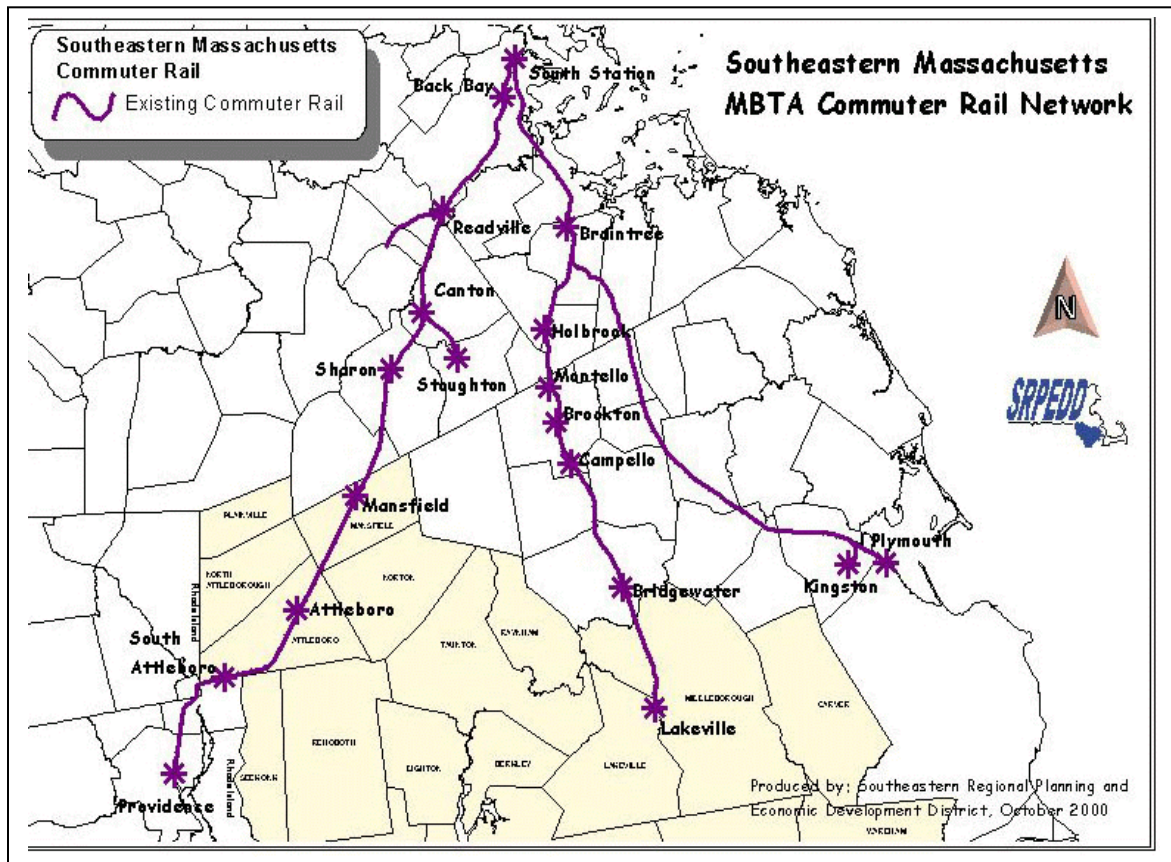


Chapter 11: Commuter Rail

Service

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) operates commuter rail service in the SRPEDD district on the Boston to Providence connection, also known as the “Attleboro or Shore Line” and on the Middleborough Branch of the Old Colony Line. There are four MBTA commuter rail stations in the region: Mansfield, Downtown Attleboro, South Attleboro and Lakeville. These stations are shown on the map below.

Map 11-1



The MBTA currently operates 15 inbound trips per weekday from South Attleboro, 16 inbound trips per weekday from Downtown Attleboro, and 17 inbound trips per weekday from Mansfield. South Attleboro and Downtown Attleboro have six inbound trains during peak period service between 5:35 a.m. and 8:20 a.m. and five outbound trains from 3:45 p.m. to 6:10 p.m. Mansfield has seven inbound trains during peak period service between 5:55 a.m. and 8:38 a.m. and the same five outbound trains from 3:45 p.m. to 6:10 p.m. Trains depart for Boston during the peak period between 20 and 50 minutes apart and about two

hours apart during the off-peak. The waiting time between trains is called “headway”. In Boston, the trains serve both the Back Bay Station and South Station.

The Lakeville station (which is also called the Middleborough/Lakeville station) receives 12 inbound trips to Boston per weekday. There are four peak period trains from 6:00 a.m. to 8:05 a.m. and four peak period trains from 3:45 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. In Boston, service ends at South Station, with stops at Quincy Center and Braintree.

All fares within the MBTA system were increased in September, 2000. The Attleboro stations are in fare Zone 7, which has a current fare of \$4.50 one-way and \$153 for a monthly pass. The Mansfield station is in fare Zone 6 with a one-way fare of \$4.25 and a monthly pass for \$145. The Lakeville station is in fare Zone 8 with a one-way fare of \$5.00 and a monthly pass for \$159. Within the MBTA commuter rail system, if a passenger purchases a monthly pass, that pass is also valid for unlimited travel on the subway system and bus system within greater Boston and on the inner harbor ferries.

