



Civic Engagement for MassDOT and the MBTA's South Coast Rail Project

Purpose and Need: In April 2007, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) published the Patrick-Murray Administration's *Plan for Action* to initiate a new environmental review process for the South Coast Rail project, an initiative to restore passenger rail service between Boston and the South Coast communities of Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford. The project will address long-standing transportation inequity, encourage economic development, foster job creation and connect people with affordable housing options, while protecting the natural environment. A key component of the South Coast Rail project was the development of the *South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan*. The plan projects job growth related to the restoration of rail service to the region and provides South Coast communities with a planning road map to promote sustainable economic development and preserve open space. RVA initially planned and staffed a robust civic engagement campaign for the planning phase of the project and is staffing public outreach for PM/CM Services with the MBTA.

Environmental Review: RVA facilitated civic engagement public meetings in numerous South Coast communities for phase 1 of the project to identify a list of alternatives to move into the environmental review process. For the phase 2 environmental review, RVA worked with the project team on a wide-ranging civic engagement effort, which included public meetings, station workshops, legislative briefings and press conferences. Through both phases, RVA carried out a number of public involvement activities including:

- Staffing regular meetings with state and federal agencies around environmental and technical issues.
- Organizing, staffing and facilitating public meetings and workshops in South Coast Rail communities.
- Providing materials for meetings with the Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force, an advisory group made up of representatives from cities and towns and non-governmental organizations, including business associations and environmental groups.
- Staffing the New Bedford Transportation Working Group, an effort to assess and propose service improvements for the Southeastern Regional Transit Agency (SRTA); RVA staffed the meetings and assisted with development of an on-board and telephone survey for riders and non-riders. A Transportation Demand Plan was produced and the proposals were implemented by SRTA.

- Maintaining a database of approximately 2,000 municipal officials, state and federal regulators, elected officials, regional transit authorities and interested citizens for regular email and postal mailings of project updates and public meeting announcements.
- Organizing all comments received on the project and drafting responses on behalf of MassDOT when appropriate.
- Drafting and producing project fact sheets, press releases, meeting minutes and other public materials.
- Developing and designing a series of project displays for art galleries and libraries on the South Coast.
- Coordinating with MassDOT's Information Technology department to update and post new documents to the South Coast Rail website, www.southcoastrail.com.

As elements of the project were funded (e.g., rail bridges in New Bedford), RVA worked with the team and impacted communities on outreach and project updates. With the acceptance of the FEIS/FEIR, the focus has shifted to securing permits in the host communities; developing a wetlands mitigation plan; and completing final design with the MBTA. Outreach will continue to finalize station designs and prepare communities for construction.

Corridor Plan and Technical Assistance: The *South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan* is the result of a collaborative working process and partnership between the Commonwealth, local municipalities and regional planning agencies working in conjunction with the Southeastern Massachusetts Commuter Rail Task Force. As part of this process, the regional planning agency, SRPEDD, planned and participated in more than 100 public meetings and events that drew on the knowledge and insights of regional residents, businesses, planners and other organizations. RVA helped develop the Corridor Plan and following its release, RVA worked with MassDOT and the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to provide local cities and towns with technical assistance (TA) to help implement the Corridor Plan's objectives. RVA continues to work with South Coast communities and regional planning agencies on station planning, smart growth and greening the train policy development. MassDOT is about to fund the sixth year of TA.

Results and Verification: The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Planning Association gave the *South Coast Rail Economic Development and Land Use Corridor Plan* the 2009 President's Award for Outstanding Planning; the plan won several other awards as well.

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For more information on the project, please visit the website:
www.southcoastrail.com