between NHDOT and the Towns of Plaistow and Atkinson that excluded specific sites in each respective municipality. The 144 Main Street property was later added to the list of potential sites to allow an option to be developed that would allow the preservation of a larger portion of the adjacent land parcel known as the Chart Industries property (now owned by Testa Realty, LLC) for potential future redevelopment.

The study team used input from the meetings and correspondence noted above to select three (3) alternatives to move forward for further development and analysis. The rationale for the selection of these three (3) alternatives is provided in the following sections.

## Initial Screening of Site Options

To facilitate needed further investigation of potential site options screening of the developed concept options was undertaken. Sites screened out and reasons for their elimination are provided below.

### **LAYOVER 1**

This layover site option is located in Plaistow at the northern end of the study corridor, directly adjacent to the border with the Town of Newton, NH. The layover is located off Kingston Road. The proposed layover tracks are oriented at almost 90 degrees off the mainline track.

The site footprint encroaches on sensitive wildlife habitat and wetlands to avoid crossing into Newton. This stipulation is from the MBTA/Pam Am Railroad agreement that limits consideration of extending commuter rail service to the approximate location of the Plaistow/Newton town line. The site is in close proximity to multiple residences to the south. Access to two adjacent businesses to the north (a bark mulching facility and trucking company) would have to be removed or relocated to accommodate the tracks. A route to relocate the business access does not appear to be feasible without causing significant impact to sensitive wildlife habitat.

Based on the impacts to the existing businesses, the substantial impacts to wetlands, and recommendation to progress consideration of other sites from the Town, and non-supportive comments at the public meeting, this site was screened out for further consideration.

### **STATION A**

Located just south of Layover 1 next to Kingston Road, this station site option is located on the opposite side of the tracks, which hinders operational efficiency if Layover 1 or another layover facility site option on the west side of the track is selected. Because Layover 1 was eliminated from further consideration, it would be difficult to efficiently operate trains between Station A and any of the remaining layover sites.

The future land use designation for the site is Resource Protection and Conservation Area and Medium Density Residential, which makes the development of a station on this site not consistent with the Town of Plaistow's Master Plan. The site has good access to Kingston Road, but the general character of the area is residential with numerous residences located within close proximity. The location on Kingston Road also is not convenient for access from Route 125, which would be a preferred access route for potential area riders.

Based on impacts to residential residents, inconsistency with future land use, and the elimination of Layover 1, Station A was screened out for further consideration.

### **LAYOVER 2**

This layover site option is located on a 35-acre property parcel owned by Testa Realty, LLC between Joanne Drive and Main Street. The layout for the layover facility extends away from the main line track to the west. The lead track off the main line is entered from the north and travels south into the facility. The train must change direction on the main line causing congestion for other train travel. The concept creates potential impacts on a potential sensitive archaeological resources area, as well as wetlands and stream buffer area. While the layout maintains some potential for adjacent development on the Testa Realty, LLC property, the layout requires a significant portion of the 35-acre site.

Based on impacts to natural resources that appear to be greater than similar options, Layover 2 this site was screened out for further consideration.

### **STATION B**

This station is located on the parcel owned by Testa Realty, LLC between Joanne Drive and Main Street. The location of the station has potential impacts on a potential sensitive archaeological resources area, wetlands, and stream buffer. Access to station parking is from Joanne Drive, which would require another stream crossing.

The station site was developed to be integrated with Layover 2. Based on impacts to natural resources and the elimination of Layover 2, Station B was screened out for further consideration.

### **LAYOVER 3**

This site option is located close to Layover 2 and Station B between Joanne Drive and Main Street, but has more impacts on the natural features of the Testa Realty, LLC and the Chart, Inc. properties to the west. The layout requires multiple tracks to cross a stream and it encroaches on wetlands and a potential sensitive archeological resources area. The northern half of the 35-acre Testa site remains available for potential future development, but in general, the site will be dominated by the layover facility and station area.

Based on impacts to natural resources, in particular the impact from multiple tracks over a stream, that appear to be greater than similar options, Layover 3 was screened out for further consideration.

### **STATION C**

The Station C site option is located on the Testa Realty, LLC and the Chart, Inc. properties between Joanne Drive and Main Street. The station is parallel with the Layover 3 facility. The station track and platform cross a stream and it encroaches on wetlands. The site remains available for potential future development. Access to the station parking is from the north through the 144 Main Street site.

Station C was developed to be integrated with Layover 2. Based on impacts to natural resources and the elimination of Layover 2, Station C was screened out for further consideration.

#### **LAYOVER 4**

This layover facility site option is located on the border of Atkinson and Plaistow on an undeveloped site behind Home Depot just before Atkinson Depot Road. The site is currently used for agricultural uses. The layout would require multiple tracks to cross a substantial stream that runs along the northern edge of parcel. Access to the site is from the north through the Home Depot parking lot. Grade differentials on the site would require much site work, including adding large amounts of fill, with anticipation of significant impacts to the stream. Additionally, comments during the public meeting were not supportive of this alternative based on perceived potential noise impacts to nearby receptors.

Based on impacts to natural resources and non-supportive public comments, Layover 4 was screened out for further consideration.

#### **LAYOVER 5**

This layover facility site option is located in Atkinson, on the east side of the main line track along the border with Plaistow on the site behind Home Depot. The site is in the general area of Layover 4. The site is currently used for agricultural uses. The site option layout would require multiple tracks to cross a substantial stream and a large grade differential between the north and south end of the site would require significant site work. The roadway to the layover is from the north via the Home Depot Parking lot, which creates potential traffic and access conflicts. Additionally, comments during the public meeting were not supportive of this alternative based on perceived potential noise impacts to nearby receptors.