Interstate Operation

Commuter rail service between Providence and Boston consists of 12 inbound and 11 outbound trips per weekday. Rhode Island service is negotiated between the two states through an agreement called the Pilgrim Partnership. In return for train service from the MBTA, Rhode Island transfers federal capital funds received from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to Massachusetts to be used by the MBTA. As part of the Pilgrim Partnership agreement, the train layover facility in South Attleboro will be moved into Rhode Island.

Providence service is in fare Zone 9, which costs \$5.75 for a one-way ticket and \$169 for a monthly pass. Average weekday ridership from the Providence station has grown from a ten-year average of 677 to over 1,000 passengers due to a recent increase in service.

The tracks used by the MBTA Attleboro Line are part of the Boston to New York “Shore Line”, also known as the Northeast Corridor. “MBTA Commuter Rail operations share the Northeast Corridor with AMTRAK for 43.6 miles from South Station in Downtown Boston to Providence, Rhode Island. The Boston-Providence segment of the Northeast Corridor is a double-track railroad with a passing siding 4.2 miles in length at Attleboro along the eastbound main track only.” (*MBTA, SDEIR, Vol. VI, Page B-1*)

The capacity of the tracks along the Northeast Corridor has been reduced because of the introduction of 150 MPH high-speed trains by AMTRAK. This restricts the ability of the MBTA to introduce additional train sets on this line.

“With the introduction of high-speed intercity rail service as part of AMTRAK’s new intercity service plan, the number of operating slots (for MBTA commuter trains) in a given hour decreases. This decrease in capacity is related to the safety requirements of operating higher speed trains. The faster moving trains require a longer distance to stop. They also catch up to slower moving trains (like the MBTA commuter trains) much quicker than the current intercity trains. As a result, the space between trains needs to be increased to keep them separated. The increased spacing between trains means fewer trains can operate in a given hour on the Northeast Corridor.” (MBTA, SDEIR, Vol. VI, Page EX-3,4)

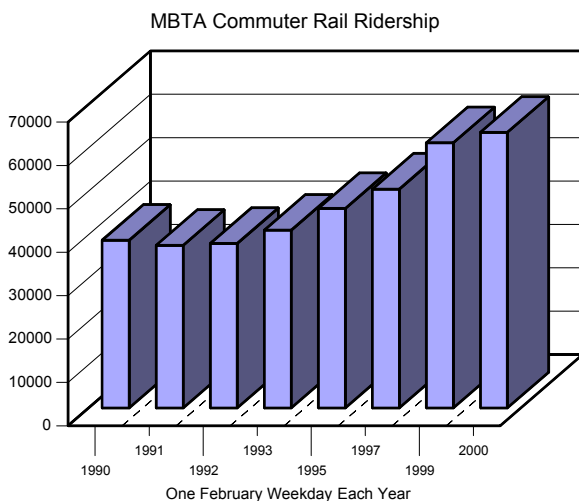
AMTRAK’s improvement to its intercity and interstate operation has resulted in a restriction on the MBTA’s ability to improve service on the Attleboro Line, unless the MBTA converts its fleet to high speed electrified engines, adds more passing tracks along the line, or constructs a third track from Attleboro to Readville.

Ridership

The Attleboro Line has the highest daily ridership of the nine MBTA Commuter Rail Lines. According to the most recent MBTA audit (October, 2002), inbound boardings for all MBTA Commuter Rail lines were 72,698 passengers in one day. Of these, 14,110 (19%) boarded the Attleboro Line, which included 1,771 at South Attleboro, 1,588 at Attleboro, and 1,677 at Mansfield.

The Lakeville/Middleborough station ridership has grown from 600 inbound passengers per weekday to 1,187 after just five years of service.

Figure 11-1



Commuter Parking

Future growth in ridership at the stations in the region is limited by an insufficient supply of parking. Mansfield and South Attleboro lots reach capacity by 7:00 - 7:15 a.m. each weekday. Attleboro Center fills up later in the morning, partly due to its lack of convenient highway access. The Lakeville lot has operated at capacity almost as soon as service was initiated there. The lot was expanded to 836 spaces in late 2000.

Parking capacity at the four stations are as follows:

Mansfield	800 total spaces (in three lots plus some on-street numbered spaces);
Attleboro Center	780 spaces (plus estimated 130 car capacity in the gravel lot at the corner of Durham and Pine Streets);
South Attleboro	762 total spaces; and
Lakeville	836 total spaces.

Intermodal Connections

The South Attleboro Station and the Attleboro Center Station are served by GATRA fixed route buses. The Rhode Island Transit Authority (RIPTA) does not provide bus service to the South Attleboro station. A bus from Downtown Pawtucket travels within one half mile of the station, but RIPTA refuses to cross the state line to connect to commuter rail.

Norton-Mansfield Shuttle

In February 2001, GATRA began a commuter rail shuttle from Norton to Mansfield that runs along Route 140 from Wheaton College in Norton to the Mansfield MBTA commuter rail station. The shuttle makes regular stops at a small satellite parking lot for commuters and at the Great Woods shopping plaza. It connects with a GATRA intercity bus route that runs between Taunton and Attleboro, and it is available to the general public anywhere along the route within Norton. (Mansfield officials voted for a closed-door policy with Mansfield, only allowing passengers to board and deboard at the train station.)

