



Introduction

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) held a series of public meetings in southeastern Massachusetts in September 2016 to update the cities and towns in the region on two topics: (1) progress in designing the South Coast Rail project, and (2) a new proposal to advance service to the South Coast using the Middleborough line, a route that was previously considered and rejected. MassDOT and the MBTA estimate that service to the South Coast is not likely to begin until 2030 on the Stoughton Electric route (see map on page 2), which is the preferred route. The agencies began to look at other potential routes that could possibly be put into service more quickly and brought this information to the September public meetings for review.

This document includes questions that were posed at the six meetings. It's not possible to answer all of the questions at this time, since the design engineers have just started to look at the Middleborough route in detail. MassDOT and the MBTA are collecting the information needed to evaluate the new Middleborough Option cost and construction duration, required permits, operational plans, travel time and ridership. The project team will present its findings to MassDOT and MBTA leadership in the next several months.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the status of the South Coast Rail project?

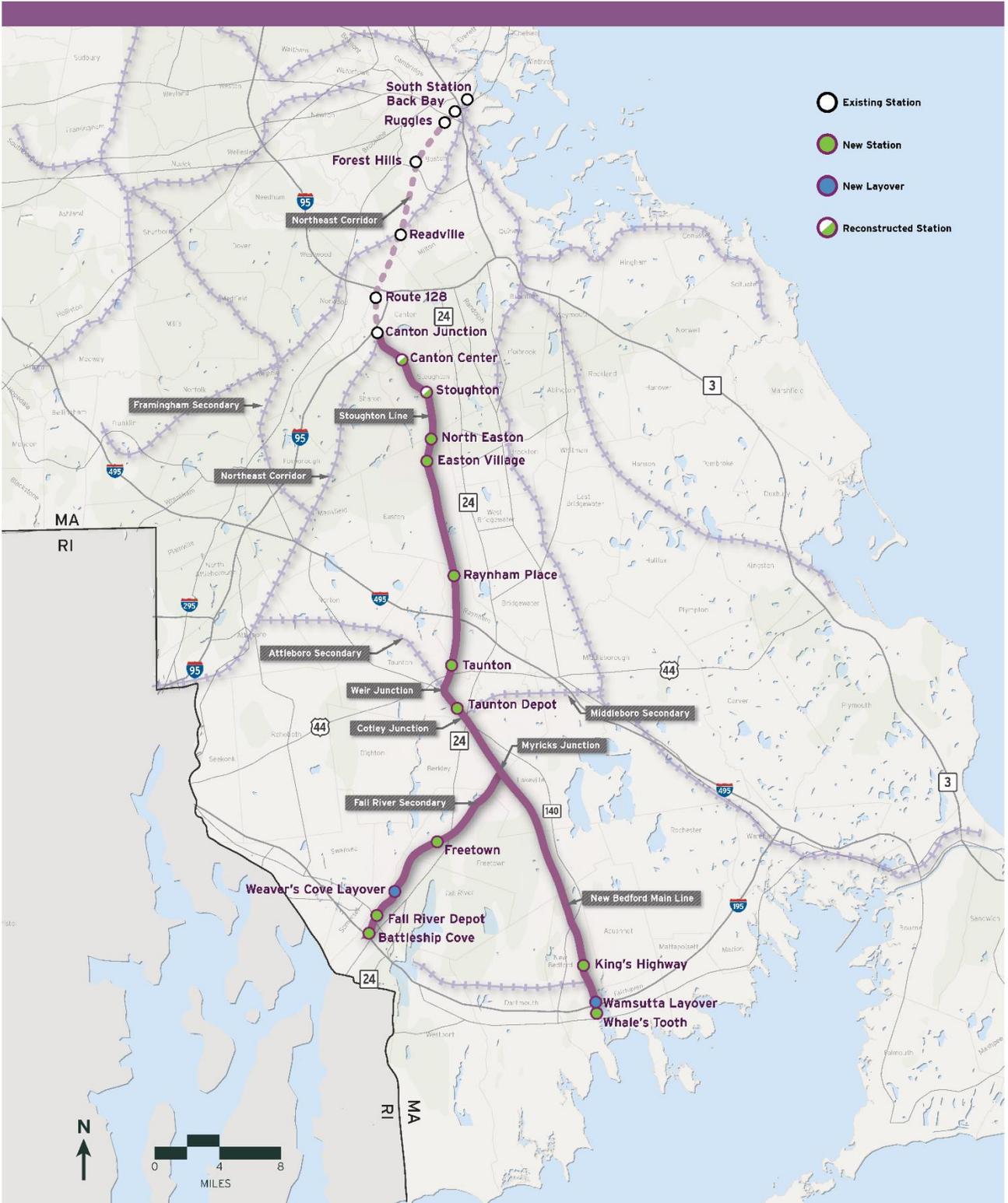
In 2013, the Stoughton Electric route was selected by the state and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from among 64 possible alternatives as the preferred route for a new MBTA rail service between the South Coast and Boston. During the summer of 2014, MassDOT/MBTA advanced the South Coast Rail project from the conceptual planning phase to the design and permitting phase. In this phase, the engineering for the 'Stoughton Electric' route moved forward.