Based on impacts to natural resources and non-supportive public comments, Layover 5 was screened out for further consideration.

#### **STATION E**

This station is located in Atkinson on the east side of the main line track on the site behind Home Depot. The station track would require crossing a stream. To access the layover facility, the train must change directions on the main line, causing operational congestion. The roadway to the station is from the north via the Home Depot Parking lot.

The station E site was developed to be integrated with Layover 5. Based on impacts to natural resources and the elimination Layover 5, Station E was screened out for further consideration.

#### **LAYOVER 7**

Located in Plaistow, just east of the Atkinson border, this layover facility site option is located on a 9.4-acre undeveloped site westerly of Home Depot. The site is currently used for agricultural uses. The layout is similar to Layover 5 and 6 but the train access point comes from the opposite direction. The layout would require multiple tracks to cross a stream along with the body of the

facility placed in wetlands. Due to the grade differences, a substantial amount of site work is required to accommodate a layover facility. The site lacks direct access to a major roadway. Consequently, the development of this site would require an easement through a residential parcel along Atkinson Depot Road, or a new access road parallel to the main line trucks under a bridge along Atkinson Depot Road. Additionally, comments during the public meeting were not supportive of this alternative based on perceived potential noise impacts to nearby receptors.

It is noted that Layover 4 and 5 are similar to Layover 7. It appears that Layover 7 would potentially be the most feasible site of the three. However, based on impacts to natural resources and non-supportive public comments, Layover 7 was also screened out for further consideration.

## **Sites Selected for Further Evaluation**

The following three (3) combinations of station and layover sites were selected to proceed as part of the alternatives development. The alternatives consist of a layover site and an assumed likely companion station. The need for a layover and station combination is based on the premise that operational efficiency requires that layover locations be near the terminus station of a given rail line.

### **1. Alternative 1**

#### **LAYOVER 6**

This layover is located on the east side of the main line track, which will minimize operational issues. Access to the layover is from a new road off Atkinson Depot Road. Designated as Light Industrial and Commercial Corridor on the town's Future Land Use Map. Layover 6 is located on an undeveloped parcel in the City of Haverhill, MA. The site is adjacent to existing industrial land and requires only one single stream crossing. The layover facility site option is located within the City's Business Park zoning district. The layover facility site would require access through a new driveway from a private roadway located on the south side of Atkinson Depot Road. This site is largely away from potential noise receptors.

A consideration of this site is the relatively long distance from layover site to any potential station site. This presents operational concerns that will be investigated further.

#### **STATION D**

This station is located off Westville Road and utilizes the existing park and ride lot. Access to the station parking is from Westville Road. The site is expected to need to plan for expansion of parking capacity.

Additionally, to minimize impacts to freight and the existing Amtrak DownEaster train, a dedicated station track would need to be constructed to allow passenger trains to terminate a run and hold until departure for the return inbound trip. The space for the station track is

constrained by an adjacent pond and wetland area. This would cause the station location to be located easterly of the park and ride lot. The anticipated station would affect an existing business and require a slight relocation of Westville Road that would impact open areas of residential property. The station is compatible with the Town of Plaistow's Master Plan.

## **2. Alternative 2**

### **LAYOVER 8**

This Layover is located off the Joanne Drive site on a parcel owned by Chart, Inc. The layover facility is angled away from the tracks to avoid wetlands and the stream buffer on the north edge of the parcel. This site will need to be configured to minimize operational impact that could occur from needing to access the mainline for access the station track. Modification of the site will be considered to minimize operational impacts.

The location of the layover site appears to have potential minimal impacts associated with noise. Access to the site could be configured from Route 125 or from the east through the Testa property.

### **STATION F**

This station is located along the mainline tracks with parking access from Joanne Drive. The station site option is located in close proximity to a few residences on Joanne Drive. However, the station avoids any wetland impacts.

This station was developed to be compatible with Layover 8. Access to the site could be configured from Route 125 or from the east through the Testa property

## **3. Alternative 3**

### **LAYOVER 9**

This layover is located on the Testa Realty, LLC, and the Town of Plaistow's 144 Main Street properties. Different from the other Testa property site options, this option places the layover parallel to the mainline. The benefit of this option is that it reduces the footprint on the Testa parcel. This layout increases the development potential on the remainder of the Testa property. The layout of this option requires minimal wetland and stream impacts.

### **STATION G**

This station is located on the Testa Realty, LLC and the Town of Plaistow's 144 Main Street properties. As with Layover 9, this option places the station parallel to the mainline. This option was developed to be utilized with Layover 9. The layout allows for potential development on the remainder of the properties. Access to the station is from Main Street.

As discussed above, most of the layover and station sites were developed to be compatible with nearby companion facility. However, each layover and station option is considered to have independent utility. As such, the evaluation of the sites may determine that a particular pairing of layover and station not initially considered may prove to be the preferred combination. This may result from modifications to initial layover and station configurations to accommodate additional information identified in supplemental field investigations.

It should be noted that the initial screening of the nine (9) layover and seven (7) station sites was undertaken to support a more in depth evaluation of the most potentially viable sites. The additional evaluation of the three (3) selected alternatives will include field investigation to further characterize natural resources, train operational considerations, and noise assessments of existing and future conditions. While it is assumed that options eliminated in the initial screening will not be considered further, should further investigation of the sites remaining from the initial screening identify unanticipated impacts that negatively change the initial evaluation of a site, then screened out sites may be revisited to evaluate the potential use of site that had previously been screened out.

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