The shuttle addresses two transportation needs: 1) the Town of Norton was seeking options for residents who commute to Boston from the Mansfield station but have difficulty finding a non-resident parking space; and 2) Wheaton College was seeking a dependable and cost-effective way for its students (and faculty) to get to and from the station and have access to Boston. Both the Town and the College provide financial support for the shuttle.

The Town established a satellite commuter lot at a gas station for 25 cars. On the first day of the shuttle, 17 cars parked in the lot. It did not take long for the lot to be filled to its capacity. The Town is now seeking to expand its satellite parking. Between January and May 2003, there was a monthly average of 658 riders from the college and 1,034 average monthly commuter trips on the shuttle. The success of this commuter rail shuttle connection is attributed to the lack of sufficient parking at the station, particularly for non-Mansfield residents.

Mansfield Connection

Earlier, in 2000, GATRA had received Transportation Demand Management (TDM) funding to start a demand-response service to transport Mansfield residents between their homes and the commuter rail station. This service started off slowly, but is now bringing an average of 30 residents per day to the station. Lack of station parking is a motivation for Mansfield residents, but less so due to the number of Mansfield only spaces (more than half of the 800 spaces). The convenience of pick-up and drop-off at home is an added attraction of this service, particularly in extreme weather conditions.

Future Shuttles Planned

In 2002, GATRA received authorization to use additional TDM funding for more shuttles to commuter rail stations: from Plainville and Foxboro to Mansfield, and from Wareham to Lakeville. These two projects have not been implemented. GATRA must first overcome the challenges of finalizing appropriate satellite lot locations, and implementing new services during a time of regular service cutbacks. The shuttles from Foxboro and Plainville are expected to be popular for the same reason that Norton's shuttle is—lack of parking at the station. Construction to improve the Mansfield station and expand parking will temporarily reduce the parking supply and increase the demand for shuttles from satellite parking areas.

Parking at the Lakeville station is currently adequate for the demand. The 20-mile one-way trip from Wareham, however, could be enough of a motivating factor to encourage use of this shuttle. There are no plans for shuttles to Lakeville from any other communities.

Recommendations

- 1. Shuttle services to stations should be coordinated with other community transportation needs, as is done in Norton.**
- 2. Provide state and federal funding to lease or buy land for satellite parking areas.**
- 3. SRPEDD should develop municipal guidelines for satellite parking lots for public transportation use, different from existing parking bylaws.**

Station Facilities

South Attleboro lacks a station building. Passengers wait for trains in their cars or on a partially roofed platform. The parking area is adjacent to the tracks (separated only by the main access road), and people can wait in their cars until the train arrives. This is not a desirable option during inclement weather.

The Mansfield Station has been a small wood-frame station house on the inbound side. It was built over 20 years ago as a temporary structure. As a result of many years of planning a new station building is under construction as part of the Phase 1 Mansfield Station Improvement Project. The new station will be twice the size of the original station.

Mansfield station has a small "temporary" wood-frame station house on the inbound side that has been there for approximately twenty years, or more. This affords many of the same amenities as the Attleboro Center station -- warmth on cold mornings plus coffee, doughnuts, and newspapers -- but it is too small to adequately serve the numbers of commuters presently using the Mansfield Station.

Lakeville also lacks a station building, so similar to South Attleboro, the passengers are protected by a roofed platform. A building is less critical in Lakeville; however, because it is the end of the line. Trains frequently idle at the station for several minutes, allowing passengers to wait in their vehicles.

Base-Year Problem Identification

The two most important aspects of the MBTA's commuter rail service that need attention are:

- a) insufficient parking and
- b) functionally obsolete stations

Efforts are underway at all of the train stations along the Attleboro Line in the region to increase parking capacity.

GATRA and the MBTA have been working with the Town of Mansfield in recent years to complete a major upgrade of the station area and expand parking. Phase One has begun. It includes a new 1,800 square foot station, landscaping, and adjacent parking improvements at an estimated cost of \$1.6 million. Future phases of the project include the expansion of all other parking areas to increase the total number of spaces from 800 to 1,600. In addition, improvements will be made to the platform and to improve handicapped accessibility. The total cost of future improvements is estimated at \$12 million.

In partnership with the City of Attleboro and the MBTA, GATRA proposes to construct a mixed-use parking garage facility to be located on property adjacent to the existing Attleboro Center train station. The proposed Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC) fulfills several needs in Downtown Attleboro:

- Additional parking at the commuter rail station;
- An updated station building;
- A more accessible connection between rail and bus modes; and,
- Urban renewal opportunities.

The Master Plan for the ITC includes a transportation facility that includes a bus station and a 700-car parking garage for commuters and businesses. The garage will abut the tracks and provide a buffer for potential condominium development in front of the garage. The plan calls for the Attleboro Redevelopment Authority to take land on Union Street between Mill and Park Streets and raze the existing buildings to create space for residential and commercial private development.

The conceptual design for the garage and public transit components is expected to be complete in September of 2003. Due to the expected cost of the project, it may be constructed in phases. The total public investment needed for the public uses is \$26 million. The private investment share of the project is estimated at \$28 million.