During 2015, field teams surveyed the future track alignment for the Stoughton Electric route and collected geotechnical data on soil conditions. This information is important to determine where and how the infrastructure required for the railroad line can be constructed. MassDOT/MBTA also established design criteria for the project; began planning for future stations; and developed track, bridge, and layover facility designs. By 2016, the MassDOT/MBTA team had advanced the design of the project to the 30% level in order to prepare wetland permit applications for the towns south of Myrick's Junction: Berkley, Lakeville, Freetown, Fall River, and New Bedford (an area known as the *Southern Triangle*).

In 2015, an Owner's Representative was retained for the project, as is legally required for all major MBTA contracts to provide engineering oversight. Over the course of three months during the spring of 2016, MassDOT/MBTA, under the oversight of the Owner's Representative, led an effort to review and reconcile the multiple cost and schedule estimates developed at different phases of the project.¹ These results were presented to the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB) on June 27, 2016, along with a status of the SCR program design and an overview of a new Middleborough Alternative (described below).

¹ The September [meeting presentation](#) summarizes this analysis.

SOUTH COAST RAIL CORRIDOR MAP



What is the 'new Middleborough Option'?

With direction from the MBTA Fiscal and Management Control Board and MassDOT's Board of Directors, MassDOT/MBTA staff is now reexamining a route for rail service to the South Coast that was previously considered and rejected. In the 'new Middleborough Option,' MBTA trains would travel on the existing MBTA Old Colony Main Line through Middleborough, where they could connect to other tracks that serve Fall River and New Bedford. A map of this route is available in the September 2016 public meetings presentation on the [Materials page](#) of the project website. This option could provide a limited level of service to the South Coast on a shorter timeline than the construction of the Stoughton Electric route. This route would make use of existing freight railroad infrastructure, which can be upgraded to Commuter Rail standards. The locomotives would operate on diesel fuel, not electric power (as is planned for the Stoughton Electric route). MassDOT and the MBTA will continue to develop the Stoughton Electric route as the new option is being explored.

Potential benefits of the new Middleborough option include:

- Faster construction than for the Stoughton Electric route
- Potentially lower initial construction costs and less construction risk than for the Stoughton Electric route
- All of the necessary tracks are already owned or controlled by the MBTA/MassDOT

Some challenges of the new Middleborough option include:

- Preserving full service to the existing Middleborough/Lakeville Station (which is located south of the junction of the Middleborough Secondary and the main line) or expanding to include other options (which are not part of South Coast Rail)
- The capacity to run only limited rail service to New Bedford and Fall River due to capacity constraints along the Old Colony Main Line, likely limiting the service to two to three morning and two to three evening peak-period trips (per city, per hour)
- Travel times are estimated to be greater than 95 minutes between New Bedford and South Station (travel time from New Bedford to South Station via the Stoughton Electric route is estimated to be 77 minutes)
- The station proposed for Taunton would have to be less centrally located than the station envisioned in the Stoughton Electric route planning

MassDOT and the MBTA held six public meetings in September 2016 – in New Bedford, Taunton, Fall River, Easton, Canton, and Middleborough – to update the communities on the project and to gather feedback on the new Middleborough Option. Based on that input, MassDOT/MBTA is developing information about the new Middleborough Option and will report back to the Secretary and Boards with an update. The evaluation work includes conducting a survey of the right-of-way and adjacent wetlands; understanding permitting requirements; and developing construction cost estimates and projections of long-term operation and maintenance costs. The project team will brief MassDOT/MBTA leadership on the findings.



