

While MassDOT acknowledges the preference of many Advisory Committee members to prioritize the 4/5 hybrid alternative, at this stage MassDOT recommends keeping Alternatives 3 and 4 under consideration until additional information becomes known. As such, MassDOT recommends deferring consideration of phasing until more is known about the project's elements.

The following four areas are recommended in order to continue advancing the project during the remaining conceptual planning phase for East West Passenger Rail.

More Detailed Study of Economic and Community Benefits and Impacts

- Conducting surveys of both businesses and residents to understand market conditions, e.g., likely riders and demographics, fare sensitivity, and other market conditions
- Working with the business community across the Commonwealth and conduct additional analysis to better understand and articulate the full range of potential economic benefits, including anticipating the benefits of how the combination of a post-COVID “new normal” and focused policies to promote affordable living in western Massachusetts affect residential locational choices and work-from-home policies and trends
- Working with local and regional governments and community members to facilitate land use decisions and new development that supports and is supported by rail transportation, and that can make travel without automobiles more viable
- Conducting neighborhood workshops on community impacts and service expectations
- Reviewing and updating cost and ridership estimates periodically to reflect significant new data
- Considering how a price on carbon and VMT fees could impact rail service

Explore opportunities with rail partners

CSX policy regarding accommodation of passenger rail service along its routes favors complete separation of the passenger operations from its own tracks whenever possible. Separation is required for any passenger rail operation where train speeds exceed 90 mph. Where shared track operations occur, CSX requires new and upgraded construction to meet its latest engineering-related policies concerning weight and clearance requirements as well as design standards. Track restoration elements found in the East-West Study assumed wider track centers (distance between two tracks) than historically found along the route as well as replacement of undergrade bridges to comply with the guidance.

Therefore, MassDOT should:

- Continue discussions with CSX to ascertain whether their support for an East-West passenger service is possible and, if not, what other options exist
- Undertake additional analysis such as rail capacity modeling and right-of-way condition
- Conduct a life-cycle cost analysis, if possible, to determine the full spectrum of costs associated with greater control over the right-of-way.
- Work with Amtrak to determine terms for increased right-of-way usage and the feasibility of service to Albany
- Secure independent appraisal of the current and prospective freight market

Understand governance options for expanded passenger rail in western Massachusetts

MassDOT is not currently set up to operate as a railroad and the MBTA is limited to operations within its service areas. Therefore, state legislative changes will be needed to create a governance structure for passenger rail in the Commonwealth outside of the current MBTA service area. Such a governance structure would not only benefit an eventual East-West Passenger rail, but other services such as the Valley Flyer.

Therefore, MassDOT should develop a white paper to establish governance structure options for passenger rail outside the MBTA service district, considering:

- Structure of a public entity to provide management and oversight
 - Powers and authority
 - Eligibility to receive federal funds
 - Liability
 - Need for balance between operating independence and public control
 - Legal/regulatory, operational, and financial characteristics of intercity and commuter rail service
- Passenger rail operator
- Life cycle costs of acquiring and supporting public interest in the right-of-way and related infrastructure
- Funding sources
 - Development through construction
 - Operations (including any subsidy required for selected fare policy)
 - Maintenance and capital renewal

Evaluate funding opportunities and obstacles

The East – West Passenger Rail project is a large and complex project that would require large capital investments to develop as well as ongoing operations and maintenance funding, likely necessitating a combination of many different funding sources and strategies. MassDOT will need to work with in coordination with state and federal elected officials and other key stakeholders to evaluate and identify funding obstacles and opportunities.

Therefore, MassDOT should:

- Continue to refine capital and operating cost estimates to set the parameters for future funding needs
- Develop a proposal for legislative changes to the federal benefit-cost analysis method based on outcomes from further study of economic and community impacts
- Based on findings from the governance white paper, catalogue existing funding sources and eligible recipients and possible future funding structures.