Commuter Parking Recommendations

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| South Attleboro - | A 440 car parking deck should be constructed by 2010. |
| Downtown Attleboro - | Construct the Intermodal Transportation Center that will add about 700 additional spaces by the year 2010. |
| Mansfield - | Complete Phase 2 of proposed improvements to add 800 additional parking spaces by the year 2010. |

Ridership Forecasts

The Attleboro Line

The total daily inbound ridership at the three SRPEDD stations has remained consistent since 1995. This is due to restrictions on the parking supply around the stations. If the parking supply were expanded, ridership would increase. Several factors have maintained the high popularity of commuter rail service from the region. They are as follows:

- Increased traffic congestion on Route 24, Route 3, I-95 and I-93 into Boston.
- The ever-present parking problem in Boston, with increased parking fees and limited spaces.
- The Central Artery and Third Harbor Tunnel project: making private automobile commutes even longer, less direct with detours, and expensive.

- An in-migration to the SRPEDD region by former Boston area residents who still work in Boston.

Latent demand is the demand that is not being satisfied because of disincentives, such as lack of marketing, unpleasant service, issues of safety or inconvenience, or lack of capacity, such as having too few commuter parking spaces. The ridership boom experienced at the Lakeville / Middleborough station when it opened indicates that there had been considerable latent demand in the southeastern portion of the region.

The MBTA recently completed ridership projections for the Boston area T-Plan. These new projections, with an out year of 2025, are presented in Table 11-1 below.

Table 11-1

MBTA's COMMUTER RAIL STATION PARKING SUPPLY AND RIDERSHIP								
	SOUTH ATTLEBORO		ATTLEBORO		MANSFIELD		LAKEVILLE	
	PARKING SPACES	INBOUND PAX	PARKING SPACES	INBOUND PAX	PARKING SPACES	INBOUND PAX	PARKING SPACES	INBOUND PAX
1991	508	990	870	1,520	805	1,460		
1996	562	1,440	870	1,700	805	1,760		
1998	562	1,600	870	1,690	805	1,650	400	630
2002	562	1,780	870	1,590	805	1,680	892	1,190
MBTA RIDERSHIP PROJECTIONS								
	Constrained	Unconstrained	Con.	Uncon.	Con.	Uncon.	Con.	Uncon.
2010	1,550	1,900	1,590	1,900	2,390	2,830	1,260	1,350
2025	1,640	2,050	1,740	2,140	2,440	3,210	1,350	1,500

Constrained ridership projections are prepared under the assumption that no expansion of the parking supply is provided in the future. The unconstrained projection assumes an unlimited number of parking spaces so that each station has the capacity to serve as many riders desiring to use the service.

Ridership Surveys

SRPEDD conducted ridership surveys at three train stations:

- Mansfield, March 1999
- Attleboro Center, September 1999
- Lakeville/Middleborough, April 2002

The Table 11-2 presents a comparison of some of the answers provided by the train passengers. Observations that can be made from these answers include:

- The residents of the station’s host community make full use of commuter rail.
- Stations in urban areas attract customers who can walk to the station. Stations in rural areas encourage driving to the station.
- Mansfield, with a parking lot that fills up very early, has a high percentage of riders being dropped off at the station.
- Carpooling is higher at Lakeville because of its rural setting and longer distances from higher density communities.
- Journey to Work accounts for between 93 and 96% of the trips.

Table 11-2

RESULTS OF COMMUTER RAIL PASSENGER SURVEYS			
Questions	Mansfield	Attleboro	Lakeville
Where do you live?	Mansfield - 54% Abutting Towns - 35%	Attleboro - 46% Abutting Towns - 50% (Includes R.I. - 19.3%)	Lake./Midd. - 29% Abutting Towns – 32%
How did you get to the station today?	Drove Myself - 70% Walked - 14% Was dropped off - 12% Carpooled – 3%	Drove Myself - 73.6% Walked - 10.2% Was dropped off - 6.7% Carpooled - 3.8% Bus - 3.8%	Drove Myself - 87.2% Walked - .2% Was dropped off - 5.1% Carpooled - 5.8%
What is your annual family income?	Under \$40,000 – 12% \$40 to \$59,999 – 15% \$60 to \$79,999 – 17% \$80 to \$99,999 – 20% Over \$99,999 – 36%	Under \$40,000 – 13.3% \$40 to \$59,999 – 18.8% \$60 to \$79,999 – 17.4% \$80 to \$99,999 – 14.7% Over \$99,999 – 22.1%	Under \$40,000 – 10.1% \$40 to \$59,999 – 16.2% \$60 to \$79,999 – 17.7% \$80 to \$99,999 – 20.3% Over \$99,999 – 35.6%
Trip Purpose?	Work - 96% School - 2%	Work - 93.6 School - 3.1%	Work - 95.4 School - 2.4%

The family income reported by the Attleboro commuter rail passengers is higher than the municipal totals for the host communities as reported by the 2000 U.S. Census. In the City of Attleboro, the census reported that 20% of the city’s population had a household income of \$60,000 or more. The survey responses at the station showed that 50.2% of the Attleboro commuter family incomes were over \$60,000. In Mansfield, the census reported 25% and the survey showed 65.2%.