Why was the Middleborough route discarded before?

In the September 2013 [Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report \(FEIS/R\)](#), the purpose and need statement for the South Coast Rail project was defined as:

... to more fully meet the existing and future demand for public transportation between Fall River/New Bedford and Boston, Massachusetts, and to enhance regional mobility, while supporting smart growth planning and development strategies in the affected communities.

MassDOT began the process by examining 64 alternatives. Based on screening criteria developed for the project, MassDOT chose the Stoughton Electric route, and its federal partner, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, agreed that Stoughton is the least environmentally damaging practicable alternative (the LEDPA). The Middleborough concept now under consideration was dropped early in the process because it provided less service and longer travel times than a Stoughton alternative, so it attracted fewer riders and did not meet the project purpose.

A more robust Middleborough alternative was assessed during the earlier alternatives analysis, but to meet the project purpose it would require a costly and complex tunnel under Quincy and Braintree or possibly widening the Southeast Expressway to make room for additional tracks adjacent to the highway. While the latter idea has been proposed recently, it is not currently a project, nor is there an estimated cost to design and construct the option.

Why not just build the new Middleborough Option now, since it will be less expensive than the Stoughton Electric route?

MassDOT/MBTA want to understand all of the ramifications of the potential new Middleborough Option before making a decision to advance its design. This means collecting, at a high level, the same kind of information that was compiled on the Stoughton Electric option, such as understanding the characteristics of the corridor; the potential need to acquire property; the presence of wetlands and rare species; permitting requirements; expected ridership levels; and projected construction challenges and costs. Over the next few months, MassDOT/MBTA will evaluate the new Middleborough Option and coordinate with the appropriate environmental agencies to provide findings to MassDOT and MBTA leadership.

What is the timeline for constructing the Stoughton or Middleborough option?

Current projections show that Stoughton is anticipated to take 14-16 years to design, permit, and construct, with a cost of approximately \$3.4 billion.

MassDOT and the MBTA are collecting the information needed to estimate the new Middleborough Option cost and construction duration.

Will freight trains use the South Coast Rail right-of-way?

The MBTA is not planning to seek environmental approval for the South Coast Rail corridor to include freight service in places where freight service does not currently exist. Freight trains currently operate along some southern sections of the corridor, and that service will continue. Any new freight service would have to be reviewed in an independent environmental process.



How can the MBTA permit high-speed trains to pass through Canton, Easton and Stoughton?

While the final details of how South Coast Rail service will operate are not complete, trains will typically slow to enter stations along the route and not pass through stations and town centers at a high speed. Where there is express service, the MBTA will evaluate if trains will operate within restricted speeds. These details will be finalized during a later phase of design and discussed with the station communities.

For the most part, trains will be stopping in these communities, so they will be decelerating and stopping, allowing passengers to board and leave the train, then starting up again to reach the next station. In addition, the MBTA will be upgrading the grade crossings with new signals and gates, and providing safety education in communities where rail service is new.

How will mitigation be determined on any route?

The [Certificate](#) of the MA Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs on the FEIS/R on Stoughton Electric route outlines the measures that the MBTA must include in order to mitigate or address impacts to wetlands, rare species, air quality, noise, traffic, and historic properties. MassDOT/MBTA have provided preliminary information based on the current level of conceptual design. The agencies will work with environmental agencies and local municipalities to develop the details and designs as the project advances.

Should the new Middleborough Option be undertaken as a first step in advancing South Coast Rail, MassDOT and the MBTA will identify the steps that need to be taken to comply with environmental permitting requirements and required mitigation.

Will MassDOT/MBTA explore service to Wareham and Buzzards Bay as part of South Coast Rail?

Service to Wareham, Bourne, and the upper Cape is not currently part of the South Coast Rail project.

Is there funding available for South Coast Rail?

The 2017-2021 [Capital Investment Plan](#) (CIP) provides funding for South Coast Rail over the next five years.

MassDOT/MBTA will develop a financing plan for the South Coast Rail project, but construction funds are not needed until a final project is permitted.

For the latest project information, please visit the South Coast Rail website:

www.massdot.state.ma.us/southcoastrail