An additional conclusion can be drawn from the Lakeville/Middleborough surveys, because there are two to compare. The last T-Plan Update (2000) presented responses from a March 2000 survey. The income levels showed a dramatic increase in the span of two years. The percentage of passengers reporting a family income of below \$60,000 dropped from 38.4% in 2000 to 26.3% in 2002. The percentage over \$60,000 increased from 53.2% to 73.6%. Within that grouping the family incomes over \$99,999 rose from 19.3% to 35.6%.

Table 11-3

LAKEVILLE / MIDDLEBOROUGH COMMUTER RAIL STATION		
FAMILY INCOME	2000 SURVEY	2002 SURVEY
UNDER \$40	16.7%	10.1%
\$40-59,999	21.7%	16.2%
\$60 TO 79,999	20.5%	17.7%
\$80 TO 99,999	13.4%	20.3%
OVER \$99,999	19.3%	35.6%

At least four related conclusions are possible:

- Commuter rail service attracts more higher-salaried workers the longer it is in operation.
- Higher salaried workers move into communities that have access to commuter rail.
- Commuter rail service has a direct influence on the average family incomes of the communities near stations.
- Salaries in the Boston metro area are higher than in the SRPEDD region, and because commuter rail improves access to jobs in Boston, local residents change jobs to raise their family income.

A new set of questions was presented in the most recent Lakeville survey concerning the importance of commuter rail to commuters in their decision on where to live and work. We found that 48% (200) of the respondents moved their residence in the last five years. All commuters were asked to select up to three of the most important factors in their decision about where to live. The most important factors chosen were housing costs (22%), family ties (17%), availability of commuter rail (15%), scenic quality (14%), the school system (10%), and highway access (9%). Commuter rail was a much more important factor to people who had moved in the past five years than those who had not moved. It was the

second most important factor to those who had recently moved. Rail service to Lakeville was restored less than five years ago.

Although housing cost is a more significant factor than availability of commuter rail in residential locations, 55% of respondents gave the highest importance rating to the availability of commuter rail in their decision on where to work. Results of the 2000 and 2002 Lakeville surveys indicated that commuter rail is an important factor in residential location, but it is of greater importance in people's decisions about where to work.

The survey results lead to the conclusion that commuter rail service increases the attraction of an area for residential choice because it allows greater opportunities for employment and commuting to jobs.

Future Commuter Rail Extensions

Commuter Rail service to Boston is being planned for the major metropolitan areas of Taunton, Fall River, and New Bedford. This expansion of service will meet various needs within this region such as reducing traffic congestion, meeting air quality standards, improving access to opportunity, adding to mode choice, and enhancing the economic development of our cities. The project is also consistent with the State's *Community-Friendly Solutions (Communities First)* policy in that it will prevent sprawl and provide enhanced mobility for sustainable transportation modes (public transportation). These three cities are the only major metropolitan areas around Boston that are currently not served by commuter rail.

A Draft EIR filed in 1999 presented the Stoughton Alternative as the preferred route for the rail service. The Secretary of Environmental Affairs ordered the preparation of a Supplemental Draft EIR to reexamine all of the other feasible alternative routes. The SDEIR was submitted for review by the MBTA in July of 2000. The certificate of approval from the Secretary of EOEAs stated that, "For the SDEIR, the MBTA conducted an operational analysis of five alternatives: Attleboro, Attleboro/North Easton, Stoughton, Middleborough, and enhanced bus service. It has concluded that only the Stoughton alternative is practicable. In particular, the MBTA finds that the Attleboro alternative is no longer practicable, based upon capacity constraints caused by the expansion of Amtrak high-speed rail service in the Boston-New York corridor. Based on a review of the SDIR analysis, I agree with that assessment for the purposes of MEPA review. Therefore, the FEIR does not have to provide additional analysis of any alternative other than the Stoughton Alternative.

The FEIR will, however, have to provide a much greater analysis of sub-alternatives within the Stoughton Alternative. ... the FEIR must discuss in detail impacts on wetlands, rare

species, historic resources, and other resources, and ways to avoid, minimize, and mitigate such impacts.” (*SDEIR Certificate, November 16, 2000, page 2-3*)

The MBTA completed the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) in April of 2002. On August 30, 2002 the Secretary of Environmental Affairs for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (EOEA) issued a determination that the “FEIR submitted on this project does adequately and properly comply with the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act.” (*FEIR Certificate, August 30, 2002, page 1*)

Stoughton Extension

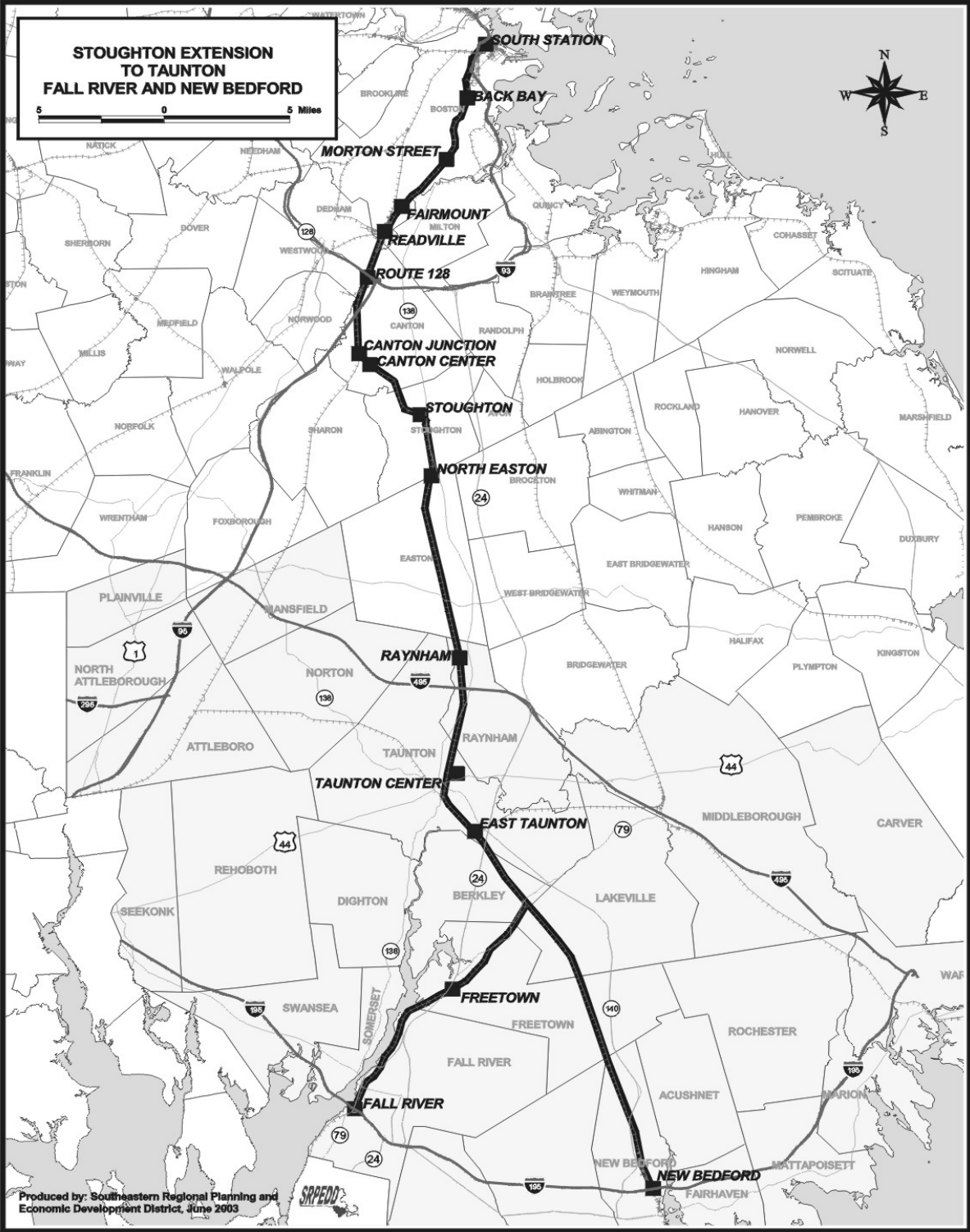
The Stoughton alternative proposes extending the existing service from South Station to Stoughton via Canton Junction and Canton along the abandoned Stoughton Branch to the Dean Street connection in Taunton, along the Attleboro Secondary to Myricks Junction, and then south to Fall River and New Bedford. This is the most direct route between Boston and the heart of the region. Stations are proposed at North Easton, Raynham, Taunton, East Taunton, Freetown, Fall River and New Bedford. Layover facilities would be constructed in Freetown and New Bedford, the two terminal stops. In addition to replacing the tracks from Taunton south to New Bedford and Fall River, the Stoughton Alternative will reconstruct 14 miles of currently inactive track from Brock Street in Stoughton to Winter Street in Taunton. Improvement would permit a maximum operating speed of 70 MPH except where geometric or civil restrictions exist.

The reasons that the Stoughton Extension is the only viable alternative are:

- The operational constraints of the Northeast Corridor, discussed earlier in this chapter in the section on Interstate Operation. The high speed train service by AMTRAK significantly reduces the capacity of the tracks also used by the MBTA. Since extending the Stoughton service only adds 6 new train trips per day to the system, it fits within the constrained operating window.
- It meets all four of the MBTA service policy delivery criteria.
- It attracts the highest total ridership and the highest number of new transit trips.

The Stoughton Alternative will result in unavoidable environmental impacts primarily due to the restoration of commuter rail service along an inactive right-of-way located adjacent to residential areas, historic districts, and the state-designated Hockomock Swamp - Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The FEIR offered to construct a trestle on the rail right-of-way through the ACEC to minimize the impacts on wetlands and state-protected rare species. The Environmental Secretary supported the trestle alternative in his approval letter.

Map 11-2



Impacts to wetland resource areas are unavoidable and have been minimized to the greatest extent practicable. “The FEIR estimates that under the Trestle Alternative, the project will alter a total of 6.8 acres of bordering vegetated wetlands, 12,000 linear feet of bank, and 6.8 acres of land subject to flooding. The project will also affect 19.3 acres of previously developed riverfront area.” (*FEIR Certificate, August 30, 2002, page 5*) “The Trestle Alternative would use an elevated trestle structure beginning at Foundry Street (Route 106) approximately 12,000 feet south to the Raynham – Taunton Greyhound Park Track Crossing (approximately two miles). The structure would be constructed using precast concrete beams, supported on piles with a concrete pile cap. The span between piles would be approximately 30 feet, and the distance between the existing ground and the bottom of the beams would be approximately three feet.” (*MBTA FEIR, Vol. 1, 3-65,66*)

The FEIR proposes to extend the existing Stoughton Line train service to Taunton, New Bedford and Fall River. A total of six new trips would have to be added to provide 36 trains on the line, 16 trips (eight inbound, eight outbound) will service New Bedford and 16 trips will service Fall River. Four non-peak trips will start at the Dean Street station in Taunton to minimize interference with mid-day freight operations on the New Bedford and Fall River tracks. The travel time between Boston and Fall River or New Bedford would be approximately one hour and 20 minutes.

Table 11-4 on the following page from the FEIR summarizes the estimated inbound weekday daily boardings and parking demands at the seven new commuter rail stations.

It is SRPEDD’s belief that the East Taunton and North Easton stations will probably attract the most riders because they will benefit from the highest level of service during the peak hours, and each has sufficient highway access. But the ridership projection for the Taunton Dean Street station is questionably too low. Dean Street is U.S. Route 44, a major east-west arterial connecting the Taunton Downtown to Route 24. Population density in the service area of the Dean Street Station is sufficient to generate a higher level of ridership. The housing stock is of quality that would be attractive to relocating commuters.

Table 11-4

Stoughton Alternative: 2010 Projected Daily Ridership and Parking Demand

Station	Inbound Daily Boardings	Estimated Parking Demand
North Easton	970	830
Raynham	200	170
Taunton (Dean Street)	250	210
East Taunton	1,270	1,100
Freetown	420	370
Fall River (Includes Battleship Cove Station)	610	510
New Bedford	560	470
Total	4,280	3,660
Total New Transit Trips	2,950	

(FEIR Table 3.3-13 Vol. 1, Page 3.46)

It is also expected that a second station will be needed in the north end of the City of New Bedford. The New Bedford station is located near the downtown, with easy connections to I-195, Route 6, Route 18, and the working waterfront, but New Bedford is long and narrow with a considerable population base in the northern half of the City. North End commuters will probably not drive south to the downtown station, leaving them with a 20 to 30 minute drive to the next closest station in East Taunton. In Fall River, the future riders in the city's north end have access to the Freetown station. We expect it will not be long before riders demand a second New Bedford station.

The biggest roadblock the commuter rail extension project has to overcome is funding the capital costs. As shown in Table 11-5 on the next page (from the FEIR), the total capital cost is estimated to be \$669+ million in 2005 dollars. When planning for this extension began, the MBTA relied on the Commonwealth to fund all of its net expenses as reimbursements. The Commonwealth was mandated to pay the bills and the State Legislature frequently debated the funding of the MBTA's capital projects. In 1999 the MBTA's legislation was changed. The MBTA was given a share of the state's sales tax and forward-funding, making the MBTA responsible for staying within its budget and also making it responsible for selling and paying the bonds it needs to fund its capital expenditures. This act eliminated all previous legislative bonding authority for the New Bedford / Fall River commuter rail extension. It then became problematic whether the MBTA could afford to pay for the extension project.

Table 11-5

The Stoughton Alternative: Cost Estimate Summary	
MBTA – FEIR Table 3.4-6, Vol. 1, Page 3-116	
Item	2005 Dollars
Infrastructure	
ROW Preparation	\$ 41,664,975
Structures	\$ 132,981,348
Track Structure	\$ 217,646,049
Signal Systems	\$ 68,705,057
Stations / Parking / Roads	\$ 79,651,682
Sub Total	\$ 540,649,111
Real Estate	\$ 20,952,775
Equipment	\$ 82,317,883
Mitigation	\$ 5,000,000
Construction Phase Services	\$ 20,384,546
Total Capital Costs	\$ 669,304,315
Annual Operating Costs	\$ 17,378,571

To help resolve this problem the Legislature included a funding provision for the extension in the Acts of 2002. Section 53 of the Acts of 2002 (approved August 10, 2002) allows the Governor to make the bond payments for the MBTA by providing the funds in the Governor’s annual budget recommendation to the general court.

“The agreement shall provide that the secretary of administration and finance shall, for each year in which the bonds are outstanding, include in the governor’s annual budget recommendation to the general court, an amount equal to all amount due and payable in connection with the bonds for such year. The commonwealth’s obligation to make payments under such contract shall be subject to annual appropriation by the general court.” (Chapter 246 of the Acts of 2002, Section 53 (d)(16)(k))

This funding solution is still pending; however, because when Governor Romney took office in January of 2003 he put all major transit expansion projects on hold because of the state’s budget crisis, and because there were too many major projects promised beyond the MBTA’s ability to fund. When the Governor reaffirms this project, it should move forward toward construction based on the comments the SRPEDD Commission made on the FEIR.

The SRPEDD Commission voted to send a letter of comment on the FEIR in July of 2002. Following are excerpts of the Commission’s position on the project and its concern over parts of the plan put forth in the FEIR.

- “The Commission continues to strongly support the proposed commuter rail extension, by way of the extension of the Stoughton Branch, as proposed in the FEIR.
- It is recommended that a regional committee be formed to review and prioritize future mitigation requests.
- The MBTA has yet to execute a contract to begin the work of the Growth Management Task Force ... to help communities deal in a coordinated fashion with the environmental and growth impacts of this project.
- SRPEDD has serious concerns regarding the at-grade crossing on Tarkiln Hill Road in New Bedford. It is our belief that the Tarkiln Hill Road crossing is as deserving of mitigation in the form of a separated grade crossing as the Route 138 grade crossing in Raynham. Tarkiln Hill Road has a higher traffic volume and more significant congestion and safety issues.
- The Commission continues to recommend that the MBTA install quad gates at all qualified grade crossings throughout the project.
- The FEIR states that Conservation Plans have been proposed for both the At-Grade and Trestle Alternatives (in the ACEC). The Commission would like to see written commitments for monitoring, the frequency of evaluations and specific planned activities ... Such a plan should be developed and approved, with input from appropriate parties, prior to any construction activity taking place.”

This Regional Transportation Plan recommends the extension of commuter rail service to Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford by way of the Stoughton Line extension.

Middleborough Line Extension to Wareham

During the 1990’s the State Legislature directed the MBTA to conduct a feasibility study on providing commuter rail service to Bourne and Wareham. This could be accomplished by extending service along the Middleboro Line from the Lakeville station south on an existing rail line known as the Buzzards Bay Secondary Track. This track is currently used for rail freight service. The service could cross the Cape Cod Canal and provide an option for commuters to avoid the bridge traffic congestion. The expected travel time from Wareham would be one hour, 15 minutes, and from Sagamore one hour, 33 minutes. The study predicted that ridership at four possible stations along the extension would be 1,300 persons daily by the year 2010. The capital cost of the project is currently estimated at \$77 million, or \$36 million if it extended to Wareham.

The study concluded, “An extension of commuter rail service on the Old Colony Middleborough/ Lakeville route to Bourne would be feasible from an operations standpoint. But it would produce relatively limited benefits.” (*Bourne Commuter Rail Feasibility Study, 1996, page 57*)

The MBTA gave the extension to Bourne a low priority rating in its recent Program for Mass Transportation (PMT) report. It stated that, “This project is not intended to serve a commuting population; it would instead serve as a congestion mitigation measure for tourist traffic. Consequently, it would not benefit environmental justice communities.” (*Page 5C-93*)

The extension just to Wareham received a medium priority rating in the PMT report. “Ridership would be near the lower end of the mid-range among commuter rail extension projects examined, but many of the riders would be diverted from other transit services.” (*Page 5C-57*)

This T-Plan recognizes that there would be benefits to the region if commuter rail service were extended to Wareham. Family income levels are low in Wareham and area residents would benefit from better access to the Boston labor market. This is the same benefit that the Lakeville and Middleborough residents received in 1998 with their train station and which Taunton, New Bedford, and Fall River residents are anticipating.

At this time; however, this T-Plan cannot recommend the Wareham extension. Since the Stoughton Extension to Taunton, New Bedford, and Fall River is still in question, all political and financial resources must be focused on the successful construction and eventual operation of that service. The region cannot afford to be sidetracked from a transportation goal that has eluded us for so long by endorsing a project that is less capital intensive, benefits fewer people, and does not support smart growth principles.

When the Stoughton Extension is committed and under construction, an extension to Wareham should be re-evaluated.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Shuttle services to stations should be coordinated with other community transportation needs.
2. Provide state and federal funding to lease or buy land for satellite parking areas.
3. SRPEDD should develop municipal guidelines for satellite parking lots for public transportation use, different from existing parking bylaws.
4. Construct a 440 car parking deck at the South Attleboro Station by 2010.
5. Construct the Intermodal Transportation Center at the Downtown Attleboro Station to add 700 spaces by the year 2010.

6. Complete Phase 2 of Mansfield Station proposed improvements to add 800 parking spaces by the year 2010.
7. Construct the extension of commuter rail service to Taunton, Fall River and New Bedford by way of the Stoughton Line extension.
8. The MBTA should file its environmental studies under the National Environmental Policy Act to begin a federal agency review of the project. (To seek federal funding of a portion of the project.)
9. A regional committee should be formed to review and prioritize future mitigation requests.
10. Execute the pending contract to begin the work of the Growth Management Task Force ... to help communities deal in a coordinated fashion with the environmental and growth impacts of this project.
11. Construct a grade separation at the at-grade crossing on Tarkiln Hill Road in New Bedford with the same tunnel method proposed at the Route 138 grade crossing in Raynham.
12. Install quad gates at all qualified grade crossings throughout the project.
13. Execute Conservation Plans with written commitments for monitoring, the frequency of evaluations and specific planned activities prior to any construction activity taking place.
14. Re-evaluate the proposed Wareham Extension after the Stoughton Extension is committed and under construction.